



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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## HANSARD

Tuesday, April 12, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2022 Spring Sitting

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

### CABINET MINISTERS

<b>NAME</b>	<b>CONSTITUENCY</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO</b>
<b>Hon. Sandy Silver</b>	Klondike	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
<b>Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee</b>	Riverdale South	Deputy Premier  Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
<b>Hon. Nils Clarke</b>	Riverdale North	Minister of Highways and Public Works; Environment
<b>Hon. John Streicker</b>	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
<b>Hon. Ranj Pillai</b>	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
<b>Hon. Richard Mostyn</b>	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board
<b>Hon. Jeanie McLean</b>	Mountainview	Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

<b>Kate White</b>	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
<b>Emily Tredger</b>	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
<b>Annie Blake</b>	Vuntut Gwitchin

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

**Yukon Legislative Assembly**  
**Whitehorse, Yukon**  
**Tuesday, April 12, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

**Withdrawal of motions**

**Speaker:** The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 394, notice of which was given yesterday by the Member for Whitehorse Centre, was not placed on today's Notice Paper as it is not in order. In addition, the following motions have been removed from the Order Paper as the action requested has been completed in whole or in part. They are: Motion No. 380, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge, and Motion No. 381, standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party.

**DAILY ROUTINE**

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

Are there any visitors to be introduced?  
 Are there any tributes?

**TRIBUTES**

**In recognition of National Public Safety  
 Telecommunicators Week**

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I rise today to pay tribute to a very important group of people. This week is National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week and we are all celebrating the people on the other end of the line when you call 911 in the Yukon. Whether you need police, fire, or ambulance, these people are often the comforting voice during a stressful situation.

It takes a special kind of person to do this job — someone who is able to stay calm, think on their feet, and connect with others.

Emergency dispatchers in our territory take on an immense responsibility every time they pick up the phone. For example, emergency response communications officers with the Yukon Emergency Medical Services team receive emergency calls, triage and prioritize the condition of the patient, dispatch the responder support needed, keep tabs on the safety of emergency responders, coordinate patient transfers to health care facilities, and provide lifesaving pre-ambulance arrival instructions over the phone, such as how to administer a naloxone kit, all while maintaining a calm presence for the person on the other end of the phone. It's a high-pressure, high-stakes, round-the-clock job.

I recently heard a quote stating that emergency dispatchers are the most important people you will never see. I must say that I agree with this statement. It also got me thinking — we really don't thank these people often enough. They work selflessly behind the scenes to keep Yukoners safe. Emergency response communications officers often provide a patient's

initial medical care but seldom see their entire health care journey. Similarly, fire dispatchers are not present for the photo opportunity once the fire has been extinguished. That's why I am so thrilled to have this opportunity today to pay tribute to this incredible group of people who receive and dispatch the 911 calls for the RCMP and policing services, emergency medical services, health services, and our fire departments. They help to create a better and safer community, territory, and country for the public.

Please take the time to celebrate these hard-working individuals in our emergency communication centres who dispatch our first responders to help us in our times of greatest need.

Thank you.

*Applause*

**Mr. Cathers:** I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize our local 911 and emergency dispatchers and all other behind-the-scenes staff and volunteers during National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

For any of us who have ever had to call 911 in a critical situation, you know the important role that these dedicated people play. From the moment you call until emergency services arrive, the person who picks up the line is an important part of ensuring that the emergency is handled swiftly and professionally, with precision and the utmost care and respect. The person will assess and navigate the situation in response to a call, as well as provide instructions, make split-second decisions, locate and dispatch the appropriate emergency personnel, and often provide needed comfort to the person on the line.

When a dispatcher takes a call, there is no telling what they might be dealing with.

They are professionals and trained to help whoever might be on the other line. They dedicate their lives and careers to helping others and deserve this week of recognition by the public. I would note that the Yukon RCMP noted that, during 2021 alone, there were 30,000 calls to 911 in the Yukon — an average of 80 per day.

I would just like to again thank all of the professional telecommunications personnel for the work that they do to assist others each and every day here in the Yukon. Your dedication is much appreciated.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Every year, during the second week of April, the telecommunications personnel and the public safety community are honoured, and I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to thank those calm souls who answer our calls for help. Hopefully, you never have to dial 911, but if you do, know that you will be met by a calm voice that will walk you through your crisis. Whether it's related to health, fire, or the RCMP, the person on the other end of the line will know what to do and who to send, all while keeping you calm and focused.

So, thank you to the heroes behind the headset — those knowledgeable, compassionate individuals who have dedicated their lives to serving their communities.

*Applause*

### In recognition of early childhood educators

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to early childhood educators — to recognize and appreciate the essential services and valuable support that they provide to Yukon families. I hold up not only the value of early childhood educators, but also how ECEs help to create a healthier community for all Yukoners. ECEs foster innovation through child-led discovery and the creation of lifelong learners. They develop skills and competencies in children through purposeful play. They model empathy and care in early childhood, resulting in more empathetic and caring future adults.

Quality early learning experiences improve children's chances for future health and success. ECEs play a critical role in influencing the course of a person's physical, cognitive, and social development during early childhood, and let's not forget how, in the past two years, ECEs worked tirelessly to create healthy, safe, and positive learning environments during a pandemic — one of the most trying times that our society has faced.

Sadly, the pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on women as primary caregivers. Investments in early learning and childcare are a critical pathway to recovery in this regard.

There are 364 educators working in licensed early learning programs throughout the Yukon — 316 in Whitehorse and 48 in the rural communities — who have provided support, care, and guidance in 74 programs with spaces for more than 2,000 children through the first year of our universal childcare.

The Yukon's early learning educators are engaged and dedicated to creating high-quality learning environments. Our early childhood educators are shaping tomorrow's world view, and for that, I am truly grateful and proud.

Mr. Speaker, I'm committed to supporting early learning childhood educators and all that they do. I ask all Yukoners today to stand with me and applaud the excellent work that our ECEs do and the meaningful services and contributions that they provide every day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*Applause*

**Mr. Dixon:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Yukon's early childhood educators. The years before a child starts school are critical to their emotional, physical, and educational development. Those critically important years set the stage for success and provide the foundation that a child needs to start their education journey.

For many parents who are in the workforce, it is important to them that during the hours they are away from their child throughout the week, they know that they are not only safe, but learning, socializing, and developing the skills they require to navigate school.

Toddlers and young children are continuously learning. They absorb information throughout the day. The role of educators to be able to provide the guidance and structure they require to nurture that learning is so important. It takes a special person to be able to provide this type of care. It takes patient, enthusiastic, attentive, interactive, and knowledgeable individuals to help build this strong foundation for our children.

Early childhood education is so much more than just daycare. It teaches our kids creativity, friendship, teamwork, cooperation, and respect for others — all skills that will help children thrive throughout their school journey.

To all early childhood educators and all those who work in early learning, who teach our kids these critical skills and provide a safe and fun environment for young Yukoners, thank you for your dedication. Your job is not an easy one, but know that the important role that you play in the growth and development of our children is sincerely appreciated, not just by parents, but by the entire community.

*Applause*

**Ms. Tredger:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the amazing work of our territory's early childhood educators.

We trust them every day with our most precious resource, with our futures. Navigating parenthood can be such a daunting task, and early childhood educators go above and beyond to help.

For too many years, government has treated early years centres as a place to keep our kids busy so their parents could go to work, but thanks to the hard work of Yukon's educators, that changed and the government acknowledged the importance of early childhood education.

Early childhood educators have gone out on their own to find professional development options allowing for high-quality education no matter the cost to the centres themselves. Some have even opted to send their educators for training outside of the territory or brought in trainers and educators themselves. Our ECEs have fought to keep their centres open during COVID, regardless of the difficulties they faced. During COVID-19 lockdowns, many early years professionals went to work to ensure that front-line workers could still go to work.

In centres where this wasn't possible, many continued meeting children daily over Zoom. These difficulties are not over as they still have to work amidst constant exposure notices. Yet in the face of all this, Yukon's early childhood educators have continued to be dedicated to our children so that they get the best possible start in life.

So, today on behalf of the Yukon NDP, I pay tribute to all early childhood educators of the Yukon for their hard work that they do and continue to do for ensuring our children are safe and have a quality education.

*Applause*

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

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I have for tabling today five documents: from December 7, 2011, the *Yukon News* article entitled “New F.H. Collins school build delayed”; from December 18, 2014, a *Whitehorse Star* article entitled “Total school costs soar to \$54 million”; from March 26, 2014, a *Yukon News* article entitled “Premier downplays true cost of F.H. Collins rebuild”; from March 26, 2014, a Yukon Liberal Party press release entitled “Ballooning costs at F.H. Collins highlight spending in new budget”; and finally, from August 12, 2016, another *Yukon News* article entitled “Demolition costs for old F.H. Collins building higher than expected”.

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

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

**Ms. White:** I rise to give notice of the following motion:  
THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with stakeholders and other governments to find solutions to retain access for Yukon mining products at the deep-water port in Skagway, Alaska.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to support municipal and First Nation governments with testing waste-water systems for COVID-19.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to create a central data collection system for waste-water test results of COVID-19 and make the information publicly available through its COVID-19 dashboard.

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

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Wolverine mine site

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I would like to provide an update on the former Wolverine mine site. The Government of Yukon and the receiver, PricewaterhouseCoopers, remain focused on continuing water treatment, maintaining infrastructure, and addressing any urgent site needs.

Water emerging from the underground is now treated on a year-round basis due to recent upgrades to the treatment process. A new treatment capacity has been added that allows us to safely discharge approximately 228,000 cubic metres of treated water from the tailings storage facility. This has brought water volumes back to within safe levels, and water treatment at the facility will continue throughout the 2022 season to further reduce levels. We have also replaced aging infrastructure, completed a series of water management infrastructure repairs, and upgraded the storm-water management systems.

Transfer of care and maintenance is the next logical step following the conclusion of the unsuccessful sale process led by the receiver this past fall. We are in discussions with the receiver on the future transfer of care and maintenance responsibilities to the Government of Yukon in the fall of this year, 2022. Wolverine is the first abandoned mine that the Government of Yukon has sole responsibility for, as it was permitted after the territory assumed responsibility for managing natural resources from the Government of Canada.

When the mine ceased operations, the cost to close and reclaim the mine was estimated to be \$35.5 million, though overall costs will likely be higher. Since 2018, the Government of Yukon has spent \$24 million on care and maintenance, water treatment, administrative costs of the receiver, and legal fees. About \$10.5 million of that spending was recovered from financial security posted by Yukon Zinc Corporation. We expect to spend approximately \$12 million in the 2022-23 fiscal year on ongoing care and maintenance and water treatment, urgent works to address higher risk areas at the site, remediation planning, and administrative costs of the receiver as they transition from their role. Prior to receivership, Yukon Zinc sold mine assets on-site to a company named Welichem. Currently, we are working very closely with the receiver and Welichem to resolve ownership and responsibility of site assets and equipment.

The story of the Wolverine mine is a cautionary tale of what happens when the security collected for a mine is not adequate for the risk of environmental impacts and proper remediation. The Yukon has had to learn this lesson the hard way — the expensive way. Mining remains an essential part of our economy and critical minerals an essential part of our energy transition away from fossil fuels. Our government remains committed to the responsible development of the Yukon’s mineral resources in a way that protects the environment, respects the rights and traditions of First Nations, and benefits all Yukoners.

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the minister for that ministerial statement as well as the opportunity to respond to it today. We look forward to hearing details of the final care and maintenance plan that will be in place for this fall. I do have some questions about this project, however, for the minister.

The former minister told this House two years ago that the sale of the property was imminent; however, that failed to materialize. So, can the current minister explain what happened with that deal that the former minister announced a couple of years ago?

Then, during departmental briefings last fall, officials from Energy, Mines and Resources indicated at the time that there was substantial interest in the project during the sale process; however, as the minister mentioned, there was no interest when it went to court for sale. Can the minister provide us with any analysis done of why that early interest waned and there were no parties to come forward approximately one month after that briefing?

Finally, department officials provided us a response yesterday to questions that we raised during this spring’s

budget briefing. In that document, amounts for security currently being held on a number of larger projects were presented. Can the minister confirm that those amounts held are sufficient for work that would need to be done to remediate those projects?

I look forward to asking more questions about this and other projects when we discuss Energy, Mines and Resources later this Sitting in Committee of the Whole budget debate.

**Ms. White:** Yukoners know too well the environmental and financial cost of poorly regulated mines like Faro and Mount Nansen. We have been promised a new way of mining that would be done sustainably and to the benefit of Yukoners and their businesses. With modern mining and regulatory regimes, economic and environmental disasters were supposed to be a thing of the past, yet here we are with Wolverine, a mine that failed to pay its full securities, a mine that ignored its obligations in the mine closure plan, and a government of the day that failed in its responsibilities. Unlike the Faro mine, Wolverine was permitted after devolution, which means that it is a sole responsibility of the Yukon government.

Before fingers are pointed from the current government to a previous one, the unfortunate truth is that, regardless of party affiliation, the Yukon government is the Yukon government. So, what has the Yukon government learned from this experience?

We know that on October 31, 2014, Yukon Zinc Corporation missed a \$350,000 payment to Yukon government, but they were allowed to continue their operations until they closed early in the new year. The last securities payment that they made was on July 31, 2014. Wolverine operated for nearly three months without paying its securities, and we all know what happened next. The mine closed and went into receivership, leaving Yukoners holding the bag.

