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HANSARD

Wednesday, May 10, 2017 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2017 Spring Sitting

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Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Deputy Premier Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation
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Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate; Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission
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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, May 10, 2017 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of North American Occupational Safety and Health Week

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of all members of this Legislative Assembly. I would like to be frank. Occupational health and safety is a very dry phrase. Some may consider it a cliché. Others may argue that the words get used so much that they have lost their meaning altogether. That's unfortunate and I don't agree. However, I can understand the perspective. When a practice becomes so habitual, its meaning can often erode in our minds. That's why I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge NAOSH Week. NAOSH stands for North American Occupational Safety and Health. But NAOSH Week is a time to celebrate the success we've experienced to cultivate a universal safety culture.

It used to be okay to build human fatalities into the cost of projects. Five workers died during the construction of the Empire State Building. One hundred perished building the Hoover Dam. To businesses and governments of the time, those were perfectly acceptable, even expected, losses. That's no longer okay.

This week, we celebrate the fact that no worker death is ever acceptable under any circumstance. We were reminded of that yesterday when we commemorated the deaths of 26 miners in the Westray mine disaster.

Another thing to celebrate is the internal responsibility system. That is where people, regardless of a law or regulation, informally agree to look after one another's safety and wellness while in the workplace. It used to be every person for themselves; these days, every person is working together to keep each other safe.

For 20 years, NAOSH Week has been observed annually through Canada, the United States and Mexico during the first full week of May. Through community activities, like festivals and barbecues, NAOSH Week breathes life back into the words "occupational health and safety". It returns their meaning and value to them. It reminds us that occupational health and safety is a community lynchpin. It is what ensures that each of us gets home from work to our loved ones and friends every day, unscathed.

Two weeks ago, we observed a very different event — the National Day of Mourning. I was honoured to participate in that beautiful, somber ceremony on the banks of the Yukon

River. It evoked memories of those we have lost. It reminded us that we must double our efforts to keep one another healthy and safe in the workplace. It bid us to look to the future, toward a time when loved ones will no longer be lost to workplaces.

Occupational health and safety is the key to delivering on the promise of the Day of Mourning, and so NAOSH Week naturally flows into it. In a sense, NAOSH Week embraces the Day of Mourning spirit and its timing is perfect.

We are on the cusp of what is, for many of Yukon's largest industries, the busy summer season. Construction sites are brimming with life, mining exploration camps are erupting with activity, and our tourism operators are opening their arms to an influx of visitors from around the world. NAOSH Week gives us the opportunity to shine a light on the occupational health and safety practices of those and so many other workplaces, to celebrate their efforts in making sure every worker gets through every day unharmed and in good health. NAOSH Week is spearheaded by the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering and its counterpart in the United States and Mexico.

As I mentioned, it is celebrated with community events across three countries. Here in Yukon, there is an annual Partners in Safety barbecue. It is taking place right now at Shipyards Park until 2:00 p.m. It is open to the public and all are welcome. As I speak, dozens of Yukoners are enjoying free burgers and drinks in the fresh air on the banks of the Yukon River. They are also exploring the many exhibits there that present a wide variety of information about how to be safe at work and at home. In about an hour, a free draw will offer up a long list of prizes that includes tickets from Air North.

As well, this year the local PARTY program — PARTY stands for "prevent alcohol and risk-related trauma in youth" — is presenting a car crash scenario to the high school students and the public to remind us of the dangers of distracted or impaired driving.

I would like to recognize and congratulate the organizers of the Partners in Safety barbecue. They represent a diverse range of organizations and businesses committed to safety, like Air North, ATCO Electric, the City of Whitehorse, Northern Safety Network Yukon, Yukon Energy and the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board. I believe I can express thanks on behalf of my fellow members to these and every Yukon employer for their continued commitment to the health and safety of workers. More to the point though, I would like to thank them for breathing life into the idea and practice of occupational health and safety with this important public event. They're helping to remind us that, even though it's something that we do every day and it may seem mundane, it's an important aspect of our workplaces and links us to our communities and homes, keeping us safe, healthy and alive.

In recognition of National Hospice Palliative Care Week

Hon. Ms. Frost: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the compassionate and dedicated professionals and volunteers who work in palliative care. “Hospice palliative care is about living well. Right to the end” is the theme of this year’s National Hospice Palliative Care Week, which runs from May 7 to 13, and is led by the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. This is a theme that resonates with me and with my Liberal Party colleagues. One of the commitments we made to Yukoners was to deliver comprehensive and coordinated programs and services that meet their needs at all stages of their lives.

The end of our life is one of those stages and it is an important one, yet people are often afraid to talk about end-of-life issues. It is something that all of us need to talk about and make plans for. We need to do this because hospice palliative care helps relieve suffering and improves the quality of life and dying.

For this year’s National Hospice Palliative Care Week, the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association is calling on all Canadians to face their fear and commit to two things. The first is to learn about hospice palliative care and advance care planning. We need to take the time to think about what we want and what we don’t want as we approach the end of our lives. The second is to make a bucket list of the top five things you would like to do before you die and share it on social media, using the hashtag #Top5WhileImAlive.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Yukoners to join me in raising awareness and taking this good advice. I also encourage everyone to learn more about the palliative care options that are available here in the Yukon. The Health and Social Services palliative care program has been providing end-of-life services to Yukoners since 2008, working collaboratively with family caregivers, Hospice Yukon, First Nations, Whitehorse General Hospital, Community Nursing, and community care staff.

Palliative care in Yukon is not limited to one location, but can be provided in a variety of care settings, including Whitehorse General Hospital, continuing care facilities and at a person’s home. Our palliative care team includes a registered nurse, a social worker, a community liaison coordinator, and a consultant palliative care physician. Once again, I would like to pay tribute and to thank all volunteers, nurses, friends, doctors, Hospice Yukon workers, home care, and hospice palliative care team members who have helped many Yukoners live well right to the end.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. McLeod: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition in honour of National Hospice Palliative Care Week, which takes place this year from May 7 to 13.

I would like to speak for a moment about the importance of hospice palliative care. In Yukon, the number of seniors choosing to retire here in the territory is increasing. It’s important for the government to highlight the plans for the care of those in our community and their families who face

life-limiting illnesses, both in the hospital and in the community. We take this week to recognize supporting and promoting compassionate care for individuals and their loved ones at a time in their lives when they need it the most. Hospice palliative care is a level of care dedicated to relieving suffering and improving the quality of life for persons who are living with, or dying from, advanced illnesses. A main goal of palliative care is to provide comfort and dignity for a person living with the illness, as well as providing support for this individual and their family.

Relief of pain and other symptoms is key and palliative care goes beyond physical needs to also meet the psychological, social, cultural, emotional and spiritual needs of each person and their families. Additionally, hospice palliative care offers caregiver support. Such services include advice and assistance from doctors, nurses and other health care professionals, instruction for families on how to care for their loved ones and home support services that provide assistance for the individual, both medically and with household tasks. These services vary across the country, but the care and compassion for the individual and their families is consistent.

It’s important to point out that in Canada, the terms “hospice care” and “palliative care” are interchangeable when speaking of this specific approach to care. It’s for this reason one will see the terms used either separately or as one term. The Yukon government had this care and support initiative in place when it went forward with the plan to build the Whistle Bend continuing care facility. The plan for this project was to be a centre to provide palliative care and continuing care for those with chronic illness and those requiring end-of-life care. This is going to be a tremendous relief, I suspect, to our Whitehorse hospital, which is currently operating at maximum capacity, largely due to palliative and continuing care patients. We’re proud of this project and look forward to the wide range of comfort, care supports and services that it will offer. We look forward to the completion and opening of the Whistle Bend continuing care facility and what it will mean for continuing care in our community.

Like Copper Ridge Place, I’m confident that this new facility will become an integral part of our community and will be a welcome addition to the vibrant neighbourhood of Whistle Bend.

I would like to acknowledge the people who care for and support those people with severe illness or who are approaching the end of life. First and foremost, their families and friends often don’t receive the recognition they deserve for taking the time to provide their loved ones with assistance and support. It is hard — physically and emotionally — and quite frankly, anyone who undertakes that is a hero. I would like to give special recognition to those who may also form a palliative care team for an individual — nurses, family physicians, specialized physicians, social workers, counsellors, pharmacists and home care support workers.

Additionally, I would like to recognize the services of volunteers within the community who play an important role in palliative care by providing support services, such as

companionship, caregiver relief and assisting in the home and with transportation. Those volunteers should be proud of their roles within our community, and I thank them all for their continued dedication.

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the NDP caucus to recognize National Hospice Palliative Care Week in Canada. As a society, we are often afraid to talk about death and dying, so talking about end-of-life care issues is even harder. But hospice palliative care isn't just about dying; it is about living your life on your terms and living it well right to the very end. You cannot know how or when that end will be, but you can get informed about what may be available to you and then share your wishes with your family and your community.

We are fortunate in the Yukon to have dedicated professionals and volunteers who work with individuals and their families who are nearing the end of life. In Yukon, the palliative care programs offer clinical consultation, education and training on palliative care. Palliative care is offered in our hospitals, our continuing care facilities, our communities and, whenever possible, in our homes. Palliative care specialists are a special breed. They are there to support their patients to live as well as possible right to the end. They offer so much more than the just the tools of their trade. They offer compassion and human touch. In our experience, it's a wonder that their hearts are even able to fit in their chests, because they really are superheroes.

The Hospice Yukon Society is a group that works collaboratively with the palliative care program and offers counselling support for people with life-limiting illness, for anyone anticipating the death of a loved one and for anyone in grief. Sometimes it is a hospice volunteer who sits with the dying individual, giving relief to family and friends, but they are also there for individuals who might not have those supports at the end of their own lives.

Part of the message this year is around advance care planning. In Yukon we have kits for individuals and families to begin those discussions and make their wishes clear. It is important to note that you have to have that available — whether it is a copy on a USB stick that you have in multiple places, it's on the refrigerator, or it's at a friend's place — because you never know when you might need that in the middle of the night. It's critical at a stressful time, so make sure it's available.

Some people associate hospice and palliative care only with sadness, but most hospice experiences include times of peace, joy and even laughter. It is a time of closeness and often gives people a deeper understanding and appreciation of life. In a very real sense, hospice palliative care is about living and dying well.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to pay tribute to these staff and volunteers who provide this really important service to us all.

In recognition of Yukon FireFit team

Hon. Mr. Streicker: On behalf of the Liberal caucus and the NDP caucus, I rise today to recognize Yukon's FireFit

team heading to the Pacific regional FireFit competition in Langley, British Columbia this weekend — May 13 and 14.

I would like to acknowledge, based on the earlier tribute, that the North American Occupational Safety and Health Partners in Safety barbecue, which is ongoing right now at Shipyards Park and is hosted by the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, has many of our firefighters there doing training exercises with the public to talk about safety.

The FireFit challenge is known as the toughest two minutes in sport. Firefighters in full firefighting gear and equipment compete in a series of tough physical challenges. They run up six flights of stairs, haul fire hoses and rescue an 82-kilogram dummy. This is what they train for on the job and the competition takes it to an elite level. The firefighters, staff and volunteers who compete in the FireFit competition are spending time and effort to become better. Their effort isn't just for the competition — it's to be the best they can be when Yukoners need them. Since Yukon's fire service is largely a volunteer fire service, it means the dedicated volunteers are training for FireFit in addition to their fire hall duties, their jobs and schooling, their families and their personal lives.

To all FireFit competitors, thank you for your dedication to firefighting to better serve your communities. I would like to make special mention of one of the veteran team members — Mr. Boyd Piper is the Tagish fire chief from my own riding of Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes. He is a team captain and a coach for FireFit.

Boyd is a fierce competitor, but more importantly, he is a leader in the fire service, a role model to young firefighters and a mentor to all. If you have ever seen the teams in training, you'll know that Boyd motivates the competitors, gets them to believe in their skills and helps them to accomplish tasks they didn't think were possible. Boyd's name is almost synonymous with FireFit. I extend the appreciation of the House for all he does for the Yukon fire services.

There are three teams heading to the Pacific regional competition this year. I'm hoping that some of them move on. Two are men's teams comprised of team captain Jeremy Beebe from Whitehorse, team captain Boyd Piper from Tagish, Kevin Mendelsohn from Dawson City, Shaun Cooke of Mount Lorne, Myron Penner of Tagish, Ray Sabo from Hootalinqua, Thibaut Rondel from Hootalinqua, and Geoff Hann from Ibex Valley.

An exciting addition this year is the first women's volunteer team representing the Yukon fire services. This includes team captain Kelsie Olsen of Golden Horn, Elizabeth Boyd of Mount Lorne, Megan Coyne of Ibex Valley and Sydney Johnson of Ibex Valley.

These men and women are inspirations to us and to their fire departments. They have signed up for a physically demanding job and take the time to train and excel through FireFit training and competition. The FireFit competition and training contributes to the functional fitness of Yukon's firefighters, helping to ensure they are physically capable of firefighting and return safely to their families after duty.

Yukon's Fire Marshal's Office contributes funding, equipment and training to the firefighters heading to the competition. The government is proud to support our firefighters in this way. Volunteer fire departments across Yukon train hard and answer emergency calls in their communities. These teams are about to show us and their regional competitors just how seriously they take their fitness and commitment to the fire service.

Good luck to all the FireFit competitors and to those from the Yukon; you've already made us proud.

Mr. Cathers: On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to join the minister in wishing the FireFit teams good luck at the Pacific regional competition and to thank all of those volunteer firefighters on those teams for their dedication to improving their fitness skills and to making the Yukon proud on this regional stage.

I would like to also acknowledge the ongoing efforts, each and every day, of firefighters across the territory, especially those who volunteer their time to keep our homes and communities safe.

In closing, I would like to note that I know some of the firefighters who came on and are now part of the women's team first joined the fire service following Camp Ember. We would like to commend the Fire Marshal's Office for that successful initiative aimed at getting women, in particular, interested in joining the fire services and providing them with the skills they need to become successful volunteer firefighters.

Speaker: Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to acknowledge a resident of Tagish and from Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes — if we could all welcome Ms. Mary Ann Lewis.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Cathers: I have for tabling a letter from me to the Minister of Health and Social Services, dated April 11, 2017, regarding health insurance coverage for a constituent who contacted the minister's office in January.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Mr. Istchenko: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to seek an independent audit of the permit hunt system within the Department of Environment and tender its management to a third-party organization in response to the increasing concerns of Yukon hunters with the permit hunt system.

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

THAT this House urges the government to improve access to abortion services throughout Yukon by making available to women the drug mifepristone, or RU-486, at no cost.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motions?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: School calendar

Ms. Van Bibber: On April 26, I asked the Minister of Education to explain why there was a delay in releasing the school calendars this year. As I noted last month in my question, the school calendars were approximately 26 days past the deadline. In the minister's explanation, she stated that the delay was as a result of the school councils. However, we have heard from several school councils that have challenged the minister's remarks.

In reference to the minister's statement that school councils work on their own schedule, a letter from the school councils of Porter Creek Secondary, Jack Hulland, Elijah Smith and Takhini schools states that — and I quote: "... is not a correct statement."

Mr. Speaker, these school councils should be thanked for their work and not blamed for something they didn't do. Can the minister clarify her previous comments and apologize to the school councils?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. The honourable member opposite will know that the letter she is making reference to arrived yesterday, which means I saw it at 6:00 p.m. last night. I have not yet had an opportunity to review it thoroughly and/or respond to it. Of course, I have sent notice to the school councils that I will be responding and that I have received it — and thanking them for that.

More importantly, I guess, with respect to what the honourable member has said, is that it is incorrect that I blamed school councils. What Hansard says with respect to that is that I said that school councils work on their own schedule and that they should, in fact, work on their own schedule. I also indicated that the department was somewhat late in getting those documents for consideration by each school council out to them and that they would be returning them after they had an opportunity to meet.

I guess I want to also mention that Hansard is a bit of a blunt instrument because it doesn't, of course, record intonation or intention. Certainly, there was no intention whatsoever to blame school councils and my review of the

reading of Hansard, which I did last night after seeing that letter, is in fact, that it doesn't do so.

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, we have established that a school calendar delay was not the fault of the school councils.

In fact it seems the minister didn't even give the school councils much time to consider the changes. According to the timeline we received, the school councils were only notified of the calendar on March 13 — 19 days before the minister's deadline.

As the minister knows, school councils are volunteers who meet monthly. For context, the minister gave the school councils only 19 days to consider the calendars, but she had 119 days from becoming a minister until the deadline set out in the act.

Why did the minister think it was fair to give herself 100 more days than the school councils to consider, and will she commit to giving school councils more time in the future?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank the honourable member for the question. At no time was the intention to hamper the consideration that school councils should give to the school calendars, because it is a critical part of the process. It's required by the legislation. In addition to being required by the legislation, it's good practice.

School councils represent families, they represent parents, and they are a critical part of the liaison between the school community itself, the Department of Education, parents, teachers and students.

The unfortunate situation in which school calendars came about this year was partly as a result of us wanting to do more than one. We now have some feedback with respect to that, and the only calendar that has been set is the one for 2017-18.

Certainly I have been attending as many school council meetings as possible in person. I have had an opportunity to speak with them specifically about school calendars and the other work they do, and I got their feedback personally as well as what they have given back to the department.

My respect for school councils is immense. I have been a school council member. I am well aware of the work that they do and they absolutely must be considered with respect to this and other issues.

