

Whitehorse, Yukon**Thursday, November 22, 2007 -- 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Tributes.

TRIBUTES**In recognition of Buy Nothing Day**

Mr. Hardy: Mr. Speaker, November 23 marks the 15th annual Buy Nothing Day. It originally began in Vancouver as a symbolic day to look at our over-consumption. November 23 was selected by activists because it's the day after the U.S. Thanksgiving, one of the biggest shopping days of the year. Everything we buy has an impact on our planet. Buy Nothing Day highlights the environmental and ethical consequences of consumerism. There are so many angles to this or things to think about when it comes to our consumption.

On a psychological level, we probably all know people who shop compulsively, buy things they do not need and often cannot afford and place their families, work and their mental health in jeopardy by doing so. In a study in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, researchers believe there may be more than 10 million people who fit this description.

In 2007, \$19 billion was spent on advertising in Canada alone. It's projected to rise to \$23.3 billion in 2011.

There's something terribly wrong with our societal priorities when such vast sums of money are spent on manufacturing consumer desires while homelessness and child poverty continue to exist. We need to look at our consumption from a perspective of the inequitable distribution of wealth. Twenty percent of the world's people consume over 80 percent of the earth's natural resources. We need to think ethically of other consumer choices we make. We need to question the products we buy and challenge the companies who produce them. Trade union activists have challenged consumers to look at the labour behind the label in generating awareness of sweatshops in the garment industry. We need to look at our consumption from an environmental perspective, especially as evidence mounts about how human activity is changing the climate and threatening our very existence on this planet.

There's an old First Nation saying, "Only when the last tree is cut, only when the last river is polluted, only when the last fish is caught will they realize that we can't eat money." Buy Nothing Day is symbolic, and the issues we must reckon with cannot be addressed one day of the year. They require constant thought and action. Though we must push governments, industry and others to make changes, we must take personal responsibility. We must slow down, Mr. Speaker. We must think about our consumer patterns and we must work out for ourselves what it is we really need, not what we desire.

Speaker: Are there any further tributes? Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. Taylor: It is my honour and privilege to ask all Members of the Legislative Assembly to extend a special warm welcome to four individuals sitting in the gallery. To the left there is Adeline Webber, president of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, as well as a board member of the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council. We also have Andrea Williams, a member of the Native Women's Association of Canada; Beverley Jacobs, president of the Native Women's Association of Canada; and Sheila Clark, the executive assistant to the Premier and special advisor to Cabinet.

Thank you and welcome.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further introductions of visitors?

Returns or documents for tabling.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. McRobb: I have for tabling a November 20, 2007 letter to Mr. David Jones, Conflicts Commissioner.

Hon. Ms. Horne: I have for tabling a letter from the Conflicts Commissioner, dated November 21, 2007.

Speaker: Are there any further documents for tabling?

Reports of committees.

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

THAT this House respond to the clear expression of support from Yukon people for comprehensive legislation to protect workers, children and others from the toxic effects of second-hand smoke by resuming its consideration of Bill No. 104, the *Smoke-free Places Act*, at the earliest opportunity, with the intent of having legislation adopted before the end of the current sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) Canada's population is aging, and according to Statistics Canada a rising wave of retirement should reach its peak in the early 2020s;

(2) a key challenge for the Yukon government will be the availability of qualified public servants as the baby-boom generation, about half of Canada's labour force, enters retirement;

(3) in its investing in the public service (IPS) strategy, the Yukon government said that 70 percent of Yukon public servants were 40 years of age or older;

(4) young people -- frequently faced with limited opportunities to find meaningful, well-paid employment -- must be given opportunities in the public service;

(5) exactly a year ago the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission said in the House that a succession plan was being developed; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to release its plan for ensuring that Yukon public service has an appropriate number of well-trained employees to continue providing excellent public services as older workers near retirement age.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?

Hearing none, is there a ministerial statement?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board employer assessment rates

Mr. Inverarity: I have a question for the minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board. It's that time of the year again when the WCB sets its next year's employer assessment rates.

In a letter to the Association of Yukon Communities dated October 22, 2002, this Yukon Party clearly stated that they were not in support of the WCB increasing Yukon employers' rates. Every year since then, Yukon employers have experienced a rate hike. Will the minister confirm that workers' compensation rates are going up again this year?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Again, the Member for Porter Creek South is not accurately reflecting the facts. The member is aware that there was a long-standing subsidy of the rates that was in place that has been removed. That is the majority of the portion of rate increase.

As far as rates being adjusted, they are dealt with by the board. The member cannot simultaneously stand up and urge the government to respect boards and respect public processes and then stand up and encourage the government not to respect that board, which I remind the member is made up of representatives nominated by employers and by labour. They manage the affairs. It is not a government board; its members are appointed by the government to hold in trust and to manage the affairs of employers, employees, and to ensure the workers' compensation system remains strong.

Mr. Inverarity: This is a really simple question and it deserves a straightforward answer. I understand that the minister's ability to provide effective leadership to the WCB is severely limited, mostly because that organization is at arm's length from the government.

We've waited for years for this minister to bring forward improvements to the *Workers' Compensation Act* and we're still hoping the new legislation, when it finally does show up, will be more than just a 10-percent solution. Yukon employers have clearly expressed their concern about Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board rates and the quality of service. If the minister is unable to improve the situation, at least he can an-

swer a simple question. How much are the workers' compensation rates going up this year?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: It's very disappointing to see the member clearly taking leadership from his leader. I understand that. Taking this very aggressive approach, which does not accurately reflect the facts and does not accurately reflect the facts as the member should know them to be. The member clearly is not doing his homework or is choosing not to accurately reflect that homework.

The assessment rates employers pay to the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board are based on actuarial analysis of claim costs, risks and trend in each industry. Based on current trends in workplace safety in the Yukon, the rates are set and assessment rates must reflect that as per the designation in the act.

In terms of the act review, the member is aware that this government is proceeding forward, that tabling is scheduled to occur in the spring and that the process -- though taking longer than expected -- had the positive benefit that could not have been predicted at the start. This is the fact that groups representing employers and labour came together in a joint submission that was also agreed to by the representatives of Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board itself -- in a joint submission on the majority of the issues identified. We're very pleased that they have done that work in identifying a solution that works for all players in the industry.

Mr. Inverarity: It's a pretty simple question. The minister responsible for WCB appears to have no authority at all over the working relationship between WCB and Yukon employers. Costs go up; we continue to wait for legislation and employers become more frustrated.

The minister responds to these concerns with, "It's not in my purview." WCB is at arm's length. I'm asking a simple question on behalf of the employers. Are the rates going to go up and by how much?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I would point out that in answer to many of the member opposite's questions, he will have the opportunity to discuss these in detail later this session when the chair of the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board and the administration come before this Assembly, as a standard practice in the fall.

The member is not reflecting the relationship between the minister and the board. He ought to be well aware that it's at arm's length and that the act and regulations give the minister no operational authority in this area. In fact, they specifically exclude the minister from having operational authority. The minister is responsible for the act. The minister is responsible for the regulations. The minister is prohibited from being involved in individual case files, and the minister does not set the rates. Those are set by the board, and they are dealt with based on the actuarial assessment. The member ought to be aware of that.

I would be pleased to have somebody brief him on the act, since he consistently fails to understand it or to reflect that understanding in his continued questions on the floor of this Assembly, session after session after session.

Question re: Secondary school programming

Mr. Fairclough: Recently the Department of Education issued a tender call for a programming study for secondary schools, but only for Whitehorse. I've reviewed the terms of reference and concur that the proposed study addresses many things that need to be studied.

As I pointed out earlier this week, however, I am concerned about the timing of this study. To formulate a plan of action just for Whitehorse prior to issuing a two-year study costing taxpayers some \$1.6 million simply does not make sense. The process is fairly simple. You study, you report, you discuss the report, and the final step is to formulate a plan of action for Yukon based on the proceedings. Now, the minister is starting in at step 4. Why is the minister not waiting a few days until the education reform project report is tabled?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and pleasure to rise to address this very important issue from the member for the third party. I appreciate that he does support that this study needs to go on. I think it is very important that we follow the recommendations in the school facility study that was completed earlier this year, wherein they said -- I'll summarize here -- that before you decide on what replacement to prepare for F.H. Collins Secondary School, you conduct a visioning exercise of what such a high school should look like in Whitehorse.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we certainly appreciate that F.H. Collins serves many of the needs of rural Yukoners. That's where we have Gadzoosdaa residence, and that's where many of our high school students from outside of Whitehorse go. It will be very important in this exercise to not only look at F.H. Collins but at Porter Creek Secondary School, at Vanier Secondary School, at the Individual Learning Centre, at the Wood Street Annex, and all our other support services that we offer for our high school programming.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, of course, again, Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't answer the question.

Now, the issuing of a tender call will be seen by many as an attempt to lessen the impact of the education reform report. The minister will be able to say that the report has little new in it, and his department is already doing much of what is in the ERP. Mr. Speaker, that's playing politics.

Now, from my review of the drafting of the terms of reference, it would appear that there is a great deal of expertise within the Department of Education. What immediately came to mind was: why not utilize the wealth of knowledge and experience to do the study? Now I see the minister has budgeted some \$300,000 for the study. Why does the minister not have confidence in his own department to do this study, and why spend another \$300,000 of taxpayers' money?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: It's unfortunate that the member opposite doesn't recognize the hard work the people in the Department of Education do. They certainly do have important issues on their desks, and one of those is addressing the ongoing issues in education. We're constantly addressing up-and-coming and emerging issues, things like experiential learning, expanding skills and trades training, and finding better ways to educate Yukoners.

One of the recommendations from the school facility use study that came out a couple of months ago was to conduct this exercise and, yes, we do have money in the budget because we are very serious about conducting this exercise and working with all Yukoners, all our stakeholders and all our partners, in doing the best possible job on this very important project.

Mr. Fairclough: It sounds like the minister doesn't have confidence in his departmental people to do this and is willing to spend another \$300,000 of taxpayers' money on this study.

Mr. Speaker, I am not happy with what is not in the terms of reference. The obvious solution goes to the heart of the ERP. The mandate of the two-year study was about governance. Now, *Hansard* would clearly show that the Premier was not in support of any sharing of education with anyone else outside of his government. The proposed study is really about the exclusion of governance and rural secondary schools.

In a last-minute attempt to water down the ERP, and thus its recommendation on governance, will the minister assure Yukoners that the governance issue and the programming in all secondary schools will be included in any future studies? Will he do that? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The member is first starting to talk about the new exercise on looking at a high school vision. I've committed to working with the Department of Education and with all our partners in education on that project.

I'd like to be perfectly clear, because I don't agree with the member opposite. I do have an extreme amount of faith and confidence in the Department of Education, our teachers, principals, administrators and the staff of the Department of Education. They are all very competent professionals who work in the best interests of all Yukon children.

We have an additional project. This isn't something we do on a day-to-day basis so, yes, we are working with some outside assistance to help facilitate this high school visioning exercise.

Question re: Anti-smoking legislation

Mr. Hardy: Yesterday the Minister of Health and Social Services tabled the report of the Select Committee on Anti-Smoking Legislation, on the committee's public consultations earlier this fall. This was an all-party initiative, and I felt it was a real step forward in how we operate in the Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, immediately afterward, he introduced a motion urging his own government to draft and table legislation based on the committee's recommendations alone.

This would mean a delay of at least six months before any legislation is passed and probably more than a year before it comes into effect. Will the Minister of Health and Social Services explain why Yukon workers, children and others should continue to be exposed to the toxic effects of second-hand smoke against their will for another year?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I can provide some comfort to the Member for Whitehorse Centre, the Leader of the Third Party, about his concerns and note that, in terms of timeline, in fact we may not even be as late, potentially, as he indicated in his private member's bill. The options the committee was discuss-

ing -- and discussing with Yukoners -- primarily included implementation either in the spring or in the fall of 2008.

The government has indicated that we will be drafting legislation that reflects the basic spirit and intent of the private member's bill that the Leader of the NDP tabled. We will also, of course, be reflecting the recommendations of the all-party committee that required unanimous agreement -- I'll remind all members -- and reflecting what we heard from Yukoners -- the concerns and issues that have been identified with the legislation, such as the section in need of modification based on the court case that the City of Whitehorse bylaw experienced.

Mr. Hardy: There is a comprehensive legislation already before this House to ban smoking in public places. That is a reality.

Bill No. 104, the *Smoke-Free Places Act*, received second reading and went to Committee of the Whole for debate last May 9. The select committee based its public consultations on that bill. The public clearly said to get on with the job. That was heard across this territory.

Yukon is the last jurisdiction to have comprehensive legislation to restrict smoking in public places. Even Alberta has now taken a great leap forward to protect its citizens, and now the Minister of Health and Social Services wants to just dump Bill No. 104. Why is the Minister of Health and Social Services dragging his feet on this important public health initiative when we could have had legislation in place six months ago? Why?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Again I remind the member opposite that, as we said at the very beginning, our primary objective as a government is ensuring that legislation reflects the will of the public. That is why we struck this process of an all-party committee -- the first time that an all-party committee has toured the territory since 1992-93. It's why we took the unprecedented step of having three members on the committee, each with an equal vote, and with the recommendations requiring the unanimous agreement of all three members. We did so to deal with this very important issue in a non-partisan manner, to provide the groundwork for a discussion with Yukoners of their concerns, their suggestions, and to do so in as non-partisan a manner as possible with this important issue. I commend the Member for McIntyre-Takhini and the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for their participation in this and for their work in setting aside partisan differences and engaging in a genuine discussion with Yukoners.

The government will be acting on the recommendations of the all-party committee. We will be drafting and tabling government legislation based upon that, but I point out to the Leader of the NDP that there were areas, including particularly section 5 of the act, the private member's bill that he tabled, that do require change. As well, the committee in fact recommended strengthening certain provisions that the member had not included in his bill. That's what we will be doing.

Mr. Hardy: Last May the government party and Official Opposition took the position that Yukon people should be consulted about this legislation. They were consulted and they said, "Do it. Get on with it." Our caucus has said we will support amendments that will strengthen Bill No. 104. We said that six months ago; we say it today in this House. We don't

need to go back to the drawing board so that we can watch partisan politics be played again. The government side and the Official Opposition have had more than six months to consider any amendments they want to introduce. The Justice department and the Health department have had more than six months to go through Bill No. 104 with a fine-tooth comb. As the Yukon's law makers, it is time for us to act, and we can do this. We can expedite this.