Yukon contractors were owed nearly \$4.3 million that they were never able to collect in full. Instead, they were offered pennies on the dollar, and when the underfunded security funds ran out last year, Yukoners had to pick up the bill. In this fiscal year, the Wolverine mine will cost Yukoners \$11.9 million just to maintain the site, and that doesn't even cover a closure plan. I would like to think that the *Miners Lien Act* has been highlighted as one issue in this saga. After all, it is the piece of legislation that allowed Yukon businesses to be left holding a \$4.3-million empty promise. So, this is a big problem for Yukoners and for industry.

What happened with Wolverine is a stain on the mining industry, affecting its image and credibility in the eyes of Yukoners, but it is also a stain on Yukon government's reputation. Yukon, its mining companies and suppliers, mine workers, and everyone who calls the territory home deserve better.

As the minister lays out this cautionary tale about Wolverine mine, Yukoners have questions about a current security deposit situation. Minto is currently violating its water licence due to the lack of storage in its tailings ponds. As a result, they recently had their security deposit increased by more than \$30 million. The government says that the new

deposit was to be paid by April 5, but it does not appear that Minto met this deadline. Instead, Minto has hired consultants to fight the increase and appears to be doing everything it can to avoid the payment.

So, I would like to know: Has Minto paid their security of \$104 million in full, and if not, when will the minister start to collect on this and protect the interest of Yukoners?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I agree with the member opposite that we do deserve better, and I also agree that it is the responsibility of the Yukon government to clean up Wolverine.

As I said earlier, our Liberal government is committed to responsible development of the Yukon's mineral resources in a way that protects the environment, respects the rights and traditions of First Nations, and benefits all Yukoners. Mining and mineral exploration remain of central importance to the Yukon's economy, contributing significantly to the territory's economic performance through the pandemic. Critical minerals are also essential to address the climate crisis and transition to renewable energy.

The Yukon was one of only two jurisdictions in Canada to experience GDP growth in 2020, and it was largely thanks to mining. Unfortunately, the Yukon Party government and Wolverine have given us a textbook example of what not to do in mining.

The Yukon Party allowed Yukon Zinc to fall millions of dollars behind on security payments. Quoting the former minister, "... when it comes to the Wolverine mine, we chose not to shut down the mine..."

Indeed, they let it continue to operate for months while no payments were made. Of course, it isn't just taxpayers left holding the bag; there were plenty of Yukon businesses that were owed money, and many of those companies received only 11 cents on the dollar, thanks to this mismanagement.

Also, there were many dedicated mine staff who didn't receive their wages for months — some who continued to work without pay to protect the site.

The shape the company left the mine site in led to increasing environmental risks and costs. For example, when the mine portal filled with water and needed to be processed through the tailing storage facility, the cost of treating that water increased substantially many times over.

The sale of equipment from Yukon Zinc to Welichem led to a situation where the receiver was not allowed to use on-site pumps, generators, or even the camp. Challenged by not being able to use the existing on-site mine equipment increased risks and costs. This is the mess we inherited, and this is the mess we are literally and financially still cleaning up seven years later, and we do take responsibility for it.

After many court proceedings, we are on the right track to clean up the property, and we will soon finalize an agreement with Welichem to have them remove old equipment and machinery from the site. Since 2018, the Government of Yukon has spent \$24 million on care and maintenance, water treatment, administrative costs of the receiver, and legal fees. We continue to work to prevent serious environmental degradation. The capable site management team continues to

do this work along with the folks at Assessment and Abandoned Mines, and I want to thank all of them for their dedication to address the situation at Wolverine.

This year, we expect to spend approximately \$12 million on ongoing care and maintenance, water treatment, urgent works to address higher risk areas at the site, and remediation planning.

Work is well underway today in order to improve the environmental, socio-economic, and governance models of mining. We are working with First Nations to develop successor mining legislation. At the same time, we are working with industry and environmental groups. The Yukon Party could have done this work, but they chose not to. There are now three operating mines in the territory and a fourth has just been permitted.

With respect to Wolverine, we will continue to address the problems left behind and clean up the site. In the words of the site manager, "It's time we put this to bed."

**Speaker:** This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Alaska fisheries impact on Yukon River salmon

**Mr. Istchenko:** Earlier this year, a report commissioned by a coalition of groups in BC showed that the commercial fishing industry in Alaska could be affecting the number of salmon that return to BC to spawn. This prompted discussion and criticism of the Pacific Salmon Treaty between the US and Canada.

The T̓silhqot'in First Nations, as well as several other salmon stakeholder groups in BC, are now calling for a renegotiation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. The *Yukon River Salmon Agreement* also falls under the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

What is the Minister of Environment's position with regard to the call for the Pacific Salmon Treaty to be renegotiated?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I had the opportunity to meet with my federal counterpart on this topic a number of months ago. I'm certainly open to this occurring. We know that there has been a full collapse of the Pacific salmon as they return to both the Alaska portion of the Yukon River and the Yukon portion of the river, not even allowing for subsistence fishing of either Yukon First Nations or Alaska First Nations.

I've read some reports — not recently — but have I read reports indicating that there are concerns about overfishing in the Bering Sea and the North Pacific, but also there could be issues with respect to the water temperature rising, as impacted by climate change.

So, I'm open to any and all avenues to try to rehabilitate salmon stocks in both Alaska and then through agreements with Alaska as well, as the numbers have collapsed.

**Mr. Istchenko:** What I wanted to know was the minister's position on whether the Pacific Salmon Treaty should be renegotiated. So, at least one of the First Nations in BC is calling for the Pacific Salmon Treaty between Canada and the US to be renegotiated. The chief of the T̓silhqot'in First Nations said that the people have sacrificed their aboriginal

rights to fish and were disappointed to find out that they made those sacrifices. He says — and I quote: "... only to learn that the drastic decline in returns was the result of major overfishing in Alaskan waters."

According to the 2021 state of the environment report, the 2020 population target for the Yukon River salmon was not met. Does the minister believe that the tools that are currently in place throughout the Yukon salmon agreement are sufficient enough to rebuild and conserve Canadian-origin salmon in the Yukon?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** As indicated, there is very little fishing that is occurring in the Yukon, and the various species of salmon are not being harvested in any meaningful way in the Yukon.

We know that there is some fishing occurring in Alaska, but the bottom line is, in speaking to both the wildlife biologists in my department and my federal Fisheries and Oceans counterparts and to some of my counterparts through officials in Alaska, that it's a complex issue, and there are similar collapses to the stocks all along the BC coast and in Alaska, so it's occurring everywhere.

I will be continuing my discussions with my federal counterparts, my BC counterparts, and Alaska counterparts in order to reach some sort of additional and creative solutions, but the numbers on the Yukon River have not recovered, and we certainly wish them to recover.

**Mr. Istchenko:** The Yukon River Panel, which is established by the *Yukon River Salmon Agreement*, recommends spawning goals, reviews management strategies and conservation objectives, and funds restoration and enhancement projects focusing on Canadian-origin salmon stocks. Also, Yukon First Nations have placed voluntary restrictions or avoided subsistence harvest activities.

The question for the minister is: Does he believe that the current tools available to fisheries managers in both Alaska and Canada are sufficient to meet the goals of rebuilding Yukon-origin salmon stocks?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** We strive to maintain quality fisheries and angling opportunities. To do so, we focus on resources in three main areas: monitoring fish populations by conducting surveys and assessments; assessing harvest impacts through angler harvest surveys and field programs; and also recognizing that Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is the lead agency for salmon management. We also play an advisory role with First Nations and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on matters pertaining to salmon management.

The Fish and Wildlife branch employs two biologists and two technicians who are dedicated to monitoring the status and health of Yukon's freshwater fish populations. Maintaining viable fish populations supports important cultural and social practices in the Yukon.

The subsistence fishing continues to be important to First Nations, and Yukon's licensed anglers are also very active in our lakes and rivers, with more than 33,500 fish harvested annually by licensed anglers.

To answer the member opposite's question, these discussions are ongoing, and as I indicated in both my first and

second responses, the genesis for the fishing stock collapse in the Pacific Ocean is complex, but as the secondary partner on this file, we continue to work hard to reach a solution.

**Question re: Mining legislation**

**Mr. Kent:** Five years ago, the Premier promised the mining industry that a collaborative framework for timelines and reassessments would be developed. We have asked about this many times in this Legislature, and the Premier and his ministers have evaded the question. However, a confidential briefing note that we have obtained indicates that the Council of Yukon First Nations and the Yukon government sent a joint letter to the federal minister in December 2020 requesting a focused review of the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, or YESAA. A reply from the minister was received on February 18, 2021, indicating that he was willing to work on these amendments.

Can the Premier confirm that this letter was sent, and if so, would he provide us with a copy of the letter and the response from the minister?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I don't have any update for the member opposite currently, but I will endeavor to get back to him on his specific questions.

We have spoken in the past in the Legislative Assembly about oversight when it comes to YESAA. We have spoken about our ability to work with both regulators to make sure that we are moving forward on a memorandum of understanding. We have spoken at length in Committee of the Whole debates on that.

As far as any specific new information the member opposite wants, I have nothing new to add right now, other than that we continue to work on these extremely important files with these agencies that really are, in my opinion, an industry standard right across Canada. I believe that the regulatory processes and our work and endeavours there are reflected in the most recent Fraser Institute update, which promotes very heavily the Yukon as a favourable mining jurisdiction in Canada.

Of course, YESAA is not just for mining, but it is an extremely important part, and it is extremely important recognition of the good work that is being done on this side of the Legislative Assembly with our regulatory processes.

**Mr. Kent:** I am hoping that the Premier will commit to get us a copy of that joint letter that was sent from the Council of Yukon First Nations and the Government of Yukon, as well as the response that the federal minister sent back.

The confidential note also says — and I quote: “The purpose of the review will be to propose amendments to address issues surrounding the need for an assessment when a project’s authorization is amended or renewed.” To our knowledge, there has been no public statement or announcement made regarding these potential changes to YESAA.

Can the Premier explain why nothing has been announced, given that this initial letter was sent in late 2020? Can he confirm that work is underway to amend this legislation?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I would ask the member opposite to have a bit of patience with things, knowing full well that, again,

the genesis of this conversation — the reset legislation — started back in his days with Bill S-6.

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

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** The members opposite don't like the answer, I guess; they're speaking off-mic.

But again, it was really difficult to get us back into a track with the memorandum of understanding in mining because there was a lot of litigation pending at that time that was going to put a lot of our land into freeze when it came to exploration because of the two different decks when it came to the litigation from the former government.

But at the same time, COVID as well — very hard to move forward. But the good news is that these letters heading to federal — where you have First Nation governments and the Yukon government working together to try to find a common ground and to try to find a solution for a wrinkle in the system that really puts a lot of onus on First Nation governments when it comes to certain projects.

So, the good work of the previous Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and of the current minister as well to get to a place where both we and First Nation chiefs are writing letters to the federal government urging them and us to work together in a collaborative fashion is a welcome change of pace under the leadership of the Yukon Liberal government.

**Mr. Kent:** So, this briefing note that we obtained said that there was a joint letter sent in December 2020. A response was received a couple of months later from the federal government that was favourable to proceeding with the amendments, but we have not seen any public announcement that there would be changes to YESAA, which I'm sure the Premier and all members of this House would agree would be major news.

That confidential note also says that the most recent meeting of the oversight group was in September 2021 and that the assessment of amendments and renewals was to be discussed at that meeting.

So, can the Premier tell us if any meetings have been held since to discuss the proposed YESAA amendments? When will industry, the public, and other stakeholders be consulted on these proposed changes?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** You know, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to any announcements moving forward, we have been working hand in glove with Yukon First Nations when it comes to these issues. I know that this is a change of pace from the previous government, but again, Yukon First Nations have maintained that any decision concerning determinations and needs for assessments on projects, amendments, renewals, or what have you — the First Nations will be there at that table and we will support each other in these provisions.

I will say as well that we have an excellent new chair on YESAB, which is sending some really good waves throughout the mining community. The members opposite keep on talking about these confidential documents that they have managed to get a hold of and, interestingly enough, have proven to be unreliable. We, through ATIPP, have changed the rules to make sure that our briefing notes are accessible to the members opposite. There is nothing confidential about them. They are



accessible to the public — and the Official Opposition, when they were in power, not so much.

Again, more open, more transparent — these are not confidential things that the members opposite worked very hard to get a hold of. It is through the ATIPP process.

So, we will continue to work hand in glove with Yukon First Nations when it comes to these important initiatives to reduce red tape for our mining industry and for other projects in communities of importance.

**Question re: Mental health services**

**Ms. White:** Yesterday, I asked the minister about systemic failures in Yukon's mental health care system based on Lori Fox's article for *The Globe and Mail*. Instead of answering the question, she talked about what is supposedly available, so let's talk about it.

First, she referred people to the mental wellness hubs. The minister should know that they are chronically short-staffed and, according to communities, are far from meeting the needs. She also mentioned the Canadian Mental Health Association here in Whitehorse. While they are doing great work, they have no psychiatrist on staff, nor can they refer you to one. There are psychiatrists, but the wait times are six to 12 weeks and only if you can get a referral from a doctor, which, despite what the minister said yesterday, is a long time and one more barrier when someone is in crisis.