Ms. Van Bibber: I also asked the minister about the new school calendar and asked her to explain why next year's school calendar showed the last day of school changing from June 20 to June 8. In her response the minister referenced consulting with these councils. Her exact quote was: "They're the ones who chose the earlier date." However, let me read an excerpt from that letter we received from the four school councils: "school councils did not have a choice in the matter as the department already had the calendars set out. Councils input was not being waited for."

Mr. Speaker, if this is the case, will the minister stop blaming the school councils, go back to the drawing board and truly consult with them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think I already said that I wasn't blaming school councils, and I'm sorry to actually hear that reference in the third part of this question because it indicates

to me that perhaps the honourable member is not believing what I have to say. I have no reason whatsoever to be concerned about the details of what I said before if I am having the opportunity now to explain it.

I was absolutely not blaming school councils. They are an integral part of this situation.

In addition to the concept of when school councils are consulted, they're consulted on a number of issues — many issues — not the least of which is the requirement for them to be consulted on school calendars. The critical part of this process is to form partnerships and to have the school councils, which are an integral part of what's happening at schools and with the Department of Education, consulted on a regular basis.

I should note that the letter that my colleague is referring to came from four school councils. There are 30 school councils in the territory. They did have an opportunity to indicate what the last date or first date should be. What they got was a draft and they were asked for comments outside of the realm of that draft and we wanted all comments.

Question re: School calendar

Mr. Hassard: Just to follow with that line of questioning, last month we asked the Minister of Education about the shortening of the school calendar. In her response, she said that the school calendar would be reduced from June 20 to June 8 by increasing the length of the school day by a few minutes per day. At that time, the minister told us that she had made this decision based off of consultations with the school councils, but now we've learned that this may not necessarily be the case.

Can the minister please explain how this decision was arrived at?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for the question.

In my view, good leadership requires that much of the work is done out front — in particular, good leadership with respect to consultation. Yes, the Department of Education did work with its officials and, based on information they've had over setting calendars for many, many years, and did draft a number of calendars that were produced for consultation with the school councils.

Various versions of that came about for each calendar for each year. With respect to 2017-18 — we'll make reference to that one. Then that document was sent to school councils so that they could give feedback. At no time were they told, "These are the dates." They were told, "These are proposed dates. Would you please tell us what you think about that?" Much of the feedback that we received from school councils did exactly what was asked of them, which was to provide their comments and feedback about proposed dates for school calendars.

Mr. Hassard: With respect to shortening the school year by around two weeks of classes and making up the difference by adding a few minutes to each day, we've heard from a number of parents who are concerned about the impacts this will have on instructional time for their children.

A lot of people believe that full days of classes are better for our children and students instead of simply stretching out each day by a few minutes.

What does the minister say to parents who are concerned that her changes to the school calendar will negatively impact the education outcomes of our students?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: First of all, I guess I should start by saying that the Department of Education and I, as well as my colleagues, are always very open to hearing from members of our community, citizens — in this particular case, from parents, teachers and staff — and from all of our educational partners in the school system.

With respect to instructional time, my colleague across the way will know that it is set at 950 hours per year in the *Education Act* and that the school calendars must comply with that and other terms that are set out in the act, and this school calendar does that.

Mr. Hassard: Yes, we do know about the 950 hours per year, but that doesn't change the fact that students will now have 11 weeks without being in the classroom. We have heard directly from parents of very young children, in particular, that this is too long a time for a child not to be in the classroom for a number of reasons.

Will the minister reconsider her decision to shorten the school year and go back to the drawing board to consult with school councils and parents?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We have heard some of the concerns that the member opposite raises. We have also heard the opposite comments.

I have heard this from school councils, teachers, families and others — not to dismiss at all the concerns brought forward by the member opposite, but we have also heard that attendance is very low in some schools in June and that an earlier end date is an appropriate way to go. The summer, between the end of June and the beginning of September, in 2017, will be 69 days.

I have looked at the averages over the last 10 or so years, and that is on the low side. It is often 74 days, and it has even been as high as 80 days. In particular, in 2017, that is the length of the summer vacation or break with respect to schools. The other part of the question — and I take this very seriously — is to take a look at the proposed calendars for 2018 and beyond, and to take into account not only the comments that the member opposite has made but that his colleague has made as well, and to consult further with school councils and all of the partners to determine what all of those dates should be.

Question re: Ross River infrastructure

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, the community of Ross River has been on the back burner for the Yukon government for far too long. From the bridge, to housing conditions and road repairs, a lot of work needs to be done to close the infrastructure gap between Ross River and other communities.

During their 2016 campaign, the current government promised funding for housing in Ross River. To date, the only evidence of this commitment is a line item in the budget for

new staff housing along with two housing units to be used as transition for homes being renovated. Luckily, the federal government stepped in and committed to fix or build 16 units, although these projects have not yet started. The problem is that 45 homes have been assessed to be affected by mould, radon, sewage or petroleum contamination.

My question is: What is the government's plan to deliver on their election commitment to make sure that the units that won't get fixed with available federal funds are habitable?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you for the question. I want to just maybe highlight a few key points with respect to that question around the care and support that has been given to the Ross River Dena Council and the community of Ross River. We have been working quite consistently with the community to address some of the pressures, and we have a management committee that is working with the federal government — recognizing that responsibility for the Ross River Dena Council's infrastructure and housing falls on the federal government as an *Indian Act* First Nation. However, we have committed to working with the First Nation and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada to identify key priorities. We have committed to working in a cooperative and collaborative manner to address the key pressures, and we are doing that very successfully. In fact, we are meeting with the chief again this week to touch down with them to ensure that the pressures are being addressed with regard to mould issues and other contaminants in the community or in the homes, and the infrastructure. We have had inspectors go in and work with the community of Ross River and their team to identify and verify that in fact there are not current pressures with respect to mould in the current houses that have been inspected.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the minister for her comments and response. I just would point out that although the *Indian Act* does apply to the Ross River Dena Council, the citizens of Ross River, including those members of the *Indian Act* band, are Yukon citizens and they also pay Yukon taxes. I know that MLAs and ministers of this government have travelled and experienced the conditions of the Robert Campbell Highway between Faro and Ross River. Anyone who has driven this road notices the difference once you pass Faro and start driving toward Ross River. This stretch of road is the main access point to town for many residents and visitors alike. Its condition is not comparable to any other community's access road in Yukon.

Is this government investing any money beyond regular maintenance to upgrade the road between Faro and Ross River?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. The short answer is yes. I have spoken to the Highways and Public Works department. I am well aware of the different standards between Faro and Ross River and I have asked my department to actually address some of the road issues leading into Ross River.

As the member opposite well knows, there is environmental and other screening that has to be done when

doing engineering and all sorts of stuff. That work is going to be proceeding and we want to get the road up to snuff.

Ms. Hanson: That's really good to hear because, as we go back on that road between Faro and Ross River, the issue at stake has been for many years the double standard that the community of Ross River has been subject to. Those 300 citizens — as I said, citizens who all pay taxes like everyone else in this territory — live in that town, and nobody else has had to endure roads of such pitiful condition and have their emergency health care services compromised.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister identify what will be done this fiscal year and where in the budget we will find the commitment made? How much has been committed to upgrade the road between Ross River and Faro this fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for that question. I will get the numbers for the member opposite. I don't have them right at my fingers right at the moment, but I will tell the member opposite that I have instructed my officials to start the engineering work and pre-planning. Coming into this role, I have discovered how much preparation and work has to be done. You can't just send the BST trucks out to start laying down road surfaces. There's a lot of preparation work and a lot of planning that has to go into this. This government is committed to planning and to doing the jobs right, and we're going to do that.

I have instructed my departmental officials to start that work — to begin assessing the roads, to start planning that work — so we can start improving the access to the community of Ross River.

There are other communities that will need some work as well. Pelly Crossing is another one that has been identified as an issue. I have asked my departmental officials to start looking at the north Klondike, which has been ignored for quite a number of years — certainly north of Pelly — and that type of thing. We are looking at all sorts of different areas in the territory that need improvement.

Question re: Opioid crisis

Ms. McLeod: Yesterday, we asked the government if they would support our motion that reads: "THAT this House urges the Minister of Education in collaboration with the Minister of Health and Social Services to instruct their departments to begin work to develop a health curriculum for use in schools that educates on the dangers of prescription opioid abuse for all students in the Yukon education system."

We haven't received a clear response to the government as to whether or not they will support it, and we hope that they will. Again, we think this issue is important enough that members on all sides of this House should come together and send a clear message.

I will extend the offer we provided the government yesterday. We're open to friendly amendments to the motion and, if there are wording changes necessary, obviously we are favourable to that.

Will the government support this motion so that our Legislature can send a clear message that we are working together to prevent the growing opioid crisis?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you to the honourable member for her question. I'm a bit confused as to how it wasn't clear yesterday, but I'm happy to reiterate very, very clearly that this work has already begun. There has been consultation between the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Social Services and other partners and other players in government to address the opioid crisis in a number of ways, not the least of which is through the schools, through community centres, and through community health centres and other partnerships with First Nations and others. This is a problem that will require a lot of energy and a lot of partners in order to bring our minds together to solve or address what is a very serious problem here in the territory.

To be clear, this work has already started and, of course, we are supportive of it because it was a top priority for us.

Ms. McLeod: All right; thank you. I guess what I heard there is that the government is not entertaining supporting the motion because —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. McLeod: If you let me finish — the minister believes that this work is already underway.

I'm wondering then if the minister can tell us how much the department is spending on the development of the health curriculum that educates on the dangers of opioid abuse. Has it already been developed? Is it finished? When will it be developed? Who is the curriculum provided to? Who was consulted, or who will be consulted, in its development?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The second part of that question was a little different from the first. Let me just back up to say that I didn't speak about the motion because it will be debated later today, I hope, in this House and everyone will have an opportunity to do that. I'm not, as the Minister of Education or the minister of anything else — appropriately — to speak about what will come out in a full debate of a motion here in the House.

I should also note, in answer to the question, that the specifics of an education curriculum to deal with this are not what I spoke about. I spoke about the departments cooperating with respect to an ability to address it. I appreciate that the motion later on will be about specific health curriculum in the schools, and I think we should debate it at that time, but certainly we'll have comments with respect to that and likely an amendment as well.

Question re: Montessori education

Mr. Cathers: The Yukon Montessori School is expanding in the territory and needs a new space to accommodate families looking for a more individualized education model. The previous government worked with Yukon Montessori to identify physical space and funding for the program. When we left office, the Department of Education was looking at the possibility of establishing a Montessori-style program at Hidden Valley Elementary School. However, since then, we've heard from parents that

they understand the Minister of Education has cancelled that work and parents are upset that they weren't consulted first and that there was no public consultation on this matter.

Can the minister confirm whether the Liberal government has cancelled plans to work with Yukon Montessori to develop a program at Hidden Valley Elementary School?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The question describes a situation that is not entirely accurate. When I became the Minister of Education, I met, actually on my first day back to work on January 3, with the director of the board of parents with respect to the Montessori school. We had a very lengthy and fruitful discussion. I also examined what the situation was with their request to the former government, which was about classroom space. There was some discussion about that being at Hidden Valley School. We ultimately went forward with respect to the request that was brought to us, which was not about space at Hidden Valley School — it was about space downtown; it was about the cost of teachers; it was about bringing the Montessori School into the Department of Education proper.

As a result of the investigation done with respect to that request, a decision was made that, in fact, that would not be the best use of education funds. Particularly in light of the new curriculum that's coming, it would not be the best use of space — of which there isn't any at this time — in elementary schools in downtown Whitehorse, which is what the request was. Ultimately, the decision was very carefully considered and parents were advised of the ultimate decision, which was that we would not be expanding the Montessori model inside the Department of Education.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to hear the Minister of Education talking about how they advised parents of their decision, but this is a government that campaigned on a promise that Yukoners would be heard.

One of the options that the Montessori school was discussing with the previous government was actually a no-cost option to the Yukon government. I know one family who actually chose to purchase a home in the Hidden Valley catchment area, in part because they expected to see a Montessori program developed at Hidden Valley School. The idea of developing a Montessori-style program or having the Montessori school move some of its resources into Hidden Valley was a popular one with parents in my riding.

Can the minister at least provide some clarity to parents who have been left in the dark why exactly this Liberal government is not considering allowing the Montessori school to be housed in Hidden Valley and why she made that decision without consulting with the public first?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: At no time was a no-cost option presented to this government. I want to say that again: at no time was a cost-free option presented to this government by a Montessori school or by anyone else.

As a result, very lengthy consideration went into making this decision. I would have to guess at this point — I'm sorry about that — but I think over 40 parents wrote to me personally and each of those 40 parents got a copy of the letter that was written back to their school board and their executive

on the basis of why that decision was made and the details that went into that. I would be happy to discuss those details with the member opposite if that is of interest to him.

Hidden Valley School does not have the space that may have been considered in a past conversation — again, not a conversation that was brought to me — but in the past conversation about simply having space at Hidden Valley School. It just isn't an option any more. Hidden Valley School has done a number of things; in particular, an afterschool program and expanding their services to their families and their students that has resulted in that school being very well populated by students. There just simply is not the space with respect to that. But again, it was not an option — not even a question that was brought to me. It was certainly a separate proposal and a different, more updated proposal that I received.

Mr. Cathers: It's disturbing hearing the minister talking about informing parents. We know the minister didn't consult with parents properly before changing the school calendar and we've heard complaints from teachers who say that they weren't consulted either. The minister didn't consult with parents in my riding before deciding not to expand Montessori programming or the Montessori school to Hidden Valley Elementary School.

We heard the minister earlier today point to school councils for delays on the calendar and we heard complaints from councils who felt that in an earlier Question Period the minister threw them under the bus and blamed them for delays in the school calendar.

My question for the minister is: What does she have to say to Yukoners who made the mistake of believing the Liberals' election promise that they would actually be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Unfortunately, I don't think the Member for Lake Laberge is really listening to my answers. I was very clear with his colleague that I did not throw anyone under the bus, not the least of which would be school councils, which I very much respect. I'm not going to repeat that again. I have said it three times. I hope they will listen to that.

I should be also clear that there was no consultation with parents in his riding because the parents in the riding were not the people who were requesting the Montessori option. The Montessori option was being requested by the current Montessori executive and parent-teacher organization. They were the ones requesting it — not the parents in Lake Laberge or in any other riding.

There were some 21 students in the Montessori program when I first started having discussions about it in January 2017 and those 21 parents — some of them at least — were requesting that we consider bringing the Montessori option into the Department of Education and that decision was made and communicated widely.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 52

Clerk: Motion No. 52, standing in the name of Ms. Hanson.

Speaker: It is moved by the Leader of the Third Party:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to consider expanding the proposed amendments to the *Workers' Compensation Act* so that all workers covered by the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board benefit from presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder or injury (PTSD or PTSI) legislation.

Ms. Hanson: At the outset, I just want to reiterate the phrasing of this motion and to point out to the members present that the motion urges the government to consider expanding the proposed amendments to the *Workers' Compensation Act* so that all workers covered by the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board benefit from presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder or injury legislation.

I think it's important to make that point because, as we all know, this government has stated that it is developing amendments to the *Workers' Compensation Act* so that it will serve as presumptive PTSD legislation for first responders and that this will be tabled in the fall.

The NDP caucus believes that the announcement by the government of its intention to follow through on this commitment is laudable. The purpose of this motion is to encourage the government to take full advantage of the opportunity afforded it as it develops this legislation to make sure it is the best legislation possible to serve all Yukon workers who currently, or in the future, may face the very serious challenges associated with PTSD/PTSI as a result of their work.

Before we go further, let me explain briefly the concept of presumptive PTSD legislation, or any presumptive legislation. A legalistic definition of legislative presumption is that it — and I quote: "... creates an inference that a fact exists because of the known or proven existence of other facts." Essentially, it says that the adjudication process that you go through under the workers' compensation process can be simplified in much the same way as that of the result of a motion by my predecessor, Todd Hardy, in 2009, whereby amendments to the workers' compensation legislation came into effect in June 2011 to create a presumption that certain types of cancer in firefighters are occupational diseases, unless the contrary is proven.

While it is encouraging to see the government act to address PTSD with respect to first responders, there is no reason to limit this protection to first responders only. The Yukon NDP tabled PTSD-presumptive legislation in April 2015, and it also covered only first responders. First responders and workers' advocates welcomed the move, but

pointed out to us that there was a need to protect all workers, and that while some work situations and some workers are more likely to be exposed to traumatic events that can lead to PTSD, it can happen to all workers and it can happen in all workplaces.

The Liberal Party in the last election promised to introduce presumptive PTSD legislation similar to what we had proposed in 2015. Knowing the government is working on this bill, a similar one as was introduced in the last Legislative Assembly Sitting, we are bringing this motion and we hope the government will learn from our experience to bring a better bill this coming fall. Other jurisdictions have already taken measures to protect all workers. This motion asks only that the government consider — in capital letters — other examples of legislation that will protect all workers before finalizing work on PTSD-presumptive legislation and before tabling their bill.

If, for whatever reason, after doing the necessary consultation and research, they believe it's not the way to go, they can come back to this House and say they looked at it, considered it, and here is the evidence upon which they based the decision, including — although I highly doubt after a full review that would be what they would conclude — that it is neither a necessary nor fair approach. They could conclude that it's not the way to go. It's a very small ask, Mr. Speaker. One would hope that the government is already looking at best practices across the country before moving forward. We hope we can all agree on this.