When Bill No. 104 comes back for debate next Wednesday afternoon, will the minister and his colleagues support it, or will they continue to deny Yukon people the protection they deserve and want, for another six months or more?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I remind the member that his bill recommended implementation in June of 2008. In fact, the committee unfortunately was not able to reach a complete agreement on the options discussed and on the form of legislation, but the committee did agree that, based on what we heard from Yukoners, implementation should occur, either in the spring or the fall. The indication was that it would occur in 2008. If members would allow me to answer the question, I'd be happy to do so.

I point out again to the member opposite that he should talk to the Member for McIntyre-Takhini. The Member for McIntyre-Takhini participated in a very positive manner in this all-party committee. I appreciate the Leader of the NDP stepping forward and tabling his suggestion for the bill, but point out that there are some areas needing change. The committee recommended change, and some of the recommendations made would strengthen the legislation, and those recommendations were not included in the Bill No. 104. As well, section 5 of the private member's bill, based on Whitehorse's court case, would not stand the legal test, so there's a need to modify that section. Justice has not gone through the act with a fine-tooth comb, because we as a government respected the process we committed to and waited for the recommendations of the all-party committee, rather than predetermining the result and drafting changes without waiting for the outcome of the committee.

Question re: Taser use

Mr. Hardy: Earlier today, a man died in Nova Scotia Correctional Centre after being tasered by police. Yesterday, we read a local report in which the superintendent of Whitehorse Correctional Centre acknowledged that a taser had been used inappropriately on an inmate in that facility. Four years ago, a Whitehorse man died after being tasered by RCMP officers who were trying to arrest him. Today, we hear that the minister has put a moratorium on the use of tasers in the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, and I applaud her for that. However, has the Minister of Justice had any discussions in the past month with senior RCMP officers about the growing concerns across Canada about the use of taser devices in law enforcement?

Hon. Ms. Horne: The Yukon contracts with the RCMP to provide policing in our communities. The terms of the territorial policing services agreement support the regular meetings between the Yukon and the RCMP to discuss policy, priorities and concerns, but not operational issues.

The RCMP is doing their own investigation this time and they will be acting on those recommendations.

Mr. Hardy: I hope they're also advising the minister.

It's hard to understand the minister's reasoning on this issue, considering the attention being focused on the use of tasers everywhere else. There have now been 18 deaths associated with taser use across Canada, including one right here in Whitehorse. A number of inquiries and investigations are now underway, both at the national level and in British Columbia. I think it's up to five inquiries or investigations that are happening.

We certainly aren't proposing a separate inquiry here, but Yukoners do deserve some answers from this minister. The question to the minister is: will this minister at least provide this House with copies of the RCMP and Whitehorse Correctional Centre guidelines on when and how tasers can be used?

Hon. Ms. Horne: At the recent meeting in Winnipeg of the federal and provincial ministers responsible for justice and public safety, ministers recognized that while tasers do often save lives, there may be more to be learned about the effects they have on the human body when that person is in distress.

The federal-provincial-territorial communiqué states, "Given that there has recently been work done in policing sectors in a number of jurisdictions on the use of tasers, Ministers requested officials to have this work brought together to share information and best practices on the use of tasers in Canada." Yukon will monitor the reviews and recommendations. We will give the deputy ministers time to do their work to submit their recommendations to us. We will then study those findings and make our recommendations.

Mr. Hardy: That wasn't the question I asked, but it was nice to get some of that information, so I thank the minister for that.

If it will help the minister at all, I will ask one of the pages to give her this copy of RCMP guidelines. It's right here; it's not a hard thing to get.

The Leader of the NDP in British Columbia has also called for a moratorium on taser use in that province until the investigation is complete in the death of a Polish immigrant at the Vancouver International Airport. On Tuesday, the Member for Mount Lorne tabled a motion calling on the minister to direct RCMP and Whitehorse Correctional Centre officials to suspend all future use of the taser until there has been an independent national review. In light of the later taser-related death, will the minister now give that direction to the RCMP and Whitehorse Correctional Centre officers so we don't have another so-called accident?

Hon. Ms. Horne: The Yukon contracts with the RCMP to provide policing in our communities and the Yukon. The RCMP are in the midst of their own investigation into the use of tasers, and I rely on their expertise in this matter.

Question re: Social assistance rates

Mr. Mitchell: I have a question for the Health and Social Services minister. For the past two years, I've asked this government when they will address Yukon's woefully out-of-date social assistance rates, and the minister has repeatedly told

Yukoners he is reviewing the rates. The minister has also continued to provide his version of the history of how many successive governments have failed to act.

Mr. Speaker, let's save some time here today. We agree it has been ignored for far too long. My question for the minister: when will this minister be announcing a new rate schedule so people struggling to survive on 15-year-old rates can afford to pay rent and put food on their tables?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, as the member noted, I have addressed this issue before, and I am pleased to see that the member is at least partially noting the fact that when the Liberals were in office, they failed to even consider this issue. Certainly they did not address it.

What we committed to do in the last election campaign -- not two years ago, as the member is suggesting -- in the fall of 2006, in this mandate, was to conduct a review of the social assistance program to review the adequacy of rates and to reduce disincentives that may prevent people from entering the labour force and to provide incentives to assist them in entering the labour force.

As the member ought to be aware, we have already acted on one provision of the review, which is now complete. That is the announcement of the increase to the childcare subsidy for low-income families, and that increase will be effective on December 1. The remaining matters, as soon as they have completed the approval processes, will be announced, and that will be very shortly. But as I indicated previously to the member, we've already acted in one area, and that increase to the childcare subsidy is aimed at assisting those of low income to remain in the workforce and build resources for themselves and their children.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, Mr. Speaker, the childcare subsidy is a separate and different issue from social assistance rates. In this minister's rush to continue to play the blame game, he says he has only been studying it for a year since the last election. I think if he'll look back, he'll see that there were similar answers to the same question before the last election platform.

Mr. Speaker, Yukon families are struggling to survive on the same rates that were in effect when this minister was in high school. The time for studying and reviewing this assignment is long past due. So again, Mr. Speaker, when -- a date -- when will this minister announce new rates?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The member has just made my point in some ways better than I could. He has pointed out his failure to understand the effect that the childcare subsidy has for those on social assistance and for those of low income, and demonstrated his lack of understanding of the fact that the social assistance structure is, in fact, even more important than the rates. We will be addressing the rate issue based on the best advice that has been received during this review.

The review done by officials has reviewed the needs. It has reviewed, most importantly, the structure of the system to address the end objective of ensuring that we are actually giving people a hand up, not just a handout. We are assisting them in entering the labour force and remaining in the labour force. This is the most significant review of the system, since its in-

ception and the end structure, which will very shortly be announced, will make us leading edge in the country in terms of the best social assistance structure. The member, I'm sure, based on his previous comments will not understand that either.

Question re: Canadian Federation of Independent Business concerns

Mr. Inverarity: Mr. Speaker, last week during general debate the Leader of the Third Party and the Minister of Economic Development made statements about the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that I found quite disturbing.

The anti-business attitude is no surprise from the NDP; however, these statements were expressed by the CFIB on behalf of Yukon businesses. The Minister of Economic Development complained about the CFIB forwarding the same questions with the same responses and had the same concerns year after year. It is hard to believe that this minister would allow all of these years to go by without addressing the concerns that are repeatedly brought forward by Yukon businesses. When will the minister stop ignoring Yukon business concerns and start addressing at least some of these issues?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: One can look back, not that many years ago, to the level of the economy that we had within the Yukon, and the Liberals' philosophy for dealing with the economy was to simply disband the Department of Economic Development and scatter it and to disband many of the structures that we have in order to deal with business. Since then, the economy has gone from double-digit unemployment to one of the lowest in Canada, and at one point, the lowest, in an environment that basically shows two jurisdictions in all of Canada with no net debt -- Yukon and Alberta. And on a per capita basis, the fact of the matter is we're well ahead of Alberta on that. So if the member opposite's concept of not doing well in the business sector is our approach, then I really am at a loss to see what his question is.

Mr. Inverarity: Well, we're in the here and now, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business provides a valuable service to Yukoners. Four hundred Yukon businesses are members of the CFIB. The survey asks about things like taxes, Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board rates, labour shortages and red tape. The minister said, "I've only met with them for four years, but quite frankly, it all seems to be one meeting with the same questions and the same surveys that come out saying exactly the same thing." Well, they have some concerns, because the government does nothing to address them year after year. When is the government going to act on some of these concerns that have been raised by the CFIB?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: I have some concerns about the member opposite's idea that actually creating a Department of Economic Development to actually address those concerns is inappropriate, given his previous government's solution of disbanding the Department of Economic Development -- a government, I would point out, that was the shortest lived majority government in the history of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Perhaps the member opposite would like to talk about things like the enterprise trade fund and other mechanisms that we have to address the business interests and labour shortage

problems we have, et cetera. We are addressing this -- double-digit unemployment to one of the lowest in Canada, with a surplus. If the member opposite considers this not addressing the problem, I really don't understand the question.

Mr. Inverarity: The Yukon Party has been in office for five years and we've seen nothing out of them. The CFIB brings forward these issues year after year on behalf of Yukon businesses because this government has not made any progress at all. Again today, the Yukon Party is busy increasing the tax load on businesses by raising WCB premiums.

Instead of shooting the messenger, which is what the minister is doing, let me suggest a different approach. Will the minister commit today to work with the CFIB and Yukon businesses and the Yukon businesses that they represent to address these concerns? It's a simple question.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The member opposite's concept of doing nothing is perplexing. Again, I remind the member opposite, as the Minister of Health and Social Services answered a few moments ago, that WCB rates are controlled by WCB, not by the government and not by the minister. He doesn't even understand the basic principles of this.

The Liberal concept was a U-Haul economy with people leaving, people moving out. When knocking on doors in 2002, it was not uncommon to find single mothers and children because the husband or the wage earner of the family had to leave the territory in order to make an income. They are coming back. They are coming back, the population is going up; we have one of the lowest tax regimes for business in all of Canada. We had at one point the lowest, and we now have one of the lowest unemployment rates. We have BizPaL, we have all of the various things.

The member opposite looks at it from his U-Haul economy, destroy-the-Department-of-Economic-Development concept -- and then says we have done nothing. I challenge the member opposite to take a look at some of the job lists and such. We have jobs looking for employees. People are moving here. He misses the point and fails to understand this completely. That, frankly, is both perplexing and rather frightening.

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

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Nordick: I would like all members of this Assembly to recognize a former MLA for the Klondike, Mr. David Millar.

Applause

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 8, *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, the Department of Education.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 8 -- *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08* -- continued

Department of Education

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 8, *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08*. We will proceed with general debate on the Department of Education.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to a number of important initiatives supported by the Department of Education's supplementary budget for 2007-08. At the Department of Education we are working to create a more responsive education system that enables all learners to succeed. We are also working to enhance transition between different levels of education, training and the world of work. We are also working to further develop and maintain meaningful relationships with all partners in education.

I am pleased to say, Mr. Chair, that the Department of Education's focus on creating a responsive education system, enhancing transitions, and developing and maintaining partnerships is well supported by this year's supplementary budget. I am also pleased to announce that this year we will be seeing an increase to the Department of Education's funding. Under the 2007-08 supplementary budget, there will be a 2.4-percent increase in operation and maintenance expenditures and a 21.5-percent increase in capital expenditures.

The total operation and maintenance supplementary budget for 2007-08 is \$2,782,000. \$207,000 is requested for collective agreement increases associated with the Department of Education's facility management agreement with Highways and Public Works. This agreement provides for maintenance and custodial services to Yukon schools. Our facilities are an integral element of providing the best possible education experience for all students.

\$175,000 is requested to complete the consultation phase of the education reform project. Under this year's supplementary budget, the Department of Education is also asking for \$1,331,000 to support O&M activities in public schools. This funding is allocated to various areas, including \$385,000 for the expansion of experiential and vocational learning programs in Yukon schools. Experiential and vocational programs have been offered in Yukon high schools as course options and as

part of regular programming in some elementary schools. This funding request is to cover increased cost for the program materials at current schools and the expansion of the availability of experiential and vocational programs to additional schools.

The Department of Education supports experiential learning and vocational training because they make for a well-rounded education system, one that can engage and inspire students. \$200,000 is requested under this year's supplementary budget to cover Canadian Heritage French-language programs. This funding, as a result of negotiations with the Council of Ministers of Education Canada and Canadian Heritage, is designed to support fine arts, sports and nature programs at École Émilie Tremblay. This funding is 100-percent recoverable from the federal government and will further enrich the educational opportunities of French-as-a-first-language students in the Yukon.

Mr. Chair, a revote of \$150,000 is requested to complete the purchase of new math curriculum resource materials. We are requesting this revote because there were delays in the final preparations and printing of these math resources during 2006-07.

The Department of Education is requesting further revotes totalling \$234,000 for school-based programs that weren't completed as a result of the differences between the school year and the government's fiscal year. Programs included under this line item, such as the home tutor program and the cultural enhancement program in schools, make a real difference for students.

In the case of the home tutor program, students can get the extra support they need so that homework time is a fluid and well-supported learning activity.

Cultural enhancement programs in schools can make all the difference when it comes to creating an inclusive and relevant learning environment for all students. The Department of Education is listening to school communities and we are hearing that targeted programs like the home tutor program and cultural enhancement programs are working.

Under the 2007-08 supplementary budget, the Department of Education is asking for \$926,000 under O&M for advanced education. As you can imagine, a large part of this funding is dedicated to supporting Yukon College. Our support of Yukon College demonstrates the Department of Education's commitment to advanced education and training opportunities in the territory. Our K-12 education system sets the foundation for lifelong learning, but advanced education plays a key role in preparing people for engaging in the world of work.

\$120,000 is requested for a base funding increase to Yukon College. This funding will provide Yukon College with an increase to the base funding it currently receives from the Department of Education. These funds are geared to help Yukon College manage the increased costs of delivering post-secondary education and training in the territory.

The Department of Education will be requesting the same base funding increase for Yukon College in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 fiscal years as well.