So, does the minister realize that her patchwork solutions for mental health just aren't working?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think that mental wellness services here in the territory are critically important. I can indicate, of course, that we have improved mental health services through a number of initiatives here in Yukon Territory over the years that we have been here. They have increased. Are they perfect? No. Are they available to everyone? Yes. Are they working hard — all mental health workers — to make sure that they are serving Yukon communities? Absolutely.

Community-based mental wellness services and mental health services were simply not available prior to the determination of this government being in power and ultimately taking that problem — issue — to heart to make sure that there are community-based mental wellness services here in the territory.

I look forward to being able to continue this conversation.

**Ms. White:** Things are even worse for people who can't afford to pay out of pocket, and to quote Lori, wealthy people get better care faster through private services.

The few mental health care services available for free to Yukoners can have months-long wait-lists. They are short appointments with almost no follow-up. Mental health care is health care. No matter how much money you make or what benefits you have, everyone deserves equal access.

The minister's laundry list of what she thinks Yukoners need is not working. She even said herself: Are they perfect? Her answer was no. The minister yesterday said that funding isn't an issue, so will the minister commit to subsidizing at least 12 sessions per year with a private psychologist of their choice for every Yukoner who needs it?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I did indicate that the financial resources were not necessarily the issue. I think that it is critically important — and I know that Yukoners are well aware of this. It doesn't seem to have maybe permeated the Legislative Assembly, but health care workers are at a critical shortage here in the territory and here in the country — actually, nationally and internationally.

We are working extremely hard to make sure that there are opportunities for Yukon caregivers to come here in the territory. We have — let's be clear — more physicians per capita than anywhere in Canada. We have the opportunity and the authority to use and have specialists come here, and they do come to the territory to provide services to Yukoners.

It is absolutely the case that there is money in this year's budget to hire more nurse practitioners, to expand the services across the territory, to expand the services through clinics, both here in Whitehorse and at the hubs across the territory. The format of those hubs, of course, involves multiple types of care, and that is what Yukoners need.

**Ms. White:** This isn't a critique of those working on the ground, but this is a critique of the government direction — that's what I'm talking about. Yesterday the minister dismissed Lori's story by saying — and I quote: "I certainly am not going to respond to an individual person's experience..."

Mr. Speaker, this was published in one of Canada's most highly regarded newspapers. It was fact-checked and based on a decade of reporting. Lori's story is not an individual experience; it has happened to hundreds of Yukoners for years while this government, and the one before, did little to help. I quote Lori one last time so the minister hears them loud and clear — and I quote: This is "... an open, standing challenge to all level's of the Yukon government to commit to fixing..." the mental health care system. "You're killing people - you nearly killed me."

Will the minister launch an audit of our mental health care system so that this story does not ever happen again?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think it's absolutely required that I correct the record and reiterate that I have not been dismissive of anyone's personal experience and I would not be dismissive of anyone's personal experience.

We have taken on the challenge of improving mental wellness services — mental health services — here in the territory. We have set up hubs across the territory. We have staffed those hubs as best as possible at the moment — up to 21 mental health workers across the territory — an improvement from the one who was responsible for everyone in the territory prior to our government coming to be.

We have put money in our budgets this year and last year toward the short-stay psychiatric unit to improve services at Yukon's hospitals. We have increased the budget for mental wellness services in the Department of Health and Social Services. We have increased the budget for Canadian Mental Health Services, which now has six-days-a-week service and is going to seven-days service when they can staff. We have recognized the issues brought forward by a world pandemic and an opportunity for Yukon to respond to that in a way that has been positive and will continue.

**Question re: McIntyre Creek park**

**Ms. Clarke:** Salamat, Mr. Speaker. In the 2021 election, the Liberal Party committed to creating McIntyre Creek park. Yesterday, the minister told the Legislature that he had asked the federal government to consider developing an urban national park. Can the minister confirm this: Is the government considering a national park in Whitehorse?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** The short answer is no, and I provided a response yesterday. The federal government is not committed to establishing a national park north of 60. However, what I did say was that Minister Guilbeault is committed — his mandate letter says to try to establish urban parks that are part of the national parks strategy below 60. The first urban park that has now been initiated, or has been opened, is in the Rouge Valley in Scarborough, just east of Toronto.

His mandate is to identify other areas in other provinces to establish urban national parks, and I believe there are five or six other potential sites.

What I also said was that there will be interest from the federal government to set lands aside and that their planning resources may come to bear so that there is a combined effort between the federal government, the territorial government, the municipal government, and First Nation governments in order to explore the possibility of establishing —

**Speaker:** Order, please.

**Ms. Clarke:** We are aware that the planned park is much bigger than many people realize and stretches from the mouth of McIntyre Creek all the way down to the former Whitehorse copper mine. There are many overlapping land interests in this area and several active or pending quartz claims.

Is the minister considering expropriating mining claims or private land dispositions in the proposed McIntyre Creek park?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** We have initiated discussions with the City of Whitehorse. We will be following up with the affected Yukon First Nations, Yukon University, and local stakeholders toward the creation of McIntyre Creek park. The McIntyre Creek area supports a diversity of habitats important to wildlife, including wetlands. It is also known to be an important cultural area for both the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'an Council.

Yukon University also recognizes the importance of the area to support field-based learning and research. We acknowledge and respect that this is an area with several concurrent planning processes already underway. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of the City of Whitehorse's new official community plan — Whitehorse 2040 — the development of the Yukon University campus master plan, and the Łu Zil Män Fish Lake local area plan.

We will continue to work with the affected parties to discuss the park's development and ways to ensure the environmental protection of McIntyre Creek moving forward.

**Question re: Top of the World Highway border crossing**

**Ms. Van Bibber:** On March 31 of this year, the Minister of Tourism and Culture told Committee of the Whole that the CBSA would be opening the Top of the World Highway border

crossing, that it would be fully staffed, and we would be back to pre-pandemic levels.

This morning, we called US Customs and were told that no decision has been made yet about whether or not they will open the Poker Creek border crossing.

Can the minister confirm that what he told the Legislature on March 31 was correct? Will the Little Gold Creek-Poker Creek border crossing be fully opened this season?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Again, we've discussed multiple border crossings here in the House over the last number of weeks since the session started. Again, since April 1, 2022, the fully vaccinated international visitors to the Yukon have not — these are some of the things we have worked on — have not required a pre-COVID-19 test. We worked with our airports and borders. We worked in ensuring that we had Canada Border Services staffing at our airports.

We have also made things easier with the ArriveCAN app — that was ensuring that, for areas where there wasn't connectivity, that we had coverage.

Over the last week, we have been made aware from business owners in Dawson City of concerns on the US side. Of course, we have the opportunity to work very closely with Canada Border Services, and I applaud the team out of Vancouver for giving us the support there. One of our concerns at this particular time is when you think about the logistics of opening up that particular site on the Top of the World Highway. We're also watching what's happening with the crossing in Dawson right now and having to hopefully not have a delay on opening. Our understanding, and within our border group of work, is that we are going to have an opening. Again, the commitment was to make sure that we had Canada Border Services in place, and now we're looking at the delay on the US side, and still, we'll bring those back to the Assembly.

**Question re: Chilkoot Trail Inn social housing**

**Ms. Clarke:** Salamat. Following damage caused by a fire, the Whitehorse fire department issued a notice to vacate the Chilkoot Trail Inn due to numerous building code issues. The residents of the Chilkoot Trail Inn are almost all social assistance clients and have few, if any, other options for housing. At the time, the Department of Health and Social Services announced that they would be working with NGOs, like the Safe at Home Society, to find temporary housing solutions for the residents. The owners of the Chilkoot Trail Inn have written to the government to ask for support to make the Chilkoot Trail Inn a safer place to live over the long term.

How has the government responded to this request?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I appreciate the question. On January 17, 2022, the landlords of the Chilkoot Trail Inn delivered an eviction notice to tenants of the inn. Tenants were required to vacate the building by 1:00 p.m. on January 31, 2022. When the Department of Health and Social Services became aware of the closure of that building, staff immediately began to explore options to help tenants with community partners, including the Yukon Housing Corporation, the Safe at Home Society, Crown and Indigenous Relations and Northern

Affairs Canada, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and other community service partners.

Health and Social Services provided communication for individuals who were impacted by the closure and notified them of available supports and the services that they could avail themselves of. This was distributed in mid-January with the alignment of the eviction notices, and individuals who sought support for relocation were moved to other accommodations, and I look forward to further discussing this really important issue.

**Ms. Clarke:** The letter from the owners of the Chilkoot Trail Inn makes a fairly clear appeal to the government. To quote from the letter: “We are specifically requesting funding to assist with the above noted repairs with the understanding that the repaired CTI can once again be used as affordable housing for clients who otherwise are difficult to house.” They also say that they have been told that they are ineligible for CMHC or Yukon Housing Corporation funding.

So, is the government considering providing funding to allow this building to continue to operate the 39 units of affordable housing?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** We are closely monitoring the impacts of the move of individuals from that particular location and supporting the clients who are clients of Social Services to continue to be available, and throughout that process, we can indicate that the Chilkoot Trail Inn had rental agreements with 30 individuals, as far as we are aware, 18 of whom were supported by the Social Supports branch at Health and Social Services at the time of the eviction.

While Health and Social Services, it should be noted, may have paid the rent on behalf of social assistance clients who were living at the Chilkoot Trail Inn, Health and Social Services did not have a funding arrangement with the Chilkoot Trail Inn or any role or responsibility in its operations.

Safe at Home is a great partner and has committed to assist — and did work with finding housing options for people who were displaced, following the closure of the Chilkoot Trail Inn. If an individual resides in a hotel for a full six months or greater, they have rights under the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act*, which I think is incredibly important for people to know.

**Ms. Clarke:** Another request in the letter to the government was to have the government facilitate a partnership with a local NGO, like Safe at Home, to manage the building on their behalf. The owners acknowledge in the letter that this would result in a more effective, safer controlled environment for the tenants and help ensure that inevitable property damage is minimized.

Is the government considering supporting this request?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** At this particular time, we are in the midst of — we have received letters from the owners, or the representative of the owner. We are being very respectful of all levels of government, including the City of Whitehorse and local First Nations. There is a long history around this particular property. There has been lots of concern around this property. Moving forward, we will do the appropriate due diligence that we need to do. I don’t think that anybody within the City of

Whitehorse or our community wants to see some of the challenges that have happened in the past happen again.

We will continue to work with Safe at Home. I commend the work they do, and as was posed in the previous question, they do fabulous work. The work that they have done in concert with us on our assets has been great. We trust working with them. Of course, we are doing a big project, which we announced, for a number of Yukoners in the old Coast hotel.

Again, we will work methodically. We will ensure that we reduce risk for all Yukoners on this project. We will make appropriate decisions and bring them back to the House when the time is appropriate.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Deputy Chair (Ms. Tredger):** I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

The matter before the Committee is Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

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

### **Bill No. 204: *First Appropriation Act 2022-23* — continued**

**Deputy Chair:** The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

### **Public Service Commission**

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I’m not going to do much by way of introduction today. I would like to welcome Public Service Commissioner Paul Moore and our acting director of Policy and Planning, Sasha Gronsdahl, back to the Assembly today to assist in providing information for members opposite in

Committee of the Whole budget debate on the Public Service Commission.

I would like to just say thank you to the public service for the work that they have done over the past couple of years. It has been challenging since the start of COVID, but many things underway — collective bargaining — but in general, working to try to make sure that the services that government provides across all departments is supported and assisted, as we deal with vaccinations, the vaccine mandate, mental wellness challenges — the gamut.

So, just to begin with, I just wanted to say thank you so much to the public service for helping to keep the Yukon safe. I'm sure this is shared by all members of the Legislature. It is much appreciated for the hard work that folks have done.

**Mr. Dixon:** I appreciate the minister's brief opening remarks and would also welcome the officials to the Legislature.

I don't have many questions, so I will just note, for the record, that I asked for a few pieces of information of officials at our briefing, and I just wanted to let the minister know that I haven't received those yet — just for notation there.

The first question I had was related to the vaccine mandate. Can the minister tell us the current status of the vaccine mandate? How many YG employees have either quit or were let go? How many are still on leave without pay? How many remaining officials from the government continue to either not provide their attestation forms or refuse to provide that information?

If the minister can just offer those numbers, I'll give him a chance to provide an answer there, and I'll have a subsequent question after.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I thank the member opposite for the reminder about the responses. I just checked with the commissioner, and I guess they're routing through our office. I will endeavour to find out where that information is at. My apologies for not — I think the fault lies with me — but we'll get it for the member opposite.

Then with respect to the questions about leave without pay, I think it started — the requirement started November 30 for the first vaccination, and then by the time we hit the second vaccination, which was, I believe, January 30, as well — there were people who were on leave without pay either because they had not been vaccinated or chose not to attest. That number was in the range of five percent of the total workforce, but I always tried to break it down for us in this House and the public. In terms of permanent and term employees, it was about 100 and about 200 of auxiliary on call, temporary on call, casual hires.

In terms of past April 4 — on April 4, we welcomed back employees who had been on leave without pay, except for those employees who worked in vulnerable settings. The list of vulnerable settings would include long-term care homes or hospitals, et cetera. I could provide the list, if necessary. Of those folks, there were 19 permanent or term employees, again, just under 100 auxiliary on call or casual. Some of those employees — I need to explain — if there are employees who are seasonal, for example, and we don't stay in touch with them over the winter months — we just don't have contact with them

— then they, in effect, are on that list. So, that's still being resolved.

