

Whitehorse, Yukon**Monday, May 5, 2008 – 1:00 p.m.**

Speaker: I will now call the House to order. At this time, we will proceed with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: We will proceed with the Order Paper. Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES**In recognition of Emergency Preparedness Week**

Hon. Mr. Hart: I rise this afternoon to acknowledge this national week devoted to keeping Canadians safe. It is the annual Emergency Preparedness Week, and it has two primary functions. The first purpose is to remind our citizens that they can take a leadership role in protecting themselves, their families and their property during emergency situations.

The second purpose is to pay tribute to the many men and women who stand ready to help their fellow Canadians during a time of crisis. Each year Canadians are encouraged to make plans and set aside some provisions in the event of an emergency situation befalling them or their community.

These emergency situations may come in a number of forms, and while they may not all be significant events such as an earthquake or forest fire, they can all have devastating impacts on individuals, their homes and their communities.

As in previous years, Yukoners will have received in the mail an emergency preparedness brochure with a bold “72 hours” on the cover. Seventy-two hours has been adopted as the recommended amount of time that people should prepare to fend for themselves following an emergency event.

In an emergency situation, the emergency responders will first focus on the people who have suffered the greatest impact from the emergency. There are a limited number of responders, and it can take time for them to respond in a safe manner to everyone’s needs.

Yukoners, like citizens, parents and homeowners across Canada, need to be prepared to take care of themselves and their families for a minimum of 72 hours until the emergency responders arrive on the scene.

By planning ahead of time what you and your family will do in the event of an emergency, you do not have to make up your plan on the spot; you will already know what your family and you need to get through the challenges associated with whatever crisis a situation may be.

Emergency events also bring communities closer together, as neighbours look out for each other to ensure they remain safe. There are a number of examples of how rural communities have worked together to endure the destruction caused by an emergency situation. Community centres become a gathering place with elders and seniors alongside of young children in a safe and comforting location, until the situation is resolved and the people can once again return to their homes.

I encourage all Yukoners to create a family emergency plan and put together an emergency kit. It is not a huge project. In fact, planning what you will need to keep safe and comfortable for 72 hours is very similar to planning for a long weekend camping trip. The main difference is you may be camping in your home, rather than in a campsite or a wilderness location.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge the many people who work and volunteer in emergency-response roles, including structural firefighters, volunteer and municipal fire departments, emergency medical service personnel, search and rescue teams and our wildland fire organization.

These people demonstrated how their valuable skills benefit our communities during the Southern Lakes flood last year, as did the people in the emergency health and social services community emergency measures office, the Salvation Army and the many caring individuals who show up to lend a hand when a crisis threatens the welfare of our communities and the people who live within them.

In closing, I encourage all Yukoners to create an emergency plan for themselves and their families, build an emergency kit to sustain themselves for 72 hours and consider becoming involved in the local neighbourhood planning group to aid each other in the event of an emergency in your area.

Plan ahead and stay safe.

Speaker: Are there further tributes?
Introduction of visitors.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under tabling returns and documents, the Chair has for tabling a report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly on travel expenses of Members of the Legislative Assembly during the 2007-08 fiscal year.

The Chair also has for tabling the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Yukon on political contributions in 2007, which is submitted pursuant to section 398 of the *Elections Act*.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Mr. Hardy: I have for tabling a memo to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Mr. Mitchell: I have a letter to the Prime Minister of Canada regarding drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, written last Friday.

Speaker: Are there any further documents for tabling?
Reports of committees.
Petitions.

PETITIONS**Petition No. 5 — received**

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly, I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 5 of the First Session of the 32nd Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Member for Klondike on May 1, 2008.

This petition was found to be comprised of two different versions. The model petition, which is appended to the Standing Orders, indicates that to meet the requirements as to form, a petition must be addressed to the Legislative Assembly and must ask the Legislative Assembly to take an action.

One version of the petition meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly and will be retained in the working papers of the Legislative Assembly. The Executive Council response, made pursuant to Standing Order 67, should be to this version of Petition No. 5.

The other version of Petition No. 5 does not meet the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders and will be returned to the Member for Klondike.

Speaker: Petition No. 5 is accordingly deemed to be read and received.

Are there any other petitions to be presented?

Are there bills to be introduced?

Notices of motion.

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Nunavut to lobby the Government of Canada to remove GST on home heating fuel and power generation north of 60.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to adopt a fairness principle in its tendering procedures so that all Yukoners and Yukon businesses will be treated equally and fairly in all aspects of public tendering.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Environment to live up to his obligations under the *Environment Act* by immediately tabling a 2005 state of the environment report and directing the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment to fulfill its legislative mandate to review the report, as spelled out in section 49 of the act.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that according to the 2004 interim report on the state of the environment, 65 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Yukon come from transportation; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to work with the City of Whitehorse to identify ways to expand the Whitehorse transit service so that more people take the bus to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to specifically explore offering free transit to senior, youth, Yukon college students and low-income Yukoners to protect them from increased fuel costs.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that according to the 2004 interim report on the state of the environment, 65 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Yukon come from transportation; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to fund a commuter busing pilot project from a community outside of Whitehorse such as Marsh Lake, Tagish, Carcross, Mendenhall or Lake Laberge as one concrete action to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by getting private vehicles off the road.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that according to the 2004 interim report on the state of the environment, 65 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Yukon come from transportation; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to mount an aggressive social marketing campaign to encourage Yukoners to carpool, as one concrete action to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by getting more private vehicles off the road.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that according to a 2004 interim report on the state of the environment, 65 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Yukon come from transportation; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to create a rebate program for Yukoners purchasing bicycles as one concrete action to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote physical activity.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?

Statements by ministers.

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the Premier.

Last week, President Bush announced that he would once again be pushing Congress to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas exploration and drilling due to the soaring costs of gasoline. The Alaskan congressional delegation and the Alaskan Governor are all onside with the President's position. My colleague, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, and I are very concerned that the Premier has not made one single public announcement opposing this renewed threat to disrupt the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd or taken any public action to ensure it remains protected.

In the past, the Premier has touted how much he supports the protection for this area; yet he has been totally silent since President Bush's announcement last week. When will the Premier take a public stand against the opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and take it beyond these walls, where it needs to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Once again, the Leader of the Official Opposition is taking out of context all the work that this

government does in conjunction with the Vuntut Gwitchin government to ensure that protection of the critical habitat for the Porcupine caribou herd is maintained. We are also very consistent in our position that the two federal governments, both in Ottawa and Washington, adhere to the agreement for the conservation of the herd that was reached in 1987. We have publicly, on many many many occasions, stated that very consistent position. We have brought this up with the President of the United States in a face-to-face discussion. Furthermore, we are pursuing, with the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, impacted First Nations and the State of Alaska, a harvest management plan for the Porcupine caribou herd. We will continue to work with the State of Alaska to get an updated count of the herd, which is critical to an ongoing conservation initiative to understand what its numbers are and what impacts we are experiencing with respect to the herd.

Mr. Mitchell: The Premier's voice is very loud in this Assembly, but seems to diminish to a whisper outside of this House and beyond Yukon's borders.

The Premier should be speaking on behalf of all Yukoners in showing Yukoners' opposition to the opening up of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling.

Why then is the Premier leaving it to the Chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin, the MLA for Vuntut Gwitchin, the Member of Parliament for Yukon and all the other voices to make Yukon's position clear in Washington? All Yukoners, including the Gwitchin, need the territory's public government leader to be speaking and acting on their behalf on this crucial issue.

Can the Premier tell us when he plans to head to Washington on behalf of all Yukoners and present our opposition to the opening of ANWR to Congress?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: We're not leaving this matter to anyone, but we are respectful in terms of requests from the government of Gwitchin, and we will continue to respect those requests and continue to support that government in its efforts in this regard.

Secondly, we aren't silent on this issue and never have been. Today, obviously the member has some new issue on his mind. I would remind the member that the outgoing President of the United States is somewhere in the 20-percent level of popularity. The dynamics of Congress and the Senate are dramatically different from what the member is representing here in an all-out push to drill in ANWR.

The position is consistent. As I understand it nationally, the Vuntut Gwitchin's position, Yukoners' position and this government's position is that protection of the critical habitat is absolute.

Mr. Mitchell: Just last week I wrote a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper to ask him to take action in response to the President's most recent announcement. The Government of Canada is also in opposition to the opening of ANWR and I have asked them to once again voice Canada's opposition with the President.

This Legislative Assembly has passed several unanimous motions over the years in support of keeping the refuge free from drilling.

The Premier needs to step up to the plate and take action on this renewed threat. If costs are an issue, the Liberal caucus will provide the funding for his airfare.

Affirmative action and ensuring his voice is clearly heard by the President, the Alaska congressional delegation and the Governor of Alaska all need to be done on the ANWR issue. Will the Premier please speak up for all Yukoners and tell us when he plans to take action on the renewed threat to the Porcupine caribou herd?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: The government side is very encouraged by the fact that the Leader of the Official Opposition has decided to come forward with a constructive measure in writing the Prime Minister in regard to the protection of the critical habitat for the Porcupine caribou herd.

We are very pleased that the Leader of the Official Opposition has joined the cause, and it's more important, Mr. Speaker, to deal with those who support drilling, versus simply going to Washington to talk to those who already oppose drilling in ANWR. That's what this government is doing.

Finally, the member opposite has seen the light and chosen to join — in conjunction with the government and Yukoners and the Vuntut Gwitchin — forces and ensure that all concerned are made aware of the fact that Yukoners' position is clear: protection of the critical habitat.

Question re: Education standards

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Speaker, last week the Council of Ministers of Education released test scores in literacy, mathematics and science for all 10 provinces and Yukon.

Yukon did not fare well. In fact, we are below the Canadian average in all three categories. What is really alarming is that we are just one point out of last place in mathematics and in last place in science. We need to do better.

I want to be very clear on this, Mr. Speaker: we are not blaming the teachers; we are not blaming the minister. We want to know what the minister has in mind to address this problem. Obviously, there is a problem. The problem is not the lack of available funds; the problem is not class size; the problem is not the professional staff. My question is simply: what plan does the minister propose to address this situation?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I'm very proud of the work that the Department of Education and our teachers are doing to ensure that we have a very responsive educational system: one that meets the needs of individual learners in our system and one that meets the needs in our community.

We'll continue to review and take into account and consideration the results from the pan-Canadian assessment test, which looked at the performance of some 13-year-olds across Canada. We'll also use the other indicators that we have, things like the Yukon achievement test, the results from the provincial exams and other assessment tools, whether they're formal assessment tools or informal assessment tools — things like the participation rate in post-secondary school. Currently, we have over 1,000 Yukon students accessing the student grant to continue on in post-secondary education, and Statistics Canada indicated that Yukon has the highest rate of post-secondary education of any jurisdiction in Canada.

There are some very good results and very good indicators about Yukon's educational performance. We also recognize that there are other issues and other challenges, and we will be making efforts to work with all involved to ensure that we close the gap in performance rates and that we increase the bar, so to speak, of the performance level of all Yukon students. We'll do this for all students in Whitehorse and the communities.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, this test was very accurate and I'm disappointed to hear it being attacked as being too small a sample group out in the public. The test was not a problem. The results were the problem. There were 370 eligible students in the Yukon — 278 of them took the test; 33 were absent; 20 were exempt because of low academic abilities; two were exempt because of parental objection and 37 because of other reasons. That leaves 75 percent of students taking the test, and 75 percent is extremely high for any survey.

The minister need not be so defensive on this. No one is blaming him personally, but what Yukoners will do is blame him if no action is taken, so again I'll ask the minister: what does he plan to do and when can we expect to see action on these low achievement tests?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, we are going to use the results of this test, which the member should be aware is in all provinces and the Yukon; there are some jurisdictions in Canada that don't participate in this test and they have their reasons for doing so.

We are going to use the results from the interprovincial exams, the Yukon achievement tests, the results of Outside organizations — such as the IALS report, the international adult literacy survey. We will look at results from Statistics Canada, we will look at results from organizations, from the Fraser Institute, and we will look at the performance of all of our students.

It is important that we get good information about what our students are doing, where they are performing, and where we need to make changes. The member opposite, I believe, knows about initiatives like full-day kindergarten, the Wilson Reading program, the Reading Recovery program, the First Nations programs and partnership unit, the changes to curriculum, the home tutor program, and our ratio of teachers to students.

We will continue to invest in the future of our students; we will continue to make increases in investment in education. The member opposite has already said that we have the highest per capita investment in students anywhere in Canada, and we will continue to invest wisely in education.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister ducked the media last Thursday. This doesn't help the issue at all. I think the minister needs to be up front on this issue because it is a big one with the general public.

This was a study commissioned by ministers of education across the country and this minister is a member of that council. He can't simply ignore it and he can't sweep it under the rug. It is too big an issue. This is not the leadership we expect and need. Many parents have been coming to us and talking

about this very issue and are very concerned. It is time to become more proactive and forward-thinking.

We want to know what the minister is doing. He said a few things — the top-down model simply doesn't work. What we need is a bottom-up model, which is in the governance education reform structure. Is the minister now saying he is accepting the governance model, as pointed out in the education reform project?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I'm amazed at how the member opposite sees spending tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars on a new bureaucratic model will help our kids learn. I don't agree with that. What I do agree with is working with our students to ensure they have the right tools, that the teachers are working with the right learning styles for our students, that we have the right curriculum. One only has to take a look at the school planning process and the evolution that is going through right now of bringing people from the community into the school to be part of the school planning process.

If the member opposite wants to see grassroots involvement, he should go to a school council meeting and one of these planning sessions to see how parents can get involved and set the priorities and issues for their school. We'll continue to do that; we'll continue to make investments to help our teachers teach and help our learners learn.

Question re: School catchment areas

Mr. Hardy: The Minister of Education has been reassuring us recently what a great school system we have. Meanwhile, the management of infrastructure and staffing for schools is frustrating parents, teachers and school councils. The minister hasn't assured anyone that they are being heard.

The government uses words like "staffing realignment" when it often really means staff cuts. The cancellation of the school bus contract provides an ideal opportunity to realign catchment areas so that schools, such as Golden Horn Elementary, may not have to lose teaching staff. Instead of launching a lengthy review of enrolment at Golden Horn and Elijah Smith elementaries, will the minister agree to fast-track this project and revise the catchment areas, if necessary, in time for the 2008-09 school year?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I recognize that not all members participate in the budget debate, but it was committed to on the floor of this Assembly — all of the processes necessary to be gone through for the realignment of the catchment area would be done prior to the next school year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to work with the Department of Education and the fine staff there, with our teachers, with our contractors and others involved in education, to ensure that we have the best education system possible. We are doing this in an environment in which the number of students in our schools is declining and where the numbers of teachers and educational assistants is increasing. We are continuing to make investments in schools. We just saw a new one officially open a couple of weeks ago, as well as the opening of the Individual Learning Centre and the School of Visual Arts in recent years. We will continue to work with all our partners in education to ensure that we have an education system that is responsive to the needs of Yukoners.

Mr. Hardy: Well, we know the record of the Yukon Party in building schools — overbudget and one in five years. Isn't that something to be proud of?

