



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 19

2nd Session

34th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, May 24, 2017 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2017 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Nils Clarke, MLA, Riverdale North
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Don Hutton, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Ted Adel, MLA, Copperbelt North

CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
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
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Government House Leader Minister of Education; Justice
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
Hon. Pauline Frost	Vuntut Gwitchin	Minister of Health and Social Services; Environment; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Highways and Public Works; the Public Service Commission
Hon. Jeanie Dendys	Mountainview	Minister of Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board; Women's Directorate

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

Yukon Liberal Party

Ted Adel	Copperbelt North
Paolo Gallina	Porter Creek Centre
Don Hutton	Mayo-Tatchun

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

Stacey Hassard	Leader of the Official Opposition Pelly-Nisutlin	Scott Kent	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Liz Hanson	Leader of the Third Party Whitehorse Centre
Kate White	Third Party House Leader Takhini-Kopper King

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Floyd McCormick
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Doris McLean
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, May 24, 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 National Public Works Week

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of this government and the Official Opposition, I rise today to recognize National Public Works Week, celebrated this year from May 21 to 27. National Public Works Week is a celebration of the people who work tirelessly to build and maintain our public works infrastructure, whether they work for the federal, provincial, territorial, municipal or First Nation governments, as well as the private sector.

“Public Works Connects Us”. That just happens to be this year’s theme. Public works infrastructure plays a vital role in connecting us all together within our communities. Community infrastructure contributes so much to the quality of our lives. Roads, highways, bridges and aerodromes link us together across this vast territory. Clean water, sanitation services and well-maintained buildings contribute to a healthy, sustainable community.

Too often we take our public works infrastructure for granted and forget its foundational role within our daily lives. As Minister of Highways and Public Works, I pay tribute to the Yukon civil servants who maintain, provide and improve our public works daily and without being noticed. Highways and Public Works staff are responsible for connecting Yukoners. They design, build, operate and maintain roads, bridges, water supply, sewage, refuse disposal systems, airports, public buildings and other structures and facilities that we use every day. These people provide other supporting functions like supplying and disposing of assets as well as maintaining and operating the light- and heavy-duty fleet vehicles that make doing all of the above possible. These employees play an integral part in providing critical infrastructure and services. They are dedicated to improving Yukoners’ quality of life, both present and future.

This week, we raise the profile of these often unnoticed professionals who serve the public good with quiet dedications. I thank each and every one of them for their service. Further, I will call out a few whose work often takes place in the worst conditions and in isolated locations. They are ensuring that others have services: our electricians, plumbers and other skilled tradespeople who respond to power failures or water leaks at all times of the day or night; the snowplow operators who clear the snow on our highways and

airports throughout the night so we can travel safely in the morning; the workers who repair broken water mains to ensure residents have access to clean water; the building and highway inspectors who ensure our projects meet design standards; and last but not least, the folks who collect garbage and compost and operate local landfills. These people perform the challenging and sometimes unpleasant activities that are necessary to keep our communities clean and safe.

We are working hard on deepening the connection that Highways and Public Works provides Yukon by completing building maintenance and energy upgrade projects, replacing living quarters for staff in highway maintenance camps at Drury Creek and Swift River, completing airport improvements at the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport, replacing and installing new equipment at the weigh stations, and completing highway safety improvements across the territory.

Public works connect us, Mr. Speaker. They even connect us through time. I remind the House that today we still marvel at Roman aqueducts, baths and roads — infrastructure. Like our forebears, we would be far poorer as individuals and as society without the connections provided by our modern transportation, water and sewer, our public buildings and other infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing National Public Works Week and in thanking all the dedicated people in our public works sector who strive every day to improve the infrastructure in our communities — this vital and often unrecognized work contributes so much to our fantastic quality of life in Yukon and touches the lives of each and every one of us.

Ms. Hanson: It is hard to imagine what our lives or our communities would look like without the work and dedication of those professionals and municipalities, First Nations and territorial government public works. Public works is the magic that happens when we turn on our tap or flush our toilet. Public works is the magic that happens when we drive to work in the morning and see fresh lines on the roads. There is so much else going on behind the scenes that we don’t see and usually are totally unaware of.

Public works professionals ensure the safety and smooth functioning of our communities and areas that connect us, community to community. They are given the tasks of ensuring our roads are safe and our water is potable.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party caucus, I extend our thanks to public works professionals working across Yukon.

In recognition of the junior rural experiential model

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal Party as well as the Third Party to speak to the junior rural experiential model that took place last week on Kaska Dena traditional territory of the Ross River Dena Council in Faro. This year’s junior rural experiential model brought students in grades 7 and 8 along with teachers and educators from 12 rural Yukon communities together for over

two days of integrated, traditional and modern teaching and learning.

The Department of Education is committed to increasing the diversity of programming options and to improving learning outcomes for rural and First Nation students in Yukon. The rural experiential model delivers opportunities similar to those made available to urban students.

Students and educators from Beaver Creek, Carcross, Carmacks, Dawson, Haines Junction, Kluane Lake, Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Ross River, Teslin and Watson Lake joined Faro students and educators for two days of engaging, hands-on activities facilitated by rural teachers, Yukon First Nation elders and knowledge-keepers, and Yukon experts.

I would like to thank Chief Jack Caesar along with elders and knowledge-keepers of the Ross River Dena Council for the warm welcome they gave their guests and for the leadership on many of the activities.

Thank you also to the knowledge-keepers who travelled from elsewhere across Yukon for helping to provide our students with so many unique experiences.

There were several daytime session options and evening activities for students to choose from, allowing them to direct their learning toward their own interests. In total, each student participated in six daytime sessions over two days, so it was a full agenda. They had two sessions focused on Yukon culture, they had two sessions focused on personal wellness, and two sessions each focused on applied skills and fine arts. Students picked sessions that appeal most to them.

Day-session options included choices like brain aerobics, mining and geology, culinary arts, circus performance arts, traditional foods and medicines, forensic investigation, canoeing, trapping, hand games and carpentry, just to name a few.

Students also participated in a traditional opening welcome and evening sessions that included a scavenger hunt, baseball, basketball, golf and other activities. I dare say a fun-filled few days that we would all have enjoyed. All of these opportunities have been developed and are being delivered by rural teachers, local experts, support staff from the departments of Education, Environment, Health and Social Services, Energy, Mines and Resources, and Sport and Recreation.

The rural experiential model is an excellent example of how successful collaboration between teachers and administrators, the Public Schools branch staff, school councils, Yukon First Nations, various government departments and rural communities can really empower Yukon students. The success of the rural experiential model is a product of the dedication and efforts of all of those who were involved, and together created programs that engaged learners.

I would like to emphasize the importance of also connecting rural students with their peers from other communities. Events like the rural experiential model help to form the kinds of relationships that can last a lifetime. It's also an excellent professional development opportunity, where

staff can connect and share with colleagues from across the territory.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Town of Faro for hosting the rural experiential model in collaboration with the community of Ross River.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker; merci beaucoup; souga sin la — which is a new word for me — and shaw nithän.

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the 2017 junior rural experiential model, or REM, which took place this year in Faro on the Kaska Dena traditional territory of the Ross River Dena Council.

On May 16 and 17, grade 7 and 8 students and their teachers from Beaver Creek, Carmacks, Dawson, Haines Junction, Kluane Lake, Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Ross River, and Watson Lake travelled to join Faro students in two days of integrated traditional learning with elders, Yukon professionals and rural teachers.

The REM program was launched in 2013 and serves as a way to teach rural Yukon students skills that they can use after graduation, as well as to give them access to meet peers and take part in activities that may not be otherwise available in their communities. Not only is this an experience for students, REM allows educators to get together and learn from one another as well.

The goal of REM is to bring more equity and possibilities to rural students. The program seeks to do so by delivering opportunities to the participants in a flexible learning environment. This year, REM offered Yukon culture choices such as games, trapping, outdoor survival, canoeing, First Nation art, plants, music and food, of course. Additionally, sessions were given on personal wellness, applied skills and fine arts. Games, sports, bonfires, and a dance gave the students the opportunity to gather in a more social setting.

The senior REM for grade 10 to 12 students will be hosted in Haines Junction on the traditional territory of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations this coming September. I would like to thank the Department of Education and all First Nations as well as Ross River and Faro, who hosted this incredible program, as well as other participants and educators who make REM possible for our rural students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In recognition of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

Mr. Adel: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask my colleagues from the Official Opposition and the Third Party to join me in recognizing May as Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. Also, I would like to welcome several members of the multiple sclerosis association in the gallery today. Thank you for being here.

MS, or multiple sclerosis, is an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system. It is most often diagnosed in people between the ages of 15 and 40 and is three times as likely to occur in women. MS is an unpredictable disease that

causes a range of symptoms including fatigue, pain or tingling, vision problems, and a loss of coordination.

Mr. Speaker, no one understands yet why this is, but Canada has the highest rate of multiple sclerosis in the world. It's estimated that about 100,000 Canadians are living with the disease.

Here in the Yukon, we estimate that about 150 people have been diagnosed with MS. Fortunately, these people and their families are supported through the efforts of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. This society, which was founded in 1948, continues to be a leader in helping to improve the quality of life of people with MS. It also funds research to find the cause and cure for this disease.

Each May, during Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, the society helps organize the annual Scotiabank MS Walk in communities across the country, with more than 30,000 Canadians participating in more than 125 communities. Here in Whitehorse, this year's walk on May 20 has so far raised more than \$6,200. A large portion of that money was raised by a team called the Myelin Rejuvenators, led by US MS Association President Cecilia Twigge. Ms. Twigge and her group have also organized an annual fundraising dinner and auction, called "Keep S'myelin for MS." This year's sold-out event raised more than \$1,000, thanks to the generosity of many people in our community.

The Yukon MS Association has purchased specialized exercise equipment, which will soon be delivered to the Canada Games Centre. This equipment can also be used by people in wheelchairs and scooters.

We applaud these efforts and encourage all Yukoners to take part in these local fundraising events. Ten percent of funds raised stay right here in the Yukon to support people living with MS. What can we do as a government, Mr. Speaker, to support Yukoners and their families who are living with this disease? People with more aggressive forms of MS often need advanced care at a relatively young age. Like others who require care, these people want to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

This is why our government has committed to working with Yukoners, health professionals and other stakeholders to offer better home care services. Just as we want seniors to be able to age in place, we want people of any age who have MS to receive adequate home care and support to stay in their homes, and appropriate residential options when they can no longer stay at home.

Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to all Yukoners who give their support to this worthwhile cause. Their efforts to continue to improve the quality of life for people with MS we hope will one day lead to a cure.

On a personal note, Mr. Speaker, I have undertaken this journey with my eldest daughter, walking side by side with her and the ravages of this disease, and I can only express my family's heartfelt gratitude to organizations like this that help out.

Applause

Speaker: Introduction of visitors.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have for tabling a legislative return in response to a question from the Member for Porter Creek North regarding recreational infrastructure for the Village of Carmacks.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling a legislative return in response to a question for the Member for Copperbelt South regarding highway work at the Carcross Cut-off.

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. Hassard: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon, in consultation with the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board, the Yukon Employees' Union and the Yukon Teachers' Association, to prepare for the legalization of marijuana by developing and implementing mandatory post-incident drug and alcohol testing for Yukon government employees involved in serious workplace accidents, including, but not limited to, motor vehicle collisions.

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: Carbon tax

Mr. Hassard: Today we have seen a federal official confirm what the Yukon Party has been saying all along. If the Yukon fought for an exemption to the carbon tax, it could have received one. The federal official stated that everything is on the table, including exemptions. This is interesting because it is a direct contradiction to what the Premier has been telling Yukoners. In fact, let me quote the Premier from May 9 when he said — and I quote: "There are no exemptions." Mr. Speaker, the question is: Did the Premier forget to ask for an exemption or was he more concerned with standing up for Ottawa rather than standing up for Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The word "exemption" has been tossed around a lot throughout this process. There is a nuance to the word that I would like to clarify as well. We fully expect to explore how flexibility and sector-specific solutions will apply to the north; however, no decisions have been made to this point. At no point was there an option for the Yukon to opt out of carbon pricing. The federal government did not

offer blanket exemptions to the territory or to the provinces that didn't want to impose a price on carbon pollution.

We have told Yukoners that we are working with the federal government on the details of what carbon pricing implementation will look like. That work continues. We are part of a federal working group that is studying the economic impacts of carbon pricing implementation, and results are expected in the fall. We are going to use this opportunity to continue to advocate for Yukoners, to make sure that the federal government understands the considerations of the north.

But to be clear, Mr. Speaker, what is now up for negotiation is not and has never been a blanket exemption as the Yukon Party would have us believe. Yukon is working with Canada to consider flexibility in how federal carbon-pricing systems apply to the north based upon the annex and the pan-Canadian framework due to the implications of our unique situations here in the territory.

Mr. Hassard: The federal official from Environment Canada who spoke to CBC was very clear. Everything is on the table, including exemptions. However, on April 25, the Premier said — and again I will quote: “There is no such thing as an exemption. There never was an exemption. An exemption was never an option. No province or territory was ever offered an exemption.”

Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Premier was wrong. Will the Premier now do the right thing, stop standing up for the federal Liberal Party and fight for Yukoners to get some exemptions on this carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Once again, the Yukon Party is reacting to news stories. Last week we heard the concerns from them that we would be following “to a T” the Alberta carbon-pricing mechanism, and this week we hear this. So which one is it? The member opposite is working without the facts, and his concerns are creating unnecessary uncertainty for Yukoners.

Let me once again explain. We are not bringing in our own carbon-pricing model; therefore, we will be using the federal backstop. Last week, the federal government released a technical paper on the implementation of their backstop. We have until June 30 to provide input on that technical paper. We will be working with the federal government to identify our unique Yukon issues.

As we have said time and time again, we are at the table with the federal government advocating for Yukoners. By joining the negotiations last December, we have a federal commitment on the Yukon annex. The federal system will return revenues from the carbon pricing to Yukon. We have committed to ensuring that all funds collected will go back to Yukon businesses and individuals.

We have also committed to ensuring that carbon pricing will not negatively impact businesses that do not have alternatives to gas and to diesel. Instead of continuing to raise undue alarms and concerns based upon speculation and hearsay, we are at the table working with our partners and standing up for what matters for Yukoners.

Mr. Hassard: The real uncertainty is created by these non-answers that we're getting from this Premier. For half a year, we have been trying to get details out of the Liberal government about this carbon tax scheme. Unfortunately, they refuse to give any real answers.

One thing that's disturbing, Mr. Speaker, is that the answers we receive in the Legislature are quite often different from those that are given to the media after Question Period. This is concerning, but hopefully the government changes course on this.