\$63,000 is requested to cover the Yukon College pension fund shortfall. These funds will provide additional funding re-

quired for this fiscal year that was identified by the actuarial report completed in June 2006. Yukon College received \$866,100 in April 2007, based on a preliminary actuarial report. The total contribution for the 2007-08 fiscal year is \$929,354, and this request for funds under the 2007-08 supplementary budget will fulfill our commitment.

The Department of Education is requesting \$165,000 for the Yukon College School of Visual Arts -- or SOVA, as it's more commonly known. This funding is essentially an accounting adjustment. Although funds were paid out late in 2005-06 for the start-up costs of the SOVA program, the activities covered by the contribution agreement were not fully expended during 2006-07 due to delays. I am sure we will all agree that SOVA is a remarkable program that is providing unique educational opportunities in Dawson.

The Department of Education is pleased to have played such a significant role in making this Yukon College program a reality. We would like to thank our partners in delivering this program, and they include Yukon College, Tr'ondek Hwech'in and the Dawson City Arts Society. The Department of Education will continue to support the operation of this program with an evaluation of the foundation year to be completed at the end of the 2009-10 school year.

Mr. Chair, the total capital supplementary budget for 2007-08 is \$2,143,000. These capital funds are invested between public schools and advanced education. The Department of Education is requesting a number of revotes under public schools funding. We wish to revote the following funds.

A \$669,000 revote is requested for the new Tantalus School building project. Mr. Chair, I'm sure everyone is aware that classes are taking place in the new school and that the new facility has been very well-received by the school community.

\$238,000 is requested as a revote to allow for the tendering and completion of the industrial arts wing ventilation upgrade at F.H. Collins Secondary School. It is anticipated that this project will be completed in November. Under this year's supplementary budget, we are requesting to defer \$146,000 in expenditure for the fire alarm system at F.H. Collins Secondary School. This project will be completed in 2008-09.

The Department of Education is asking for a further \$125,000 in capital maintenance to complete a number of smaller projects that began in 2006-07. These projects include the repair of the Chief Zzeh Gittlet School in Old Crow, drainage pit repair at Vanier Catholic Secondary, and various small projects throughout the territory. A revote of \$146,000 is requested for all schools to complete projects initiated by school councils and staff and not completed by government's fiscal year-end.

Under the 2007-08 supplementary capital budget, the Department of Education is requesting a number of revotes regarding advanced education funding. A \$205,000 revote is requested to accommodate an accounting adjustment for funds allocated to the Yukon College School of Visual Arts program. Although funds were paid out late in 2005-06 for the one-time capital start-up costs of this program, the implementation phase was just beginning, so the funding was not reflected as an expenditure but as an accountable advance.

To support community trade funding agreements signed late in the fiscal year, a \$176,000 revote is requested. Community training funds provide targeted training opportunities for Yukoners across the territory so they can take advantage of local employment opportunities.

The final budget item under advanced education's capital expenditures for 2007-08 is a request for \$32,000 to provide for job training initiatives to support school-age youth. I am particularly pleased about this project because the Department of Education will be working in partnership with the Blue Feather Youth Centre to deliver a job-training program for at-risk youth. We found that these youth have a harder time not only engaging in education but also in the labour force. Education, life skills and career coaching can make all the difference for these youth. The program offered at Blue Feather with this funding will help school-age youth stay in school while providing them with the extra support they need to acquire and maintain employment. A program like this provides many benefits for the youth involved, including increased feelings of self-confidence and self-sufficiency. The Department of Education is looking forward to its work with Blue Feather in helping at-risk youth to finish their education and find meaningful, lasting employment.

The 2007-08 supplementary budget for the Department of Education is going to continue the good work that we started in our first mandate and will be supporting new initiatives introduced during our second mandate.

As I mentioned earlier, the Department of Education's focus on a responsive education system, enhancing transition, and developing and maintaining partnerships is well-supported by this year's supplementary budget. Education is key to creating and maintaining the kind of economy in communities we value as Yukoners. The government investment in education in the supplementary budget is proof of our commitment to improving the quality of life for all Yukoners.

Now, Mr. Chair, if members opposite have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them or, if they prefer to go into line-by-line examination, we can do that as well.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Cardiff: I would like members to join me in welcoming Kerri Ceretzke from the Yukon Literacy Coalition.

Applause

Mr. Fairclough: I do have questions for the Department of Education. I know this is a very important department, as it affects everyone in the territory. I do have questions in regard to the expenditures, both in O&M and capital. I have been asking the minister a number of questions this week and last week in regard to initiatives under the Department of Education.

The big one I'm concerned with here is the education reform project that was, and still is, ongoing, and how it's not being tabled in the House and how it's basically left to others to decide when the report should be released to the public.

I have a draft of that report and could be asking questions on it, and I'm sure all members on that side of the House also

have the draft report. It is out there in the public and the public wants to be able to comment on it. I read the report with interest.

One of the main mandates behind the report was in regard to governance. Even though the Premier himself did not feel governance should be discussed by the committee in public consultations, it was and is reflected in the draft final report.

I was hoping that the minister responsible for Education could speed things along and have this brought out to the public. We don't have to go through the same process we did with the Hold Fast report. Two days after the House recessed, the Hold Fast report was released to the public basically with very little change to the draft final report. It was two days after, and we couldn't bring it up in the House because we were recessed for the summer.

Here we are, going down the very same road, and I don't think that the minister should be doing this. I understand that he's going to say we have partners in education, but that in itself brings another question. I asked that question today regarding why the minister was allowing a contract to go out and look at programming in schools here in Whitehorse with full knowledge that the education reform project looked at governance and involved people when it came to examination of curriculum throughout the schools in the territory. I was a bit surprised that this contract for \$200,000 did not involve the experience of the department, and I think they could have done it with ease, and it would have saved taxpayers a whole pile of money.

It didn't involve the First Nations, particularly the section of governance in the education reform project, for their input into this study. I've got the terms of reference in front of me and people have been looking at it. The terms of reference do mention the committee -- I believe -- four members from First Nations on that committee. I really think that the minister could have taken control here, to ensure that the steps of the education reform project were followed and to have those recommendations reflected in the report. I thought we had gone beyond that. Here we are taking a step backwards and still having a lot of that control in the minister's hands. He knows full well that the education reform project and the governance section is there for a very big purpose, and it is to involve the people in curriculum and program development.

There's a huge, huge section in regard to governance, and the minister should not ignore that. I know one of his answers, Mr. Chair, was that the department just doesn't stop, and we don't expect it to stall or be stagnant. We expect it to continue on, in good faith, with reports that that department has done in the past. We spent a lot of money on it. It has been two and a half years and the minister is still failing to bring this forward. I understand from my discussions out in the public that this report is going to be finalized soon. There are some concerns about it. That needs to be raised. I understand that it's going to be possibly tabled, although I have my doubts about that -- but it will be released to the public. There is no reason why the department cannot operate in the manner of having this report as guidance for what they do from now into the future.

I asked the question today, Mr. Chair, and I was disappointed in the minister's answers. I'm hoping that he would do

some homework on this matter and show the respect that was written up in the education reform project in regard to governance and have that respect reflected in any other studies that governments do in the territory in regard to education and program and curriculum development. So I was disappointed in the minister's answers on that.

I'm going to ask the very same question to see if I can get anything different out of the minister today. I asked the minister why he didn't have confidence in departmental people with all the experience and knowledge that they do have. Why can they not lead this study that the minister is proposing now? Why does the minister not have confidence in them, and why are we going to some Outside company to head up this study? We're spending, I believe, money that we don't need to be spending. It could be directed elsewhere in the schools. So why can't the minister show that confidence in the expertise we have in the department and have them basically do this study for the department?

I looked at the terms of reference and a number of departmental people are listed, including superintendents of schools -- people with a vast knowledge of education in the Yukon and in the past. Why not put that upon them? After all, we've had a lot of questions in this House about others coming in and doing studies for us. Why can't the department do it and why can't the minister have the confidence in the department and their expertise and knowledge to do this study?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: We need to back up a little bit in this discussion because it has gotten quite far-ranging. The education reform project was started because this government is committed to reforming education by making changes to the system that will better meet the needs and aspirations of all Yukoners, particularly First Nation students.

This process we undertook is not specifically about changing legislation; it's about vision and what we want the education system to accomplish. It's not about means; it's about an end. How do we increase the educational success rate of all Yukoners? What do we need to look at in our processes and systems in order to change and to do that? We're looking at things like curriculum -- curriculum content and curriculum processes -- and the teachers, facilities, the manner in which education is presented to students, so it's looking at how we can incorporate information that's important to the students, from an intellectual perspective, a cultural perspective, an emotional perspective and an aesthetic perspective. How can we make changes to better meet the needs of our students?

How can we make changes to our system to better reflect the needs of our community? It's very important to have a role in our education system for parents, for our communities, and for the other orders of government in the territory. We also need to involve the teachers, administrators and other professionals involved. That's the purpose of the education reform project.

The member opposite knows that when we embarked on this project, it wasn't done unilaterally; it was done as a partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations. Both organizations said this was very important and that we needed to work together, and we did. We struck an agreement. At its in-

ception, the offer was made to those Yukon First Nations that aren't members of the Council of Yukon First Nations to participate. The Kaska First Nation representatives took us up on that. There was an executive steering committee put together that included the chair of the Chiefs Committee on Education, the Minister of Education, and a representative from the Liard First Nation.

We have worked very closely with our project team. The project team, as members are quite aware, included a chair put forward by the Council of Yukon First Nations and a chair put forward by the Government of Yukon. They were given some direction to go out and ask how we can reform, make changes, improve our education system here in the territory in order to meet the needs of Yukoners, including Yukoners of First Nation ancestry.

They did some very good preliminary work. They put together a lot of good ideas. They went out and conducted consultation throughout the territory. There were meetings in every community in the Yukon. There were meetings with the various partners and stakeholders, and now they are finishing their work.

Once their work is completed, it then goes through to the Executive Committee and, as we have agreed -- and the member opposite knows because he has seen the letter. The communications from the principals behind this to the Education reform project -- they've seen letters. We gave them direction to go out and look at specific items. We gave them direction to go out and do consultation and, in the agreement, the principals behind the agreement said we would determine the next steps and how to do that. I will not unilaterally release the information as I have said on this floor many, many times. There is a partnership in place and we will honour that, and I request that the member opposite not ask me to break that agreement.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is very important for the government to honour the agreement that it has with the Council of Yukon First Nations and with the Liard First Nation and work together on this. The future of education in the territory is vitally important. We all know that. We on the executive team know that we have to get this right. Getting it done right is more important than getting it done fast. I will say that on any topic. It is more important to get the project done right than to get it done fast, especially with education where it will have such a long-term impact on every facet of our society.

So, Mr. Chair, I am committed, as I have said in recent days, to the other partners in this project, to working with them, to continuing this process, to continuing this project, to looking at making reforms to our education system here in the territory in order to best serve the needs of all Yukoners.

Mr. Chair, when we embarked on this project, it was fully recognized by all partners involved that the Department of Education would not become stagnant and would not become complacent. It would not just sit still. No. There was an understanding among all the partners that the Department of Education would continue to be responsive to the needs of the community. It would continue to launch new initiatives. It would continue to work on addressing the important and new initiatives.

We're doing that. One of the first initiatives this government undertook upon being re-elected last fall was to launch the school facilities study, which looked at the Copper Ridge area, Porter Creek and the high school suitability and F.H. Collins Secondary. It very much included consultations with the community, with our various partners in education. We did put together advisory groups -- the Copper Ridge advisory group. We met with the school councils and administrators. The list of consultations in that process is quite extensive.

When that report was released -- and yes, Mr. Chair, it's a fact there were questions about the original drafts of that, which were sent back and greater clarification was asked for, or a greater analysis. Again, it's more important to get it done right than to get it done fast.

So the work was sent back. We said, "Look more into these areas, and please include these changes." The recommendations weren't changed; it was the supporting evidence that was more thorough. There was more meat on the bone, so to speak, but I certainly did not change the recommendations that came forward.

Following the release, there was a meeting specifically with the Copper Ridge advisory group, because I felt it was important to sit down with them. They had put forward their recommendations in the Hold Fast report -- the school facilities study. I sat down with the people who were on the committee and able to attend the meeting, and we had a very good discussion about whether they thought it was thorough and about their confidence level in the data, and they restated their recommendations to me. Those are recommendations we're taking to heart.

One of the key recommendations from the Hold Fast report -- and I don't need to recite it here on the floor -- the member opposite can get a copy of the document if he doesn't already have it. If he'd like one sent over, I can arrange that for him as well, but it is available on-line. One of the key recommendations there was to conduct a visioning exercise for Whitehorse's high schools. They recommended that, before replacing or repairing F.H. Collins, we take a very serious look at what the programming needs for a new facility would look like. As I'm sure the member opposite will appreciate, the demands on a school built in the 1950s or 1960s are different from the demands on a school built today.

The member is quite aware of what the school in his own community looks like. The new school in Carmacks looks very different and works very differently from schools previously built. There was a perfect example of going out and working with the community, finding out how to best identify their needs and to build the structure that responds to them. That's what we're doing with this high school visioning exercise.

In the Whitehorse area, we have F.H. Collins Secondary School, Porter Creek Secondary School, Vanier Catholic Secondary, the Individual Learning Centre, the Wood Street Centre School; other areas like Skills Canada, like the Arts Centre, like Yukon College, like the Canada Games Centre. It's important that we take all these different assets, different characteristics and different needs into consideration. That's what is being done with this high school visioning exercise.

Now, the member opposite asked why not just have the Department of Education do this. Well, Mr. Chair, the Department of Education will be very involved in it. As the Education minister, I am very proud of the work that the Department of Education does.

They are a fine group of professionals who put their heart, soul and mind into their work on a daily basis. This project advisory committee that will be working on the high school visioning exercise will include the assistant deputy minister of public schools, the Whitehorse area school superintendent for high schools, principals for F.H. Collins Secondary, Porter Creek Secondary and Vanier Catholic Secondary or designates, First Nations programming and partnership representatives. It will include the director of programs and services. It will include our facilities project managers and the assistant deputy minister of advanced education or a designate. It will also include the chairperson or designate from F.H. Collins Secondary School, Porter Creek Secondary School and Vanier Catholic Secondary School councils and the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon -- I missed that one earlier when I mentioned the different high schools in Whitehorse, because it is very important to recognize École Émilie Tremblay and their high school program. The member, I think, is aware of the work that the Government of Yukon has done with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon in order to expand the experiential education program there. Well, they're going to be involved in this. As well, we'll include representation from the Kwanlin Dun First Nation and the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee, which is representative of all 14 First Nations, the Yukon Chiefs Committee on Education and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

We're going to be as inclusive as we can with this, and I expect that, as the project unfolds, once there is a contractor that comes on board and says, yes, they wish to be part of this project that, as the workplan unfolds, it will include significant community consultation. It will be working with our other stakeholders in education -- for example, the college, Skills Canada, literacy organizations and the variety of different partners that we have out there, because they all have something important to contribute.