When teaching positions are cut, often the first things to go are programs such as music, art, language, physical education and special education. Many of us remember the Yukon Party's history regarding their attitude toward these programs. When a school loses some of these programs because a teaching position is cut, the students pay.

Regarding the pan-Canadian assessment program, indicating 13-year-olds in the Yukon were doing poorly compared to the rest of Canada, my concern in this regard is — and this is the question here — if this minister will assure us that he will not use this report to cut programs such as music, art, language, physical education and special education. Frankly, from my perspective, one report does not justify making changes.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: As I mentioned, the government will continue to use the results of the Yukon achievement test, provincial exams, indicators from other organizations — some of them the member opposite likes and some he might not always agree with. I'm in the same boat, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes we get information and we're happy with the methodology and other times we do have to stop and scratch our heads over it.

The member opposite also didn't recognize the opening of the Individual Learning Centre or the School of Visual Arts. I can't make a much stronger commitment to the arts and arts education in the territory other than having been part of the Yukon Party government that opened the School of Visual Arts in Dawson City.

We recognize it is important for children to have a broad, well-rounded education. Frankly, I don't want to see our system turn into one where we just teach to one test. It's too easy to do that, and other jurisdictions have.

But in order to maintain a community of healthy, well-balanced people who have the ability to participate fully in our economy and in our society, we recognize we have to have a broad range of courses. We'll also work with our school councils in determining how to address the situations in the schools.

Mr. Hardy: I agree with the minister opposite on this. I was at the graduation of the students of SOVA in Dawson City, and I was very proud at that moment, proud of the NDP history in being at the beginning of it, as well as the Liberals who were supportive of it when they were in government and the Yukon Party continuing that — so kudos for everybody in that area.

But I also agree with the minister that one test doesn't justify changing the whole system; we must take these tests and balance them out on what our students are achieving — and they're achieving a lot.

I don't like to see one test put down our students, because I have great faith in them, as well as the staff who teach them.

But in the rural communities — since we're starting to talk about that — experiential education doesn't really get out there. Many of the rural communities do not have what Whitehorse has and the education reform report says that communities out-

side of Whitehorse need to take steps to integrate experiential learning.

What is the minister doing to guarantee that all Yukon students will have the best education experience possible, regardless of where they live?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I will endorse this budget, for one thing, Mr. Speaker, which includes funds for experiential education and vocational training. We expanded that last year; we are continuing it this year.

I'll vote for this budget, which includes initiatives like the artist in the school program, an increase from \$25,000 to \$100,000. I'll support this budget, which continues to invest in Yukoners and to maintain one of the lowest student/teacher ratios in Canada.

What else will I do? I will also endorse this budget, which provides cultural training to teachers and cultural dollars to the schools, so that they can put on relevant programming for their students. I'll support this budget, which also includes working with the Yukon First Nations programs and partnership unit to ensure that we have curriculum that is meeting the needs of our students and meeting the needs in the community.

I'll continue to ensure that this government, as well as my colleagues, continues to invest in education. We recognize the importance that it plays in our community and our future and will continue to work with our partners in education to ensure that we have responsive ways of addressing the issues that our students and our communities have.

Question re: Environment report

Mr. Hardy: It's always tough not to be able to respond to the last one.

In the last sitting, we asked the Minister of Environment repeatedly when he would release the latest state of the environment report.

Finally, in the last days of the sitting, he produced the interim reports for 2003 and 2004. There was no sign of the full report for 2005 — three years. It was still being written, according to the minister. History seems to be repeating itself: why is the minister still sitting on the 2005 state of the environment report, and will he table it immediately, so that MLAs have a chance to review it and question the minister about his findings during this sitting?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, I was just checking to see if I was sitting on the report. No, I'm not.

Great progress is being made toward the completion of the report. I can tell the member opposite that a special Cabinet meeting was held today to give sanction to the report. I would ask the member to indulge me in considering some patience. The report will be tabled in the immediate future.

Mr. Hardy: I've heard this one before, Mr. Speaker. This is three years. This is from 2005. Where is the work? Where is it, if it's not underneath his —? Anyway, the state of the environment report is like the canary in the mineshaft. It is intended to tell Yukoners how our environment is doing and what changes we need to make to prevent future problems. If there are any problems brewing, how can we respond appropriately if these reports are three or four years out of date before we see them?

When the minister lets them sit on his desk or wherever, it makes me very suspicious about what he doesn't want Yukoners to see. When did the minister receive the 2005 final report, since he obviously has it? What changes did he ask to be made and why hasn't he lived up to his legal requirement to table it in this House?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, Mr. Speaker, we placed a great priority on developing our climate change strategy. We placed great priority on developing the climate change action plan. We placed a lot of priority and emphasis and investment on modernizing our biophysical database. Along with that, we placed a great emphasis and priority on making sure that reports, like the state of the environment report, are being done and tabled in this House, and it will be.

The member opposite, as I understand it, places all the third party's eggs in one basket. Without the report, there can be no environmental protection, conservation or management. This government does not agree with that approach. We think that there are multiple measures and initiatives that we must undertake to ensure the protection and conservation of our environment. It's very precious to Yukoners and indeed it has a huge bearing on our future. We are therefore doing all this work in conjunction with ensuring that a state of the environment report will be tabled, as I said, in the immediate future.

Mr. Hardy: I really hope to see 2006-07 tabled at the same time.

With his Finance hat on, the Premier wasn't too worried about the *Financial Administration Act* being breached. With his Environment hat on, he's obviously not concerned about what the *Environment Act* says either. The act requires the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment to review every state of the environment report. It can't do that, because for all practical purposes the council doesn't exist any more.

A few weeks ago, a government member tabled a motion that both the *Environment Act* and *Economic Development Act* be reviewed in relation to the council's mandated membership. In plain language, the Premier wants to do away with the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment altogether, Mr. Speaker.

Until a public review takes place and the two acts are amended, what steps has the minister taken to live up to the law and ensure that the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment can perform its legally mandated job?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: We are very concerned about such statutes as the *Financial Administration Act*. That is why this government provided full disclosure to the Auditor General in regard to the investments and brought forward a policy to ensure that this kind of problem cannot arise again. It is this government that brought forward the policy to deal with that.

Secondly, I must remind the Leader of the Third Party that this whole initiative was conceived in the 1980s. Much has changed in today's Yukon here in 2008. That is the reason for the review: to ensure that we are consistent here in the territory with all these measures with what is happening in the Yukon. As I said, much has changed, much is happening, and there is an approach by this government for environmental protection

and conservation second to none when we compare ourselves to past governments.

Question re: Whitehorse Correctional Centre rebuild

Mr. Inverarity: Six years ago, this government made a political decision to stop construction on a new corrections centre. At that time, the facility was going to cost about \$24 million. Today, in 2008, we are looking at a minimum cost of \$32 million. This represents an increase of \$8 million to construct the same facility, in the same location, using the same architect.

That decision will cost Yukoners more than \$1 million a year. Add a few million for the cost of renovating the old jail over the past six years and then add a few more million for the six years of study and review that has been done. Does this Minister of Justice have any idea how much extra this political decision and the six-year delay is really going to cost Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In response to the member opposite, it certainly isn't the same building that was planned by the Liberal Party of the day. It's not the same concept. It's a modern facility for today and tomorrow in our justice system. It has nothing to do with what the Liberals had planned on any level.

Question re: Housing for single parents

Mr. Inverarity: I have some questions for the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation.

Earlier this year, the minister announced a residence for single parents. The government originally pegged the cost of this development at between \$9 million and \$11 million. Documents released this last week regarding the construction of the new corrections facility also referred to this project. It was described in the tender documents as a women's housing project.

The price attached to it was \$13 million — that's \$2 million more than the high end of the estimate that has already been made public.

Will the minister confirm the cost to the project has gone up by \$2 million and we haven't even started construction yet?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: I am very glad that the member opposite asks questions about the single parent project.

The last social housing anything like this was built in 1994 under the previous Yukon Party government, and the NDP in the latter 1990s. The Liberals, in 2000 and 2002 didn't build any social housing, of course, but they did have an excuse. They managed to drive themselves out of office before they had a chance to do much of anything on that.

We have so far built 48 units of affordable housing: 24 for the college student families; a sixplex for seniors in Haines Junction, and we are adding another three units in that complex as we speak. We have certainly led the charge in terms of affordable housing.

The project that the member opposite is referring to at the moment is scheduled to build seventeen 2-bedroom, thirteen 3-bedroom and three 4-bedroom units. We are out in consultation with people to see what they want. Because of the nature of the building, there will be a higher grade of standard. The project

now is projected to exceed the green home standards, well beyond what much of construction is doing now.

The cost depends on what is going in it. We are asking people what they want, not simply building something.

Mr. Inverarity: The documents clearly say “women’s housing project”. We are under the understanding that it will be for both men and women. I wish the minister would make it clear for whom it is for. We would like to see it for everyone.

The project that was announced a few months ago said that the price tag was going to be between \$9 million and \$11 million. Only two months later, it is now up to \$13 million. This is starting to resemble the Watson Lake Health Centre, which started at \$5 million and is now over \$11 million. For this extra \$2 million, are we going to get more units? It doesn’t sound like it. I suspect that this answer is no. Now the cost per unit has gone up to \$435,000 per unit. These are all kinds of condos. We can buy one across the street for \$360,000. Why are the costs of these units so high, compared to other buildings that are being built right now?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The single parent facility that the member opposite refers to — the private sector currently is building condos and such. They are 2-bedroom units at a cost that ranges between \$199,000 and well over \$250,000. The cost estimates for our construction of 2-bedroom units at 900 square feet is approximately \$250 per square foot or \$225,000, well within the current range of the private sector.

We are also building to accommodating home standards and guidelines. This involves barrier-free access to accommodate people with mobility limitations, and larger doors, hallways and space to manoeuvre in rooms. It also involves larger parking spots, lower windows, accommodating bathroom and kitchen fixtures, low profile door thresholds and floor transitions, and multi-storey, multi-residential facilities that will include an elevator, of course.

I thank the member opposite for giving me the opportunity to point out that this is a very different building. The Yukon Party government is the only government since 1994 that has built any such housing.

Mr. Inverarity: I was talking to someone the other day and they said that the price of lumber is now at 1980 prices. The price of this thing should be going down, not up.

New information released this week says that the minister’s new single parent residence is ballooning in price and we have not even seen a selection for the location yet. It has gone from \$9 million to \$11 million, and now on to \$13 million. So much for good fiscal management. The Yukon Party has obviously not learned anything from a recent report from the Auditor General about their spending habits.

We think this is a good project; however, it is obvious that no one in the government has a good handle on the budget, which is spiralling. The new units are going to come in at around \$435,000 per unit. It would be cheaper to simply purchase the entire building going up across the street.

Why are there no cost controls on this project?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The Liberal mathematics are sometimes astounding, but I will put them in the perspective of the Mayo-Dawson run, which ran from \$17 million to \$42 mil-

lion and rising, as we are still in court. I understand that the Liberals do have some difficulties with mathematics there.

I do understand the price of lumber may have gone down to 1980 levels but I think that the Member for Porter Creek South would agree with me that most workmen would not want to go back to 1980 wages. The common spaces on this complex are all part of that. That includes the probability and possibility, depending on consultation, of a daycare, library study areas, meeting areas, indoor activity and outdoor activities for children.

The final determination for these things has not been made, of course, because we are consulting. We are talking to the people involved who have made clear some of the things that they want and are refining other things that they want.

We recognize that the facility will have a large number of very active children, so we are going to increase wear and tear. Certain features, such as rough-duty hallway walls, will be built in to assure durability and low-cost maintenance; we are building something very different.

I thank the member opposite for allowing me to get that information out to the Yukon population, as the Yukon Party continues to build social affordable housing, much more than any previous government.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Nordick): Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 11 — *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Department of Energy, Mines and Resources — *continued*

Hon. Mr. Lang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In opening I would like to say, as we move through the department, that we in Energy, Mines and Resources — “we” meaning me and those hardworking individuals who work in the department — would like to present the budget here today.

On the last day we had a discussion on it, mostly about the oil and gas segment of the department. We all understand that Energy, Mines and Resources covers many very important branches in the government. We’re a regulatory department that works very hard with agriculture; there’s the abandoned mine process; energy is very important in the territory; mineral resources; the land issue is always high on our priority list; and of course oil and gas.

Some of the discussion the last time we were together was on the Mackenzie Valley project and that is high again on our radar screen because of the many things that are going on in the Mackenzie Valley with the National Energy Board and all of the other hearings going on at the moment.

I reviewed what we were doing with this and, as we all know, the National Energy Board is in the middle of its hearing. There is the Joint Review Panel, a subset of the National Energy Board hearings, so in essence there are two hearings going on. We have been involved in both of them.

There were some questions about economics and what this government resourced and when they resourced it. Understand the size of the Mackenzie project, which at this moment is targeted at \$16.2 billion, is a massive project that will have ramifications not only in the Mackenzie Valley but it will certainly open up our resources to market and have impacts on our work force, the companies and it will provide access to jobs and contracting and other things that will be opened up to Yukoners.

Yukon has been participating for a long time in these hearings, on and off, since the year 2004. Over those years, we spent approximately \$1.1 million on these hearings. Of course, that involves the individual department and also, Mr. Chair, we hire expertise to do some of the work, because we don’t have in-house expertise on some of these issues. A lot of the work is done in-house, and certainly we have a very tight department with a lot of very capable individuals working in it, but when they need assistance or they need some expertise, we certainly don’t deny them that, and that kind of expertise has a dollar value.

As I said, on the last day here in the House, this will be a twofold situation. There is the Mackenzie gas project for \$16.2 billion, which will go ahead first, and then of course there is always the Alaska Highway pipeline, which, as I explained last time we were together, was on the horizon too.

The department is working on conceptual plans and looking at maximizing Yukoners’ benefits, understanding that the Mackenzie Valley pipeline will give us the expertise, when and if it goes forward, to confront the Alaska Highway pipeline project. Of course, that is going to be approximately twice as much money — \$30 billion — which again is a lot of money in investments in the territory. Three-quarters of that line will be

going through the territory. I am here to answer questions from the members opposite. I look forward to doing that.

Mr. Hardy: Well, let’s start with that. Very quickly, I have a very simple question. With the recent announcements from Alaska, a pipeline through the Yukon may actually materialize. That has been 30-some years of discussion. I also really do have to question what the minister said just recently, that the Mackenzie Valley pipeline is going to go first. I would not say that there are any assurances whatsoever that it would go first. My question is very simple. It is a standard question that I think has been asked before. Once again, I would like to know what the department is doing to maximize the benefits for Yukoners specifically on the Alaska Highway pipeline.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I agree with the member opposite. This government is not going to be the government that is going to pick what pipeline goes first. It might very well be the Alaska Highway pipeline.

I’m old enough to remember where I was the day it was announced in 1978 that the pipeline was going ahead. It has been a very long process in the territory. How are we maximizing the benefits to Yukoners? It is very important for all Yukoners that we work with the federal government on this issue. We have the NEB to work with. We have to ask the questions regarding the overview of the environmental question. All of these questions have to be answered.