I thought I would begin today by giving a quick overview of what PTSD and presumptive PTSD legislation is. I will then give a brief overview of what has been done elsewhere on this important issue. The definition of post-traumatic stress disorder has until very recently been firmly rooted in the sphere of psychiatric definitions. I am going to refer to an excerpt from a document that I am tabling now. It is the stakeholder consultation document that was produced by the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba when they amended their workers' compensation act to provide presumptive coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder. This will be circulated electronically as well as the hard copy. The question asked and the information that I will quote from this is on the second page of that document. It says — and I quote: "What is post-traumatic stress disorder?"

"There are many mental disorders that might be experienced by workers and that might be caused by various types of events. PTSD, however, is a specific type of psychological condition associated with specific types of events." This is where it gets all psychiatric on us: "The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the 'DSM-5') is the standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals in Canada and the United States. It is a compendium of psychiatric diagnoses produced by the American Psychiatric Association... It is considered the standard and definitive source of information about psychological conditions.

"The DSM-5 identifies the triggers to PTSD as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

The exposure must result from one or more of the following scenarios, in which the individual: directly experiences the traumatic event; witnesses the traumatic event in person; learns that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or close friend (with the actual or threatened death being either violent or accidental); or experiences first-hand repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event (not through media, pictures, television or movies).

“PTSD can arise from different sources, ranging from a single experience, such as an accident or a violent act, to a prolonged, ongoing exposure such as that caused by war or family violence. The symptoms of PTSD can vary among individuals but generally include: reliving memories of the event; recurring distressing dreams of the event; flashbacks; avoiding reminders; irritability and over-reaction to common stressors. PTSD is marked by ongoing symptoms to the point where the symptoms impair an individual's social interactions, capacity to work and other important areas of functioning. PTSD can arise very shortly after the triggering event or it can be delayed by days, months or even years.”

However, as I have just said, that is the DSM-5 definition, the psychiatric definition, with respect to a disorder. However, about five years ago, within the psychiatric community, there was a movement to change the name from a disorder to an injury, and it became more mainstream. It originated with a request — as I understand it — from an American military psychiatrist who felt that changing the name from PTSD to PTSI would reduce barriers to care.

I will just quote from the letter from the psychiatrist named Frank Ochberg to the American Psychiatric Association as they were considering in 2012 amendments to the DSM with respect to PTSD. He says: “To change PTSD to PTSI would mean we physicians believe that brain physiology has been injured by exposure to some external force, not that we are just anxious or depressed by tragic and traumatic reality.”

It goes on to say: “Prior to a trauma that caused PTSD, there was no PTSD, by definition. After the shattering experience, the alteration in memory function, with unwanted, uncontrollable episodes of re-experiencing, persists. It is not a weakness. It is really not, in its origin and manifestation, a disease. It came from something that happened, like a traumatic amputation.”

This is coming from a military psychiatrist: “No military surgeon diagnoses a Soldier or Marine whose foot has been taken off by a mine as suffering from ‘Missing Foot Disorder’. To those who live with the impact, PTSD is an injury — and a painful one at that.”

He then says: “Like the mine that takes off the service member's foot, the primary psychological injury usually is not what kills or disables the survivor, but the complications do. It's the cascading complications and consequences that do most harm.”

This doctor went on to say that: “We are past the point in medical science when gross tissue damage is necessary for a wound. Alteration of myocardial conduction due to electrical

shock, leaving no demonstrable bruise, is an injury with a grave consequence.”

Mr. Speaker, I know that both the Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board and the Premier are aware of the ongoing work by Yukon's unions on issues related to PTSD and PTSI. Last fall, Yukon Employees Union had a two-day human rights panel on post-traumatic stress injury.

The panels were chaired by Jim Regimbal, the Dawson City fire chief and a passionate advocate of the need to recognize post-traumatic stress disorder in first responders and others. He was one of the people whom I talked with a lot during the period in 2014 leading into 2015 before we tabled our presumptive legislation amendments in the spring of 2015.

I have to say that I was only able to attend the first day. The comments and observations — workers from across the spectrum, not just first responders — reinforced my sense that, yes, presumptive legislation is needed for first responders but we must not ignore the realities that all workers potentially face situations of trauma significant enough to cause injury that may not be physically visible or quantifiable but, as the references I quoted above note, it is real.

One of the panelists, Nicole Bringsli, a psychologist, used the analogy of a water glass. A glass can only hold so much liquid. All it takes is one too many ordinary, inconsequential drops of water and the glass spills over. Like the water glass, we can witness and contain only so much pain and trauma before we reach our capacity to cope and, like the water glass, we risk spilling over.

Mr. Speaker, today we're becoming familiar with the idea that people who put themselves at risk, in harm's way, to help their fellow citizens, whether they are firefighters, ambulance paramedics or nurses, may be vulnerable to PTSD/PTSI. But it wasn't always that way.

In Yukon, we owe a lot to brave people like Michael Swainson, who shared his story publicly in 2009. I had the opportunity many times before he went off to university a year or two ago to fulfill his life dream of getting that education to follow on his experience that he described publicly — and that's why I'm choosing to read a couple of excerpts from a CBC interview that he did on November 2, 2009. He followed up on this interview with a lot of public advocacy work and public education work on the issues related to PTSD.

He said that the reason he did it is that people need to know more about just how bad things can get for front-line workers. I'll just quote here from this interview and I can make it available for members if they wish, or else it's online. He said he started working at the ambulance in Whitehorse in 1984, so he spent just over 20 years as an ambulance attendant and a primary care paramedic. He figured he went on about 5,000 ambulance calls and not all of them were serious. He thought out of 5,000, maybe between five and 10 percent were really, really serious emergencies. But one of the things he says that's curious — and I'm quoting here — about first responders is: What first responders are running into is what most people are usually running away from. It's danger, it's

fire, it's major accidents or whatever, and they are the guys running in there. He said that a lot of people have come and talked to him on the street and said, "How are you doing now, Michael?" He said that for probably the first 15 or 16 years, he said, "You know, it doesn't bother me. It didn't bother me." But then he said, "I sort of liken it to — when I started working at EMS, I put on this imaginary backpack and every time I went on a really bad call, somebody would put a rock in that backpack. After five years, I probably had 40 or 50 small rocks in there and, you know, I'm a big guy. I can carry around 50 rocks. After 20 years, and you have 200 rocks in there, it's not going to take too many more rocks before you're going to fall over and that's what happened to me."

During the Canada Winter Games year, unfortunately there was a teen killed in a snowmobile accident, and he said, "I remember going out there and I was driving the ambulance that day. I'm just so very thankful that I was driving and was in the back with the patient — and that day, we just happened to have two extra bodies in the car so there were three of us who went out on the call." This person had been hit skidooring. They had been hit by a vehicle on the highway. "You know what? Normally I would have been the first guy in like a dirty shirt doing my thing and when I got there, I wanted no part of that call. I mean, I did my job. I got the equipment. I couldn't even stand to look at that kid. You know, it was an awful thing." What made it worse for him was that this kid was 16, and he had two kids who were 15 and 16 — 17. "You know what? They like to snowmobile and that was the one thing that literally drove the nail into the coffin for me. That finished me off."

He said, "I thought it was burnout." People with PTSD, when they don't know what it is — he said you absolutely think you're losing your mind. He would have conversations with people and would start to ramble. He said, "I couldn't focus and I thought I was going crazy."

Mr. Swainson's story is sadly not unique. Through my work as an MLA, I have talked with, unfortunately, many other people — not just first responders, but people who work within our system in government and outside — who have experienced that trigger, that nail in the coffin.

It's unconscionable that, as a society, we expect those who literally risk all to save our lives to risk losing their own livelihood because of the injuries caused in the course of their work. That is why presumptive PTSD/PTSI legislation is so important. We can't overlook the fact that, as the Yukon Employees Union panel pointed out last fall, there are many other lines of work that may result in injury. Social workers face many heartbreaking situations in the line of their duty. Removing children from dangerous homes, denying parental access and leaving vulnerable children in foster situations can take a terrible toll.

Sheena Larose, a former child protective services worker from Ontario, recently wrote — and I quote: "Unless you are in the trenches, people don't understand that child protection work can be among the most intensive, heart-wrenching and volatile work one could ever encounter."

Mr. Speaker, I can speak to that from experience, having done that for a very limited time — only a couple of years. Social workers counsel child abuse victims and must bear witness for their frightened and confused young clients. When we talk about social workers' emotional health, we often say they have burned out. We don't consider post-traumatic stress injury or disorder as a likely outcome. Vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue — whatever the results, whatever we call it, the results can be life-altering and career-limiting.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago, a Yukon social worker doing a master's degree wrote her master's thesis on compassion fatigue within Health and Social Services, within child welfare in this territory. It's a qualitative analysis and it's troubling.

Front-line workers in shelters for domestic violence victims face recurring trauma. Imagine the daily challenge of maintaining a healthy outlook when you're immersed in the pain of others. The convenience store clerk who is robbed and assaulted — it sounds to me like they fit the definition in the DSM.

Where does that leave us? We do know that Ontario and British Columbia have passed presumptive legislation for first responders. While this is a step in the right direction, as I have outlined, there are limits and downfalls to this approach. Ultimately, no matter how exhaustive the list of professions is, we must acknowledge that any workplace can expose a worker to a traumatic event that can lead to PTSD/PTSI.

Whether it's a postal worker who is first on-site of a violent car crash or a retail employee who is the victim of a violent theft, there is no reason why we would exclude them from presumptive post-traumatic stress/post-traumatic injury legislation if their injury happened at their workplace. The Yukon Federation of Labour, representing over 7,000 unionized workers in Yukon, supports the expansion of presumptive coverage, as does the Yukon Employees Union.

There is a fair and fairly simple solution to this. It is to look at the experience and the evidence from elsewhere in Canada, where new benchmarks for excellence have been established. In this case, the government can look to Manitoba, where presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder legislation has been in place since January 2016. In Manitoba, all workers covered by the Workers Compensation Board are subject to presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder legislation. This means that any worker who is exposed to traumatic events at work, regardless of their line of work, if that workplace is covered by workers' compensation, they will benefit from presumptive PTSD legislation.

Let me quote a couple of sections from the Manitoba Workers Compensation Board's analysis of this measure: "The post-traumatic stress disorder presumption is not limited to a specific occupation, recognizing that PTSD-triggering events can happen in any workplace." Again I'm quoting: "The intention of the presumption is to reduce stigma around mental illness and to make it simpler in some cases to establish a causal connection between post-traumatic stress disorder and a worker's employment."

To dispel some of the concerns around post-traumatic stress disorder presumption, I would like to outline a few of the simple FAQs regarding the Manitoba approach. Again, Mr. Speaker, I am quoting here from the document that I have circulated to members.

One question that comes up is: “Am I covered by the WCB if I have PTSD or another psychological injury?” The answer is: Work-related, psychological injuries, including PTSD, have always been and continue to be covered by the WCB, and that is the truth in the Yukon as well. The challenge we face is that the onus is on the worker and it can take months, if not years, for that proof to be brought to bear.

What is the PTSD presumption? In Manitoba, the answer is that, as of January 1, 2016, if a worker in Manitoba is exposed to certain types of traumatic events and is diagnosed with PTSD, the WCB can presume the PTSD is caused by the worker’s employment, unless the contrary is proven. This is called presumptive coverage.

WCB will continue to adjudicate claims involving PTSD in the same manner as other psychological injuries. The presumption only applies to certain types of cases involving PTSD and does not apply to other work-related psychological injuries. If there is evidence that the PTSD was caused by something unrelated to the worker’s job, the presumption may be rebutted — so it’s not a catch-all for everything, Mr. Speaker. This is not opening the floodgates wide. It never is when we’re talking about workers’ compensation.

The question is: Do I have to work in a certain occupation to be covered by the PTSD presumption? In Manitoba — and this is what we would urge the Government of Yukon to consider — PTSD presumptive coverage applies to all workers covered by workers’ compensation in Manitoba, and recognizes that PTSD-triggering events can happen in any workplace.

Some people — and I have seen this in correspondence with respect to circumstances of individuals in the Yukon — ask: What if I suffered a psychological injury many years ago? Am I still covered? The answer in Manitoba is that the legislation is tied to a current diagnosis of PTSD. Therefore, if you are diagnosed with PTSD after January 1, 2016, the presumption may apply. That would help a lot of people here — not a lot. With the risk of falling into that trap of “a lot” — “a lot” means, of the six or seven cases a year that the WCB gets and they approve maybe three or four, those other three might have been approved — maybe — who knows.

Does PTSD presumptive coverage guarantee that my WCB claim will be accepted? The answer: The WCB will investigate each claim individually to determine if it is acceptable under the presumption or other sections of the *Workers’ Compensation Act* and policies. The presumptive coverage does not guarantee that your WCB claim will be accepted. Does the PTSD presumption give workers special benefits? The PTSD presumption relates to the cause of the injury. It has no impact on benefit levels.

What types of treatment does the WCB cover? This is similar to what we will see here in the Yukon. These are all fairly standard in terms of workers’ compensation. Some of

the costs directly related to your psychological workplace injury that may be covered include: counselling services, medication including prescriptions, and other health care costs related to your workplace injury.

In conclusion, the Manitoba example tells us that it is possible to tackle this issue for all workers. There is no reason for half-measures. We know that lots of work goes into updating legislation. We have the opportunity as legislators to do the right thing at the right time, and we don’t need to go halfway. Unfortunately, Ontario appears to have veered in that way. They just recently passed their presumptive legislation — within the last week or so — so that police officers, firefighters, paramedics and other first responders are covered, but it doesn’t benefit nurses. That was an exclusion that drew sharp criticism from the Ontario Nurses’ Association. The nurses reported — and I quote: to be shocked and disappointed. They have many PTSD cases under appeal now that have taken a decade. Under what circumstances do we think it’s fair that a nurse who has worked in the ER department dealing with the same kind of trauma that a first responder deals with should have to wait a decade to get the proper coverage and services? The purpose of workers’ compensation, we need to remind ourselves, is to assist the worker to get back to work. We leave them hanging.

This motion is not even asking the government for a commitment to do it — to follow the example. All we are asking for is a commitment to consider it. If the government, in good faith, considers this — looks at the Manitoba example and determines that it’s not a good idea, then so be it. It will of course fall to them to explain why it shouldn’t apply to all workers, but at the very least, they need to look at options beyond first responders — and only first responders — before bringing their bill forward. There is enough time to do it before the Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

It is an opportunity for the government to show that it is actually listening and willing to cooperate and is open to feedback from other parties and from Yukoners. We won’t agree on everything, but I think this is something that could make a big difference in many peoples’ lives and we can work together to make sure that the bill this government brings forward in the fall is the best that it can be.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Leader of the NDP for bringing this motion forward today. I can say right at the start that we will be supporting the motion.

The action called for in the motion is in fact something we, as a government, are already doing. We also want to thank Dawson City Fire Chief Jim Regimbal for the advocacy on behalf of first responders in the recent years in regard to post-traumatic stress disorder. Actually, soon after being sworn in as Minister responsible for the Yukon Workers’ Compensation Health and Safety Board, I attended that session for one of the days and listened to first responders and others from the union speak about the passion that they have for this. At the time, I anticipated that this would be one of the areas in my mandate letter, which is exactly what I received.

During the 2016 election campaign, we did make this a commitment to amend the *Workers' Compensation Act* to include presumptive provisions for PTSD in first responders.

I hear your comments in terms of the compassionate and compelling description of workers who are first responders. I consider myself a first responder. I have been on the front line for a really long time in First Nation communities. I too have been on the front line in dealing with child welfare matters that do cause you to have a lot of fatigue, particularly around your ability to have compassion. I'm so blessed that I have been able to hold on to my ability to have compassion and so I am one of the lucky ones — I know that. I have been on the front line for a long time and I have a lot of friends who actually suffer from PTSD — people who I have come to know during my work for many years within the justice, child welfare, and mental health fields, so I recognize and am very committed to assisting in whatever way I can as the minister responsible. I thank the Premier for tasking me with this important work on behalf of all Yukoners.

At the time, we said we recognized the risks first responders face in providing services to Yukoners. One concrete way to do that is to address the serious health care consequences those workers suffer from. We also committed that a Liberal government would work with the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board to develop prevention measures to reduce the incidence of PTSD in all Yukon workplaces.

We agreed that more is needed to be done to raise awareness of the issue itself. We also agreed there needed to be more support for critical incident stress management, which helps address post-traumatic stress before it manifests into a disorder.

The member opposite talked about the involvement and a description of interactions with Michael Swainson. I too have had many discussions with him. During my time as director of justice for Kwanlin Dün First Nation, we had developed a crisis prevention model that looked at the impact of post-traumatic stress and the trauma we were faced with on a day-to-day basis, regardless of what job you were in. You could be somebody working in finance and called into a community to deal with an issue that arises from a traumatic incident in a community.

I heard first-hand, and that's where I really began to fully understand the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder on first responders and on communities. The experience and the trauma loads that we have within our communities are not limited to people who are working. There are so many others. There are volunteers; there are many others who experience trauma and are oftentimes first on the scene or working with family members to respond to traumatic situations in communities.

PTSD, both cumulative and traumatic, is currently covered under the *Workers' Compensation Act*; however, workers must prove their condition is work-related. The member opposite talked about the presumptive legislation for Manitoba, which came into effect January 1, 2016, and was well-noted in her opening comments.

PTSD is very prevalent among first responders and, without treatment and intervention, it can result in significant mental health and work disability issues for these workers.

