

Whitehorse, Yukon**Thursday, November 29, 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 World AIDS Day**

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Saturday, December 1 is World AIDS Day, and I rise today on behalf of the government members to ask all members of this Assembly to join us in reaffirming our commitment to continuing the fight against HIV and AIDS.

HIV and AIDS have both become a fact of life. While both sometimes seem to have fallen off the radar screen, we must remember that the fight against them is far from over.

Last year alone, 4.3 million people were infected with HIV, more than any other year to date. Infection rates for young people aged 15 to 24 are frighteningly high. We need to fight against complacency and acceptance of these risks. It is important to remember that while these statistics are high, the number of people impacted by AIDS is even higher. The toll of AIDS on families, friends and communities is devastating.

Today I reaffirm the Yukon government's commitment to continuing our efforts to educate and raise awareness of HIV and AIDS and to help prevent the spread of the disease.

Government has an outreach nurse who works each week at Blood Ties Four Directions in the area of public health and prevention and directly with those affected, and our health promotion staff work together with Blood Ties Four Directions on educating our youth about prevention and awareness. Through our other education campaigns we promote protection of self and others.

We support the needle exchange program offered by Blood Ties and, through our funding to that organization, assist in their education awareness and support initiatives.

In addition, our support of the outreach van helps to ensure that those most at risk, those affected and infected are getting the information and the care that they require. These are only some of the things we do through government as well as our continued support to individuals living with the disease, working together with other agencies and organizations to carry on this work.

The theme for 2007-08 is leadership. I believe that we are taking the leadership through our commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mitchell: I rise today on behalf of the Official Opposition to pay tribute to HIV/AIDS Awareness Week and World AIDS Day, which is this Saturday, December 1.

In 1991, the Canadian AIDS Society launched the first annual AIDS Awareness Week to sensitize the public about HIV/AIDS issues and to support the awareness and education efforts of community-based AIDS service organizations in Canada. One can become infected with HIV/AIDS regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation or ethnic origin, by having unprotected sex, by sharing needles, or by any blood-to-blood contact with anyone already infected with the HIV virus.

The Blood Ties Four Directions centre, located in Whitehorse, provides support and education for individuals, families, agencies and communities in relation to HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C. The No Fixed Address outreach van in Whitehorse also operates a health educator from Blood Ties Four Direction, offering health education and referral services.

Stigma and discrimination remain major obstacles to effective HIV/AIDS prevention, support and care. Fear of discrimination may prevent many people from seeking information, treatment and support, or from acknowledging their HIV status. World AIDS Day is an ideal time to challenge members of our communities to examine their attitudes about this disease and to work toward the elimination of HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.

World AIDS Day is about reminding us all that HIV/AIDS is an issue for everyone. HIV/AIDS remains a serious disease for which there is still no cure, and awareness and prevention remain the best defence against its spread. We would like to thank the many front-line workers, health care professionals, educators, counsellors and volunteers for their support services and efforts toward fighting this terrible disease. Working together, we can win this struggle and save many, many lives.

Thank you.

Mr. Edzerza: I rise on behalf of the NDP caucus to pay tribute to World AIDS Day, December 1.

This is the 20th year of recognizing this devastating disease. AIDS was not even known a quarter of a century ago, but it is now the fourth leading cause of death in the world. It has affected every corner of the globe and every level of society. Among those people newly affected, the number of women is increasing. About half of new HIV infections are young people between the ages of 15 and 25. We have a long way to go before we can say that this disease is being controlled.

The theme of World AIDS Day this year is leadership. Leadership is required of everyone to overcome the tragedy of HIV/AIDS, from all levels of governments, private businesses, communities and individuals. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions worst hit by this global epidemic. In that area, the Stephen Lewis Foundation is taking on the leadership challenge by carrying on exceptional work to alleviate the pain and social upheaval of HIV/AIDS. The foundation is very active in many different projects to support families that have suffered the loss of parents due to HIV/AIDS. Part of their program is called "Grandmothers to Grandmothers", where mothers of AIDS-affected sons and daughters are caring for their grandchildren.

We are pleased to note that a chapter of this vital organization has been established in the Yukon, and we will no doubt

hear more from them as soon as they take leadership in the fight against AIDS in Africa.

Leadership is also being shown in the Yukon. Activities this year in support of the fight against HIV/AIDS is coming from the artistic community through the Yukon Artists at Work cooperative. They will be assisting Blood Ties Four Directions in a project titled "AIDS and the Arts: Keeping the Flame Burning". The two organizations will display art pieces in local businesses that commemorate the losses due to AIDS and give hope for the future. This will be followed by a silent auction of the pieces on World AIDS Day, Saturday, from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Yukon Artists at Work gallery in MacRae. We congratulate them on this innovative project and encourage everyone to view the creative talents of our local artists and support Blood Ties Four Directions.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Nordick: I rise to have all members of this Assembly recognize Ms. Roseanne Skoke. She's a grandmother of one of our pages, Angel Burns.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any other introductions of visitors?

Returns or documents for tabling.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Hart: I have for tabling a legislative return in answer to an oral question by the Member for Mount Lorne on Thursday, November 15, regarding policies regarding promoting green technologies.

Mr. Hardy: I have for tabling a letter addressed to the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada. I wish I would have been able to get it to the leaders of the other parties sooner, but I wasn't able. I'll talk to them later about it.

Thank you.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Introduction of bills.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 108: Introduction and First Reading

Mr. Hardy: I move that a bill, entitled *Legislative Renewal Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Leader of the Third Party that a bill, entitled *Legislative Renewal Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 108 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills for introduction?
Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr. Mitchell: I give notice of the following motion:
THAT this House urges the Yukon government to
(1) expedite implementation of proposed social assistance reforms; and

(2) accelerate the process to have new social assistance rates in place to benefit those Yukoners in need before the Christmas season of 2007.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. McRobb: I give notice of the following written question:

On what date was the Government of Yukon's public Web site updated to make available the internal government audit, officially entitled *Report on the Audit of Contributions*, dated January 2007, prepared by the government audit services branch?

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

THAT in the interest of public accountability, this House urges the Yukon government to make publicly available, within two weeks of completion, all future internal government audits such as the one only made available some time this month, officially entitled *Report on the Audit of Contributions*, dated January 2007, prepared by the government audit services branch.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to immediately establish a mine training school in the community of Mayo in order that

(1) workers will be properly trained, thus receiving the full financial benefits of their training;

(2) Yukon will have well-trained workers to meet the needs of the mining industry; and

(3) workers will be properly trained in safety procedures, thus lessening the likelihood of work-related accidents.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to amend the *Family Property and Support Act* to conform to the guarantees of equal protection and equal benefits of the law, as contained in section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon not to permit the development of a winter road into the Wind River-Bonnet Plume area for purposes of uranium exploration until Yukon people have had an opportunity to engage in full public discussion of the question of whether or not uranium exploration and development should be permitted in the territory;

THAT this House urges the Premier to direct the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment to conduct research into the risk and benefits associated with uranium exploration and development and to make its findings public; and

THAT a select committee of the Legislative Assembly, consisting of equal representation from all parties in the Legislature, be established to conduct comprehensive public consultation on the environmental, health and social impacts of uranium exploration and development using the research provided by the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment as a public information tool in the course of those consultations.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?

Hearing none, is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Nominee program

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take the opportunity today to announce some very important changes to the Yukon nominee program. These changes will have a significant impact on how Yukon businesses meet current and future labour market shortages. The Yukon government recognizes that the territory is facing a labour shortage, and employers are increasingly finding it difficult to attract and retain workers. We are working to alleviate the shortages through amendments to the Yukon nominee program because we know that a strong economy needs the support of suitably trained and available workers.

Changes to the Yukon nominee program that will have a direct impact on easing the labour shortage include: establishing a critical impact worker component to the Yukon nominee program and discontinuing the requirement for a labour market opinion to be supplied under the skilled workers component of the Yukon nominee program. These two changes will not only speed up the process of labour immigration, they will also help local businesses meet their operational requirements and thereby function to their fullest capacity.

Establishing a critical impact worker program will allow Yukon employers to nominate employees currently on a temporary foreign workers permit for permanent residency. The critical impact worker program will focus on jobs at level C and D of the national occupational classification index. These are jobs that primarily serve the retail and hospitality industries. What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that workers in entry-level or semi-skilled positions will now be eligible for permanent residency.

Previously, employers would bring over entry-level or semi-skilled workers into the temporary foreign workers program. These workers were granted a two-year temporary residence permit, and in order to renew this permit they had to leave Canada and reapply from abroad.

The critical impact worker component of the Yukon nominee program will help maintain continuity in the Yukon labour pool in the critical labour shortage areas, thereby taking the pressure off of Yukon employers to constantly recruit foreign workers to meet their operational needs. Once employers have nominated employees for the critical impact worker component of the Yukon nominee program, they will receive a bridging

permit so that the employees won't have to leave the country while their permanent residency application is processed.

Discontinuing the requirement for a labour market opinion to be supplied by employers under the skilled workers component of the Yukon nominee program is also going to have a big impact on Yukon's available labour force. This amendment will expedite the current application process for approving immigrants into the skilled workers program. Rather than employers being required to provide a labour market opinion to support their application on behalf of skilled workers, we will be able to waive this requirement. Labour market opinions have previously been supplied through the federal government and, Mr. Speaker, getting one can take up to 12 months.

With Yukon taking the lead on labour market opinions, we will be able to shorten this time considerably, while continuing to ensure that each application is legitimate and represents the best interest of the Yukon public. Both the establishment of the critical impact worker component to the Yukon nominee program and discontinuing the requirement for employers to provide a labour market opinion to the federal government will be piloted until March 31, 2009.

We believe that this will give us an opportunity to see the full impacts of implementing these initiatives, which are just two of the many labour market development initiatives currently underway. In addition to facilitating the immigration of skilled and semi-skilled workers in the Yukon, the Department of Education is also working in many other areas to strengthen the available workforce.

Thank you.

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to respond to the ministerial statement and thank the department officials, those involved and the stakeholders for their input into this policy change in government. We on this side of the House, the Official Opposition, are very aware of the labour shortage in the territory, as well as the rest of Canada.

Now, there are a couple of areas in the ministerial statement that stand out. The critical impact workers component is one of them. It will not only help employers' needs but will cause less disruption in the workforce. It will allow Yukon employers to nominate employees currently on a temporary foreign workers permit for permanent residency, and that's what we're looking at here. This portion here does not address the immediate need of these entry-level or semi-skilled workers who are in demand right now in the territory.

Discontinuing the requirement for labour market opinion may help. This amendment will expedite the current application process, as the minister said, for approving immigrants under the skilled workers program. Both components of the Yukon nominee program -- the critical impact workers component and discontinuing the requirements for employers to provide the labour market opinion -- will be a pilot project, as the minister said, until March 31, 2009.

What we're talking about here is the semi-skilled workforce in the territory, and I think that is what is in demand right now, because we've seen it over the last couple of years, and the skilled workforce. Earlier, I read into the record a motion

for developing a mine training school in the community of Mayo, and this was worked on with the government, Yukon College and the Chamber of Mines. Everybody recognizes this. There's a difference between Whitehorse and the communities when it comes to the unemployment rate; it's much higher in the communities.

A lot of these activities are taking place in and around the small communities, so I'm hoping that the minister could one day bring forward to this House a ministerial statement in regard to a mine training school in the territory. I understand that Yukon College does have programs addressing this. I certainly hope that the minister, or one of the ministers on that side of the House, can address that.

One of the things is that we want to make sure that removing the labour market opinion requirement will not open the doors for unqualified applications. I know the minister addresses this somewhat in his ministerial statement, but we can't help but flag this as a concern on the part of all Yukoners. We also want to ensure that the best interests of the Yukon public are at hand with every application.

Also, we would like the minister to bring forward a report of some kind to the floor of this Legislature so we can see how well this pilot project has performed over the time it has been given, to March of 2009.

Mr. Cardiff: I'm pleased to rise and respond to the ministerial statement. We recognize that this response is to requests from the business community to address their concerns about the shortage of labour that they are experiencing, but we need to stress that this is only one part of the solution to the current shortage of labour here in the Yukon.

The minister mentioned the removal of the labour market opinion for skilled workers. He mentioned 12 months, but I know for a fact that it can even take longer. But at the same time, we need to ensure that we're not missing out on skilled workers who are here in the Yukon. We need to attract the local workforce and we need to build capacity.

There are other components to dealing with the labour market problem here in the Yukon that exist already and they need to be strengthened as well -- programs for older workers, programs for persons with disabilities, attracting more youth to the job market through apprenticeship programs and through the high schools, organizations like Skills Canada Yukon and the young women exploring trades program.

The Assembly of First Nations, Council of Yukon First Nations and Yukon First Nations have all called for better skill-training programs for First Nations who live here and intend to live here for their entire lives and who are available to enter the work market with the right training.

We need to invest in realistic training programs, implementing land claims and a representative workforce here in the Yukon. While this is just part of the solution, we too would like to see the minister issue a report. We'd like to see how this turns out.

I will just raise a few concerns that we need to watch for. We need to ensure that all the rights and protections afforded under the *Employment Standards Act* and any other applicable

labour legislation here in the Yukon apply to these workers who are entering the territory, that they're paid the proper wages, and concerns about rental accommodations are dealt with. There is a current shortage in that area.

I would just point to the experience in British Columbia. A lot of immigrant workers were employed on the light rapid transit project in British Columbia, in the Lower Mainland, and many of those workers were paid below the minimum wage. We don't want to see that happening here. We want to ensure these people are treated fairly so they feel they can make this their home.

Right now there are no protections for these people in what they're charged by employment agencies.

We'll be watching and listening to how this turns out and look forward to the minister reporting back on it.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I would like to thank the members opposite for their positive comments and constructive criticism on this very worthwhile initiative. Again, this is one more step that this government is taking to ensure that Yukoners have a very successful and bright economic future.

As well as the traditional areas of responsibility of the Department of Education in areas such as post-secondary education skills, trades training and the community training trust funds, we are currently working with Yukon College and the federal government to deliver the targeted initiative for older workers. This program allows people who are 65 years and older to refresh their existing workplace skills and to learn new skills that will help them engage better in the labour force.

The Department of Education is working with First Nation governments to provide training in communities where large infrastructure projects such as schools and power lines are planned. We also provide support to organizations that work with persons with disabilities, such as the Learning Disabilities Association of the Yukon. We provide training for work-ready social assistance recipients in order to help them access and retain employment. The Department of Education is a strong supporter of the Yukon women in trades and technology program and Skills Canada Yukon, both of which are providing unique training opportunities for women and youth.

We will also continue our work with Yukon College in providing employment opportunities for at-risk youth. We are providing funding for a very successful women exploring trades course held last spring. Other changes recently announced including changes to childcare funding and the proposed changes to social assistance rates will also help Yukoners to participate in our economy.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, in addition to facilitating the immigration of workers, the government has domestic labour market development initiatives underway for First Nation citizens, older workers, persons with disabilities, women and youth. Our scope is broad. We will continue to examine further initiatives that will assist in developing the existing labour pools.

In addition to what I've already mentioned in terms of labour market development initiatives, a business investor program is also administered through the Department of Economic

Development under the Yukon nominee program. This program brings investments and, as a result, more jobs to the Yukon. All the government's labour market development initiatives are geared to promoting healthy growth in the economy and providing the supports needed to manage the growth effectively.