I remind everyone in the House and Yukoners that if and when a pipeline is announced in Alaska we will certainly have a window of opportunity to grow into it. The announcement will come and after that there will be a period of time when all of these questions will have to be addressed. As with any government, whether it is us or a new government, we are going to be very aware of maximizing our benefits because the benefits to Yukoners are very important. This pipeline is huge; if it goes ahead, it will be the largest contract ever entered into in North America.

What are we going to do as a government? We have the Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition up and funded and doing their work. They are moving forward with their internal issues. We are looking forward to the hearings that will be held, and there will certainly be extensive hearings held on the Alaska Highway Pipeline.

Implementing a pipeline strategy with our neighbours — British Columbia and Alberta — those kinds of things are a work-in-progress and we are keeping very much aware of it.

For the member opposite, what are we doing? We’re keeping aware of what’s happening in the State of Alaska, which is very important because again, I would remind everyone, we’re not the ones who are going to pull the trigger on the Alaska Highway pipeline. At this point, they are working very hard with the producers who own the product. TransCanada Pipelines Ltd. is one of the players, so that’s optimistic for the Alaska Highway pipeline. We are funding the Alaska Highway Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition. We’re working with B.C. and Alberta on a pipeline strategy — a work-in-progress — and we look forward to making some announcements on that.

We’re doing the hard work it takes in the Mackenzie Valley project. So, in answering the member opposite, that’s a very

short overview of what is happening internally here in the government. We certainly look forward to an expanding pipeline, if and when any one of these pipelines is announced to be a reality. That would mean we would have to upgrade our work internally and work with all the agencies that are going to be involved after the decision is made on how this thing will unfold in our territory.

Mr. Hardy: I look forward to sending the minister some correspondence requesting more information over the next while, as we anticipate any kind of movement from the Alaska side regarding this pipeline.

Next question — I'm going to keep moving right through these: a few weeks ago, British Columbia placed a moratorium on uranium exploration and development in that province. Will the government consider placing a moratorium on uranium exploration and development in the Yukon and open up consultation so that people can decide if they want this kind of development?

Hon. Mr. Lang: That was an announcement that B.C. made. I am not sure what background they had to make that kind of a decision. We certainly are very aware of the uranium question, not only here but across Canada. We have exploration going on, but most of it is not directed at uranium. Most of it is looking at other minerals. If in fact we were to look at uranium mining, which would be a long way off, we certainly would look at Saskatchewan and how uranium projects are managed in their province.

There is a lot of overview for anything nuclear. We have the *Nuclear Safety and Control Act*, which is involved in any nuclear mining. If we were exploring for it and we uncovered a uranium deposit, any of those that have been uncovered have not fallen under the umbrella of the *Nuclear Safety and Control Act*, because they don't meet the minimum standard of overview. It's something that we're aware of. The option is always there, if we found as a government or as a jurisdiction that we wanted to question the uranium part of it.

At the moment, we trust in the YESA process, which we have internally. We respect the *Nuclear Safety and Control Act*, which we would have to fall under, whether it's for exploration or an actual mine. Before we did anything, we would go to Saskatchewan to see how they manage the mines they have in existence. Saskatchewan produces more uranium than any other jurisdiction in the world. I think they produce 27 percent of the world's uranium. They have been doing this for many, many years, so they are producing uranium and their mines are active. We would look to them for guidance and overview if, in fact, we were to move forward in any uranium mine concept. As far as I know, as minister, I have not seen that on the horizon.

Mr. Hardy: I appreciate the minister for staying focused on the question and trying to give me some information without long explanations that don't often lead anywhere. I'll try to keep my questions in the same manner as well, with very little preamble.

My next question: what concrete action will the department be taking to expand alternative energy production in use

in the territory, specifically solar, wind, biomass and geothermal?

People see signs of wind generation every time they drive to Porter Creek along the Alaska Highway, up on Haeckel Hill, I believe.

Can the minister just give me some indication of what areas they are looking at, and what they are exploring?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Certainly, we do have the wind turbines on Haeckel Hill, and the production is one thing that comes from the wind turbines on Haeckel Hill, but also, Mr. Chair, it's very nice to see how much notice people take of that facility. I have had kids come up to me, as young as four or five years old, and ask me why the propellers aren't going around.

So it serves two purposes: it does supply a small amount of energy, and it certainly has improved over the years, and it also is a great tool through which we can be aware of that kind of energy program.

What is this government doing? This government is working on many levels. We are looking at the Yukon College fluidized bed gasifier. The study was done in 2004, and we certainly are working with the gasifier to see what we can do to move ahead and commission it to produce syngas.

All sorts of things come out of that project. There's a heating potential for the actual college and then there is also the education component. We are also looking at the college hybrid energy system, the installation of a monitoring display kiosk to demonstrate the effectiveness of the hybrid wind solar system installed and recently refurbished at the Yukon College. That is one thing we are working on.

We are looking at air source heat pumps and examining the feasibility of using air source heat pumps in the territory. That again has some potential.

Earth tubes — designing and piloting the use of earth tubes in Yukon. Earth tubes involve the passive preheating of air for combustion or ventilation in homes, so that again is something that could be utilized in the territory.

Steam turbines — conducting a pilot study to examine the feasibility of using a steam turbine in low-speed, low-head-river situations is another thing that could bode well for the territory.

Biomass heating — we are conducting a pilot study on the environmental and economic feasibility of commissioning a small-scale wood fuel heating system in the forest management branch building. That is another thing we are looking at.

Biomass small-scale district heating — we are conducting a feasibility study for a small community-scale biomass district heating system. Case study will be completed in Faro, Teslin and Dawson City.

Forest industry task group — Energy, Mines and Resources are working with the Department of Economic Development as well as key members of the forest industry to identify market opportunities for forest products. The economic and environmental potential of obtaining local wood to produce energy is being assessed by this working group. A number of projects are currently anticipated including piloting the conversion of a fuel-oil heated building to a clean technology wood or pellet-heating system. That is another thing we are looking at.

District heating in Whitehorse — conducting a feasibility study on a district heating system in the downtown core of Whitehorse. The department is working with us, Property Management Agency, and the City of Whitehorse to explore options.

Wood and geothermal are being considered as a fuel source.

Wind monitoring program — working with the Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon Energy Corporation to provide wind monitoring towers to assess wind regimes for Yukoners — has been an ongoing thing over the last five or six years.

Clean technology rebates — exploring the possibility of providing another phase of rebates on energy-efficient consumer appliances and potentially on certain renewable household energy technology.

Mr. Chair, those are some of the things we're doing. We certainly are aware of the cost of energy and we are where we're at in Canada. Hopefully, over a period of time, we will be less dependent on products from the south which, by the way, are growing in cost by the day. We're working with our communities to make them more financially viable on the energy side of the ledger.

In Watson Lake, Yukon Electrical Company did an overview of the energy coming off their new generating units that are being used now to heat the high school and the recreation complex. We are looking at other ways we could utilize that heat.

The interesting thing about the Yukon Electrical study was when they did the study on the temperature of the water as it moved through those two complexes — which meant it crossed the Campbell Highway, moved into the high school and then moved to the recreation complex — they actually lost only five percent of their heat in the process. There is a lot more heat out of that generator that could be used in the community of Watson Lake to minimize some of those costs.

It would be very beneficial for us as a government and the Town of Watson Lake to look at the new hospital complex and the potential of a seniors complex that would again use some of that heat that's available there to heat those complexes. Those are certainly on the horizon.

Mr. Hardy: I will shift away from alternative energy, although we all know that energy is just going to continue to cost more, if we continue the way we are going.

I will move directly into agriculture, since the minister mentioned products from the south. We sure can understand the costs, every time we go shopping, and how things are continuing to increase. It takes energy to get the food up here. My question is very simple and a local one: because of the distance food travels to reach Yukon tables, and given the reality of climate change and the vital importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and the costs, what plans will the department undertake to stimulate local agricultural production, as well as the sale and consumption of Yukon food?

Hon. Mr. Lang: It is an interesting question, as our energy becomes more and more expensive and also as we become more health conscious. That's not just in the territory. I

was talking to my sister in Calgary about some issue regarding diet. She said that she follows the 100-mile rule. She eats what can be grown in her area within 100 miles. I think Yukoners are becoming more aware of this all the time.

We, in government, are undertaking different things, but we're looking at getting land to our farming community so that we can grow more products. By the way, Mr. Chair, we just have to go down to the Fireweed Market to see just exactly what kinds of products are available in the territory. If we go back 20 years, it is a completely different market today. Of course it is in season.

We do have potatoes that are available almost year-round from our local farmers, but the other vegetables are seasonal. We've gone to work with the federal government to make sure they recognize us as part of that agricultural group across Canada — and they have done that. That opens up opportunities for the farmers to access a business risk management suite of programs to provide agricultural income stabilization for farmers. We recognize the environmental stewardship of the agricultural industry. 20 percent of the industry has enrolled in the environmental farm plan process, so we're working with them on that.

We're working on research and we are working with farmers on soil enhancement, variety evaluation, technology transfer, production management and the economics of all that. Last December, the new multi-year development plan for the agricultural industry was released. The plan outlines a series of recommendations and targets to increase and sustain production, sales and profitability in the Yukon agricultural and agri-food industry. They will set up a meat-processing working group to address the future meat processing needs of the territory.

We have the mobile abattoir, which continues the red-meat inspection and slaughter services. We look at poultry processing and equipment, which was purchased last year.

We're doing a lot to help the industry, understanding it's a very small industry, and we look forward to working with them in the future. They are a very dynamic group of individuals. Through this government, we made it possible for older farmers to stay on their farm, but also to sell some part of the farm so we keep it in production. Those kinds of things all bode well for the industry.

We're looking forward to expanding a lot of the things we do to make sure this industry grows. If you were to go to their meetings and listen to their concerns and look around the table, there are younger people there now and it's interesting to be a part of that dynamic. It is a big question for all Canadians: where do we get our food? How do they grow our food? People want to eat locally.

And that will bode well for all of us.

Mr. Hardy: Thank you to the minister opposite for recognizing the importance of food in our life and, ideally, the ability to grow it within the region you live in as much as you possibly can.

I recommend to people whenever they sit down to eat to try to identify how many types of foods they are eating that actually can be grown in the Yukon. It is a good lesson.

Land availability? Of course it is connected to agriculture and, if the minister can give this to me or, if he doesn't have the information at his fingertips but can supply it to my office at some time in the future, what is the status of land availability in rural Yukon communities as well as the Whitehorse area? Also, how many service, residential or commercial lots are currently available by community — and rural lots as well as agricultural lots that have been identified in communities and in the Whitehorse area.

Finally, I have noticed over the last bit that the City of Whitehorse is developing lots, some private developers are developing lots, and First Nations are developing lots. Has this government done an assessment of how many lots are coming on stream in the next three to five years, and what kind of impact that could have, if we are looking at anywhere from 500 to 800 lots all of a sudden, in a very short period of time? If they have not done that assessment, would they do it so that people understand what is coming down the pike?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I will try to answer this with a couple of hats on. Part of this is in Community Services. They are working with the city through the protocol we have internally with the city. The City of Whitehorse is the lead, and we work with them to develop the land within their official city plan.

If we were to look at 2007, they sold 47 lots in Whitehorse Copper, 19 in Mount Sima, 56 in the Copper Ridge residential area and six lots in the Hot Springs rural residential area. The upcoming projects in the Whitehorse area are Whitehorse Copper country residential, phase 2, with 58 lots. Community Services is managing all aspects related to the development and legal survey. The Burns Road commercial area will release up to eight lots. Arkell development is being considered by the city and that will open up a number of other lots. Takhini North is another potential. That is all part and parcel of the city's decision. There is also the Stan McCowan arena area.

Outside of Whitehorse, in 10 communities there are 170 lots. Beaver Creek has an inventory of three; Carmacks has a total of 20. There are 16 residential and four commercial lots available. Dawson City has an inventory of 20 residential lots. Faro has five country residential lots in Tintina and one industrial. In Haines Junction, there are five country residential, six residential, one mobile home, seven tourist/commercial and agricultural land in the Champagne-Aishihik traditional territory. I think there is something like 16 parcels of agricultural land that will be phased in. I think four were sold last year and there are a number to be sold this year. Mayo has 18 country residential lots. Ross River has three industrial lots. Teslin has 37 residential airport lots and two commercial lots. In Watson Lake, they have an inventory of three residential lots, 12 mobile home lots, 13 country residential lots and 11 industrial lots. Then there is the Whitehorse area.

That covers the 10 communities in and around the territory. I will send you some communication on that. It is pretty straightforward.

Mr. Hardy: Thank you to the minister for that and also for his offer to supply us with that information. I really appreciate that.

Moving along, I only have a few more questions. These are a little tougher in some ways and are more difficult to answer. I am going to do a tiny preamble just to set this up, and then hopefully just get the questions out.

The *Environment Act* recognizes that the resources of the Yukon are the common heritage of the people of the Yukon, including generations yet to come, that long-term economic prosperity is dependent on wise management of the environment, that a healthy environment is indispensable to human life and health, that every individual in the Yukon has a right to a healthy environment. The act states that the Government of Yukon is the trustee of public trust and is therefore responsible for the protection of the collective interests of the people of Yukon regarding the quality of the natural environment.

The *Umbrella Final Agreement* is authorized to ensure that social, cultural, economic and environmental policies are applied to the management, protection and use of land, water and resources in an integrated and coordinated manner so as to ensure sustainable development, which is part of the Energy, Mines and Resources mandate.

The *Umbrella Final Agreement* also indicates that any regional land use planning process in Yukon shall provide for public participation in the development of land use plans. Once a claim is staked, the land is alienated from the Crown and no other value can be recognized. The person or company staking the land has a right to mine the land and to sell the claim with no profit to Yukoners in that regard.

I'm sure the minister recognizes that I am talking about the old system that is very unique to Canada; it is called the free entry mining system and it has been around for a long time. Many people consider it a sacred cow — definitely people in the mining industry. However, many other countries around the world do not, and have not, and yet mining continues in those countries as well.

My question: what plans does the government have to adapt free-entry staking in order to harmonize it with the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and the *Environment Act* principles and policies?

Hon. Mr. Lang: To be short on that, that's the *Quartz Mining Act*; there is free entry in the territory. Certainly, all of these acts in time, will be reviewed through the UFA, and those kinds of questions can be asked when they are reviewed.

It won't be my decision here today when they are reviewed, but over time, Yukon has committed — not this government — we've committed to look at this with our partners, the First Nations, and review all of these acts that the public government has.

Mr. Hardy: I really do look forward to having a chance to actually work on something like this. They are very ancient, and times have changed, especially with the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and recognition of lands, and the impact it has on the socio-environmental consequences of the usage and what is the priority. I do look forward to that; I hope the process starts fairly soon.

The minister is right that it is of course the *Quartz Mining Act*. My question again: has this government considered changing the *Quartz Mining Act* to base royalties on net smelter re-

turn? In other words, production mining-specific expenses rather than on net profit where all sorts of expenses are deducted, including their CEO pay and benefits? This, unfortunately, often means that there are no profits, so there are no expenses, because they can write off a lot.