There is an option to doing this. That is simply rebuilding the structure exactly the same way it was before and not doing any consultation, or leaving it up to the minister to make the decision. The member opposite is shaking his head. He doesn't want to see that decision being made by just one person and we need to include others.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I think I'm hearing, "Right on." Well, that's the process. Let's start with the vision and include the partners. Once we have the vision established, then we will go through the next steps of designing the building and constructing whatever that is going to look like. It's going to include the partners. One of the things we've done in this last year is that we've been inclusive in working with our different partners in education and we've had regular meetings.

I will take a look at my notes here. As I said, we are not going to allow the Department of Education to remain stagnant.

We are going to continue to be responsive. We are going to work with our partners and with the recommendations from the reports we've received, and we are always going to work in the best interest of Yukon students.

Mr. Fairclough: I heard the minister say a few times that it is better to get the job done right than to get the job done fast. The minister repeated that a couple of times. My question today was: why can't the minister wait until the education reform project final report comes out before doing this study?

If he really believes in what he just said, he would have done that instead of saying exactly what he is saying now. But he didn't. I asked him if he would do that in the spirit of the recommendations laid out in the education reform project report, which I don't believe is going to change much.

If it does, and it excludes governance, then there are a lot of questions that need to be answered by the minister. Governance was an issue that was brought up in every community as the education reform project team went around the territory. It is reflected in the draft report that the minister has before him. It is going through a technical review right now, Mr. Chair, and that's it. Dot the i's and cross the t's.

I don't believe that it would be right to exclude any of those major recommendations at all from the education reform project's report. If that is the case, Mr. Chair, we would have many questions for the minister. He did say that it was better to get it done right, than to get it done fast. He put a lot of emphasis on that. Well why the heck didn't the minister answer the question today? He skirted around it and tried to make it look as best as he possibly could, but why not wait for the education reform project final report to come out? Why not wait for that?

It could be, Mr. Chair, that the minister doesn't have confidence in it coming out soon. I've talked with people, and they feel that this report is going to come out to the public soon. The draft is out there. I say that, because of the minister's remarks in answer to my question -- I believe it was yesterday -- when he said the final final final report. It appears that the minister doesn't believe that there is only one final report, and it is going to be tabled or brought out to the public. I just find it hard to believe that this minister would say that it is better to get it right than to get it done fast. I say the same thing in regard to this study. There is a huge governance model in the education reform report that the minister has before him. Why not wait that little bit of time and get it done right?

The minister can't answer the question other than hiding behind something, and this is what he hides behind, the fact that the Department of Education cannot remain stagnant. That's what I keep hearing the minister say. Mr. Chair, isn't it better to have it done right than to have it done fast? That's a question I should ask the minister right now.

I believe we're going to go through a whole 20-minute answer. I'm hoping that, perhaps in Question Period, these very important questions could be answered properly.

I asked the minister this question in my final question today. I asked the minister if he would assure Yukoners -- the public out there, because he is the minister for the greater Yukon, and we keep hearing the Premier say that -- whether or not the whole issue of governance and programming in all sec-

ondary schools will be included in any future studies. In Question Period the minister skirted around that whole area and didn't answer the question.

Those are important, and if the minister denies that, there's something wrong here. We believe it's important; we asked the question. The question comes from the public -- for us to ask the minister. I don't believe they deserve to be treated the way they were with the answers coming from the minister today.

I read the report and the terms of reference, which are available for anyone who wants to bid on this contract. I was interested to know how many people would be members of this advisory committee. I really feel that from what the minister read off there, any one of those people in the department -- the assistant deputy minister of the public schools branch or the Whitehorse area superintendent for high schools -- could do this job of coordinating the study that he wants done on Whitehorse schools. Again, it's on Whitehorse schools, Mr. Chair.

I'll ask this very simple question then: would the minister consider having one of the departmental people, who have the knowledge and experience, head up this study, instead of wasting \$200,000 on a company from -- who knows where -- Toronto? Or are they pre-picked, or what? Would he do that? Would he consider it?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: One of the very important characteristics of an education system is that it has to be responsive to the needs of the individuals in the system and to the needs of the community. We are endeavouring to do that on a daily basis. There are issues that arise regularly that need to be addressed. We are going to do that.

There have been changes made in the Department of Education in the last couple of years. They include things like the establishment of the First Nation partnership and program unit and their work with the First Nation Education Advisory Committee, the work of the curriculum development group, and the changes in the grade 5 and grade 10 curriculum. As well, there has been an introduction of several new primary school reader books.

The department will always be responsive to the needs of the community. We are not going to differ from that. The Department of Education is not going to become stagnant.

We often hear the criticism in here, "Act, and act now." Then, in the next heartbeat it is, "Exercise caution and consider other means."

Or it's, "Consult," or "You consult too much." Obviously, we can't just pick one of those directions. There has to be a middle ground, and it's somewhere between acting now and exercising prudence and more caution.

The government has to respond to needs, but we can't go madly off in all directions either. The issue of F.H. Collins has been a significant one in this territory for years. This government is now preparing to take action on that. I'm disappointed to hear that the member opposite wants that to stop. We're going to continue ahead with this project. We're going to continue ahead with the education reform project and we're going to continue to work with all our partners in education -- those partners who are of First Nation ancestry, those partners who speak French, those partners who practise the Catholic faith,

our teachers, our parents, our students and everyone else in the community. Yes, we'll commit to the member opposite. We will continue to consult with all Yukoners across the territory on issues of importance to Yukon students. We will work with our school councils throughout the territory. We will work with the Association of School Councils, Boards and Committees. We will work with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon. We will work with the First Nation Education Advisory Committee on all the emerging issues in education. We will especially focus on how we can change education and all the means that lead up to the end of how we improve the outcome and the life opportunities for the students who go through the Yukon system.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister is disappointed that we're bringing up these questions. I can't blame that minister simply because of their importance. We feel they're important. If the minister is disappointed that we bring up these important questions, then he needs to question himself and not those of us on this side of the House.

Mr. Chair, we ask the minister to do things. Can he speed things up? Do proper consultation. They spent \$1.6 million on the education reform project, but they couldn't release it to the public. It is top secret yet, Mr. Chair, according to the minister, even though we have a draft report. They are refusing to let Yukoners comment on those recommendations.

In the meantime the minister is trying to implement some of the recommendations to water down the report, in his view. For the minister to think that the public can't see that is totally wrong. The public is on top of this, Mr. Chair. Maybe the minister isn't, or would like to think that he's the only one who has this information -- but the public is on top of this. They are bringing this issue to us. They are asking us to ask this question.

What's wrong with the governance model that the minister doesn't like? What part of the governance model does this minister not like? Why can't he include the governance model in any studies that the department conducts?

Now, Mr. Chair, there is \$300,000 dedicated to this study that the minister is so proud of. He didn't budget for it in the spring. It is a new amount of money. He's moving ahead with this. We're asking the minister to get a move on and talk with their partners so that we can have this education reform project debated in the public.

I'm not sure what the Minister of Education thinks he's going to do with the education reform project, but Yukoners want to comment on it. They want to comment on the contents. They want to comment on the public findings, and they want to have input. I think that's a process that needs to be followed. The minister should not keep that a big secret, and he should be able to release that information to the public. Why is the minister keeping it such a secret?

Why isn't the public able to see that information? Why doesn't the minister understand the whole governance issue on the draft report on education reform? Why doesn't the minister understand it?

There are good intentions in the education reform project. There are dramatic changes in the way governments conduct

themselves in regard to education. There are lots of changes in there and they come from the people.

The minister took it upon himself to conduct this study without looking at how the governance model and the education reform project could steer this. To me, this is neglecting their partners in education, even though, in the terms of reference, it has listed them as part of the committee. I'm talking about the First Nations. That's unfortunate.

So we wait for the final report on the education reform project, until the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed. How long do we have to wait for that, Mr. Chair? We know the contents of it. I can give it to the minister if he doesn't have it, but I'm sure he does; he sits on the committee. We understand it, we've been reading through it and we like a lot of what is in the education reform project.

First Nations are interested and they're interested in the governance model. It may not have been in the interest of the Premier, but it is in the interest of the public out there. I say that because if the Minister of Education has questions about the Premier's interest in governance, he can go back and read through *Hansard* all he wants and he'll find that we are saying exactly what the minister has said.

I believe the minister said he was following recommendations from the Copper Ridge school advisory group. I would think that anything this department does would follow the recommendations of the education reform project and involve the people who should be involved.

Now, my understanding is that not all First Nations have bought into the education reform project. Maybe the minister could clarify that question before I go on to the next one.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I have a request for the member opposite, and I am requesting that he allow me to honour the partnership agreement that was established for the education reform project to work with the Council of Yukon First Nations and, in this case, the Liard First Nation, and to work with the partners in this project and do our work. I will not break that and unilaterally release the report. So I am going to continue to work with our partners on this project as expeditiously as I can in order to bring the project to fruition.

Now, I expect there will be changes made. I expect there will be some short-term changes made, some immediate reactions. I expect that we will make changes that are done in the more medium term. I expect that there will be changes that happen over the long term. That's how education evolves. We will continue to work with all our partners to evolve education, to involve people, and to incorporate best practices and new techniques in order to help all Yukon students become the best that they can be. That's the purpose of education. We will continue to do that, and education will continue to change. So I'm asking the member one more time: would he please allow me to honour the agreement and work with our partners on this?

We've already established that education should not be stagnant, that education also needs to respond to issues. One of the first things we did a year ago was to commission the school facility study. I see in the executive summary that recommendation number one is to review the program direction of F.H. Collins Secondary School and prepare a vision for the future.

This is an opportunity to review the program direction of F.H. Collins and then define building requirements for the new school. The decision to build or refurbish can then be based on the new requirements, with the final decision being determined by costs. It would be an error in our judgement to build a new school or launch a major renovation to the existing building without completing a review of the school's mission and how it relates to other schools in Whitehorse.

When we received that at the end of June, we made a commitment to go ahead and work on implementing the recommendations. Now I am before this Assembly asking for the support of this Assembly to vote the funds to do this. We have gone out and commissioned the study, now we are trying to implement the recommendations, and I am asking the members opposite to support us in that. Yes, I will commit that it will be a very inclusive process.

The member opposite accused us of neglecting people, yet he went on to read in the terms of reference about how it would include people. We are trying to build an inclusive process, respond to real and recognized needs in the community, and we are all working together to try to build a better education system.

Are there areas of concern in this budget with expenditures? Are there expenditures about Yukon College? Are there expenditures about capital investment? Are there expenditures for the School of Visual Arts or other areas of this budget that the member opposite would like to ask questions about?

Mr. Fairclough: Maybe the minister didn't realize it, but it is a line item in the budget -- \$300,000 -- and we are questioning that.

The minister said he had the Hold Fast report in June. Well, Mr. Chair, we all know that's not true. The minister did in fact have the report long before that, before late June. The minister knows that; we know it, so the minister must know it too.

Mr. Chair, it's important what the minister is doing here. We ask the Department of Education and the Minister of Education to honour the agreements made with CYFN and the Liard First Nation -- those that are on the executive committee with the education reform project. Do that, but don't sit idly by and have this thing go on and on.

The minister is responsible for the department and can put pressure on to ensure this project is out there for public comment. There's lots to do yet, and I'm not sure if the minister understands that. We do. There's lots to do in regard to having this information out there for the public. The public would like to comment on the findings. This is a change in how we do things in this department. We ask him to do that.

I can tell the minister, though, that we do have a draft of that education reform project. The public has it; the media refers to it; and we'll be watching the minister to see what comes forward.

I did ask the minister -- and he didn't answer the question -- whether or not all First Nations had bought in to the education reform project. Can he answer that question?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I have a question for the member opposite, and that is: when he is preparing to come

into the Assembly, does he ever sit down and sketch out his thoughts and ideas? And then, does he go back and change those? Maybe he sleeps on them for a night. Does he do that? Does he then give it a bit more thought, come at it from a different perspective? Does he go in and do a little more research and add that to it? That's the process that many people go through in creating a document.

Yes, Mr. Chair, there are usually a variety of drafts created when a major project goes forward. And yes, there was a draft of the school facility study. Yes, it was submitted to the Department of Education. The Department of Education then did the work that it was supposed to do. They sat down, compared the draft against the terms of reference and asked if it was complete. Does it have sufficient information? Does it include the background information that we asked for? Did they do things the way they were supposed to? When they have other questions, they will send it back and say that this other area needs to be changed or beefed up or adjusted, or that they want to see some more supporting information. That's a natural process. I will tell everybody that if I get a document and I have questions on it -- and I'm sure people standing very close to me now can attest to this -- I will pass it back to them and say I have more questions and ask for some more information.

I think that's a responsible thing to do. Yes, the principals did receive the draft of the education reform project that the member opposite is talking about. When it was presented to us, we were told flat out, "There are changes coming to this. There is the possible addition of papers." As well, they expected to make changes to some grammar, to some spelling, and there may be some of a more significant nature. I wouldn't have known the details of those changes until I then saw them. Yes, there have been other revisions. Now, the executive team, the chair of the Chiefs Committee on Education, the Chief of the Liard First Nation and I are working on the next steps. We are working through those. I am working with them on a very regular basis. We are working to expedite the release of this. It has to be done appropriately. It has to honour our agreement and our partnership. Now, when the education reform project was started, we came out with the areas that we wanted to look at. We wanted to make it as inclusive as possible. The education reform team had meetings with targeted stakeholders, and then they went out and held widespread consultation throughout the Yukon, in all Yukon communities. They encouraged all those who were interested in participating to come out and to contribute. That is how to conduct open consultation -- invite everyone out, and that's what they did.