Nurturing Yukon's labour force is a complex job, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to say the work by the Yukon government today is already making an impact. The government has listened and has responded to the territory's business community about the need for more workers. We look forward to supporting Yukon's business community now and in the future through various labour market development programs in order to keep the Yukon economy vibrant and strong.

Thank you.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Old Crow drinking water well

Mr. Elias: Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the Minister of Community Services. In 2006, the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Committee on Health and the Environment approved a new standard that lowered the allowable levels of arsenic in drinking water to reduce health risks. In other words, the standards have risen.

In the legislative return I received yesterday, the minister stated that the Yukon Party government has until 2011 to comply with the new standards. I also quote: "Old Crow's water supply contains levels of arsenic that are slightly over the newly released Canadian drinking water guidelines." Why hasn't the minister made the safe drinking water in the community of Old Crow a priority by completing the required upgrades?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the question asked by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin. Of course the issues related to actual installation of infrastructure are the responsibility of the Department of Community Services, but water testing is carried by the environmental health services branch within the Department of Health and Social Services. The Yukon does follow the national guidelines, and the national guideline was recently lowered for the level of arsenic permitted in drinking water, and that was based on the issue of cumulative, lifelong exposure and new advice in that area.

However, with one exception, all chemical tests since 1999 have indicated that the Old Crow water source is in fact below the new limit for arsenic levels and therefore, from the health and regulatory perspective, the level of arsenic is within acceptable levels. We are assured that there should not be concern from the members' constituents. In fact, I am having a letter drafted to both the member and the Chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, informing them of the issues related to water testing.

Mr. Elias: This is exactly my point, Mr. Speaker. One minister of this government says that it is over and the other minister says that it is under. There are too many unanswered questions here with regard to the drinking water in the Yukon. Too often in this country, governments have said to their citi-

zens, "Don't worry. Your water is safe to drink." The citizens of Walkerton, Ontario, where seven people died and 2,300 became sick, are a case in point.

I'm going to put the minister on notice and say that the people in the communities of Old Crow, Ross River, Carcross and Mendenhall, deserve safe drinking water now, and they shouldn't have to wait several more years.

Mr. Speaker, this delay from a government that is sitting on a \$100-million surplus is simply unacceptable. This minister is essentially telling my constituents and other Yukoners that he's comfortable allowing them to drink water that is substandard and proven unsafe by delaying the upgrades of drinking water wells. When will the drinking water wells be upgraded in these communities?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the member's concern, but I would point out to him that we do rely on the advice of the experts in this area. The acceptable level of arsenic -- what was considered safe -- was at a far higher level, but it has been reduced recently on the advice of national experts.

In this case, arsenic is, in fact, naturally occurring in Yukon water systems and, as with many other types of elements and minerals, there are certain levels that are considered safe and certain levels that are considered to pose a human health risk. Of course, even oxygen in high enough concentrations can be poisonous if breathed for too long a time.

So, my point to the member: I think I can allay some of his concerns and provide information. The new standard for Canadian drinking water quality -- the maximum allowable concentration for arsenic has been revised from a previous level of .025 milligrams per litre to a new level of .010 milligrams per litre.

Chemical testing samples taken from the Old Crow drinking water supply have found arsenic levels in September 2004 at .00830 milligrams per litre and in June 2005, 0.00849 milligrams per litre.

I understand that I am out of time, and I will give the member further information in my next response.

Mr. Elias: Judging from that response, it seems we may have to call on the Canadian Auto Workers Union and the Assembly of First Nations to once again do this minister's job and provide safe drinking water to Yukoners. Too many unanswered questions remain here. We need some answers.

What are the detrimental health effects of drinking substandard water for four more years? That's one question.

The Sierra Legal Defence Fund put a national drinking water report card out in 2006 and the Yukon got a C minus. They said our treatment standards need improvement and public reporting is lacking. I want to be able to go on-line, click on a community water well that I'm concerned about, and find the data. I can't do that. Will the Minister of Health and Social Services please provide some leadership and relieve the stress of Yukoners and seek to answer all the unanswered questions and provide full disclosure of the test results for the water in Old Crow and other communities?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the member's concern. To provide him further information, I emphasize that the new

level under the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality*, the best advice in the country on the maximum allowable concentration for arsenic, is reduced from a previous level of .025 milligrams per litre to a new standard of .010 milligrams per litre, based on concerns about the impacts of lifetime exposure to low level concentrations of arsenic.

Again, in addition to the numbers I read previously to the member, the test for February 2005 is another example. It showed the Old Crow drinking water supply arsenic level at .00937 milligrams per litre. In June 2006 it was .00944 milligrams per litre. In July 2007 it was .00826 milligrams per litre. I remind the member opposite that the new level is .010 milligrams per litre of what is the maximum allowable concentration. The water well in Old Crow, based on the testing, is indeed within the acceptable advice under the new tightened drinking water standards, which do not in fact even come into play until 2011.

Question re: Internal government audit

Mr. Mitchell: My question today refers to the report on the audit of contributions. The audit identified seven areas for evaluation. I'd like to address two or three of those and get the acting minister's response.

The audit said, "Contribution programs and projects are designed to achieve expected results, manage risks, ensure due diligence in spending and provide accountability for public funds spent." In other words, programs are designed for a reason; there's an expectation that the program will get results; risks are identified and systems put in place to manage them; spending should be prudent and, of course, there must be accountability.

Does the Acting Premier concur with these criteria and does she feel they are important?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: The Yukon government is very pleased to speak to this particular report. We're very pleased to be acting on the recommendations, many of which have already been done and many of which are fully underway, as we speak.

As the member opposite knows full well, as do all members on that side of the House, the purpose of an internal audit is to do just that: to review the administrative practices that go on within the Government of Yukon.

I just wanted to put on the record that this particular report on the audit contribution agreements is actually the first comprehensive review that the Government of Yukon has undertaken in 15 years. Furthermore, this is the very first time under this government's watch that internal audits have been posted on the public Government of Yukon Web site.

We are exercising full accountability, disclosure and transparency with respect to how we manage and how we can improve program services on behalf of Yukoners.

Mr. Mitchell: The Acting Premier has finally got an answer partially correct, but I'm afraid I have bad news for her. The audit revealed that, in this area, the Department of Tourism and Culture received a grade of D. The Department of Economic Development received a grade of D. The Department of Energy, Mines and Resources received a grade of D. The Department of Education received a grade of D. The Department

of Community Services received a grade D. That's zero for five, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister explain to the House how something as important as these criteria -- and something that she apparently admits to being important -- could get an across-the-board rating of "seriously deficient" in all five departments? This is after five years of this government being in power.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: We were the first government to actually take a comprehensive review of contribution agreements for the first time in 15 years. I think that speaks volumes about this government's commitment to accountability, exercising full financial scrutiny in this Legislature and to the taxpayers of this good territory.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, this report on the audit of contribution agreements is a review of how we administer programs and services on behalf of Yukoners. We are fulfilling our commitment to undertake those recommendations, some of which are already complete and some of which are fully underway. I have great respect for those officials who administer programs such as the arts funds, FireSmart and the community development fund. They are very good programs. Any time that a Government of Yukon can reflect upon how we deliver programs and services to the fullest of our ability, we will undertake that. We continue to exercise full transparency and accountability.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's clarify something. We're not criticizing the programs. We're certainly not criticizing the officials, because they're the ones who have brought this to light. We're criticizing the minister and the government for waiting until the fifth year of their governance to do something about it.

Let's look at another criterion, Mr. Speaker. The audit looked at whether contribution programs are periodically evaluated for performance. Well, I'm not going to ask whether the minister agrees with this criterion. I'll assume that she does. Money is invested in programs for a variety of reasons, all of them admirable, I'm sure. This criterion focuses on revisiting programs to assess if the need is still identified, and are the expected outcomes being evaluated and met.

Mr. Speaker, if you sold your car, would you continue to pay for the insurance on it, year after year? No. You don't fund programs either, if they're not needed or they're not working. The audit was very clear. Of the three departments that this applied to, all three received the D rating. Can the acting minister explain why, after five years, this government is still funding programs without knowing whether or not they're working or even needed?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Perhaps the question that we should ask of the members opposite is why they didn't do it when they held office? Why didn't the previous government do that? Again, Mr. Speaker, our government is the first government in 15 years to undertake a comprehensive review of contribution agreements.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, our government has certainly exercised full accountability, transparency, fiscal responsibility, year in and year out. I refer to the five consecutive years that this government has received a clean bill of financial health

from the Auditor General of Canada, unlike the previous Liberal government, which received qualified audits. They did not receive five consecutive clean bills of financial health. I commend the officials in the Government of Yukon, the hard-working employees, who deliver and who certainly are fully accountable to public taxpayers for the delivery of sound fiscal programs, whether that be the community development fund, whether that be the arts fund, FireSmart and so forth. I am very proud to be part of a government that has been able to raise the level of funding to our many NGOs.

Question re: Uranium mining

Mr. Hardy: As the Deputy Premier is aware, Cash Minerals has applied to build a winter road of more than 200 kilometres into the Wind River-Bonnet Plume area for the purpose of exploring four blocks of potential uranium deposits. The matter is currently before the YESA Board in Mayo, and Yukon people have until next week to make comments.

As I understand it, there has been a vigorous response, both from people who favour the application and from those who are opposed. As matter of fact, this has probably generated the most applications and responses the YESA Board has ever received. There is a broad issue at work here that I would like the Deputy Premier to address.

To the Deputy Premier's knowledge, have the Yukon people ever been consulted on the question of whether or not they agree with uranium exploration and development taking place in the territory?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: We do have some concerns with the number of comments that have come into the YESA Board in Mayo. It's within the purview of YESAA. We have no intention of subverting that good process; we will abide by it, but people should be aware of the fact that when erroneous information, or limited information, is posted on the World Wide Web asking for a response, the responses tend to come in from a large number of people who really don't know anything about the issue.

For instance, we're not talking about the construction of a road; we're talking about working with a road that was cut through there in the early 1950s. It has already been there for 60 years.

Mr. Hardy: I would advise the minister to take a walk down the trail, because it's not a road. It's 40 years old. What was punched through has become rather overgrown.

Yesterday, in one of the local newspapers, we had the president of the Chamber of Mines basically saying that uranium is just another mineral, like cobalt, copper and iron. Is that a fact?

With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, that's like saying a stick of dynamite and a firecracker are the same, because they're both red paper tubes with gunpowder in them.

The fact is uranium is not the same as other metals at all. It's a very valuable mineral with many positive uses, especially in the medical field. However, it contains radio isotopes -- or whatever they are -- which, within the medical field, are carcinogens. Uranium tailings can pose a risk of radioactive contamination for 100,000 years.

Before we go down the uranium road, Yukoners should have a say in this. Will the Deputy Premier agree to ask the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment -- it's a simple question -- to conduct some intensive research?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Again for the member opposite, the process is within the purview and within the good consideration of YESAB. This government will not subvert their work and awaits the information that comes out of that.

I'm glad to hear that the member opposite does recognize that uranium does have very positive uses, and many environmental groups are actually beginning to understand that nuclear energy is a relatively clean energy. It is much better than burning fossil fuels. I've had the very good fortune of touring some of the research facilities that look into that -- most particularly at the Idaho National Laboratories in Idaho Falls.

There are a number of good uses of this. A group has applied to use a road that was punched through 60 years ago. We await YESAB's decision on that, but we feel that drawing in with incomplete information a letter-writing campaign through the World Wide Web is perhaps misusing the whole way that the YESAA program was set up.

Mr. Hardy: You know I wish the minister would stop belittling the intelligence of the people of this territory. They do know their issues and they have the knowledge to speak on this -- that is why they are making presentations and will present at the forum itself. It is a shame that there is misinformation being presented in the Legislative Assembly by this minister in this regard.

I don't want to lose sight of the fact that the Wind River -- and, in fact, the whole Peel River watershed area -- is an extremely important area. It has enormous environmental value. There is also a significant amount of uranium exploration work underway in the territory -- some close to Whitehorse as well. Is it wise to encourage even more of this exploration -- especially in an area such as the Peel River watershed?

Does the Deputy Premier agree with the importance of asking Yukon people to provide informed advice to the government on the acceptability of uranium exploration and development through public hearings by a select committee of the Legislature or some other comprehensive consultation process to get to the facts?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Before the member answers, the Leader of the Third Party made a reference to the minister presenting misinformation. That is not permissible. I would ask the honourable member not to do that in the future.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Again for the member opposite, we are talking about a road that was put in almost 60 years ago. One of the concerns we have is some of the information being put out. For instance, the Web site that I referred to states that many jurisdictions have imposed moratoriums. The reality is that only Nova Scotia has, and they don't have uranium so it's not an issue.

We're talking about a road. I appreciate the member opposite's concerns. He is trying to turn this into a different issue -- namely the minerals among many others that may be found

along that road. That is not really the issue before us. The issue before us is the road itself.

I remember the member opposite commenting a few days ago in this House that he did not think catering to high-end tourists who are coming up with thousands of dollars -- and then supporting with thousands of dollars tours in this area. Tourism is a good thing. We think it's part of the process that YESAB has to look at, and I am sure they will. It is a good group and a good board that will consider this. We have every faith that they will do due diligence.

Question re: Social assistance rates

Mr. Edzerza: After 16 years of neglect from all governments, we are pleased to see that the Minister of Health and Social Services has finally recognized the need to give families on social assistance better support. The review of this program has taken many months -- much longer than necessary. The results are far from adequate. What we have for all the time spent are merely proposals, not policies. The minister says he can't do anything until he confers with First Nations and Indian and Northern Affairs, since they will be affected. It looks like another bleak Christmas for a number of Yukon families waiting for decisions to be made by this government.

Why were the First Nations and INAC not consulted long before this? Will the minister assure us that this isn't just another ploy to delay the implementation of reasonable policies for Yukon families in poverty?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I'm somewhat disappointed by the tone that the Member for McIntyre-Takhini has taken in asking his questions. It's unfortunate that he's choosing to -- I can't think of a term that isn't unparliamentary, so I'll simply go on to the rest of my response in noting that we do in fact have an obligation to consult with First Nations and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. This is not a matter of choice; this is a matter of obligation. We have made the proposals. The member is minimizing the hard work that was done by officials and the scope of that work.

Officials of the Department of Health and Social Services reviewed not only our own case experience and history within the social assistance rolls, but took a look at every jurisdiction in Canada on what they were doing to address social assistance, new initiatives implemented and best practices, to come up with recommendations that I believe will make our system the very best and most effective system in the country at providing adequate rates and assistance to people when they are forced to rely on social assistance and will assist them in entering the workforce and remaining there in the long term. In fact, as I've indicated, as soon as we receive the formal response from First Nations and INAC, we will move very quickly to implement it.

Mr. Edzerza: Another of the proposed changes is also long overdue. He is finally spending some of this government's excessive surplus by raising the amounts given to needy Yukon families on social assistance. It's about time, we say. The minister says he will have the best system in Canada, but again, it's not enough. Tinkering with rates is not enough to alleviate poverty. In fact, the proposed increases of about 20 percent don't even match the cost-of-living increases over the past 16

years. So, in real dollar terms, families on social assistance will continue to receive less than they did 16 years ago.