Hon. Mr. Lang: The short answer to that: I guess we are looking at options on that. Those are options that are out there and we certainly as a government are looking at all options.

Mr. Hardy: I won't go down this road much longer — or at all, actually.

I'm going to wrap this up. There are many other departments that need to be debated. I do appreciate the minister's attempt — and willingness — to try to answer the questions I asked. Ones that don't get answered — I've sent the minister the list of some of the questions I was concerned about — he will have them and he can reflect on them over the next while and maybe we'll revisit a lot of them in the fall.

However, the last question is a very simple one. Will the department's energy strategy include introducing a carbon tax similar to B.C.'s? Are any other measures aimed at making consumers pay for carbon emissions?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I'd like to thank the member opposite for his questions here this afternoon.

We're looking at all sorts of options, Mr. Chair. That's one option in understanding our small jurisdiction and, of course, the cost of petroleum today, but it's not something we're looking at.

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

Mr. Hardy: I request the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 53, Energy, Mines and Resources, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, cleared or carried

Chair: Mr. Hardy has requested the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, 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 \$36,921,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$3,640,000 agreed to

Department of Energy, Mines and Resources agreed to

Chair: We will now proceed to the Department of Health and Social Services. Do members wish to take a brief recess for officials?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Chair: I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*. We will now proceed with Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services.

Department of Health and Social Services

Hon. Mr. Cathers: It's a pleasure to rise in the House during Committee of the Whole to debate the Department of Health and Social Services. As members will recall, earlier in second reading I referred to a number of the areas under the department, so I will not go on extensively at this point in time. They include much of the good work officials have done over the past years, including social assistance reform. As members will recall, this had five key components. There is the increase in rates. There is the change to the earned income exemption, whereby the three-month waiting period is eliminated and the earned income rises to 50 percent for a maximum of three years. This provides incentive and the enhanced ability for people to move into the workforce and to build their personal resources while they are there. Of course, the three-year timeline was based on the fact that a review of case files has demonstrated that once individuals were off social assistance for a period of two years, they typically never return to the system.

It is time limited for the purpose of preventing misuse of that system. As well, changes include the disabled persons assistance program that will provide increased ability for the department to assist those who have a long-term disability, and that will also reduce the administrative burden on departmental staff and on individuals with respect to the requirement for filling out such information rather than submitting reports on a monthly basis, as is the case with social assistance recipients. It will move to a yearly review for those who have, by virtue of a doctor's diagnosis, a long-term disability.

As well, the reform project identified two key areas for increase within other parts of the system that have been acted on with a significant increase to the child care subsidy of 25 percent, an increase in the maximum eligibility limit, and the increase to the Yukon child benefit — a significant increase again from a previous level of \$37.50 per month to a new level of \$57.50 per month per child.

Effective April 1, the department launched the services to children with disabilities program. \$418,000 is allocated for this purpose. This builds on previous existing resources and is a program aimed at providing increased ability for parents who have a disabled child, particularly those with severe disabilities. It provides an increased ability for that parent to care for that child in their home and to support the child's development, ultimate potential and ability to function effectively in society and live a fruitful life.

This includes additions to the health human resources strategy carried forward in this year, including the family physician incentive program, the medical education bursary, the health profession education bursary, the nurse mentoring program, the increase to the previously existing nurse bursary, and

the expansion of existing physician practices through funding available as long as the practice meets the eligibility for that.

They must create space for at least one additional physician, and work with the Department of Education and Yukon College on developing the licensed practical nurse program, which will be up and running this fall at Yukon College.

As members will be aware, this government is the first one in Yukon history to move forward with a comprehensive health human resources strategy and we will continue to work, as we are right now, with health professionals on evaluating the work that has been done to date, the success of those programs and determining ways in which the program should continue to evolve to support recruitment, retention and training of health care professionals for the Yukon.

As well in this year, as members will recall, in January we announced the expansion of the telehealth network which, through a partner, with Canada Health Infoway, has resulted in the Yukon being the second jurisdiction in Canada to have telehealth services available in all communities, and are available through all of our nursing stations at this point in time, effective earlier this year.

As well, work is ongoing to develop the nurse line partnership with the Province of British Columbia. We anticipate that service being up and running sometime later this year, likely during the summer. That will allow people to dial 811 and receive access to counselling from a nurse who provides information by telephone. As members will likely be aware, at one point in time it was possible in a simpler time to receive that service from the hospital or from doctors or nurses over the phone — but in recent years, due to changes in liability requirements, that fell by the wayside.

This will provide an enhanced level of service that will allow access to nurses who are dealing with a wide range of issues and have experience in assisting people with assessing their own symptoms and choosing what services they may wish to access, what would be appropriate, and provide advice to them on whether they need to see a health professional such as a doctor or a nurse in their community, rapidly or whether it may be something that they could deal with themselves.

It will be counselling to assist them in taking increased control and be involved in their own health at home.

Work has been ongoing in improving support for mental health services, which I will touch on later. As a result of these financial increases, the overall financial overview is that planned O&M expenditures in the department are expected to increase, for a total of \$209,209,000. This reflects an increase from last year's record budget.

We are very sensitive and aware of the many current and future processes that will impact health spending. That is why we have announced the health care review and appointment of a committee to look at the sustainability of our health care system over the longer term. We look forward to this committee doing its work and reporting later this year.

This is complementary to work that has been launched, both in the department and in the Yukon Housing Corporation, of long-term strategic planning, which had taken place in the past in a less formal context. This new process in both entities

is aimed at getting more involvement from all staff who are affected in bringing a comprehensive strategy and approach to long-term strategic planning of the health care system as a whole. Those two strategic planning processes will feed into the health care review being done by the panel and will continue beyond the completion of that panel's final report.

Revenues are anticipated to increase by a further one percent and comprise 14 percent of the total expenditure for the department. Capital expenditures for the coming year for the department are estimated at \$11,131,000.

Highlights of operation and maintenance funding include the Canada Northwest FASD Partnership. As of April 1, the Yukon took over the lead of the Canada Northwest Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Partnership with me as chair of the ministers council. We've been a member of this partnership for the past nine years. It is formed of the western provinces and the three northern territories, as well as clinicians and a significant network of technical people who are connected through this partnership, in sharing studies and the results of initiatives that have been done by each jurisdiction to try to reduce FASD and to diagnose it as well.

Although the Yukon has hosted an international conference and a symposium of the Canada Northwest FASD Partnership, this is the first time we have taken on the role of lead and chaired this group. We have, of course, been very actively involved in the Canada Northwest FASD Partnership research network since its inception. Members will be aware that our government's five-step FASD action plan was a significant part of our plan during the last mandate. We have carried that forward, delivered on all areas and have worked both internally and with non-governmental organizations to deliver various components, as well as worked with the hospital and doctors to do such things as the meconium-testing project to identify the level of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and fetal alcohol effects that are seen in babies in the Yukon.

Of course, as I noted before, this enables us to connect with work being done in other jurisdictions. I look forward to sharing further information with members, following the conference that will take place — the annual meeting of ministers and the annual conference that will be taking place later next month in Banff. We look forward to announcing further results from the meeting at that point in time.

Another initiative that has been ongoing in the last fiscal year and will continue in this fiscal year is the expansion of the chronic disease collaborative management program. This program began in May 2005 with a focus on diabetes. The program focuses on supporting health professionals to improve the quality of care for people with a chronic condition and supporting those health professionals working together to that end. The program provides education and training sessions, clinical support from chronic disease management, a nurse, and facilitates support.

Participants are health care providers working in Yukon communities. Together, they provide care and support to over 700 Yukoners with diabetes.

Health providers in the program have demonstrated significant improvements in patient care, consistent with Canadian

Diabetes Association clinical practice guidelines. In addition, innovative changes and collaborative work has been implemented, such as patient group visits.

Future steps for this program include a rollout to all Yukon communities and medical practitioners, and expansion to other chronic conditions. Along with diabetes, the program will support improving the clinical management of hypertension, heart failure, pulmonary disease and kidney disease.

Other initiatives under the territorial health access fund, in addition to the health human resources strategy initiatives I outlined, include emergency preparedness planning. The department is undertaking a number of activities to better prepare for its responsibilities during major emergency and disaster events, including updating departmental emergency health and emergency social services plans, completing contingency plans for specific events, and updating branch business continuity plans.

Other activities include training events, participation in national planning activities, managing resources under the national emergency stockpile program and inter-agency and intergovernmental coordination and agreements. These types of activities — emergency preparedness — would apply to situations such as the flood last year, which fortunately saw a limited need for services. However, the staff and working groups of emergency health and emergency social services were ready and did assist in, fortunately, a limited number of situations — but they were prepared for a larger scale demand on services, which fortunately was not needed. Of course, I'm referring particularly to the flooding situation in Marsh Lake, Tagish and Lake Laberge.

Other activities that could occur would be things such as the SARS epidemic that was seen in Ontario, the possibility which epidemiologists tell us will occur at some point in time that is impossible to predict — an influenza pandemic that occurred in the past and will occur in the future. Such activities, particularly in these days of modern travel and with the increased speed of travel of the virus in early stages, will require the ability to respond quickly and appropriately.

That is one example, when I refer to the branch business continuity plans, where such events as health emergencies could have some impact on the level of staff available and, therefore, all branches of the government need to be prepared to operate in a coordinated fashion in such challenging sessions. We are connected of course to national activities in this area as we do that.

Another area that is funded under the territorial health access fund includes the risk management and quality assurance office, which is leading and directing the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of quality assurance, quality improvement and risk management activities throughout the department, with these activities expected to lead to increased client satisfaction through improved service provision, increased value to the taxpayers and increased staff morale, as well as program sustainability, through better management of risk. This includes, of course, reviewing situations where our front-line staff are exposed to potential risks, including violent situations and exposure to diseases and other haz-

ardous situations that could affect their health. A comprehensive review is being done to ensure that our policies, procedures and activities meet the best possible level they can.

Additionally, dental health enhancements at the community level will increase rural Yukoners' access to dental services by recruiting, orienting and equipping dentists to provide service in rural communities. Services to children will be enhanced by increasing access to specialized pediatric dentists and sustaining the Yukon children's dental program to increase recruitment and retention activities for dental therapists and attract young Yukoners to the field of dental therapy.

I also mentioned the area of mental health. Improved mental health support at the community level is an area we will be moving further forward on. This will build on the enhancement I previously referred to of a rural clinician being based out of Dawson City, with access through the telehealth network to other areas of the territory and the services based out of Whitehorse, the youth clinician based out of Whitehorse and the contracting of a second full-time psychiatrist. This is in the process of being expanded to contract a second rural clinician for the southern regions of the Yukon.

These clinicians provide training consultation and professional support to health care providers, engage in public education and awareness activities and conduct assessments and develop treatment plans for individuals with known or suspected serious mental health problems.

Additionally, a new program — early psychosis intervention — will increase awareness, diagnosis, management, treatment and support for young people with early psychosis, including increased referrals, assessments and treatment plans for young people with potential psychotic disorder and increased services for clients, families and caregivers. It will also include an increased capacity of clinical staff to be up to date with knowledge, policy development and clinical interventions, and increased capacity for clients and families to engage in mutual aid and support.

Mr. Chair, I believe you're about to tell me that my time has expired, so I look forward to continuing my remarks later and hearing questions from members opposite.

Mr. Mitchell: I want to start by thanking the minister for the overview he has presented this afternoon, and which he has indicated he will continue to present at his next opportunity. I want to thank the officials for being here today, as well as for the briefing that they provided to us earlier in the sitting. It's much appreciated having that information. I want to put on the record how much I, our caucus and all Yukoners appreciate the health care providers across the Yukon, be they doctors, nurses, LPNs, administrators, radiologist technicians or physiotherapists who do their best to keep us in the best possible health on a daily basis. They deal very frequently with people who are experiencing discomfort and anguish. In my experience, they do an amazing job at trying to alleviate people's fears and concerns and assist people toward recovery at the earliest possible opportunity.

As the minister said, we are planning on spending over \$209 million in the current fiscal year just in operation and maintenance funds, and another \$11.131 million in capital

funds. It's the largest area of our budget. I know that the minister takes his responsibilities very seriously. I know that he recognizes that probably the two portfolios that touch Yukon families in the most ongoing and intimate basis are health and education. It is not an easy portfolio, because there are always going to be competing demands for the money. We do appreciate that.

Last year, in general debate on Health, I indicated to the minister that one of the advantages of general debate as opposed to Question Period is the opportunity to elicit more information in a more collegial and less confrontational atmosphere. I indicated to the minister at that time that, due to the limited time available for debate, I would look forward to asking more specific questions and getting more specific answers and going back and forth that way, hopefully avoiding too many of the 20-minute intervals when either the minister or I are on our feet.

It's easier for the officials to follow forward. Perhaps we'll be able to do that this year as well — I hope so.

In his opening remarks, the minister spoke about the change — not only to social assistance rates — but to the whole structure and approach of providing social assistance to the clients who need it, including the change in the 50-percent level of being able to earn income and maintain social assistance, up to three years of being able to work while continuing to receive some social assistance. I do think these are good ideas, good approaches and good programs.

I have one question I would ask the minister. In the budget under social services, we see \$23,131,000 compared to \$22,710,000 in the 2007-08 forecast — an increase of some two percent — I think that works out to \$421,000. We haven't actually ever heard any sort of barometer or standard of how this will translate for individual recipients. I don't know the minister wants to provide that, because I recognize that every situation is different. You have single people, you have families and the numbers in families differ. So I don't know what yardstick the minister wants to use, but I'm confident he will be fair in choosing one that's readily understandable.

We're just wondering if there is some amount of average increase per recipient, based on recipients without children, families with one child, two children, et cetera. Whichever way the minister wants to break it down would be helpful, but could he give us an idea of what those increases will be. I do recognize — as I'm sure the minister will point out — that there's a great deal of variation, depending on individual circumstances.

We have known for many years that people are struggling in an era of increasing food costs, fuel costs, housing costs, to make do. We have heard, and there have been many public demonstrations that we have all attended — members of all caucuses, including the government side — where people are stating that they have to cut into their food amounts to supplement housing costs in order to find decent enough housing to house their family.

If the minister could just answer that — I think I'll just leave it on this one issue. If the minister could refrain from just reading another 20-minute section of his notes, maybe we

could do it sort of issue by issue; if not, well, we'll get back to other issues later.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I don't have the rate breakdown in front of me here. I can undertake to look into that for the member opposite.

Suffice it to say — and let me remind the member opposite of the work that officials did on the recommendations to the rate increase for social assistance — the most significant increase was for the food portion of that, based on the market-basket approach. I believe it is Agriculture Canada that comes up with that number, but it's the federal market-basket approach to calculating a nutritional food basket. While that reflects more than a bare-bones ability to live on what is allocated for food, it is the best assessment that we have that includes local calculation to allow nutritional food costs — including the appropriate mix of fruits, vegetables, et cetera — and some additional room to ensure that those who are on such a calculation have the appropriate resources to have a good healthy diet.

That was the most significant increase in the social assistance reform that was identified. As well, there were rates identified across the board, and I believe we announced this back when the proposed structure was first indicated.