Those who had comments that they wanted to share -- I trust that they did so.

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to do what the minister just did. Why didn't the minister have more questions to ask? If he had more questions to ask and if he looked into the matter more, then maybe he would have received answers from the department. Why didn't the minister have questions, Mr. Chair? Why didn't that homework get completed before moving forward?

The minister didn't answer my question in regard to this -- whether or not everyone had bought into the education reform

project. He didn't bother to answer the question so I'll leave it alone.

Tender has gone out, Mr. Chair -- and it is difficult to move off of this because we're getting nothing from the minister at all. He says that he'd like to hear comments from the public out there, and yet anything that is brought forward by us on this side of the House, Mr. Chair -- we get the information from the public -- he does not want to include it in anything that he does. It is the minister's way and that is it.

Public tender has gone out for this study and included is a project advisory committee. Has the minister had consultation with those that he listed on this advisory committee -- particularly Kwanlin Dun? Did they agree to be on this advisory committee. Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, the member opposite is right. I do have a lot of questions. I ask them on a pretty regular basis. I ask: why are we doing it that way? How can we do it better? How can we do it differently? I ask what the goals are. What are the common goals out there? What should we be striving for? I ask the big question: what is the purpose of education? What do we expect our kids be able to do when they graduate?

I ask these questions on a very regular basis. I ask if we have the right curriculum, if we have the right content, the right teaching techniques, the right number of schools. That's my job: to work with the department constantly, to be there to ask questions and strive to make it better, and ensure the areas of importance to Yukoners are reflected in our education system.

I have a lot of faith and trust in our educators -- the teachers in the classrooms, the principals in the schools, the Department of Education staff -- and a lot of things are on the right track. It's also my job to ask how we're doing; what's our performance like? How do we measure our results? How do we know we're doing a good job? How can we be more accountable and transparent to the public? How can we show the results of the education system? How can we work better with our partners? How can we do things more cost efficiently and effectively? How can we respond to the changing issues that children coming to school have? How are we adapting to the changing nature of some of the children in addressing important issues like FASD and some of the other issues the children are coming to school with? How can we better reflect the culture and the areas of importance to Yukoners in our education system?

How can we make better use of our school councils? How can we work with them to live up to many of the areas of responsibility they have in our *Education Act*?

So yes, Mr. Chair, I will agree that I do ask a lot of questions, and I will work with the staff until we all get answers we're all satisfied with. That's one of my key roles.

Mr. Chair, it's important that we try to identify all the different partners, stakeholders and people affected by change and invite them to participate. That's all I can do -- make sure an invitation is sent out, offer incentives to participate and that kind of thing, and value their contribution by listening to it and having it effect the change. That's what we will do. We will invite people to participate, facilitate how they can do that, try

to accommodate them wherever possible, and then value their contribution by giving it meaningful consideration.

One of the challenges we face is that when we bring 10 people into a room, there are often 10 different perspectives and 10 different ideas. Then we have to work to focus on what the goals are and then reach consensus on things. That means there have to be compromises. Really, that's how the system works. We look to identify the common goals and establish techniques as to how to get there, and compromises are made in order to accomplish that. That's how consensus is reached, and that's what we strive to do. That's what we will continue to do in the Department of Education.

Mr. Fairclough: If the minister asked those questions and got answers, did he get answers to his questions from the department? Did he? Maybe the minister would say yes. That would be nice for us to get some answers from the minister in this House, particularly in Question Period. If he thought it's important to have questions answered, then he would do that in Question Period, too, and not play that silly game that the Yukon Party has been playing for quite some time now, Mr. Chair.

I asked the question of whether or not Kwanlin Dun was asked to be part of this advisory committee, and all the minister said was, "We sent an invitation out." Then he talked about striving for consensus. But he talked about sending out an invitation. So now a person gets this contract, and the department is going to write to Kwanlin Dun and say, "Name the person who is sitting on this advisory committee." Well, that's not right. And what happened to the whole issue of governance -- putting the control of the future of our education into the hands of Yukoners? Well, I think the minister is doing a runabout here in how he wants to do things. I have never heard the minister say, "Good point; I'll take that under advisement. That's a good issue that was raised and it should be looked." Or, "We could save \$200,000; let's have a look at it. Let's ask these people in the department, with their vast knowledge in education, whether or not they in fact can do this job." Those were probably questions that the minister didn't ask.

I have lots of questions in regard to this report, and I'm going to leave it for now, because much more needs to be asked of the minister.

I read a motion into the record on November 20, Mr. Chair, and basically it asked that tuition fees be eliminated for Yukoners taking the career preparation program at Yukon College, and I would like to ask the minister whether or not he is interested in supporting Yukon College by wiping out these tuition fees for the adult basic education program. Is the minister at all interested in this, or what can he do about it? I believe we asked this question in the past years and haven't got an answer from the member opposite.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the member opposite's question about advanced education and specifically about Yukon College. Eliminating tuition is certainly an interesting idea. If the member would take a look at the last annual report from Yukon College, he would see that tuition and registration fees account for about three percent of their total revenue, which would look like a very small number. I would hope that

many of the students going to Yukon College would sit down and take a look at that as well. When they look at what they're paying in tuition, they need to consider how much of a contribution, a commitment and an investment the government is making. Ninety-seven percent of the cost of their education is being covered by other means.

There are a couple of points in this I would like to make. One is that I think it's always important for individuals to make an investment in their education. I'll use myself as an example of that -- investing time and energy, blood, sweat and tears to go to college. I did that. Also, it's important to invest in constant upgrading and continuing education. I demonstrated that by going back to school and getting the provincial instructor diploma at Yukon College. Then, a couple of years ago, when I was re-evaluating the direction of my life, I made a decision to go back to school again. I invested -- actually at that time it was more than \$20,000 out of my own pocket in doing a master's program -- because I knew that making that investment -- not only the financial investment, but the time investment, the hard work and all the other sacrifices around the home -- would pay back in the future.

I put forward these examples, because I think investing in one's education is the best investment that an individual could ever make.

I'm looking around, hoping to see some nods of encouragement. Making the decision to invest in your future is, I believe, the best decision an individual can make, and it has to be done in a meaningful manner. We all recognize that when we make an investment, there are sacrifices that go along with it. Part of that is what makes it valuable and important.

Those are a couple of things. In our society, we value some of those things that cost us the most. It's unfortunate, but that seems to be some of the situation in our society.

There are a couple of points there. Investing in your education and your future is the best decision you'll ever make. The government currently makes a huge investment in Yukon College and the programs there. According to the 2005-06 report, tuition only accounts for about three percent.

I also want to add that there are other funding opportunities available for Yukon students. These include the Yukon territorial government programs, such as the student training allowance. I'm familiar with one student at Yukon College who receives more in their student training allowance than their tuition cost. There are the Yukon excellence awards, which I'm very happy to say that this government continues to support and enhance; the Yukon grant, of which 770 Yukoners in 2006-07, ending March 31, receive, and the amount for that is about \$5,000. There are other programs out there, like the Canadian millennium program and other scholarships, as well as the Canada student loan programs. We have other programs, such as the STEP programs, and other initiatives to help employ students when they're not at school.

I appreciate the member opposite's comment. It is an interesting idea and I'll take it under advisement. I will raise it with my colleagues. It is an important issue.

This budget already is making significant investments in Yukon College, and I trust the members opposite will show

their support for those investments and vote in favour of the budget.

We're increasing the base operating grant and there are some specific funds going in there. I think they've already heard me talk in the past about other allocations of financial resources to go to the college to enhance the apprenticeship program and some of our community programs. We are constantly reinvesting in the college and working with them. So, it is an interesting idea. We're going to look at how we encourage students to value their education and then how we provide financial assistance to the college to keep it going, and how we provide the appropriate amount of assistance to other students when they go to other institutions.

Mr. Fairclough: I think we're making some progress with the minister. This is an issue that was raised to us by the public. We're not talking about all tuition fees -- we're talking about the three developmental study programs: basic adult education, the apprenticeship preparation program, and the college and career preparation program. I thank the minister for that, Mr. Chair. I think that's the best we can ask for at this point -- that the minister take it under advisement and look at this carefully with the department.

While we're on a roll here, Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister about another motion I read into the record. Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that this is a positive one too, and I think the minister may show some interest in this.

Recently we had 16 Yukon educators graduate from SFU with a master of education in numeracy. Now the program, Mr. Chair, was offered entirely in the Yukon and I really believe that we need more of this -- not just in numeracy but, of course, in literacy and others that could be defined too.

I want to know if the minister would support it. I did read into the record a motion calling for government to acknowledge that teachers, like other professionals, want and need the availability of ongoing professional development opportunities to promote excellence in the teaching profession by (1) in conjunction with Yukon College and other educational partners, offering expanded teacher training for both pre-service teachers -- those who are not yet in the system -- and those who are already employed in the Yukon, to ensure that the teachers are able to maintain the highest level of qualifications, benefiting our children and the education system as a whole; and (2) in conjunction with Yukon College and other educational partners, offering post-graduate level programs based in the Yukon so that teachers already employed in the Yukon system can take advantage of and benefit from the advanced educational opportunities.

Can I get the minister's thoughts on that?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I trust the member is sitting down, but I agree with many of the things the member opposite said. Having opportunities for continuing education is very important. Continuing to develop one's professional skills and knowledge is incredibly important. Through the Department of Education, there is an ongoing commitment to professional development. I think all members are aware of the professional development days where we close down the schools and pro-

vide training and in-service opportunities for the staff. That's one method that we use.

I think we have negotiated about \$300,000 with the Yukon Teachers Association, which has been put into a professional development fund to encourage teachers to continue their education and to cover the cost of other opportunities.

I believe there might even also be opportunities for teachers to take a leave of absence if they need to go Outside to another jurisdiction in order to continue their education. As well, Mr. Chair, I think it's important that we look at ways of continuing education -- and I'm going to agree with the member opposite again -- and look at ways of continuing that education here in Whitehorse or throughout the other communities in the territory.

There have been arrangements between Yukon College and a variety of institutions, including the University of Alaska, the University of Alberta, and the University of Regina. I believe there is an ad in the paper right now for the master of public administration program offered through or in association with Yukon College. There's the bachelor of social work program I believe that people can access through Royal Roads University as well as other institutions. The Royal Roads model, which is the one I'm most familiar with, offers opportunities -- well, with that one, the school has offered a master of business administration and executive management for educational administrators. That is possible to do from here in Whitehorse.

There are opportunities to use distance education, either over the Internet or through the very extensive videoconferencing systems that have been developed at Yukon College and also at our Yukon schools. Mr. Chair, it is also important, too, for our teachers to have additional training and education in the Yukon context -- that is, becoming aware of the cultural situation here in the Yukon, our history and other aspects of what makes the Yukon different from other jurisdictions.

I am pleased to see that our teachers do get involved in that. So to summarize, I believe it's important to continue with professional development. It is supported in the Department of Education. We are working with other institutions in order to expand the opportunities for Yukoners to take advantage of that training and education and certification.

I'll also note that the teacher, upon successful completion of many of these programs and because of their increased level of credentials, is often moved up in the payscale, so there is an increased remuneration to the employee once they have completed their education -- so there is also a financial incentive for them to continue with their education.

I should add that the training trust funds that are throughout the territory support the various professions and industries by providing assistance in training to people.

Mr. Fairclough: If there's anything new, I'd appreciate it -- if the minister didn't say it here -- if he would send it to me by way of a legislative return.

While we're on a roll here and have this feel-good attitude right now, let's take a step back a little bit to the education reform project. We're looking at it coming out to the public soon.

This education reform project will be reflected in the amendments to the *Education Act*, I assume. It should be anyway.

When can we expect amendments to come forward in the *Education Act*?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I'm going to continue to honour the relationship we have with our partners in this project, respect the process that has been established, and work with them as we continue the project. That's where we're at on that one.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister has talked with the department and has possible dates for things that can move quickly. I think the public deserves to know when they can see amendments to the *Education Act*. The minister must know approximately when it will happen. We don't need the same old line we've been getting from the government side -- "in due course". I don't think the public deserves that type of answer.

We've been waiting a long time for this information to come forward and see it reflected in the *Education Act*. Can the minister see when the amendments would come forward to the *Education Act*? Does he see it in the spring? In the fall?

With the process that needs to take place with the education reform project, does he see it taking place in a couple of years? What is it? There has to be an approximate time. The department has been looking at this amendment. We're seven years overdue.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I'd just like to clarify something for the member of the opposition. Earlier he mentioned the technical review. I just wanted to clarify that very few members of the Department of Education and the Council of Yukon First Nations have worked on the technical review, but the document that he's referring to has not been released to government or has not been distributed in the Department of Education. That will happen in due course as the executive committee releases the document. Once that happens, the Department of Education will start to go over it and make the analysis of that.

As the member opposite stated earlier, he had many questions. I would expect there will have to be the appropriate amount of dialogue on those changes and that will take as long as it takes to have a satisfactory discussion about things.

Mr. Fairclough: I'm really surprised that the minister doesn't know the answer to that question, or could not give an approximate time. It's too bad. He has all the expertise around him and could possibly give the possible days when we can see these amendments. It's too bad that he's sticking to the same old line. We're far beyond that, I thought, in this question.

I do have a couple more questions for the minister. The Hold Fast report appears to be very narrow in its focus. The F.H. Collins Secondary School was studied only in terms of rebuilding or refurbishing. It looked at the Copper Ridge in terms of the immediate area. The report did not look at long-term capacity building. It did not really address the declining population in regard to elementary schools that feed these secondary schools.

What does the minister see in the long term? What need does he see for his facilities planning for both the Whitehorse area and for the rest of the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, the school facilities study provided some very good information. They did a very

good job of collecting information from the Bureau of Statistics, from the Department of Education, from the City of Whitehorse and from the various different advisory groups that were involved. They did do some demographic projections, and I believe there was a motion earlier today about how we're going to respond in the territory to the changing demographic situation.

We all know the baby-boomer bulge is getting older and the people are nearing retirement. I particularly see that effect in my riding on a daily basis. Look at the community of Tagish, for example. It has the oldest average age of any Yukon community. I believe the average age there is about 47, which has a huge impact on the facilities and services needed out there.