Will the minister commit to raising the social assistance rates by a minimum of 26 percent and indexing them so that recipients aren't caught in a continuous cycle of falling further and further behind the cost of living?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Member for McIntyre-Takhini is mistaken in his assertions. The announcement that we made included five components, and one of them -- the part related to rates -- includes raising the rates for food to reflect the market-basket approach used by the federal government to assess the cost of a nutritious food basket. That will be done. That is a significant increase in the bulk of the cost for raising the rates, as well as raising all other rates within social assistance, to reflect current costs in that area, as assessed by officials in the Department of Health and Social Services who, again I point out, spent many, many hours conducting this review and did excellent work. I am very pleased with the work they've done, and on behalf of Yukoners I'm proud of the work that these officials have done in this area, and I am proud of the five recommendations that we have.

We will be announcing one very shortly that will be another incentive aimed at helping low-income Yukoners. We took the approach of not only addressing adequacy of rates but also providing incentives to assist people to enter the workforce while taking steps, such as increasing the childcare subsidy, to help low-income families and to help them remain in the workforce and to continue building their resources for the good of themselves and their families.

Mr. Edzerza: I think everyone in the Yukon is proud of the work officials do in government. The minister says he is willing to allow social assistance recipients to keep more money earned from working than they have been able to in the past. This is a good step, and we applaud the minister for that. Many of the families that will benefit from this are headed by single women who care for children as well as work part time. They can definitely use this help; however, we don't see any reason why this part of the minister's proposal needs to be delayed. In fact, some First Nations already have their own policies about working while on social assistance. Will the minister agree to remove the three-month clawback on earned income immediately and also double the amount that social assistance recipients are able to keep, starting December 1, so that the working poor of the Yukon can retain more of their hard-earned money and have some security at Christmas?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The member is urging me to do something that he ought to know would violate our legal obligation to consult with First Nations and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. We cannot simply implement those rates without that consultation.

As I've indicated to the media and, I believe, before on the floor of this Assembly, and I made it very clear in letters sent to First Nation chiefs upon beginning the consultation, as well as a letter to the Grand Chief and in a phone call to the Grand Chief, that we would certainly appreciate any ability they have to expedite their formal response to the consultation on the

changes to social assistance rates, because we would like to implement this as soon as possible.

Ideally we would like to implement this in December if we receive the response soon enough, but we must give them fair time to consult.

Again I have to emphasize to members what they're missing: the key part of this announcement is the proposed change to the structure that will address the nearly 70 percent of the recipients who have been on and off social assistance typically because, when they enter the workforce, they hit an unexpected large expense, such as a car breaking down or a furnace needing repair, that pushes them back to social assistance and then, for a three-month period, every dollar they earn in the workforce previously has been clawed back by the system. We're providing a time limited period when they can keep more money, enabling them to continue working and build their own resources.

Question re: Internal government audit

Mr. Mitchell: The audit entitled *Report on the Audit of Contributions* examined four contribution programs in 2004-05, totalling about \$7.6 million. The audit reported that, overall, many program terms and conditions lacked one or more of the control elements. Reports suggested that expenditures had few or no restrictions, or they lacked frameworks for audits and evaluations.

We're not talking peanuts here; this is serious money. This is a serious matter: \$7.6 million without proper controls being placed on it is totally irresponsible. Try to get that amount from a bank without controls.

Will the Acting Premier attempt to explain how this government could be handing out \$3.2 million in one case alone without proper accountability attached to it? How does she explain this cavalier attitude to taxpayers' money?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Well, I would say that this particular report is anything but cavalier. This report speaks to accountability. Hosting the information on the Government of Yukon Web site also speaks to transparency and accountability.

The audit looks at 58 specific recommendations. The audit came from senior officials within the Government of Yukon. It points to a number of different areas where programs and the delivery of services need improvement for a number of reasons. It is for the very fact that it was the Government of Yukon that chose to undertake this particular review. As I said before, it's a review. It's the first review in 15 years.

I would say that the Government of Yukon is looking to the recommendations, many of which are underway and many of which are already complete. The very fact that this exercise was undertaken, and the very fact that many more will be undertaken in many more areas, is a good part of good governance.

Mr. Mitchell: I am disappointed. I am disappointed with what I find in the report, that Yukoners may be subjected to another four years of this government and disappointed with this government's total lack of accountability.

This government is showing itself to be totally unable to manage the finances of this territory. The bond fiasco, the Auditor General's investigation, cost overruns on many major

projects and now there is this most recent revelation from this government's own officials. When is enough, enough? If our personal banker displayed this lack of accountability, we would very quickly take our business elsewhere. Unfortunately, Yukoners may not have that opportunity with this government for possibly four more long years.

What does the Acting Premier propose to do to restore public confidence, seeing as how she will not even give Yukoners an apology or even an acknowledgment that things have gone wrong on her shift?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Oh Mr. Speaker, I'm very disappointed in the member opposite. I'm disappointed in the fact that he continues to second-guess the good work of our officials within the Government of Yukon. Mr. Speaker, who is accountable? For the first time in 15 years, the government has chosen to conduct a comprehensive review of contribution agreements undertaken by the Government of Yukon. That is in fact what has transpired.

As a result, a series of 59 recommendations specific to many programs have been made. The Government of Yukon is fully undertaking these recommendations, and they are very serious about adhering to them. Mr. Speaker, our government continues to be fully transparent and fully accountable when it comes to the finances of this territory.

One only has to take a look at the Auditor General of Canada's role in providing five consecutive years of a clean financial bill of health to the Government of Yukon -- unlike the previous Liberal government. Unlike the previous Liberal government, we have been provided with unqualified audits. Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous Liberal government, we have posted information on the Government of Yukon Web site.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing these references to years ago. What we're getting from this minister is History 101 and we're talking about current affairs. Now as for the unqualified audits of which this minister is so proud, what they basically say is that the government has followed generally accepted accounting principles. They don't speak to the quality of the program delivery or to the costs of delivering them.

I sometimes wonder why we even have Question Period, Mr. Speaker. I think that sometimes the government members could just table the briefing notes that they are so fond of and save us valuable time. Now this is very serious issue. At the core of any government is the intrinsic underlying principle of accountability.

So, Mr. Speaker, if this government would simply admit that they had neglected their financial responsibilities, Yukoners might even forgive them. The buck stops at the top, Mr. Speaker. As the Acting Premier, will this minister accept the responsibility and accountability entrusted to her and demonstrate some leadership in this matter?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: I'm very disappointed in the member opposite who is now second-guessing the Auditor General of Canada and her good work. Mr. Speaker, I find that deplorable. If the member opposite would quit reading from the questions that have been prepared by the officials in his office, then maybe he would have time to listen to the responses being pro-

vided by this side of the Legislature. That is, this government is fully -- fully -- compliant with the measures provided for in the Government of Yukon. We are fully compliant; we provide sound fiscal management, and I refer to the good work conducted by the Auditor General of Canada. I refer to the good work of the internal audit office provided through the Executive Council Office and the Department of Finance. They make very good decisions on behalf of the Government of Yukon. Reflecting upon how we do business in the Yukon is a good thing. It speaks to accountability. It speaks to good governance -- something that obviously the members opposite do not understand. We on this side of the House have actually increased resources to the internal audit function by enhancing the staff available so we can conduct more audits, as we have; furthermore, we are providing that information on the Government of Yukon Web site, unlike previous governments.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. 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: I will now call Committee of the Whole to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 8, *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Yukon Housing Corporation.

Is it the wish of the members to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: We will take a 15-minute break.

Recess

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

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

Yukon Housing Corporation

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 8, *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Yukon Housing Corporation.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: It gives me great pleasure to present to the members of this House the supplementary budget, which will allow the Yukon Housing Corporation to continue our work in helping Yukoners with their individual housing needs.

Like my colleague from the Department of Community Services mentioned, it has been a very busy, busy summer season for the Yukon Housing Corporation. Working with Com-

munity Services, Highways and Public Works and Emergency Measures Organization, Yukon Housing Corporation adapted its home repair program to help the property owners affected by the Southern Lakes flooding this past summer.

The 2007 Yukon flood relief initiative was developed to provide financial assistance for property owners whose dwellings have suffered damage from high water levels. The initiative provides two financial assistance methods based on the normal use of the property. Grants are available to repair damages to principal residences, and interest-free loans are available for repairs to recreational and other types of properties that are not considered principal residences.

To date, the Yukon Housing Corporation has received 53 applications for flood relief. Most of these applications have come from the Marsh Lake area, but we have received applications from Upper Liard, Carcross, Tagish and Lake Laberge.

Funding under the flood relief initiative is meant to restore the dwelling to a positive state of health and safety. Repair items not eligible for the flood relief funding may be eligible for funding under other Yukon Housing Corporation home repair programs.

Once the Yukon Housing Corporation receives an application for funding, a technical officer makes arrangements with the client for a site visit. The technical officer completes a detailed assessment report, which shows the extent of the damages and repair needs. The Yukon Housing Corporation staff determines which items are eligible for funding and whether or not they are covered by a grant or are eligible for an interest-free loan. The clients are then responsible for obtaining estimates on the costs of the approved repairs. Once those estimates are approved by the Yukon Housing Corporation, the clients can begin the work and receive funding.

The Yukon Housing Corporation staff has been very helpful in guiding clients through difficult times. It's not an easy task, of course, to clean up your home and repair damages caused by flooding. First, the affected homes need to be dried to ensure that mould is not allowed the opportunity to further damage the home and cause health and safety concerns.

Then the actual repairs can take place. This can be as simple as replacing some damaged drywall or, in more extreme cases, repair footings and foundations. The initiative will continue into next year to ensure that all damages caused by the 2007 flood can be addressed, and homeowners can return to safe and healthy homes. The initiative was developed to assist clients in a fair and reasonable manner. Feedback from the public on the initiative has so far been very, very positive.

I want to talk about the home repair program. Under the general home repair enhancement program, all eligible clients will be able to access up to \$30,000 financing, amortized up to 10 years to repair their homes at a zero-percent interest rate if those repairs improve the energy efficiency of their home. This is a real potpourri of things that we have tried to develop within the corporation that will allow Yukoners to address energy conservation and reduction of fuel costs and electrical costs. Eligible clients whose home repair costs exceed the home repair program financing limit can access the home repair enhance-

ment program. There is no subsidy available for the home repair enhancement loan.

Yukon Housing Corporation's health and safety guidelines apply to both programs. Therefore, clients may have to complete required health and safety upgrades or repairs before they can access financing for energy efficient items.

I want to point out that a very important and significant change to the home repair program occurred earlier this year. The Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors raised the loan ceiling from the current \$35,000 to \$50,000 to assist homeowners with repairs and upgrades for the benefit of a disabled occupant. A particular case at the time came up and I asked the board to take a look at that policy, and I am very pleased with what they came up with.

There truly are many forms of disabilities. It's vitally important to provide programming responses that ensure flexibility and success. The Yukon Housing Corporation staff undertook research with families and discovered how complex and expensive interior and exterior upgrades can be, yet these upgrades make a world of difference in improving the quality of life of a homeowner or family member with a disability. This is a very high priority for the corporation.

This decision to introduce a new loan ceiling is a very progressive approach by the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors because they recognize the additional costs involved with these types of improvements. They can range from ramps and lifts to new flooring, expanded washrooms with special features and accessible entrances -- and these just name a few. I could go on for a long, long time with that list.

The loan ceiling was increased by \$15,000 this year so the eligible applicants can access up to \$50,000. The loan is available at an interest rate of 2.4 percent.

For low-income homeowners, the Yukon Housing Corporation offers subsidies to make the loan more affordable. This can be the determining factor for a family proceeding with the necessary improvements.

The corporation has also looked at a number of green initiatives. Early in the summer, the Yukon Housing Corporation launched a number of funding options designed to help Yukoners save money and reduce negative impact to the environment. The housing board approved six initiatives, all designed so home owners can make energy efficiency improvements to their residences or rental properties.

Eligible applicants are able to access up to \$35,000 in financing, amortized over 12 years, to repair their homes at zero-percent interest. If those repairs improve the energy efficiency of the home, then this program would be a possibility.

Low-income earners are potentially eligible for a subsidy to offset the cost of their loan. The subsidy is based on variables such as family size, location and disposable income. Payments on a \$35,000 loan under this program can be as low as \$25 per month.

The Yukon Housing Corporation went further to address the needs of rural Yukoners by including alternative energy systems within this program, because even people who want to live off the grid want to reduce their energy costs and carbon emissions. Eligible clients can access financing up to \$30,000

amortized up to 25 years to install alternative energy systems in their home.

The alternative energy systems include, but are not restricted to, electrical power systems -- harnessing energy primarily from sunshine -- and wind and microhydro systems can also be heating or cooling systems, which do not use fossil fuels for combustion, such as heat pumps, heat exchangers or passive solar heating. This option has captured the attention of many Yukoners and a lot of people living off the grid. To the Member for McIntyre-Takhini, yes, this could reduce his need to drive his waste oil to proper disposal in the future, so I encourage him to take a look at this. Alternative energy systems include all these things and they allow people to get rather creative in how they approach the problem.

Fourteen applicants have applied to build a new green home from scratch, and five landlords have made applications to improve the energy efficiency of their rental properties, which is also covered under this program. The Yukon Housing Corporation has worked with these landlords and they have undertaken other work while they are taking advantage of the energy efficiency initiatives. In one case, this included the installation of a sprinkler system to provide an improved level of safety for low-income tenants. A second applicant is able to undertake extensive renovations to more than a dozen dwellings, which will be available to households in need of affordable housing. These newly renovated dwellings will provide a safe living environment and will now be affordable to heat and maintain.

Initiatives such as these often act as a catalyst for overall improvements in housing. Each living space improved under the rental rehabilitation program means improved living conditions for a Yukon family. A small investment provided through this program means a huge improvement for the family involved.

The interest rate here is set at zero percent for the first 10 years and one percent below the existing home repair program rate at the renewal date. This rate will continue for the remaining term of the plan. Homeowners can access up to a \$400 grant for energy evaluations performed on their homes. We recommend that all applicants get their homes evaluated so that they can achieve the greatest benefit by having an expert evaluate what should be done to make the home more energy efficient. Energy advisors perform on-site assessment of the client's home and provide the homeowner with a personalized report with recommended repairs to improve the energy efficiency of the home.

Mr. Chair, Yukoners are taking advantage of this innovative program, because they see the value of making these investments in their homes rather than paying an ever-increasing price of fuel. As of the end of October, for instance, the price of a barrel of crude oil was at \$93.80. I think it actually, at one point, peaked either close to or over \$100. I'm pleased to report that as of today 71 homeowners have applied for this beneficial program and will be making their homes more comfortable, energy efficient and at the same time reducing their carbon footprints. I should add, Mr. Chair, that not only is this a good program, and I encourage people to take advantage of it, there

are federal programs available that require such an audit to be taken. So we're willing to fund that audit, which would then leverage into more and better access to even more subsidy from the federal government to improve the quality of life and the quality of the home.

The Yukon Housing Corporation added significantly to our seniors social housing inventory with the addition of the athletes village complex. From all reports, the new tenants are very pleased with their accommodations. I understand that this is the first addition of housing stock to the Yukon Housing Corporation's stock since 1994. Once you get over the great view almost every suite has to offer, you begin to realize the many other advantages there are to living in a seniors complex. Yukon College has also welcomed this project and made their facility available to seniors in a number of ways.

The college has an indoor walking program, which the seniors can take advantage of, especially in the winter months. The college offers courses at no cost to those seniors who want to keep learning new things. There is a library and archives that many of the seniors are able to take advantage of. For those seniors who want to take a break from cooking, there is a cafeteria available and I understand that the food served there is both tasty and affordable to the seniors -- I've been there a number of times and it is a great place.