But in the meantime, today, Environment Canada told CBC that, with respect to the carbon tax, exemptions are on the table — and I quote: “... the ball is still in the Yukon government's court...” So I'm curious, Mr. Speaker, is CBC wrong here or is the Premier shirking responsibility in reversing his earlier decision to sign on the carbon tax and actually get us an exemption?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I think the Yukon Party is just not used to hearing answers in here, so they can't hear them when they actually get them. We are working and continue to work with the federal government on analysis and the further implementation of carbon-pricing backstop from the federal government. As a result of the recent technical paper, we are working with Canada to conduct a study on the impacts that carbon pricing may have on the northern economy and on vulnerable groups here in the north. This economic study will be done this summer and should have results in the fall.

Part of the federal government's commitment in the pan-Canadian framework is that together, we will study and recognize the unique circumstances in the territories before the backstop is implemented.

Let me be very clear here, Mr. Speaker: the federal government has confirmed even today — I don't know what CBC is saying, but the federal government has confirmed today that the results of this study will be considered before the federal backstop is implemented. That's the work we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

If we listen to the members opposite, it seems that Yukon would believe that one day, without notice, a tax officer from Ottawa is going to show up at the gas station and start taxing our pumps. This is clearly not the case, Mr. Speaker. My officials here, the Yukon government, my team and I are working on what the implementation of a federal backstop will look like and how it will impact Yukoners.

We also have a commitment from the federal government that all the money will be returned to the Yukon. These commitments have not stopped and have not changed. We didn't stick our head in the sand; we're working with Ottawa for Yukoners.

Question re: Carbon tax

Mr. Cathers: I note that, in February, the Premier of Nunavut told their Legislative Assembly that his government was actively negotiating exemptions to the carbon tax. We have also seen a number of other premiers indicate that they have successfully negotiated exemptions to their carbon tax or are in the process of doing so. Today we have seen a senior

Environment Canada official say that an exemption to the carbon tax is possible for the Yukon. However, our Premier seems to be so ideologically in favour of a carbon tax that he has decided not to follow the lead of other premiers and not to stand up to Yukon families. The Premier is on record saying — and I quote: “An exemption was never an option.” The good news is that the Premier was wrong.

Will the Premier now admit his mistake, go back to the negotiating table, and seek an exemption from the carbon tax for the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I’m going to continue to say what I have been saying in the Legislative Assembly. Putting a price on carbon is one element of the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and on climate change, and the Government of Canada will be implementing a carbon price sometime in 2018, regardless of what the members opposite say.

The nuance we also talked about is that we are fully expecting to explore how fixed flexibility works for the north and also sector-specific solutions. I have said this from the get-go: You cannot use this federal carbon-pricing mechanism in areas where we cannot reduce our emissions. This is the good work this government has been doing on this side of the Legislative Assembly when working with Ottawa to make sure that a federal carbon-pricing mechanism works for Yukon in the unique circumstances.

I would ask the members opposite to maybe read the annex, to take a look at what we’re saying. It looks like they are changing their opinion here. They said they wanted a blanket exemption, and now they’re saying to look into specifics. Mr. Speaker, the good news is that this government has been looking and working with Ottawa to make sure they understand the unique circumstances in the north so the federal carbon-pricing mechanism will do what it’s supposed to do and will return those revenues to Yukoners.

What was the Yukon Party’s plan? Stick their head in the sand and just say no and ask for a blanket exemption — which we all know is not going to happen?

Mr. Cathers: I would like to remind the Premier that the only reason we have the territorial health access fund is that a former Premier actually stood up for the Yukon, instead of bowing to Ottawa.

For the last six months, the Premier squandered the opportunity to negotiate an exemption to the carbon tax for Yukon. On the rare occasions he provides answers in the House, he has changed his tune multiple times. If the Premier had gotten to work right away, perhaps we would already have a federal agreement for an exemption to the carbon tax, but apparently he just signed on the dotted line of the carbon tax scheme without knowing the full details.

Mr. Speaker, even though it is the eleventh hour, it is not too late. The Premier’s carbon tax scheme isn’t slated to come in for seven months, so he still has time to get an exemption if he fights for it. Will the Premier stop bowing to the Ottawa Liberals and start defending Yukon’s interest by seeking an exemption from the Liberal carbon tax scheme?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will try to listen to the question between the insults and I will commit. Basically it doesn’t

matter who is in Ottawa, we will work with the government in Ottawa. It doesn’t matter if they’re Liberals or Conservatives. I do recall the Yukon Party leaving a previous prime minister at the runway because they didn’t like the poll numbers, I guess, at that time. We won’t do that.

Mr. Speaker, we have said time and time again that we are working with Ottawa. You know what? As far as our support of a federal carbon-pricing mechanism, we’ll join with the federal mining agencies and others, right across the nation, when it comes to how to actively deal with man-made climate change.

The Yukon Party doesn’t believe in man-made climate change or they don’t believe in carbon pricing. I’m not really sure exactly which one it is or if it’s both, but I believe — and so does everybody on this side of the floor — that carbon pricing is a cost-effective way for Canada to reduce its emissions. It will encourage innovation in renewable energy and efficiencies and will help build a foundation of a low-carbon and resilient economy. That’s the opinion of the Yukon Liberals. That’s what we campaigned on and that’s what won us part and parcel of a majority government here in the Yukon, because Yukoners want to do their part.

When it comes to the federal backstop from the federal government, we have been working tirelessly with the government to make sure the unique circumstances of the Yukon have been taken into consideration, and in the fall when this information comes, we will show the successful fruits of those labours.

Mr. Cathers: Despite the Premier’s insults, we know that the Yukon Party, when in government, not only recognized the reality of climate change but was one of the leaders in the country in an incentives-based approach to dealing with the problem through solutions like the good energy program and the microgeneration program.

As the Premier knows, we worked with governments of every stripe in Ottawa.

Premiers across the country are showing leadership on this issue by standing up for their citizens and getting exemptions to the carbon tax. Our Premier appears to be more concerned about impressing Ottawa and his ideology than what’s good for the Yukon. We know a senior Environment Canada official has said exemptions for the Yukon are on the table. Did the federal Liberal government offer the Premier something to walk away and leave these exemptions on the table or is the Premier again making decisions based on ideology instead of on evidence and on common sense?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The accusations coming from the opposite side are very concerning for a democratic process in the Legislative Assembly and for government-to-government relations. I’ll leave it at that. But again, for him to say that at some point, they do support their federal counterparts in Ottawa — we have seen them say, “absolutely no connection”, and then we have seen other members in the opposition start backing federal campaigns for the next election, but we’ll leave that for another day.

What I will say again is: What we’re doing is making sure that the federal backstop actually works for Yukon — gets us

on the right side of history, gets us to have availability for money, for innovation and for technologies and also identifies the issues here to where we can actually reduce our emissions and not in those areas where we can't.

Anything that comes out of flexibility or a sector-specific solution will be based upon the hard work that this government has done, working with Ottawa to make sure that those concerns are heard, because that's what this government does. We work with other governments — whether they are municipal governments, First Nation governments, the territorial or the federal government — to make sure that the decisions that are made that are affecting Yukon lives are made based upon the facts, and that's exactly what we're doing with the federal carbon mechanism.

To be very clear, what is up for negotiation now is not, and has never been, the blanket exemptions that the Yukon Party campaigned on — and now it seems that they're changing their narrative a bit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question re: Type 2 mine site remediation

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, under the devolution transfer agreement, the federal government agreed to transfer financial and human resources for land and resource management to the Yukon and then effectively back off. The federal government did retain financial liability for the care, maintenance and ultimate remediation of the seven most contaminated mine sites — type 2 mines — that had developed under the federal watch.

Right after devolution, an independent arm's-length mine remediation office was set up but after a year or so, the Yukon government wanted it closed. Some observers have noted that both federal and Yukon government type 2 staff have increased over the years. Funding for contaminated sites will expire in 2020. The federal government is assessing options for the management of type 2 liabilities.

Has the minister requested an independent assessment of the government's management of type 2 mine sites and does he believe there is any duplication of efforts on type 2 sites by the federal and territorial governments?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just getting right to the key part of your question, have I requested an independent assessment to look at duplication of efforts in the governance model? I have not. Certainly I think the comments from the Leader of the Third Party hits a chord. What a challenging situation. I think that myself and the previous ministers have all gone through this. The governance model when it comes to how the federal government and the Yukon government make decisions seems to be a challenge from time to time. That's what I have experienced in my short time here. Certainly some of the other work on the type 2 mine sites seems to move smoother.

The commitment I will make is that I'm continuing to look closely at how these relationships are built, how money moves, and making sure that really, the key is how do we clean these sites up? How do we get good impacts to the economy of the Yukon? How do we make sure that our land and water is safe? I'll make that commitment to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the minister for his response. One aspect of the devolution agreement often ignored by the previous government was the fact that the federal government is on the hook for the seven type 2 sites, as they were in 2003, the effective date of the devolution agreement.

When the government allowed the Ketzia mine to resume operations, we questioned the previous minister on whether or not he had confirmed the baseline federal financial liability for the mine before allowing new work to be done. We never got a clear answer to that question. There were clear signs of compliance issues, which should have been no surprise, given the fact that the owner of Ketzia had previously abandoned the Mount Nansen mine without completing remediation.

Can the minister tell this House what financial liabilities there are to the Yukon government for the decision to allow new mining activity at Ketzia prior to confirming Canada's liability and what portion of the final costs will be paid by Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think this is also a good opportunity — we can dig into this — the abandoned mines, just the updates — as we go through the Energy, Mines and Resources budget. This year, I believe — without having the budget in front of me — about a half-million dollars are being moved toward design. We do have a financial responsibility that we're looking at, as we design the cleanup. At the same time, the only security that is left right now is the security that is connected to exploration work. It is not security that can be used for the cleanup, but it could be used on other activities that have been there.

I can have a fuller conversation on the total cost, but right now we're looking at — I believe with our environmental trust there has been about \$5 million transferred over and there is a pretty significant cost as we move through the design phase.

Just to note, we are working with Ross River Dena Council, Liard First Nation, Kaska Dena Council and Teslin Tlingit Council as they all have assertion in that area, to make sure that there are opportunities for them. Of course when we came into government, there was already a camp in place and there is some ongoing work, but we can dig into the pricing as we get into the Energy, Mines and Resources budget.

Ms. Hanson: The issue is not really just the pricing; it's actually who is going to pay the bill and why?

Mr. Speaker, another type 2 mine of interest is United Keno Hill. The Keno mine ceased operations in 1989. After 75 years, there is significant known and potential contamination. After several failed attempts to sell the mine because of unknown site liabilities, the federal government agreed to take on the historic liabilities and entered into a sales agreement with Alexco that sees Alexco move ahead with exploration and mining in the area, as well as assuming responsibility for development of a closure plan for remediation of the contaminated areas.

Again, this is a question asked many times to the previous government. I hope this government will have a better answer. The original time frame for the Keno closure plan was first

2008, then 2011, then maybe 2013. Can the minister confirm whether or not a closure plan for Keno has been completed and approved, and tell this House what the projected cost for remediation of these historic liabilities will be?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The price for the Faro-Keno project, we can discuss later. Certainly, I don't have that figure. At this particular point, the design and permit remediation approach — we're still working on the north fork of Rose Creek. That is underway and scheduled for implementation in 2018. I think the bigger question here is — to answer your concern about this, there is a huge concern here about what has been happening and what continues to happen.

I see that there has been a real challenge between the federal government and the territorial government. I know that there are some ongoing conversations that are happening between the First Nations in the area and the federal government — so kind of watching what's happening there as they sort of make a bit of a move into working with us on this project.

The closure plan still has to be looked at and we have to continue to monitor water, and it is of concern. Looking at how the site has been taken care of to date and making some larger decisions on water licensing and issues like that are things that I've directed the department to do. We're working with our federal counterparts to make sure that Yukoners are looked after, there is a transparent process, we have integrity, and they know exactly what's going on there and how much it's going to cost as we get the plan in place.

Question re: Seniors housing

Mr. Istchenko: I would like to raise an issue that I've been working on with my constituents in Haines Junction. This is phase 2 of seniors housing in the community. The current facility is full and the community is in need of more beds, which would be addressed in this phase 2 of the project. Can the minister provide an update on the status of this project and when it's expected to be completed?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to seniors housing in the community of Haines Junction, we are recognizing that it has been a priority. We do have other pressures also across the Yukon with seniors housing complexes that are in disrepair.

We are looking and working with the community of Haines Junction and the municipalities, we've met with the First Nations, and we will continue to do that. We remain committed to working with Yukoners to create solutions to promote an aging-in-place model, which includes providing housing geared toward seniors in all Yukon communities.

Currently, we operate 289 units across the Yukon that are designed for seniors, including a total of nine seniors units in Haines Junction in a building that was constructed in 2008. We have other units across the Yukon that are much older than that and require repairs, so we are trying to balance accordingly and look at our priorities.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the member opposite for her answer. Regarding this project, a bit of work has already been undertaken. The previous minister and I met with seniors and elders to discuss this issue. As a result, our government

committed money in the 2016 budget for consultation for this facility. The need was identified clearly.

Has the government committed any new money toward this project for this budget? If not, can we expect to see a commitment from them to move forward on this project?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you for the question. In order to establish future housing priorities, clearly we need to look at undertaking more information-gathering analysis and engagement with all Yukon communities — no exception to Haines Junction.

The decisions we intend to make will be based on future evidence-based decision-making on housing complexes and approaches to seniors housing in rural Yukon. Aging in place is a key priority for this government. We have made a commitment to rural Yukon and we will uphold that commitment and follow through, but we will do it in a time-sensitive manner and look at the priorities for Yukoners.

Mr. Istchenko: If the minister is looking at all options and requires more information to make a decision, a meeting with the community members, the Village of Haines Junction, the First Nations and the St. Elias seniors group can certainly provide the information she needs — probably get an opportunity to have a look at Kluane meadows golf course, their beautiful greenhouse gardens they have going right now, and their garden beds.

The community would like to see a commitment to move forward with design and completion of this project for rural seniors housing. Further — and the minister stated this earlier — the Liberal government committed in their platform to provide community-based services that allow seniors to age in place to the greatest extent possible.

If the minister cannot make any solid commitments to move forward on this project, will she commit to holding a public meeting in Haines Junction to hear the concerns of the residents seeking spaces in the community for their family members to age in place?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am committed to travelling to Haines Junction. My staff and I are looking at travelling to Burwash and White River to look at some of the key priorities in that part of the Yukon.

As backstop to all of this, have we committed any funding to social housing in Haines Junction? I can't say that we have. Yukon Housing Corporation has a number of units in Haines Junction that provide for seniors housing — social housing units, owned and managed by the corporation. Six of the units are for seniors.