There is a declining number of school-age children throughout the territory; we're seeing that. We're also seeing an increase in life-long learning. So we might have fewer child-age students, but we also have more mid-career professionals, more older folks looking at continuing their education. So the Department of Education is going to have to work very closely with the Bureau of Statistics to look at the trends in population and how they change -- and again be responsive. That's one of our jobs -- ensuring that, as the community needs or the community demographics change, we can respond to them. That means ensuring that we have adequate education in all our communities, which is often a challenge.

If we look at some of the smaller communities in the territory where we have schools with fewer than 10 children in them -- in many of these cases it would offer a better pedagogical sense if there were more children there, if we had bigger classes. Sometimes that makes it a lot easier to do group work. It's hard to do group work in a class where there is only one child or two children, and unfortunately we have that situation in some places. Again, this is also one of the reasons we're doing the high school visioning exercise. I was made aware of one -- I believe it was a geography or a science course that we had running last year, and it had fewer than five students in it. This offers some significant challenges. When you have fewer than five students in a class, it's awfully hard to do any kind of group project.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Well, the member opposite says that five is not a group. Well, it's hard to get a debate going if you are trying to have a debate of three or four people against three or four people. Yes, if all the students do show up, then there are five. But again, if two of the students are missing, then often there is a reluctance on the part of the teacher to go ahead without all the other students being there. So it does offer some challenges.

To summarize, Mr. Chair, there are challenges we are facing with the declining number of school-age children, with the distribution throughout the territory, and we, the Department of Education, are taking that very seriously and looking at ways that we can best address that and looking at how we can get the right teacher in the right classroom with the right situation, how we can use things like distance education. I mentioned a little bit earlier about some of the videoconferencing that was available. I think those are techniques we need to look at, as well as

Internet-based education or computer-based education. The Individual Learning Centre has been very successful with some of its curriculum programs and styles, and we might look at ways of providing those different techniques out in our other learning environments.

So I agree with the member opposite: the times are changing, the demographics are changing, and the Department of Education is going to have to respond to those changes.

Mr. Fairclough: I was asking the minister how it fits in and what the plans are -- if the department has any. A number of schools are now experiencing a decline in population. It appears to be a continuing trend -- for example, Golden Horn, Hidden Valley and Grey Mountain, and I am sure there are others. Now, how are these trends being accounted for in the long-term planning?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: We're carefully monitoring the situation. We're ensuring that we have appropriate resources and the appropriate teachers out in the different areas. We're also looking at some of the areas where we're going to see much of the growth in the near future. If we look to the south of town, it looks like that's where many of the new subdivisions are, with Mount Sima and Copperbelt. We're going to see some of the growth there and the Department of Education will respond to that. Sometimes it takes awhile for a new family to move in and then get into a situation where they have school-age children.

The Department of Education looks at the statistical indicators very closely. Each year we look very closely at the composition and the age distribution in our schools and respond appropriately. In the Yukon, one of the key indicators is the pupil/teacher ratio. We have one of the most favourable ratios in Canada, which in many cases is a really good thing. We'll continue to work with our teachers and look at the number of students going in and how the grades balance out. In some cases that means we have to have a mixed-grade class. In some of our communities, they even have three grades in one class. It does add additional challenges to the teachers so we try to provide additional resources.

The other thing is that we also have to look at the classroom composition, and that is looking at the needs of the children in the class. In the territory, we have a significant number of children with special or unique needs. We are doing our best to respond to those situations.

I hope I'm answering the member opposite's question. We are taking a look at all the numbers, making decisions appropriately, making staffing decisions that take those into consideration, and looking at how we can best allocate resources to schools and respond to the situation.

Mr. Fairclough: Often some information might be there with the minister, and he may not have said it, but I asked how these trends are being accounted for in the long-term planning. If there is anything new to add, I would appreciate it if the minister could send that over.

I would like to know if there are any plans to close any schools and/or if there are plans to consolidate the catchment areas in the near future or in the long term.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I will be very clear for the member opposite. There are no plans for school closures and there is no intention to lay off any teachers.

Mr. Fairclough: I don't believe all of that question was answered. If the department could return that information to us by legislative return, I would appreciate that.

I'd like to carry on, Mr. Chair. One comment I want to make is regarding the education reform project. The minister said it started under the Yukon Party, the interest was there, but I can remember when there was a demonstration outside of this Legislature due to the frustration that First Nations felt in regard to the lack of respect and their not having a voice regarding education.

It was so loud that for the first time in a long time they seriously considered the drawdown of education. That was big. That wasn't just one demonstration; there were two. I could even remember and picture in my mind right now, some of the wording that was on the signs outside, and it wasn't very good. The wording was in regard to the Yukon Party government and its action. I mention this because the Yukon Party wants to take credit for this. Fine, but I believe that Yukon First Nations were so frustrated that they looked at the option of drawing down education. That prompted the Yukon Party government to take some serious action, because the control over education would shift, and that would be a major blow to any government in place, and the Yukon government recognizes that. This education reform project got off its feet because of that. I know right now that a number of First Nations are still considering the drawdown of education, so I just wanted to mention that. The public knows differently on this matter.

Here's another one that is going on and on and on and doesn't seem to have an end to it, but I know there will be soon, maybe in a year or two, and it's the building of the Tantalus School in Carmacks. It started with a certain amount of money being designated to replace and rebuild this school, and we've gone far beyond that. I remember it going up to \$9 million, \$10 million. Soon it was \$11 million and \$12 million, and it's still climbing.

We're looking at revotes right now, and the minister did say that the \$669,000 was revotes. How can we look at that in a supplementary budget when normally these things are accounted for in the fiscal year. If it's not done in that fiscal year, we might see that revote in the next budget that comes forward.

We've been asking questions about the Carmacks school for years -- years. I know the member opposite went through the school, and it's a fine facility; it was designed by the community. But people would like to know when it is going to be completed.

The Minister of Community Services was up there for the opening of the library. My colleague from Porter Creek South also attended the opening with me and still, at that time, the siding on the school was not complete. The entrances of the school and the back were not complete. Double-wide doors are usually at exits in schools, and one in particular had a rope tying it together so nobody would go through that exit, simply because the school is not done. How many years of construction do we have to go through to get that school completed?

We've heard this one before from the minister. When the \$236,000 was voted for in the spring, it was for the completion of Tantalus School. We heard that one before. Along comes the supplementary budget, supposedly a revote for \$669,000, and it's for the completion of Tantalus School. We know it's not going to be completed with this money. We know that; the minister knows that. Why say "completion"? It's frustrating for the community to see this ongoing, with students having to live with construction workers in their school. It's actually embarrassing and shameful that we're still doing this. The keys haven't even been turned over to the principal. I see the minister does have a lot of questions in regard to this.

Here we have a school built beside the old school, which is still standing, and completion of the school would be like any other home. You complete the groundwork around it -- the school, the yards, the fields, and so on. The old school is still there and I'm sure nobody will go there and tear it down for free. There will be a cost to it. Not only that, the grounds need money dedicated to them.

The departments worked on this for awhile. They have to know the money amount, so I ask the minister to please let us know when the school will be completed and what the additional cost will be to have the old school torn down and the schoolyard fixed up? Does the minister have any idea?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the questions coming from the member opposite. His questions are of a broad territorial nature and he also asks questions that pertain specifically to the school in one of the communities that he represents.

I would like to go back to the member opposite's preamble and his discussion about the impetus behind education reform. I would just like to put on the record and this government and I respect the self-government agreements and the final agreements signed by Yukon First Nations and we respect the powers that are in there. We do recognize that there is a PSTA, a program and services transfer agreement, for the drawdown of education.

I think, Mr. Chair, that there must have been a reason or logic for doing that. That is an attribute that First Nation governments have. Just as the government of Yukon was devolved powers and responsibilities from the federal government, I could see a day -- I don't think it would be tomorrow, but I'm not sure -- when First Nation governments might decide that they would like to provide their own education system for their own people, and I will respect that.

I also want to say that I think our education system throughout the Yukon will be the strongest when we all work together. I certainly want to work with all in the Yukon to provide the best system of education for all of our students and I do want to work with First Nations, the francophone community, the Catholic community and with others to provide the best possible education system for all Yukoners.

I think that by having one system, we can take advantage of more economies of scale, we can share best practices more easily and we can build a better community where we all work together and get along or are used to working with people who might be -- I'm looking for a politically correct way to say

"kind of different". I think it's important that our kids grow up in an area where they work and grow with people who are a little different from them.

I certainly respect the Constitution of Canada. I respect the *Yukon Act*. I recognize our responsibilities to provide a Catholic education and a French first language education. I want to work with all our partners in education, including the First Nations who, in their self-government agreements, have the ability to draw down the power and responsibility of education.

I want to work with all of our partners in education in making the best possible system that we could have in the territory. As minister, when I'm looking out for kids, I'm looking out for all of the kids in the system, regardless of their race, colour, creed and what have you. I wanted to put that out.

As for the school in the member's riding, I appreciate the challenges. I appreciate that in construction projects there are often delays. Sometimes they're for very frustrating reasons. I'm sure the Member for Mount Lorne can share some of those frustrating reasons as to what causes a construction delay. Sometimes it's an issue of a missing manual, or it's that the ground is frozen so that you can't get in there to do the sub-excavation to do the appropriate work. As Minister of Education, I have been working very closely with the department on this issue. I'm glad to see that the students are in there and that they're in there with smiles on their faces and that they're embracing the school. It's great to see when there's a new school in the community, how quickly it can become the heart of the community and that people embrace it and enjoy going there.

It has been confirmed and assured to me that it is a safe place to go. That's our number one priority -- to ensure that we have a safe and secure facility for our students and teachers. I've been assured that it's a safe environment and that it's really the best place for the kids right now.

I can't give the member a specific date as to when the last shrub will be planted and when everything is done. I know that's frustrating. I think that those of us who have been involved with home construction know that sometimes just when you figure you've got the last coat of paint on, the next colour changes and there are then changes and adjustments. There are some natural growing pains as well, when you get into a new facility like that, of looking at whether a door opens one way and it should open the other way. There are changes and responses.

I am, on a regular basis, working with the Minister of Highways and Public Works who, through the Property Management Agency, is responsible for this construction project. I will continue to work with him and his department to see that the project is brought through to completion, as quickly and as best as we can.

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

Recess

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill

No. 8, *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Department of Education. We'll proceed with general debate.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Chair, I do have more questions in regard to Tantalus School. Just before I continue asking questions on that, my colleague from Old Crow asked me to ask a question in this department, and I'd just like to clear that one aside before we continue.

In the minister's opening remarks, he said there was \$385,000 for experiential and vocational training, and I would like to know if the land-based experiential learning pilot project in Old Crow is going to happen? What's the thinking on the part of the minister? Can he give us an update on that?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, the member opposite is correct. This supplementary budget does include funds for vocational and experiential education programs. There is \$385,000 in this item. This funding will provide for an expansion of the experiential and vocational learning programs in Yukon's schools.

I believe that these funds are going out to the specific schools where they will then be able to design the projects and initiatives that they want to work on. There will be some discussions about this with the school council, which has an opportunity to review the school budget. I would expect that it will involve the school council to a degree, talking about some of the priorities for projects like this.

I don't want to preclude any school from going ahead with any different initiative. It is going to be up to the individual schools. If the Chief Zzeh Gittlit School decides to go in one direction and if it can be worked in, I am sure that it will be accommodated wherever possible.

As for some longer term initiatives, yes, the idea of experiential learning is coming more and more to the forefront -- as well as the land-based programs that the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin has talked about. We are looking at that, also in cooperation with First Nation governments. They may be offering programs in the near future. The Deputy Minister of Education will be going to Old Crow and I expect that this will be an item of discussion.

We will continue to look at new initiatives that respond to needs in the community.

Mr. Fairclough: I'm sure my colleague from Old Crow will be interested to hear the response from the minister on that. I have a few more questions in regard to the Tantalus School. The question I asked the minister and I didn't really hear a response to was about a completion date for that school.

They were constantly saying that this is for completion of the school but we haven't heard how long it's going to take to rip down the old school. There is an issue that was raised with the Minister of Community Services of whether or not the government can not tear down the gym portion of the old school. I would like to know what has taken place with that. Are the minister and the department and the government still talking with the community about that?

While the minister is on his feet answering that question -- I talked to the minister about trying to get the contractors out of the school. This is an issue right now. They still have all their tools in one section of the school, so the construction and the

woodworking area of the school is not being used simply because the contractors are still in there working and they still have their equipment there.

Part of the problem right now is, because we had to move the children into the school before it was completed, not all the classrooms had the appropriate keys. The minister says he has answers for me. One of the issues was that the science room couldn't be locked up. Basically, everything had to be held in the old school and locked up and students were not able to get at it.

The other issue was that the teachers didn't have duplicate keys made for the classrooms. The janitor had a key for all the classrooms but, once they were locked, the teachers could not get back in.

I believe that the principal had a key for the entrance of the building. Work is continuing on the back entrance of the building. One of the issues also was that, because the keys weren't made, the department had to send someone down there to key the locks -- locks on drawers in classrooms so that they can be locked. That takes time. Can the minister give me an update about the keys, whether everything has been turned over to the principal, and answer the question about when the school will be completed? I understand that there are always little problems that come up, but there has to be a date in mind.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Last fall, immediately after the election, we did have the opportunity for this House to come together and discuss the supplementary budget. At that time, the member opposite did raise the question of the future of the old school with me. There was a request that we take a look and see if there were alternative uses we could come up with. At the time I did commit to the member opposite to take a look at that. We did. Unfortunately, it does not prove to be feasible to use the old school. It doesn't work out. We've looked at it in a variety of different ways. We've taken the advice of the member opposite and have taken a look at it, but unfortunately it doesn't work out. We did take the advice of the member opposite and we had discussions on if we could look at alternative uses.

Just to let the member opposite know, I've been told that the tools have been moved to the mechanical room, so the tools will be kept there, giving students access to more of the classroom space throughout the school. I have been assured, though, that it's a safe environment.

On the issue of locks, during our brief recess I had an opportunity to talk with some officials and also to talk with some of the staff in the Minister of Highways and Public Works' office. They are in the department that contains the Property Management Agency, which is responsible for the construction of the school. In the discussion I had with officials, I was told that they are working on a master locking strategy and that the earliest the contractor can be there is very early in the new year. It has been scheduled to get the contractor up there to do the whole master locking scheme throughout the whole building.