Although there is no regular bus service available directly to the seniors building, there are buses coming and going from the college on a regular basis. One senior went so far as to time his walk from his suite to the bus stop and told us that it was a six-minute walk.

I realize that there was some controversy in the construction of this building when the Official Opposition claimed that seniors didn't want to live there. I'm pleased to report that about 51 percent of the people who moved into that complex, in fact, moved out of the downtown core to move into the complex.

A number of the seniors are really quite excited about the walking trails in the area as well. We understand that one of the seniors has a favourite fishing hole in the area, the exact location of which does not appear in any of the briefing notes.

The addition of the 48 new housing units into our inventory has provided the Yukon Housing Corporation with some new flexibility to place other tenants in housing more suitable for their needs, thus giving the Yukon Housing Corporation a more balanced social housing portfolio. For example, some families who were previously housed in apartments have been given the option of moving into duplexes and other units with yards and other features more appealing to the needs of their family.

The Yukon Housing Corporation is also constructing a new seniors housing complex in Haines Junction. It will provide new, warm and comfortable accommodation for six tenants, and we now expect to have the new tenants moved in in the coming weeks and certainly by the new year -- we're progressing very quickly on that.

This facility is not just another apartment occupied by seniors. It was designed to allow seniors in the Haines Junction area and the north highway to remain in the community when age makes it difficult for them to manage normal activities in

their own home. I'm pleased to report that we are very actively looking at the possibility of enlarging that building by another three units.

The facility is fully accessible and it's secure and has amenities that will serve the seniors who reside there as they continue to age. These amenities include a library, meeting room, common kitchen, modest dining area and a space that can be used for visiting professionals -- for instance, a seniors foot care clinic, a hairdresser or other services that, in the past, seniors would have had to travel to.

This facility was designed with extensive input from both the St. Elias Seniors and the Village of Haines Junction. It's an example of the level of community consultation and involvement in the Yukon Housing Corporation and what we've committed to.

Although the facility is not large, it is appropriate for the size of the community, and the opportunity it affords for seniors to remain close to their families and friends for as long as possible is of huge value to the strength of the community.

The 2004 report evaluation of the social housing program identified that there are many reasons why people require social housing. Not all these reasons are necessarily financial ones, as I think we all recognize. These reasons range from medical and mobility issues to people fleeing abusive and violent situations.

As a result, the Yukon Housing Corporation undertook an extensive refinement of the priorities for social housing applications. The Yukon Housing Corporation staff worked with a variety of client groups and stakeholders to develop this new approach of assessing priority housing. This new priority rating system has been fully implemented and, over the past year, the Yukon Housing Corporation has also created some very innovative policies that are designed to help people in urgent need acquire suitable housing.

A new priority consideration policy was created to accommodate victims of violence who leave threatening situations and require housing removed from that threat. Seniors who need access to medical services may now receive priority consideration for access to social housing so they can be closer to the medical attention they need. As well, for individuals with mobility challenges, having also been identified as a priority group in need of housing, and for many individuals with mobility challenges, finding a barrier-free and accessible accommodation really does present a difficulty.

We are seeking an approval for an increase of \$176,000 for negotiated collective agreement increases; an additional \$110,000 is being requested in relation to term positions approved under the residential energy management initiatives -- 1.5 full-time equivalent for a technical officer and 1.0 for a program officer. The money is basically wages for 75 percent of the year 2007-08.

There is \$18,000 for our shared services cost increase. As you know, Community Services, the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Housing Corporation are combined into what is called shared services, where administrative oversight and similar functions of each department are combined to

achieve new economies in the operations. I am pleased to report that has worked very well.

I'm running out of time, Mr. Chair. I am very pleased to give that report. I hope I've given enough information so it will be easier and quicker for the members opposite to ask questions. With that, I'm very pleased to turn the floor over.

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to respond to this department and the supplementary budget. I thank the minister for giving his opening remarks. He actually did answer a few questions that I had. I don't have a whole lot of questions in this department, so hopefully things will go quicker than is normal for other departments, Mr. Chair.

There are a couple of things that the minister said that did raise interest. One was closer to the end when he mentioned refining the social housing applications. In the community of Carmacks, for example, I know that Yukon Housing Corporation responded well to the needs of that community when the First Nation went through this whole thing trying to take care of the black mould issue in their houses. They turned to Yukon Housing Corporation to house those families that were living in these unhealthy conditions until such time as it was fixed.

I haven't seen the changes to the applications. I'm interested to know what the changes are. If the minister can send that over to us or read it out -- he touched on some of them in his opening remarks -- I am interested to know. I have a follow-up question once the minister answers that one.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Sure, we have no problem sending that over. Yes, there have been changes to forms for medical relocation and all the rest of it.

I do thank him for his comments about the response to Carmacks. I think that brings up the one point that I tried to make in my opening remarks. The Yukon Housing Corporation has programs, but they are also a great source of information and a great source of expertise and help. It is a great place to go to get consultation and information far beyond what I think people understand. I encourage people to do that, although it would probably put pressure on the staff, but it's a pressure that we're happy to take.

Mr. Fairclough: This is one department that I think has more good news in it than perhaps any other department in government. It's about putting programs together for the people of the Yukon. Often this is the department that could respond in a positive way. I see that in the increase to the supplementary budget. There is a new item for the Yukon flood relief program.

I realize that this department has a lot of experts and good people who have tough jobs to do that many other departments in government cannot do. For one, there is collecting loans. This is a very difficult one to do. We have gone through this for years with the Yukon Party and this is one area where the Yukon Housing Corporation has good people and they are able to do that. Collecting loans is a difficult thing, even for First Nations and their housing departments.

Often, it is very difficult to run a housing program in the First Nations. Now, we have seen a lot of programs, mortgages, and green mortgages in the past. The corporation basically moved into a business type of corporation over what it was

originally designed to do, which was to provide social housing to Yukon people.

Now, I've asked this question before, and I know it's a difficult one to deal with, but to live in a housing unit under the corporation requires 25 percent of your gross income. It was not always like that. I think it came into effect in 1990 or 1989, something like that. It's difficult for one to be stuck in that position and wanting to build one's own place.

I've asked this of the minister before, whether there could be a program put together for those who are in Yukon housing and want to move out of Yukon housing and build their home, that they're not paying that top dollar for rent, but rather the cap that we normally have for our government employees, with the rest of it going toward building of a unit or a downpayment for a mortgage, either through Yukon Housing Corporation or the banks. Would the minister consider that, or have they already considered that?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Well, thank you. Before I answer some of the earlier questions, so I don't forget it, yes, we are. That's probably the simplest answer to that.

The member's comments, I think, are very good and certainly reflect the fact that he was, in fact, the minister of this department for four years. I recognize that and his knowledge of the portfolio, I think, is very good. Collecting of loans, yes -- good point. I think all three stripes of political parties have proven that governments are fairly good at giving out loans, but the Yukon Housing Corporation is only about two percent in arrears, which I think is way ahead of banks and everything else. It's really quite an incredible record.

We eliminated the market rent structure in 1993 and went to a rent geared to income, and even today, that 25 percent is the lowest in all of Canada. It's 30 percent or more in other jurisdictions. I think his comment brings up the rest of my comments and brought up more debate today and certainly debates in Question Period -- the Yukon Housing Corporation was, in his words, to provide social housing for Yukon people. That really was the main thing the Yukon Housing Corporation was put together for.

However, we are looking at affordable housing and things that are outside the original mandate. We have to now look at replacing some of the social housing. When you look at the statistics of the aging social housing units, it gets rather frightening to see how fast these buildings are aging. What gets even more frightening for the general public is not being aware of the fact that many of these buildings were put up quickly in a time when the construction level was -- to say "poor" would be a compliment, I think.

We have to look at that replacement; we have to look at possibly getting into programs that provide affordable housing. Unfortunately, contrary to some of the questions in the House, we can't interfere with the market end of it but we can certainly do other things. I encourage the member opposite to stay tuned over the next few weeks, because I think he will be very pleased with some of the things he'll be hearing.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister also listed a new green initiative program and he mentioned six points. He also said there were approximately 71 people who took up on these

green initiatives. How far is the corporation going when it comes to green initiatives? Are they looking at the best and newest technology? Are they looking at some of the old technology that we definitely could use for energy efficiency? How seriously is the corporation looking at geothermal technology?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The member opposite is leading into a good area here. These are certainly things that we're looking at. We do have to look down the line at geothermal as a possibility. It would potentially be very good in Whitehorse and Haines Junction.

I think, over the years, as I'm sure the member will be very familiar, that the original concept of an R-2000 home was considered to be a very energy efficient home. Yukon Housing Corporation certainly was in the lead in putting together what they called the "green home". The green home was sort of R-2000 on steroids; it had a much higher level of everything really. What we're looking at now and starting to develop is -- for want of a better term; we keep running out of superlatives -- the super green home, which could be as high as R-50 in the walls and R-100 in ceilings -- extremely good, well-constructed, extremely energy efficient buildings. Interestingly enough, some of the initial work on it shows that we would have a payback -- because obviously this is going to cost more to construct -- as short as 12 years, depending on what happens to the price of fuel. It could be less. I somewhat doubt that the price of oil is going to come down, but who knows? Stranger things have happened.

We would not necessarily construct the super green concept ourselves. I know that when I was in Ontario, the Ontario government built an R-2000 home just down from ours and invited people to look at it. It is nice what you can do when you have lots of money, but what we're trying to do is subsidize, in various ways, people to build these and to build our own buildings and our own replacement buildings to this standard. So if we're replacing the social housing unit, if it is dropped and the housing is rebuilt, it will be built to the super green standard. In the words of our always jocular Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, you could probably heat it with a cat -- they will be so energy efficient. A big building might take two cats.

Mr. Fairclough: I look forward to seeing that. As a matter of fact, I want to draw the minister's attention to the fact that, from my understanding, two houses are going to be built in Carmacks by an individual who is looking exactly at that -- super green, energy efficient homes, using the latest technology in insulation with big huge slabs and so on, and using geothermal technology. It's done through the Carmacks Geo-Source Ventures. It will be interesting to see. Of course, a big part of it is having good air quality.

Many, many years ago, the First Nations, along with CMHC, which is now run by Yukon Housing Corporation, built some very energy efficient homes. I looked at, for example, Pelly Crossing where there were homes built with 16-inch walls. This was about 20 to 25 years ago. They swear that they could heat these homes with a candle. They are big homes and very comfortable. Even back then, somebody tried to go above and beyond the standards of the day. Probably the standards that Yukon Housing Corporation was following at the time

meant building homes with two-by-four construction, heated with electrical heat. I lived in one of those homes on Klondike Road and I know the expense.

I look forward to looking at these super green homes, as the minister calls them. I think that many will be looking at that down the road, especially when the price of fuel seems to be climbing and climbing and climbing. There doesn't seem to be an end to it in the near future.

Many are putting more emphasis on energy efficiency. Is the Yukon Housing Corporation, for new homes that are being built, because of the price of fuel going up -- I know they've done this before, and it has gone from one source of heating to another; it went to electric heat, it went to propane, and then back to oil. But is there an interest now in looking at homes being heated with electricity?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Yes, I think all options have to be looked at. Certainly, when these homes are constructed, one of the parts of the spreadsheet in putting it all together is the future operation and maintenance cost. As I mentioned before, some of these homes are more expensive to build, but the payback will be in about 12 years when all of a sudden -- the payback is huge because the cost of fuel is very definitely a concern.

The green home initiative, of course, came in 1999, which is why the member opposite is so familiar with it. We are familiar with the two houses in Carmacks. I think anything like that that can be done is going to be a selling point and it's going to be good for the private sector to be able to market this and to show the private sector why it is important to do these. That is why we are building all of our staff housing, and we will be building any replacement units, as we develop that program for social housing -- they will all be done to green or super green standards.

The athletes village is to green standards. The building in Haines Junction is there. The buildings in Falcon Ridge -- not only accessibility under the affordable housing initiative, which I think was badly misunderstood, but that also required that these homes be built to the green standard. So we've come along well with that. But that certainly is part of this: when you're looking at anything like this, don't just look at what it costs to put it up. Look at what the payback is and what the cost is to run it.

I remember one building a few years ago where the building actually notified the RCMP that fuel was being stolen from the building, and they found out by putting a guard on the fuel tanks that in fact it was burning oil that fast. Nobody really took a close look at the operation and maintenance, and you have to look at both.

Mr. Fairclough: I have a few more questions. In this supplementary budget there is an increase to the home repair program and loans program. I did not write down the minister's remarks regarding what that \$250,000 was, but over the years, with the increased cost of building supplies and labour and so on, is this part of that? If so, what percentage of the increase of building homes or repairing homes is directly related to the increase of professionals and the cost of doing the job?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: A number of factors came into that. The member has noted that correctly. We developed the concept earlier in the year, in terms of energy efficient homes and that sort of thing, and we knew very well when we developed these programs that there would be a cost involved in that. We budgeted that in with the expectation that it would be picked up in the supplementary budget. Cost of building supplies is always part of that, but also more to the point is the increased uptake of some of these programs. Those are the things that you can never really predict. I know of one program in Nova Scotia where they budgeted for, I think it was, 7,000 uptakes of the program, and it was actually 76,000. They got a little offbeat there. But when we offer these programs and see the number of people who were looking at energy efficiency -- that's good. That's all a good thing, because as we go, that will help us in the future.

The other thing that we have to look at is under the home repair program. The loans are actually 85 percent recoverable; 15 percent is non-recoverable for the subsidies. It appears in the budget on the expense side, but it will be appearing on the revenue side as well.

Mr. Fairclough: That's the nice thing about this department; it does have income coming in all the time. I raise this, because I was recently going through one of these with a friend whose house had burned -- not down to the ground -- and the cost of renovating and repairing it is much higher than tearing it down and building a new one. That's why I raised this question.

I know I'm going into lines, and I hope the minister doesn't mind. There aren't a whole lot of lines here. The Yukon flood relief program has a budget of \$400,000. I believe another department, Community Services, also had a line item on that. A portion of it was grants and the other was for interest-free loans.

Did the minister say only if it was to address energy efficiency in regard to the flood relief program? Maybe I misheard the minister and it was another line he was talking about.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The home repair program and the program enhancement -- just before I get sidetracked here -- actually there's \$35,000 and \$30,000, so you can actually again leverage that.

With the member opposite's kind indulgence, I'll go back into some of my notes here to answer the question on the flood relief and some of the other things around that.

We did administer the flood relief program on behalf of the government. To enable the service to be effective, the corporation has added another technical officer to deal with client applications and undertake inspections relative to those claims. The addition of this 0.5 position prompts us to request \$41,000 in the supplementary budget. I throw these out so the member will have them anyway.

So we are seeking approval for another \$15,000 to support the promotion and delivery of flood relief.

In mentioning technical officers, one of our questions initially was that, because things are so busy with flood relief and the energy programs -- particularly in the Whitehorse area -- it may influence the availability of the technical officers in the

communities. I've asked that technical officers go out and spend time periods in some of the areas -- you know, go up to Dawson for three or four days or a week and head to Watson Lake for another week. That is taking some of the pressure off of that.

Also, every year Yukon Housing Corporation technical staff goes through all staff and social housing units to determine what work has to be done to keep the housing in good condition. The work that this generates all goes to private sector contractors and directly contributes millions of dollars in the economy. Of course, that doesn't appear in the budget.