We know that in the spring of 2016, the MLA for Kluane had made a commitment of \$50,000 to allocate to support funding for an expansion, but that funding was never budgeted for in last year's budget. Do we have \$50,000? No, we don't, and we are looking at all of the Yukon. We are looking at key priority areas, which are really essential.

Haines Junction — the design and the build — there are critical safety concerns and critical concerns with the building. We will most certainly look at it, and the Department of Health and Social Services, as well as Yukon Housing

Corporation, will look at all potential options in Haines Junction and all of Yukon communities.

Question re: Alaska Highway upgrades tender

Mr. Hassard: I have some questions for the Minister of Highways and Public Works regarding a project to upgrade the Alaska Highway near the Carcross Cut-off. This project is currently being assessed by the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. The public comment period is currently open and remains open until at least tomorrow. The process allows for up to 17 days from the close of public comment until the recommendation is sent.

Typically the decision document takes approximately a month to prepare. This has been the case with recent private sector projects. This means a “go/no-go” decision would come forward well into July, yet the project is being tendered now and closes on June 13.

Is the minister prejudging the outcome of the YESAA review by tendering the project before it’s complete?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. Highways and Public Works, as I have said before, is working to improve traffic safety on the Alaska Highway. We do our best to minimize the impacts on businesses while keeping public safety top of mind. Upgrading the Alaska Highway to national safety standards requires a reduction in the number of highway accesses on that road.

We have consulted with the public on proposed upgrades for the Carcross Cut-off intersection — the Alaska Highway and south Klondike Highway. The results of the consultation are publicly available on the YESA board online registry.

Construction work is expected to begin once we have the proper permits in place, and we hope to have it done by September.

Mr. Hassard: While we agree with the improved traffic safety and upgrades to our highway infrastructure, there certainly still are questions. There are two tenders associated with this project: one for the consultation services and one for the project construction. One closes May 30 and the other closes on June 13. On April 26 during motion debate, the minister said that the opposition wanted him to — and I quote: “... simply toss contracts on the procurement management system without thought or consideration.” What thought or consideration did the minister put into this tender when he advertised it even though the project has not been approved?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. This government does put a lot of thought into the things that we do, and we are putting a lot of thought into this one as well. I am glad the member opposite endorses improving safety along the Alaska Highway — it’s important. Last week was National Road Safety Week, so I am glad he is doing these things. In the long term, the Carcross intersection will be much safer and will have fewer accidents.

We know that this intersection is fairly dangerous. It is well above the average for intersections along that route for injuries, and we want to make sure that it is safer so that people have less of a chance of getting injured when driving our roads.

Upgrades to the south Klondike intersection and construction of a new Duncan Drive intersection will help minimize the intersection conflicts and address the right-turn collision issues. The new entrance to the Alaska Highway on Duncan Drive will also provide direct and safer access to Golden Horn Elementary School. These upgrades are required in order to improve vehicle safety at the Carcross Cut-off intersection as well as to provide safer access to and from Duncan Drive, Salmon Trail and the Fire Hall Road.

We are not prejudging the outcome of the YESAA process; we are just preparing to ensure that there are no delays if YESAB approval is given. I’m sure that the member opposite will appreciate that.

Mr. Hassard: I guess I don’t know what to say after all of that, but anyway, I will carry on with my questioning.

During that same debate on April 26, the minister said in referring to tenders and contractors — and I quote: “That type of inconsistency — that type of fast and loose behaviour is something that we want to avoid, if at all possible, and they appreciate that.” Does the minister think that asking contractors to invest time and money in preparing a bid and have their price come before the public prior to the necessary environmental approvals being in place avoids being what he characterizes as “fast and loose behaviour”?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I think the question has to do with my impression of fast and loose. We all know what fast and loose is; we have seen it for many years. I have spoken about that. This government is looking forward to doing things in a methodical fashion. We are going and getting the proper approvals. We have spoken to the community.

The Department of Highways and Public Works knows the processes. I have every confidence in our civil servants to do the job right. They have contracted many of these projects in the past. They have gone through the proper permitting.

We are going to go through the proper permitting and make sure that this project is executed in accordance with the laws. That is what we do, and that is what we are going to do here.

This government is not about fast and loose. We have said it before; we will say it again. I think, in the end, we will have an intersection at the Carcross Cut-off that is much safer than the one that is in existence now.

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. 50

Clerk: Motion No. 50, 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 immediately initiate a review of Yukon's minimum wage in the Legislative Assembly prior to British Columbia's minimum wage increase scheduled for September 2017.

Ms. White: I think it's important to set the stage on this issue. The first thing we need to say is that Yukon's minimum wage right now stands at \$11.32 per hour. It's also important to say that increasing the minimum wage is not a magic bullet, but it's an important element of an overall comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty and inequality. I don't think anyone in this House will say with any kind of confidence that you can live anywhere in the Yukon, no matter what your situation, with any sort of security on \$11.32 per hour.

For many families and individuals, this means relying on the food bank and soup kitchens, it means housing insecurity, and it involves cutting basic needs like healthy food, heating, school supplies and basics that many of us take for granted.

For many, it means falling into debt — cycles of debt and then, despite best efforts, not being able to see the end of that same debt. Mr. Speaker, this is not acceptable.

Let's be clear: no one should live in poverty, no matter what the circumstance — but let's also be clear that no one working a full-time job in Yukon should be living below the poverty line, but it's happening today.

As legislators, we have the responsibility to fix this problem and, as legislators — and this is a beautiful thing, Mr. Speaker — we have the ability to fix this problem. This isn't any different from us recognizing the importance of National Aboriginal Day and then doing something about it, because we saw that happen here in this Chamber, and we knew there were naysayers but we still did what we knew was right, and this issue is no different.

We as legislators have a responsibility to do everything we can to eliminate poverty, to ensure our neighbours have a good quality of life, and we have that ability but, even more, we have that responsibility to do what is right.

The sad reality in Yukon is that we have reached a point where even people with a full-time job, and sometimes more than one full-time job, cannot make ends meet. How is it that, in a society that has an abundance of resources, both natural and human, some of our neighbours get up in the morning and they go to work day in and day out, often working more than one job, yet they continue to live in poverty? How is this acceptable, and how can we sit here and ignore that reality? My opinion is that we can't. We can't just sit back when people who have a full-time job need to rely on the food bank to eat. We can't sit back because we have the power to act. We have the power as legislators to make a difference, and I hope that today, as we debate this motion, we will collectively seize this opportunity to make a difference.

Some people might ask if raising the minimum wage is the solution to poverty. It's kind of like asking if a nail gun is what you need to build a house. The answer is obviously that, "Yes, you'll need a nail gun to build a house, but you can't build a whole house with just a nail gun."

So will poverty be a thing of the past if we raise the minimum wage tomorrow? Certainly not. But will raising the minimum wage reduce the number of people living in poverty? Absolutely it will.

Raising the minimum wage is a tool among many to help eliminate poverty but, to be honest, we are going to need every tool from the toolbox to tackle poverty in a significant way. But as long as people with a full-time job earn a poverty wage, and as long as our system continues to create the working poor, despite their best efforts, some of our neighbours will be stuck in a cycle of poverty.

A comprehensive American study has shown that 10 percent in a minimum-wage increase is associated with a 2.4- to a 3.6-percent reduction in poverty rates, Mr. Speaker, so we know it can be done.

As you might know — especially because I recently talked about this issue in the House — Yukon is trailing other western jurisdictions on minimum wage. In Nunavut, the minimum wage is \$13 an hour, in NWT it's \$12.50, and in Alberta, it is \$12.20 and they have committed to raising it to \$15 by 2018. By mid-September, British Columbia will raise their minimum wage to \$11.35 an hour. That is when we will fall to the sixth position — in September of this year.

The minister has said there would be an automatic review in the Legislature when we fall to number six, and then he corrected himself to say that would happen when we get to the seventh place.

So I have two comments to make on this particular point. My first comment is more of a question: Why would we wait until we're behind? Why should we aspire to be mediocre? We know that people can't live on \$11.32 an hour. We know that such poverty wages keep individuals and families in a cycle of poverty, so how is it acceptable to say, "Oh well, we'll wait until we fall farther behind and we'll wait to take a closer look once we're in the seventh position?" Mr. Speaker, that is not leadership.

When we compare ourselves with the rest of Canada, we also miss important differences among provinces and territories. The minister has said that he thinks that because the cost of living in Nunavut is higher than Yukon, their higher minimum wage might actually be comparable to ours. But let me flip that question and ask the government if they think we should compare Yukon's minimum wage to some of the Maritime provinces, which have been hit by a major economic downturn. The average home price in New Brunswick is well below \$200,000. Does it make any sense to say that our minimum wage is 32 cents higher than New Brunswick, so don't worry, everything in Yukon is fine?

During his press conference after tabling his budget, the Premier said that he was raising the taxes on tobacco to the same level as the other territories because Yukon's tobacco taxes were lower. No later than last week, the Premier again said that he chose to reduce taxes on corporate profits even before getting advice from his economic panel because we needed to be on the same level as other provinces and territories.

Well, Mr. Speaker, why shouldn't the same logic be applied to minimum wage? Why would we need our corporate taxes and tobacco taxes to be comparable with the other territories and neighbouring provinces, but our minimum wage can lag behind? It just doesn't make any sense.

Ultimately the other territories and both British Columbia and Alberta are all going to have a minimum wage above Yukon's in September when BC raises theirs. No later than next year, Alberta will have a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. As far as I can tell, there is no reason to wait. There is no reason to let working people continue to live in a cycle of poverty when we have the power in this Chamber to act and review the minimum wage. I really do hope that the government sees this and sees their role in poverty reduction and that they support this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I could have easily put forward a motion that just stated that we needed a \$15 minimum wage, because we really do. I could have said that we needed to echo the calls across the country to fight for \$15 and fairness, but I didn't do that because I know that, right now, this new government doesn't have the appetite to push that hard. Although I don't agree, I wanted to pass an olive branch toward doing what is right.

I intentionally left the wording of this motion less prescriptive. It leaves room for the government to take action. We haven't said that it should be this amount or that it should be that amount. We're simply saying that \$11.32 an hour is not enough and it needs to be reviewed so we can do better by the people we have all been elected to represent.

In fact, as many of my colleagues will know, even a \$15-an-hour minimum wage would not be close to the living wage for many Yukoners. The concept of a living wage is the hourly wage needed for a family to cover basic needs, after factoring in government transfers and deductions. In Yukon, the Anti-Poverty Coalition has calculated that, for a family of four, with both parents working a full-time job, a living wage would be just over \$19 an hour each.

We currently have an \$8 gap between that living wage and our current minimum wage, Mr. Speaker, and surely we can start closing this gap by reviewing our own minimum wage. As I said earlier, it won't resolve everything, but it will certainly help to get us in the right direction.

Recently I spent a fair amount of time reading about minimum wage. I have read reports, and then I have read reports about reports. I have read opinion pieces championing both sides of the spectrum and, more important than any of that, I have listened to the lived reality of people in our community who are living below the poverty line.

I want to conclude by exposing a few myths about the minimum wage. I hope we won't hear too many of these repeated in this House but, just in case, a little myth-busting might be helpful. Who earns a minimum wage? It's probably not who you think. It's also important to know that, although we collect employment statistics in Yukon, they don't go as deep as we need them to go for this conversation. I thank the Bureau of Statistics for the good work they do, and I look

forward to the day when we can dive deeper into the issue of employment in Yukon.

Because we don't collect this level of statistics here at home, I'm looking toward the hot-bed of the minimum wage increase conversation in the country right now, so I'm looking toward our neighbours in Alberta, who have committed to raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018.

This next bit is based on the statistics out of Alberta. I asked you what the stereotype is of the minimum-wage earner in Alberta. Typically the stereotype is that they are teenagers living at home with their parents, earning extra spending money by working part-time after school and maybe weekends at small mom-and-pop businesses. What is the reality? Seventy-six percent of people earning minimum wage in Alberta are not teenagers; 38 percent of them are 35 years or older; 36 percent of them are post-secondary graduates; 62 percent of them are women; 60 percent work full-time; 67 percent do not live at home with their parents; 51 percent work at large corporations that have 100 employees or more; and nearly 40 percent of all minimum-wage earners in Alberta are parents.

Canada-wide, we see similar trends. The Statistics Canada labour force survey shows that 79 percent of people making under \$15 an hour are not students. So it's clear that there are people of all ages and all demographics, including parents, because in Alberta, 40 percent of minimum-wage earners are parents. Here we have seniors who are earning minimum wage, or just cents above it, after working in the same place for years.

Another myth that I want to address is the idea that raising the minimum wage will be the end of small businesses. First of all, we know that a large proportion of minimum-wage earners across Canada are working in large corporations — the big-box stores are the obvious examples. We also have plenty of examples of small businesses here in Yukon that do pay well above the minimum wage — and I'm talking about coffee shops, used book stores, restaurants and bicycle shops — not exactly businesses known to be particularly profitable. They pay well above minimum wage because they know it's the right thing to do. They know that they will have staff not looking for other jobs; they know they will have staff who are happy to come to work and staff who care about the businesses they work for.

Mr. Speaker, you might not know, but I owned a coffee shop between 2006 and 2009 and I paid my staff what would be considered a living wage because they deserved it. They worked hard. I was saved the revolving door of staff looking for better-paying jobs. I was saved the task of training and I had people who were happy to come to work every day and felt invested in their jobs. It's also important to note that I never had any issues with theft.

The fact is that most small business owners understand that if people have money to spend in their store, it will be good for their business in the long run. Increasing the minimum wage will boost the local economy because it's the lowest paid workers who will have more money to spend, and

they're not going to be buying luxury cars in the south or holidaying in Hawaii or investing in tax havens.

If minimum-wage workers make a few dollars extra an hour, it just means they might be able to get more and better food to feed their families, and it might mean that they might be able to consider signing their kids up for hockey or soccer, and it means maybe, just maybe, they might be able to try that new restaurant or even see a movie once in awhile. Investing in workers is what gets our local economy going. Poverty wages not only hurt people, but they also hurt the economy. You don't have to take my word for it. Just a couple of years ago, 600 economists — including seven Nobel Prize winners — signed a letter that states — and I quote: "... increases in the minimum wage have had little or no negative effect on the employment of minimum-wage workers, even during times of weakness in the labor market... could have a small stimulative effect on the economy as low-wage workers spend their additional earnings, raising demand and job growth..."