I understand there are locks and keys for the individual locks but, in a building of this nature, a school, you often want to have different locking schemes -- for example, to give the

janitor access to all the buildings and the teachers access to some, and to have keys that open a variety of different locks. That work is being done; I've been told it will happen very early in the new year.

The minister responsible for the PMA might be able to shed a bit more light on this issue than I can. I encourage you to bring that up with him when we get to that item in the budget.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister responsible for Highways and Public Works could answer this question, if he has an answer for it. I was interested to see how the school was designed by the community. It was designed to follow the flow of the river. The way the community designed it was the kindergarten students would come in one end and, as the river flows, grade 12 students would leave.

Well, Mr. Chair, I was surprised when I toured the school early last summer that the school was built with the blueprints basically upside-down and end-for-end, for that matter. I was totally surprised at it because I was involved in the early planning of this school and you know that this would never happen in the private sector. So how could governments even allow it to happen on this major project?

I was really surprised, and if the minister walked through the school -- and he knows how the river veers off to the right and the school is now to the left and it starts off from grade 12 and finishes in kindergarten. Now, the blueprints are flipped upside-down and end-for-end. I was really surprised, because we pride ourselves in that community for designing the school -- and it was built totally different. So what's the explanation for that?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I have had the opportunity to visit the school during construction and I am very much looking forward to formally opening it. I think it is going to be a wonderful celebration in the community. I know that the community has been waiting a very long time for this, and I am sure the member opposite will agree that previous governments neglected to replace it, that previous governments didn't take action on this and that previous governments should have built the school. It's very unfortunate that it wasn't done previously. This government has certainly lived up to its responsibility. We went there, looked at it and said, yes, this school needs to be replaced. It was a priority for this government.

I haven't checked the voting record on this one, but I'm not even sure if the member opposite has voted for this construction project. It's a very important project. It's a beautiful new facility and I am confident that it will serve the needs of that community for generations to come.

Mr. Fairclough: There's something that the minister can learn today, if he hasn't already learned it. This is important. When there are projects in a budget and the opposition likes it, they mention it. The overall budget may not get voted for, but that doesn't mean that we, on this side of the House, do not approve of that part. There we go -- the minister has learned something. Since he has brought this up again, will I have to remind him of this again? It's an easy one to remember.

He brings up previous governments not building this school. It's the chair of the school councils that put this together.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Fairclough: The Member for Pelly-Nisutlin says no. Well, let's put this out: why did the Yukon Party not replace the school in Old Crow? Was it a failure on their part when they were in government? Why didn't they replace the one in Mayo? Why didn't they replace the school in Ross River? It's a dead argument for the members opposite.

They should be ashamed of even bringing this forward. I also have a couple more.

In Carmacks during the opening of the library, I said that the government gave the go-ahead for the chairs of school councils around the territory to come up with a priority list for capital construction of schools. They did that, and it was so well put together that it survived the changes in governments. I am proud of that, and of the fact that the chairs of school councils could do it. Perhaps they should be called upon again to review this matter.

I'd like to ask two more questions about the Carmacks school. One is in regard to the bus dropping off the students at the school. Why isn't there a turnaround spot for the bus? Why does the bus have to stop on the road and let the kids off? Why wasn't it designed properly to at least have a bus turnaround to drop the kids off at the main entrance? Why?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I am proud to be part of the government that has built this school. I very much look forward to opening it and celebrating that opening with the community. I appreciate the member's comments. We do show our support by voting for things. We show our support for a motion by voting on it and we show our support for legislation by voting on it. I am pleased to see that the member opposite supports the construction of this school.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I didn't hear the member's comment.

I appreciate the issue that he has brought forward now about a bus turnaround. It's not an issue that I have at my fingertips, so I will endeavour to look into it and I will discuss this with the minister responsible for Highways and Public Works, which is managing this construction project now. There might be an opportunity for the minister, when we get into his department, to address this issue and concern. There might not be a response coming from the Department of Education because it's a construction project that is going on under the Property Management Agency right now.

I am going to put it on the list and bring it up with the Minister of Highways and Public Works. If the member has any other concerns about the construction project, I would encourage him either to send a letter to me or one to the Minister of Highways and Public Works, and maybe we can find some ways to expedite the resolution of some of these construction-related issues.

Mr. Fairclough: It doesn't matter to me which government is in place, which party is in place, as long as the Tan-talus School is replaced.

The argument the minister keeps making doesn't hold much water. What does the Yukon Party say about the school in Old Crow? They didn't vote for the budget, but I'm sure that they were in favour of the project. I did explain how things went at the opening of the library in Carmacks. I know that the people are quite in tune with how things have gone over the number of years. I'll just leave that alone, and I'm hoping to get some answers with regard to the bus.

Here's another one. The Yukon Party decided to speed things up. I know it went very slowly, but they sped things up and built the school. It was built right beside the road on the side of the school property. Now, if the students in the grade 12 end who leave the school want to go to the restaurant or to the store there, they run out the door and in a few steps, they are on the road. There have already been some close calls. What's going to happen with that road? Are the Department of Highways and Public Works and the Education department working with the community to try to close that road down, and why is it necessary to close a road such as that? Why was this such a big mistake in the first place? I just want to know whether or not the department is going to address this safety issue.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Yes, as I said earlier, the safety and the security of our students and teachers is of vital importance to the Department of Education. One of the things that this government has done recently is put in the school bus turnaround for the Whitehorse Elementary School. Again, it was addressing a problem that has been around there for years and years. This government did recognize that it was a problem; we went in and fixed it. If other issues are coming out now, I have confidence that this government will respond to them. If that means that the Department of Education, the Department of Community Services, Department of Highways and Public Works and the town council need to sit down and have a discussion about it, I am confident that those things will happen.

When we're discussing the grand opening of this beautiful new facility, I don't want to get into a debate about whether or not it's built in the right spot. The time for that discussion is long gone. The member opposite has already talked about the extensive consultations that went on with the community about the design and the building committee. We worked very closely with the situation.

We've taken to heart the member opposite's question: can you find an alternative use for the old building? Well, we looked at that and, no, we can't, and we've looked at the engineering realities of this site and where things can go.

This government recognized a need, it went to work with the community, and it built a beautiful structure, one that would be the envy of any other community -- well, I'm not going to say in Canada -- in the world. It is a world-class school that will serve the needs of that community for generations to come.

I have the utmost faith in that community that we're going to make it work. The government and the various departments involved will work to make it safer, and we will work to address needs where we need schools. The government will respond and build other buildings -- you know, community centres or fire hall upgrades. The Yukon Party government responds to the needs in other communities and addresses them.

It certainly isn't a government that is just driven by political decisions and makes political decisions about where to build community centres or new schools -- no. There is evidence in the member opposite's riding and in all the members' ridings. We are working toward the betterment and enhancement of the territory.

The departments of Education, Community Services, and Highways and Public Works, and the community and school council -- I'm sure we can all work together to address the situation the member has just brought up.

Mr. Mitchell: J'aimerais poser quelques questions de la part de la Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon. Je les poserai ensemble. Je ne parle pas le français très bien, alors je vais les poser en anglais.

So, considering my lack of strong French, I will switch to English, and that is probably easier. Although I know the minister also has the ability to speak French, it will probably be better for both of us if we maintain the accuracy of our mother tongues.

I have just a few questions and I'm going to roll them up into sort of one. I know that the minister may not have answers at his fingertips on these, but this comes from meetings I've had with the president of l'AFY and with other people who have brought these questions to my attention. I'm speaking from some actual briefing notes that I think the minister has probably had the opportunity to see -- but if not, I will send him over a copy.

I have a copy of notes that were their briefing notes, not the minister's briefing notes. In the interest of openness and accountability, if the minister would like to share his briefing notes we could probably shorten debate on many a day. They have raised a series of issues and I'm not going to raise all of them on their behalf right now. I know that they brought these issues forward during the former government's tenure in the hope that these issues would be included in the *Education Act* review. Since that time, that process ended and the current government went forward with the education reform process. I'm not sure what the status of these issues is.

Some of them seem very straightforward, Mr. Chair, and I would think that they would be the sort of thing that the government would be eager to do. Others, I recognize, have costs attached to them and so, like any funding decision, they may require consideration along with other issues and some are obviously policy issues that the government will have to make decisions on.

I'll just mention a few of them today: amend the preamble to the *Education Act* to mention the fact that Canada has two official languages -- French and English. Now, that's one that I would think would be pretty straightforward. If the *Education Act* follows the process of review that will occur when we finally see the final, final version of the educational reform document, and if it goes through the process that the minister has outlined a number of times between the First Nations and the Government of Yukon -- and then there's the internal process that the government has to go through -- I think that is something that could be accomplished. It would certainly be sending an important signal to the francophone community in

particular if that is in the preamble of the *Education Act*. Since there are constitutional requirements to offer instruction in both official languages, why not include that in the act?

Ensure that the act makes it mandatory for the Yukon curriculum to include a part regarding the history and contribution of the francophone community of the Yukon: again, I think that would be an important step to take. There is indeed a very proud francophone history in Yukon going back to its earliest days, prior to even being a territory. It is an important part of Yukon's history and I think it should be taught, along with the other Yukon-based history that we teach. It's something that is a reasonable request for a sizable community speaking one of the two official languages to be included.

Provide in the *Education Act* that the territorial government must consult with the francophone community of the Yukon regarding its needs for primary and secondary school education: we have talked frequently in here on the importance of consultation. The minister has talked about how strongly he believes in consultation. I think that's one that the minister would probably find easy to agree with.

They had one and, again, this document refers to things they have asked for in the past. We live in the present and things are changing. The *Education Act* must provide for full-time kindergarten for the francophone community. I recognize that the kindergarten exists, but I think the request here is not just that it be provided but that it be mandatory through inclusion in the act. I would be interested in hearing the minister's thoughts on that.

I see the Minister of Community Services is looking at me, and I think he wants me to go back to French, because I know he practises his French quite often, but he has taken more instruction than I have so I'm not going to switch.

There are a series of other issues here, one of which is that the position of director of education for the CSFY must be a permanent position established in the *Education Act*; the director of education must be selected and hired by the CSFY and the budgets must be given to the CSFY for this. The director of education for the CSFY must continue to be involved with the Department of Education. That might perhaps be more controversial, but I'd be interested in the minister's response to that request they made.

One here I understand fully why they would like it: the new *Education Act* must establish the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, numero vingt-trois: presently it is established by regulation; they're asking it be established by the act.

I know the critics for both our party, the Official Opposition, and the third party have a lot of questions they want to ask, but I just want to put a few on the record. I would be more than happy, if the minister or the department do not have this document available to them, to get a clean copy of it. I've been making notes -- and I will get it to him before tomorrow.

I would be happy now to hear some response from the minister.

Merci.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I would attempt to do this in French. Mais je parle moins qu'un petit peu de français.

Unfortunately my language skills don't give me the opportunity to respond to this important issue in French. Actually, I think the folks in *Hansard* are probably applauding quite loudly at that too.

I will do my best to answer the member opposite's questions regarding the Government of Yukon's relationship with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon and l'Association franco-yukonnaise. There are the two organizations. L'Association franco-yukonnaise is more the parent organization that looks at many of the broader French first-language issues in the territory. The Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon is the French-language school board. They serve a different role. There is often an overlap of people. Like many of the organizations in the territory, we sit on different boards and wear different hats, depending on the table we are sitting around and sometimes the time of the meeting.

Since taking office a little over a year ago, I've had the opportunity to meet with both organizations and several times with the French-language school board. There have been some very good meetings. One in particular resulted in the opening of the l'Académie Parhélie, the experiential education program at the l'École Émile Tremblay, which actually is in this budget and relates to the matter at hand.

We're again working with all our different partners in education: those who speak French, those who practise the Catholic religion, those who are of First Nation ancestry and the "other" group that falls into the "other" category. We'll continue to work with all the various different partners and stakeholders in education.

In the Yukon, we do have a French language school board. It is the only board that has really been established in the territory. That's where the territory is very unique in how education is governed and managed. There's an ongoing relationship with the Department of Education on this. It's a very close relationship. We also have the involvement of the federal government in this relationship with the bilateral agreement that provides additional funding to the Yukon, to provide the French-first-language programming, which, as we can all appreciate, is more expensive to offer, because of the challenges we face as a very small jurisdiction already and then with an even smaller French-first-language population.

There are constant working groups going on to ensure that the education in French-first-language is to the best of our ability and capacity here in the territory. One of the recent changes was the expansion of the experiential education program, which is still in its infancy. It has only been operating for a couple of months now, but all the reports I've heard from parents, students and from staff is that it's going along very well. I'm very glad to see that.

Yes, there are issues that the new Deputy Minister of Education has been apprised of regarding the relationship with l'Association franco-yukonnaise and the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon. We're working on how we can address those. Some of those issues can be changed in practice; some can be changed in policy; some can be changed in budget allocations; and as the member opposite mentioned, there will be some that will require changes to legislation.

Again, it's the ends we're working on: how can we best provide the students with the best learning opportunities? And we realize that the i's have to be dotted and the t's have to be crossed in order to do that. Given the nature of changing legislation, sometimes that does take time.

As for incorporating issues like history or culture, the Department of Education has a couple of people who work on French curriculum and incorporating that into our school curriculum. Also, the Department of Education works with the western and northern education curriculum group to share curriculum among the jurisdictions.

As well, I believe there is a relationship between some of our people in the Department of Education here and people in Quebec, where there is obviously a stronger tie to French than there is here in the north and in the west.

So, we look at where we can find opportunities. I believe there have even been some trips between people from the territory and going back and finding out about curriculum opportunities from Quebec and how we can incorporate that into the Yukon.

As well, the member opposite went through a list of issues that have come up. I can tell the member opposite that the Department of Education is familiar with that list and that there are meetings scheduled with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon about how we can go forward and address those.

Mr. Mitchell: Just to follow up, on the one hand I am encouraged by the minister's comments that he's open to these issues and that he and his department are looking at them. I'm just a little bit concerned because, when the minister talked about different groups and said "and other", and there are lots of other different groups, I want to make certain that the minister is fully cognizant -- I know he's aware and that he knows this -- that, in fact, there are two founding nations in Canada. And, of course, in Yukon we also have 14 First Nations, which is a whole other issue -- but that there are constitutional issues at stake here as well.