We are very pleased with the dedication and quality of the local contractors in the communities and how they often go above and beyond the call of duty, especially during the cold winters when heating emergencies are bound to come up with only a limited number of people in the community who can be called on to help. I scratch my head sometimes over lot availability and people saying that this is going to adversely affect the contractors and there will be no work for them. You try to find an electrician or a plumber. They just aren't around. That's a good sign. I'm very happy to complain about that.

In addition to this, Yukon Housing Corporation is building new staff housing where it is not available to ensure that professional staff coming into the community have a good place to live, and they tend to stay in the community for a longer period of time. It is a good thing for communities to have good, consistent staff and jobs that are key to the success of a community. The quality staff housing often keeps the staff in the community long enough to get to appreciate the benefits of living in rural Yukon, and eventually some do decide to invest in the community for the long term and buy and build their own homes. So there is a bit of a turnover in staff housing in that respect.

The operation and maintenance costs for the athletes village seniors housing complex have been estimated at \$343,000, which is included in this request as well, and \$105,000 is requested for incentives to homeowners who upgrade and build homes to green home standards, which help homeowners to save money and energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The rental income from the athletes village senior social housing complex is forecast to be \$228,000. We won't capture \$80,000 in revenue from cost-shared recoveries from Canada for the home energy evaluations program, as that's no longer available. We are asking to revoke \$60,000 in the following manner: \$5,000 for the final development of a business continuity plan; \$5,000 for our client information system; and a further \$50,000 for the replacement of one of our current loan management systems. This is all information technology.

Still with capital -- and I am trying to give information that hopefully the member has questions about anyway, but I will see if I can jump the gun -- we are seeking approval for \$250,000 for home repair loans. This is under the HRP, which is the home repair program. Again, this is directly related to the green home initiatives, with 85 percent of that recoverable over the term of the loan.

The member's direct question was about financial assistance for flood relief. There is \$400,000 in capital funds allo-

cated to the Yukon flood relief initiative. There is \$200,000 for the principal residence claims, \$90,000 of which is recoverable from Canada's disaster financial assistance arrangement. There is another \$200,000 allocated to the zero-percent interest loans program for owners' claims for recreation properties. This is in flood damage. It isn't energy efficiency. This is directly for flood damage. Of course, when one is doing the repairs, one can certainly build energy efficiency programs into that. It gives people a huge smorgasbord, to use the term, of programs that they can go on to that, even in terms of the program of doing an evaluation on the energy efficiency of the home. That can be used to further leverage federal funds.

On the capital recoveries side of it, we are looking at \$213,000 related to home repair loans and a forecasted increase in applications due to the green home and energy efficiency initiatives. Again, these are 85-percent recoverable on \$250,000 in expenditures.

Mr. Fairclough: The corporation did an estimate of \$400,000, and the minister said there were 53 applications for the flood relief program. Is this what the department expected, or is it higher than expected? And can the minister also tell us - I would assume that most if not all of the homes, whether they're recreational or full-time, would have been insured. Are these programs over and above what is covered through insurance?

Yes, we'll take time for the technical stuff. I want to take this opportunity to just praise the dedicated technical staff. They have just been working their tails off to get out and get this information to us. The majority of the repairs, given our climate, will probably be done in the next fiscal year. So there will be more jiggling of this budget as we go into next year's budget. So far, I think we've been pretty pleased with the number -- it hasn't been shocking, let's put it that way. I think I'm missing one thing, so if I miss something, please throw it out again.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: I'm sorry, before the Chair reacts there, it was over and above insurance claims. I believe that is yes.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for the answers to those questions. The community of Old Crow is predominantly First Nation. How many of the home repair programs are in the community of Old Crow? Is there any at all or is it strictly within the corporation itself, where any of the work done is done on the corporation's houses?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The member opposite has hit on a good point. The home repair program is not allocated by community. We don't break it up that way at all. However, there is a requirement under the program that the home be on fee-simple land and in the name of the person who resides there. If that were to occur in Old Crow, we certainly would deal with it. It does have to be on fee-simple land.

And again, most of this involves the floodplain area.

He hits on a really interesting thing there, because many of these programs -- both Yukon and federal programs, as he well knows -- are either for fee-simple land or for on-reserve/off-reserve and of course we don't have that sort of system here. It

leaves many of the First Nations ineligible for many of the programs. That's something that we fight about with Canada on a daily basis.

Mr. Fairclough: Earlier I gave praise to the department for their ability to collect on loans and all that, but I couldn't help but read the pamphlet that was tabled by the minister -- the annual report. In there, for the year 2006, the department wrote off \$164,347 -- much higher than previous years. Perhaps the minister could explain what was written off.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Basically the way that is structured is that the Auditor General of Canada, whom we deal with on a daily basis to review accounting procedures and everything else, requires us to book that as a write-off over a time period, so it is an accounting procedure. However, nothing in that procedure with the accounting thing that the Auditor General requires precludes us from continuing to try to collect that.

Also, there's often a case where multi-year debts might be written off in one stroke, so it's not necessarily indicative of an exact fiscal or calendar year. It's just a question of when it happens. In this case, it's an accounting thing to conform with the Auditor General of Canada.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for answering the questions and look forward to passing through this department in the supplementary budget fairly quickly. I'd like to turn it over to my colleague from the New Democrats to ask questions.

Mr. Cardiff: I have a few questions for the minister and then we can move on. I'm going to roll a few questions up into my comments and then I'll sit back and let the minister answer them.

If the minister doesn't have the information at his fingertips, I would be more than happy to receive some of this information by legislative return at a future date -- hopefully before the end of the sitting.

I'd like to know what part of the mandate is to resolve existing and emerging housing needs of Yukon. What we hear is a big need -- and the minister has touched on this -- is the replacement of social housing units and the need for new social housing units. In the affordable housing agreement of October 2002 and subsequently in the amendments of November 5, 2004, there were provisions for the affordable housing dollars that flowed from the federal government to be invested in new rental social housing units.

First of all, I'd like the minister to provide at some point in time an accounting of where the affordable housing dollars received from the federal government were expended. There were projects that were talked about and never ever came to be. There were promises of rental housing in some projects that never came to be. Then there were new projects that came on, such as the athletes village and the student residence, that have some seniors housing and some social housing.

So I'd like an accounting of where those monies were expended and how much of that money was expended on new rental social housing units owned by the Yukon Housing Corporation. There is a mention in the annual report tabled yesterday of Yukon Housing Corporation's participation in the northern housing trust, which was \$50 million, \$32.5 million of

which is being distributed to Yukon First Nations to meet their housing needs in their communities. Because there is a mention of it, I'd like to know what Yukon Housing Corporation's role is in expending that \$17.5 million and what their priorities are for that \$17.5 million, should they have authority over where it goes and what types of housing units it is expended on, and the distribution of that money to communities other than Whitehorse.

As somebody who has worked in the construction industry, I pay fairly close attention to the type of thing the minister has mentioned and the questions about the green or super green home projects. I think it's a good idea. I think it's responsible both from an environmental, climate change perspective, and from the perspective of fiscal responsibility, but there are some other things that come into it. Number one is to ensure that the people who are buying those homes or who are in those homes understand how the mechanical systems in those homes work. I'm sorry for doing this, because I know I've done this before, but it is imperative that the homes are maintained properly so that they work efficiently and remain viable and healthy for people to live in.

There was also some mention of geothermal energy. I'd like to hear the minister's and the corporation's thoughts, not just on geothermal energy but also on district heating systems. The minister is talking about housing projects. If you have a housing project -- whether it's in Whitehorse or in a community -- when you are building houses, district heating systems actually make a lot of sense. It is basically heating more than one residence from one heating source, whether that's geothermal, whether it's solar, whether it's some sort of biomass heat generator, you know, solid fuel, wood, wood chip, or whatever. There has been talk recently in the City of Whitehorse about using geothermal energy for district heating systems. There have been district heating systems in the Yukon before, and they can be quite effective. I'd refer the minister to -- I believe it's in Okotoks, Alberta -- where there is a solar district heating system in a project.

I'll just ask the minister one more question. I would like to know what the Yukon Housing Corporation's role is regarding the provision of space for an emergency youth shelter. I will listen to what the minister's responses are to those questions and then I just have a couple more.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: That's quite a list, but I will try to go through it for the member opposite. If I miss one, it's not necessarily from lack of trying. I will see what I can do here.

I will talk about the affordable housing agreement first, because I made some notes on that and they percolated their way to the top.

The decisions on that have primarily come out of the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors. This is a board that is among the very best I have ever worked with. They are very good in terms of investing that funding for affordable housing in a really good and strategic way. There have been challenges with that, of course, because with the increase in property values and everything else, it has been a moving target all the way through. We try to do strategic investments that would assist Yukoners who experience affordability prob-

lems when obtaining appropriate housing that meets their needs.

I want to particularly compliment the Yukon Housing Corporation for deciding to seek out opportunities in rural Yukon, specifically the building of a new sixplex for seniors in Haines Junction. We are looking, as the member opposite knows, at the capability of adding another three or four apartments within that building. We are looking at that now.

Through the Canada-Yukon affordable housing agreement, Yukon was allocated \$5.8 million toward the construction and/or repair of affordable housing. Through the good work of the department, that was a matching grant. It came from the federal government and we had to match the amount of money. It is not a difficult thing in a big jurisdiction, but for us it was quite challenging. I think there was actually one Maritime province that couldn't match it and ended up with a huge number of problems.

Through the good work of the department, we actually got Copper Ridge to be accepted as part of that contribution, so we came out of that in pretty good shape.

To date the investments are -- and I can give the member the exact numbers -- \$3.5 million at the athletes building for seniors, and that does not include the building for Yukon College that we've turned over to them. That's the seniors complex, or another 48 rental units. In the end we put in \$172,500 for a private sector developer to build 23 affordable home ownership units in Falcon Ridge in Whitehorse. There was a rental component to that, but with the shifting value of real estate and everything else -- that was approved; it was done and it was a long, long time before the proponent actually withdrew from that project and decided not to take up the money. Through the board of directors, about \$1.8 million was flipped over to the Haines Junction building, and that's how we constructed that. We've got a little bit left out of that. The \$172,500 that did go into the construction in Falcon Ridge was the kick-start to build that whole project. Once the project was going, I think that was \$23 million for construction at the time. So that was \$172,500 to promote and bring about \$23 million, the vast majority of which was all Yukon contractors. I think that was a pretty good deal in the long run.

All units receiving funding are built to our green home standards and the accommodating home standards. The idea is that you do not necessarily build it so that it is totally seniors capable right now, but that it has the capability of doing that in the future. The units in Falcon Ridge for example are two-store. As people age in their home and stay, it gives them the ability for storage; it gives them the ability for a caretaker; it gives the ability for family or friends to visit. There are many different ways that you could utilize that. In fact, the stairwells were built to such a standard that chairlifts and this sort of thing could be put in for the seniors as well as fully handicap washrooms. The idea is aging in rental accommodation and not necessarily in a seniors complex.

We were also able to claim funds under the agreement for homes that received in excess of \$24,000 in funding under the corporation's home repair program, so we can dovetail a bit of that in. There's about \$325,000 now remaining in the agree-

ment and we're looking at options to that. They will be presented to the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors. If it wasn't done at last week's meeting, it will be at the next meeting.

Once a decision has been made by the corporation and the board, we'll follow the protocol agreement with Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for a joint news release. There are all sorts of requirements in that agreement to do it in conjunction with the feds. While that can be a pain in the neck when it's dealing with that kind of money, we're more than happy to smile and do it to get that money for our use.

That leaves us with, at present, an increase of 54 housing units available for social tenants, including in that the six in Haines Junction, which may or may not end up with social housing. We haven't finished it yet and don't have the people actually in it.

That's a quick look at that end of it.

In terms of the mission, the Member for Mayo-Tatchun put it succinctly that the whole reason for that is to provide social housing for Yukon people. That has broadened out into emerging issues, and the Member for Mount Lorne is quite right with that. With an aging population, we see an increase in seniors housing. We see an increase in aging-in-place policies -- they're not necessarily seniors now, but if we're going to build it, we don't want to build it in such a way that people would have to quickly move out, or move out in the long run.

We're looking at energy efficiencies; we're looking at green and super green; we're looking at upgrading existing places; we're looking at upgrading apartment buildings because they come into this -- and then flood relief. These are all parts of that.

In terms of the \$17.5 million for the housing trust, at this point we have no firm decisions on it. There are a number of things being looked at. There is a consultation out right now through the Women's Directorate that I'm sure the member is familiar with, and there will be other announcements hopefully coming in the next couple of weeks as the board accepts some of our proposals and comes up with a few of their own. We hope to have some good information on that soon.

The main thing right now is to do it and do it right. I think it goes back into the 1970s really when you started looking at some of the social housing. I am not a contractor, so I think the Member for Mount Lorne is more aware of this than I am. If you look at some of the buildings that were built in the 1950s or 1960s, besides being virtually historic, they were reasonably well built. You look at the ones that were put up quickly in the 1970s and they have aged beyond belief in some cases. So we have a huge problem coming up with that, and all these things have to be dovetailed.

In terms of geothermal, again it is not our mandate to be doing research on anything like this, but in subsidizing -- for instance geothermal -- under some of these programs as an option, particularly as an off-grid option, hopefully this will stimulate some of the people getting into this. This is what we are hoping for and I think that it will.

The district heating systems are good. I was sort of laughing while the member was speaking, because on one of my

trips for PNWER -- if I remember correctly it was in Boise, Idaho, but I might be screwing that one up -- we saw a district heating system that went up one road, and it heated all the homes all the way through there and some government buildings at the end of it. It really was quite funny, because everything was covered in snow and here is a perfectly bare and dry road that went right straight through town. That is what it was -- the district heating system.

We're not directly involved in that, but we would love to be. If a contractor or a developer wants to develop something like that, or a municipality wants to develop something like that, then we would jump in as a consultant and utilize everything we've got with our staff. But in terms of our mandate, no. I do agree; there is a lot of capability with that. We really deal with the individual homes; that is our main mandate. The expertise that is there is pretty amazing some days.

I am sort of touching on some of the other ones. With Falcon Ridge or any of these other ones, is there consumer education? Yes, absolutely. It's one of our big mandates, both in terms of what we construct or what other people construct. Even in terms of people listening who have a system and are not sure how it's functioning, please get in touch with the Yukon Housing Corporation because it's quite amazing what is available there for expertise. I had the good fortune to sit in on a discussion with one of our people who had come back from a housing conference. They wanted to go over what had happened at that conference. He could have gone on for another four hours. I was really quite fascinated with what is available if you only ask the question.

We are working with Health and Social Services to identify viable options for an emergency youth shelter. That's one of the things that is not within our mandate, but certainly we work with any of the groups. We'll do what we can and see how that develops. I have the feeling that it will develop in the near future. As of this point in time, it's simply a working relationship.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for his answers. He covered it off fairly well.

I just want to be clear that with the comments I made about the district heating system, I was suggesting -- though I didn't link it directly -- that one of the things the Yukon Housing Corporation does -- and it is something the minister has talked about -- is replace social housing. If these units are in such bad shape, I suspect that they are going to be torn down or removed and there will be a new housing project. Some of them may actually be fairly close to where we're standing right now. I don't know.

If it's a housing project where we are building social housing, I am suggesting that we could take the lead. If we are building to green home or super green home standards and the minister said you could heat it with a cat and the Member for Mayo-Tatchun suggested a candle -- all I'm suggesting is that the units share that cat or candle.