I will, however, undertake to look into that for the member. I don't have the information at my fingertips.

However, there are increases to rent, facilities and all rate categories, based on the work done by officials in assessing the cost-of-living increase in this area. Secondly, and more importantly, it is in identifying the actual cost that is necessary to achieve such services in the Yukon.

As the member is likely aware, the key objective of the review was focusing on the nearly 70 percent of social assistance recipients who have been on social assistance on more than one occasion. It determined that these recipients often end up back on assistance because the program structure encouraged dependency by clawing back every employment dollar an individual made for a period of three months after entering the program, and then allowed them to retain only one dollar out of every four as they entered the workforce. This created a situation whereby if someone faced an unexpected car breakdown, furnace problem or other unexpected costs they couldn't personally deal with, they went in to social assistance for assistance. For a three-month period, they would then have every dollar they made in the workforce clawed back, so they would see no benefit from going to work.

In fact, due to the costs of travelling to work and the various little expenses we all face when coming to a place of employment, they would probably be worse off working during that three-month period than if they had stayed at home and not worked. This resulted in a structure that encouraged despondency among those individuals and made it very difficult for them to gain those personal financial resources and enter the workforce.

Secondly, the key objective of the three-year period where they receive the enhanced earned income exemption is to help them build those personal savings, so that when they see the increased cost of a car breaking down or a furnace, and so on,

they would not be forced to return to social assistance, because that in itself is a very demoralizing experience. Our objective in this structure is to assist people to enter the workforce and build their personal savings and resources for themselves and their families.

Nearly 70 percent of the caseload that showed they had entered to workforce and attempted to make it go demonstrates that they have the willingness to work, the ability to be hired, and were making an attempt to get off the system. The key and most important objective of social assistance reform is targeting those individuals in particular and helping them break dependency on the system and become fully self-sufficient.

Other areas that I would like to touch on in resuming my comments from before — I recognize that the member is eager to proceed with further questions and I am eager to give further answers — but there are a few areas that I think would be helpful in avoiding needless back and forth in debate by me providing that information now, which I did not have the ability to do in my first comments.

Further enhancement in the mental health area includes support for persons with serious mental health problems, and a mental health social worker has been hired to provide case management services to persons with complex mental health problems including concurrent mental health and addiction problems. That is what is often referred to as dual-diagnosed clients and of course those are individuals who have both a mental health challenge and an addiction to either alcohol or another substance. These situations have become very complex and very difficult to treat. It is increasingly difficult for them to break their addiction and to engage in healthier behaviours.

The social worker will also work with clients, landlords, educators and employers to optimize housing, education, training and work opportunities for these clients.

Another enhancement that is related to our disease management program includes improved supports for tuberculosis. The goal of this program is to reduce the incidence and spread of tuberculosis through effectively and timely case-finding, screening, contact-tracing and treatment of infected and at-risk individuals.

TB nurses work with community health nurses and TB workers to enhance monitoring, surveillance and ensure clinical practice guidelines on the treatment and management of tuberculosis are followed.

Public information materials, TB worker manuals and protocols are developed to guide the identification, treatment and management of tuberculosis.

Another area that I'd like to make members aware of is the advanced directives implementation. A full-time coordinator is now in place to enhance services and build the capacity of individuals and health care and other professionals to increase the number of advanced directives put in place. This will be done by increasing awareness and knowledge, training and coordination, promoting and working with all levels of the health care system to ensure forms are completed, on file and accessible when needed.

Another area that we're pleased about is palliative care. The official launch of the program in the new building occurred

this morning. The palliative care program involves implementation of hospice palliative care support program — “program without walls” — to provide end-of-life services to family, community and formal caregivers. A key part of the work of staff includes coordinating existing palliative care resources, improving communication and clinical support among care professionals and improving public and professional skills and knowledge through education and training in Whitehorse and the communities.

One of the things they'll be doing in large part is providing support to other health care professionals who do not necessarily have expertise in palliative care in assisting them in helping people who are experiencing or facing end of life. The staff of the program will be working with them to help them build their ability to handle such situations and to provide those professionals advice while dealing with someone who is facing such challenges.

It will also include working in Whitehorse with Hospice Yukon Society. Hospice Yukon is limited in capacity in rural areas, so volunteers will also be coordinated through this new office in rural areas where hospice does not have the resources to extend to.

Of course, Hospice Yukon and staff and volunteers of that NGO do excellent work in providing grief counselling to individuals who are facing the end of their lives, as well as to families and friends who are coping with the loss of a loved one. At the launch this morning, I found it interesting that one of the professionals told me that this has been something they have been after for 10 years. They are pleased to see that it is finally moving forward and finally up and running.

Another area within the department that I would like to touch on is healthy living and health promotion, which is funded under the territorial health access fund. This program aims to enhance tobacco reduction and control activities to assist Yukoners to quit smoking and prevent youth from taking up the habit. This will be done, as I announced earlier, by expanding the programs to assist Yukoners with nicotine replacement therapies, and we will be enhancing the education activities particularly related to smoking in cars. This will be done in cooperation and with the participation of the motor vehicles branch.

As well, expanding on previous work, such as the Quit-Pack program, cessation tools, programs engaging particularly youth in a range of education and skill development activities and working with community resource persons to promote and support smoke-free living are a few of the many ways that staff is working and assisting people to break their addiction to smoking and encouraging people to not start in the first place. The program extends to include efforts to reduce second-hand smoke exposure, using a harm-reduction approach and increased awareness of the health effects of smokeless tobacco.

A new initiative under health promotion is programming to support healthier food choices among Yukoners with public health care providers, educators and others being the target audience. It is to increase their awareness of healthy eating and create environments in which healthier choices are easier to make.

These programs will work closely with rural Yukoners and communities to address the unique challenges they face.

Another initiative is the health information sharing and protection of privacy in electronic health records. This initiative focuses on the complicated legal policy and administrative issues relating to the sharing of personal health information among health practitioners and institutions throughout the health care system in order to provide for timely and improved quality across the continuum of care for patients.

The end result may include a legislative framework for the Yukon to address these issues as well as protocols among health care professionals, et cetera. As members are likely aware — they should be, as I've mentioned previously in the House — improving and enhancing the technology including electronic health records and the sharing of information both within the territory and to treatment centres in other jurisdictions will increasingly be a key part of providing effective health care. This is an area in which we can better coordinate our resources and provide increased access to patient files for all health care providers. This will include things such as electronic prescribing, which will reduce challenges that have been faced nationally and noted in the number of health care challenges, some due to as simple a thing as the doctor's handwriting being misread by the pharmacist.

I take this opportunity to note to members and any others who are listening that it is always important to understand the information that your doctor or other health care provider tells you, and you should not hesitate to ask questions if you do not understand it. It is very important particularly if you have a diagnosis of treatment including medication or other steps to understand what you are being prescribed and to ensure that is in fact the prescription that is filled out. Even when electronic prescribing occurs, which we anticipate at some point in the future, computer and individual errors can occur. Each and every one of us should be providing our due diligence and double checking the work that well-qualified and hard-working people do because they too are only human.

Mr. Chair, other activities under the territorial health access fund include pan-territorial projects and the operational secretariat. The operational secretariat fund consists of \$10 million over five years. For 2008-09, the shared budget with the other two territories is \$2.5 million. This is money that is in trust for all three territories — the Yukon is the banker for that program but, as I noted, those monies are for all three territories put together and support a number of pan-territorial projects and initiatives. We distribute it to the other territories as directed by the assistant deputy minister working group.

Pan-territorial projects currently planned or underway include the Arctic Health Research Network, which is the first Canadian tri-territorial health research network linking northern regions. The network includes health research centres based in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Its mandate is to improve health outcomes through research. The network is community driven, northern led, and a health and wellness research network that facilitates identification and action on health research priorities in all three territories.

A second area under this, the operational secretariat funding, is the oral health initiative. During 2007, a pan-territorial oral health initiative was undertaken, with the N.W.T. Department of Health and Social Services taking the lead.

A report was completed that analyzed existing oral health systems and programs in the three territories for children zero to 10 years of age, and proposed an appropriate continuum of care to improve oral health outcomes for children residing in the territories. The report was then used to guide the design and implementation of short-term strategies and long-term actions, and also to identify potential projects that the territories could jointly undertake to improve the oral health status of children from zero to 10 years of age.

Another area is the program referred to as "Healthy Foods North". Nunavut presented a proposal to the territorial and federal Health ADMs working group to expand the Healthy Foods North initiative for consideration as a pan-territorial project. Under this initiative, a feasibility study will look at implementing programs intended to encourage healthy choices and prevent obesity and chronic disease by increasing access and availability of healthy foods in community stores and promoting their purchase and utilization.

One more area in this section is mass media collaboration. The Yukon put forth a proposal to develop a pan-territorial mass media campaign using the same themes across the territories but with the face and feel of the campaign being territory-specific. Due to the high cost of media placement, this allows each territory to do much more than it would otherwise be able to do, and considerable savings are realized through this approach.

Likely areas that will occur as this moves forward include tobacco education, injury prevention, alcohol and drugs, and sexually transmissible infections. The Yukon is the lead for this project, with resources provided to N.W.T. and Nunavut, as well as to the Yukon, for communications and social marketing expertise.

Also under the operational secretariat funding is a program referred to as "orientation", which will involve the development of orientation programs for new employees of the Department of Health and Social Services in the three territories. Further, we have medical travel evaluation, which provides a foundation to inform decisions, clarify options, identify improvements and provide information about government-administered medical travel programs within the three territories.

With that, Mr. Chair, I look forward to further debate.

Mr. Mitchell: I will thank the minister for all that information. I am not sure what we have here is quite a debate. I think I asked one question over a couple of minutes and I got quite a lot of information back, although the answer to my one question wasn't available. I am a little disappointed because I would have thought that the minister, based on past sittings as well as many Question Periods, would have anticipated that I would ask that question, but I will accept that the minister will endeavour to have that information for us at the earliest opportunity — perhaps as soon as tomorrow, and certainly before the sitting is over.

I would also have asked what the rates are going to be for housing. I know, for example, it was going to be \$290 for a single person's housing allowance in the past. I fear to ask that, because the minister likely doesn't have that information available. I know that even the Premier was concerned during the minister's answer. I think he thought for a moment that he heard his ride leaving without him as he listened to the street noise. In any case, the minister did touch on a number of other areas. Many of them were covered in the briefing notes.

I will turn to a different area, since the minister has said he doesn't have the breakdown on social assistance. There's not much point in asking more questions, just to get the same answer. I have been asking the minister now since he became minister — I think I asked his predecessor, the former acting minister, as well — about what is being done to plan for the future with an aging population soon to retire in the Yukon. There is lots of anecdotal evidence of multigenerational families that I can see even in my own neighbourhood. It's almost like returning to the old farming family days to see grandparents living with adults and children. Inevitably, those people will need some sort of extended care if they intend to stay in the Yukon, and hopefully they do.

I think I've told this minister and his predecessor that I likened it to an iceberg, where 90 percent of it is under the surface and only 10 percent is showing. All we had heard over the last year and a half is that there were 12 more beds to be opened up in Copper Ridge Place. They do appear in this budget in the statistics as having opened in November 2007. I believe we have determined from debate in Question Period that they were then closed again due to staff shortages. I guess one question I will ask the minister is if any of these beds reopened since then and if not, when are they anticipated to be open?

Among the excellent briefing materials that we were given, there is the annual and monthly Bureau of Statistics' reports about our population demographics. In looking around my own neighbourhood, it has now been acknowledged by the minister's officials that 20 percent of Yukoners 75 years and older reside in long-term care facilities and that currently we have 147 beds. I am not sure if that included the 12 beds that have been closed or if that is minus those. Six are used as respite beds. By 2016 there will be 1,274 people over the age of 75 and if that same 20-percent figure requires long-term care facilities, Yukon will need 255 beds just to service this section of the population. That is quite a healthy increase.

The briefing notes go on to say there is a need for a new facility within the next five years and within the next 10 years, which I had pointed out to the minister in the past. We have already heard at the briefing that the Thomson Centre will not reopen this year. There isn't any money in this year's budget for any capital work and I believe we were told there are no nurses to staff it in any event. The minister can clarify the situation with Copper Ridge Place when he is next on his feet. I do hope that he simply tells us what the plan is and what the date is when the facility will be fully operational again. I don't think there is any need to hear about this being a problem across Canada because Yukoners just want to know what the

answers are for Yukon. I'm sure Albertans will hold their minister of health accountable for what is being done in Alberta.

We just want to know what the plan is for Yukon and when the 12 beds will reopen. Also, we were told that in terms of other extended care facilities there was no planning for a new facility — it will probably begin in two or three years. Based on the track record of this government to date with moving from the planning of a facility, be it the Watson Lake extended health care facility or the planned facility in Dawson, to the projected time lines for the single-parent facility that was discussed earlier today in Question Period — we know that it will take at least two or three years to plan and get a facility going; probably three at the minimum.

I am hoping that is a misunderstanding and that the planning is ongoing now and perhaps there will be a new facility in three years. Does the minister mean to tell us that they won't be looking at it for another several years?

Again, I would like an update on the Thomson Centre. I'll lump these together because I think the minister will perhaps spend a lot of time answering this and other questions we haven't yet asked, and that will likely take us to the break and I'll have only asked two questions. I will lump in with that a question about the Watson Lake Health Centre: at this point, where is that project at?

I know management of it has been handed back over to Highways and Public Works, Property Management Agency. Certainly the minister must be in close contact with his colleague, the minister responsible, or he can send him a quick note. We'd like to know if that project is scheduled to be completed this year. What are the plans for integrating the existing hospital with it, or when will any renovations to the hospital be complete? That is certainly something he would need to know, regardless of which agency has taken operational control of the construction.

For Dawson City, there was apparently \$60,000 in last year's budget for planning. We were told it is hoped it will be revoted in a supplementary budget later this year, and actually planning will be done this year. Could we get some indication on the status of that project?

I've lumped these all together because they're all extended care. We know there will be a great need in the future and we don't want to be forced back into the situation where we're making use of hospital beds at Whitehorse General Hospital for people who should actually be in a long-term care facility.

I look forward to the minister's response on those issues.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: In answer to the member's question, it's interesting that the member is taking credit for noticing the population is aging. I'm not going to dispute that he noticed that but, of course, we've all noticed it and it has been reflected in statistics and projections for some time.

As the member will be aware, the work being done to assist with this includes significantly increasing the pioneer utility grant to senior citizens to assist them to live in their own homes. We indexed that against inflation.

As well, the department is currently working on the home care review, which will review the existing services provided not only by the department but also through other agencies,

such as the Yukon Housing Corporation. This review will eventually present recommendations to me, caucus and Cabinet on what areas may be appropriate for enhancement of these services, both in Whitehorse and rural Yukon. This would be to achieve the ultimate objective that we have, as laid out in our party's 2006 election platform, which is to assist seniors and elders to remain in their homes for as long as possible and as long as it is safe for them to do so. The goal is to ensure that those services are available, either directly through the government or through coordination of other services, including such things as helping people who need some minor repairs to their home, but perhaps are in a situation in their life where it's becoming difficult for them to deal with contractors and others without either misunderstanding things or perhaps getting ripped-off by someone who is unscrupulous.