Our government is now working with the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board and the Department of Health and Social Services on solutions and implementation of our election commitments. The *Workers' Compensation Act* will be amended to include presumptive coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder for first responders in the fall legislative session. This is a first step forward in terms of opening up this legislation. A presumption replaces the need to decide a claim on the balance of probabilities for select workers and presumes injury arose because of the work. While PTSD presumption for first responders is a good first step in recognizing the effects of psychological injury, we also have to recognize that preventing these injuries is equally important.

In 2008, the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board enacted policy EN-09: Adjudicating Psychological Disorders to manage adjudication of psychological injuries, including PTSD. A psychological injury may be considered work-related if it is caused by one sudden unexpected traumatic event or a series of events that happens in the workplace. Based on the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, employers with 20 employees or more are required to maintain occupational health and safety programs and have programs in place to assist workers exposed to traumatic events to prevent potential psychological injuries.

Following disturbing incidents, employers should encourage employees to use the assistance in place and talk to trauma teams to prevent potential psychological injuries. Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board can assist with arranging debriefing teams. To accept a claim — the PTSD on presumption — the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board will still require a diagnosis on PTSD from a qualified mental health care provider. The presumption can be reviewed, meaning if evidence is presented that disproves that the cause of PTSD was the work, the claim would not be accepted.

The Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board has hired legal counsel to do a jurisdictional scan to research presumptive provisions for PTSD and preventive measures in place in occupational health and safety laws across the country. This summer, we will consult stakeholders on proposed amendments to our current legislation. One aspect of that consultation will be around the costs associated with potential changes.

Mr. Speaker, "first responder" is a broad term we are using as a first step in the consultative process to identify the scope of presumptive coverage. A definition of "first responder" will be established as we consult with the public and draft legislative changes to the Yukon *Workers' Compensation Act*.

All Yukon workers covered by the Yukon *Workers' Compensation Act* are eligible for mental health injury coverage, including those who have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. Some Yukon workers who may be

considered first responders, such as RCMP officers, receive workers' compensation coverage federally.

The definition of "first responder" varies across the country. Let me outline some examples of what worker groups are defined as first responders in other jurisdictions. Alberta: emergency medical technicians, firefighters and police officers; Ontario: firefighters, fire investigators, fire chiefs, police, paramedics, emergency medical attendants, ambulance service managers, correctional officers, youth service workers, including managers, dispatch workers, workers who provide direct health care services in adult institutional corrections and secure youth justice facilities and are members of emergency response teams; and New Brunswick: emergency response workers are defined as firefighters, paramedics and police officers.

Again, a definition is part of the work we are doing right now on this issue. Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a severe type of mental condition that can develop after someone is exposed either directly or indirectly to extremely disturbing events.

PTSD cannot be formally diagnosed until 30 days after the event was experienced. Given the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, there is no way to expedite the diagnosis. The long-term effects of mental health — and this is where some of the preventive measures come in — so that if you are able to work with a team to talk through or work through traumatic experience, the likelihood of that becoming a disorder is reduced.

The Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board responds immediately to all claims involving risk to a worker's mental health with prevention, support and care. Some groups prefer the term "post-traumatic stress injury" to "post-traumatic stress disorder", and I recognize the member opposite gave a very good definition of why that is. They feel this change in language would remove the negative and stigma effects that come from the origin of "disorder". They feel the word "injury" would work better in an employment context, as denoted as an external source, and would promote healing.

We use the term "disorder" instead of "injury", not to cast judgment on the person suffering, but because it's a clinical term and we must assess mental health injuries using established medical standards. Post-traumatic stress disorder is one of a number of mental health injuries. PTSD may be either acute, the result of one event, or cumulative, the result of several events over a brief or long period of time. It could also be a vicarious, indirect exposure to a traumatic event through first-hand account or a narrative of that event.

PTSD must be diagnosed by a psychiatrist or registered psychologist using the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Medical Disorders* which is the DSM-5. This manual is published by the American Psychiatric Association and is the standard for the classification of mental disorders used by mental health professions across Canada, including the Yukon and the United States.

Mental health claims, including PTSD claims, are increasing. There have been eight PTSD claims filed in the

last three years alone, exceeding the claim volume for this type of injury for the entire period of 1992 to 2013.

I know my colleague, the Minister of Health and Social Services, will be speaking to the motion as well, but I do want to touch on the topic of mental health in general. I know that my colleague will go more in-depth in this area. Protecting the mental health of Yukoners in the workplace and caring for those who have suffered injury are priority issues for this government. Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board has seen a steady increase in mental health claims for the past few years. Managing these types of claims requires significant human and financial resources. Mental health concerns extend beyond the workplace and require the understanding and support of our entire community.

There is a growth in mental health awareness, which presents an opportunity to combat the associated stigma. I think we've seen so many great campaigns over the years that help people to come forward and speak about their experience with mental health and that's a very, very good first step to being able to address the issues.

At the memorial — the Day of Mourning — I had some first responders come and talk to me about their personal experience and just express to me how important this legislation is to them and that it essentially could save lives rather than having people resort to self-medicating. That's something we know is happening among first responders, so there are so many difficult circumstances that people are managing, sometimes on their own.

To put it into context, here are some of the national statistics to consider. In any given week, half a million Canadians are unable to work because of mental health issues or injuries. Thirty percent of long- and short-term disability claims are attributed to mental health problems and illnesses. The annual cost of mental health problems to the economy is over \$50 billion. Mental health compensation claims are on the rise across the country, including the Yukon.

I want to thank the member opposite again for bringing the motion forward to debate today. It highlights an important problem, one that our government is absolutely addressing. As I said earlier, we are working with the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board and will be consulting with stakeholders this summer. Again, we will be supporting this motion.

Mr. Cathers: I rise today on behalf of the Official Opposition caucus. We will be supporting this motion. We considered the possibility of proposing an amendment but decided, in the interest of the House's time, we would simply add some additional suggestions for the government to consider. We will support the motion, as worded.

We agree this is an area that is worth looking at. The key point we want to add to the debate — and considered adding to the motion — is the fact that there needs to be a focus on critical incident stress management. While there are cases where people develop post-traumatic stress disorder or an injury, in our view, there really should be every effort made to avoid getting to that stage. While in some cases, someone who

is a first responder or another citizen who sees an incident may have PTSD following a single incident, in most cases, according to the information we have, it is typically the result of cumulative stress after multiple incidents, just as in the case of the former paramedic who the Leader of the Third Party was mentioning in her comments.

There are a number of things that can be done to try to help people from getting to the stage where they have PTSD, and that includes peer support, access to counselling and better efforts at identifying when someone is exhibiting signs that they are feeling the burden of the work and of the very difficult incidents and situations they have had to see, deal with and help people in the context of.

With that addition, we would again encourage the government to not just focus on the legislation, but to work with staff of departments that deal with first responders to reach out to those first responders and others who are in the health care field who may see these types of very difficult incidents that can be traumatic for people.

We would again just urge the government to reach out to all of the front-line responders and health professionals who deal with people in times of crisis to see what more could be done to improve the critical incident stress management that is in place today. We believe it has come a long way from what it used to be, but that further improvements can be made through ensuring that the network of peer support and counselling is there for the people mentioned in debate with the Premier on the budget yesterday. There is a long list of service personnel who may need this type of support and counselling, and that includes everyone from the RCMP to EMS to volunteer firefighters to highways crews who may be the first on the scene.

It can include the staff at the coroner's office and community coroners; it can include victim services workers, victim assistance volunteers. I know that I am missing some from the list, but just to give an example — the long list of people, both paid and volunteer across the territory who may be in need of peer counselling, access to mental health support and more support after they have dealt with a difficult situation or a series of difficult and unpleasant situations that can weigh on the mind of anyone.

With that, I will wrap up my remarks and just encourage the government to talk to the staff of the key departments in this and look at how to best reach out to front-line service personnel and volunteers to ensure that we are doing the very best that we can as a territory in supporting them in dealing with post-incident situations.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the members for their comments and I will follow up in a moment on the Member for Lake Laberge about reaching out to our first responders. I think that's an excellent point.

I would like to thank the Leader of the Third Party for her motion, which is encouraging us to consider expanding the proposed amendments to the *Workers' Compensation Act* so that all workers covered by the Yukon Workers'

Compensation Health and Safety Board benefit from presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder legislation.

I happen to be married to a nurse and I happen to have had the experience of being with my lovely wife on several occasions when she has been called upon to act in a good Samaritan fashion in dealing with injuries that we had come across. They ranged from a nasty gash in a leg to a ruptured spleen from a vehicle accident to a death in a motor vehicle accident. I know that there is stress in those situations, and I know that when people are injured, they themselves sometimes are struggling to cope and are sometimes disoriented, and sometimes, even though people are working to help them, they're not always aware that this is what's going on and it can be very stressful. I remember conversations with my wife and Michael Swainson about his analogy of the backpack.

We appreciate the comments that are being brought forward and I'm happy that my colleague, the Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board, is looking to expand the scope so that not only is it presumptive, but that we look at other workers, including expanding the definition of what it is to be a first responder.

Let me speak for a moment, as the Minister of Community Services, about our first responders. They are critically important to our community. They are our friends, our neighbours and our family, and they are there for us when we need them the most, so we need to ensure that we are there for them when they need us. We know that they are prone to stress and trauma because of the work that they do and because of the stoic culture that sometimes still exists in certain fields.

I appreciate that the motion wants to go beyond first responders, and I acknowledge that we should consider all workers covered under the Yukon *Workers' Compensation Act*. I am also concerned about first responders and wish to ensure that they have the support that they need.

Post-traumatic stress is prevalent on front-line health care workers, paramedics and firefighters. These occupations are exposed to stressful, potentially traumatic situations and incidents. We have many first responders in Community Services so it is a priority for me to ensure that they are safe and able to carry out their work and, in fact, are proud of the work that they do. I want them to be proud of the work that they do. It is important to ensure that first responders, as well as other staff and colleagues, have early supports so that stresses don't become post-traumatic stress disorder.

This is to follow on the comments of the member opposite. I note that all speakers have talked about critical incident stress management on both sides of this House, and I will as well.

I am supportive of that. Community Services works with other departments such as the Public Service Commission and the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board to support the well-being, health and safety of first responders. Community Services emphasizes supportive workplace practices and professional services to manage stress reactions. These practices identify those in need of support and provide

timely assistance to deal with workplace mental injuries such as critical incident stress and post-traumatic stress. I believe we should focus on prevention and early critical incident stress management for all, including first responders. A proactive, timely approach that mitigates post-traumatic stress by addressing its early signs and symptoms in the workplace will make us all healthier and keep us all safer.

This government is committed to supporting our public servants — both our staff and our volunteers — to enable them to provide quality of life for Yukoners through their daily work. Keeping our front-line responders safe and well is a first step in building healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I too appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. I am going to read the motion because I think that it is very important that we consider the language that we use within the motion. I like the language that was just currently presented around preventive care and the measures that we have in place to address early intervention.

The motion reads: “THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to consider expanding the proposed amendments to the *Workers’ Compensation Act* so that all workers covered by Workers’ Compensation Health and Safety Board benefit from presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder or injury (PTSD or PTSI) legislation.” The reason I read that is because — I see the member opposite finds humour in that. But what I want to say is that it is very, very important that we look at all of our society. Post-traumatic stress disorder doesn’t just impact first responders, as expressed. It affects everyone.

We heard last week during the Mental Health Week that members of our community suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder from terrible trauma that they have experienced from sexual violence and physical violence in our communities. There are considerations that we have to take under advisement as we look at this particular motion and we look at preventive measures as we move forward.

I cannot express how important it is to recognize the mental health of our first responders and the importance of dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. Now, why am I feeling so passionate about this? I know first-hand the horrifying experiences that meet a paramedic or a police officer arriving at the scene. Why? Because I was a paramedic. For many years, I volunteered and came upon incidents on our highways where we’ve had death. We had significant situations happen. As a young police officer, I experienced first-hand incidents where I had to deal with families of trauma victims of incidents that happened within our society.

Dealing with life-and-death situations is not something we take lightly. I don’t take it lightly as Minister of Health and Social Services. The impact of many of those memories is still with me today, having dealt with very traumatic situations. It has affected all of us in some way and in some shape where we’ve had an opportunity or we have been impacted — friends, family, community members. We saw

that last week as we walked in the community with members of our society who suffer from mental illness and challenges. Post-traumatic stress disorder finds itself in that group as well.

Things that you see colour your life. It colours what you see every day — your thoughts, your sleep. It changes the way that you think about things. It drives who you are as a person later on in your life. Perhaps some people don’t have the support they require at the time that they need it most. Later on in life, we have opportunities to try to put some programs and services in place to address that. Fortunately, as a Liberal government, we have that opportunity. We have just that opportunity to listen to our communities, to listen to the paramedics and to listen to the members of our community who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder that isn’t associated with the first responder kind of employment or volunteer job.

Mental illness affects all of our citizens. It’s important to this government. It speaks to our desire to create healthy, happy and vibrant communities. Mental wellness of all of our citizens is important, and it’s important that we have a 10-year mental wellness strategy. It has seen its first year, but there is a lot of work to be done in that strategy — prevention, services to Yukoners, critical incidents, stress management and looking at reduction strategies. What can we do through our mental wellness strategy for all Yukoners, for all members of our society so that we take a people-centred approach to wellness to help Yukoners thrive?

Throughout the past year — the last six months, since being elected — we have worked with our partners, First Nation governments and community groups, to build on the concept of mental wellness for all citizens of Yukon. When we think about mental wellness, we think about everything we need to do to create wellness. Recognizing and talking about things that make us ill is an important first step. As a volunteer ambulance attendant and a paramedic, not everyone will step up to the plate and say, “classify me as that person”. Why? Because there is a stigma attached to that. We know that and we heard that loud and clear last week, and we continue to hear that.

What can we do to break down the stigma associated with post-traumatic stress disorder and mental illness? Like many other mental challenges, post-traumatic stress disorder is treatable. We need to make people aware, create awareness within our society and within our government, perhaps looking at expanding the scope of care for our health providers, care providers and families. As family members and community members, we need to be aware, identify and ensure that we have the services readily available. Where do we go? What do we do? Who do we contact? How do we educate and eliminate the stigma associated with PTSD? Why? I know, because I experienced it first-hand. I know what is needed. Yes, it makes me emotional. I know what is needed. All of us, in some way — we just put forward a tribute earlier about palliative care and end-of-life care. That leads to high-tension emotions about what we do to provide supports for members of our society, for family members who experience death in some way or end-of-life care. Those are

traumatic events in our lives that address or trigger some high-priority points we need to tie into our mental wellness strategy.

At first blush of all of this, we look at putting some expanded scopes in and phasing in integrated mental health, child and therapeutic services, addictions services, coordinating collaborative care and responsive care, timely care, and delivering on an expanded scope of services at home, in the communities where people live. It's a first step, and we have a lot of work to do to implement the strategy that's before us.

We need to ensure that treatment is provided in a timely fashion so that, eventually, the person experiencing PTSD is healthy and recovered. We don't have those supports in rural Yukon. We need to look at the strategy to ensure that the supports are delivered and are available to members of our rural Yukon.

Symptoms, as was expressed by my colleagues, include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts of events. Is PTSD an anxiety disorder? How do you cope? What can we do to support our clients — our citizens of Yukon? It is a mental illness after all. We have a strategy that we have to implement and, as a government, it's our obligation — all of us in our House — to participate in that process and give good guidance and ensure that we are involved and give the necessary feedback and participate in the process.

I just want to acknowledge that, as minister, I take this very seriously and I will do my part to ensure that we have a strategy — a mental wellness implementation and collaborative strategy — that addresses some of the preventive measures and ensure that we have the supports in our rural Yukon so that the volunteers in rural Yukon have direct access as well to supports that they need.

Ms. White: I thank the House for the comments because this is a really important day. I think it's also important to know that my colleague here really laid it out initially. When we worked hard on this legislation first, we made a mistake. We're telling you right now we made a mistake. We only listed first responders. It's important not to get lost in that language because when you say "first responders", we lose too many people on the side. We made a mistake when we tabled this and that is why we're coming back with this motion and we're asking you to consider opening it up, because if you remove the language of "first responders" in the presumptive legislation and you insert the word "workers", it means that we are going to make sure that everyone has access to this. That is why we're here because we made a mistake and we're trying to fix that right now.

I have a great friend in the gallery right now — this is my friend Steve Hahn, and he's sitting here right now because this is a really big deal for him. In his experience — under that classification of "first responder", he would not be classified. He is here because he needs to see that we understand this and he has actually written you guys individually. He has written you and I'm going to read that, but I want you to know that

my friend Steve is here and I am grateful for him. He's sitting through this. I tried really hard to get through your letter, but I'm just going to take a second.

I think when we talk about expanding it to workers, I am a perfect example of different situations. My friend Jean-Francois, in 2006, was killed when doing mining staking. The people he worked with — who were in the helicopter — who were the first people on-site would not be considered first responders.

When my friend Paul was killed at a mine site when a vehicle backed over him, the friends and colleagues who he had who responded would not have been considered first responders — and the list goes on.

If you were robbed at gunpoint, if you were robbed at knifepoint, if you were assaulted in the terms of your job, does that person become any less valuable to us than first responders? That is the conversation. We're talking about workers and workers as a whole.

I think this might be the first time that this has ever happened — what I'm going to do right now — but I have a copy of the letter and we made it available. I think everyone will have an electronic copy. Steve really wanted to make sure that you heard the personal account of what we're trying to avoid.