So that kind of clarifies that portion of my comments. I only have one other area that I'd like to question the minister on, and that is with regard to what is happening with the Whitehorse Housing Co-operative. The Whitehorse Housing

Co-op has been in receivership for approximately four years, I believe. They have been paying their bills and paying down their bills. It's my understanding that they are doing a good job of that. Even in the face of adversity and in the face of dealing with the Yukon Housing Corporation, they've proven that they can survive as a co-op. I believe that there is a will to survive in that community, and they want to take control of their own destiny.

It is also my understanding -- and we've talked about this before -- that there is a \$300,000 loan to deal with maintenance issues and that that offer is still on the table, as it was for the last two years or so from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and that there is a proposal on the table, as well, to limit or eliminate any liability for Yukon Housing Corporation or the taxpayers. I think the Yukon Housing Corporation needs to tread fairly carefully on this matter, because they are not only the receiver but should this end up in a default position, they would also be the beneficiary -- if it were to totally fail -- of the infrastructure. So there is a bit of a conflict. I have had to study this for awhile to come to these conclusions, but I think that the Yukon Housing Corporation needs to show some compassion and show some appreciation for the hard work of the individuals who are involved in the housing co-op.

Give them some answers and work with them to ensure the viability. I believe they are viable and I believe there are lots of people here in the Yukon, both in and out of government, who believe they are viable and that this is a good project. They need to be given a chance. I believe they have proven themselves on this.

The minister has spoken glowingly before of housing co-ops and how well they work in other communities. There's no reason why it can't work here in the Yukon. I hope the minister and the corporation will work positively with the Whitehorse Housing Co-operative.

I'd like to hear the minister's comments on that and what the corporation's position on that is and whether or not they will make some attempt to get this housing co-op out of receivership.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The member has hit on a really sticky problem. For the last three years, the board of directors of the Yukon Housing Corporation has worked with the administration of the Whitehorse Housing Co-operative. There was a request by the Whitehorse Housing Co-operative for an independent review by a third party regarding future options and for the management. The review is known at the Mintz report, which I've tabled in the House, and the member has a copy of it. It concluded the co-op has some serious viability problems. They made their recommendations, but the choice really isn't ours. I do have to stress that point.

We're still looking at this. It's not quite as simple as the member puts out but, again, it's not our choice to deal with. There is a \$295,000 existing debt for repairs, and there's a long story on that whole thing. The co-op actually consists of 12 single detached houses on Turner Crescent, and there's a blend of rent-geared-to-income tenants in there, as well as market rent tenants.

CMHC transferred the administration of the project to the Yukon Housing Corporation in October 1998 as part of that social housing transfer agreement, and then there were further problems.

The member is right that the stabilization fund seems to be prepared to provide a repayment of that \$295,000. The problem is, from that point on: is a good way to handle debt simply getting into more debt?

We're still looking at this. We're still going on. No decisions have been made, nor is it our place to really make that decision. We were appointed receivers by the court. Any decision comes out of the court, so the member's reference to a possible conflict is incorrect. There is nothing that we are going to do to put ourselves in conflict. We will do what the court orders us to do.

Chair: Is there any further general debate? Seeing none, we will proceed line by line.

Mr. Cardiff: I would request the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried

Chair: Mr. Cardiff has requested the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required. Are you agreed?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$908,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$1,210,000 agreed to

Yukon Housing Corporation agreed to

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

Recess

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

Department of Highways and Public Works -- *continued*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 8, *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Department of Highways and Public Works.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I'd like to open by thanking my department and the individuals who have come in the House with me, who do a stellar job working within the department and being in the House here to help answer pertinent questions that will be asked of the department. Of course, we're talking about Bill No. 8, *Second Appropriation Act, 2007-08* and the Department of Highways and Public Works.

Mr. Chair, the department does much more than contribute to the safe and efficient operation of the Yukon government, and at this point I would like to speak to the \$3.7-million increase in the Highways and Public Works operation and maintenance budget for this fiscal year by describing the important work that my department staff undertakes.

Highways and Public Works is one of the government's largest departments with close to 800 very dedicated employees. Close to 90 employees work in the corporate services branch. This includes finance, contract services, policy and communications, and information and communications technology program areas.

They provide support services to the Department of Highways and Public Works itself, as well as communication information, record management services, guidance for tendering and contracting advice, IT and telecommunications services and corporate infrastructure to all government departments.

This budget is looking for a \$144,000 increase to the O&M budget for corporate services, primarily due to a collective agreement increase. There are 47 employees working in the supply service branch. They successfully deliver cost-effective, accessible, logistical support through the provision of services related to material management, air and ground transportation, mail delivery and publishing.

Two dozen employees work in the human resources branch. They provide staffing and human resources support across the department in these times of changing demographics and worker shortages. These hard-working people are doing their best to maintain the department's staffing levels.

The Property Management Agency has over 250 employees working in virtually every Yukon community. PMA staff manages facilities that will provide affordable, appropriate and safe accommodation for government and publicly funded agency programs and activities. There is an increase of over \$600,000 in this supplementary budget allocated for building maintenance in various buildings, including space planning, cooling systems, roof repair, fire alarm system replacement and front access drainage pavement.

The transportation division has the greatest number of employees in the department. Close to 450 staff spread throughout the territory develop and maintain our transportation infrastructure that all Yukoners rely on. This industrious group manages over 5,000 kilometres of road, 129 maintained and inspected bridges as well as 299 large culverts. They operate two ferries. There is one international and two regional airports, 10 community, and 16 airstrips in Yukon. There are 21 maintenance camps and two year-round, fully staffed weigh stations as well as two periodically, partially staffed weigh stations.

The Department of Highways and Public Works has a large and diverse mandate. We're fortunate that Yukon has always drawn unique, talented and skilled people from a variety of places and fields of endeavour, and my department is fortunate to employ many, many of them. It was this collection of devoted and enthusiastic staff who, along with many others, lent their time and effort to assist with the flood issues in the Marsh Lake region earlier this year.

In closing, Mr. Chair, I would like to reiterate this department's commitment to providing safe and sustainable infrastructure to be used and enjoyed by all in the territory. We will strategically prioritize management of government infrastructure continue forward movement in dealing with climate change and its impact on our infrastructure. There is an overall commitment by me and the entire department to improve services and economic growth.

I would be pleased to now answer any questions that members may have on the Highways and Public Works budget.

Mr. McRobb: I don't see any other members standing besides the minister and me, so I'll proceed. I'll continue from where we started on Tuesday afternoon. This is the second part of this debate. It's the first time I've had an opportunity to stand and ask a question.

I would like to start by following up on the bridge inspection issue. As the minister indicated on Tuesday, in light of recent accidents back east and, of course, the one in Minneapolis, this has drawn a lot of concern. Has the government undertaken a bridge inspection of all bridges across the territory, including secondary roads? When was that done? Could we get a copy of the report along with the findings?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We do a routine inspection of all bridges every two years. We expect to table here in the House a bridge inspection overview in the spring sitting.

Mr. McRobb: Okay. I guess I'll have to settle for that although it would be nice to have it sooner than what is probably going to be at the end of the spring sitting. If the government is going to be held accountable on this issue of ensuring that our bridges are safe, then it has to be open to questions. For that to happen, we on the opposition side need the information on what the inspectors find. We're in a fall sitting right now. If we don't get that information until the end of the spring sitting, then the soonest we can ask -- based on the information -- is a year from now. I suggest that it's not a very high level of accountability if that is going to happen.

I want to ask the minister about the Campbell Highway spending. Can he give a breakdown of how that large sum of money that was announced will be spent? Which areas will be upgraded?

Hon. Mr. Lang: On the bridge situation, we are committed as a government to maintaining our bridges. We have in the past and we will in the future. There is a routine of inspection. It's done every second year. We're committed to put out a report. It will be tabled here in the spring, hopefully. We're doing exactly what the public expects us to do. We're maintaining the bridges at a very high level.

On the north highway, we're actually replacing bridges. We're re-decking bridges on the Alaska Highway. We're very concerned that our bridges pass the test and they're safe for the general public.

As far as the Campbell Highway is concerned, I'm happy to announce that this government will invest \$31 million over the next three years to bring sections of the Campbell Highway to a standard that Yukoners have grown to expect on our main highway corridors. Another commitment we made was the BST program between Faro and Carmacks. So those kinds of

improvements will be made on that end of the Campbell Highway. In 2008 we're going to reconstruct from kilometre 12 to kilometre 17 north of the airport in Watson Lake, from kilometre 31 to kilometre 32 at Tom Creek, and from kilometre 107 to kilometre 104, which is north of there.

Mr. McRobb: That would be in the Tuchtua area, Mr. Chair. All right.

Is it possible to get a timeline and project cost breakdown for the Campbell Highway improvement?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the member opposite, we certainly are committed as a government on this project to move forward as quickly as we possibly can on bidding the job out. But we have to work on the design and the details of that, and that is part and parcel of the good work that is done internally in the government. We're working on that at the moment, and we certainly have committed the resources to invest in that highway.

Again, internally with the Auditor General and our process, there is a process for how this unfolds, and it will unfold and we will hopefully get the bid papers out as soon as possible in the new year.

Mr. McRobb: I asked the minister for a timeline for the project expenditures, and I expected to hear from him something to the effect of -- well, first of all, that he would provide us with a timeline. Having it in writing would perhaps be the most expeditious way to satisfy my question. I would expect it to include a breakdown -- let's use the example of engineering costs in 2008-09 for a particular section, perhaps some preliminary construction work in a section and so on from the beginning to the end of the project. This is normal information that could be expected.

It's a major expenditure in terms of public money -- \$31 million, Mr. Chair. That's equivalent to about one-third of our surplus. It's a lot of money. I'm just asking for some information in order to hold the government accountable on how the money is spent in future years. Can he provide us with the information requested? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We have committed a \$31 million investment on the Campbell Highway over the next three years. We are going to work to do exactly that. The government is going to work with the process we have in-house to get the bids out as quickly as possible. We have three seasons to do the job and hopefully we can get all the work done in that 36-month period.

Mr. McRobb: We're not off to a very good start. Let's just review where we are so far after barely 10 minutes. We know a bridge inspection study was done. We won't get the report in time. The soonest we can get it is so that we can ask questions one year from now.

On this major expenditure of upgrading the Campbell Highway, the minister refuses to provide very normal information. He struck out on both questions so far. This doesn't say much about the level of accountability of this Yukon Party government in this Legislature.

I want to ask him about the north Klondike Highway. A number of upgrade projects have been identified on the highway between Whitehorse and Dawson City that are needed for

reasons of public safety, for one. I would like to know if this \$31-million expenditure on the Campbell Highway will compromise the ability of the government to proceed with improvements on the north Klondike Highway?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I think the member opposite is getting mixed up in how government works. We have committed \$31 million to improve the Campbell Highway. That money is new money that is going to be put in place. We will be maintaining all of our 5,000 kilometres of road to the same standard we do today, with the improvements worked into that. We will also be maintaining our 129 bridges. We will have a report there, which is being put together so that we can do an overview of our bridges in terms of their lifespan and go forward with a projected plan for managing those investments.

We also have 299 large culverts. They will be maintained to the standard they are today. I imagine in the process that there are probably budgetary resources to replace some of those culverts. The two ferries will be maintained at the level they are now. Money will not be taken from any part of the transport for the capital investment in our highway system. Our international airport, our two regional airports, 10 community and 16 airstrips, will be maintained, Mr. Chair, at the high level they are today. Of course, we have weigh stations and they will be maintained and staffed at that level. So no part of the Department of Highways and Public Works will suffer because of the investment this government is putting into the Campbell Highway.

The \$31 million -- I make it clear, Mr. Chair, for the member opposite -- is an investment in that infrastructure on the Campbell Highway. All of the roads and all of the infrastructure that we maintain on a daily basis -- and I listed them five minutes ago -- the many miles of road, 5,000 kilometres of road, that are being maintained by this government, will continue to be maintained and, where needed, will be improved on, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McRobb: In the interests of time, I won't bother responding to everything the minister said. Let's go to the Dawson City ferry, because he mentioned ferries. How much longer will this ferry be in operation?

Hon. Mr. Lang: There is no timeline on the ferries. They are inspected on a yearly basis by the Canadian Coast Guard. As long as they continue to be needed and they continue to pass that scrutiny every year, they will continue in service until they are not needed any more.

Mr. McRobb: We could have assumed that to be the case. I was hoping the minister would take the question in the context of when the ferry would be discontinued because the government had proceeded with a Dawson City bridge.

To refresh the minister's memory, when we discussed this matter in the spring, he did reiterate this government's earlier election promise to commence construction on the bridge.

So, once again, how much longer does the minister expect the ferry to continue to be in service before the bridge is built?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The ferry will be in place until the ferry is not needed. It will be maintained at the level it has to be kept at for the safety of the travelling public. It is inspected, independent of us, every year by the Canadian Coast Guard.

They go through the ferry thoroughly to make sure it's up to the standards acceptable in Canada today.

The ferry is in place; it will continue to be in place; it will be maintained; it will be inspected on a yearly basis.

Mr. McRobb: Let's approach this from a different angle. In what year does the minister expect the Dawson City bridge project to be completed and open for service to the public?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The bridge in Dawson City has been talked about since the 1960s. Many governments have approached it and looked at the project. To this point, no bridge has been built across the Yukon River at Dawson.

For me to stand in the House and give dates would be irresponsible. The ferry is in place; it will continue to be in place until such a time as the ferry is not needed.

Again, I will state that the ferry is inspected on a yearly basis by the Coast Guard -- both ferries, Ross River and Dawson. As far as the Ross River ferry, it will continue in place until such a time as that ferry either doesn't pass the inspection or is not needed any more.

That's the long and the short of it, Mr. Chair. There is a ferry in Dawson; it's being used on a seasonal basis for access to the Top of the World Highway. There's a ferry in Ross River that is being used on a seasonal basis so individuals can access the North Canol.

Those ferries are inspected on a yearly basis and they will be left in place until such time as they're replaced by new ferries or they're not needed any more.

Mr. McRobb: If it's irresponsible for the minister to identify the year in which he anticipates one of the major Yukon Party promises to come into effect, then whose responsibility is it? Somebody who works on the ferry? The minister ought to recognize he does have a responsibility to inform the public about these types of matters.

I want to ask him now about a project I raised with him in the spring and that was a possible highway improvement project to four-lane the Alaska Highway between the Carcross Cutoff and the Mayo Cutoff. Can he indicate if he has considered this proposal and give us an estimated cost for it?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The department is aware of the traffic flow between the Carcross Road turnoff and Whitehorse at certain hours of the day. We have done some improvements on that stretch of highway. We are doing the work that we have to do to assess it and we will keep abreast of it and, as the volume builds up and we can see that the numbers warrant the investment, this government would invest in that kind of infrastructure.

Mr. McRobb: So the minister can't give us an estimated cost of that upgrade. He can't tell us when the bridge over the Yukon River at Dawson City would be constructed. He can't tell us what the bridge inspection report says, even though the work was done. He can't tell us what the timeline is for the Campbell Highway spending. I'm beginning to wonder whether this exercise is futile, because we're not getting any information from the minister at all. It's quite frustrating.

Let's ask him a few questions about the Shakwak highway improvement project. As you may be aware, this is about a

half-billion dollar project upon its completion. It was paid for in its entirety by the U.S. taxpayers. Its main component, the road construction between the border on the Haines Road and the border on the north Alaska Highway, is almost complete. There are just a couple of bridge projects left to finish and then possibly some paving and resurfacing, and that's about it.

First of all, I would like to ask what impact the high Canadian dollar has had on funds for this project.