Mr. Speaker, lifting people out of poverty is not only the right thing to do, but it's also the smart thing to do from an economics point of view, from a health perspective and from any way you look at it. I urge all members to support this motion and to support reviewing our minimum wage. We shouldn't accept that people with a full-time job live in poverty — and make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, \$11.32 is not enough to live on in the Yukon. This is an opportunity for us to stand up for Yukoners and Yukon families, and we can do that together in this Chamber.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for her motion and for her words on minimum wage. I will read some of the work I had prepared for this motion, and then I'll try to respond a little bit to the comments by the member.

I rise to speak to Motion No. 50 and I thank the member opposite for this motion and the opportunity to speak to it so we can shed some light on the issue. Minimum wage policy in Canada is set locally in each province and territory and varies according to the model utilized in each jurisdiction. Generally speaking, there are three approaches utilized, with the goal being to balance the protection of low-wage earners and provide a stable framework for employers. The first approach involves the use of a formula that links minimum wage growth to the consumer price index to address the issue of inflation and provide workers with cost-of-living adjustments.

The second approach relies on a recommendation by a board or a committee comprised of representatives from affected stakeholder groups. After a review is triggered and completed, recommendations on whether to maintain or revise the minimum wage are made to government.

The third approach is based on policy that adopts the provincial minimum or territorial minimum wherever the federal employee is working. In the Yukon, annual minimum wage increases are tied to the Whitehorse consumer price index and are adjusted every year on April 1. This approach mandates adjustments in a way that increases minimum wage for workers annually, but also creates clear expectations for

businesses by reducing erratic fluctuations to the cost of doing business in the Yukon. The most recent revision saw an increase in the minimum wage from \$11.07 to \$11.32 on April 1, 2017, as was noted. In the Yukon, the Employment Standards Board is an independent body from government and may initiate a review of its own accord or at the request of the minister.

Other jurisdictions use different approaches, but for the Yukon, our approach is twofold: (1) an arm's-length board and (2) to use a formula, both in terms of increases to the minimum wage and also in terms of initiating reviews. As the member opposite noted, when we drop into the lower half — I am informed that if we drop to the seventh position, that review would be initiated by the Employment Standards Board.

I just want to state, to begin with, that we believe the system is working well. I'll address the comments by the member opposite about poverty in a moment. I'm going to differentiate between a minimum wage as serving different purposes — the purpose of an entry-level wage versus a living wage.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that, for the government, the initial decision of whether to request that the board conduct a formal review or not must be based on comprehensive research, evidence and analysis. As I have noted here in this Legislature, the Department of Community Services is doing analysis, and I have stated that.

This government believes in an evidence-based approach that clearly supports identification of both the status and the issues, as well as the criteria that should be included if such a review were to be undertaken. We need to work with our Yukon partners and stakeholders to determine whether a review of minimum wage is the best tool to address the needs of low-income earners as well as consider the larger social impacts this might have.

Is increasing the minimum wage the only answer, or the best answer, to address poverty in the Yukon, or are there other tools that should be adopted to support Yukoners in leading healthier, happier lives? I'll turn to that toward the end of my comments, Mr. Speaker. The impact of socio-economic trends must also be researched and analyzed to determine if national trends or issues raised by national advocacy bodies are pertinent to the Yukon.

Before this government commits to the significant resources to undertaking a review of the minimum wage, we need to have a solid idea of the Yukon picture. We need to do the research and analysis, as I have stated in this Legislature, to depict the status of employment, income and social well-being in the Yukon. As the member opposite noted, there is a need for some of that information and I appreciate her suggestions.

We are certainly interested in and affected by the trends and decisions by our partners in other jurisdictions — for example, Alberta. However, we must take a measured approach to consider information, data research and criteria pertinent to the Yukon. The variety of approaches to the issue of minimum wage speaks to the diversity and the

distinctiveness of every jurisdiction, and the Yukon is no exception. This government is committed to working with its partners and stakeholders for its Yukon citizens to build a strong Yukon economy, invest in our communities, take a people-centred approach to wellness and to foster good government-to-government relationships.

We are moving forward in a collaborative, transparent and evidence-based manner to meet these objectives and we will continue to do so with all issues, including minimum wage.

For the past year, before I was elected to this Legislature, I was a recreation programmer in the community of Marsh Lake, where we hired many young people to work in our community centre. For those people — they are not concerned about a living wage. They are concerned about an entry-level wage. So, while I don't have the statistics to note what the percentages of people are who earn our minimum wage here in the Yukon — I think that is a good question, and I will seek to get an answer. I'm not going to rely on Alberta's data. I will look for what information we have in the Yukon. But I note that there are people who use our minimum wage as an entry-level wage and I have hired some of those young people. For those people, the question is not poverty. However, as the member opposite notes, there is a question around how we will address the issue of poverty in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to the document that the member opposite was referring to. It's called *Living Wage in Whitehorse, Yukon: 2016*. It was some research work conducted by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, published last year and prepared by Mr. Kendall Hammond.

In this document, they talk about a living wage, and they give recommendations at the tail-end of the document to suggest ways that we can work to address poverty wages — and now I am quoting, Mr. Speaker. This is for elected officials and public policy-makers. The first bullet is: "Support the development of affordable housing options." The second bullet is: "Improve accessibility and reduce child care costs." The third bullet is: "Explore solutions to lower transportation costs such as subsidized transit passes for low-income households." Fourth is: "Support the implementation of policies in public sector organizations to ensure that all direct staff and contracted service workers receive a living wage." Fifth is: "Create more opportunities for local suppliers through preferential procurement practices." I will quote one more location here — to all of us as Yukoners, people of the Yukon — titled here as "Consumers" — "Encourage elected officials to support the development of affordable housing, transportation and child care options."

I want to talk for a moment about what we are doing as a government to try to address the issues of poverty. I am quoting from the mandate letter of my colleague, the Minister responsible for Yukon Housing — and I quote: "Through cooperation between the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Housing Corporation, increase housing for vulnerable populations using a Housing First model." What I want to point out is that we are working to

address poverty, but the tool that we are using is not the minimum wage. We are using other methods, and we have stated those as our priorities. I note that it complements what was being suggested by our community partners, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, and what they were working to do to address concerns about a living wage.

The second one that they noted was around childcare costs, and I note that, although it's not in the mandate letter, within our platform, we have identified that we will research, develop and implement a Yukon early childhood strategy under childcare development and education in consultation with early childhood education and health care professionals, parents and First Nation governments in order to improve developmental and education outcomes.

Finally, there is a note there about transportation costs. I, as Minister of Community Services, have been directed to work with municipal governments. I have had meetings already with those municipal governments to talk about transit within our communities — where it is possible — and I am doing my best to assist them in improving transit. We appreciate that there are issues of poverty in our communities, and we are working to address those situations. As the Minister of Health and Social Services stood up and stated in this Legislature, we take those issues seriously and we wish to address them. We don't believe that minimum wage is the correct tool, and so we are not supportive of this resolution at this time. We appreciate the suggestions by the member opposite about the use of raising the minimum wage, but we feel that our policy of increasing minimum wage based on inflation is a strong policy and we'll continue to do research to make comparisons.

I will add one other thing, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite discussed the other two territories. When I took a look at the other two territories and looked at their minimum wages and the levels at which they are higher than ours, I think that is worth noting. However, when I looked at the cost of living in those jurisdictions, it was much, much higher. So if we're going to use that as a comparison, it will ultimately show that the Yukon is ahead of the other territories. I look forward to getting some solid research on that — that I can share.

But as I've noted, we should take this as a Yukon approach and a Yukon decision so we don't have to just compare. However, the method that we have — using the Employment Standards Board and using inflation as an automatic increase — is the method we believe is a solid method.

Mr. Gallina: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to speak about the minimum wage. I thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing this issue forward.

As we all know, Yukoners are hard workers and they take pride in their work. According to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, the number of employees in the territory in 2016 increased 3.5 percent from 2015 to 21,002, comprising almost 55 percent of the population of 38,293 in 2016.

As our Liberal government continues to grow Yukon's economy in a way that balances economic diversification with environmental stewardship, creating good jobs in a sustainable environment, the number of workers in Yukon will continue to grow as well. Regardless of their age, level of experience or industry, all employees in the territory must be paid at least \$11.32 an hour, the minimum wage. Ours is the fifth-highest minimum wage in the country, following only Ontario, Nunavut, Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

This is something we can be proud of. Nevertheless, it is important that we understand that the minimum wage in any jurisdiction is only one part of a larger picture. Telling the full story about the standard of living and well-being of the most vulnerable in our society requires looking at a wide range of factors. Beyond minimum wage, there is the personal income tax rate, the cost of living — including the availability and affordability of adequate housing, and the cost of food and utilities — and the affordability and accessibility of various programs and services, such as basic and extended health care, childcare, education, art, cultural, social, sport and recreational programs, and legal support and services, to name a few.

Minimum wage is just one piece of the puzzle and it is important to understand how it fits into a larger picture. It is also just one of the tools available to government, and that tool alone cannot address the needs of those who earn the lowest incomes. Our Liberal government recognizes that the long-term well-being and quality of life of all Yukoners is integral to our success as a society. We believe in taking care of each other and giving a voice to everyone, especially those most vulnerable. That is why we are taking a whole-government approach to the lifelong health and well-being of Yukoners. We are looking at all the tools available to improve the standards of living and economic outcomes in our communities, and we are supporting Yukoners' well-being through a variety of programs and services.

We are investing in people, in affordable housing, in alternative methods of care, in people's mental health and in active living. We will continue to work collaboratively with governments, First Nations, communities, community organizations and stakeholders to create the conditions for Yukoners to thrive.

Mr. Hassard: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion No. 50, which was brought forward by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King. I would like to begin by thanking the member for bringing this motion forward for debate today, as it gives members an opportunity to outline some of the costs, in addition to the benefits, that result from wage increases.

While some may argue that the cost can never outweigh the benefit of increasing the minimum wage in provinces and territories, I would like to take a few minutes to outline some of the more unspoken side effects that wage increases, ahead of inflation and the cost of living, can have on our communities.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to minimum wage in the Yukon, increases are standard, as the Minister for Community Services said previously. On April 1 of each year, the minimum wage rate increases by an amount corresponding to the annual increase for the preceding year in the consumer price index for the City of Whitehorse. This does allow for an annual incremental increase that ensures businesses are not burdened by large payroll increases, while keeping the minimum wage in check with inflation.

Yukon's current minimum wage, as we have heard, is \$11.32 an hour, and this is seven cents higher than the anticipated increase to British Columbia's minimum wage, which according to the Government of Canada's minimum wage database is set to reach \$11.25 in September of this year. I'm inclined to think that as closely aligned as our territory is with BC with respect to the cost of living, the seven-cent difference is not a cause to immediately initiate a review of Yukon's minimum wage in the Legislative Assembly prior to BC's wage increase.

When BC increases their minimum wage in four months' time, we will only be six months away from another standard increase to Yukon's minimum wage as well. As our government is already ahead of BC in terms of minimum wage — and this will not change with the impending provincial wage increase — Yukon businesses are currently facing an increase in costs and must find ways to make up for that change to their bottom line from the implementation of a new statutory holiday, for example. The increase in operating costs that will be experienced across the Yukon will be felt by all local businesses and this is something that we must consider when committing to undertake a review of this nature.

An increased minimum wage does have benefits. There is not a person making minimum wage in this territory who would not benefit personally from receiving a larger paycheque. Unfortunately, a number of small businesses would not be able to handle increases that go beyond the CPI for our jurisdiction. Administratively there is a cost associated with each change to minimum wage for every business. Currently business owners and operators are able to anticipate these changes as they are standard and expected, as they are tied to the CPI.

The problem of increased cost to businesses swings us back to an all familiar topic in this House — the carbon tax. Of course this will increase labour costs to businesses, which unfortunately have to be made up somehow and that's usually by passing the cost on to consumers. Additionally, there is a higher likelihood that employers with an increased payroll would be less likely to be able to offer fringe benefits that many depend on, such as sick time, bonuses or even vacation pay.

In addition to businesses feeling pressure to the bottom line, there will almost certainly be an impact on young workers trying to get entry-level positions in the workforce. When a young person gets his or her first job, they're often looking at getting their foot in the door by working for a minimum wage until they can gain experience and knowledge

to move on. For many of these workers, inexperience is common. Many live at home and go to school. Raising the minimum wage too high will have an impact on these workers. By forcing businesses to pay higher wages, you're forcing businesses to also change their hiring policies or habits to search for more experienced people to essentially get more bang for their buck, so to speak.

A report by Statistics Canada in 2014 states that the minimum wage increases seem to be associated with a decrease of employment among teenagers, but has a small to nonexistent effect on total employment.

Rather than increasing minimum wage beyond the standard increases along the CPI, government should maybe concern itself with more job creation in the private sector. By supporting private industry, providing better access to education and training programs, government would be able to help people to find or progress into better-paying jobs.

Mr. Speaker, by creating tax incentives, government would be able to save individuals and families money in different areas and allow them to live more comfortably at their current wage. By not imposing new taxes on Yukoners, government could allow families to thrive and benefit from what they earn as employees now. Creating more burden on small business by having them pay out more to individuals can create larger problems in the long run than increasing individual paycheques a few dollars at a time. Providing more opportunities for families to save and for people to excel in different areas can lead to a larger payoff for our community as a whole. This government has yet to deliver on its promise to eliminate the small business tax and in the coming years in its term, it's a great goal to make good on this commitment.

By supporting our local businesses, local businesses are able to provide more support to their employees. Our territory is already ahead of British Columbia in terms of minimum wage, so rather than jumping ahead of the system we have in place for minimum wage being indexed against the CPI, status quo might just be the best way for our territory to remain ahead. Trying to keep pace with other provinces might be putting them behind, rather than ahead for reasons I've outlined above. We are not giving our small businesses the respect and support that they deserve. By following through with the commitment to cut the small business tax, this government can start earning the trust of local businesses.

By lending support to the small business community, this government could provide some sort of relief to them in the wake of the effects that the impending carbon-tax scheme will have on their bottom line.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned by the Minister of Community Services, there are better ways to deal with this issue than by raising the minimum wage.

Ms. Hanson: It is interesting to see that both sides — the government side and the Official Opposition — speak with the same voice on this issue. It is also interesting to me that both the government and the Official Opposition have assumed what the outcome of initiating a review of Yukon's minimum wage would be, so they have assumed an end point

and then jumped to an analysis of the potential consequences of that end point.

On the government side, I find that perplexing. I have heard nothing over the last six or eight months from this government, in advance of the election and since the election, but the fact that they purport to be an evidence-based government. They make decisions based on evidence. In advance of any evidence that would be coming as the result of a review, they have concluded a whole series of things that would indicate to them that even taking that baby step of allowing a review, to initiate a review of Yukon's minimum wage — as the Member for Takhini-Kopper King said, in putting forward this motion, the New Democrats did not say we should raise the minimum wage. We did not prescribe a minimum wage. We did not prescribe, as the Minister of Community Services seems to conflate, the notion of living wage and minimum wage. We did not say that.