This might take a little bit.

It says, "Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker" — in this case, Mr. Chair — "My name is Steve Hahn and I am a survivor of occupationally acquired PTSD. As a board certified flight nurse and paramedic who worked on the critical care medevac team at Yukon EMS from 2002-2011, I developed PTSD as a result of exposure to Yukon's citizens and visitors having the very worst days of their lives. My path to recovery was the hardest challenge I have ever had to face, with loss of a home, savings and possessions along the way. From time of going off work until I was diagnosed and eligible to receive benefits two years later ... I was brought to the brink of suicide, financial and mental health failure.

"On September 5, 2011, I went to work a medevac day shift, tired, broken and emotionally exhausted. I had not slept in days and my hands shook uncontrollably from fear. Drenched in sweat, I did not know what was happening to me and felt I could not get out of my truck. I was suicidal and mission in-effective. I called in sick and went straight home to hide from the world. Friends called on me and a fellow paramedic texted me that I should call a crisis line. I was taken to hospital and admitted for my safety. This certainly saved my life that day.

"The call the night before was to the RCMP cells where a young man, suffering an acute psychotic break, was shackled, hobbled and put in cells. I was able to talk with him, get him to volunteer to go to hospital and take some anti-psychotic medications. As I put him on the stretcher, a well-meaning but ill-informed RCMP read him the riot act and caused him to go into a rage. I then had to aggressively sedate him and secure him to the stretcher. This left me emotionally triggered and having flashbacks all night. While working solo medical crew medevac flights in Nunavut, I had been confronted with these

types of clients on my aircraft and had to treat patients while one of the pilots came back to hold the patients down. For me, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. Children that I cared for who needed pediatric intensive care teams, trauma patients who bled out in front of my eyes, pregnant mothers whose babies were footling breech births, that I had to hold inside them until I could get to hospital, a 3 hr flight away. Ladies and gentlemen, these cases never leave your mind and will haunt you every day.

"This pivotal event began a two-year journey into the depths of my soul and the brink of ending my life. The result of a bad call five years previous that left unanswered questions, guilt and feelings of failure. I did not come to realize I had PTSD until 5 months later when a Psychiatric Nurse postulated that I might have operational stress injury secondary to my time in emergency services. Due to constant prodding of friends who had been diagnosed before me, I spent \$6,000 dollars of my own money to go to California to better understand if that is what was wrong with me. I was able to sit in the room with 14 first responders from different backgrounds who had the same symptoms and struggles I had. It was like a light went on in my head. When I came home, knowing that I had this condition, nobody would listen to me or undertake a proper diagnostic process. In one case, an assessment with a psychiatric specialist in Vancouver was cancelled, due to the recommendations by a social worker that I did not have enough exposure to trauma to warrant such a waste of money. Although my employer graciously paid for me to go to Ontario to attend an eight-week post-traumatic stress recovery program, I had to write my own care plan, advocate for myself and in one case link several specialists and case workers together to present evidence on my behalf.

"When I returned home, there was no plan. My primary care physician retired and I was adrift. Realize that flight nursing was my life. I was now unable to continue and it seemed that there was no hope. I still did not have a firm diagnosis and it seemed like I was falling through the cracks. Thanks to some excellent practitioners at community mental health who were concerned about my health status, I was able to have a chance to visit with a psychiatrist who specialized in PTSD. He put me on the right medications, set up lab work to verify issues secondary to PTSD and set me on the right trajectory. Moreover, I finally had a diagnosis. Without this diagnosis, my claim would have gone nowhere. In September 2013, I put in my claim and it was finally accepted after a battery of assessments in November 2013. Because of the delay in diagnosis and the legislation as it is written — \$85,000 it took me to get back healthy enough to work and I will not be reimbursed for it.

"Some of you may be thinking right now that this is what he signed up for or it comes with the job, suck it up. I had been working in critical care in pre-hospital practice since 1988, working in some of the most austere and difficult situations, providing care to the sickest and most vulnerable out there. I was an army medical technician, wilderness EMT, registered nurse, and primary care paramedic who was an expert in the field. I excelled at anything medical I tried. I was

jump qualified, short-haul and long-line rated and taught many of the classes in certifications I attained. However, I was never educated in the toll it would take and how to be emotionally resilient in the face of tragedy. Plainly, if you think that I was weak and lacked the intestinal fortitude, please understand that I was the most likely part of the team who cared for the aunt, father, child, or even you when you needed it most. I went to the call when I was tired, hungry, it was snowing and it was uncomfortable. PTSD is an occupational hazard in emergency first response and the hazards need better mitigation and care for those affected.

"The reason I came through this was due to my mental toughness, physical resilience and a core group of folks who never left my side. My care and recovery was both directed, orchestrated and financed to a large extent by me. Instead of it being easy, the road was blocked by ignorance, apathy and prejudice. Understand me when I write that I am unique and not the norm. There are many responders who have become ill with PTSD, who become frustrated with the lack of care and assistance and simply faded away.

"Creating comprehensive presumptive legislation that assists firefighters, paramedics, flight nurses, community nurses, enforcement officers, social workers and corrections personnel is something that is truly needed in Yukon. It will not be used as a crutch, but rather as a way to limit delays in treatment and aid in stopping the progression of the condition. I can honestly say that being sick with PTSD is debilitating and dangerous. What is needed is a plug-and-play process that speeds folks through the process without judgment or prejudice. I agree, we should also focus on prevention and early recognition, but when folks become ill, they need care that is timely and accessible. We need to be a leader in the north and not the hold-out jurisdiction that does not want to face this real issue. I know for a fact, ladies and gentlemen, that there are many responders in this territory suffering in silence. I am scared that we will have a responder commit suicide because of the lack of an adequate process to get them the help they deserve. This does not sit well with me. As I see brothers and sisters in other jurisdictions turn to suicide out of desperation and lack of efficient access to the financial, health and social support that they need during the acute phase of their illness. BC and Ontario have done it, now let's get behind our responders and show them that we will care for them here.

"In closing, my motivation for seeing this legislation through is so that not another responder will be told by the supervisory team: 'We knew that you had PTSD all along, we just thought you knew how to take care of it if it became more serious!,' like I was. This is not a crutch or a way so individuals can be lazy. Recovery from PTSD is possible, but it takes financial resources, work on the part of the individual and a clearly articulated process to get the person healthy and ready to return to duty. Thank you. Steve Hahn RN, CFRN, CEN, WEMT-1, PCP, QL4 Med A, (ret)".

Thank you, Mr. Hahn.

Mr. Chair, this is one example. At the time, as a flight nurse, Mr. Hahn would not be considered a first responder —

nor were my friends at the mine site or my friends who were on the staking line or the attendant at the 24-hour gas station that gets robbed. What we are asking for is that the government, which has identified that this is important — that we don't want any more situations like what happened to my friend Steve to happen to other people. It needs to be expanded, because if you have PTSD as the clerk at the gas station, you still have to justify, you still have to be able to explain, you still have to be able to go through the entire process to say, "I was injured because of my job." What we are asking here today is that we take away that barrier and we say that, if you are suffering from post-traumatic stress injury, we will not make you go through that process. We will get you the help that you need in a timely fashion so you don't get pushed to the brink. We are happy to hear that all sides are supporting this, but the real work lies with government. You have the ability, when you open up that legislation this fall, to, instead of giving a definition of "first responder", remove that by just adding the words "all workers". That is what we really hope for.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank my colleagues in the House. I especially thank Steve, who was brave enough to write that out and, more importantly, that he wrote it out to you because he wanted you to hear about his experience. Let's learn because he is here to tell us. Let's not put anyone through this, no matter what their job is. First responder, liquor store clerk, postal worker — all workers deserve this kind of support from government.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Mr. Hahn, for your letter. I am happy to discuss the motion before us today that was brought forward by the Leader of the Third Party, and I thank her for bringing the issue forward. I thank her because the more we talk about occupational health and safety, occupational disease and mental health — the better. It is better for workers, better for business and business owners, better for our communities and better for our territory.

Let me be clear. We are talking about saving lives, about preventing injuries and trauma — the limbs, the lives, the mental health of our sons and daughters, our sisters and brothers, our wives and husbands, our friends and our neighbours — people in our community we pass every day in the grocery store or while we are attending a show at the Arts Centre or, in Mr. Hahn's case, at the workers' memorial — real people. Make no mistake: the more we talk about this, the better. We should talk about it. We must act on what we know. This is our shared responsibility.

Last week, while I was at a meeting with my staff, I looked out over the parking lot and saw a pair of fellows on the roof — a three-storey roof. Neither of them was wearing fall arrests. In fact, one of the fellows was hanging on to the other guy's belt as he leaned over the roof line to secure, of all things, a plastic owl to the roof.

I called my former colleagues at Workers' Compensation and they responded immediately and spoke to the fellows. They were not workers. They were just regular people on the street. They were not on the job, but last afternoon they

learned a little bit about safety. You shouldn't be hanging off a roof holding on to a guy's belt. That's not safe. It could have been tragic. We also learned that safety is all of our business. Hopefully they take that information to heart the next time they are out on a roof with a plastic owl.

We have a responsibility to act when we see behaviour that is not safe and to try to prevent injuries before they occur. We share this responsibility, so I welcome this motion. It is about progress. It is about understanding. It is about compassion. It is about caring for our family, friends, neighbours and those in the community who are grappling with a mental illness.

I thank the member of the Third Party for bringing this forward. This discussion benefits us all. The Leader of the Third Party has spoken with compassion about the people she has met and has represented who are struggling with the triggers of mental trauma. It is terrible.

I too am aware of the perils of post-traumatic stress disorder through my work with the compensation board and also in my personal life. Both my brothers have trained as first responders. One of my brothers is a first responder today, serving his community. I have glimpsed — I could never know, but I have gleaned some of the effects when he has come home from a tough call to a family barbecue, to his young sons and his nephews.

I have a friend who was in the Balkan conflict. I have glimpsed the mental trauma he carries from that war zone. He hides it well because, like many people who have experienced such things, he's stoic. But I know my friend. I grew up with him and I caught a glimpse of that trauma that he now carries, so, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that's close to me personally.

I'm not alone. We have heard the stories this afternoon from the members opposite. They are compelling and absolutely terrible, and I'm sure we're all aware of the people in our lives — people who are first responders or soldiers, people who have been exposed to traumatic events, people who have been exposed to terrible things.

The point is that we're talking about this this afternoon, and that's very, very important. We're coming to a greater understanding about this issue in this Legislative Assembly. This is a complicated issue.

Trauma is not limited to first responders, as we learned this afternoon. In housing, front-line staffers checking on tenants can see terrible things — traumatic things. It is not a profession you think about, but there you have it — it happens. My own mother was a bank teller in Kanata, Ontario. One day, a desperate fellow — a fellow who had no cash and had been denied cheques for months — jumped on to the counter and started shouting, screaming and waving around a gun. He was desperate, threatening to shoot everybody. The bank staff, my mother and all the rest of them crawled into cupboards underneath their bank tills — tiny little spaces. My mom gave me a harrowing account of her colleague, crawling around outside, saying, "Please let me in." They were terrified. The fellow was caught and nobody was hurt — or rather, nobody was shot. No blood was spilled thankfully, but the women — the staff at the bank were

largely women — carried the experience with them for years. My mother carried it. She got nervous and edgy whenever somebody raised their voice or there was a loud noise. When that happened, it brought back the memories. Unfortunately for her, I raise my voice fairly often, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't realize this incident happened until a couple of years ago when my mom and I were talking about workplace incidents and trauma. The incident happened in the 1980s. She didn't get workers' compensation. The bank, it should be noted, gave the employees a couple of hours off and a single drink at the nearby restaurant — not more than one, just one. Then the staff had to go back to work that afternoon and had to balance their tills. It was in the 1980s — in my lifetime. I was a teenager, I guess, at the time so I have a smidgeon of information about this topic.

Workers in many fields can experience trauma, so I am happy to discuss this issue. I'm happy to say that, unlike Ontario in the 1980s, the Yukon will assist workers who suffer trauma at work — bankers, housing workers, paramedics, firefighters and others. Everyone is eligible for mental health injury coverage today, right now.

Care is made available to all workers. Presumption simply removes the requirement to verify that injury occurred at work. We're doing this with cancers — people who suffer from specific cancers and occupational diseases that are well-known to stem from work. Asbestosis is presumed to come from work if, for example, you worked in an asbestos mine. The compensation board presumes the ailment stemmed from your work.

Other workers, non-miners, can get compensation for asbestosis if it stems from work. It has to be shown that it stems from your work. There is no presumption, but there is coverage — so too for post-traumatic stress disorder. The term "disorder" is a clinical term, as my colleague, the Member for Mountainview, noted. It denotes the type of diagnosis. Injuries to the mind are not easy to pin down. It takes a specialist, a psychologist or a psychiatrist, and we in the territory know how difficult it is to get that type of specialist's help. It is a barrier — one my colleague, the Minister of Health and Social Services — is trying to address.

We have to do more. We have to do more work on this front. We have to be creative and use some imagination to try to find ways to get these resources in place so that people in the territory can get the help they need in a timely fashion so they're not waiting and so they can actually get that help.

But it cannot be diagnosed on a Friday afternoon by your family doctor. It's not that easy. This injury is complex. It is difficult to pin down and it is often not easy to talk about. I've seen that with the people I know personally. Like so many injuries, it is much better to prevent than to treat once it happens.

As my colleague from Mountainview has noted, prevention is essential. We have to get specialists into workplaces beset by traumatic events to help workers cope with their stress before it becomes a mental injury. We have to be aware of these things and we have to get that help to these

workplaces quickly, regardless of where they are — to housing or a bank, to the paramedics and fire stations.

We also have to discuss this issue, as we are this afternoon, to remove the stigma in all workplaces, not just among first responders, and to get people to accept mental illness and trauma, to understand the symptoms and to be willing to reach out for help and break down those barriers so people aren't reluctant to do so — that they're actually comfortable doing so. That unease in doing so stems from all of us in society and in this room.

Once again, I want to thank the member opposite for raising this essential issue in this Assembly this afternoon. This is about progress. This is about understanding. This is about compassion. It's about caring for our families, our friends, our neighbours and the people in our community who are grappling with mental illness or who could find themselves facing trauma in the future.

I thank you for the opportunity to discuss this this afternoon.

Deputy Speaker: If the member now speaks, she will close debate. Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. Hanson: I would like to extend my thanks to all members of this Legislative Assembly who have shared their views this afternoon on this motion that we brought forward this afternoon.

I also want to extend a very special thanks to Steve Hahn for writing to us, as members of this Legislative Assembly, and for allowing my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King to read into Hansard, where it will be forever as testimony.

We often speak about the importance of bearing witness, and what Mr. Hahn has done is a classic and very important example of bearing witness and allowing us to bear witness to his journey and asking us to prevent that journey from having to be followed by anybody else.

As the government prepares amendments to the *Workers' Compensation Act*, what we have all agreed to this afternoon is that the government — and the government has agreed — will consider expanding the proposed amendments to make sure that all workers covered by the Yukon *Workers' Compensation Act* benefit from presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder or injury legislation. At the end of those discussions with a broad range of people, no doubt — and we heard from the minister opposite that the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board is doing its due diligence, as they do when they are asked by government to consider amendments to the legislation. We know that these are not the only amendments that are required to the workers' compensation legislation. It should have gone through an overhaul — a complete legislative review in 2015. It didn't happen.

We have an opportunity, as I said earlier. If the government, in good faith, considers what has been discussed this afternoon, considers the testimony that it heard this afternoon, looks at other legislation — for example, looks at the Manitoba legislation — and determines that it is not a

good idea for the Yukon, that will be their decision. But it will fall to the government to explain to Yukoners and to Yukon workers why it shouldn't apply to all workers. We do believe that there is time to do this well and to do it before the Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly. As I said earlier, we believe there is an opportunity for the government to show that it is actually listening and not bound by the very words that it wrote in an election platform. A platform is to generate an interest in what you are saying and to engage with Yukoners and to get them to support you. They expect you then, once elected, to listen. I think I heard someplace about a motto about "hearing" or "heard". Well, let's demonstrate that the government does hear and will demonstrate with the legislation that it puts forward this fall that it heard Yukoners and that it heard all Yukon workers.

We look forward to the work that will be done over the next while. We will certainly partake in whatever consultation process comes forward over the course of the next few months. We thank the members for their engagement this afternoon and for their support of this motion.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 52 agreed to

Motion No. 38

Clerk: Motion No. 38, standing in the name of Ms. White.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to:

(1) acknowledge that it has been 10 years since school spring break was extended to two weeks to accommodate the 2007 Canada Winter Games;

(2) acknowledge that a two-week spring break is an economic burden for many Yukon families; and

(3) consult with parents, school councils and the Yukon Teachers' Association on reducing the length of the spring school break before planning school calendars for the 2018-19 academic year onwards.

Ms. White: I'm going to try to change gears from our previous debate.

The spring break issue is an interesting one. As a person who doesn't have children, it doesn't affect me the way it does many other people, in the way that I don't have to try to find child care for children who aren't school-aged; I don't need to pay for camps; I don't need to do those things, so the spring break doesn't affect me personally in the way it does many others.