Hon. Mr. Lang: The high Canadian dollar does have an impact. It has an exchange impact on the contracting procedures, so there is some impact on that kind of agreement.

Mr. McRobb: All right, Mr. Chair, I would appreciate if the minister could give an equivalent dollar amount, for instance, for this budget year, of what that impact is.

I would like to ask him about the remaining bridges that will be constructed and ask him the order in which he believes they will be constructed.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Because of the fluctuation of the dollar and the exchange rate, I can't give him that figure here today, but there is a definite fluctuation between when we receive the money and when the bills are paid. All those things are dealt with on an exchange rate. As I said to the member opposite, there is an impact. It impacts the Shakwak project, because the exchange rate is a very important part of the financial picture in Canada, whether we are looking at the car industry in Ontario, the manufacturing or dairy industries in Quebec, the berry industry in southern B.C. or the fruit industry. All these people are impacted by the exchange rate. It is part of the responsibility of the government to manage that and work within those figures, resolve it and go forward with the Shakwak project.

Mr. McRobb: Well, Mr. Chair, I asked the minister for an estimate of the impact of the exchange rate on this year's spending. Now, Mr. Chair, most of the spending for this year has already been incurred. There are only basically four months left in this year and they are winter months when very little work will be done and very few expenditures will be made on this project. So in terms of the fiscal year, the impact is probably known to about 95 percent at this point in time, yet the minister is unable to give an answer. So there is another example.

Further, he didn't answer the question about the order in which the bridges will be built. So I'll give him a second chance to do that.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I remind the member opposite that the exchange rate is part and parcel of the Shakwak project and there is certainly some impact when that exchange rate fluctuates. There are contracts that are extended. The Donjek River bridge is an example. Part of that contract is to tear down the existing old bridge. Well, again, there is an example of contracts that are being continued.

When the member talks about the Shakwak project and when things are done and when things are shut down -- certainly the road construction has been discontinued for the year, but we're looking at the Donjek River bridge to be torn down, which would be an ideal project for the winter because they would have to work off the ice surface. We're looking forward to moving forward on the Duke River bridge. That will com-

mence later in the winter of 2007-08, commencing with a detour bridge and river channel work. That is ongoing. Foundation work for the new bridge will start early in the spring of 2008. The new bridge is expected to be completed in October 2008.

The next thing is the Slims River bridge -- all part of the Shakwak project, Mr. Chair. Construction of the Slims River bridge is also in the design stage and construction is planned for the year 2009.

We are moving forward. The Shakwak project is moving forward. I would like to thank the Government of Alaska for its support. It works with us in Washington to free up the funds to do this project. It's very important that we thank the American people who contribute to this and have done so for the last 20 years. It is a very large amount of money that, in our small jurisdiction, would not otherwise be available to us to do the work on the north highway. It's commendable of the Americans. I look forward to working with Alaska and the American government on finishing this bridge that is a part of the Shakwak project.

We are also looking at the north section, in conjunction with universities, to see how we can combat the permafrost issue that has been a challenge for us. The Americans are very positive on working with us to see if we can mitigate that issue and bring that highway up to a safer and better standard than it is today. That work is ongoing, and I am looking forward to having it finalized in the next four or five years. There is science out there that would work in that area, and it certainly is an issue that we as a department are concerned about. I look forward to it. Laval University is doing the work. We are working with them to bring something into place that would mitigate that issue. It is a continual challenge to maintain it on a yearly basis.

Mr. McRobb: The next question I am going to ask the minister came from several people in the area, either working on the Shakwak project or people living in the area.

Why isn't the Slims River bridge being constructed first, since the road construction is right there? It would seem to save needless expense jockeying around the approaches to the bridge if it were all just done at once. Can he give a viable response to that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: That's a management decision. I think the management decision involves how much work you want done in one specific spot. Remember, Mr. Chair, we only have 190 days a year where we can really do this kind of work. It is inconvenient for the travelling public, so we try to spread it out to try to minimize the impact on our tourists and residents.

So the Slims River bridge will come last, because if we were to do it now it would have a very concentrated construction area, so by doing it this way, we minimize the impact on the travelling public.

Mr. McRobb: Okay, I think that point is debatable, but I won't do it here and now.

I want to ask the minister about the Haines Junction intersection project that was stalled last spring. The minister identified it in his opening remarks for the mains budget. I got up and asked him if he was aware that it had been set back from this

year, and he didn't really respond or seem to know about that. Obviously, now it has been.

Can the minister let us know when that project will proceed? Will it be a revote in next year's budget? What's the scoop?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In answer to the member opposite's questions regarding the Slims River bridge, and the investment in the Duke River bridge, and the timing and everything, we as government leave that up to the experts on the ground. I know the member opposite is an expert on bridge building, and I appreciate that, but I'll leave the decision making to the people we hire, and those who work in the department who can do the job on the ground. I think that to second-guess them is very unfair to the department.

The department does an excellent job making decisions like this, and I will leave those decisions at that level. For me to stand up and debate whether the Slims River bridge should be built this summer or next summer would be a waste of time for the member opposite and for me, because I don't think, between the two of us, we have the expertise to make that kind of decision.

As far as Haines Junction is concerned, we're working with the community consultation and, after we go through that, there will be some decisions that come out of that. We look forward to that being resolved and working with the community as we do the consultation and hopefully moving forward in the near future.

Mr. McRobb: If we're going to have any semblance of constructiveness in this discussion, we've got to listen to what each other has to say. I clearly indicated I would not enter into a debate on the order of the bridges, yet we saw the minister stand up and continue to advance arguments that he wants to make about the order of the construction. Had I decided there was time to enter that debate, I would have given that signal, but the opposite signal was sent. I would encourage the minister to attempt to be a little more constructive in debate.

He didn't give a date for the commencement of the Haines Junction intersection project. I asked him that in the last question. I would like him to revisit that question and also ask if he could send over a copy of the plan for the intersection project so we can take a look at it.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I would recommend to the member opposite, regarding the bridge decision-making process, that this is not the place to bring out plans to critique them and make decisions. This is the place to debate the policy and how we move forward with the department.

The department is tasked with doing the job. I told the member opposite I do not know the date when it will start because the process hasn't finished. We are still in the consultation, working with the municipality and working very positively in the community to resolve these issues. For me to stand up and give a date would be irresponsible and would be short-circuiting the process that we have in place.

The member opposite would not be happy if I brought up a date and that date was not met because of municipal or consultation questions. We're doing the process that we committed to do; we'll work with the community; we'll work with the mu-

nicipality; and we will resolve the issue about the junction in Haines Junction in a timely fashion.

Mr. McRobb: What are we going to do? Back in the spring, the minister clearly said the project would be completed in the summer of 2007. Essentially, he gave a date. Now he's saying it's irresponsible for him to give a date some six months later -- make sense out of that.

He refused to provide us with a copy of the information provided to the community -- for the record, just to clarify that. Can he tell us what the plan is for improvements immediately west of that same intersection?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I've tried to work with the member opposite but he's not very positive. That is very disappointing because we could have a positive discussion here this afternoon but, from my side, being the government, we have to deal with facts and the facts are that we're in a process that we committed to do -- working with the community and the municipality to resolve the issues internally so we can move forward with a plan on how to answer the questions about that situation in Haines Junction.

So, in answering the member opposite, we are working with the community on the other question, which is: what will happen west on the road? That's another issue we're working on with the municipality. Those are some of the investments this government will make in our highway system -- not part of the Campbell Highway budget, not part of the \$31 million. We're not taking money from other projects; we're moving ahead with managing exactly what the member opposite has been talking about, but we're going to do it in a very structured way.

Part of that is working with the municipality and working in consultation and resolving the issues that arise. We look forward to all that being resolved so we can put the plan together to move forward.

Mr. McRobb: All right, again he has refused to provide us with a copy of the information about these improvements planned just west of that intersection in Haines Junction. One question is: are they all Shakwak related expenditures? In other words, are the costs paid for by Uncle Sam or does it come out of the other highway capital budget that competes with other projects such as improvements to the Campbell Highway or Klondike Highway and so on. So the minister needs to explain who is ultimately paying for those improvements and whether he would be willing to send us over proposals made by the department to the communities so that we can be apprised of what is going on.

Now I want to ask him the final related question. This past summer, several new street lights were installed along that same section just west of the intersection, and it was brought to my attention that during the construction there were several residents along that section who were concerned about it. The gist of their letters and complaints were that they felt they should have been consulted before those street lights were put in. I looked into it a little bit and one of the major concerns was the brightness of the lights. They felt it was disturbing their privacy and so on. I know he consulted with the local village council, but I would like to know if he or someone in the de-

partment consulted with the property owners along the section of road affected.

Hon. Mr. Lang: That's where the member's argument falls off the track. We did consult. The lights were all part and parcel of a decision by the municipality and we worked with that municipality to put those improvements in place. So we followed the instructions of the community, the wishes of the community, and we did the work assigned to us.

As far as the roads are concerned, all roadwork in the Haines Junction area on the major thoroughfare -- in other words, the Haines Road and Alaska Highway -- are covered by Shakwak. There is a paving program going ahead. Hopefully the junction itself will be addressed. There will be improvements in the area. Once we are done with our consultation and working with the community, we certainly look forward to moving ahead with that.

Mr. McRobb: So, for the record, the minister is off-loading the responsibility for consultation on to the local level of government. He has refused to provide us with the information on the department's proposals with respect to these highway improvements.

I would like to ask him about something else he mentioned, which is the permafrost distress project. It was a collaborative effort with the university to examine the extent of permafrost degradation on the north Alaska Highway as part of the Shakwak highway improvement project. It is my understanding from talking to some of the people working on that project that they have identified slumpage in the highway bed in the magnitude, in some cases, ranging between one and three metres. Three metres is about 10 feet. That is an astounding amount of slumpage in a highway bed.

I would like the minister to confirm or deny these figures and indicate what we can expect next in terms of the results of this project. When will they be revealed?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I would like to correct the member opposite about his comments about the community. In the communities, we always consult with the government of the community. That's how the process works. Individuals have access to their own community government. We, as the territorial government, consult with the community government. In the community of Haines Junction, we work with the community government when working on improvements together.

As far as the north highway, as I mentioned to the member opposite, it's a work-in-progress. We are working with our partners on the Shakwak project and with the university to address some of these issues. Some of these issues will take a longer period of time, I imagine, but we are concerned with them, as the travelling public is. The university is doing its work and hopefully we can resolve some of these issues.

Mr. McRobb: For the record, another non-answer from the Minister of Highways and Public Works.

I would like to ask him now about this year's rip and re-shape program on the north Alaska Highway. I presume the minister should be familiar with this. Basically, a couple million dollars have been allocated each year for several years now. I believe the figure for this year was even higher, closer to \$3 million.

Can he indicate how much was spent on the rip and re-shape on the north Alaska Highway this year and identify any stretches of road that were resurfaced?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We've come here to debate this supplementary that we have in front of us today. We don't have information that was in the mains. The member opposite would best save that question for the next budget cycle.

Mr. McRobb: I see my colleague from Mount Lorne is just as frustrated at these non-answers as I am.

Mr. Chair, this is unbelievable. I'm going to ask this again because I really think the minister should think twice about refusing to answer that question, as he should about every question, but this one in particular. I'm asking him how much was spent this fiscal year on the rip and reshape on the north Alaska Highway. Can he answer that question?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I don't have those figures today, because I remind the member opposite we're in the supplementary budget here and of course my capable help here brought pertinent information for this. We don't have those kinds of figures at our fingertips today.

Mr. McRobb: Why not? This is a question that has been asked before. It's asked pretty well on an annual basis. We're in the Department of Highways and Public Works. It's a major expenditure -- several million dollars, at least \$2 million -- and the minister doesn't know. There is no undertaking from him to provide that information to us. That's what the instrument called a legislative return is all about. Before moving off that one, I want to ask the minister if he would agree to provide a legislative return to give us that information requested.

Now I want to turn to the issue of the speed plows. You might recall there was some debate earlier in this sitting, and it appears the position of the government was that these plows only do the shoulder of the road and only in late winter. That's not what I've been told. That's not what I've seen. In fact, let me explain what I've seen. When there is a heavy snowfall, those plows could be out there in early fall, because the underbelly plow can't handle snow deeper than about four inches. So these plows do the whole road and they do it possibly in early winter, in the fall as well. Yet the minister's position was they're not needed and that, he thought, bought him time in being so late to get this vital equipment into operation.

So, what is the minister's response to the use of these speed plows? Is he going to stick to the line that they're only used later in winter and only on the shoulders? Or is he going to accept reality and admit they are used for the whole highway in times when we get dumped on?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The member opposite is not only a bridge expert he is now a plow-truck expert. Isn't that interesting, Mr. Chair, micromanaging a department from the floor of this House: second-guessing the safety individuals we have in place; second-guessing the individuals we have who manage the infrastructure for this great territory on a daily basis. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should be ashamed. The people who work in our department on a daily basis --

Chair's statement

Chair: Order please. I'd like to remind members not to personalize the debate. The Chair feels that "ashamed" might not be appropriate language to be used in this Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, we have individuals in place who make those management decisions in a timely fashion. I'm not prepared, as the minister, to involve myself in the day-to-day management of the plow-trucks or second-guess our engineering staff on the safety of our bridges. I depend on them for the advice that they give this government and I trust that advice and I will move forward with that advice.

For the member opposite to get involved in the daily operation -- of the graders that we have, the trucks that we have, or the management of the staff -- does a disservice to the people we have hired who do a stellar job on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

So, Mr. Chair, I will not as Minister of Highways and Public Works instruct the department on anything to do with managing a plow-truck; whether it is to pick the person who is driving the truck or when and if they put the blade down.

The department does a fine job of that on their own. In my job as minister, Mr. Speaker -- and maybe the Member for Kluane doesn't understand what a minister does -- I at no time get involved with those kinds of issues on a daily basis. So, Mr. Chair, let's move on with the questions. Let's move off personnel questions about our staff, our capable staff, and let's get this department through.

Mr. McRobb: This is about public policy with respect to road safety, and it deals directly with the lack of political will from this Yukon Party government. These are not operational issues -- I'm not asking who is driving the speed plows. My question pertains merely to whether they were in service and what they are being used for.

Anyway, I can see it's pointless to ask any questions, but I have a few more. There is also an issue about the use of salt brine. I know the minister is going to get up and repeat what he just said, but again there is a policy issue here and it pertains to public safety. I'm aware that there have been several accidents -- even the RCMP has pointed the finger at the use of salt brine as the cause.

There is also an issue about government expenditures due to the high corrosion of equipment, and there is the aspect of corrosion to equipment used by the public and by trucking companies -- whoever drives on our highways.

I want to ask the minister: does the government still have a policy to use salt brine on the highways, or has it been suspended or shelved or what? What's the scoop?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Again, Mr. Chair, I have to deal with facts on this side. I have to be responsible for what I say, and that's how governments manage the public interest. I'll inform the member opposite that he is wrong on all counts with what he has said in the last two or three minutes.

That again is a management issue. It's done internally, and those decisions are made by the capable staff in the Department of Highways and Public Works, and I will leave it in their capable hands.

Mr. McRobb: When I asked about contaminated soil, especially at many of the highway maintenance camps that are owned and operated by the Government of Yukon, can he indicate which highway camps have contaminated soil and what is being done about it?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We are doing an assessment as a department. We are going through phase 1. That entails looking at known issues that are at our grader stations and managing them. We are committed to resolving any issues we have on the ground as far as environmental problems are concerned. We are moving forward with that.