Some of the things that I have recited you know, such as amending the preamble to the *Education Act* -- some of these, I think, would probably be almost a requirement if anybody were to ever pursue it on a constitutional basis, because we may have a Latino community here and I know we have a small community of people from Pakistan, for example. There is, in fact, a true difference here because we're talking about things that are enshrined in the Constitution.

I know that Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon had prepared -- at one point -- a court action. They put it in abeyance because of conversations that they had directly with the Premier early on in the first term. We don't ever want to get to that situation again where we are dealing with things in court, rather than in the Legislative Assembly and in consultations. If the minister could just reassure me that he's fully cognizant of the constitutional aspects of the issues I raised and that he will move expeditiously to try to address these issues in a positive way, that will be all I ask.

Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, as Minister of Education I am very cognizant of the Constitution of Canada. I'm very aware of the *Yukon Act*, and I'm intimately aware of the *Education Act*. I recognize the responsibilities that we as Canadians and that we as legislators have in this area. I recognize that we have significant legal requirements, constitutional requirements and also, Mr. Chair, the moral requirement.

There is a moral imperative for us as Yukoners and as legislators in this Assembly and those working in the best interests of all Yukoners to work toward the best education system possible for all Yukoners. That is my commitment. I appreciate that, in Education, we have some very specific requirements and conditions laid out in our Constitution, in the *Yukon Act* and in the *Education Act*. I'm also aware that there are many different lines with which we could divide our education system. I'm very aware of that. I am very cautious of that too.

The member has raised the 14 First Nations. If one were to sit down and come up with the most divisive system for education in the territory -- and I appreciate that the member isn't saying that, but it is a caution -- it's one of those issues that keeps me awake at night. What would the territory look like if we divided it up in 14 ways, as well as dividing it based on religion, language or other criteria? That scares me. What I want to do is work with all our partners in education. I have come up with lists of the partners and I don't need to recite them. It includes everyone in the territory and all the different criteria and conditions we live with.

As the territorial government we have the responsibility to provide the best possible education system that is responsive to the needs of Yukoners, both individually and as a collective. That's what I will strive to do.

I appreciate the member's comments about how he wants me to be aware of our constitutional responsibilities. I certainly am. As well, there are our other legal responsibilities under the *Yukon Act* and under the *Education Act*. I also take our moral responsibilities very seriously.

Mr. Cardiff: It has been a long afternoon. It has been interesting to listen to the conversation this afternoon though. I am hoping that the minister and we on this side of the House are getting a bit more of an understanding of each other.

I just listened with interest to the discussion about governance. I listened with interest to the discussion -- and the minister just mentioned it again -- about creating the best education system possible for all Yukon and about all the partners. The Member for Copperbelt has brought up the requests from the francophone community to address some changes to the *Education Act*.

I think we do have to all work together as partners. That was the original concept when the current *Education Act* was introduced, hence the title on the front of the act, "Partners in Education."

I guess I get scared when I hear government talk about how to best address challenging situations. I'll confess that I was speaking out of turn when I asked, "Isn't five a group?" I understand the minister's point a little bit better, but he also mentioned economies of scale.

Yes, there are classes in schools, in communities, where we have two grades in one classroom. I went through that experience myself in elementary school, but when I hear "economies of scale", I don't think we should be sacrificing the best education we can get for our children and our communities for the sake of a few dollars. I hope that the minister understands that.

The minister made some comments a few minutes earlier about how he didn't want to see an education system that was split up into 14, 15 or 16 separate education systems. I don't think that anyone wants to do that. What I would like to say about that -- and I won't dwell on this, because we had this conversation many times last spring -- is that, at some point, we have to stand back if we are concerned about the education system. If we are concerned about the quality of education and the inclusiveness of the education system for all people of the Yukon -- communities, First Nations and immigrants -- at some point, we have to address that governance issue. It is the issue the Member for Mayo-Tatchun was talking about. It's the issue we talked about a lot last spring.

What this means to me is that they have to be willing to give up a little bit of the power. Maybe giving up isn't the correct term. You have to share it. You have to share the responsibility; you have to share the power. That's what is in 17.7 of the *Tr'ondek Hwech'in Self-Government Agreement*. It is what we talked about last spring and a little bit last fall, as well.

I just wanted to put that on the record. I don't want to dwell on it. I think the minister has probably heard me and others talk about this often enough. I hope that he's engaged in discussions with First Nation leaders about how that sharing of responsibility, that sharing of power, would work. The minister can respond to that if he wants, I suppose, but I don't really have any questions about it. I would just like to put that on the record.

This afternoon there was a question raised by the Member for Mayo-Tatchun about declining enrolments here in the Whitehorse area. The minister responded by saying that there are no plans for high school closures and there are no plans for teacher layoffs. He failed to respond to the question of whether or not there would be a catchment area study. I'm wondering if he could respond to that, because that was one of the questions that was asked: whether or not there would be a consolidation of catchment areas or if there would -- from my perspective -- be a study of catchment areas to address redistribution. There has been a lot of growth in the Copper Ridge area. There is growth south of town. There has also been some growth north of town with the Takhini Hot Springs Road subdivision, and there is some other planned development out that way as well. I'm just wondering if there are any plans to look at catchment areas.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the member opposite's comments, and I'm glad to see that we all seem to be in some agreement about building the best education system in the territory and not desiring to go off on different tangents.

When I used the phrase "economies of scale" -- I'm going to ask the member opposite to forgive me for every once in awhile bringing some of my economics background into this. Economies of scale to my mind -- I'm not sure if it has the

same connotation to the member opposite -- and I didn't even mention the marginal cost of an additional student in a class, which is another term.

But we do have space in some of our classes where we could add a couple of other students and where I don't think it would be a detriment to the class. It might even make more sense from an educational perspective to have 14 or 15 people in a class, as opposed to eight.

From my experience of being an adult educator, there were cases where dealing with a class of 12 was much easier than dealing with a class of three, for example. Sometimes having a smaller class size doesn't automatically translate into better educational opportunities.

There is something to be learned by working with others and working in a group. And there are instances where, if we have a limited number of resources, we do need to maximize them. And that's one of our jobs as efficient managers of the public trust: ensuring that we get the best return on our investments.

I'm not for one moment suggesting that we sacrifice the educational quality that our students receive. I hope that dispels any of the concerns the member opposite may have. I also appreciate his comment and his perspective on the issue of governance and on governments working together and also on the responsibilities of public government.

He also went on to the areas of catchments. I should back up a moment. I just want to clarify what I said, because I stated that there would be no plans for any school closures. I didn't qualify it as high schools or public schools, but there are no plans to close any schools.

The Department of Education is very closely monitoring the issue of where the students are and where they are coming from. There have been some issues brought forward by school councils and it is an area that the department is giving significant attention to right now. I can tell the member opposite that we would certainly listen to our other partners in education -- the parents, the school committees and any other advisory council that we might create -- on these issues. The input from the parents and the people who live in the communities is vital to making these kinds of decisions.

Mr. Cardiff: There is no formal study of catchment areas planned or underway currently, by the sound of it, but they are open to listening to their partners -- the school councils and the parents.

I'd like to clear up a couple of other questions that I heard raised but not totally answered -- or maybe they weren't totally asked either. Some of this information I would be more than happy to receive in a legislative return in the near future.

I'm wondering what the total cost to date for the Tantalus School is. We have \$669,000 in the supplementary budget as a revote, but I would be interested to know what the total cost to date is. I realize we're not finished, but for some reason this government seems to take a long time to finish some projects.

The other question I have around the Tantalus School that wasn't asked is whether or not the Yukon government is involved in any court cases with regard to the construction of the Tantalus School. I know there was some difficulty with con-

tractors and subcontractors. I'm just wondering whether the government is involved in any of those court cases.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: From the figures we have on hand right now, the total funds budgeted to date, including what is in the supplementary budget before us, is \$11,669,000.

With regard to the second question, the Department of Education is in a different situation here where we are the agency or the organization that works with the Property Management Agency to execute the contract. I am not aware of any suit being filed against the government. If the member would like to bring it up with the minister responsible for Highways and Public Works and the Property Management Agency, I would encourage him to do so.

Mr. Cardiff: I would like to ask the minister a new question. We may have asked this question in previous sittings.

I wonder if the minister or his department has given any thought to something that relates to a motion I read into the record in the last couple of weeks about school nutrition. I am just wondering if the minister has given any thought to a Yukon school nutrition program for all schools in the Yukon. That would be my wish and the wish of the community, I think. This would basically be to combat the growing obesity problem and look after the health of the children in our schools.

I have a bumper sticker in my office that says it will be a great day in the Yukon when the education system is fully funded and we have to sell chocolate bars to build highways. I know the Minister of Highways and Public Works would probably support selling chocolate bars to build highways. One of the specific points is to eliminate junk food sales and promotions that require children to sell junk food. There are lots of programs for which our children and our schools are selling grapefruit and oranges. Chocolate bars are not that healthy.

There could be a program that would involve community businesses in investing in nutritional and traditional foods in schools, a program that would consult with and involve the Yukon Food for Learning project and a program that would establish nutrition curricula for all grades.

I think it's important that our children are eating healthy food while they are in school and that healthy food is encouraged and provided. Any program that is providing food in school should be healthy food and it should be the best quality and the highest nutritional value and not pop, chocolate bars, potato chips and stuff like that.

I think it's important, not just because of the health of our children, but I also think it's better for the learning environment as well. I'd be interested to know whether the minister would support something like that.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. The Department of Education has taken this issue very seriously. The Department of Education believes that good nutrition is one part of a student's health and well-being and that it is an essential part of learning.

In keeping with this principle, the department supports the Yukon Food for Learning Association by providing office space at Jack Hulland Elementary School. Also, the Minister of Health and Social Services may address this when his budget is under debate.

There was a recent announcement of an additional \$50,000 from the territorial government to the Food for Learning Association to assist them in their very worthwhile endeavours. I should add that this is a charitable organization that does have a charitable number. If members would like to make a cash contribution or an in-kind contribution, I'm sure they would accept that too. And I would encourage members to pass the word to others, so that other people who may choose to make a donation to this very worthwhile organization can do so.

Healthy eating and nutrition are topics that are covered in many areas of the kindergarten to grade 12 curricula, including health and career education, planning in grade 10, science in all grades, physical education and home economics in the high schools. As well, many teachers have also participated in healthy eating workshops and are supplied with resources through the Recreation and Parks Association of Yukon and through the B.C. Dairy Foundation.

For the members' information, a comprehensive draft of the school nutrition policy is now out for consultation with our stakeholders. I should make the member opposite aware of the Eat Right Be Bright program that's in many of our schools. The Yukon active schools program is in 24 schools across the territory, which includes healthy living components such as nutrition and lifestyle choices. I think the member is aware of the health promotions program, which provides nutritional education in schools, including initiatives such as Drop the Pop. So we've taken these issues very seriously. There are concrete actions going on in school -- for example, dropping the pop.

The member opposite then spoke about the fundraising side of things as well, whether or not to have the standard chocolate-covered almonds or the seven-pound chocolate bars as items for sale as fundraising. I appreciate his comments. The school fundraising policy is under review right now and is being worked on with the different stakeholders and partners, school councils, et cetera. This would be a good topic to be discussed with them. I will ask the department to take that into consideration. Thanks for the good idea.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for all that information. The one thing I didn't hear was that the minister would be interested in eliminating junk food sales -- for example, chocolate bars, potato chips and pop. It's good to have an educational program that says to drop the pop, but not if it's available. This is being done in other jurisdictions as well. I would be interested in hearing more from the minister as to whether or not he would be willing to actually go that far.

I would like to ask the minister a question about the labour market strategy area of his department. I received a newsletter from the federal government in September. On the second page of the four pages, the third paragraph down, if he has a copy -- if he doesn't, I am sure I could make a copy available to him when we adjourn for the day -- says basically that the federal government and the provinces and territories are in negotiations; the federal government wants to move forward to complete the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of employment insurance, employment benefits and support measures with those jurisdictions with which it currently has co-management arrangements.

The Yukon is one of those, and I'd be interested to know -- and it is right in the newsletter -- what stage we are at in those negotiations. Have those negotiations begun? What are the feelings of the minister? Is it the government's intention to take over those programs? I'm guessing that it would be like the devolution process that we've been through in several other areas. Would the same protections and conditions apply to the employees who work for the federal government currently? I'm just wondering if the minister is aware of this initiative and what stage we are at and what the plans are.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Yes, this is a pretty wide-ranging department with public schools, advanced education, labour market initiatives, and some immigration initiatives as well. Here in the Yukon the Department of Education has several different programs in response to labour market initiatives.

These programs include the co-management under the labour market development agreement, our community training funds, the aboriginal human resource development agreement, the Yukon Indian training trust, and our investment in Yukon College. The Department of Education manages the labour market development agreement, the community training funds, trades training, post-secondary education support, literacy support, on-the-job training, and initiatives to recruit workers to the Yukon.

The labour market development agreement -- I believe that's the agreement that the member opposite is alluding to -- is an agreement that Canada has with Yukon under which we co-manage employment services in the Yukon. I believe these are often referred to as EI section 2 programs. They include things like the self-employment small business program or some of the other programs that are out there to assist Yukoners who are currently receiving employment insurance in order to re-engage with the employment situations.

There are funds that come from the federal government that are allocated for the labour market development agreement. One of the key projects that the Yukon has initiated and worked on with the federal government over the last couple of years is something that the member might be aware of. It's the targeted initiative for older workers. This includes an investment of \$660,000 over two years, which began last August at the college. It's an initiative in which we work with the federal government to put on programming to encourage older workers and assist them to re-engage with employment situations.

Mr. Chair, seeing the time, I move that we report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Rouble that we report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

Chair: Mr. Cathers has moved that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 8, entitled *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, and has directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole. Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Member: Agreed.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: The time being 5:30, the House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following documents were filed November 22, 2007:

07-1-38

Conflict of Interest, re Minister of Justice: letter (dated Nov. 20, 2007) from Gary McRobb, MLA for Kluane to David Jones, Yukon Conflict of Interest Commissioner (McRobb)

07-1-39

Conflict of Interest, re Minister of Justice: letter (dated Nov. 21, 2007) from David Jones, Yukon Conflict of Interest Commissioner to Gary McRobb, MLA for Kluane (Horne)