In the last five years, I have definitely referenced my little sister, because I'm really proud of what she does. She is a mother of three children: Kemper is almost 11, Aason is four and Lennox is two. I have also said she works for the most feminist company in all of Yukon, because she drives a school bus. The reason why she drives a school bus is because she can take her two young children with her to work. Previously she worked as a receptionist in a dental clinic, but the cost of daycare became too much for her and her husband, so they made choices, and that was to drive the school bus.

This last spring break, I got to see how tough it was. She said it was good, because she was home with the two little kids, but then to entertain the older guy, he was in ski camps, and those are costly. Then I got another message from someone on Facebook that said, as a single parent of a young child, two weeks' spring break — she said she can't even cover it — doesn't know where to start, can't afford to send her to camp, can't afford to take two weeks off right now — is lucky there are older kids who can care for her — but this is a burden.

It is interesting because, in 2007, I owned a coffee shop at the Canada Games Centre so I had the front-and-centre view of the massive contribution of the citizens of the Yukon during the 2007 Canada Winter Games. In 2007, the territory had to make the decision that we were going to close down the schools for two weeks for spring break because, for one thing, we needed the space and the school facilities, and the second thing we needed was we needed all hands on deck. We needed as many volunteers as possible. Thousands and thousands of people volunteered for those two weeks, and it was incredible. I had a first-hand view of that. It was amazing.

That happened in 2007, and we never revisited the issue. We never went back to say, "Okay families, that was one-off", or "we're going to look at doing this again; how do you feel about it?" I was told this morning there was a consultation in 2015 — maybe? — but I didn't hear about it. My sister obviously didn't participate at that point in time.

I looked across Canada to see what happens in other jurisdictions because, if everyone has a two-week spring break, then maybe that's just kind of the way it happens.

For most jurisdictions across Canada, spring break is one week. The exception is Yukon and British Columbia. It is important to know that not all school districts in British Columbia follow a two-week spring break. There are some that go for two weeks and some that do not. In the NWT, it is a mix, but it depends on where you live.

When I started thinking about spring break this morning before I came to work, it is important to note the conversation that happened — I put it out at 8:00 a.m. this morning. I asked on Facebook: "Yukon parents! What's your experience with a two-week spring break? I'm looking for positives and negatives." The incredible thing is if I pull up my Facebook right now, we are on 94 comments. It's really interesting — it's fascinating because there are positives and negatives. People are really honest about the financial burden of trying to figure out what they are going to do with their kids. It is interesting, because I am also friends with teachers, and so we have the perspective of teachers. Some say that they need the break by that point in time. Some say that it is too long and it's disruptive to their schedule. We have some people say that it's great because we can make big travel plans and we can go to far-off destinations. Then the response underneath it is: I would really like to be able to go to far-off destinations, but two weeks alone is more than I can handle.

What it has really shown me is that it is a good time for a discussion. It is a good time to have a conversation with people, especially as we get ready to set the schedule for 2018 and onward. I can tell you that out of the almost 100 comments, there are probably 50 percent on each side. The one thing that comes up again and again is that even the people who like the two-week vacation find there is a financial cost to it. People say that not working in the public service, they don't have access to that kind of vacation time. Some people say that we just can't afford \$350-a-week camps. The camps would be fantastic, but we just can't afford them. Then there are people who say that the camps are great, but they start at 9:00 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. and I start at 8:00 a.m. and end at 5:00 p.m.

There are so many responses. If anyone is interested, I could be friends with you on Facebook later and you can take a look — but I do feel that by going out to consultation will definitely help government make the decision as to whether or not the two-week break should continue. I don't think that kind of consultation is a bad thing, especially when some schools — I have friends on school councils and they have said that families can deal with anything as long as they have enough time to plan — they can make backup plans. Setting the calendar for the next number of years will be really helpful, but I really do think that there is a really good reason to have this conversation right now.

We know in the territory that we might be on an economic upswing, but we know for a lot of people that is not their daily reality. We know that sometimes daycares will also

shut down the same time as spring break and that leaves some families without that option.

I know personally that it's not an option for my sister. It's not an option for her to pay for two weeks of daycare for three kids. It's just not a financial option.

I know my brother puts his son into camps, which is great, and sometimes they go away — but they're in two different situations. It's often a decision of: Does someone stay home? Does someone go to work? If you're able to go on vacation, like I said, I think that's fantastic. But if you're not, what does it mean? For many, one week is hard to cover, but two weeks almost becomes a crisis because that's a lot of time off work and if your paycheque is already put toward managing your household, that's a big deal.

I don't think I really need to go on at length because I feel it's all listed in the motion, so really, what I'm asking is that — we haven't talked about this since it happened in 2007. At that point, it was with a really distinct purpose and that was to make sure that Whitehorse would be ready for the Canada Winter Games — and we were. We saw tens of thousands of visitors essentially descend on the territory in those two weeks. It's not 2007 anymore. We're not hosting the 2018 Canada Winter Games. We don't need the schools for the same purposes, so what I would really like to see is for this to go to consultation. I would like parents, school councils, teachers, educators, daycare workers — I would like people to be able to give their feedback as to whether or not they think that two weeks makes sense. I look forward to having that information shared with us at a later date.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to other members' comments.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion this afternoon, particularly following the questions from the Official Opposition today. It will allow me to reiterate the important details of the school calendar, primarily with respect to March break as noted in the motion, in a process that's perhaps more than 90 seconds, although I won't take too long.

The Government of Yukon works collaboratively with Yukon schools, the Yukon Teachers' Association and school councils to establish school calendars that balance the needs of Yukon's school communities. The school calendars are complex, as already described by the Third Party House Leader, and they require a lot of planning and discussion.

The *Education Act* sets criteria for establishing school start and end dates, certain vacation days, training and non-instructional days. Each school year must include 950 hours of instruction, three non-instructional days developed with school councils in consultation with them, and three professional development days determined by the Department of Education.

Depending on the length of the school day, the school year is between 171 and 180 days, or at least it has been in all recent memory. The collective agreement between the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Teachers' Association reflects these same requirements. It provides for 950 hours of

instruction and 30 hours or six days of non-instructional time for training and professional development.

The *Education Act* also requires that in communities where there is more than one school, all schools in that community must have the same dates on their school calendars. This is needed for coordinating student transportation, including busing costs. It also helps families with children who are in more than one school, in planning for schooling time and childcare. All Whitehorse schools must have the same start date, winter break dates and spring break dates. The two schools in Watson Lake also aligned their key dates. The *Education Act* also provides school councils with the authority to provide feedback on the calendars and working with them is an important way for us to gather input from parents and families on planning the school calendars.

We sent the proposed calendars, with key dates for discussion, between the school principal and the school council. Rural schools have a choice of school start dates and some flexibility on dates throughout the year to support the unique needs of their school communities. School councils determine how to best work with their school communities, including parents and families, to provide feedback on their school's preferences. The principal and the school council then send their feedback back to the Department of Education, where it is reviewed for compliance with the act and the school council liaison and by the Public Schools division. That's how it happens in the department. The calendars are then set by the Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister of Education.

Part of the planning for school calendars includes deciding when key dates such as spring break could occur. School councils, school staff, parents and students are always interested in the timing of these dates for obvious reasons — for parents, or for aunts and uncles here in the territory. The key dates for the school calendars are important factors for each of them, including the spring break. We work with schools and school councils to ensure that school calendars best reflect the needs of all the schools in each community — at least that is the goal. We always have the opportunity and create the opportunity to do so, although there are, as my colleague has mentioned, varied opinions.

Prior to 2007, spring break in schools across the Yukon historically varied between one and two weeks, depending on the schedule of the Arctic Winter Games. Then, 10 years ago, the then-government made a decision because Whitehorse was hosting the Canada Winter Games — and we have heard a great description of that — to have a two-week spring break. Since then, we have no longer alternated and always had a two-week spring break each year.

It's important to note that in rural schools, school calendars for each community have different key dates, including for spring break. Based on the preference of schools and school councils in each community, some rural schools have had a one-week spring break and others have had two weeks. We know it can be challenging for some families to look for childcare and that not all families take vacations during the spring break.

My personal experience with respect to the things that the honourable member opposite has mentioned in her submission today — self-employed vacation time was not really an issue, but spring break vacations were not something that my family ever was able to indulge in, but certainly we all know people who can do that and have done so. We also know it's challenging for many families where that is not available to them.

Over the past few years, we have received mixed feedback from families and staff about both one-week and two-week spring breaks. I think the member opposite's Facebook survey is probably right in line with the other feedback we have managed to obtain.

A two-week spring break was set during the 2014-17 calendars in response to results of a public survey that took place in 2013, which my colleague referred to, where the majority of Whitehorse participants preferred a two-week spring break. Those three years were set to include that.

We continue to hear mixed feedback on the length of spring break with little consensus, but that does not mean we should stop asking. Shortening the spring break would also mean that the school year might end a week earlier, as the school year is based on the required 950 instructional hours and not on a required number of days, but that could be adjusted.

We are currently working with schools and school councils to set a four-year school calendar, which you have already heard about. This four-year calendar will set the same start date, winter holidays and spring break for all the Whitehorse schools, with some flexibility permitted for rural schools. We continue to encourage school councils to gather input from all families and their school communities and provide feedback on that. The deadline that was previously set for school councils was the end of this week, but if that kind of feedback is still forthcoming, it will be welcome.

We are currently in the last year of the three-year school calendar that was set previously. When I took over this job, I asked the department if they could explore and provide information to set school calendars for the next four years to coincide with the implementation of the new school curriculum. It was established following extensive consultation with schools, YTA members and the public. I'm referring to the calendars that were set between 2014 and 2017.

For the past three years, all elementary and secondary schools in Whitehorse had the same school start date and a two-week spring break. Rural schools had the option of choosing an earlier start date option in August, the same start date as Whitehorse or a later start date, often after Labour Day. Rural schools also had the option of choosing a one-week or two-week spring break. As I have said earlier, some chose a two-week and some chose a one-week one, depending on their school community.

Yukon school communities greatly appreciate the planning process, and that's why we have undertaken it for the next four years, so that school calendars are available well in advance. Having the information well in advance helps

families and staff to set their plans. It also helps after-school organizations, sport organizations, community groups and major events to know the school calendar. It helps daycares, city recreation programs and summer camps to plan for their programs, and it helps offer childcare options to Yukon families or for them to have the opportunity to explore what those might be.

The four-year school calendar will align with the four-year implementation period for the new Yukon curriculum, including essential training and support for teachers as we begin to introduce changes in the next year. For the 2017-18 school calendar, additional training days will be incorporated to support the implementation of the new curriculum, along with a new teacher evaluation process.

We need to provide this additional training and time to teachers to support them during the implementation. The usual six training days for school staff training each year are usually used as two days at a summer academy prior to school starting for teachers, and then four days throughout the school year. To provide extra support during the first year of the new curriculum — and I emphasize that this is for next year only — we have proposed that there will be eight training days, with six training days during the school year, plus a summer academy before the school year begins. This is supported by school councils.

Five of the six training days during the school year will be used for school staff to work, train and plan together on the changes to the curriculum as they start using it in the schools. It is both for opportunities for them to train with each other inside of a school and it's very much being encouraged that they train with other schools — elementary and high schools together — so they have an opportunity to learn from each other, as well as best practices and new ideas. What we do know is that many schools are well on their way to incorporating the new curriculum into their work and they are eager to share those opportunities with each other.

The five days of training will be all the same for the Whitehorse schools to facilitate that kind of cooperation. The actual training days are still being set. The dates are not yet picked.

This is a similar approach to what British Columbia is taking as it also implements its new curriculum. It's important to note that instructional time in schools has often been used for activities that support student learning, such as exams and parent-teacher conferences. An important note is that, as many exams will now be written in class with the new curriculum, there will be fewer exam days when students are not in school, which will result in more class time.

We consulted with the Yukon Teachers' Association and with school councils on these changes. We will use training opportunities to support teachers in further developing the instructional skills required for the new curriculum and with ongoing opportunities during the year for activities that support student learning.

School superintendents are working with their family of schools to develop individual area training plans. Training plans for the next year will focus on the priority areas of the

curriculum implementation, including assessment and Yukon First Nation ways of knowing and doing. The training plans will be reviewed and monitored during the next school year, with a report at the end of the school year from each school on their progress.

I would like to thank all school councils and all schools for their feedback during the exercise on the 2017-18 calendar. As I have said, we are asking for continued feedback and look forward to assessing those submissions.

Another point as I am beginning to conclude my remarks today is that it is important to note that from school attendance reports, we know that student attendance drops in June as Yukon summer weather begins. There are also many reasons for that with respect to First Nations and other communities outside of Whitehorse and their activities in the individual communities. It may be time for us to recognize — and maybe I am one of the people slow to do that, but I am open — that the Yukon summer is in June and July and not in July and August as it is in many other parts of Canada — primarily southern Canada. Our calendar should adjust to that reality and to the needs of Yukon families.

I should note that, after considering the feedback that we sought with respect to the 2017-18 calendar, it was set on April 21, 2017, and communicated after that.

Since 2006, as I have said, summer breaks have varied between 64 and 80 days for elementary schools. The summer break for 2017 will be 69 days. Next year's summer break, or the summer of 2018, for Whitehorse schools depends on the start date that is ultimately chosen with respect to the school calendar, and that has not yet been determined. We are expecting more feedback from school councils, and we will continue to gather that and assess it as it comes in. Not unlike the Facebook survey, my own attendance at school council meetings — as many as I can possibly manage — since December have included questions about school calendars, and feedback has been mixed. As our colleague has said, it is a complicated issue. Individual families all have opinions — and rightly so — and individual school councils have priorities. One of the key goals for us is to allow those dates to be set so people are forewarned and have knowledge because that is a benefit. But I do get mixed feedback from all those school councils with respect to March breaks and start and end dates, but primarily the one thing everyone can agree on is that knowledge — forewarning and planning — is the best.

Planning for school calendars is a really important process that sets the pace for learning over the coming years and allows the entire school community to plan ahead for key dates throughout the school year. It can be a complicated process, as we have heard, to develop calendars that balance the requirements and the needs — and really, the preferences — of all schools. I thank all of the schools and the school councils for their feedback and ask them to continue to provide it. It did play a critical role in ensuring that school calendars reflect each school community's priorities.

The Department of Education, schools, and school councils will continue to work with their communities, including parents, school staff and teachers, to provide

feedback that represents the needs of each unique community. The Yukon government will then prepare school calendars, as we have already done for feedback, but we will continue to do that a year ahead once the next three years have been set — the year ahead — so that there is always lots of notice for families and schools.

I very much appreciate the motion being brought forward by the Third Party and I am going to propose what will call a friendly amendment to that motion.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move:

THAT Motion No. 38 be amended by:

- (1) removing the words “is an” and replacing it with the words “may be”;
- (2) removing the word “many” and replacing it with the word “some”; and
- (3) removing the word “reducing” and replacing it with the word “determining”.

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Minister of Education:

THAT Motion No. 38 be amended by:

- (1) removing the word “is” and replacing it with the words “may be”;
- (2) removing the word “many” and replacing it with the word “some”; and
- (3) removing the word “reducing” and replacing it with the word “determining”.

Then, just for greater clarity, to read the proposed amended motion back, the preamble remains the same and (1) remains the same; (2) will now read — and somebody can correct me if I am not correct here — as follows: “acknowledge that a two-week spring break may be an economic burden for some Yukon families”; and (3) becomes: “consult with parents, school councils and the Yukon Teachers’ Association on determining the length of the spring school break before planning school calendars for the 2018-19 academic year onwards.”

Speaker: Minister of Education, on the amendment; you have 20 minutes.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I should mention that the amendment, as has been passed up, says that we would want to remove the words “is an” but I think it is just “is” — if I’m allowed to correct that with you. You actually read it correctly by taking out only the word “is” and that was the intention, so that the sentence does read: “acknowledge that a two-week spring break may be an economic burden for some Yukon families” — so just remove the word “is”.

Speaker: Just for clarification then, on Motion No. 38, removing the word “is” and replacing it with the words “may be.” Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don’t intend to take the 20 minutes. I do intend to just explain the reasoning behind the suggested amendment.

The first paragraph in the motion, as you have said, is unchanged and I don’t intend to make any change there.

In the second paragraph, I think it’s the suggestion of the words “may be an economic burden for some Yukon families”. This does, I think, what the original motion intended without making an assessment of how many Yukon families, or whether or not the spring break is or isn’t a burden. The suggestion is only that the wording be a little broader so that the sentence reads: “acknowledge that a two-week spring break may be an economic burden for some Yukon families” and I think that is a true statement. As such, I am making that suggestion with respect to those wording changes.

Lastly, the third paragraph, suggesting that the word “reducing” be replaced with the word “determining” because the purpose, in my view, of going to consultation is to determine what the length of a spring break should be — if it should be two weeks or one week, or if it should be reduced some way or maintained in another way. I think putting the word “determining” in there just allows for that assessment to be done following the consultation, which is the true purpose, I think, of this motion and I hope that the members opposite will see that as the friendly amendment it is suggested as and that we will be able to proceed on supporting this amendment and also, ultimately, this motion, if it becomes the motion.

Thank you for the opportunity to explain those suggestions.

Mr. Kent: I thank the Minister of Education for the amendment. The Yukon Party Official Opposition will support this amendment. I like it for a few reasons. The original motion as put forward by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King was quite prescriptive with respect to the consultation, and I think replacing the word “reducing” with “determining” adds some more flexibility for those consultations when it comes to spring school break. I will speak more when we get back to the motion as amended, but certainly what I’ve heard from constituents — and many colleagues on this side of the floor have heard from constituents — is with respect to the broader calendar, not just the spring break or the legislated Christmas break — but minutes in the day. There are a few other things that I would like to read into the record when we get beyond the amendment. I don’t want to be called to order for speaking beyond that at this time.