The 19 term employees — most of those have already been reassigned or found different locations of employment that are not in a vulnerable setting. I think we are down to a handful. I think the number is five we are still working on. We have had no terminations to date.

**Mr. Dixon:** The minister said there were zero terminations to date. Is he aware, or does the government track, how many employees quit as a result of the vaccine mandate?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I did ask the Public Service Commission to try to look into to see if they could discern whether there were additional resignations at that time or retirements at that time. I think there was some anecdotal information of some people who chose, rather than going on leave without pay, to take early retirement. I will have to turn back to the commission and ask them again. At the time when this was first happening and I asked for that information, we didn't see much of a signal. I asked it to be compared against other previous years around the end of January, just to look to try to see. We didn't see that there was much difference, but of course, COVID time is different anyway, so it can be challenging.

While I understand, anecdotally, that there were some folks who chose to step back, we don't have information that I can share, because when people choose to resign, they don't always tell us what it is that is contributing to their decision. I did have some conversations with some individuals who sought other work, so I know there has to be some, but it wasn't something that we could readily see in the public service and discern from the data that we were tracking.

**Mr. Dixon:** Can the minister explain if they have considered removing the vaccine mandate altogether? I know that a number of provinces have fully dropped their vaccine mandates now. Some remain for vulnerable or health care settings, but some have been dropped altogether. As we have seen, the vaccine mandate that currently exists is for two shots. We know that has changed a lot, as well, over the months. There is now a fourth booster available, and the efficacy of a two-shot mandate is at least coming into question for some provinces.

So, I am wondering if the minister has considered, at least, fully dropping the mandate altogether, given the reduction of effectiveness of a two-shot mandate?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** First of all, I will note that this is a decision that is taken by Cabinet. It is based on recommendations from the chief medical officer of health. The member asked whether there was consideration for it — yes, absolutely. We were provided a range of options. I will say that, I believe, some time ago when the order — it was changed from being two vaccinations to whatever the current recommendation is by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization — so, whatever they say is the full dosage, that will be what is required. Over time, that may change, and if that changes from the advisory committee, then that is what will change.

Yes, of course, we looked at the situation. The advice that we got, and ultimately where we landed, was that there are

some settings, like the shelters and our long-term care facilities, where the risk was deemed to be high, and we wanted to make sure that people in those congregate settings who are vulnerable because they may have comorbidities or other health issues — that we didn't put them at undue risk. So, that was the reason.

I appreciate that other jurisdictions have landed differently. This was based on the advice that we got and, with consideration, it's where we landed, but we definitely considered a range of options.

**Mr. Dixon:** I would like to shift gears now to the issue of deputy minister severance. In 2018, the former minister committed to making severance for deputy ministers public. A *Yukon News* article said that the current Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission said that he wants — and I quote — "... to bring the issue of DM severance into the light."

He says: "I'm talking specifically about the severance that this government pays to DMs that are released from their roles in the government." That was the former Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission talking about the need to allow for transparency around the issue of DM severance. Of course, the Premier, before he was elected as Premier, advocated that the government also make deputy minister severance public.

Can the minister tell us whether or not that commitment from the Premier and the former minister has been acted on?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I will have to look back to the reference that the Leader of the Official Opposition is making. I will check it out.

The note that I have in front of me talking about severance is that, since 2016 — let's say since the 2016 election — we have had 14 deputy ministers who have resigned, retired, or otherwise left the employment of the Government of Yukon. I am given to understand that, under the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, it would prohibit me from releasing individual income with the low number of employees. I will try to investigate to ascertain where there's a threshold where there's enough where you could roll information up, but as I'm given to understand right now, we wouldn't be able to disclose severance payments because of that rule. But thank you for the question.

**Mr. Dixon:** Just for the minister's understanding, this is a *Yukon News* article dated June 13, 2018. The title of the article is "Yukon government promises more details on DM severance, eventually". The lead-in of the story reads: "The territorial government is promising to make severance paid to deputy ministers public..." Then it goes on and on, and the ATIPP act is referenced, of course. The article also referenced the 2016 commitment of the Premier. It notes — and I'll quote: "In 2016, prior to becoming Premier..." — the Premier's name — "... took the former government to task for refusing to release details..." about 10 deputy ministers who were let go over 18 months.

He said at the time — quote: "When the premier hires deputy ministers and then fires them, there's a cost to the taxpayer — hundreds of thousands of dollars each time that this happens ... It is very unfortunate that this government keeps having to do this and it is even worse when it refuses to tell the

public what this major turnover at the highest level of public service is costing the taxpayers."

So, the Premier made a clear commitment; the former minister made a clear commitment. The minister could have put forward legislative changes to enact or bring forward that promise, but it sounds like instead they have decided to just simply break that promise.

I stand to be corrected if that's wrong. I invite the minister to offer an explanation as to why that promise was made and what action has been taken to act on that promise.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Again, I will look into what the rules under the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* say. I will try to see what is possible.

Again, I thank the member opposite for the question. If that's right — 10 people who were let go over 18 months — and I just listed 14 over six years — that's a tenfold difference. Maybe the challenge here is that we haven't had as many people leave. I will have to see.

I hope that the member opposite knows what was given — I should not assume. But, of course, the member opposite was a minister in the Yukon Party government and therefore presumably would have some ability to understand what severance was when he was in the role.

I will, at all times, be sure to try to do this in a way that would not disclose individual information but try to find a way to aggregate it so that it just is helping Yukoners to understand without sharing specific information about individual severance.

Again, I committed here, earlier in my response, to investigate to see what the rules are under the act to make sure that we do this in a way that is appropriate for our previous employees.

**Mr. Dixon:** Just so I understand, the minister is saying that he is going to go back and check what was committed to. Of course, what I can indicate is that the Premier did indeed commit to this in 2016. In 2018, the former minister committed to this.

I would just like to ask if there has been any action at all. Has any direction been given to the department to consider legislative amendments to act on the promise that the Premier and the former minister made?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** What I just stood and committed to and will do so again — I certainly will read back through the previous references to understand what was said. What I committed to do was to look into the act and to understand what is allowed and what is not allowed.

The member opposite just said that we could change the act. But there is a principle at work in the act — which I think I would try to uphold — which is to respect privacy of individuals.

What I'm saying is that the act has outlined how many people you would need to put together in order to not unfairly look into individual situations and to be able to aggregate the information together. That's a principle that is there.

The issue is not so much what number was set, but rather how many people have been let go. That's the difference. I will check to find out whether this is a way to share this information

appropriately under the rules of the act, which I believe are there to protect individual privacy while doing our utmost to share information.

As an example, we said that, under the new *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, previous briefing notes for ministers would become available to members opposite and the public. That was a change, so we will try to use the act to provide as much information as we can while, at the same time, respecting privacy.

**Mr. Dixon:** It is quite clear from that answer that absolutely nothing has happened between 2016 and now with regard to that promise from the Premier — certainly nothing since June 2018 when the former minister made the promise. If the minister has to go back and check now, obviously, over the past four years, nothing has happened. It's pretty clear that no action has occurred so far.

I will move on. The next question I had is related to the employee engagement. When is the next employee engagement survey going to go out, and for which departments?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** When I came into this role roughly a year ago, I, of course, sat down with the then-commissioner and very quickly met with the incoming commissioner. I certainly met with my colleague who was the previous minister responsible. We went over many files. This wasn't one of the ones that I understood to be of significant priority. That doesn't mean that nothing has happened in the interim; it just means that I have not inquired about it. I thank the member for his questions. I have offered to go back and look into what has happened. I don't think that I could stand today and talk about what has happened because I haven't seen this as a critical issue and have not made sure to get up to speed on it. I am saying that I will.

The most recent employee engagement survey was conducted last year, and I am anticipating that there will be results out shortly.

I am given to understand that results will be out shortly. I think, roughly, the employee surveys are done every three years. I think that we did hit a hiccup with COVID and things got postponed a bit, but my understanding is that the results of the survey that happened last fall are now being worked through, or formed into, the information package for our public service employees, and that will come out shortly.

**Mr. Dixon:** I know that the last set of employee engagement survey results didn't paint a very good picture for the Premier, and I was wondering if all of the departments will be included in this survey, or is it just a certain number of departments?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** All departments.

**Mr. Dixon:** I will cede the floor to my colleague from the NDP.

**Ms. White:** I thank my colleague from the Yukon Party, and I have to honestly say that I didn't quite anticipate my participation this soon, so I welcome the officials here.

Interestingly enough, after my colleague was asking about severance packages for deputy ministers, it got me to thinking, because I do agree. I hear what the minister is saying about privacy, but again, deputy ministers are appointed by Cabinet,

and they serve at the pleasure of Cabinet and very much are — I guess I wouldn't maybe say "not political creatures", but they are appointed. So, it got me to thinking about the work that I participated in between 2011 and 2016, and I do remember that was a question that was supposed to have been asked by the Premier and by the Yukon NDP.

I was just Googling through sunshine lists. So, a sunshine list is a list that is made that releases, actually, that kind of information. For anyone who is curious or listening, you can actually go onto the legislative website for Yukon, and you can actually find out how much everyone in this room makes, except for, of course, the public servants and the Clerks, but politicians' wages are publicly available, as they should be.

I was looking for sunshine lists, and I think it's really interesting that the Government of Ontario actually has a sunshine list. It is a comparative public sector salary — it is really interesting, because it only releases those salaries that are over \$100,000 — so, six figures — and it shows all sorts of interesting things. If anyone is curious, you can go to [sunshinelist.ca](http://sunshinelist.ca) and what it will show you is Ontario. It is interesting, because — this is an example. The first one up is the year, which says 2022. The employer is the "Ontario Power Generation" and it has the person's name. This person makes \$1,635,785.84 — sure. My guess is that they are probably a CEO or a high-level position within that, but that is an important point.

We are talking about sunshine lists and that kind of disclaimer, and there is a real cost to changing deputy ministers. I do think that this is worthy of conversation, or at least a mention, so I do appreciate the minister's stance, but I will say that, for sure, Ontario has a sunshine list. By the sheer surprise on my face, you know that I only got through one look as I was going through it, but I do think it bears mentioning in the future. I will just put that on the record.

What I wanted to get into is that during the debate on the supplementary budget from last year, we had a conversation — the minister and I — about sexual harassment. I wanted to know if there have been any developments since we had that conversation back on March 29, I believe. The minister and I were talking about sexual harassment policies within the Yukon government.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Just before I answer the question from the Leader of the Third Party, I will say that, while we don't have a sunshine list, we have, in conversation with the unions, agreed to publish wage scales. So, we won't know what deputy minister X or the commissioner make specifically, but what we do publish is a range of salaries that the deputy ministers — all of them — will fall within.

I thank the member for her question about how we're working to support our employees and address issues of sexual harassment in a proactive way. When we were talking last, the member had mentioned about the Yukon Legal Services Society, which offers free advice and information on sexual harassment. I know that the commissioner reached out to that society the day after we were in here debating in the Legislature, and they formed a dialogue and talked about how to work together. That was one of the steps.

The second step was that we worked with the unions and formed an approach to areas of work that sometimes have been strongly not as diverse in their gender so may be more at risk of having issues of sexual harassment. What has begun is an initiative to work at those work sites to do a couple of things to provide direct information to staff and talk to them about, if they are having issues with sexual harassment, where to get support and how we can support them.

Second of all, it was to educate staff about a safe workplace and a harassment-free workplace and about the importance of inclusivity, whether that be gender or any other prohibited grounds from human rights — so, sexual orientation, ethnicity, beliefs, et cetera. So, that was the second thing that has happened since we last spoke here in the Legislature.

The third thing is that, in working again with unions, we have developed a companion guide — a conflict-of-interest guide — that basically clarifies scenarios and situations to proactively try to address situations that could lead to potential sexual harassment.

Those are the three ways that I know of steps we have taken since we were last here with the Public Service Commission.

**Ms. White:** I do thank the minister for that. It's great to know that when we want to, government can move faster than molasses in winter. So, I do appreciate that very much.

I'm curious — I also appreciate the thought that it's about educating folks in areas maybe where there's less gender diversity. The truth of the matter is, I work with the Deputy Chair. If I was making unwanted advances, it's sexual harassment. I work in an office space that is very gender-diverse. The truth of the matter is harassment is harassment is harassment. If it's unwanted, it is harassment.

Maybe targeting areas where there is less diversity is important, but again, I wanted to understand more on the systemic issue. I was just pulling up the conflict-of-interest section from the *General Administration Manual*. I'm not sure if this is the most recent one. I'm hopeful it is. It says that the last time it was amended was in June 2008, so maybe I can get the confirmation from the minister. If I was to Google "conflict of interest Yukon government", this is what comes up.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** First of all, I agree with the member opposite that we need to work on making sure that all of our workplaces are safe and free from harassment. While I think this is a good step that the Public Service Commission, in conjunction with the unions, has taken, I don't think that it should be limited. I think it was a step to start with targeting areas where there may be more risk. As we refined it and improved it, I think it can be useful for all.

I know what the member is talking about with the pace of government, but my experience with government is that people work carefully and with dedication. There are times when things take time because there are necessarily a lot of processes to try to help make sure of this. I know how, to the public, it can seem that sometimes government moves slowly, but I wouldn't want that to reflect on the dedication of public servants themselves.