Of course we would aspire to think that, in a territory as abundant as this, we could contemplate working toward a living wage, and it would not put us out there with the radical left. There are municipalities and governments across this country, in North America, in Canada and the US that have done just that.

Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about anything wild and crazy here. What we are saying is that it is in the purview of us as legislators in this Assembly to initiate a review of Yukon's minimum wage. The status quo seems to work on both sides, for the Official Opposition and for the Yukon government, but I will argue that it does not work for the working person in some of the big-box stores — not just small businesses. Maybe people don't listen to the people they're talking to on their doorsteps, but there are people in this territory who are not teenagers, who are not entry-level workers, who are making minimum wage.

That's why we think that it is important to have that discussion. We don't think it's simply good enough to say that, oh well, we have a number of things and we have vague language contained in a platform around setting up some sort of review, not even talking about childcare cost — one element that struck me was some broad review of childcare and a direction with respect to Health and Social Services and the collaborative across-government approach is that we're dealing with the vulnerable.

Are we not making people more vulnerable by keeping them poor?

Mr. Speaker, we've already asked many questions in this Legislature about the approaches and the wishes of this government with respect to dealing with poverty reduction and social inclusion. It's clear that the evidence that was gathered by many, many, many non-government organizations and concerned citizens over the last 15 years — almost 17 years — going back to the early 2000s with respect to the many, many reports that were done on poverty, poverty reduction, point-in-time counts, minimum wage and living wage. Those are in evidence.

I guess the question has to become: What qualifies as evidence for the Yukon Liberal Party to accept it? Now, some

of the things I heard this afternoon from the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes very much echo some of the work of one of the experts that they've engaged to be on the Yukon financial experts panel. That should cause some of us some concern, particularly those who are working side by side and along with those people who are poor in this territory — the many representatives and NGOs. If that's the intention of the Yukon Liberal Party to follow the advice of one of those panel members who argues against any minimum wage increase in Alberta, so be it.

In putting forward this motion, which, as I said already, was not to prescribe an amount but simply to urge the government to review our minimum wage and the approaches that we take to it. I heard the Leader of the Official Opposition say, "Oh yes, well we increase it and we did increase it." The issue here, going back to the notion of having evidence, is that yes, there is an automatic indexing every April 1, but it is fundamental to any sort of base that you have to revisit every once in awhile and determine if that base is still valid in order to determine whether or not what you are increasing it by every year by the CPI is valid. What other factors are at play now that weren't at play six years ago?

At the very least, it would be interesting to see what the Employment Standards Board has recommended and, as the minister pointed out, either the board or the minister can instigate a review. I will remind this House — and some members here will remember because it was terribly embarrassing — but the Employment Standards Board of the day had recommended an increase to the minimum wage and the minister sat on it. It wasn't until we, the Official Opposition and, finally, the Employment Standards Board, said, "Minister, this is not right" — and did speak out. I hope that this government is not going down that path, which is forcing the Employment Standards Board to say that you have to do something about this. We will be interested to know when and if this government will give direction. What would be the basis for them giving direction to review the minimum wage in Yukon? It is difficult to find out what kind of direction there may be because there doesn't seem to be any minutes of the Employment Standards Board posted online.

There has been a lot of talk about the impact of increasing, or even talking about increasing, the minimum wage — that somehow this is going to be a scary tactic, a scary thing to happen. But if we aren't asking employees and employers what they feel is necessary to happen, how do we know that \$11.32 is okay? If we aren't looking across the country and at what is happening in other jurisdictions, how do we know that \$11.32 is okay? We heard again, just as the minister said a few weeks ago, that there is a policy that we should look at our minimum wage when we dropped to sixth or seventh — and now it is seventh place.

As my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King said, "Why wait when we know that \$11.32 leaves people living in poverty?" The Minister of Community Services quoted selectively from the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition's report, and he left out a number of things on the living wage. I would encourage all members — and maybe we should table that.

Maybe the Minister of Community Services will table the report from the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition from last year on the living wage. There are more factors than just those ones that he listed with respect to the issues and questions that should be asked of consumers, employers and politicians. They were talking about the living wage — the \$19.32 an hour per person for a family.

How can we sit back while working families and individuals are relying on the food bank to put food on their table? That is not the experience of anybody in this Chamber. How can we say that it is just because we aren't behind enough compared to other jurisdictions? I don't think that people get what \$11.32 an hour is.

My colleague for Takhini-Kopper King did a great job in dispelling some myths regarding the impact of increasing the minimum wage on small businesses. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's consumers, not employers, who create jobs. Minimum wage helps low-paid consumers buy more and it has, despite what we've heard so far, been dismissed by academics and is becoming mainstream that increasing the minimum wage works. It works because of the evidence, which I would think for a government that's looking for evidence, it would be something they would be looking forward to being able to use.

We have spent a fair amount of time over the last five or six years on the issues of minimum wage and living wage. From our conversations, we know that there are direct benefits to increasing the minimum wage for businesses. I want to say that I have heard from small businesses. We could even call some of them "micro businesses" as my colleague for Takhini-Kopper King identified just a couple of examples who already ensure that their staff are paid \$15 an hour — \$15 an hour, not \$11.32. Now, why would they do this? Why would they cut into their own profits? Well, we've heard that there are lots of reasons that they do so. They recognize that they save money. No longer is there a revolving door of staff — those looking for something that pays them more. They no longer have to train staff on a continual basis.

That's a cost, Mr. Speaker. Staff stick around and tend to invest more of their ideas and their own personal investment of time and energy into the business' success. Many, many small business owners have told me how expensive training can be and how much productivity is lost every time they have to hire the new person.

Probably the most important and less tangible aspect is that they believe that their staff deserve to be paid because no one who devotes 40 hours of their life to one's business should live in poverty, and that's what we're asking them to do at \$11.32 an hour.

Those small business owners recognize that in order for them to have staff that are happy in their jobs, they need to be paid a reasonable wage, not a poverty wage. But we should also be looking at what the reality is in jurisdictions that have raised their minimum wages. Again, before we jump to the conclusion that we don't need to do this or that there is no evidence to support it or that we shouldn't even consider a review — a simple discussion about: Well, were there massive

layoffs? Did businesses close? Reliable studies have shown that it just didn't happen.

Mr. Speaker, I went and looked at a couple of — there have been studies and studies and meta-studies, which are studies of studies, on minimum wage issues across this country. My colleague for Takhini-Kopper King talked about some of the issues that arose when the provincial government in Alberta announced as part of its platform — so it was an election commitment that it had made to the citizens of Alberta — that it would in fact raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. We've heard many dire predictions, dire warnings of massive job losses and impending economic doom. A paper by Ian Hussey said that — and I'm quoting: "The problem for critics of the minimum wage is neither history nor academic research backs these notions up" of massive job losses and impending economic doom. "The Canadian Federation of Independent Business made the bold prediction that the government of Alberta's \$15 per hour pledge would cost the province" between 53,500 and 195,000 jobs.

Now I've heard the members from the Official Opposition quoting the CFIB many times, so basically they believe that almost half of the Alberta workers currently making less than \$15 per hour would be unemployed. Their prediction of massive job losses, according to Mr. Hussey, is based on a report published in 2011 that misinterpreted the economic research on minimum wage — and this is where it becomes important that when we're talking about statistics and reports that are put out, we actually look at what is comparing apples to apples and not apples to oranges.

I'm quoting here: "However, the weight of the academic evidence finds no negative impact of minimum-wage increases on the employment levels..." — and this is where the meta-studies come to the conclusion that of the 64 minimum-wage studies — so this is not something that there is no evidence on. There is no lack of research on minimum wages and studies that have been done.

One meta study of 64 minimum-wage studies published between 1972 and 2007 — these researchers took the almost 1,500 employment estimates and they looked at 1,500 employment estimates in the studies and weighed the estimates by their statistical precision and they found that the most precise estimates were heavily clustered at near-zero or zero employment effects. In other words, the most precise estimates point toward minimum-wage increases having no or near-zero effect on employment. So when somebody says, as the Leader of the Official Opposition says, that it is going to decrease jobs, it doesn't wash.

We heard a lot earlier about how this — the notion of somebody working at a recreational centre — and I have done that. We all did that as a young teenager or whatever. Those are good entry-level jobs, but that is not the majority of people who are in minimum-wage jobs, including in Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, that is one of the common mistakes, I think, of minimum-wage opponents, or even those being asked to consider reviewing whether we should increase our minimum wage — that it mostly applies to teenagers. That's not true and

my colleague from Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes outlined that already for this House.

It's difficult to understand, when we look the reality in the territory of a person earning \$11.32 an hour, working full-time, working 37.5 hours a week, they are going to have about \$425 a week. That is almost \$1,700 a month. That's \$22,000 a year and that is before any deductions.

One of the things — when the Minister of Community Services was talking about the living wage discussion that has been ongoing for a number of years and focused last year when the Anti-Poverty Coalition put forward its report — is that there are tools — and the Anti-Poverty Coalition did identify that there are tools — that would help reduce the level of living wage required if the Government of Yukon chose to do it. One of those was, for example, if the lowest income tax rate — as we have said in this Legislative Assembly, the Yukon is leading in terms of lowest income — the \$44,700 and the taxation rate that is paid on that, we are leading in terms of the amount that we expect people to pay. If we reduced that just to five percent, as opposed to the close-to-six percent that it is, it would reduce the living wage by 20 cents. If we made an investment that was significant in social housing, it would reduce the living wage by \$1.55. Those are factors, but those are not things that we're talking about. Housing for the vulnerable is one thing, but that's not going to help the person who is earning the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, what we have asked for today is a willingness and openness of this Legislative Assembly to review, not to prescribe what it should be or that there should be a change in minimum wage, but to be open to having that question.

Surely if a government can't have that open discussion, then it's not worthy of being a democratic government, because you are telling us, as citizens, what is good for us, and that's what we lived with for 14 years under the Yukon Party. That's why there was a change in government. People thought we were getting a government that was open to listening and that said, "You will be heard." I think Yukon citizens are expecting to be heard by this government.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, she will close debate on this motion.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. White: I was sitting here and thinking about the times I have been in this Chamber and been disappointed. I'm disappointed right now.

The first Sitting we had in the 33rd Legislative Assembly, I put forward a motion about working together to develop a housing strategy for all Yukoners. This was in 2011 when the housing crisis was at its absolute peak. The language was changed to say "implement its housing strategy". The first nine days on the job, my heart broke, and I thought, oh my God, how can I do this job for five years?

You kind of have to get over it, because the idea of apologizing to 35,000 people and quitting to 1,300 people just wasn't an option.

We had other tough debates, and the Premier is going to remember the first time we brought forward National Aboriginal Day. It was soul destroying.

We brought forward motions about truth and reconciliation and making sure information was available, and that was hard. It turns out that today is equally hard.

It's fascinating to me — and this information is all available online — that we're sitting in this Chamber where our base salary is \$76,725. We get an expense allowance of \$14,763. A minister earns an additional \$41,341, as does the Leader of the Official Opposition. And we're going to sit here and we're going to say that we don't have the will to ask for a review of minimum wage — that, with the money that we earn, we're going to tell people who are in this lived reality that, right now, the status quo is enough and that right now, between the Liberals and the Yukon Party, you found a point to agree on, and that's that. Right now, the status quo for minimum wage is okay.

The NDP — we started working at soup kitchens, and we do the orphan Sunday, so every fifth Sunday of the month. That's at the Sacred Heart Cathedral. When we started there, there were 50 people who would come, and then a year or two into it, there were 70 people, and then the demographics started to change.

It wasn't people who were homeless who were coming; it was people who were the working poor. We saw people bringing in their families; we saw kids accessing the soup kitchen on Sundays. You realize that the issue is bigger and poverty is a bigger issue in the territory than you want to admit.

It's interesting to know that, right now, when the vote comes, it's going to be really hard. But you know what? I know that when the Member for Whitehorse Centre and I continue to work at the soup kitchen, when we continue to attend community events where we hear the stories of people working on minimum wage, I won't have to look away.

I am not going to be embarrassed about where I stood on this issue because this is more than talking about young workers in entry-level positions. You look across jurisdictions and we have the division between entry-level minimum wage and up, and we have seen the problems that it creates, and it is that older workers get left behind.

What we were asking for was for a review prior to what was going to happen in BC in September. What we heard here today is that it's really not required yet. We heard from the Minister of Community Services that they are committed to social housing and the costs of daycare. Well, right now there are more than 100 people on the wait-list for social housing. Then we heard about Housing First, and that's fantastic. I look forward to when that facility is constructed, but we still haven't had a timeline for that. Clients for social housing are not who we are talking about.

We heard the Leader of the Official Opposition talk about tax breaks. Well, I also remember the time when we brought forward a motion to increase the kids recreation fund. That was to allow families to access more money for recreation for their children, and that motion got morphed into a tax break

for families who could afford to spend more than \$1,000 on their kids' recreation in a year. What did it do? It left behind the poor. It didn't allow them to increase their ability for their kids to access activities, but it did definitely help people who could help themselves. That was hard. There have been a lot of hard days here, it turns out.

I'm going to put it out one more time. I'm going to ask the members across the way to reconsider. What we are asking for is a review of the minimum wage. We haven't set out or prescribed how that is going to happen. The Yukon Bureau of Statistics doesn't have information available online right now for me to be able to use those numbers.

The Member for Porter Creek Centre talked about the employment rates, but unfortunately, that same statistical information doesn't include how many people earn minimum wage and what demographic they are in. That is part of the problem.

I hope that my colleagues will reconsider where they stand on the issue because it is a lot bigger than even we can talk about here.

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: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Disagree.

Mr. Gallina: Disagree.

Mr. Adel: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Mr. Hutton: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are two yea, 16 nay.

Speaker: The nays have it. I declare the motion negatived.

Motion No. 50 negatived

Speaker: Are there any further motions other than government motions?

Motion No. 78

Clerk: Motion No. 78, standing in the name of Mr. Cathers.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments be mandated to conduct a review of building standards and inspections, including:

(1) assessing the consistency in interpretation of legislation and regulations by building inspectors;

(2) reviewing the *Building Standards Act* and regulations, and recommending changes that would improve customer service, including, but not limited to, ensuring the appeal process is timely and effective;

(3) recommending changes to improve access to service for people in rural Yukon;

(4) recommending changes to make it easier for home builders, including reducing paperwork and red tape; and

(5) investigating whether further improvements can be made to make it easier for Yukoners to build log homes;

THAT the committee report to the House its findings and recommendations no later than November 1, 2017; and

THAT if the House is not sitting at such time as the committee is prepared to present its report, the committee Chair shall transmit the committee's report to the Speaker, who shall transmit the report to all Members of the Legislative Assembly and then, not more than one day later, release the report to the public.