I thank the minister for the amendment. I think it strengthens and provides more flexibility to the motion as presented by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

Ms. White: I thank the Minister of Education for bringing this down to me earlier. It’s an example of how, when you’re pre-warned, you can be pre-informed and I’m happy to accept the amendment as friendly. I look forward to further discussion hopefully on the amended motion.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the amendment?

Amendment to Motion No. 38 agreed to

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the main motion as amended?

Ms. Van Bibber: I'm pleased to rise to speak to the amended Motion No. 38 brought forward by, first, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, and the Minister of Education.

I would like to acknowledge the ideas put forth within the motion by the members and also highlight the consultation piece and its importance to this discussion.

The decisions made regarding the school calendar should be reflective of the collective wishes of those identified by the member in her motion. Providing the opportunity for parents, school councils and the Yukon Teachers' Association to weigh in with their comments, ideas and criticisms is the only way to ensure a fair and accurate representation of the wishes of our community.

I do understand the struggle of childcare, having raised two children myself. I have talked with members of our community who do express their concerns. I have also spoken with parents who are grateful to have a generous break in order to vacation as a family while the weather is still not very cooperative and summer is still a ways away.

A friend of mine with three small children in elementary school and a full-time job shared her concerns with me. She does not have the opportunity to take time off work to spend with her children, nor could she enlist the help of family during spring break. Rather, she and her husband were able to enrol all three kids in camps. The price tag attached to these camps over a two-week period ended up taking most of her take-home pay. Unfortunately, for even more parents, spring break camps are not an option because of that cost.

I have spoken with another parent who is thankful for that additional week as it has been a long-standing tradition in her family to head south to visit more family. A teacher herself, she is happy to have the time and not have to pull her child out of school for an additional week to make the long drive south each year. Another couple I spoke with shared that they teamed up with other parents of school-aged children well ahead of the spring break, and they each took days off ahead and made plans to share childcare throughout the two weeks. Perhaps this is a concept that might be worth more of an uptake.

Regardless of whether spring break is one or two weeks, parents must often make decisions on what to do with their child or children during that time. In the end it could be to the benefit of parents who think they have no options to be creative and team up with others in the same situation to come up with these solutions. As mentioned, there are so many stories from people on both sides of the issue.

With regard to the request of the member for government to consult, I would like to point out that they are in

consultations right now for the three school years beginning in 2018. I do commend the rapid and proactive decision to put forth a survey to parents that was offered via e-mail from their schools. In the survey, parents are asked pointed questions about their preference for the school start date, length of Christmas and spring breaks, and the end date in June. Accompanying each question is a series of choices along with an area to provide full comments. I believe parents should take advantage of lending their voices to the creation of future calendars and will have to put their trust in the government to read each choice and comment and to use them to fully inform their decision going forward.

I would urge the government to produce the results of the survey to the public in full and complete with comments in the name of transparency. I would also urge all parents to participate in the survey. Let your concerns be known and provide the department with the stats and input that they will need to make a decision for coming years.

I ask the Minister of Education to continue to involve parents, school councils and the Yukon Teachers' Association fully in discussions and decisions made that will affect their children, their schedules, their finances and their personal lives. Consult in full and use these results to correctly inform your decision and ensure that these consultations are meaningful and transparent. Full consultation should not only cover decisions made on the school calendar, but extend to all issues or considerations that may arise in the future regarding the education of our children.

I would like to mention that, while I have heard parents on both sides of the issue on the length of spring break, I have yet to hear a comment or opinion in favour of the proposed changes put forth by the department regarding student assessment. Like the issue of spring break, consultation is a key on the student assessment changes.

As I mentioned, with disclosure of the results of the survey on the school calendar, I also urged the government to make the full results from the survey of student assessment public to ensure they are held fully accountable for the decisions they make. I look forward to seeing the results and whether or not the department chooses to act on these results.

I would be inclined to say that, whatever option gets the most uptake from parents and other parties, that is the option the government should adopt for their upcoming school calendar years. People with small children are not all keen on having them out of school for two weeks. Generally those with older, more self-sufficient children do not mind either way. In the survey offered by the Department of Education regarding the school calendar, the question pertaining to spring break was accompanied by the following choices: "always one week"; "always two weeks"; "two weeks in an Arctic Winter Games year and one week in other years"; "no preference"; and "other".

Regardless of which direction the department chooses to go after considering the results of the survey, there will always be a group of people who are unhappy with the outcome. Once again, I would encourage anyone who has a strong opinion on whether their spring break is one or two

weeks to ensure their voice is heard. Complete the survey; contact your school council. They are your advocates and will ensure your opinions are heard by the department. I would encourage all Yukoners to also be in contact with their respective MLA. When I receive a concern from a constituent, I bring it forward to the government immediately. I will continue to do so and ensure the government hears you.

I would like to take a moment to expand on the ideas put forth in this motion as I recently viewed a letter from a parent who was very concerned with the fact that the school calendar next year will result in an 11-week summer. While I do not question the validity of debating a one-week or two-week spring break, I do believe it is imperative that we include the concerns the parents have with the length in summer, in addition to a two-week spring break.

Parents may struggle to find childcare in March, but it could be additionally problematic for them to seek childcare for an extra two weeks in summer. Without going into a multi-faceted debate over whether a length in school year or school day results in better student performance, I will simply remind all that consultation is the key. In a situation where parents are consulted on an issue, the department should ensure the consultation period is long enough to allow people the chance to be heard, and also that parents and interested parties receive more notification that it is taking place. That will likely lower the risk of people missing any deadlines.

In closing, I would encourage the government to continue to consult with parents, school councils and the Yukon Teachers' Association, who are all invested in education and may have different viewpoints. Use these results to form your opinions and be transparent. To all, be involved in education. It is the base for our future.

Mr. Kent: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this Motion No. 38, brought forward by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King and subsequently amended, again with our support, by the Minister of Education.

I just wanted to take a little bit of time — obviously as a former Minister of Education, it was one of the most difficult jobs. I have been the minister of a few portfolios during my political career, and it was one of the most difficult jobs I have ever had, being Minister of Education, but also one of the most rewarding. I'm hopeful that in maybe 10 or 15 years a few old ministers of Education can get together and compare some war stories. I look forward — maybe we won't have our respective premiers there so we can talk about them behind their backs on their choice to put us in those positions. I commend the minister. It's a difficult job trying to balance so many different perspectives on so many different things. Education is so important to everyone in the territory. It's one of those departments that touches just about all Yukoners.

I agree with my colleague, the Member for Porter Creek North, when she says the parents need to be involved and to fill out these surveys and get involved with the consultations. Parents need to be partners in education, along with our teachers, the department staff and everyone else who is involved in this. Like my colleague from Porter Creek North, I

would like to read into the record a couple of comments I received on the broader school calendar today. The letter that was referenced in Question Period earlier today, I noticed, is published in its full form, in its entirety, in the letters to the editor in the *Whitehorse Star* today. I invite anyone who is interested in looking at that — I would refer them to the *Whitehorse Star* to take a look at that letter.

Last night and early this morning, I received a couple of comments from constituents of mine in Copperbelt South, obviously concerned parents and parents who are very involved in their children's education. I wanted to read those into the record and then, if time permits, I would also read in a letter that was addressed from someone else to members of the Selkirk school council with respect to the broader calendar.

The first one is from a constituent. It was sent to me last night at around 9:40 p.m. It says, "Hello ... I was just made aware that the Yukon Education calendar has changed for the 2017-2018 school year. As far as I can tell the summer holidays have been lengthened to 11 weeks and the school day has been lengthened by 8 or 10 minutes" and it says question mark "to make up for the extra holiday time. I think the Yukon Government is currently planning the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school year. I'm confused and angered by this change. As far as I can tell there was no consultation for the changes.

"As the parent of 2 kindergarten kids who attend Golden Horn Elementary School, I strenuously oppose the changes made for 2018 and do not want to see them added to the next 2 years.

"Why? A longer day does not equal more learning for young kids; longer holidays equals more financial hardship on parents who need to pay for more childcare/camps; a longer gap between school years equals more loss of knowledge, more time teachers need to review concepts, less new learning each school year; this change is contrary to the latest research on what works best for kids and moves the Yukon away from more forward thinking countries who have moved to reducing the length of summer break." She goes on to give examples of Australia, Britain, Netherlands and Germany.

"I wish I had time to write a more thoughtful and articulate e-mail, but as far as I can tell time is of the essence and YTG is deciding this right now. Thank you." She gives her name as a resident of Pineridge, located in my riding of Copperbelt South.

I believe I did send this particular e-mail on to the minister this morning after I received it. I sent a copy to her.

A second e-mail that was sent last night was sent to the Deputy Minister of Education and copied to a number of individuals. I thought the minister was copied, but it doesn't look like she is. I will send her a copy of this as well. It was sent to me, our Member of Parliament, the principal at Golden Horn and the school council at Golden Horn Elementary School as well. This e-mail says:

"Ms. Arnold: I am writing tonight after a day at work and tucking kiddies into bed, as I very recently went on the Department of Education's website to view the upcoming school year calendar. To my shock and dismay, it appears that

the summer break has been extended substantially, with school ending June 8, 2018. As the 2018-19 calendar has yet to be released, I am left to assume that this creates an 11 week summer break. My son currently attends Golden Horn Elementary School, and in 2018, my youngest will be entering kindergarten.”

She said she was copying our Member of Parliament, her MLA, and the principal at Golden Horn School and the school council — “as I feel this issue is important not just to myself, but to all Yukon children and families, and I understand there are some pressing timelines in terms of finalizing subsequent school calendars.

“I was simply baffled to read the upcoming school calendar, as anything that I have read indicates that longer summer breaks equal less learning retention. I have attached some links below that speak to this. I am sure the research must not only be well-known by the Department of Education, but for reasons that have not been made clear, evidence such as this has been overlooked when planning the school calendar.

“I see that the Christmas and Spring breaks have been shortened, but I have also heard that in order to accommodate this longer summer break, the school day will be lengthened. Can this be confirmed, as this is not clear on the Department of Education website. If this is the case, I can say, observing my son’s experience, that the weekdays are already mentally and physically exhausting, with the pressures of school, dayhome, sports activities and trying to fit in precious family time, all within the span of 11 hours before bedtime. As a parent, it is not an unreasonable expectation to be asked if the education system can keep my child for more time in any given day.

“One explanation I can think of for the school year ending June 8, is that perhaps the following school year is planned to begin mid-August at the latest? If so, please excuse my comments. If an 11 week summer break truly is the vision, I strongly question the motives and am curious to know what the proposed benefits would be. I can absolutely see this as a benefit if Yukon families were all given additional paid vacation days to be able to personally contribute more time to their children’s learning during the summer months. I can see how a model such as this would be an asset in rounding out children’s learning and life skills, and if any Yukon family would welcome the opportunity to spend more valuable time with their children. But this isn’t what is being proposed. All I can see is more daily stress on Yukon families, less learning retention for Yukon children, and added work/financial pressures for all Yukon families, not to mention the pressures on the already stretched resources of childcare providers.”

“Some of the questions that come to mind for me are: Do you have a baseline of indicators for learning retention from previous summer breaks, so you can even begin to measure the impacts a longer break will have in Yukon? Who can I send my son to when he is asking why he has to go to yet another summer camp with strangers? Who can I refer my supervisor to when I have added pressures to try and juggle limited vacation days? Is there someone to send the bill to for

added summer child-care/summer camp costs? What is the process for all Yukon families to have a true voice in the education of our children and the scheduling of our lives? How does the Department of Education see this impacting Yukon children and families? These are questions that ought to have been asked and answered for all Yukon families prior to a calendar such as this being released.”

This letter concludes by saying: “There’s one more thing that I ask; please, please, please put at the forefront that when it comes to education, Yukon children and families come first.”

Again, there are some links to the various articles that were referenced earlier in the letter and it is signed by a constituent of mine who lives in the Wolf Creek area here in Whitehorse.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Member for Takhini-Kopper King, on a point of order.

Ms. White: I allowed the member to read the letter because I didn’t want to interrupt his constituent who was voicing his concerns but, in my opinion, if the Official Opposition wanted to debate the school calendar as a whole, they could have moved a motion.

My complaint is that it is not speaking to the question at hand, which is the consultation about a two-week spring break. That is my complaint.

Speaker: Member for Copperbelt South, on the point of order.

Mr. Kent: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and with all due respect to the Third Party House Leader, I recognize that you did give some latitude to the minister to speak in broader terms about the school year and the length of the summer break. I’m merely bringing concerns from my constituents about the broader school calendar. This is a motion related to school calendars as it talks about the length of spring break. With respect to the Third Party House Leader, I’m just merely bringing forward concerns from constituents on the broader school calendar.

I too am hopeful we get to a vote, and I will wrap up my remarks shortly.

Speaker: Are there any other submissions on the point of order?

Speaker’s ruling

Speaker: I, like the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, was reviewing section 19(b)(i) of the Standing Orders, and it was certainly arguable that the comments by the Member for Copperbelt South were straying fairly substantially from what is arguably a fairly discrete and distinct motion that has been put forward by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

I take the point that the Member for Copperbelt South made in his submissions that the Minister of Education was provided some latitude to discuss issues pertaining to the school calendar generally. However, I would say to the

Member for Copperbelt South that you are beginning, in my view, to stray fairly substantially from the discrete motion that has been put forward by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, so if you could govern yourself accordingly. Thank you.

Mr. Kent: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To wrap up my remarks, I won't read the final letter that was sent to me, and apologies to the individual who sent it. I will provide it to the Minister of Education by e-mail. I certainly don't want to stray any further beyond what your ruling suggested. This motion that was brought forward by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King does speak to the two-week spring break and the economic burden.

I am glad the amendment was brought forward by the Minister of Education. It is much less prescriptive than what the original motion suggested. There were some generalizations made in the original motion that I don't believe were fair. So again, I'm happy to see the amendments that were put forward by the minister. Like my colleague, the Member for Porter Creek North, I would certainly encourage the Minister of Education to continue her work meeting with school councils and encourage all parents to continue to send me e-mails, and I will continue to forward them or raise their concerns here on the floor as I am able. I thank them for being partners in their children's education.

I too will be embarking this fall on my son's educational journey with him as he starts kindergarten. My wife and I have already have discussions about the shortened school year and have talked about our concerns with respect to it as well. Those individuals who have reached out to me — thank you very much for doing so. I'll continue to represent you as your MLA and bring your concerns forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank members of the House for allowing me to discuss my concerns here today.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the motion as amended?

If the member now speaks, she will close debate. Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. White: I appreciate the support that has been shown for the motion in the conversation about consultation for spring break, and I do appreciate the point of view from the members of the Official Opposition.

I just hope that, when the consultation goes out and the survey goes out, it's more than a yes-or-no question because it needs to say: Is a two-week spring break a financial hardship? Does this lead to problems in your family for childcare or financial burdens? In the same breath, does the two-week spring break give you the ability to travel? Is that why you like it?

I think if it's just a yes-or-no question, it doesn't really get down to the root of the problem because, if faced with a 50-50 or a 60-40 split in favour, we need to think about the 40 percent and what are their main reasons for saying that, no, it doesn't work for them. Is it a financial hardship? Is it the lack of affordable alternatives? Is it the lack of affordable

childcare? That is an issue in the territory. Is it more of a hardship for the working poor, the marginalized, those living in poverty?

When the consultation goes out, it needs to be expanded so we can figure it out. Is the weight for both those answers — for whether it's a vacation or whether it's a hardship — the same? Do they have the same value?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank everyone for the conversation and I look forward to the vote.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion, as amended, carried.

Motion No. 38, as amended, agreed to

Speaker: Do we have more business to transact this afternoon, Mr. Clerk?

Clerk: We do, Mr. Speaker.

Motion No. 55

Clerk: Motion No. 55, standing in the name of Ms. Van Bibber.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Porter Creek North:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health and Social Services to instruct their departments to begin work to develop a health curriculum for use in schools that educates all students in the Yukon education system on the dangers of prescription opioid abuse.

Ms. Van Bibber: I will just speak briefly to this motion as we had mentioned it earlier.

Prescription opioid abuse in the Yukon education system should really not be in the same sentence, but our teenagers and our children need our guidance when they are growing, learning and most vulnerable. Social media has proven wonderful in many respects, but it has also meant many detriments as well in how our youths view issues. Parents and guardians are not always aware of the type of communication or information they are receiving or sending. Peer pressure — I don't believe it has changed much since we were kids — whether pressure to smoke, to drink, to do drugs, to stay out late. These have been around forever, but the synthetic or new drugs are so much more dangerous and they kill.

Oftentimes even adults do not fully understand the dangers of these drugs. Our local headlines read about the number of deaths linked to fentanyl. This is no longer just a big city problem, but has arrived in our small towns and city. The north is not immune. The use of drugs and the need to withdraw from society for any number of reasons does not stick to a certain class of people or ethnic group or age group. It can strike anywhere.

That's why the Official Opposition has brought this motion forward. We think it sends a good signal if we as legislators from across party lines identify this as an issue. We want to take action so our children and youth know the dangers of dangerous drugs like fentanyl.

I think there is a way we can all work together to ensure a better, innovative way to educate and get the word out by using our schools, classrooms and lecture halls. We can use our skilled medical teams and educators to instill the knowledge of how harmful and life-altering taking drugs can be. Self-esteem can counter peer pressure.