With respect to the GAM policy, I will have to check on the date part of it, but the companion guide is like a

compendium to — or an attachment to — the GAM policy itself, so even if the date on the bottom of the policy is 2008, there are ways in which things get updated to it. The companion guide is an example.

To the point that was made regarding wanting this to be for all employees, the companion guide is, of course, meant to work for all employees.

**Ms. White:** To clarify with the minister, my criticism is never of the public service; it's always of the politicians who direct the public service. I guess I should say that I appreciate that the minister asked that the work be done, and I am grateful to the ever-able folks within the public service who completed that work. My criticism is never of those who do the work; my criticism is always of those who direct the work. I will just put that out there right now — always.

Right now, I am currently looking for the companion guide to the conflict-of-interest document. Is that currently available online?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I appreciate the criticism. I thank the member — that it is directed well toward me and my colleagues.

The companion guide is just in its final stages of approval.

I know that deputy ministers were reviewing it last week, and it should be up and available shortly. I think that it has been circulated through the policy folks and has worked that way, so it is imminent.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that.

I believe that I have a draft right now, and so I am going to go based on the draft because I don't have the final copy. I was hopeful that I could find it online and then we could have a discussion about the final.

One thing in the companion item that is new, I think, or possibly new — I'm not sure because I can't find the existing documents — is the "intimate relationship between employees" section. So, if the minister understands or has more of an idea about this document, I would like to have a conversation about what may be in the final document.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I am just asking my colleagues to see if they can retrieve the document, and I could try to answer questions. I am happy to try to get it and happy to try to answer questions, but we are just trying to bring it up. I'll stop there.

**Ms. White:** If the minister is frustrated about not having a copy, imagine being in the opposition and dealing with a draft and not being sure where this draft is in the process. It might be the first draft; it could be the third draft; it may have had input or it may not have had input — I have no idea. Maybe what I will do is that I will highlight right now that it would be great to have a conversation on these documents with both of us having a copy of the one, but I am going to point out some things.

I am not sure that this is going to be in the final one. In the table of contents now, it says: "Intimate relationships between employees". Although I do appreciate it, this section talks about consensual relationships. Consent is really obviously critically important. The conversation that the minister and I had was about harassment — sexual harassment, which is unwanted, which is not reciprocal — so I wanted to know if there is a

policy that exists about sexual harassment. So, although I am looking at a draft that, at some point in time, says: “When in doubt, find out — a companion guide to understanding the conflict-of-interest policy”, in that table of contents that I have, it doesn’t actually talk about harassment; it talks about intimate relationships between employees, but that entire section is about consensual relationships.

So, is there a section somewhere — within conflict of interest or somewhere — that an employee can read about sexual harassment?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I just want to be careful and thoughtful around this because the member opposite has a version of a draft document. I would prefer it if we let the public servants get to a document that is finalized. I will make sure to table it here so that everyone can have it — that it’s there. It is in process; that’s all.

Of course, there are situations where we have people who are in consensual relationships, but what happens when they are also in a relationship where they are a supervisor with someone who is being supervised? That can lead to challenges, so that is what this policy is trying to talk about — trying to help them interpret that type of situation and how to navigate it to avoid leading to situations that get into conflict or even possibly into non-consensual situations.

With respect to sexual harassment in the workplace, the main policy where this lives and works is the respectful workplace policy. That is where that information is. That policy sets out processes for addressing disrespect and sexual harassment in the workplace. Our Respectful Workplace Office is the place that’s responsible for implementing the policy.

I agree with the member opposite, but we are talking about two complementary things. The conflict-of-interest guide is not meant to be the main focus around sexual harassment.

**Ms. White:** I do appreciate that. I’m sure that the minister can understand the frustration of trying to find documents online, including things like the *General Administration Manual*. Despite where I work, I’m not a Yukon government employee. I don’t have access to all sorts of the wizardry that I think exists. It’s behind a wall that I can’t get through, so I just imagine that it’s really fantastic. So, I would appreciate that when it comes out.

The next part is actually still going to be talking around that companion guide.

So, as politicians — for example, before the end of April, we need to sign a conflict-of-interest document. We need to sign a document that gets stored or tabled — I’m not even sure what happens to it — about our own conflicts. Within those conflicts are financial ones. It asks about the level of financial investments or if we have properties — it goes on to a long list of things. One of the things that I did notice in the draft is that there doesn’t appear to be anything that talks about — I think there is a section that talks about investments and private assets, but looking in other jurisdictions — so, I’m going to actually reference Alberta.

In Alberta’s *Code of Conduct and Ethics for the Public Service of Alberta* document, in section 13, it says: “Investment and Management of Private Assets”. The reason why I want to

bring this up is that it makes sense that, as Yukon or private sector employees, people shouldn’t be able to benefit from things that they know.

For example, I would say that I used to joke when I worked in mining camps that the only way I was ever going to invest in a mine is if I worked in the camp on the ground because you can see how it operates. You can see how it’s run. You can see what works and doesn’t work. I can tell you that, in the camps I worked at, I knew there were companies that were not going to survive based on how their camp was run.

But in my position now, one of the reasons why I have to fill out this disclosure notice is that I can have influence.

I can benefit from the influence that I hold here, but within the public service, there are lots of different positions where a person can benefit from essentially knowledge that’s known. I want to know if any other jurisdictions were looked at as far as bolstering the conflict of interest around financial gains.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** For elected officials and deputy ministers, there is a requirement to fill out an annual disclosure. So, like us, the deputy ministers have a form that they’re required each year to share any disclosure of a financial nature or an investment nature that would — could — potentially indicate a conflict.

That type of information around — for a broader public service, for all employees, about conflicts of financial investment and insider knowledge — is not in the companion guide, but is in the broader conflict-of-interest policy, and it talks about it where it says that there is a duty for employees to disclose that information should their situation change. So usually, I think the way it would normally work is, for a new employee or as they come into a new position, there would be a check on that with them. Then afterward, it’s their responsibility — if there is a — like, for example, if they’ve invested in something, that they would then have the duty to report that, but there isn’t a requirement for them to fill out a disclosure each and every year.

**Ms. White:** I do appreciate that answer from the minister. I look forward to seeing that finalized document, which is ultimately what I am looking for.

We heard from my colleague from the Yukon Party ask about folks affected by COVID, but can the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission tell me how many Yukon government employees there are? It can be the FTE equivalent. I am just looking for a whole number.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Noting that this number changes — it is never static — so, on any given day, it goes up and down, but if we are counting all employees, including auxiliary on call, casuals, all permanent and term employees, then the number is in the range of 6,150-plus or -minus on any given day.

**Ms. White:** I do appreciate that from the minister, so I would like to dig down into those numbers now. Out of that number, which can fluctuate a bit depending on the day, of the 6,150, can he tell me how many are full-time employees, let’s say, today?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I will have to ask the commission to go off and get those numbers. The reason I have the full



number is because, as we were working on the leave-without-pay situation, I asked to be briefed at all times about how many employees we had.

Let me just be very clear for the member opposite and all Yukoners: There is a difference between full-time employees and the number of people who are working with us, because with full-time employees, you can calculate it based on hours worked, and you can work out an equivalent of full-time employees. What I was giving in my answer of 6,150 is how many individual people we have who work with us in any capacity.

I will have to get something more specific for the member opposite about the permanent and term. I know that the Public Service Commission can generate that number; I just don't have it here today.

**Ms. White:** I will ask the minister to also request the number of AOCs, the number of casuals, and the number of term positions. The reason why I think it's important to have this conversation right now with the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission is that, if you are an auxiliary-on-call employee, although you get a reimbursement per shift that covers things like benefits or sick days, there are a lot of things that you sacrifice. There are departments, offices, or workplaces within the Yukon government that rely solely on auxiliary-on-call or casual employees. I think that it is an important conversation to have. I will just give the minister an opportunity to respond.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I do have the number of auxiliary-on-call employees. I try very hard to not use acronyms. I am doing my best, but it is tough some days.

Our number of auxiliary-on-call employees ranges anywhere from 850 up to 900 or 950 in any given year. The last year that I have is for 2020-21, and the number that I have is 861 auxiliary-on-call employees.

The Leader of the Third Party is correct that the auxiliary-on-call employees receive pay in lieu of other leave entitlements, and their positions are not eligible for a pension. We are always in dialogue with the unions about auxiliary-on-call employees and what is reasonable compensation, where it is appropriate to be using them and where it is not. So, that is an ongoing dialogue at all times.

**Ms. White:** I do thank the minister for that. Even if it is not the current number, it is still a number that gives us an idea to work with.

Can the minister tell me if an AOC employee of Yukon government was able to access paid sick leave due to COVID?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** No, as I just stated a moment ago, the auxiliary-on-call employees receive pay in lieu of other leave entitlements, like sick leave.

**Ms. White:** I think the reason why I want to bring us back to that is — you know, the minister belongs to a government that talks about “unprecedented times, worldwide pandemic — we encourage people to stay home when they are sick”, and I don't disagree with any of those things. I guess that the next question I have for him is: Does he have access to see, within departments, the number of AOC staff and where they are?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Auxiliary-on-call employees often have a real range of backgrounds in terms of their work status and situations. Some of them pick up extra work as auxiliaries on call. Some are retired, and some just enjoy being around the public service and do it for, I think, the collegiality. It is for a range of reasons. They are certainly a diverse group.

With respect to the question, does the commission have the ability to track auxiliaries on call across departments? The answer to that is yes. I don't have those numbers in front of me, but that is information that the commission could furnish.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. I guess I'll just put the minister on notice that I would like to have that discussion in the fall if the Public Service Commission comes back with a supplementary budget. I think that's really important.

It's my understanding that a great number of the positions at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter are actually auxiliary-on-call because what we are told when we ask Yukon government about it is that it's in the process of transitioning. It's going to transition toward something different. The concern that I have is — understanding that the minister just told me that auxiliaries on call don't have access to sick leave, but the shelter is being run by folks who don't have security. They are not in auxiliary-on-call positions by choice; it's by circumstance. If they don't go to work, they know that it's going to affect their co-workers because, instead of it being just a fill-in, it's being treated like a permanent position by Yukon government, by their employer. I highlight that I have concerns, and the reason I would like to have a conversation about those departments and where they are is that I think there are some patterns that exist. I think those patterns are what need to be investigated.

Not only would I like to have the discussion in the fall if there's a supplementary budget, but I would like the minister to table those numbers for me — the breakdown by department. When we go to briefings, we do ask that because we are interested in knowing, but I do believe that it's something that — when we look at it from the 30,000-foot view down, I think we can see patterns and I think those patterns need to be figured out.

The reason I say that is — I think the minister is correct. There are a lot of different reasons for why people have those positions, but in other circumstances, it's because there are no term positions and there are no permanent positions being offered for that, and people do the work because they think it's important.

I would like to have a conversation about that in the future. I do understand what the minister just said about benefits being paid out hourly or per shift, but if an auxiliary-on-call employee is essentially working a full-time job and then gets COVID, the question remains that if we are supporting every other employee to be able to be sick, what happens to those who are unable to take that same benefit?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** The commissioner provided me with the responses that had been drafted from the March 9 briefing. I will table them right now so that they are here. I thank the member opposite for her comments and questions

about auxiliaries on call by department. We will work to get those numbers for members.

I will just reiterate what I began with in today's Committee of the Whole debate by saying that I think all public servants are to be commended for their work to support Yukoners, whether they be permanent or auxiliary on call, whether they work in the Executive Council Office, the Public Service Commission, or Highways and Public Works. I feel that they are truly working to try to support Yukoners, and I will say that their work is much appreciated.

I will just table this.

**Ms. White:** I do appreciate that being tabled now, but if it's only one copy, it's hard for me to be able to reference right this second.

The Yukon Employees' Union sent out an e-mail that some employers had been incorrectly deducting union dues. Was one of these employers the Yukon government? If so, how is that going to be corrected?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I am unaware of that being us. I will ask the commissioner to check into that to see, but I am unaware of any incorrect calculations for union dues.

**Ms. White:** Just as I wait for the return to make its way to me, can the minister tell me more about what happens in People and Culture — I'm not sure if "department" is the right word — in the Public Service Commission?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** This division is responsible for a few things, including our Diversity and Inclusion Services, our Respectful Workplace Office, our strategic initiatives, and communications. There are a few specific projects that are being worked on this year. These include: recruitment practices, given all the labour pressure that exists in Canada and the world; streamlining human resource processes; and also conducting a comprehensive review of psychological health and safety in our government workplaces.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. One of the conversations that we had during the briefing was the working from home policy. My understanding is that directive 5 ended on March 18, so that has ended. I am sure that the minister will remember that, from my position, I believe that the more people we can get working in communities for Yukon government the better. If that means that they are working from home, that would be a benefit.

Can he walk me through where we are right now around the policy on working from home?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Even within my mandate letter there has been — and even as part of *Our Clean Future*, there was work for us to support people working remotely. While the pandemic was here, we had brought in directive 5, but sometime in the past year, we brought into place a remote workplace policy. That policy came into effect, but directive 5 was still in place encouraging Yukon government employees to work from home where possible. Once we dropped directive 5, the remote workplace policy was there and in effect, so it is in effect today.