Mr. Cathers: In rising to speak to this motion, I would like to begin by noting that, as my colleagues and I have indicated to the government and to members of the Third Party on several occasions, we believe that some of the issues that we have heard from Yukoners about building inspections, as well as issues that were discovered as a result of review by the Department of Community Services, of 9.36 of the National Building Code and the information we heard from the special advisory committee that was composed of Yukon citizens, including home builders — both log-home builders and non — and energy-efficiency experts and other contractors, the information that we received out of that consultation with them and that they heard from the public has helped to inform the approach that we're arguing and encouraging government to take.

As both my colleagues in the Official Opposition and I have noted to government members on several occasions, this is an area where we're happy to work with government in addressing and modernizing some of the areas within building standards. We are happy to work with — I believe that working in an all-party manner would be productive and effective. Of course if the government is not willing to accept this request, we will continue to bring forward issues on the floor of the Legislative Assembly until changes are made in this area.

As the motion urges, we believe that there are several systemic issues at play in this area and note — I want to be very clear in prefacing my comments by saying that we're not criticizing staff of the department. We are, however, pointing to some of the areas for policy and systemic improvement within this structure. We know that as department staff determine when the issues around section 9.36 of the National

Building Code — those being the parts pertaining to energy efficiency — when those provisions effectively overnight made it extremely difficult for log-home builders to get buildings permitted across the Yukon, one of the things that we heard from department staff after they had reviewed this area is that part of the problem in some of the situations was not just the specific wording of 9.36 of the National Building Code, but inconsistency in how different inspectors were interpreting it.

Part of what we are arguing for in this motion is that, if the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments is mandated to conduct a review of building standards and inspections, among the areas that are looked at is assessing the consistency and interpretation of legislation and regulations by building inspectors. In fact, through that, we are suggesting that the appropriate approach would be both hearing from Yukon citizens — including in the contracting and home-building community and from individuals, as well as from department staff — about where they believe there is room for improvement and what the best way of ensuring that consistency and oversight for that would be.

As well, as noted in the motion and as I noted previously in Question Period on May 17, there is an appeal structure within the *Building Standards Act*. Sections 6 and 7 set out the powers of the Building Standards Board, which include the ability for a person to appeal a decision by a building inspector. However, as of last year when we discussed this with officials prior to the election, the board had never heard a single appeal despite having been in place for decades. Clearly, to us, that demonstrates that the appeal process needs changes to make it workable, timely and effective. While this came to our attention during the work that was done by the Department of Community Services along with the working group that advised us — the special advisory committee on log-home building and energy-efficiency standards — this came out at that point in time. The preliminary work had begun prior to the election on looking at this area, including how to make the appeal process work more effectively as well as addressing the fact that the board didn't actually have an honorarium structure in place. If they were to meet to hear an appeal, they wouldn't be compensated for that. These are a number of areas that, due to the age of the original structure of this legislation, we believe there is room for improvement.

We also believe that a reason for doing this through an all-party approach rather than having government simply conduct a review is that the information that we as MLAs — especially those of us who represent rural ridings — have heard from constituents about their specific concerns with building inspections would help to inform that review. Dealing with it through an all-party committee would make it a more collegial approach than bringing forward these issues as problems in the Legislative Assembly. Those issues include changes to improve access to services for people in rural Yukon and recommending changes to make it easier for home builders, including reducing paperwork and red tape. As well, as identified in the motion that I tabled here in the Assembly with the support of my colleagues in the Official Opposition,

we believe that there should be additional discussions looking at whether there are further improvements that can be made to make it easier to build a log home.

For the information of members who may not understand our point in that area, we are referring to not just the energy-efficiency part, which we responded to and made changes to address, but simply the process by which structures are permitted, assessed and so on, because log homes are a little more complex to build often, and to permit as a result, than some other structures.

As I mentioned to the Minister of Community Services on May 17 in questions, among the areas we have heard concerns on is that we have heard from three separate sets of constituents where in two cases, according to their side of the story, they believe they were evicted, or had to evict tenants, as a result of orders issued by the building inspectors. I note that, in those areas — of course, I haven't heard the other side of the situation. I have seen copies of those orders, which were posted, and, in the most recent case — the third situation — I had a couple who are very concerned about the situation they are currently facing — in a meeting with me just last week, after they reached out to me via e-mail. I would like to acknowledge the fact that, after I raised this issue with the Minister of Community Services, he has agreed to meet with me and this couple who contacted me, later this week.

I want to also note that the reason we're bringing this motion forward today is that this is not just about individual casework that we're talking about. Recognizing the complexity that can exist in some of these situations, we believe the systemic issues are better dealt with through an all-party committee working with officials and listening to Yukon citizens who are affected by this, so we can hear all sides of the situation and come forward, hopefully, with shared recommendations by all members of the committee and all three parties that will allow us to improve the system and do so in as productive and collegial a manner as possible.

I would also like to note that, as I mentioned, this goes beyond individual cases. It is systemic. It's an area of the act and regulations that need modernization, some of which were identified during the tail end of the last mandate and some of which have come to light since then. We believe that the fact that the building standards appeal committee has not actually ever heard a single appeal, based on the information we had from officials last year, demonstrates that this appeal process is not functioning effectively.

We also believe that the fact that I and my colleagues, especially those of us who are rural MLAs, have heard from many constituents who had concerns both large and small with building inspections demonstrates that there is not as much customer satisfaction in this area as we believe there can and should be. Recognizing that officials do their job within the structure that they have — again I want to emphasize this is not intended as a criticism of those officials, but recognizing that, depending on the inspection mandate they have and the tools they have under the act and regulations, as well as their expectations under their policy determine how they would respond to a situation.

In this case — as I mentioned, through three cases of tenants being evicted as a result of inspectors' orders — and in situations like that, let me go on record as saying that I believe that no one should ever be evicted from their home, whether they own the home or are tenants, due to minor building code issues or technical permit issues. I believe that an eviction should only occur or a cease-occupancy order should only occur if there is an urgent life or safety issue. However, that being said, I think that both the act and the regulations need to be modified to ensure that inspectors have the proper tools available to issue a compliance order requiring someone who is not complying with the regulations to bring that accommodation up to code and to set out a reasonable time limit for doing so.

I also believe that there may need to be a discussion of whether additional fines should be put into place as an alternative to the current order to cease occupancy so that we can strike the right balance of protecting public safety and ensuring adherence to the building code while also ensuring that no one is ever put out on the street because of anything other than an urgent life or safety issue within the building code but that, in doing so, the structure that is put into place doesn't become one that makes it easier for builders to beg forgiveness than ask permission. I recognize that there may need to be a look at whether additional fine provisions would occur in a case of non-compliance that would currently be dealt with by inspectors through ordering someone to cease occupying the building immediately.

Those are a few of the things that we're suggesting. Again, we hope the government will support this. Of course, if they are not willing to support this approach, we will continue raising these issues but, as I stated both at the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments and in debate with the Premier, as well as to the Minister of Community Services both in and outside this House, we do see this as an opportunity to work together in a collegial manner. We think that the experience that we have, especially those of us who are rural MLAs, and from what we've heard from constituents both recently and over the years would help strengthen that review and would make it a less adversarial process for not only the staff of the department in terms of responding to the concerns we bring forward but especially for the elected members of the government that they would find it, we believe, a much more constructive and effective manner for sitting around the table together discussing problems that we've heard and potential solutions to those problems.

Some of the other areas that I've heard specific concerns about from constituents and other Yukoners include the challenge that those within the agriculture sector are having on getting buildings permitted. One example of this is a situation that came to our attention just prior to the election of someone wanting to build a building here in the Yukon that is available for sale in Alberta. If they were a farmer located in the Province of Alberta — because that structure is pre-fabricated and is available for purchase — they would have simply been able to purchase it and assemble it themselves.

Yet here, there was the additional requirement for further certification by a structural engineer.

I have also heard a list of other areas from constituents and others about problems in getting everything from barns to other agricultural facilities permitted because the Yukon does not have an agriculture-specific section to the building code like some other jurisdictions do. In some cases, while these structures have either been eventually permitted or maybe moving toward it, they faced significant red tape and delays in terms of the department reviewing these structures because — in fairness to staff of building inspections — in some cases, they may be reviewing a type of structure that they have never actually dealt with before and they need to familiarize themselves with it because of the specifics of that issue.

This includes a long list of issues and while it may sound either esoteric or technical to members, I would note that in one case, I have heard from a constituent who tells me that because of this, he believes that he spent at least \$30,000 more in building a facility than he would have been required to if he were building it in a jurisdiction such as the Province of Alberta or Saskatchewan. Those types of costs, especially in the Yukon agriculture sector — considering the size of the market — are significant in nature. There have been other issues related to homes, including temporary shelters and tiny homes, both on wheels and not on wheels.

We have again heard many concerns of people about the delays and timeliness of reviews of applications, again noting that this is a systemic criticism, not a criticism directed at staff. We believe there are also solutions to this.

We should also note, as the government is considering whether they wish to support this or not, that one of the concerns with the approach suggested by the minister in response to me on May 17 is that the minister invited me to bring forward specific concerns via caseworks and to bring forward those issues in that manner. I would note to the minister that while emphatically emphasizing that I am not personally saying staff would do this, a concern I have heard from a number of people on repeated occasions is that because of the current structure and lack of functioning appeal, they are concerned that if they complain about it, it may lead to them having more difficulty in dealing with inspectors in the future because they don't have the confidence that the structure, as it's currently set up, might not lead to punitive actions in the future.

Again, I want to emphasize that I am not personally casting that criticism toward staff, but noting that has come up repeatedly as a concern that undermines public confidence in the option presented by the minister of writing about the specifics of their situation to their MLA and having their MLA raise it with the minister. That is one of the reasons underlining the approach of why we're suggesting a review of this system — a systemic change — and that steps be taken to ensure that there is an appeal process that is both timely and effective for Yukoners who have concerns with a decision of the building inspectors.

There are a number of possible ways that could change. We're not, at this point, here to propose specific models,

although we do have some suggestions if the members of the government are interested in that. But again, rather than spending too long debating specific options or proposals or debating the facts of any specific case or complaint that we've had, we believe that these matters would be best dealt with in a constructive all-party setting, similar to committees, for example, like the all-party committee on anti-smoking or the all-party committee on off-road vehicles. In those cases, both committees were committees I was a member of. Those all-party committees not only did effective work and reached out to Yukoners and heard from Yukoners, but were able to reach unanimous agreement across party lines on what to recommend to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just trying to see if I have missed mentioning any of my notes. The other thing I would just like to mention is that the reason we proposed the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments be mandated to do this work is, in fact — though the committee, because of the structure of the original motion appointing it, would not be able to review legislation and regulations that are already in place — we have confirmed with the Legislative Assembly office staff that it is completely in order for us to propose via a motion in the Legislative Assembly that the committee be mandated to conduct a review of existing regulations and legislation, and to make recommendations on that should this motion pass in the Legislative Assembly.

As far as the proposed reporting date — included within the motion — of November 1, 2017 — if the government has an alternate suggestion for that, we are open to it. The date of November 1 was our sense of what would be a reasonable amount of time for the committee to do its work. As previous members of the Assembly will know, and new members who have read up on previous legislative assemblies may also be aware, it is certainly possible for a committee to seek an amendment to their reporting date if the committee agrees that more time is necessary to do their work. Should the government wish to propose a different end date, we would certainly be amendable to it.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister of Community Services and members of the government and note that while we do hope they will choose to support this all-party approach, as we think it is both the most effective and the most collegial way to address this situation, they should be aware that if they are not amenable to it, we will continue to raise the concerns we have heard from Yukoners about building standards and inspections until those problems are fully resolved. We believe that will require changes to the *Building Standards Act* and the regulations, including the establishment of an effective appeal process that is both timely and effective. We believe it will include as well making changes — some may be regulatory, some may be legislative and some may be in terms of policy or systems — that will make it easier for home builders and for people in rural Yukon. I would note to members that I have heard positive comments in this area from Yukon log-home builders who I have reached out to that they are interested as well in seeing additional changes made to make it easier to build log

homes. While we haven't heard the current government's views on it, I hope that they will support the decision that we made previously to continue to recognize the value of log-home construction.

I will state my personal view that log homes built from locally sourced logs and built by Yukoners or with local labour — in my view, there is no greener or more environmentally responsible choice for log-home construction. While I would not go to the extent of suggesting that government should make it more difficult to permit homes built out of non-renewable materials or those sourced from Outside, I do think that the government should always be looking for ways to make it easier to build log homes to an appropriate standard, of course, that are structurally safe. Encouraging and making it easier for log-home builders is something that has a net benefit to the territory and is a good example of a way that Yukoners and the Yukon government can reduce the environmental footprint for log-home construction, increase the amount of economic benefit that is seen here within the territory and employ Yukon citizens in doing so.

I want to note, as I missed it in my notes, that in terms of an enforcement process for issues of non-compliance with building inspectors' decisions, we also believe that it would be appropriate for government and for the all-party Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments to take a look at how Building Inspections is currently responding to issues of non-compliance and move toward a model more similar to that used by Compliance Monitoring and Inspections, which is — as noted on their literature, including their poster board set up at their booth at the gold show last weekend — to educate, encourage and enforce. The expectation within that branch has been that they educate people on what their responsibilities are. If they discover an issue of non-compliance, they then encourage them to comply and, only if it's necessary, take enforcement action because the person is not voluntarily coming in compliance should they do so.

I will give one more example of how a different branch of the government would respond to a situation of non-compliance with regulations based on an actual example within an area dealt with by Land Planning branch — again noting, based on what I've heard from constituents, that they feel that, without notice, there were three cases where people were effectively kicked out of their homes almost on the spot as the result of an order to cease occupancy and a threat by the inspector that, if they didn't comply, the power could be shut off by order of Building Inspections.

In a comparable situation, there was an issue in the always publicly controversial Takhini Hot Springs site within my riding on one of their lots where there was a complaint made by residents about a dwelling that they believed was being occupied contrary to the development agreement between the Land Planning branch director and the owner of Takhini Hot Springs.

Upon investigation, staff determined that indeed one of the residences was being occupied in contravention of that development agreement. In that specific case, while the owner

was directed to rectify the issue of non-compliance, they were also given a number of months to do so in recognition, I believe at least, by the staff of Land Planning branch that an immediate enforcement of that development agreement would have resulted in a family being put on the street, so they chose to balance the interest and concerns of neighbours and the protection of the law by providing reasonable opportunity for the owner to address an issue of non-compliance and providing reasonable opportunity for the affected tenants to seek alternate accommodation.