We can provide information to parents and guardians on how to monitor their children's behaviour and patterns, such as sudden changes and mood changes, which can signify something other than growing pains. We can promote things like having family check their own prescription medications that we all keep for far too long after we need them, both old and new, by disposing of them properly. Take them back to a pharmacy so they can be disposed of and you know they are then removed from temptation. These are real worries; these are real fears. If we all focus, who knows? We might save one precious life.

With that, I hope the government and the Third Party can support this motion. Again, if there are certain friendly amendments that keep the spirit and intent of the motion intact that others feel are required, we are open to that.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank the honourable member for her motion and for the introduction of that motion.

Mr. Speaker, I, along with our government, share the honourable member's concern about opioid abuse. I note that she spoke about prescription opioids, but I'm going to speak more broadly, because the scourge of fentanyl in particular has moved this concern to the forefront of all our minds.

Fentanyl, in its various forms — and I'll speak about that in a bit — is particularly concerning because of its deadly nature, because it cannot be detected and because illicitly distributed prescription drugs and illegal drugs can be tainted with fentanyl.

The crisis of opioid use is affecting many parts of Canada and resulting in overdoses and deaths. The numbers could surge, and there is real concern among the government and I am sure among the members opposite that the numbers here in the territory — or anywhere — could surge with a new shipment of illicit drugs being introduced at the street level here in our territory, or anywhere in Canada. It's also important to note that this is key and in the forefront of the minds of individuals who work in justice, particularly the RCMP. Their federal investigations unit will continue with its drug enforcement efforts to do what is possible to stem and reduce and interject in the illicit trade of drugs in this territory.

I appreciate that the motion is about continuing with respect to the Department of Education, but I think it's important for us to understand the context in which we are living here in Whitehorse and in the territory throughout, and in particular, what our front-line workers are doing, so that we all recognize the context of what we're talking about. It's one thing to talk about education and how we're going to address these issues in cooperation, in education, in a curriculum or other setting, but it's another to understand what it is really and truly on the streets that we're up against.

The local RCMP have trained all front-line members in the safe handling of the drug if it's encountered during drug seizures and along with the effective administration of naloxone to fellow members who may be exposed during the course of their duties. It's important to remember what a small amount of this drug could do. Even coming into contact with it inadvertently — which is why it's so important that we educate all members of our community — can be deadly.

They have also trained and equipped front-line members with naloxone kits, and the RCMP is also able to render assistance to a person experiencing an overdose, where appropriate. I am going to talk later about how that has also been integrated into schools and other departments in the government.

The Yukon has established a number of opioid response, surveillance, clinical and safety working groups that involve the full spectrum of law enforcement, the chief and deputy chief of medical health, health agencies and various NGOs. We know that the coroner's office is involved. We know that Department of Justice and their officials and workers are involved. I think it was mentioned earlier — Victim Services — those kinds of things and, of course, the net widens to ensure that first responders are equipped to respond to potential overdoses with their naloxone kits and the training. Of course, naloxone kits require training.

I do want to emphasize that, similar to other jurisdictions, the Yukon has put in force a number of working groups to address this problem — or begin to address it. As I say, in order to begin to address it, we must absolutely understand what the context in the community is.

At this point, I will move to clarify that the Yukon Department of Education will be known to everyone here, but for those listening, the Department of Education uses the BC curriculum. I note that the BC curriculum identifies learning outcomes that are expected at each grade and subject level.

The BC and Yukon curriculum has learning outcomes from kindergarten to grade 12 that are related to harmful substances, such as poisons, prescription medications and illicit drugs. I think it is very valuable to emphasize that point, because I am going to go on to explain and describe how those particular elements of the curriculum exist in the current curriculum and in the upcoming new curriculum and the importance of how each of those elements are included already, but not to dissuade from the motion, which wants us — actually, the wording is to “start” that work and I want to explain how much of it is already inherent in the curriculum.

The BC and Yukon curriculum has learning outcomes, as I have said — but to emphasize — from kindergarten to grade 12, that are related to harmful substances, such as poisons, prescription medications and illicit drugs. In this case, it is important to start at the very earliest ages with respect to the knowledge of those kinds of things. I think one of the most fearful things with respect to fentanyl and other opioids — but particularly the fentanyl situation — is that such a small amount can harm or do irreparable damage and/or kill someone. In many, if not most cases, they may not even be knowingly taking the drug.

In grades 5 to 10, there is a specific focus on the potential harms of illicit drugs and alcohol. It is an important piece of the educational curriculum and an important focus for communities and individuals to be aware, because that focus between grades 5 and 10 is ongoing and absolutely required. Within that framework, the department develops local curriculum resources to add Yukon context to the BC curriculum and then to support teachers in developing learning activities.

The Department of Education works with Health and Social Services, as well as with other agencies, such as the RCMP — again in this context — to ensure that students receive the most current knowledge on healthy living, including the dangers of intoxicants, opioids and alcohol, and the detriment use any of those substances can have on an individual's life — mental health and well-being, and family situations.

We value the partnership, because we are able to provide curriculum resources to address concerns that are current and specific to the school community. One of the important partnerships in communities outside of Whitehorse — in Whitehorse, of course, but in the communities outside of Whitehorse — is that between law enforcement and the community, RCMP and the schools' ability to teach children to trust police officers and authorities that can help them. A great way to do that is the educational piece where officers and others in the community partnerships are addressing issues that children are well aware of in their communities and in their families and giving them an opportunity to view those

things in a way that is safe, in a safe place, and to be able to talk about them at that time.

Social responsibility is another important component of the educational programming at all grade levels. Students are taught about making healthy and safe choices throughout their school years. We continue to provide students with information and skills necessary to help them make informed and safe decisions. We are addressing the dangers of prescription opioid use in our schools, among other substance-use issues. This is just one part of the picture.

I hope, in this short time, I can give the members opposite and the members of the government an idea of how we are working to ensure that all Yukon students have the skills they need to succeed, not just in the workplace or in their school careers, but also later in life. This is part of the government's overall commitment to wellness and improving the well-being of Yukoners — a high quality of education and ultimately making the lives of Yukoners better. Health education is a fundamental component of our curriculum.

I do appreciate the motion being brought forward. I guess the message I really want to convey today is that it's not a new idea and it's an important component already of the education curriculum, but something that, in light of the fentanyl crisis — if I can call it that — can't linger. It must be robust; it must be up to date; it must meet students where they are. We must be able to speak to them and have them take in the information in a format that allows them to really take it in and have it influence their lives.

Health education is a fundamental component of our curriculum, not only based on the current situation here in the territory and other places in Canada, but the research tells us that it's an important role played by education that contributes to prevention. That's really what we want to go forward with. We want healthy and happy communities. We know how some members of our community wrestle with addictions and the difficulties around those behaviours — mental health issues. In order for us to hopefully alleviate that to a certain extent, we can go forward with a community that not only addresses the issues we currently have, but tries to prevent the ones that we can prevent.

I will take an opportunity to break down the approach that we have to the issue of substance abuse in schools. I think that would be of benefit on this motion, which is asking about us going forward to do just that. As I said, we can always do better, but it's important for the members considering this motion to know what it is that is currently happening. We are building on the work that has already been underway for many years to give students the information and the skills that they need to make healthy choices.

At the kindergarten age, the introduction is really about laying the groundwork for understanding self-care and how to avoid dangerous substances like poisons and medications, and that's a reasonable place to begin with students of that tender age. Kindergarten students are introduced to all these preventive learning outcomes and the goals are to have the teachers and the class be able to identify opportunities to make choices that contribute to health and well-being; to identify

sources of health information; and to identify and describe a variety of unsafe and/or uncomfortable situations. Even four-, five- and six-year-olds are able to do that with the right instruction and with the opportunity to be in a safe place and do that.

The preventive learning outcomes also include identifying and describing practices that promote mental well-being — discussions around feelings and what makes youngsters feel uncomfortable and what makes them feel safe. Students are expected to know specific learning content as well, which ultimately are what practices they can understand to help promote health and well-being and the different types of substances — poisons and medications — those kinds of things.

Throughout these lessons, students are also taught about hazards and potentially unsafe situations. They learn about caring behaviours in groups and families and about emotions and their causes and effects. I can remember, even though it's quite a long time ago now, the kindergarten lessons that my own child experienced, learning about empathy and what that meant with respect to his classmates, what that meant for each of them in their emotional development, and having those discussions with him, which I hadn't thought about until right now. I think it's kind of interesting that this would come back from all that time ago. He's not in kindergarten anymore — I'll just say that.

The context is very important because I want everyone who is listening to understand that students are introduced to ideas that contribute to positive mental health, as well as avoiding dangers, at a very early age. This is something that we're not only expecting or hoping that families introduce to them from a very young age — from being a toddler on to school age — but something that we think is important enough that it is integrated, even at that early age, into the curriculum — positive mental health — again about avoiding dangers and about going forward and about prevention.

The holistic approach over the years will help contribute to students not only being informed, but also having confidence to do what they know is best for them, what feels good. As five-year-olds, we talk about feelings and, as their knowledge base grows, good emotional health is something that will never fail them.

The themes in kindergarten curriculum are built upon all the way up through the graduation year, so it must be started early. It has to grow with the child, with our classes and with the opportunity to talk about those things so we are not dealing with kids in grade 10 or 11 — maybe that's optimistic — or 7 or 8 who are starting to experiment with these things, who have not had opportunities or time to discuss what is good for them and what they should be avoiding for good physical and mental health.

As students get older and the learning deepens, the lessons grow more complex. At grade 4, students have moved from primary to the intermediate grades, and grade 4 students will demonstrate the understanding about themes that include understanding ourselves and the various aspects of health, how that helps us develop a balanced lifestyle and make

personal choices, and the social and environmental factors, including how they influence our health and our well-being.

I pause to say that it has to be contextual. It has to be in light of whatever the family situation may be, whether it's a single family, whether it's kids who live with aunts and uncles or grandmas and grandpas, whether it's same-sex families or large extended families with multi-generational people living together — but they need to have an opportunity to understand that in context. There are a lot of influences on kids.

Related to the curricular competencies that are introduced at grade 4, they include identifying and describing factors that influence healthy choices. It is a pyramid, if I could say it that way. It is built piece on piece — the foundation laid in the very early years. Grade 4 students also focus on examining and explaining how health messages can influence behaviours and decisions. They learn to identify and apply strategies for pursuing personal, healthy-living goals, and they identify and describe avoidance and assertiveness strategies to use in unsafe and/or uncomfortable situations. They also describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance abuse.

I appreciate that some listening to this might be thinking that I am focusing too much on the mental wellness strategies, but we need to be able to understand the context in which individuals make choices to use substances — to avoid pain, to alter their state of being, to change their current circumstances, whatever they may be — because what we know is that those kinds of behaviours ultimately lead to addictions. They can ultimately lead to the abuse of alcohol and other kinds of drugs in our communities. They can ultimately lead to problems that become much larger than they might otherwise be if what we could do is address the core issues for individuals and give them an opportunity to really learn these skills going forward, and an opportunity in a safe place to discuss them and understand how they can be safe and how they can reach out.

Schools are an amazing opportunity to do that because many of our children, if not all the children, attending schools spend a large amount of their day with adults or peers in those situations and they often become the people they trust — particularly in high school, with peers and influence of peers. There is real opportunity for intervention to happen early, even in early childhood, because teachers are such an integral part of a child's life and an opportunity to observe them during the day and maybe identify if there is a problem, identify if there is a family issue or concern that can be addressed.

These do seem like broad things, but if we are able to address them — and what I'm trying to explain is the curriculum that is currently being taught, being built on and being delivered in our schools for the purposes of addressing those kinds of issues, which ultimately, we hope, will help them to avoid things like drug addiction, like the experiments with drugs, like use of opioids of any kind.

By the end of grade 4, students are expected to understand, in age-appropriate terms, the potential effects of a

psychoactive substance or use of that and strategies for preventing personal harm. Examples of psychoactive substances could include alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs and even solvents. Teachers can focus learning on issues that are of most concern to their specific community, to their specific school, maybe even to their specific students.

For example, several years ago, there were specific concerns about the use of ecstasy here in the territory. Right now, the opioids, and specifically fentanyl, are of particular concern. All our schools have received information from Alcohol and Drug Services about fentanyl so they can have good tools to include in their lessons.

Let's look at the next phase of their learning, which occurs in grade 8. I want to be sure I'm not saying that it happens in grade 4 and then in grade 8, but it is grades 4 through 7, and then in grade 8, the focus changes a bit again. Grade 8 is the year that Yukon students are starting high school, so we should take a look at what they're learning about healthy choices. We hope they have built on the lessons from earlier.

Grade 8 students will demonstrate understanding about themes that include healthy choices that influence our physical, emotional and mental well-being — and advocating for the health and well-being of others — that connects us to our community. It's a bit broader — but, again, empathy.

Learning content is growing in complexity at that stage. Students learn to identify factors that influence health messages from a variety of sources and the influence of that on their behaviour. They are learning to identify and apply strategies to pursue personal healthy living goals and to reflect on outcomes of personal healthy living goals and assess strategies that they use — what works for them, works for their friends, how can they make that real in their lives.

They learn to describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being for themselves and for others. They describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental health, well-being and substance abuse for themselves and for others.

This is really critical at this stage, because we know that a lot of experimentation with illicit drugs or with alcohol or with prescription drugs and others tends to — we have kids in grade 8 who are generally 13 years old; there's peer pressure. They have moved to high school. They have probably moved from a smaller elementary school and are getting new friends and new influences. The opportunities open for them, but then so does the stress and the pressure.

I dare say that anyone here who has been to high school can recall that. It is a topic of legendary writings — the angst of teenagers in high school. It's not to be taken lightly, but we can all remember what that experience felt like being the young grade-eighter — as we like to call them. By then, students are expected to know the basic principles for responding to emergencies and the strategies to protect themselves and others from potential abuse or exploitation and harm — and in a variety of settings. This also comes with peer pressure. The flip side of that is peer support. Kids who are going down this road or a road that is not healthy for them,

hopefully if their friends and the friends around them have these basic skills and principles, they will be able to support them and hopefully pull them back from the brink.

During the graduation years, grades 10 to 12, learning continues with the themes we have already identified. These are related goals — again, they develop knowledge, skills, strategies for building respectful relationships, positive self-care, self-identify, self-determination and mental well-being. This really becomes a focus for them at this stage.

They are asked to demonstrate knowledge, skills and strategies needed to make informed decisions that support personal and community health and safety. We know that physical activity and other healthy choices can really help reduce the occurrence of preventable illnesses and the rates of harmful substance abuse. A focus on sports is important here. Individual or other activities outside of school are critical. The growth of the experiential school curriculum and things like the sports school in F.H. Collins and other similar opportunities in the high schools are really important to keep kids connected and healthy.

Now that you have seen the outline of how the curriculum relates to substance abuse that appears at various grades, I will just give you an example of the teaching resources that are available to teachers to deliver these programs. That's an important piece. We don't want to leave individuals without the skills and opportunities to learn those.

Teachers design lesson plans that meet the expectations and the competencies that I have outlined and the content outlined in the curriculum: What are the learning outcomes? What are the requirements? How do they build those into their school teachings?

Research tells us that fear-based approaches to drug education are very rarely effective when it comes to helping young people develop the competencies they need to navigate the world where they see substances used every day.

Our schools will embrace the new curriculum. We're encouraging cross-curricular objectives, and drug education lends itself particularly well to cross-curricular lessons.

Teachers may also take the opportunities to address substance use in other subjects, not necessarily just in health — in language arts, in social studies or in arts education, in English courses where they may write about or read books about people who have struggled with these things — or other opportunities for understanding.

Our schools will also continue to deliver successful programs in partnership with government departments. We spoke earlier today during Question Period about the opportunities and the cooperation between Health and Social Services and Education with other community organizations and, as I have mentioned already, with the RCMP.

Some examples of those programs that I think are critical: the PARTY program — my colleague mentioned that earlier today — which stands for prevent alcohol and risk-related trauma in youth — there, high school students are taken to the hospital to observe and participate in the very, very stark reality of the effects of alcohol and drugs. It's a very powerful program. It is supported by the departments of the government

— our one-government approach. Again, it goes through various departments but the students are very much affected in a hopefully long-standing way.

Steps to Respect is another program that helps students make healthy life decisions. The drug abuse resistance education program, also known as DARE, is the drug and alcohol program sponsored by the RCMP. It's delivered to grade 5 students by specifically trained RCMP officers. I mentioned earlier that it is an important opportunity for communities — schools and other community resources and RCMP — to join forces in that knowledge, in that learning process.

The drug and alcohol resources — there are assorted kits including activities, videos and guest speakers that are provided by the drug and alcohol resource services in Health and Social Services. There is a program designed to aid teachers and administrators in what to look for in a youth drug culture. This is very important — it's called street drugs — because if teachers and administrators don't know what they're dealing with — don't know what to spot, don't know how to respond — they can't be as helpful as they probably want to be and maybe as students need them to be.

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

Debate on Motion No. 55 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following documents were filed on May 10, 2017:

34-2-1

Health insurance coverage for Nadja Cooper, letter re (dated April 11, 2017) from Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge to Hon. Pauline Frost, Minister of Health and Social Services (Cathers)

34-2-2

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), letter re, from Steve Hahn to Hon. Nils Clarke, Speaker (White)