What I can say is that we hit sort of a peak in work from home during the last wave of the pandemic. In February, we were at roughly 13 percent. In March, we were at nine percent,

and currently, in April, we are at seven percent. I can say that, under that remote workplace policy, we worked in a way to support our communities, so we said that it is okay, under that policy, if people wish to locate their work outside of Whitehorse. Again, I could table the policy if that is of interest. But say that it is a type of work that can happen remotely and that it works with your supervisor, you could work outside of Whitehorse, but you couldn't do the reverse. So, it was to try to support that people could move and work from communities outside of Whitehorse.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. I do think it's critical if we want to support the growth or the vibrancy of rural communities — making sure that folks have access to good jobs is important.

The next question I have is: How are folks who are working from home with permission from their employer — so Yukon government — how are they covered under WCB? So, talking about ergonomic desks or things like that, how are people supported from workplace injury?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** The employees and the supervisors have to go through a health and safety checklist and review where the work would take place remotely, which often could be home, and make sure that it is appropriate and adequate and up to the standards. So, there is a process in place to sign off on that.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. Recently, I was asked in the media about my thoughts about extending the First Nation hiring policy. I think it's an important thing. I know that the pilot project was, I believe, to run for 15 months, and it has been extended. Can the minister tell me about that extension and what his hopes are in extending that program?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** *Breaking Trail Together* is this initiative. We know it's important for our public service sector or our public service to reflect the diversity of the Yukon and the communities that we serve. We feel that it's important to extend the plan and the project, so we have now extended it to 2029.

When we brought this in, it was in the middle of COVID or as COVID hit. The challenge, of course, is that we're in a very tight labour market. We have low unemployment nationally. We have the lowest unemployment here in the territory. There is a lot of pressure for finding employees — and that is not just for the public service; it's across the employment sector in the Yukon. There is a lot of pressure on the commission.

We were hoping to see more of a shift in our public service. We haven't achieved it yet, but I can say that during the opening 15 months that we had the plan in place, we did have 78 successful indigenous candidates being hired out of roughly 600 competitions. So, there is work to do, because we want to increase those numbers. We believe that this is the right thing to do with the plan — to extend it — and I am looking forward to further work on it.

**Ms. White:** I am just looking at the additional information that is available for the Public Service Commission specifically under the "Employee Relations" headline. It is supplementary information and talks about employee

grievances, which are estimated to be 110 this year, but if we look back at the actual from 2020-21, the number of employee grievances was 344. We don't have the real number from 2021-22, but can the minister tell me why the actual number of employee grievances in 2020-21 was 344 and the estimate for this year is 110?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** There was one specific issue that arose that resulted in 150 grievances. It was about a pay period issue. It resulted in quite a block in that year. That's the main reason. I will check to see if there were others, but that 150 was the same one, because it affected so many folks.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. My hope is that error was caught and rectified and not replicated in 2021-22. That is my hope.

At this point in time, I am sure I could ask a lot of different questions about the supplementary information, but what I am really interested in is talking about health. I thank the officials and the minister for their time, and I look forward to being able to discuss the companion document to the conflict of interest and taking a look at that. I will remind everyone that sexual harassment exists in all workplaces, and don't be a part of that problem.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I am informed that the other 110 grievances, which were from the past fiscal year, are not related to the one that was there. They are probably all important in their own way. I will thank the member for her comments. It is important that we have workplaces that are safe and free of sexual harassment. I appreciate that it does exist and we need to do our best. I thank her for saying that we should take responsibility around this issue. I appreciate that.

**Deputy Chair:** Is there any further general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission?

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

**Ms. White:** Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

### **Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried**

**Deputy Chair:** The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Deputy Chair:** Unanimous consent has been granted.

**On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures**

**Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$58,694,000 agreed to**

**On Capital Expenditures**

**Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$68,000 agreed to**

**Total Expenditures in the amount of \$58,762,000 agreed to**

**Public Service Commission agreed to**

**Deputy Chair:** The matter now before Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

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

### **Bill No. 204: First Appropriation Act 2022-23 — continued**

**Deputy Chair:** The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

### **Department of Health and Social Services**

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I will take this opportunity to welcome the officials from the Department of Health and Social Services who are here with me today and to introduce them to the other Members of the Legislative Assembly. I am joined by Michael Hale, the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, and by Rob Ganzer, who is the director of strategic finance for Health and Social Services. Their teams have been truly instrumental in ensuring that we develop a budget that supports Yukoners, and I want to thank them and their teams for all their hard work in getting us here today.

The Department of Health and Social Services has a large budget, but maintaining and improving the health and well-being of all Yukoners is important work and it is an investment that benefits us all. The government and the Department of Health and Social Services are committed to spending these valuable resources wisely. We are also committed to being transparent about how that money is spent, and I welcome questions from the members opposite.

**Mr. Cathers:** To begin with today, I would also join the minister in welcoming officials to the House. I have a number of questions, as you would imagine.

I want to begin by asking about — we understand that there was money within this budget for a new position under the government's climate change and energy policy, or OCF. Could the minister please confirm how much is in the budget for that position?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** The 2022-23 main estimates contain \$137,000 for a position related to *Our Clean Future*. It comes under the Department of Health and Social Services unit of population public health evidence and evaluation.

**Mr. Cathers:** So, over one-fifth of Yukoners — 21 percent according to the numbers that the minister likes to cite — don't have a family physician. We have called on the

government to reinstate the physician recruitment position that used to exist in Health and Social Services. Is there funding in the budget to do that?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** That you for the question. There is a position designated in the Department of Health and Social Services for this purpose of recruitment and retention. There is money included in the Health and Social Services budget to cover that position in this year, 2022-23. We are looking, as well, to partner with the Yukon Medical Association to enhance the effectiveness of that position.

**Mr. Cathers:** I am pleased to hear that the minister has included money for this, as we've called for.

Can the minister please confirm when this position within Health and Social Services is anticipated to be staffed? Could she clarify — she made some mention of the Yukon Medical Association — could she also indicate how much money is being provided to the Yukon Medical Association for physician recruitment?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** The amount that is provided to the Yukon Medical Association — I don't have their memorandum of understanding with me or their transfer payment agreement, but we will look to see if we can find that information for the member opposite. We are not currently advertising to staff the recruitment position because our conversations with the YMA are ongoing. We would prefer to be able to partner with them so that we have a single recruiter or we have a team that is working on that in conjunction with the YMA. Those conversations are happening and we will make a decision. Hopefully, we will be able to proceed with them as a partner and be able to focus recruitment and retention work in that way.

**Mr. Cathers:** I appreciate the partial answer, but the minister didn't indicate how much funding is in the budget for that purpose.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think that there are two amounts. I am not sure what the member opposite is asking about. I think that probably both amounts are what is being asked about. One is the amount that is provided to the Yukon Medical Association for the purposes of doing all of their work, which includes recruitment and retention, and the other is the particular amount that will be set aside should we proceed to hire or partner with the YMA to hire.

I have indicated that I don't have both of those numbers, but we will be happy to provide them. We may be getting them. We are continuing to look through the material we have to see if I can get those figures, but I think that is what the member is asking for.

**Mr. Cathers:** That's correct. I was asking for the cost of both amounts.

The minister has made reference again to a transfer payment with the Yukon Medical Association. Previously, during Question Period, she indicated that it included funding that they had the flexibility to use for physician recruitment and for the locum recruiter position they have created. Our understanding is that there isn't an agreement referred to as a transfer payment and that the 2017 MOU between the department and the YMA has funding included in it for recruitment, but that is clearly earmarked as a defined incentive

for physicians who meet specific criteria. Our understanding is that it is not flexible funding that they can choose to reallocate for other purposes, such as funding the new position.

Can the minister provide any confirmation of the claims she made in Question Period that a transfer payment exists with the YMA, under which they have funding that could be used to cover the costs of the physician recruiter position, and if not, would she correct her earlier comments?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I certainly don't disagree with the member opposite. There are provisions in that agreement — even in the current one that the member is making reference to with respect to recruitment incentives. I can also confirm that the Yukon Medical Association currently has a contract with a recruiter for the purposes of providing services and recruiting doctors to come here to the territory. They have done that. I have met this professional young woman, and I look forward to the effects of her work coming forward.

**Mr. Cathers:** The minister didn't actually answer my question, and I would again ask her to provide a copy of any transfer payment agreement with the YMA that currently exists and which allows them to support financially the new physician recruitment position. The minister was very clear in Question Period in stating that the transfer payment allowed that. We have heard to the contrary from physicians, and we have seen, as well, the relevant parts of their 2017 MOU.

Again, does a transfer payment currently exist that allows the YMA to use funding from the government to support their physician recruiter position?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I don't hear a question there; I'm sorry. I appreciate the comment. I appreciate the point of view of the member opposite, but I don't necessarily hear a question. I would not be permitted to provide a copy of the TPA or the MOU with the Yukon Medical Association here today, but I will consider whether or not that's a document that they prefer to have available to the public and speak to them about that.

**Mr. Cathers:** The question was quite clear about whether the minister could confirm that the transfer payment with flexibility to fund that position that she told us in Question Period exists actually does and, if not, to correct the record.

But I'll move on. I would note that our understanding is that the 2017 MOU with the Yukon Medical Association actually expired on March 31. Is the government continuing to honour the provisions of that, including the benefit programs within it, and do they anticipate doing so?

Actually, let me rephrase that: Will the minister commit to doing so until they've negotiated a new MOU with the YMA?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Yes, the current MOU with the Yukon Medical Association — that does have an expiry date of March 31, 2022, but as the member opposite and everyone can imagine, we have had discussions with them about continuing to honour that MOU and all the provisions of that MOU until the new terms of the MOU have been decided through a negotiated process.

I want to make reference to that, because the member opposite did, clearly understanding that this is what is occurring at the moment, but that won't be something that everyone knows. The department is currently in negotiations with the

Yukon Medical Association about an agreement going forward. Those negotiations are currently ongoing, so I won't be able to say anything more about that, other than to advise people that this is what is happening, and we are currently honouring every provision of the reference to the MOU that was made by the member opposite.

**Mr. Cathers:** We have the situation where over one-fifth of Yukoners don't have a family doctor. The walk-in clinic closed last year. The physician shortage crisis is about to get worse. We have learned that five doctors that we know of are planning to go on maternity leave and that there may be others, as well, who are planning to take time off or go on other leave that we are not aware of, but the problem that we are aware of is bad enough. We have also heard that some of them have had trouble lining up locums to take on their patients while on leave.

To date, we haven't really seen action by the government on this. I am pleased to hear that the minister is indicating a willingness to work with the YMA, but our concern, since this is a time-sensitive situation, is what government is actually going to do to address the problem. Stepping back from even the technicalities of how government does it or works with the YMA in this situation, the reality is that, for any physician who might be considering coming to the Yukon as a locum, people tend to make plans for work with some lead time, not just on short notice. For these gaps that are anticipated to happen over the next number of months, it is important that action be taken without any delay to line up locums to replace the physicians who are going on leave.

Can the minister tell me what the government has done, if anything, in this area? Have there been active offers made by her or by officials to physicians individually or to the YMA to assist them with this situation? What is the status of government's action on this important issue?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I'm just going to look for something else as well. I think it's important to remember that, of course, we recognize that provisions of medical service here in the territory are completely a priority for us and for the Yukon Medical Association. I know that in the international medical associations — the Canadian Medical Association — it is certainly a topic of serious contemplation and work, because there is a — I don't hesitate to say — a worldwide shortage of medical practitioners, but certainly here in Canada, individuals who have been properly licensed and educated for the purposes of providing medical services are at a shortage right now, and we have to recognize that.

We do have, through Insured Health, the provision that a locum can come to the Yukon Territory, provide fee-for-service, and have the opportunity to substitute for one of our local doctors relatively seamlessly. That is an important factor because there are, I would say, low barriers to that practice. I think that we also must remember that physicians here in the territory, for the most part, are owners and operators of private businesses, so they are responsible for getting coverage when they have patients — and their responsibility to patients — and have locum support when they are going to be away.

The Yukon Medical Association recruiter who I have mentioned is, I understand, focusing on recruitment of locums at the moment; that is a priority for the work that she is doing. There is some provision in the MOU with the Yukon Medical Association for locum service, identifying locums for their members, and helping in that way.

I guess lastly what I would say is that locums provide a very important service for Yukoners. It has been difficult to find individuals, on the one hand, who want to come and move to the territory and set up a practice; on the other hand, there are people who are interested in new experiences post-pandemic, if I can say that. Although, as we have warned everyone, COVID has not finished with us, and I think that is important to say.

I note that the physician recruiter who is contracted to the Yukon Medical Association is focusing on locums. We have great hopes that she will be able to identify individuals who would like to come here. It is also an incredibly important part of our process for recruiting physicians because locums who come and experience the practice here in the north and practise here in the territory can see what it might be like. We are working, as well, with money in this budget to contract additional nurse practitioners who will hopefully be able to provide services at existing clinics, and some might assist those medical practitioners who are planning to be away.

**Mr. Cathers:** I understand that the minister has indicated that they are negotiating with the YMA, and I recognize that the details of the arrangement between the YMA and the Yukon government — the same specific details that they are negotiating on are obviously things that the minister is not going to be the one doing the negotiations with the physicians on.