I would note, as the minister will hear — and I'm not going to get into the specifics of any individual case matters in the House here. The Minister of Community Services will have the opportunity to hear from the two constituents we have a meeting with on Friday, and I do thank the minister for agreeing to that meeting. In their case, they have told me that they did not have prior warning that the order was coming to cease occupancy and that they are now put into a situation where they are having a great deal of difficulty finding an alternative house they can afford to rent.

The point I want to emphasize in this is that — as government is looking at areas such as their commitments around looking at a Housing First strategy and looking at reducing homelessness and increasing affordable housing — building inspections is part of the puzzle. If actions are taken — even if those actions are well-intentioned by inspectors — that have a negative effect on tenants, it can create unintended hardship for those people, as I believe it has in this case, based on what my constituents have told me in this situation.

In situations like that, I believe — and I think I speak on behalf of the Official Opposition in stating that — in issues of that type, we believe there should be an appropriate time for compliance to occur within and that steps other than immediate evictions should be taken, unless there are urgent safety or health issues at play that do require an immediate response by inspectors.

With that, I will wrap up my remarks. I hope members of the government will choose to support this motion and recognize that where this comes from is a very genuine and sincere concern on behalf of a number of me and my colleagues who have heard a number of concerns from constituents regarding the structure and the way by which Building Inspections operates — everything from issuing permits to doing inspections. We recognize that many of those are structural in nature and, without that structural change, inspectors are left operating within the structure that they now have.

We believe there is a significant opportunity for systemic improvement. We would be more than happy to be a part of helping the government work through both the problems and potential solutions, and we hope they will choose to support this motion and result in the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments — the longest dormant committee on the Legislative Assembly's books — being reinvigorated and investigating an area in a collaborative manner where we believe there is potential opportunity for all-party agreement on recommendations to make the system work better for

Yukon citizens and a reflection of a modernization approach in recognition of changes since the original act and regulations were put into place.

With that, I will conclude my remarks and commend this motion to the House.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I rise today to speak to Motion No. 78 and to thank the Member for Lake Laberge for bringing it forward.

First off, I want to talk about building safety generally, and then I hope to address some of the specific questions raised by the member opposite. The National Building Code of Canada, at its core, provides for the safety of building occupants. Mandatory minimum building codes are the most effective and least expensive way to protect public health and safety. While Yukoners may debate over the applicability of codes, we must adhere to the codes when it comes to matters relating to life safety.

The permitting and inspection process is required for all dwellings to ensure that both current and future occupants are safe — safe from fire, carbon monoxide, building collapse, electrocution, et cetera; safe because fuel-fired appliances are inspected; safe because building occupants have more than one way to get out in an emergency; safe because detectors and alarms are installed; and safe because electrical wiring is inspected. The Yukon has a strong building safety regime that saves lives. The process does require paperwork and it requires some effort and scheduling on the part of the homeowner or builder to fulfill the permit and inspection process.

The Building Safety and Standards office works with property owners to ensure homes and businesses meet codes and standards for public health and safety, fire, structural safety, and environmental and property protection. The Building Safety and Standards office is responsible for permits and inspections, whose purpose is to ensure that safety codes are applied throughout the territory.

I spoke with the department following the member opposite's questions last week. If my recollection is correct, it was one week ago that the member raised questions here in the Legislature during Question Period. I asked the department to give me a sense of the quantity of inspections carried out each year in the territory. Last year, in 2016, inspectors completed over 5,300 inspections: 940-plus building inspections, 2,800 electrical inspections, 200-plus plumbing inspections, 450-plus oil heating inspections, 120-plus boiler inspections, just shy of 80 elevator inspections, and over 680 gas inspections.

Unlike in the south, in the Yukon building codes and safety standards apply to all, and the member opposite noted that situation here. This includes self-governing and non-settled First Nations, rural and municipal. The National Building Code applies to all residences regardless of size and location. In addition to protecting occupants, the National Building Code protects local companies and qualified tradespeople by laying out clear objectives and requirements

by adopting updated codes. There is no competitive market disadvantage for code-compliant homes.

Building codes also protect the owners from unnecessary cost from wasted energy, wasted water, design flaws or improper installation, and even from disasters. Application of the National Building Code of Canada and, as a result, the National Fire Code, is essential to save buildings.

I would like to turn to address some of the points that were raised in the motion by the member opposite. I will leave the process parts of the question — first of all, the first point raised about assessing the consistency and interpretation of legislation and regulations by building inspectors. Of course we seek to be consistent in the interpretation of legislation and regulations. Consistency is important, and while I believe there is generally consistency in the application of the legislation and regulations, I have noted that we do need to assess and evaluate in an ongoing way. That is critical.

When the department or I, as minister, hear concerns raised about building inspections in this House, or from members of the public who call me or department staff, we use these moments as opportunities to assess consistency and fairness of implementation of the legislation and regulations. We use both an ongoing methodology and an as-requested methodology to assess and evaluate the legislation and regulations.

Last week, the member opposite — when he raised the specific concerns, I encouraged him to do so to me directly as minister of the department so that we could work on them. In fact, I did follow up with him, as he noted, following the questions in the Legislature, and sought to establish a meeting, again as he noted, with his constituents.

I would like to point out that the service standard for building inspections is very high. The department has nine full-time inspectors and one half-time inspector and, as I stated, had over 5,000 in-person interactions with the public in an enforcement capacity last year. This number would be substantially higher if we were to add the interactions that our inspectors undertake to educate and inform builders and the general public on the phone and through e-mails.

With over 5,000 interactions with the public every year, there are times when people are not happy with the response they receive from building inspectors. They may feel at times that regulations designed to protect their well-being and the safety of their family, tenants or future buyers should not apply under a particular set of circumstances such as location, building size or building materials. Inspectors do listen and do educate and do work with clients and wherever possible, they try to find ways within the codes for projects to move ahead.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that there is some, at times, dissatisfaction with the building inspections office; however, the customer service provided by the Building Safety and Standards office at this scale is actually quite commendable.

On to the point raised in the motion to review the *Building Standards Act* regulations and make recommendations for changes to improve customer service and ensuring that the appeal process is timely and effective — we support continuous improvement in customer service and

to ensure that the appeal process is effective within the department. An official review of the act and regulations is not scheduled at this time; however, there remain other ways to ensure continuous improvement and we will focus on working collaboratively with officials and with members opposite and listen to comments from the public to achieve this objective.

On the point of recommending improved access to service for people in rural Yukon, as part of our commitment to local solutions for local communities, we want to ensure that residents in rural Yukon have access to these services. I note that two building inspectors live and work in rural Yukon — one in Watson Lake and one in Dawson. They work specifically in rural communities. It is important that we balance staffing levels with demand for services, yet we will always work to assess whether we have a fair balance across all communities.

On the points of making it easier for home builders to reduce paperwork and red tape, and also on the point of log-home builders, this is an issue which has been brought forward both in our platform — to reduce red tape — and I have been directed to work with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and with the Minister of Highways and Public Works to find ways to reduce red tape, including around building inspections. Recently, this was an issue that was brought forward from the Association of Yukon Communities at their recent AGM. They passed a resolution about owner-built homes — which is more than log homes, but includes log homes — and encouraging us, the Yukon government, to acknowledge the unique circumstances with owner-built homes. I fully intend to work on how to ensure that owner-built homes are treated fairly and consistently within the building inspection process.

Our government is also committed to reducing red tape and having a responsive regulatory environment. Again, we need to balance these requests with ensuring that the National Building Code and safety standards are consistent and fairly applied. As I said before, we are always aiming to continuously improve our processes and ensure that we become more efficient in service delivery and excel at customer service. We want to facilitate local home building, but we also need to apply the act and regulations consistently, so we work continuously to find that balance.

Now I wish to address the issue of the basis of the motion and using the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments to perform a review. I believe that the place to address the concerns of the member opposite is through the department and through my office as Minister of Community Services. It is my understanding that the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments does not have the authority to do what the mover of the motion is asking. I will try to address his point that we can, by motion here, create a new mandate. The Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments has not met in many years. I don't believe that it met during the entire time the previous Yukon Party government was in office during the past 14 years. It is interesting to see the Yukon Party now showing an interest in the committee.

Under the last Yukon Party government, appointments were made, but the committee itself never actually met. It appears that the previous government did not see value in this committee. I am pleased to note that this body has had its first meeting in many years earlier this spring. This committee can serve a role related to accountability of government. When this Chamber provides for regulation-making powers and bills, we as legislators are delegating this authority to Cabinet.

The Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments is available to ensure that, in making regulations, Cabinet stays within its authority. The Legislative Assembly website states — and I quote: “The Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments has the authority to review any regulation that comes into effect after the committee is formed. The Legislative Assembly may also refer existing or proposed regulations to this committee for review.”

I think the member opposite referred to it as the longest dormant committee that we have and noted that we could mandate it by motion here. I will try to speak to that in a moment. The motion today makes a specific request to review legislation, which is not the mandate of the committee. It is regulation.

The Department of Community Services, which carries out inspections under the *Building Standards Act*, is constantly looking to improve the consistency of their inspections. That is the most appropriate avenue for addressing this issue. It is certainly outside the mandate and jurisdiction of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member opposite has offered to work in a collegial way, and I commend that. I am also working to work openly with members opposite.

The member opposite referred to this situation we're facing as systemic. If it is a systemic issue, then surely it has been a systemic issue for some time; thus it is interesting to note that now the proposal is to use the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments. I would prefer to start with working within the department. I invite all members here, and the public, to approach if they have concerns with the building standards department.

My reason for saying this is that when issues are raised to me, I will work diligently to see that they are addressed, as I have done. It was one week ago today that the member opposite raised concerns to me about some residents within his riding, and that day, I reached out to him to encourage him to approach me, to meet with those people and to address those issues. We have set up a meeting for a couple of days from now.

That is a fair process. We do support the concept of all-party committees; however, I'm not sure that is the right approach at this point. If we attempted to address some of the concerns that are raised and saw that there is a systemic issue, as the member opposite believes, then I think there might be an opportunity to raise the issue and address it further. However, at this point, we are not supporting the motion because we don't believe that it is the right methodology. However, I wish to emphasize that, as the Minister of

Community Services, I remain open to all members of this Legislature and their constituents. If they have concerns, they can raise them to me and I will work with the department to see that there is a fair and efficient process at work for those constituents.

At this point, I don't have the evidence in front of me that would alert me to the challenge the member opposite has raised in this House. I prefer not to use this Legislature as a place in which to address specific concerns, so I do encourage them to be raised through the department and through me, if needed. Through that, if we do identify systemic problems that we are not able to address through our ongoing processes, then I will happily reconsider the member opposite's suggestion.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the Member for Lake Laberge for bringing this motion forward this afternoon. I appreciate there are a number of issues he has identified in this motion with respect to addressing the concerns that, in fact, I have heard that member raise in various ways over the last number of years in this Legislative Assembly. I would have to concur to a certain extent with the Minister of Community Services that it's a little strange that it has taken to this time to bring them forward to suggest this means for addressing these issues. There are a number of areas within the member's motion that resonate with a motion that was put forward as I think the Minister of Community Services alluded to — a motion that came from the Village of Haines Junction last week at the annual meeting of the AYC. In the Sunday morning debate or discussion of those various motions, the ones that most directly touched on this were the issues raised by the Member for Lake Laberge when he talked about the inspections process and various suggestions about recommendations on changes to improve customer service, including, but not limited to, a timely appeal process and an effective appeal process.

The context of the discussion that I heard in Faro was really around the issues of improving communication between those who are involved in building homes and Community Services.

I have notes in the margin from just listening to people speaking and one person speaking said: "We're not trying to ignore or replace the National Building Code. We are asking Community Services to streamline the process." They said they want Community Services to be more proactive.

This had a lot to do with issues of communication with respect to, as I think the minister referred to, the discussion of owner-built homes and the real concern that there is a lack of communication and they're asking Community Services to basically put in an automated bring-forward system. If you have somebody who has an annual inspection required, which you do under the building permit, rather than waiting until it expires and then saying, "Whoops, it's expired; you have to go back to zero and start all over again", simply let them know that their permit is coming to an expiry date and that then creates less of a negative — reduces the potential for conflict and gives them, as they said, what they were asking

for in the note — they're asking for latitude and asking the Building Safety branch to make the system more user-friendly and simple. Make it user-friendly and don't wait until it's an issue. Don't wait until you have a confrontation.

I think that, although well-meaning in its intent, I think the motion as structured is way too complex. It may have some built-in inconsistencies in terms of what outcome might be achieved through the process, not the least of which is, I think, the timeline that is being proposed here is unreasonably short. It's in the middle of a construction season, so many of the people who you would want to consult or see consulted would not be available. One would presume that the committee would be calling upon expertise to assist with this. Where would that be coming from? None of this has been identified.

It veers from being general to being very prescriptive with "THAT" and "THAT" at the end of the motion. I think that although there is a combination of having sort of a general statement about what might be needed, to making quite specific recommendations in terms of changes to improve access — so it's already suggesting what needs to be fixed before even concluding an objective assessment of the scope of the problem.

There may be further or different improvements that are needed, but we also think that some of that needs to, as part of a systemic review — it's one of the reasons why we have within government the Internal Audit Unit. We talked yesterday in the debate of Executive Council Office about the various audits that can be done that will help improve the functioning of each department. There are a number of bodies and entities that would normally be involved and appear before a committee that aren't referenced here.

I think that the intentions of the member are laudable, but I don't think that this motion would achieve what he is hoping for and so for that reason, we will not be supporting the motion.

Mr. Adel: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Motion No. 78. As the Minister of Community Services has indicated, we on this side of the House will not be supporting the motion. The place to address the concerns of the member opposite is through the minister's office. His motion does not fit the purview of this committee. This motion was tabled just this week. It has not had time to run through the minister's office to address these concerns in a timely manner and that would certainly, in our opinion, be a much better way to do it.

It's very interesting to see the member opposite using Wednesday afternoon to try to set the agenda for the standing committee. It's not clear to me why the member opposite didn't just put this on the agenda for the next meeting of the committee. It has also noted, for the public record, the member opposite's dissatisfaction with the work of Yukon building inspectors. Clearly he has no confidence in the work they do. Last week, it was the employees of the Department of Finance; this week, it's the building inspectors; and before that, it was the lawyers in the Justice department. Then there

are the judges. There's a pattern of criticism here that has not gone unnoticed.