That is the overall scope for the member. There will be further announcements as this work continues throughout this fiscal year.

As well, assisted living facilities through the Yukon Housing Corporation provide activities such as the work that has been done in Haines Junction in the assisted living facility there. They will be working with Health and Social Services in discussing the needs in communities. I will leave the announcements and debate for Yukon Housing Corporation to the minister for that department.

I'm frankly not sure exactly what has been announced to date, but I can tell the member there is significant work going on in planning in that area for addressing the need in rural Yukon communities of assisting living. Home care services would be provided to people in those facilities when they're not required to be in a continuing care facility per se. As part of our current review of the home care program, we would be looking at the services to people in an assisted-living facility and in their own homes, to try to provide them the services that prevent them from having to move into a continuing care facility until such point as it is truly necessary for them to do so.

With regard to Copper Ridge Place, yes, as we've debated earlier — and as I've indicated previously to the House — we did have some operational challenges with opening up the last 12 beds there. This was significantly contributed to by the increasingly competitive environment we're facing nationally for health care providers. While we've done very well to date through the good work of staff, we did experience a temporary unexpected reduction in the number of staff we had and were not able to keep that 12-bed wing fully running, as we had anticipated being able to do.

The measures taken to correct that include the recruitment fund — I believe I mentioned earlier in debate — which, in working through Public Service Commission, as we must, it has been made available to the managers of our continuing care division. In fact, they have stepped up recruitment activities in sending managers directly out to job fairs, rather than sending human resources people, as had previously been the case. The managers are better able to aggressively recruit people to the territory and inform them of what they will face if they choose to become staff.

The department has done good work through the continuing care branch in addressing these challenges. We anticipate that the wing will likely be up and running by early summer — that staffing levels will once again be at a level where we can reopen that 12-bed wing.

That of course leads into the situation at the Thomson Centre which affected the timelines for Cabinet consideration of capital needs at that facility and for the date of planned re-opening, because quite clearly if we were not able to fully staff a 12-bed wing and run it, we would not be able to staff 37 continuing care beds in a 7-bed palliative care unit, as is planned for the Thomson Centre. Once we determine that in fact we have been effectively successful in re-staffing and fully operating Copper Ridge Place, work on the Thomson Centre is ongoing right now in the department and is part of the strategic planning. Evaluation is being done on what we need to ensure that when the Thomson Centre is re-opened that in fact we are (a) able to staff it; and (b) are able to retain the staff for that facility.

One part of doing this, I should note, is the LPN program where the staff of Health and Social Services collaborated with Education and Yukon College to get this up and running in the fall. It will be a key part of addressing our staffing needs at all our continuing care facilities.

It will take time to roll out the graduates from that program and we hope to be reopening Thomson Centre before the completion of the first two years of that program, but again that program will provide us with the ability to address our staffing needs and does have the capacity, if necessary, to expand the number of students accepted and thereby graduating. So, through training in the territory, we will be able to better address some of our needs than through solely recruiting Outside.

As well, through the health human resources strategy, the health profession education bursary that we launched back in 2006, is available to students who enter the LPN program at the college this semester. It is application-based, but is available for application, and those interested in doing so would be well advised to move forward quickly in getting an application form and applying. I believe the deadline for application for this semester is June 30, 2008.

Regarding the Thomson Centre: the answer for the member opposite is that, as a result of the work being done internally, the Cabinet and I will be reviewing the success of re-opening the 12-bed wing at Copper Ridge and the staffing planning that is ongoing right now, as well as the changes that continuing care branch has implemented to the staffing model to address the requests and interests of staff in making it a more flexible work environment to suit their needs. This is all part of the planning that will enable us to move forward on Thomson Centre in the hopefully not-too-distant future. All these matters are part of the strategic plan that's ongoing and part of the review of health care by the panel that has been appointed and will be reporting on recommendations for a 10-year plan later in this calendar year.

With regard to the Watson Lake facility the member refers to — the health care facility that is being built — the member is incorrect; it has not been transferred to the Property Man-

agement Agency. That option is being considered at this point in time, but a move has not occurred. As the member can understand, the rationale behind potentially making the move is that Property Management Agency is typically the arm of government that deals with such projects.

Initially, the project was proceeded with under Health, because an individual department can move forward on something outside of the Property Management Agency. At that time, due to the lack of property managers within the PMA, they did not have the internal capacity to do that work.

However, the situation has changed since the project commenced. It is quite likely that we may be transferring that back to the Property Management Agency, although that has not actually occurred and I have to correct the member on that. With regard to what exactly the facility is going to encompass, as the member may be aware, it is a fairly large building. There is a significant amount of space that is available for a number of potential uses in that facility. I anticipate that an announcement on that will be made within the next several weeks.

With regard to Dawson, again I will have to encourage the member's patience. We will be making further announcements in the not-too-distant future. I anticipate sitting down with staff of the department, the MLA for Klondike and the health professionals in Dawson City with regard to potential options, and discussing with them the proposed steps for moving forward with the facility.

As the member is likely aware, there was a facility design that was done at one point in time. It did not, however, meet with approval by those health care professionals; therefore, the intention is to move forward with a facility that meets those needs. This includes health care needs, as well as dealing with the challenges related to McDonald Lodge, to ensure we continue to provide adequate continuing care for the people of Dawson City and the surrounding area. Again, I look forward to announcing when we will be sitting down with the people of Dawson City to have those discussions, when we are able to do so. At that point in time, we will be announcing expected timelines for moving earth and beginning construction in Dawson City.

Mr. Chair, I think that has largely addressed the member's questions. The answers are perhaps not to his satisfaction as unfortunately, rarely, we seem to find satisfaction with each other's respective approaches in this Assembly. I have provided the information to the best of my ability, and I hope it will be useful to the member. I look forward to continued discussion.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Mitchell: We live in hope that perhaps during the 15-minute break the minister found the answer to the first set of questions on social assistance rates. I see he is nodding that it was deeper down on his desk than he had time for, so we won't ask for that again.

A couple of points: the minister indicated in his last very all-inclusive response to a very short question that he saw that I was trying to take credit for pointing out for the last couple of years that we had a population demographic that required us to plan for the future of more extended care facilities, seniors housing and so forth. He has mentioned that before about taking credit, like when it came to the ideas we promoted starting in the winter of 2005 on health care worker bursaries, forgivable tuition and subsidies.

We aren't really interested in credit. I think I got all the credits I needed when I was in university. We aren't looking for credit and as long as the government takes action on issues that matter to Yukoners, we will be happy, so we cannot worry about that.

I would point out that the minister felt the need to correct me when I mentioned that we understood that management of the Watson Lake Health Centre was being handed over to the Department of Highways' Property Management Agency. For the minister's information, this wasn't some street rumour. It was what the deputy minister told our researchers during the briefing. If that has now been changed, so be it, but when the deputy minister attends a briefing and responds to a question — and I think the question came from the Member for McIntyre-Takhini — and says that something is happening, we certainly accept that. If it's not yet happening, so be it.

We were talking about the Thomson Centre. The minister agreed that there's a challenge in finding adequate staffing for the Thomson Centre. He pointed out some of the programs, including the LPN program that is going to go forward in the Yukon to help address that. That is all positive. I don't think we heard an answer as to the status of the facility itself. A number of deficiencies were being addressed. There was a discovery of mould. In the last sitting, we had some discussions on that. I think the minister was quick to point out that it had been built in a substandard way by a previous NDP government. The minister laid that at their feet, but since it's a government facility that we must make the best use of, if the minister, when he's next on his feet, could provide an answer as to whether or not the health, structural and mechanical issues have all been addressed, then we'll at least know that that portion of it has been done. I think the minister said that because of the shortage of nurses and LPNs, they weren't putting capital funds in the budget to even move forward to address those issues.

I wouldn't mind the minister clarifying if that's what's happening, if even addressing the repair issues in the facility have been put on hold until such time as the outlook is sunnier for recruiting staff.

Moving on to recruiting staff, we understand we don't have a pediatrician currently in Yukon since the last pediatrician left. We're wondering if the minister can update us on what is the progress to date in attracting a new, full-time pediatrician to practise in Yukon.

Perhaps we need to have a look at how this individual will be paid. As the minister will no doubt tell me, it is a very competitive environment. Perhaps we need to look at the way in which we pay the pediatrician. Perhaps it has to do with the government looking at perhaps establishing an office for the pediatrician rather than expecting the individual to come here and incur the costs of setting up the office. I don't know what the answers are. I've heard from a number of doctors in the community that they have concerns about it, particularly concerns revolving around newborn babies and small children who could use that expertise in a hospital setting. When the minister is next on his feet, I'm hoping he can answer that.

I'm going to roll a number of questions into this question. I was hoping to do this as straight-question, straight-answer, but if the minister is going to use 20 minutes to answer five-minute questions, we are never going to get through this that way.

I'll ask several — the officials can assist the minister with notes — and hopefully the minister won't come back to my questions with a where-do-I-start response.

This minister is beginning to remind us of the Tourism minister who always says, "...and I would be remiss if I did not..." I am hoping he is not going to take his debate style from the Tourism minister because, in the past, he has been pretty straightforward in providing answers to our questions, and we do appreciate that — in general debate. Question Period is a whole other issue, Mr. Chair. I don't want the minister to be too pleased with the accolades that are coming from this side.

My colleague from Mayo-Tatchun wanted me to ask this question and I warned him that it might be a 20-minute answer, but since I am now rolling several into one, I'll ask this question. We've heard — the minister can certainly correct this — that it has been a long time since this minister has met specifically, if ever, with the doctors practising in rural Yukon — in Carmacks, Faro and elsewhere. I know he meets with the YMA and with doctors as a group but rural physicians have their own challenges and would appreciate the minister visiting them within their communities. Does the minister plan to do this perhaps after the House has risen later this month?

I am a little disappointed that the answers to Copper Ridge Place, the Thomson Centre, the Dawson health facility and the Watson Lake health facility were all answered in terms of there being answers forthcoming, perhaps in a few weeks. It sounds like those answers will all be given after we're done sitting this spring. It's difficult to address these issues if we can't get answers in the House.

I'm going to roll a couple more into here to see if we can get answers. The collaborative health clinic the minister's party discussed during the last campaign — I will apologize as that may have been the terminology we were using and it may have been multi-disciplinary or another terminology, but I think the minister knows what I'm talking about. This would be a clinic that government would assist in setting up, where different disciplines — doctors, nurses, perhaps nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, nutritionists and other specialists — could more holistically treat Yukoners as opposed to them going from referral to referral to referral. They could go to one place and actually have all these services provided, perhaps even in

one visit, or at least at one location where they knew the experts were talking to each other on a regular basis.

We understand there is consultation going on with that and invitations have been sent out to form a steering committee. Could the minister update us on the timeline? Is there now a steering committee? When will it meet — just a timeline? We do know, and I'm sure the minister will be quick to tell us that they won't make any such changes without fully consulting with the health care practitioners, and we would have it no other way. We just want to know how it's progressing.

I'm going to leave it at that. I think I've given the minister enough to fill his 20 minutes.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Perhaps I can be quicker than that. I do apologize; I know the member finds it frustrating getting lengthy responses but I think the member would agree I have provided him relevant information, not all of which he would have had before. So I am attempting to assist the member and to assist others across the floor by providing them with information.

I thank the member, although I almost fell out of my chair and hurt myself when he said I had been pretty straightforward in providing answers in the past. I do thank him for the compliment.

The member asked a number of questions. I note with regard to the Watson Lake health care facility, I think I answered that one adequately in the first response, but it has not been transferred from Health to Property Management Agency; however, it is quite likely that will occur. It has not at this point in time; it is being actively considered right now and in fact may occur in the near future.

With regard to Thomson Centre, there are some capital issues that have not been addressed. The issues include the requirement to re-outfit the place because beds — I think beds are roughly \$10,000 a piece and up, depending on the type of bed — and all equipment associated with that, from nurse carts to everything that goes on those carts, was stripped to go to Copper Ridge Place. Therefore there is a need to re-outfit in that area.

The other major capital requirements include upgrades to the heating, ventilation and air-cooling system, commonly referred to as HVAC. At this point in time, it is adequate for occupancy; however, there is a higher standard that applies to a health care facility for long-term clients, because they tend to be in a more fragile state. Therefore the air quality standards and standards for the ventilation systems are to a higher level than for non-health care facilities.

As well, the nurse call system requires upgrading to meet current standards. It was one of the deficiencies where the construction of the facility was not quite adequate. We have debated extensively in the past the political decision by an NDP government not to build the building to code. While that did save them costs at that point in time, it has resulted in increased costs now that we must face as a result of that very poor political decision. That included, in fact, that there weren't sprinklers in all areas where there should have been and that some parts of the sprinkler system had not been hooked up, much to the surprise of those who examined the facility.

We do know the capital costs of those issues; in fact, in addressing it and bringing it up to modern safety standards and to code, the member is correct, as I indicated. Right now, an evaluation is occurring as to the success of restaffing the 12-bed wing at Copper Ridge Place, as well as planning that is going on right now around recruitment and retention of that number of people. Once that work unfolds, and the strategic planning that is currently going on within the department and work that is being done by the panel is a bit further along, there will be more information available to assist caucus and Cabinet in their review. At that point in time, because the capital costs are known costs and there are known timelines for the upgrades, Cabinet will no doubt consider the capital costs and the submission on those matters.

The simple answer is, stay tuned. It is something we are all eagerly awaiting. Much of it is due to being confident that the changes made to address the challenges of Copper Ridge Place will be successful in enabling us to staff the Thomson Centre at such point in time that it opens.

With regard to a pediatrician, we do right now have a part-time contract that has been in place for services. We are also actively pursuing discussions with a pediatrician to examine possibilities for providing longer term access to one in the territory.

It is one of the many specialty areas that are an example of the increasing challenges that we are facing. The problem of doing planning becomes — as members will no doubt note — that although we have in areas such as the health human resources strategy stepped far beyond what any previous government has done, the environment in recruiting, retaining and training health care professionals is becoming increasingly competitive and challenging due to a shortage of people. As we move in a particular direction, it may be adequate that day, and another jurisdiction then takes a look at what we've done and tries to outdo it. It becomes an area of evolution and that is one of the key reasons the health care review panel has been struck, to take a look at the future pressures on the system.

It is quite clear to anyone who looks at the number of health care professionals from coast to coast and the fact that every jurisdiction in the country is short of health care professionals in some areas. The fields vary depending on the jurisdiction. It's quite obvious that on the current trajectory, simply getting into a bidding war will not be successful. It will drive the health care costs of every jurisdiction through the roof. The bottom line remains that there are still not enough health care professionals to fill the jobs that are available to them, so clearly the strategies must go beyond that.

That includes steps we've taken in establishing the LPN program and the bursaries we've provided to assist students in going to medical school and in receiving education as a nurse. These are coupled with initiatives, working with the Yukon Medical Association, to increase support for residency and preceptorships — that is for doctors, particularly those who are in family medicine if they undertake their period of residency in the Yukon.