However, when it comes to the issues of physician recruitment and other additional measures that government can take that aren't part of those negotiations, there's no reason that the minister is unable to talk to the Yukon Medical Association at this point in time. I think it would be fair to say that most Yukoners would agree that when there is a crisis with a shortage of physicians resulting in over one-fifth of Yukoners not having a family doctor — and many not having access to primary care because of it — and the problem is expected to grow this year — most Yukoners would agree that not only would it be reasonable for the minister to talk to the Yukon Medical Association about additional measures that government can and should take to assist the physician community and to recruit and retain doctors in the territory but that, in fact, it should be an absolute priority for the minister to do that.

So, what I would ask is two things: Has the minister met with the Yukon Medical Association recently to discuss physician recruitment and what government can do to help encourage more doctors to move to the Yukon? Will she agree to reach out to the Yukon Medical Association and request a meeting to talk to them about what else government can do to attract and retain family doctors to the Yukon, including to address the gap in locum support that I referenced earlier?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** First of all, I want to clarify: I didn't say I wasn't able to speak to the Yukon Medical Association during the negotiations. Of course, that is not an issue. We have lots of things we can cooperate on that don't have anything to do with the negotiations, which are quite separate from that process.

I will have to look at my schedule. I don't want to guess at when I will have met with the YMA last, but the physician recruitment issue is one that is regularly on the agendas when the deputy minister meets with the association and with their executive director.

I think, less than two weeks ago — within the last two weeks is the estimate of the last time the deputy minister met with the YMA, but they are in very regular contact by e-mail, and certainly part of these conversations about sharing the recruitment responsibilities have been on their agenda. The deputy minister will also be attending the board meeting of the Yukon Medical Association on April 27. They certainly have no issue with reaching out to the Yukon Medical Association for the purposes of discussing this topic.

To be quite frank, the work being done by the deputy minister, along with the executive director of the YMA and their board, will be the way in which we can continue to cooperate on this.

I appreciate that the member opposite is insinuating that we do not have a strong relationship with the YMA or that I am saying things, but the YMA or members of the medical profession might be saying something different — that is the business of government. We are committed to having a positive, strong relationship with the Yukon Medical Association as a partner in our work going forward to provide modern, leading-edge medical services to the Yukon public.

I can also indicate that I have met with other partners and indicated that when we would be having meetings with those partners, through whatever the topics might be, that we will be wanting to invite the medical association, or when we meet with the medical association, we would want to invite other partners so that we are building a strong network of partnerships to provide services to Yukoners.

What I can also say about this question of locums and recruitment and the priority that it is, is that we provide \$300,000 annually to the Yukon Medical Association for the purposes of locum coverage or locum — I'm going to say — issues. Of course, they can do with it as they choose.

I can also indicate that in 2017, when the agreement was signed with the Yukon Medical Association, they had a little over \$300,000 remaining in that fund. The government permitted them to roll that over, or to keep those funds, for the purposes of enhancing their recruitment or locum coverage. How they wish to use those funds is set out in the transfer payment agreement — the MOU. There are different names; for this particular one, for the YMA, it seems to be an MOU.

Certainly not in my experience, although it is only a little less than a year right now, have there been any issues with how they spend those funds or the opportunity to provide them flexibility.

If I haven't made it clear, I want to make clear our commitment to being a good, strong partner with the YMA, because that's what will provide the best service for Yukoners.

**Mr. Cathers:** I do appreciate the minister's verbal commitment to be a good partner with the YMA, but we are looking for action — not words. Our understanding is that the MOU is actually not as flexible as the minister has indicated it is, that some of this funding is more clearly defined and specified.

I will move on to other issues, as I do have a very long list of questions on a large number of issues.

I want to ask about the bilingual health centre that is referenced in the budget and the budget speech and the walk-in clinic as well. The budget speech indicates that more than \$2.6 million will support this new bilingual health centre. Could the minister please confirm the location of the clinic, first of all, and, secondly, indicate what is the model for that clinic?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I understood the question to be about the bilingual health centre, which is quite distinct from any other form of medical clinic that we might be speaking about. I am going to concentrate with respect to the answer on the bilingual health centre. I appreciate the opportunity to do so. The government, of course, is dedicated and focused on this project to equitable access to health care. We have been working with the francophone community and other health system partners to deliver primary health and wellness services at a new health centre.

It is designed to be located at 9010 Quartz Road here in Whitehorse — which might be familiar to some people as the public health clinic — in some space there that is currently being redesigned and renovated for that purpose.

The bilingual health centre was one of the recommendations of *Putting People First*, and their recommendation indicates that it will improve care for all Yukoners — we believe it to be the case — including a growing francophone population, but a focus on bilingual. The renovation plan for the clinic is underway.

The bilingual health care centre will be a collaborative care model, a team-based model, which allows clients to access a range of primary care providers, depending on their needs, and to be connected with additional services as required. We will hire full-time staff, including a clinic manager, nurse practitioners, a licensed practical nurse, a registered nurse, medical office assistants, and a social worker, and we will contract physicians.

In addition to delivering innovative quality of care in both languages, the bilingual health centre is expected to expand access to primary care service for Yukoners and reduce some of the pressures on our health system. The bilingual health centre will be the first of its kind, acting as a catalyst to begin building our team-based, integrated primary health clinics in the territory in alignment with the recommendations of *Putting People First*. These are sometimes referred to in *Putting People First* as “polyclinics”. It is a new model of care, and it will be the foundation of Yukon's health and social services system and connecting every Yukoner to a team of interdisciplinary primary health professionals as close to home as possible,

which, of course, is the polyclinic model — the model designed and recommended by *Putting People First*. We look forward to the bilingual health centre opening later in 2022.

Recruitment for positions is actively ongoing. Some positions have been filled, but we need to continue that process and are doing so actively while we await the renovations for that location. I think that's my answer with respect to that.

**Mr. Cathers:** So, can the minister then indicate: Where is the walk-in clinic going to be located and what are the timelines for it opening?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I can indicate that the plan at the moment — still being completely finalized — is for a walk-in clinic to be located at the same place as the River Valley Medical Clinic was located. It was known as the “Whitehorse walk-in clinic” prior to it being closed last year. It is on Lambert Street in Whitehorse, not a very far walk from here. That will be an important factor with respect to the walk-in clinic because it will be a place that is known by Yukoners who might be looking to have that kind of service. We are currently working with Yukon physicians to support the opening of a new walk-in clinic.

The plan is to support — government funding will support the start-up of the clinic. It will be serviced by individual doctors, primarily from Whitehorse, who will take different shifts at the same time as they are doing other work, whether it be at the hospital or in their own clinics. They will sign up and agree to cover certain hours at the walk-in clinic. The initiative is just one piece of the work that we are doing to expand access to primary care, and we hope that the walk-in clinic at that location will be able to open as soon as May. We are also providing over \$200,000 in start-up funding for the purposes of the clinic starting and having the appropriate administrative staff, software licences, and the like for the doctors to be able to work there.

**Mr. Cathers:** I do want to pursue that a little bit more with the minister. With this walk-in clinic, who will be operating the facility? Will government be handling the administration and operations, or will physicians be handling that? Or will it be run by the Hospital Corporation or some other entity?

The second question I would ask is: Since the minister indicated they are working with current local physicians, has the government actually done an analysis to determine whether this is going to result in an increase in physician services to Yukoners or simply a reallocation of those services? If the doctors are here already and they are already practising — either in private practice or at the hospital or both — it does seem quite possible that a doctor who is working five days a week right now might choose to work at the walk-in clinic but, in doing so, would reduce the services that they are currently providing, either at their own practice or at the hospital.

Again, the question there is: Has the government actually done any assessment to determine whether this will result in an increase of services or just a reallocation of existing services that are being provided?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think that it is important to note that the clinic I have been describing is — and I think I have

said this every time — a walk-in clinic, so it is designed for individuals who are not otherwise attached to a practitioner or for someone who might need to go there in an urgent but not emergent situation — somebody would be unable to see their own physician if they had one. Sometimes walk-in clinics do have individuals like that. It is designed to and should reduce the number of visits to the hospital for what are otherwise minor afflictions. Of course, when individuals attend the hospital, it has higher costs, just based on the nature of the service provided there.

I should indicate as well that this is a commitment by the Yukon medical practitioners who have worked with us to come up with this solution. It is not the only solution. It is not going to be a silver bullet in any way, but it is going to provide an additional option for individuals who need urgent or medical care when they might not otherwise be able to have it. I can also indicate that medical practitioners who will work at the walk-in clinic will have the same fee-for-service payment style as they would have if they were working elsewhere. Again, it would be on the clinic basis.

**Mr. Cathers:** I'm just going to move back to the bilingual health centre and ask the question: At this facility, will doctors be bilingual? What are the criteria for patients being eligible to go? Is anyone eligible to go, or is it particularly targeting members of the French community, for example?

In addition to answering that question, I'm just going to go back to a question I asked previously on behalf of my colleague, the Member for Kluane, regarding the situation in Haines Junction. When I asked the minister about the resident physician in Haines Junction who was leaving earlier this Sitting, she indicated that the person who is providing those services would not be renewing their contract beyond today — or sorry, pardon me. I believe she said — I misread that. She indicated that it was beyond April 12, 2021 and indicated that the department is exploring options.

Has there been any progress on that? What is the government doing to try to ensure that there is a physician in Haines Junction to provide services there?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** With respect to the bilingual health clinic, we certainly anticipate hiring physicians who are bilingual, at least one of them for sure. The bilingual health clinic needs to be able to provide that kind of service, but there will be other bilingual professionals there as well. Anyone can attend the bilingual health clinic.

With respect to the Haines Junction note, the previous resident physician has not renewed their contract, and the Department of Health and Social Services has been exploring options, of course, to ensure that residents have coverage. A nurse practitioner has been recruited for the Haines Junction Health Centre, and they will deliver services to residents of the community along the north highway. The position will commence at — the estimate is at the end of June 2022 — so, in a couple of months — an individual moving to do that job.

We recognize that recruitment of physicians in rural communities is difficult. We are working with the Yukon Medical Association to identify new resident positions. In the meantime, the question was: What action has been taken? Two

Whitehorse-based physicians have been contracted to deliver virtual care services to residents at least twice per week in the Haines Junction area and have been providing supplemental, in-person community visits so that residents have continuity of care — so, those two physicians working together to provide service for those individuals in Haines Junction, both in-person and virtually.

**Mr. Cathers:** I don't think that the minister indicated who is eligible to go to the bilingual clinic, and again, it would seem that with one-fifth of Yukoners — over one-fifth of Yukoners — without a family doctor that, if it is available for anyone, just like any other physician who provides care, this will quickly become overwhelmed with the people who are wanting that service. I was just asking for clarity on whether they are offering priority or preference for people on that list — and not suggesting it, but just asking whether that is how they are dealing with it, and if not, how this is going to be operating.

I also want to ask about a couple of other things that were mentioned in the budget. The budget speech mentioned \$1 million for spirometry. What we don't have yet from the government is clarity on who is providing this service, where it will be provided, and when. So, I would ask the minister to provide that information.

My second question regarding specific budget commitments is with regard to the dental program that emerged as a result of the CASA agreement. Is this program set up to be the payer of last resort? What are the criteria for this program? Who would be eligible for it, and what would be provided under it, and when?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I can indicate that, on October 7, 2021, spirometry testing resumed here in the Yukon Territory. A company known as TrueNorth Respiratory is a privately owned respiratory health business and holds a three-year contract for the spirometry services in the Yukon Territory. TrueNorth's clinic in Whitehorse has been retrofitted to meet the COVID-19 recommendations needed for the resumption of spirometry services, which of course was an issue during the early parts of COVID-19, and testing ended as a result of those COVID protocols.

TrueNorth is working to reduce the existing wait-list, and it is anticipated that, by the fall of 2022, spirometry results will be able to be returned to a referring practitioner within four weeks of ordering the test. The 2022-23 main estimates have, as noted by the member opposite, just short of \$1 million for the in-territory spirometry services.

With respect to the dental program, in response to the *Putting People First* report, there was a recommendation in there as part of our commitment — and under the commitment of the 2021 confidence and supply agreement, working on implementing a territory-wide income-test, payer-of-last-resort dental care program within the year. As outlined in the confidence and supply agreement, \$500,000 was budgeted in the 2021-22 main estimates as an initial investment to develop the program. We have used these funds to contact public dental health specialists and to modify and ready our internal systems to be able to support this work.

There is an increase of \$1.3 million in the 2022-23 main estimates to continue the work on this initiative. We are committed to ensuring the program implementation in the 2022-23 fiscal year that provides dental coverage for lower income Yukoners who have no other form of insurance. I think that it should be noted that Yukon does provide coverage already in many forms. Many Canadian jurisdictions, including the Yukon, provide dental care for lower income families or social assistance clients, and the Yukon Territory does so already.

Yukoners registered in the pharmacare and extended health benefits program, social assistance clients, non-insured health benefits clients, as well as children in K to grade 8 in Whitehorse and in K to 12 in communities currently all have access to dental care. The *Canada Health Act* does not include dental care as an insured service, other than through in-hospital emergency oral surgery. Of course, dental care is an important part of health care. With respect to this work that is being done on the new dental care program for Canadians, it is also something that has recently been taken up by the Liberal Party of Canada in their new agreement with Canada's New Democratic Party to also work to deliver these kinds of services to Canadians who can't otherwise be covered by another program or afford important dental care. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about that program.