Mr. McRobb: I would like to request more detail. Can the minister provide a legislative return that identifies which properties are contaminated and an appraised extent of the contamination, along with the estimated cost of reclamation? Also, can he provide a date by which this work can be expected to be carried out?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The work is being carried out, as I said, on a phase 1 basis. We are moving forward with exactly what the member is asking about. As budgets allow, part of that budget will be assigned for the cleanup. We will be doing it over a period of time, because we have a large investment out there on government property. The Department of Highways and Public Works has grader stations and investments. There are issues out there that need more immediate service. We are committed to doing that.

Mr. McRobb: For the record, this is another request denied by this Yukon Party government.

Now when the Fleet Vehicle Agency brought in low-emission vehicles several years ago, there was a review of the cost-effectiveness that was promised at the five-year mark. I believe we're very close to that or it might have already been past. Can the minister indicate or give us a progress update on that review and when it's expected to be released?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the environmental issues, I'd like to put on the floor that environmental cleanups on the sites invariably take more than one year. It is quite an extensive process, so it's not an issue where one day it's there and one day it's gone. It's a thing that would be over a period of time and we would work on it so as to work with the issue on the ground.

As far as the overview of the Fleet Vehicle Agency, I would have to take that under advisement. I would get an answer back to the member. I'm not aware of when it's done or if it's done at this moment.

Mr. McRobb: Well, of course it's over a period of a number of years. That was reflected in the question. The minister still refuses to provide us with the information requested.

Let's go now to the Property Management Agency. Can he give us an update on the master space plan? While he's on his feet, can he indicate how many of the current building projects are running overbudget?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the space plan, we have moved forward with that master space plan. We look forward to that being completed early in 2008, so we're looking forward to it being in front of us in the next six months.

Mr. McRobb: I asked the minister another question: whether or not he can indicate how many of the current building projects are running over budget. We didn't get a response. Can we get one to that question now?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I don't deal with those on a daily basis and we deal with them on variances. To address that question, I as minister don't see that on a daily basis. We deal with that on variances.

Mr. McRobb: Can we perhaps get the information sent over? Does the minister want to sweep it under the rug and hope that we just forget about it until next spring? Is that his plan?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I will repeat for the member opposite that I don't deal with that on a daily basis. We deal with it on variances. That's how the government operates. That's how we address those issues.

Mr. McRobb: I've just been reminded: I've reached the point of resolving that this exercise is futile, as I have in previous sittings. I've just had enough. I feel that my questions are legitimate. They are questions the public wants to know. They are questions that we want to know. They are requests for information that we feel is necessary to know in order to bring the government to some account, yet virtually every one of the questions asked are either operational or the minister doesn't have an answer or he indicates that, at some future time, they may be available. Well, Mr. Chair, I will just conclude by saying, what's the use. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I am very disappointed with the member opposite. We are open and transparent as a government and we are here to answer questions. I am not going to debate on a management level about how we handle the graders, man the plow trucks or other such issues. That is not up to me as a minister to do in this House. I leave that up to the capable individuals who run the Department of Highways and Public Works. I trust that they will make those kinds of decisions. They have in the past and will in the future.

I am disappointed with the member opposite but, as the Minister of Highways and Public Works, I have worked with the member opposite and that's how it goes.

As a government, we're committed to working with the individuals across the floor. But I'm limited to what I can say. I can't manage the graders from here. I can't issue orders from the House here as to when the blades are going to be dropped. I can't hire people from in here, and I hope that no government is allowed to do that. That's not our job.

Our job here is to answer the pertinent questions at the level we can answer them. If the member has an issue with members in the Department of Highways and Public Works, I would take that kind of information, direct it to people able to answer the questions and move on.

If the member has problems with the lights in Haines Junction, that is a municipal thing. We work with municipalities. To have that member stand up and say that we didn't consult -- well, we don't consult in a municipality. We leave that up to the community. Those are responsibilities of the community. We have been working with that community, and we have been

following instructions, and we have been investing in that community.

So, as far as the member opposite saying that we don't consult, let's get the facts on the table. That, again, is what government has to do -- we have to be factual. I can't answer questions on a managerial level on the Department of Highways and Public Works. Half of the questions the member opposite asked today had to do with the management of equipment and assets of the government. That's not my job as the minister.

So, when the member opposite says we're not answering questions, I'm not prepared to answer questions from a management point of view, nor am I here to talk about individuals who work for the department, nor do I think anyone in here should point fingers at individuals.

The Department of Highways and Public Works, regardless of what the member opposite thinks, runs a very efficient organization. Again I remind the member opposite that they maintain 5,000 kilometres of highway. They maintain 129 bridges and 299 huge culverts. We run an airport system in the territory. All of that is done in the department.

They do a very good job of maintaining our highways. I utilize the highways on a daily basis. I travel throughout the Yukon. We can go from the B.C. border to Inuvik. We can go to Skagway on a daily basis. In the summer we can go to the Northwest Territories on the Canol Road. All of that is being maintained on a daily basis by this very efficient organization. I'm not prepared, regardless of what the Member for Kluane insinuates, to manage the day-to-day operation of the Department of Highways and Public Works on the floor of this House. That's not my job as minister and I'm not prepared to be baited or anything else to answer questions that pertain to management of the department.

The department will manage the salt on the highways. The department will manage the bridges. They will man our graders. The safety issues are out there. We have very capable people to manage the safety issue and I will leave that with the experts. As we travel through this territory there is a lot of expertise in the Department of Highways and Public Works and they do a stellar job on a daily basis.

Mr. Chair, the member opposite is disappointed and I'm disappointed with his questions. That member has been in this House for 10 to 12 years. He understands the nature of what our job is. We're not here to point out individual faults. We're not here to meddle in the salt management of the Alaska Highway. Why would we sit here in the House and waste our good time debating what kind of rock salt they are using on our highway system or who is driving what grader or when the blades are allowed to go on the plow trucks -- and that's an issue, Mr. Chair? Let's bring this debate up to a higher level, Mr. Chair, where it should be.

Mr. Cardiff: I'll agree with one thing the minister said this afternoon and that is about being open and transparent, because he's so transparent, you can see right through.

Chair's statement

Chair: Order please. I have left a lot of leeway for the personal comments today. I feel that they have definitely be-

come extremely personal. I would like to remind members not to personalize debate.

Mr. Cardiff: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to take a little different approach and I apologize if that offended the minister. I want to start with something a little different from Highways and Public Works and that's some of the legislative responsibilities of the minister. In the spring sitting, we were informed that there was a working group on a consultation plan to address changes to the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Could the minister update us on where we are on that? I haven't heard or seen any advertisements in the paper regarding public consultation, which the minister is really fond of -- ensuring that there's consultation. Could he update us on when the public consultations on revisions to that act will begin?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We're just in the process and we haven't got timelines on when we're going to go out to the public. That would be part and parcel of this ATIPP process. We're doing some internal work at the moment and next would be the consultation.

Mr. Cardiff: The minister was disappointed in some of the questions, but we're already getting disappointed by the answers. During the briefings during the spring sitting -- we came back here in April, so that leaves May, June, July, August, September, October and November; it has been seven months -- they were working on a consultation plan. That's what we were told. This is important. The former Privacy Commissioner made recommendations on this since 2004. The minister is obviously dragging his feet on this one.

There was some talk of other changes to legislation. We see that there was a proposal for the *Motor Transport Act* to be repealed and we see that is happening. It was very tough for the minister to get that one done. There was some discussion about the possibility of an airport act review. I am wondering if there are any discussions around that or any other pieces of legislation that the department has in the works.

Hon. Mr. Lang: In terms of the airport act, it is in process, so it has gone through the Legislative Overview Committee. They are waiting for decisions on that. It's being looked at and we are waiting for direction.

Mr. Cardiff: I would like to see if I can set some ground rules with the minister for the remainder of the afternoon. I would be interested in receiving any of the information, as I know my colleague from Kluane would as well, by legislative return. Earlier, the minister said that he didn't want to get into operational issues, but that he could direct those questions to the appropriate personnel in his department for those answers. I would like to start by asking the minister if he would commit to doing his best to provide legislative returns, either during this sitting or shortly following its conclusion, to provide that information to the members on this side of the House when he doesn't have it at his fingertips.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I will work with the members opposite in a positive way and I can hopefully address the concerns of the member, as the questions are asked. So, ask the questions and we'll see where we go.

Mr. Cardiff: The minister didn't answer the question. The question was: would he commit to providing legislative returns or information that he doesn't have available at his fingertips during the legislative sitting, or shortly afterward, if possible? Will he commit to doing that if he doesn't have the information available?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I think we should proceed with the questions. I'm not going to commit to doing something when I don't know what the question is, and I'm not going to task the department to do things we could answer and address in the House. I have two capable people here with me, and we have 15 more minutes to address these questions, so let's have questions and I will answer them.

Mr. Cardiff: I hope the Minister of Community Services could help the Minister of Highways and Public Works, because I believe the Minister of Community Services has provided two legislative returns in this Assembly in this week alone. Maybe he can help the Minister of Highways and Public Works on this project.

It's amazing. At least we know there are two competent people on that side of the House -- and the minister admitted to that.

I wrote the minister earlier this year and received a reply. I'd like to know what's happening regarding the Whitehorse Airport terminal project. We were promised information in the spring regarding the various phases. It appears that there were some problems with meeting the needs of the Canadian Border Services Agency. Can the minister update us on when we might see ground broken on this project?

There were some tenders for schematic design issued last year and we've seen the parking lot project get underway, but I'd also like to receive that information that was promised this spring regarding the various phases -- a little more detailed than what is in the response that he provided in September.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Regarding the airport and the investment this government is making in the airport, we certainly have worked on the parking lot, which is quite obvious. That investment has been made and it will be finished this coming summer. We have a proposal in front of Management Board. I will wait for those kinds of decisions to come out of Management Board so we can move forward with resourcing anything we do at the airport for the next stage.

Mr. Cardiff: This is a prime example of what I just asked for earlier. The minister doesn't have more detailed information on the various phases -- phase 1 and phase 2, and I believe that phase 1 is just about complete -- at his fingertips. This is where he could provide a legislative return at a future date. I won't hold my breath waiting for that.

I have another question for the minister. This is another policy issue with regard to the department. The department is responsible for issuing a lot of contracts, Mr. Chair. It appears that there is a trend in the way that contracts are issued.

The value of sole-source contracts in 2003-04 was almost \$79 million, and 67 percent of the contracts issued were sole sourced. In 2004-05, there was \$108 million in sole-source contracts, and 66 percent were sole sourced. In 2005-06, there

was almost \$121 million in sole-source contracts, and that was 68 percent of the contracts.

The respective percentage value of the total number of contracts has remained relatively the same. We're watching the number and value of those contracts increase a little bit. Checking the contract registry, the trend is continuing. In 2006-07, there was \$133 million in sole-source contracts, 73 percent of the contracts, representing 36 percent of the value of all contracts.

The Auditor General was critical of the department's use of sole sourcing, especially in the area of leases, and we may touch on that a little bit later. But I'm just wondering why this government has this penchant -- desire or need -- and how they justify sole sourcing contracts at such a great rate when their philosophy is that competition is better.

Hon. Mr. Lang: We follow the contracting regulations that are in place. We're not doing anything any differently from any other government. If you were to look back at other governments, that was a management tool, but we as a government are concerned, like the member opposite, and we are looking at the contract regulations. Hopefully we can modernize them and be aware of some of these investments. Some of these investments are costs that we have no control over, for example, the utility companies and things that are under \$10,000. This is a management tool that's in place -- one that all governments have used in managing the department. We are committed to looking at the contract regulations and see where we can improve on them.

Mr. Cardiff: There are numerous examples of this government using sole-source contracts well above the threshold of where they should be. We'll probably end up discussing some of those a little later.

We didn't really get an answer; maybe it was because the information wasn't at the minister's fingertips. I'm going to try to help him along a little bit on this one. It has to do with the master space plan. In the Auditor General's report, the department agreed that a Yukon-wide master space plan was needed. It was underway. It was targeted for completion in September 2007.

In the annual report, tabled by the minister just a few weeks ago, there was a contract awarded. The completion of this project is expected late in 2007.

Can the minister tell us when the master space plan is going to be available? Will he provide a copy of it to members on this side of the Legislature? The response to the Auditor General was that it would be ready in September, which is actually late in 2007. It's getting even later now and we are anxious to see a copy of it.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I have a commitment as minister that it will be out in early 2008. Of course, as government, everything that we do is public information. It will be accessible to the general public when, in fact, that master plan is finalized.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Chair, I'm going to go back to the Auditor General's report. One of the criticisms of the minister by the Auditor General was that he can't complete a project on time or on budget. They cite numerous examples of it. We had a commitment that this would be completed in September

2007. There is another commitment here that it would be completed late in 2007. The minister is now saying that it is not going to be ready until early 2008. I'm not sure what "early" means, Mr. Speaker. It could be any where in between January and July, because that probably would be early in 2008 in the minister's estimation. I guess the other question for the minister is: is this project on budget?

Hon. Mr. Lang: This is the first master plan that this government has done on their facilities. We are working diligently on it. We are concerned and working with the Auditor General's report. We will make that document public as soon as it is finalized. It is done internally in the government and we have outside assistance and we are working on it diligently to get it finished as soon as possible.

We're looking forward to having that overview so that we, as a government, can address some of the issues that were brought up in the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, it sounds like he doesn't know if it's on budget. It's obviously not on time. It's just a continuation of the same old thing.

One of the other items brought up in the Auditor General's report was the maintenance of government buildings. It was committed to by the department. The department's response was that processes will be documented. Basically, the recommendation was that the Department of Highways and Public Works adhere to the government directive for planning and implementing building development projects to ensure that projects are completed according to the specified requirements, on schedule and within the targeted cost.

The government committed that work would be done, and by the 2008-09 budget year they would adopt some best practices and standards and that there would be a new building project delivery management procedures manual written.

Now, I realize that this is a long-term project. But given the fact that the minister hasn't been able to deliver on some of the other projects on time, I'd just like to put him on notice that we're going to be watching this. I feel it's important that projects be completed on time and on budget and that the Auditor General does as well.

But the project we were just talking about, which was the master space plan, isn't on time or on budget. Seeing as we're looking at the 2008-09 budget year, I'm hoping that there will be funds in the upcoming budget. I don't know if funds are dedicated to this in the supplementary budget, but I would hope that the minister does a better job of delivering on this project.

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

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

Motion negatived

Mr. Cardiff: Isn't that something? Yesterday the government couldn't wait to get out of here, Mr. Chair -- five minutes early, they wanted to adjourn the House, and here it is 28 minutes after and we all know that the Speaker is standing just outside the door. I can't believe that.

I hope that the minister can get this project on time. I don't know if he can get it on budget or not, but if he wants to hear me talk for another two minutes, then I guess that's what he's going to get.

There are a whole number of issues that this minister is going to be asked questions about in the coming days on Highways and Public Works, and I hope that the minister is prepared for them.

Chair: Order please. Seeing the time, the Chair will rise and report progress.

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I 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 directed me to report progress.

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

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

The House adjourned at 5:31 p.m.

The following Legislative Return was tabled November 29, 2007:

07-1-3

Policies promoting Green Technologies and Yukon Climate Change Strategy (Hart)
Hansard, Oral, p. 1610

The following document was filed November 29, 2007:

07-01-40

Kyoto Phase 2 agreement, letter (dated November 29, 2007) from Todd Hardy to Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada (Hardy)