Through the family physician incentive program and the medical education bursary, we provide assistance to new

graduates and to a Yukon student. Through the medical education bursary, they can receive an additional \$15,000 per year, if they take on their period of residency in a Yukon family practice.

We have taken some steps over the past year and are looking at enhancements to that program for supporting local doctors in providing the preceptor support — the supervising physician support — to a medical student who is in the residency period. We will be looking at further enhancements in that area to try to attract and retain doctors in the Yukon, noting, of course, that it has been quite successful in the past.

A large number of our local doctors came up under previous programs in the past when this occurred. As members will note, it had fallen out of use for some time. At one point in time — quite some years ago, in most cases — many of our long-time local doctors were originally attracted through residency programs. That's one reason we've stepped up what we're doing in that area and are looking at further enhancements.

With regard to rural physicians, I have not formally met with rural physicians as a group, but I have met with most of the rural physicians, or at least representatives of most clinics, because there are some, of course, that do employ other doctors.

Certainly, if the member has heard from any of them that they would like to meet with me, I have always been available to meet with any physician who wishes to discuss issues of relevance. Of course, we have to respect the process we have set up through the Yukon Medical Association, but my door is certainly not closed to those individuals, if they have particular concerns or suggestions they'd like to discuss.

With regard to the collaborative practice clinic and the commitment we made in that area, the member is correct in noting that we sent out letters of invitation to health professions to participate in a working group to plan this clinic and to provide a steering committee to guide the development of this project, including determining what exactly a collaborative practice is, because it means different things to different people. This I note is in addition to steps that we are taking to assist doctors to expand the supports and collaboration operated out of their own practices. We are moving on two tracks with that: one to expand the options available within private practice clinics and the second being the commitment to establish a collaborative practice clinic.

Setting it up does require the engagement of various professionals to have those discussions and, to that end, we have not heard back quite yet from all of the professions. I know, in the case of the Yukon Medical Association, they informed me of the member they would nominate to this committee just last Friday. So we look forward to getting that group together in the not-too-distant future once we have confirmation that all groups have nominated someone to that committee. We would then allow them to sit down and have some discussion around timelines, respecting and recognizing the fact that these professionals have busy schedules. If we want to have a truly effective planning process, then that process and the timelines and meeting the schedules associated with it must be sensitive to the time pressures these individuals are facing in carrying out

their standard work service and assisting their clients in that area.

So, Mr. Chair, I think I have covered the member's questions here. With that, I look forward to the discussion.

Mr. Mitchell: I thank the minister for his answers. In this collegial atmosphere that we seem to be in this afternoon, I almost fell out of my chair, because I think — I'll have to check *Hansard* whether it was once or twice — the minister actually said that the member is correct, so we are making progress here.

Just to recap what I believe I heard: the capital costs of the various upgrades in terms of HVAC, the nurse-call button infrastructure, the sprinkler upgrades, and the other issues, are known at least and quantified, although I take it that, until a Cabinet submission has been made and decisions are made, we are not going to hear that figure, but that's all right — the figure will only matter when it becomes a budget figure and when it actually is going to be done.

The wait time for surgeries — I know more are being done here. I'm speaking specifically about orthopaedic surgeries; I know that we have increased the number of knee surgeries that are being done in Yukon, which is certainly beneficial to Yukoners who don't have to travel Outside to have them done, and is also probably cost effective for us as in making use of the facilities here and not having to pay travel.

I have known of a number of people, I certainly have several constituents, who have struggled with what they perceive as being long wait times — in some cases, they have been over a year — for hip replacement surgeries. I know those are not done here; I don't know if there are any plans to do that here, or if it's too complex a surgical procedure to do in our current facilities; but I am wondering whether anything is being done with the various funds that are available from the Government of Canada to try to reduce those wait times.

The people I have talked to are in a great deal of discomfort and pain. The quality of their life has really become difficult while they wait. I know of several who are at the point of needing to be driven around by other people. I know wait times are an issue across Canada, but again, we are dealing with Yukoners and the Yukon, so I would ask about that.

In terms of recruiting and retaining health care professionals — and the minister indicated that getting into a bidding war would not achieve anything, and I'm not suggesting that that is the answer — but I think if we look around this Assembly at the people who have chosen to live and work here, among the officials and elected members, most of us chose to live here based on what we see as a superior quality of life and lifestyle.

We may complain about traffic jams that are only six minutes long as opposed to 60 minutes long elsewhere. We have immediate and ready access to incredible wilderness, because when we walk out the door, if there's a greenbelt, we are likely to see wildlife. We don't have to go to a zoo or a special facility to do so. We have great artistic facilities. We put on wonderful musical programs and art displays. We have very talented Yukoners. We have sporting opportunities here. We know that we have at least one person who should be going to the Beijing Olympics and other future Olympians here. That

speaks volumes about the opportunities that young people have had growing up in the Yukon.

So I would suggest to the minister that, knowing physicians 35, 36 or 37 years ago who were young physicians in the Yukon, many of whom are now retiring, almost to a one they were here because of the lifestyle.

Somehow we need to reinforce that. At the same time, we have to recognize that if the economics of living here are different enough from other jurisdictions, then we have to address that as well.

I would like to ask the minister about the patient navigator program. We know that the agreement was in place in Edmonton but I think we determined during Question Period last week or the week before that there were some operational difficulties in actually getting it up and running. We believe there is nothing yet in place in Vancouver or Calgary. Is it the intention to provide this in all three cities or just Edmonton and Vancouver, and what are the timelines to have it operational in Edmonton, Alberta, and Vancouver, British Columbia?

As I have told the minister before, I am pretty comfortable navigating around cities, but years ago when I had to go out for medical treatment, I still found it to be somewhat overwhelming taking public transportation when I didn't know the routes, taking taxis, trying to figure out how much time it took to get to the hospital I was going to — then you get to a hospital and there are 12 or 15 buildings. We have seniors and elders in Yukon who may have never been to a city bigger than Whitehorse. We have heard of at least one case in our own caucus where someone went to Vancouver and was so terrified that they simply stayed in their room and didn't leave to go to the appointment because they didn't know how to do this.

It is an important service, and I would like to hear an update on it.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I will begin answering the member's questions. I will start out with the patient navigation program. In fact, I have to correct the record on that matter. I think the member is correct — I hope he's not too shocked in my saying so — that I did say we had an agreement in place; however, what I should have said is that we had an agreement in principle in place. We had challenges with Capital Health Authority, through our respective legal departments, in actually getting the final agreement in place. However, we have gotten to a point where — I can't share too much with the member here today, but I can let him know there will be an announcement coming prior to the end of this sitting of the Assembly on the program.

The work has been commencing. Concluding this was more challenging than expected. That, of course, is the reality we sometimes face in this line of work.

The patient navigation program — I should also make sure that the member understands what it is intended to do. It is intended to assist people in navigating the continuum of health services available within Edmonton through the Capital Health Authority. It will not do all things that some might hope it would. They will not have somebody holding their hand and taking them on a tour of the city or finding places, et cetera.

What it will do is provide information specifically on health services and help patients understand consultations provided to them by specialists and assist them with accessing future appointments. It will assist them as well in identifying where they need to go to go back to their hotel, how they get there, where they might be able to take a bus and where they need to take a taxi, and how this happens.

So it will provide them some assistance in that regard, but it will not be an escort for going around the city and from appointment to appointment — at least, not in most cases. It may occur within hospital, for example, where they may get walked down to another appointment. But I think that will clarify for the member what it does.

There are also other services in place, and one has been in place in Vancouver for several years, called “We Care Home Health Services,” which provides to people some services from a nursing perspective and can include, in some situations, picking them up at the airport if they particularly require assistance.

That is something that has just recently been expanded to Edmonton and Calgary, and we contract with We Care in Vancouver and are doing so in Edmonton and Calgary as well. And these, of course, are local initiatives that are trying to improve the resources available to patients in need of such care.

Once the patient navigation program is up and running in Edmonton with Capital Health Authority, we would look to expand that to Calgary and Vancouver. However, in the past, Edmonton entered into some arrangements with the other territories to provide such services, which is why they’re the first we’re dealing with. The Calgary health authority and the Vancouver region have indicated a willingness to enter into such; they’re working with us on this. It will build when we have a success of the program in the Capital Health Authority region, and we then look forward to moving forward, hopefully in a timely manner, to implement similar agreements with those two health authorities. Of course, a significant part of that is not directly within our hands, but we will certainly actively pursue that type of arrangement.

With regard to health professions, the member referred to my comments on a bidding war not being an effective solution. I also want to clarify that I wasn’t suggesting that compensation isn’t a factor, because it is and always will be. I think the member will agree with me, however, in noting that money alone is not a solution. This needs to include access to an appropriate number of health care professionals so all jurisdictions are not getting into a fruitless and extremely expensive bidding war that would ultimately put the Canadian health care system in jeopardy. We need to take a more effective approach and ensure we’re taking the steps necessary to address service delivery, training and access to health care professionals, and not simply competing with each other.

The member is correct about lifestyle. It is as significant a factor for doctors, nurses and others who have stayed here long term, as it is for many of us remaining in the territory — this beautiful environment we have in the territory. Although some people complain about the cold in the winter, the fact that we tend to have fairly stable weather and predictable climate

makes this a much better place to live — in my humble opinion — than the other alternatives available.

As we know, the access to pristine wilderness and our natural beauty is very important to many of us who choose to make this our long-term home. That’s why part of the approach that has been taken through the increased efforts in the health and human resources strategy includes increased activities in magazines and job fairs at universities and so on to provide information on what life is like in the Yukon. This includes pictures of our natural beauty and also information on the levels of services and resources that are available in the territory.

In one case that I may have previously mentioned to the member opposite, it was the innovative approach by staff in the department where they changed the recruitment approach for dental therapists. They were successful in fully staffing a program in which we had been having staffing challenges for years. They went directly to the college that graduates dental therapists in Canada — only one at this point in time — and provided the information directly to the graduates on what the Yukon is like in terms of the natural environment as well as some of the services such as child care that are available. A number of the people we were successful in retaining had young children. That information on the significantly strong level of support for childcare that the Yukon has, versus most jurisdictions, was part of that successful approach in getting them to come here and choose to become citizens of our beautiful territory.

A nursing recruitment DVD has been produced by staff of the department and the hospital. The YRNA was involved in its development as well. It is an approach to try to paint a visual picture for potential health care professionals to move to the Yukon, painting a picture for them of what the services, work environment, life and so on are like here.

Although there are challenges for front-line service providers in our work places and they face, as all health care professionals do, challenging jobs at some point in time, in comparison to many other jurisdictions in Canada, it is an improved work environment and there is no place like it in Canada. By sharing those experiences from professionals in the field as well as sharing information as to what life is like in the territory and what options exist within our communities, this we believe will add to the success we have already seen in attracting and retaining health care professionals.

With regard to the Thomson Centre, the member is correct on the capital cost. It would not be appropriate at this point in time for me to start naming numbers until Cabinet has approved the proposed plan for completing the capital upgrades. It is a rather large number, unfortunately, but that work must be done to repair a project that was never built to code — a political decision of the NDP government of the day.

With regard to wait times, the member refers to orthopaedic surgery and, in particular, hip surgery, and I share the member’s concern about the wait times we have in those areas. Unfortunately, we are not alone in Canada, which is a key part of the problem we are having in facing wait times for orthopaedic surgeries. It is one of the surgeries that was noted both in the wait times initiative report from health ministers. I believe it

was the 2004 report of health ministers at that time on the benchmark procedures; it was one of the listed procedures because of the wait times. It was also one of the procedures that the Canadian Medical Association referred to on long wait times for services in Canada.

It is an area in which we are facing challenges and we will be looking at this area.

With regard to the wait-time trust fund we receive from the federal government, as the member no doubt knows, we made a commitment to implementing a wait-time guarantee for mammography screening. There has been an improvement already in the timelines for such procedures. We look forward to having the wait-time guarantee formally in place once the hospital makes some capital upgrades that we have resourced them for. The current expected timeline is late this calendar year. Late fall we expect that to be in place and hopefully at that point, we will be able to announce a wait-time guarantee as being officially in place, well ahead of the three years we committed to as a timeline in which to implement that guarantee.

Once that is complete and the full cost of that is known — because again we are working with the hospital in this project — there will be additional funding left over in the money we received. We look to invest that in other areas, particularly related to medical travel and accessing services in areas and hospitals beyond Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton, where we currently access special services.

We intend to use it to expand those services and to provide travel to some of the regional hospitals within Alberta and B.C. that have shorter wait times for a number of procedures. This would likely see some impact as well in orthopaedics. It's one of the areas that are noted in this, but we intend to use a broad-based approach to enhance the travel. Right now, the travel for medical treatment regulation provides for travel to be paid to Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton through the wait-time trust fund.

Again, once we have nailed down the exact dollar cost of the wait-time guarantee for mammography, we intend to expand the assistance to provide a travel subsidy to other areas within Alberta and B.C. Depending on the exact amount we have left over, it may be for a specific list of procedures, but that work is being done.

The preliminary work, preparatory to that, is currently being done in working with Yukon physicians. One thing that members may or may not be aware of is that the system does not operate on one waiting list. The Yukon government does not send out a note that we need surgeries to any one hospital, and have them put it on the list. It is done from doctor referral to specialist. This results in certain specialists being busier than others.

An example I can give the member is through the wait-time reduction initiatives that have been done by other jurisdictions: Saskatchewan, for example, found out with regard to cataract surgery that they had eight surgeons and 72 percent of the wait-list was for two of the eight surgeons. So, each surgeon has a different wait-list and doctors tend to be comfortable referring to a specific surgeon or specialist that they are familiar with. So one of the steps that is already underway,

preparatory to implementing this enhancement to a medical travel program specific to wait times, is doing some of the groundwork to connect doctors with specialists with whom they are not currently familiar. Otherwise, if we did not do so, then this initiative would not be successful because it would simply not be used.

This is another example in fact — this Saskatchewan example — that gives some context to the benefit of electronic health record projects that are underway in Yukon and in every jurisdiction in Canada. One of the challenges that is faced — particularly in larger jurisdictions — is with a system that is largely paper-based where no one agency has access to the waiting lists or information of where there is excess capacity. In some cases for certain procedures, there are long waiting lists at one hospital for one specialist, and another specialist may have a very short or no waiting list.

Ontario, also through the initiative that they put into place — if my memory serves, I think they put roughly 1,400 surgeons on this system. I'd have to check; in fact, I stated in a previous session in *Hansard* the exact number of this. But through putting a significant number of surgeons and — I believe it was — 57 hospitals on the system, and connecting them through the steps, Ontario reported — as of the date I guess it would be over a year ago now — they had seen a significant reduction in wait times for some of their procedures. I believe it was a reduction of four percent across the board and 27 percent for the targeted surgeries, simply by having the information about which regions and which specialists had excess capacity and the ones that had waiting lists they could reallocate within their system.