**Mr. Cathers:** So, on the topic of spirometry, the minister appears to be indicating that the funding is just to continue spirometry services, but the budget speech specifically said that the money would — quote — "... expand spirometry services in the territory." It says that on page 7.

If the minister could clarify, are those services actually expanding, or is it just a carry-forward of what they began in the previous fiscal year?

I also want to move on to the area of the chronic underfunding of the Yukon hospitals that has occurred since 2017 under this government. As the minister knows, we've debated this many times in the past. The government likes to claim that they have increased funding every year, but, in fact, in some of those years, the increase to the core budget was less than the rate of inflation, as the minister knows very well. In some cases, necessary funding wasn't provided until literally after the year-end.

There were also two years in a row when the hospital's annual report shows quite clearly that expenses were millions higher than revenue. For example, in the one that I'm looking at here now, it was close to \$4-million short at the end of the year according to the hospital's own report, and it was two years in a row with roughly a \$4-million hole in their operating picture.

So, let's talk about the hospital's core operating budget now compared to last year. Has the government increased funding for the hospital's core operational budget since last year, and if so, by what percentage and what dollar figure?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I want to address the spirometry question. I guess there's a wording issue in the budget. Clearly, spirometry services are being expanded as a result of the fact that they didn't operate for almost two years.



They have had funding and time to do renovations with respect to their services. We expect that the wait-list, which is currently as a result of the pandemic, will be resolved and then services can continue as Yukoners need them.

With respect to the Yukon Hospital Corporation — I appreciate that the member opposite does not like the answer to this. I don't know where the Yukon Party gets the information with respect to the funding that's provided to the Whitehorse General Hospital. It has been increasing all of the time that the Yukon Liberal government has been in power for the purposes of providing those decisions.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation, of course, operates at arm's length from the government, and a board of trustees governs its activities and programs. The historic mains for funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation over the previous six fiscal years — I can provide the numbers for each of them. I can indicate that, in every fiscal year since 2015, the funds provided to Yukon Hospital Corporation have increased, with the exception of one year, 2018-19, which saw a \$2.3-million reduction. That was as a result of a pension solvency question with respect to the re-stating of values as presented and published from the 2017-18 main estimates. I don't want to go too far down that road, unless the member opposite wants more detail, which we can provide.

The budget in 2016-17 was approximately \$64 million. It then went to \$70 million. After that, as I have noted, in the one year, it saw a \$2-million reduction to almost \$68.2 million. It then went to \$74.9 million. In 2021-22, the core funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation, with small additional amounts there — within less than \$200,000 — was \$81.333 million, an increase of \$6.4 million.

In 2021-22, their budget was \$85.5 million, which was another increase of \$4.22 million, and in 2022-23, the budget that is before us, their funding is \$88.295 million, an increase of \$2.74 million. I can indicate that's approximately a 3.4-percent increase for the budget for the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

I have additional information, if the member opposite would like, with respect to specific things noted in the budget regarding the short-stay psychiatric unit, for instance, or the Omnicell medication dispensing units and other information, but I will take my seat and await the next question.

**Mr. Cathers:** Although I do have a long list of questions, in the interest of sharing time with the Third Party, this is going to be my last one here. I do want to just note — I would be remiss if I didn't point out that the minister questioned where the Yukon Party was getting their numbers from about hospital funding. Well, we are getting them from the hospital's annual report, we are getting them from the information provided by her department in briefings, and we are getting them from the appearance of witnesses. I would point out in the annual report that if the minister looks in there — and I will just quote from the selected financial highlights as of — the report I have in my hand is for their fiscal year ending in 2020 — the hospital's own annual report clearly shows \$96.5 million in total expenses and \$92.6 million in total revenue. That is in their report.

Just my last questions here that I will group together quickly. There has been specific discussion about the MRI backlog. Has the government provided additional funding to the hospital to deal with that? In the area of surgical specialist wait times, we have heard from Hospital Corporation witnesses that they are too long across the board. Can the minister indicate what the government is doing to address those long wait times?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I would like to address the questions from the member opposite, if I can, with respect to the MRIs.

First of all, before I get there, I should correct myself. I think I said the overall budget for Whitehorse General Hospital this year, in the 2022-23 mains, is an increase of 3.4 percent, but the calculations we have now are that it's actually a 3.2-percent increase. I just wanted to make sure I didn't mistake that 3.2 percent.

I can also note that the member opposite is looking at the annual report of the Whitehorse General Hospital. It includes approximately \$9.2 million of non-cash depreciation for the Whitehorse General Hospital accounting. Without going into too much detail with respect to that, it certainly probably clearly explains the differences in the numbers.

What I can also confirm is that I recently had the honour and privilege to sign the more than \$88-million transfer payment to the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and they will, I know, use it wisely with respect to providing service for Yukoners.

I also note that we provide a capital budget as well to the Whitehorse General Hospital — and operation and maintenance. Those are the O&M figures that I was speaking about.

With respect to the MRIs — I think that the member opposite indicated that there was a long wait-list. Certainly, if it is for a non-urgent MRI here in the territory just now, there is too long of a wait-list, but I want to make sure that Yukoners hear and understand that the Whitehorse General Hospital endeavours to support urgent cases, which are evaluated by medical professionals, but current wait times for patients who require an urgent MRI are less than seven days. Whitehorse General Hospital endeavours to support semi-urgent cases in as close to 30 days as possible. As of February 28, semi-urgent cases were being completed within 44 days, so slightly over the goal of 30 days. At the same time, non-urgent cases were being completed within 20 months.

There are other options, of course. We have been working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and having conversations about an increased ability for the MRI to operate. Some places in Canada, for instance, have extended the hours with additional staff. I want to note and thank the individuals who do staff the MRI — the technologists who work in that process. Of course, our highly trained specialists have been affected by the shortage of medical professionals here in Canada. The Yukon Hospital Corporation has continued service with the use of casual technologists or locum technologists to ensure that acute and time-sensitive exams are completed as soon as possible. The Whitehorse hospital is continuing with aggressive recruitment activities both for permanent and short-term staff so that all options can be considered.

I appreciate the opportunity to note that for Yukoners. Thank you so much.

**Ms. White:** I would like to thank my colleague for Laberge for the opportunity to get the floor today. That is fantastic.

Before I get started, there was a recent announcement with the new hiring or appointment of a new Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services. My question is: Why is only one of the deputy ministers here? My understanding was that the department was being divided. We were going to on the Health and then the Social Services side. Can the minister explain why only one deputy minister is currently here for the budget debate on the mains in Health and Social Services?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Yes, I appreciate the opportunity to introduce, at least in the Legislative Assembly by my own voice, Ed van Randen as the second deputy minister with respect to the responsibilities of Health and Social Services.

I don't necessarily think it's fair at this point to say that the department is being divided, but certainly we recognize that there are priorities that require the attention of individuals in the deputy minister role in many areas of the Department of Health and Social Services because it is so broad.

Currently, Corporate Services is the responsibility of Deputy Minister Hale, although Deputy Minister Hale and Deputy Minister van Randen are working very closely together. Certainly, there are some responsibilities in Corporate Services and budget debate that will be the responsibility ultimately of Deputy Minister van Randen. We can certainly have access to him if there are certain questions that ultimately become his responsibility.

As this is budget debate and Deputy Minister Hale has just slightly more experience with our Corporate Services — it was incredibly important to bring the expert in the room, Rob, with respect to the director of strategic finance as an opportunity to provide as many broad and budget-based answers as we can.

**Ms. White:** Although I appreciate the answer, it's the minister who tells us that we have a new road map, that we're following *Putting People First*, and that we're looking at new ways of doing health. It is no criticism, of course, of the two support staff who are here and certainly not of the deputy minister who is present.

This is the first time in the history of Yukon government that a department has two deputy ministers.

A lot of time — and the conversation we have within the budget debate isn't actually about budgets but programming. Although I appreciate that the deputy minister who is present today will have access to folks electronically, I would have thought, since this is a new step, that we would have had the opportunity to have both or that the minister would maybe want to have both.

I digress. I will move on. The first thing I want to ask about is the transfer payment to All Genders Yukon for funding counselling for folks who are trans and their families.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I appreciate the opportunity to answer this question. Our government continues to support non-governmental organizations and other partners that

provide Yukoners with the best possible care. All Genders Yukon is certainly one of those partners.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we provided All Genders Yukon with a total annual budget of \$106,000. In total, in the 2022-23 fiscal year, our government is providing All Genders Yukon with a total budget of \$161,000. In the fiscal year of 2022-23, we have committed to providing All Genders Yukon, as I have noted, with their \$106,000 base funding, if you will, and we have increased their budget by \$55,000 to fund counselling services for individuals who might seek counselling there. I just want to confirm that it is my understanding — although I could be corrected — that All Genders Yukon provides this kind of counselling by funding individual counsellors outside of their organization, if someone attends there and wants counselling, and they can use some of that funding to do so.

It should be noted that, during the 2021-22 fiscal year, we provided All Genders Yukon with \$106,000 as their base funding. This year, it's another \$55,000 to fund counselling, but during that period of time — 2021-22 — we provided additional, one-time COVID funding of \$111,000.

So, while I think it is clear, with the opportunity to explain — the base funding this year plus the increase of \$55,000 and the one-time funding of \$111,000 last year could be seen by someone not understanding the total of the budget as some sort of budget cut, but it was additional one-time COVID funding that was provided to All Genders Yukon back in 2021-22. So, their budget has not been cut. We provided them this year, actually, with an increase of \$55,000.

**Ms. White:** It is interesting that the minister talks about how that could be perceived as a budget cut, because that is exactly how it has been perceived by the organization itself. The difference in the budget, between this fiscal year and last year, is directly related to the number of counselling appointments that individuals can have. So, it has gone down from two a month to one a month, and so, although the minister said that \$111,000 was for COVID purposes, it was used for counselling purposes.

It is my understanding also that All Genders Yukon accessed money from the Canadian Red Cross to bolster — to be able to offer — those counselling services.

So, what we see right now — whether it is understood or not — is that number that is budgeted now is actually affecting people, and it is affecting the mental health of people who are supported by All Genders Yukon. Has the minister had a conversation with that organization? Has anyone in her department reached out to that organization to find out what that effect, or what that budgetary change, means to people on the ground?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I appreciate the question. I agree that any counselling services and opportunities for individuals to receive assistance through our NGOs is a practice that we want to continue to support. I think that the COVID one-time funding is going to have an effect, whether they are individual businesses, NGOs, or individuals who might have received COVID funding, because it will, in the future, change. What I can indicate as well is that the federal government has just, in

their current budget, announced a \$100-million increase in their budget with respect to providing mental wellness services to Canadians. We certainly expect and will be in rapid discussions with our counterparts at the federal government to determine which portion of that will be coming to the Yukon and how we might be able to use those funds.

We always make pleas, conversations, positions, and arguments with the federal government to build in as much flexibility as possible with those federal programs. We have been extremely successful at doing that. We are committed to the service provided by organizations like All Genders Yukon. I should note that I am aware of the services provided by All Genders Yukon, but I should note that counselling services, for instance, with respect to the Mental Wellness and Substance Use unit in the Department of Health and Social Services, is available to everyone, regardless of how an individual might identify or the concerns that they have.

We are very committed to talking to All Genders Yukon, if they have an opportunity to continue counselling services in that vein — and support them financially if that's a possibility. We will certainly respect their interest in doing so. I can say that I have not met with them about this particular issue, but I have not been contacted by them. We will confirm that they have not reached out to anyone at the department. Nonetheless, we will reach out to them to discuss this issue. I was certainly not interested in having them misunderstand the one-time funding or the increase in their budget for counselling services.

**Ms. White:** Before we continue on, I think it's really important that, when we talk about minority groups, we recognize that, although we all need supports, those folks who face more systemic barriers than others — folks who historically have a higher rate of suicide and self harm, folks who, unfortunately due to the way society is set up, have a much worse time — do deserve additional supports — straight up. I probably didn't say that in the most eloquent way, but let's be clear that folks who access the services and supports of All Genders Yukon deserve those supports.

It is important to note that the money that All Genders Yukon — so, in 2020-21, they had funding from both Yukon government, \$120,000, and they also got \$86,000 from Red Cross. That money was all used for counselling supports.

In 2021-22, again, it's the \$111,000, but it was still \$16,000 from Red Cross. The difference is that, in the 2020-21 fiscal year, the number of hours of counselling per unique individual accessing counselling per month was two hours and 30 minutes. In 2021-22, it went down to an hour and 22 minutes. It's expected to be at an hour a piece this fiscal year.

So, if we here, in this place where budgetary items are decided, think that this is acceptable — again, anyone will be able to point out the fact that I'm going to vote in favour of a budget I don't support because of the agreement that I signed, but let me highlight that it is not an acceptable thing.

We know that in December 2021, All Genders Yukon had to inform mental health professionals and members that there was insufficient funding to cover counselling sessions as of the end of January 2022. Again, they had to rely on emergency

funding from the Yukon government to cover mental health services for February and March 2022. And, going forward, All Genders Yukon is seeking sufficient funding based on the data that they have collected at this point and the anticipated growth of the support of that community.

Again, I appreciate that the minister and her officials will reach out, but again, this disproportionately affects a community that is already disproportionately affected.

Deputy Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

**Deputy Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King that the Chair report progress.

*Motion agreed to*

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

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

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

### Chair's report

**Ms. Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

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

*The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.*