One of the challenges that Canada's health system in every jurisdiction faces is the fact that the information management systems are very antiquated and paper based. It provides a challenge and jurisdictions cannot effectively manage the allocation of resources and scheduling within those jurisdictions. Those of us such as the Yukon, which have to refer to those services Outside, face the challenges that those jurisdictions face, so as expensive as moving forward with the electronic health information system will be, nationwide, it is key to effectively and efficiently using health care resources and ensuring that people are directed to the areas where there is the capacity to treat them.

Mr. Mitchell: Again, I thank the minister. I have to admit that if the minister says I am correct and that we are in agreement a couple more times, I may start to lose my edge and expect a birthday card and Christmas card. It's not the right date, but then I got the minister's date wrong once too. We'll call it a draw.

I would point out one thing about rural doctors — to be just a little bit edgy. Although the minister says his door is always open, I think what the doctors would like is for the minister to pass through their door, so that he would have a first-hand understanding of what they have to deal with. He would see the conditions and perhaps see the equipment and so forth. I think that that was what was intended, but in any case, we'll leave it.

I want to ask a few more questions. I know that the third party wants to get into this debate. I have a lot of questions I would like to ask, but rather than ask them all, I may re-enter the debate later or try to ask some of them in line-by-line debate.

One question I'll ask is, just looking at the \$31,020,000 estimate for the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which is basically flat to last year's \$31,009,000 O&M expenditure, and both being less than the 2006-07 actual, is the minister confident that — considering we agreed earlier that we do have both rising costs and an aging population demographic — this is sufficient and won't create a bit of a crunch for the hospital in being able to operate?

I know that some of the previous funding may have been one-time funding to address a pension shortfall, but I am a little concerned when I look at that amount not changing, when we hear about how rapidly costs are going up.

These questions are not necessarily in any particular order, but to avoid spending too much more time, can the minister give us an update on the status of progress of negotiations with the Yukon Medical Association? We were told that the agreement expired on April 1, 2008, and the first negotiating session was set for the end of the month, which we presume to have been at the end of April. I know the minister is not going to want to negotiate on the floor of the Assembly, nor would we ask him to. However, could he update us if things are proceeding well?

When I mentioned about the hospital and, of course, this would be capital expenditure, not just O&M expenditure — there has been quite a lot of discussion in recent years about the difficulties that exist because there is not a separate and secure area or ward for mental health patients. Rather, patients who are suffering from various mental health problems are treated within the same general area as are other patients. There have been some issues arising from that, and we've heard that from medical practitioners — nurses in particular, as well as from other patients.

Are there any plans to address that, either this year or in the future? I also noticed that there was a significant increase in the number of direct clinical hours and direct and indirect services hours for mental health care in outpatient mental health services. I don't know whether or not the minister has anything to add — this is from the statistics portion; the yellow pages — as to how this is being addressed. Is that because we have the additional psychiatrist? I would like some details on that.

There is one more question about the outstanding money from the Government of Canada — I believe the bill is now some \$12 million, which is down from \$14 million last year. The Premier has indicated that this is just a normal operational cycle and there is always this lag time. Perhaps the minister could update us on this funding and when he hopes it will arrive.

Finally, with regard to the children's receiving home, we were last told that the minister was awaiting a report from Property Management Agency and there was no money to move it, replace it or renovate it in this year's budget. Is that correct? These are the notes we have from a briefing, but per-

haps the minister has a more up-to-date response to that. If the minister can answer those questions, I think I will save my other questions for later.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The member asked a number of questions and I will try to catch them all.

First of all, with regard to the receivables from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, this is something that the member knows has been a matter of frustration for successive governments with regard to the lag time for payment for those receivables. During my last meeting in Ottawa, I had an excellent discussion with the minister responsible, Chuck Strahl, regarding that and my desire to see us reach a clear business arrangement on how these payments work and what is billed, what services Yukon delivers and how they can be paid in a timely manner.

He was amenable to that and indicated that he would have officials work on that matter. Based on our discussion, I would expect to hear from him sometime early this summer regarding the work done by officials in that area. It was a very receptive discussion and I thank him for his interest in resolving the past challenges in this area, ensuring we have a clear and simple business understanding and moving forward in the future in resolving a long-standing, decades-old problem and frustration to Yukon.

Now, let's see, what else did the member ask? He asked about funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation. In the 2006-07 fiscal year, there was a significant payment for back years in the pension plan deficit and a significant up-front payment. That shows up as part of that line item in that fiscal year. Overall, the contributions to the hospital have increased versus 2006-07.

As far as the total number of \$31 million and change — that is something where there is always the possibility with health services that if demands increase, there might be a need — as there was in the last fiscal year, that being 2007-08 — to provide the hospital additional funding in a supplementary budget. We will assess that throughout the year — of course, in working with them — because if there are spikes in services and demand, et cetera, there may be increased needs based on volume or based on such things as the possibility for unexpected capital needs in this area.

We work closely and will continue to do so with the Hospital Corporation in ensuring the operational needs of the hospital are met. Of course, we're working together — as members would be aware — on the strategic planning in each of the departments in the hospital, as well as working together through membership on the health care review panel in looking at the broad costs of the system and effectiveness in working together. We'll continue to monitor it, but it is an increase.

As I've previously mentioned in debate to members, the number reflected here for the hospital is a significant increase versus the operation and maintenance funding it stood at under previous governments. I would note that, under the Liberals when in office, the operation and maintenance funding stood at around \$18 million per year, so we have significantly increased that O&M funding. That is good news, in terms of measuring the government's commitment to resourcing the hospital, but it

is also bad news, in that it is reflective of the significant increased cost we're seeing within the system.

As far as the negotiations with the Yukon Medical Association, there was a date originally scheduled for late April. At the request of the Yukon Medical Association, it was rescheduled to later this month. We look forward to having positive negotiations with them. I cannot discuss any detail about such negotiations, of course; we have to leave that for the negotiating table.

However, we certainly appreciate the work Yukon physicians do and appreciate the pressures that face the Yukon Medical Association and doctors in private practice, and the need for us to work together in reaching our mutual goal of ensuring there is a fair fee-for-service arrangement between the government and physicians that allows them to meet the needs of their practices and earn a living and it allows the system to operate in a manner that is as efficient and cost-effective as is possible in delivering services to Yukon citizens.

Although in negotiations there can always be some difference in perspective at times, I'm optimistic it will be very positive because I believe both the department and the YMA are going in with the best of intentions and with an understanding of the pressures the other faces, and share the desire of reaching an outcome that is in the best interests of all involved.

As far as mental health goes, the hospital is doing planning work right now to upgrade facilities to provide increased support for mental health. As we've discussed in previous sessions, we offered to assist them with capital changes to provide improved ability to deal with those with mental health challenges. They're doing planning work right now, and once that is complete, we look forward to making announcements of that.

If the hospital comes up with an arrangement that is acceptable and meets with the approval of Cabinet, when I present that to them for their approval, that would be another area that might result in an increase to the hospital's contribution agreement for this year. It is not currently budgeted for, as it is an unknown that remains subject to approval, both by the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board and by my Cabinet colleagues.

With mental health outpatients, the member references statistics of increased numbers and, in fact, yes, he was correct in guessing that this is the result of the increased capacity we've put in place. As I mentioned earlier, we have increased capacity by contracting a second full-time psychiatrist and providing a youth clinician based out of Whitehorse. That has increased capacity which results in increased statistics, because they were previously operating at a fairly full capacity. Well, obviously, it was more than full capacity, which is why we increased the resources in that area, particularly with regard to the contracting of a second psychiatrist.

With that, Mr. Chair, I think I have answered the member's questions.

Mr. Hardy: I was listening to the debate earlier on, and maybe I missed something — I don't think I did — but I was also dealing with somebody in my office who was listening to it on the radio. I'll start with that, because it was kind of

in the back of my mind, and maybe if the minister has already answered, he can refer to that, but I am looking at dental health.

I am concerned, as usual, with what has been happening to dental health over the last few years and some of the directions that it has been going in. My position, of course, is that we have a very good program in the Yukon, and we get a tremendous amount of benefit from the dental therapists who are able to assist the children, both in Whitehorse and in the rural communities.

I do have a multitude of questions about dental health in this area, but I would like the minister to start by giving me an idea of what he sees as the direction in regard to dental therapists and dental treatment, both in the rural communities and the Whitehorse area; where it's going; what are the plans for the future, and then maybe we'll get into more specifics around that.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: With regard to dental health, as the member may have noticed — I gather he was not able to hear all parts of it earlier — we have funding in place to assist in increasing rural Yukoners' access to dental services by recruiting, orientating and equipping dentists to provide services in rural communities, to increase services to children by increasing access to specialized pediatric dentists and sustaining the children's dental program through increased recruitment and retention activities for dental therapists and by attracting young Yukoners to the field of dental therapy.

As I noted earlier in debate, we had a challenge — as members will be aware from previous debates — for many years when we were unable to fully staff the program. Through the good work and innovative recruitment that I referred to earlier in debate — and I will not repeat myself extensively here — we were successful in fully staffing the program. Work is ongoing in terms of expanding that program, noting that the Yukon is acting in an area that is not part of the standard insured health services. It is simply something that for years it has been thought to be best practice to assist people in this area. The Yukon has acted in this area and we look forward to increasing the activities in this area to reach the goal of improving health for rural Yukon children.

That, in a nutshell, is what we're attempting to achieve. The member will be aware, and we can discuss this in more detail if he wishes, that challenges we faced in the past with having dental services provided to rural Yukoners and having no one local willing to provide those services to some of the Yukon communities. As a result, we contracted with a dental clinic out of Hay River and then, at the conclusion of that contract, they did not wish to continue. We can continue that discussion if the member wishes, but suffice it to say that we are attempting to ensure that in-house resources are expanded and that we work with Yukon dentists wherever it is practicable to do so in providing those services to rural Yukon to assist people who otherwise may not come to Whitehorse and receive the services they should.

Mr. Hardy: We are kind of running out of time, and the minister has made an offer to go much more in-depth in this area. Actually, I'm kind of inclined to delve deeper into this area, because there has been so much over the last few years

that raised some serious concerns for people within the communities. They have called me and my office about it, as have people within the profession within the Whitehorse area, as well.

Just look at the numbers for the community health dental plan under health services. I'm just looking at road trips to rural communities, and I see a decrease for the dental therapists from 2006-07, which was at 39. The forecast in 2007-08 is 29. That's 10 fewer trips to rural communities. Then the estimate for 2008-09 is still that number — 29. That indicates to me that what we have here is a drop of 10 rural trips by the dental therapists. I see number 3 beside dental therapist. It says the number of trips and health promotion activities is reduced due to staffing shortages.

I'm probably going to put a few questions together for the minister and maybe talk about them a little bit, but my question in that regard is that this is a substantial drop. When you only have 39 trips, and you're going down to 29, that indicates to me that the children are not getting the same service they got a couple of years ago, because there are 10 fewer trips.

Now, either the minister can stand and say that he has put dental therapists into the communities and they're just living there — so they're not visiting some of the communities any more — or this is a cut in service to the children in this area.

The other argument could be, of course, that they've hired dentists or they're contracting out services that were once provided by the dental therapists — who are employees.

Looking at this, I don't see an increase in dentist visits to the communities, so obviously that argument doesn't work. So really what it comes right down to is there are fewer services in the rural communities, from my viewpoint. Unless these figures are skewed in some way, that doesn't represent what really is happening out there.

I look a little bit further down at "presentations and health fairs." There were 12 of them in 2006-07. The forecast for 2007-08 was six. The estimate this year hasn't gone up again. If they have replaced or have been able to fill the staffing shortages — which I seem to have got the message from the minister that we have — it's six; the presentations and health fairs are still six. So, there's a 50-percent reduction within two years — well, it's within one year and then it continues — there hasn't been an increase.

So there's a reduction in the presentations and health fairs, which is very important. There's a reduction of the dental therapists going into the rural communities — what's on this page indicates it was caused by staffing shortages but, after a couple of years, you would figure some of those staffing shortages would have been addressed.

My understanding is that the training still happens. I believe that training — if I remember rightly now — is done in Saskatchewan, one place where they do training for dental therapists. I'm not sure if any of the other provinces do it.

I think we relied upon the people who are being trained in Saskatchewan, to be able to access those people in this field. It's good to have people who have community and rural experience as well.

Again, is there difficulty? Have we not really filled the staffing shortages? Have the staffing numbers changed over the years so it's not a matter of shortages any more but just a matter that we are not employing as many dental therapists — is that the issue here? Is that how the minister gets his point across that there are no more staffing shortages — we just only employ one, two or three or however many there are. Maybe the minister can give me an idea of actually how many we have employed under the dental therapist program. How many were actually employed four or five years ago? Maybe we need to look at those comparisons and maybe the minister can supply me with that information.

Dental enrolment is dropping. Maybe that is because enrolment in schools is dropping. My understanding is that there is supposedly a drop in rural enrolment — they are almost identical in that sense. All these figures — if you go back to the actual numbers in 2006 and look at the comparisons, they are all going down, except for the dentists who are still being utilized at the same number.

The forecast, of course, for 2007-08 was 24, so it was an indication, but that has been moved up. That's the only one that seems to have been moved up.

A lot of parents rely on this program. It has, for so many years, given good service to the parents and children. I believe also that the dental therapists give a very good service for the cost of the program. To be shifting more toward dentists taking on more of the duties, from my perspective and knowing the costs of dental work, could possibly cost the government more money, because we are not using the dental therapists to the full range and capacity that we could. The same argument applies to nurses, of course. This is a question I want to ask again, which has to do with the government hopefully looking at expanding the roles of nurses and nurse practitioners. I think that this applies also to the dental therapists.

Many of these professionals are trained to do a larger range of work at a lesser cost and are just as competent because of their training as a dentist or a doctor — up to a certain level, of course — and are able to take on a greater degree of responsibility. It would ease the pressure on doctors, allowing them to really focus more on what is needed right now, and it would allow more services for the public. I think the argument for the nurses also applies to the dental therapists. It also applies to those who can't afford the service.

Contrary to a lot of people's opinion, not everybody in the Yukon is rolling in dough. Many people work in the service industry, which is a lower paying area. Many have one, two, three children and have very little money at the end of the day to pay for these costs.

I think it is incumbent upon the government to ensure this is a service that doesn't continue to contract. Maybe the minister can tell me about the numbers over the past few years. Has it contracted? It should actually grow. Is there any intention of growing this program? If not, why not? Is there any intention of allowing the dental therapists to do —

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

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order. May the House have a report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 11, entitled *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, and directed me to report progress on it.

Speaker: You have 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., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:31 p.m.

The following Sessional Papers were tabled May 5, 2008:

08-1-72

Travel Expenses of Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly 2007-2008, Report on (dated May, 2008) (Speaker Staffen)

08-1-73

Political Contributions 2007: Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Yukon (Speaker Staffen)

The following documents were filed May 5, 2008:

08-1-57

Energy, Mines & Resources, letter (dated May 5, 2008) re, questions to the Minister, Hon. Archie Lang, re 2008-09 Main Estimates from Todd Hardy, MLA, Whitehorse Centre (Hardy)

08-1-58

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, letter (dated May 32, 2008) re, to the Prime Minister of Canada Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper from Arthur Mitchell, Leader, Yukon Liberal Party, MLA Copperbelt (Mitchell)