Just to repeat some of the things that the Minister of Community Services said just for the record, the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments hasn't met in many years. I don't believe it met during the entire time the previous Yukon government was in office — over 14 years.

It's odd to see the Yukon Party suddenly showing an interest in the committee. Under the last Yukon Party government, appointments were made, but the committee never actually met. Clearly the previous government did not see the value in this committee.

I am pleased to note that this body had its first meeting in many years, early this spring. Given the length of time since this committee has met, it is important to refresh all members about what the mandate of this committee actually is. The committee can serve a role related to accountability of government where the Chamber provides for regulation-making powers in bills, as we legislators are delegating the authority to Cabinet. The Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments is available to ensure that in making regulations, the Cabinet stays within the authority.

Our Legislative Assembly website says — and I quote: “The Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments has the authority to review any regulation that comes into effect after the committee is formed. The Legislative Assembly may also refer existing or proposed regulations to this committee for review.”

The motion today makes a specific request to review legislation, which is not in the mandate of the committee. The Minister of Community Services said earlier today that his department, which carries out inspections under the *Building Standards Act*, is constantly looking to improve the consistency of their inspections. If the mover of the motion has any specific concerns, he should bring them forward so the minister responsible can address them. That is the most appropriate avenue for addressing this issue. It is certainly outside the mandate and the jurisdiction of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Member for Lake Laberge, on a point of order.

Mr. Cathers: I think it might be helpful to draw the member's attention to Standing Order 45(4), which is: “At any time, a Special or Select Committee may be appointed to consider any matter referred to it by the Assembly.”

Speaker: The Government House Leader, on the point of order.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: This is clearly a dispute among members. The member from the government side is certainly entitled to put forward his perception of what the situation is and the member opposite is clearly entitled to disagree with it, but it's not a point of order.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: The overall issue in the motion, as I understand it, for the Member for Lake Laberge is that he is asking that this House consider the definition and the extension of the mandate of the statutory instruments committee, and that is appropriate.

I suppose that's what we are debating.

The Member for Lake Laberge is referring me to Standing Order 45(4) — is that correct?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: It's certainly not my job to prejudge what the committee ought to or ought not do, and ultimately that will be the decision of this Assembly.

In any event, Member for Copperbelt North, you can continue.

Mr. Adel: In conclusion, I would note for the record that the mover of the motion had 14 years in government to bring forward changes to this legislation, including the appeal process that he mentioned today, and failed to do so either as a member of Cabinet or through the statutory instruments committee.

I look forward to the next meeting of the standing committee and I am pleased to see the members opposite are interested in being a part of it.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Mr. Cathers: I would just note, in closing, that I'm disappointed to hear the tone in some of the responses from government members. If members were listening, they would have understood the chronology. It's interesting to see a government that campaigned on a promise of being heard and said it was going to be more collaborative and work with other parties, yet in this case, as I noted, a number of these specific concerns came out after a public review that government did in response to concerns from Yukoners that emerged from what we heard and what the special advisory committee on the energy efficiency sections of the National Building Code heard from Yukoners and what they told us. A number of specific concerns emerged from that departmental review.

As I advised members — and as the Minister of Community Services will certainly know from officials — the preliminary work on looking at the change in the appeal structure under the *Building Standards Act* and making it more effective had begun prior to the Yukon Party leaving office last year.

It is not possible for government to change all pieces of legislation at once, and it is not possible for concerns that come up from Yukoners at the tail-end of a mandate to be immediately acted upon.

Again, it's unfortunate. We have offered to work with government in a collaborative all-party manner. I recognize the Minister of Community Services has been one of the most collaborative members of the government, and I think there is

an interest on his part in working together. It is unfortunate that some of his colleagues, including the Member for Copperbelt North, chose to speak and suggest that this motion is not in order.

I would give them a little helpful tip for future debates in this Legislative Assembly, which is that if a motion tabled by a member is not in order, the Clerk and staff of the Legislative Assembly will make adjustments to correct those areas where it is not in order before that motion is called for debate. So if this motion wasn't in order, I would, in fact, not have been able to bring it forward in its current form.

As I mentioned, section 45(5) of the Standing Orders does allow for the mandate of any standing committee to be modified or for it to review any matter that is referred to it by the Legislative Assembly. We heard some rhetoric from the government side about how the Yukon Party should have called this committee while in office.

As I pointed out not only here in the Legislative Assembly, but at the first meeting of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, we do commend the government for calling this committee, but there is also a substantial difference between what occurred during our time in government and now. We never had, to the best of my recollection, in 14 years, a request from the Official Opposition or the Third Party to convene a meeting of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments — though there was in fact one meeting, contrary to what the member said, when the Member for Watson Lake was appointed as chair of that committee. Had the members brought forward suggestions — had the Leader of the Liberal Party, when in opposition, chosen to bring forward a motion of this type, I, of course, will not guarantee whether, depending on the substance matter, we may or may not have supported it, but that motion was not brought forward, so we are attempting to be constructive and propose a specific area of review.

I would point out to the Member for Copperbelt North — who, I think, was not at the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments — that his suggestion that I bring forward this at the committee for inclusion on their future agenda — that was already done at the meeting — I believe it was in April — of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, where I substituted for one of my caucus colleagues who is a permanent member of that committee. We proposed two areas for review at that point in time and brought them forward to the committee. That was that the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments should review the area of building standards and inspections as well as review the area of environmental health — in both cases, reviewing their consistency with the interpretation of regulations and whether a change was necessary in those areas. The government members committed to considering those concerns. We have yet to hear a formal response, though that has been several weeks in the making.

It is unfortunate that we are not going to see the government supporting this motion. They should rest assured that these issues will not go away unless they are dealt with. I would again note to members that, contrary to some of their

statements, in fact, when you have a structure that leads Yukoners to not have complete confidence between the separation of the complaint process and those who are making the final decision in building their homes or issuing a permit — just as government a couple of years ago under the previous Member for Copperbelt North — Minister Currie Dixon — brought forward legislation to establish the protection from disclosure and wrongdoing act, also commonly referred to as whistle-blower legislation. Just as that legislation was established to provide Yukon government employees a venue where they could make complaints without fear of reprisal — just as that was brought forward — in this case, whether or not officials in those departments would ever engage in a reprisal or punitive action, there is concern on the part of individuals that it could occur and, therefore, for us to use the casework approach on every individual matter is simply not a workable matter because I have received a number of concerns — as I know some of colleagues have — from people who wish to bring those concerns to our attention, but they don't want their name personally identified because they are not sure how government will respond.

Again, I would note that, just as it applies to the area with government employees making a disclosure of wrongdoing under the whistle-blower legislation, the fact that fear exists on the part of someone who might come forward doesn't necessarily mean the person in authority would act in the way they fear could occur. So it should not cast aspersions on those officials; however, if people lack confidence in a complaint process — the separation between their ability to complain about an inspector and the decisions that are made regarding their applications — then we have a system that does not function as effectively as it could.

As mentioned, we have a number of areas where we have suggested improvements here. I would note, just in comments to the Member for Whitehorse Centre, that the two sections of the motion she seemed to be confused by — the two parts of it that referred to specific timelines, et cetera — are, in fact, borrowed almost verbatim from previous committees of this Legislative Assembly when they were mandated to review a specific topic, and that would be in the establishment of the all-party committees. I would note again for members that under the Yukon Party's time in government, we actually had more all-party committees than every other Legislative Assembly combined. In each one of those terms, we had a more collaborative approach and we had more all-party committees during our watch than every other government. I hear the Premier say, "so far" and I hope that expresses an interest in forming all-party committees and doing as we did — which was not always reaching consensus, but we did make a sincere attempt to do so.

As members will note, in the area of the off-road vehicle committee and the all-party committee on anti-smoking, there was a unanimous agreement reached by members across party lines on what those recommendations should be. We believe that those have in fact strengthened the processes as a result of that unanimity.

We also established through a motion that I tabled during my early time as Government House Leader a motion to establish the all-party Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees. That was a commitment that had been made by parties of all stripes. We were the ones who actually delivered on it and, as members will know, that committee — to their credit, they established it as well in this term. I would hope that the members of the government and the Third Party would share our view that while that committee does not always reach consensus, in fact, in many cases, it does do so. Government members during our time in government worked to take concerns from other members of the committee and make adjustments to who was appointed on that basis, and there is, in fact, often a very collegial atmosphere at that body — which by the way, as a side effect, has made it more comfortable for Yukoners to put their name forward for a major government board without fear that their name will become subject of political debate.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will commend this motion to the House and I will encourage the government to revisit their plan to vote against this and note that if they do indeed do so, they should be well aware that this issue is not going away. It will not go away until we are satisfied with the outcome of this situation and the systemic change made to address the concerns of Yukoners and to improve the system.

Speaker: Before we have a vote here — Member for Lake Laberge, I have one point of clarification — if you could actually refer to section 45(4) of the Standing Orders.

You referred to it again in your wrap-up comments. It seems to me that 45(4) does not reference the regular standing committees. It only references “a Special or Select Committee”. Do you have the Standing Orders there?

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You are correct actually on that clause, but section 45 does allow for the amendment of motions of standing committees as well.

Speaker: But I understood your submission to be that you are relying upon that section to stand for the proposition that a regular standing committee could consider — basically using that clause: “... consider any matter referred to it by the Assembly.”

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case, I apologize. You are correct. That section says: “a Special or Select Committee” but the Standing Orders do allow for the amendment of a motion or for the referral to a standing committee of any motion. I must say that I am actually a bit confused. I have never had this type of dialogue with a Speaker in 14 years at the end of debate on a motion.

Speaker: New sheriff in town, I guess. In fairness, I will explain myself. The Member for Lake Laberge said it once on a point of order and then in his final submissions he said it again. He referenced a standing committee and he asked me — I hadn’t looked at it before, and when I looked at it, it does not appear to reference a standing committee. I accept the position of the Member for Lake Laberge that there is other support for his proposition somewhere else, but it

doesn’t appear to be supported by that section. I just wanted a clarification because the member did mention it twice.

Mr. Cathers: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. In this case, I am assuming this is revisiting the discussion on the point of order that I had raised, but I must say that I am genuinely confused because this is highly unusual in anything I have seen in 14 years for debate at the end of a motion.

I have concluded my remarks. I corrected the reference to the Standing Orders there, but I do stand by the fact that a motion would not even be allowed to be called for debate if it were considered out of order by the Legislative Assembly staff.

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: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Disagree.

Mr. Gallina: Disagree.

Mr. Adel: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Mr. Hutton: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Disagree.

Ms. White: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are five yea, 12 nay.

Speaker: The nays have it. I declare the motion defeated.

Motion No. 78 negatived

Motion No. 15

Clerk: Motion No. 15, standing in the name of Mr. Cathers.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to continue to support the development of communications infrastructure in rural Yukon, including improving access to emergency services by working with the private sector to expand cellular phone coverage to people without service in rural areas including Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake, Ibex Valley, Junction 37, and Mendenhall.

Mr. Cathers: I'm pleased to rise today in support of this motion regarding our request. Our belief is, as the Official Opposition, that there is value in expanding the Yukon's existing cell service network, as well as making improvements within some of the existing service areas.

As the motion refers to, we're specifically encouraging government to work with the private sector to expand cellular phone coverage to people without service in rural areas, including Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake, Ibex Valley, Junction 37 and Mendenhall. I would like to apologize to the Member for Kluane and his constituents. An earlier draft of this motion also included Champagne and, through an error on my part, the final version did not, but it is also an area where we believe cellphone service should be expanded, although in the interest of the House's time, we are not going to be proposing that specific amendment to the motion.

I would also note that, among the service improvements we have heard from Yukoners include Yukoners from the Mayo area, who were at the gold show last weekend and brought forward the fact that they would like to see improvements to the cell tower at Stewart. That tower was put in through the support of the previous Yukon government during our time in office. It has not been upgraded to 4G yet, so most of the phones that people have, myself included and probably including what most of the members of the Legislative Assembly have, when you drive through what used to be a cell service area at Stewart Crossing, the newer phones do not work because it is currently providing only the CDMA system.

I would also note, as one of my constituents brought forward recently, there was some initial confusion about lack of service in certain parts of Ibex Valley that had recently occurred, which were apparently due to a temporary disruption in the CDMA service, but I would encourage government and the private sector to continue to discuss whether that CDMA service that provides service to older phones should continue to operate within rural Yukon communities and across the territory.

For those who are not familiar, it should be noted that the initial cellular phone towers in the Yukon were put in place within Whitehorse by NMI Mobility at the time. After that, it was government through a competitive tendering process for two primary reasons: one, the requirement for government to replace the MDMRS radio system that operates for government employees had led to a plan that we inherited from the Liberal government, which would have cost upward of \$80 million to expand and update that system across the territory. It would have served only government employees. We, through the work of a number of members around the table — I would like to specifically note that one of the most vocal members in favour of cell service at the time and expanding service to Yukoners was the former Member for Klondike, Mr. Peter Jenkins, who recognized the value of ensuring that if we're investing in communications infrastructure, we also look for the opportunity to expand to all members of the public, not just government employees.

Through the discussions among the caucus and government staff of the day, that led to believing that an effective way to not only address government needs but increasing service for the public was to expand cell service in areas that currently were nowhere near the population base that would be attractive for a cellphone company — NMI or another company in that case — to make those investments on their own. We believed that while the expansion of cellular phone service was not technically part of what government is required to do, it was one of those areas where, through the Yukon government acting and working with the private sector in expanding a service that is technically something that we're not forced to do — in that case, it would have a tremendous benefit for the territory in terms of improving access to communications, improving public safety, improving communications for people in rural areas, and economic benefits as well. We believe that this decision has stood the test of time.

It should be noted that while today, Yukon communities across the territory have cellphone service and we have focused today on the handful that do not already have cell service, the fact that any of them outside Whitehorse have cell service is due to an investment by the Yukon Party during our first term in government and second term as well. Without that action, it is likely that most, if not all, of those communities outside of Whitehorse would still not have cellular phone service.

Certainly the cellphone towers that have been expanded in my riding through the Ibex tower and the Vista tower — the cellphone service that is on the south side of town as well — were put in through government support and at the time were nowhere near a large enough population base that cellphone service providers were interested in on their own. Government then entered into a competitive tendering process. The company that was at that point referred to as "Latitude" was the successful bidder in that case and expanded cellphone service through the territory to most Yukon communities.

Through changes in population primarily, as well as noting gaps in service, I, along with my colleagues — especially those who represent the other communities mentioned in this motion — would like to see cellular phone coverage extended to the people in Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake including the south Fox Lake area and the northern area around there, Ibex Valley — which does have cellphone service but there are gaps in that — Junction 37, Mendenhall and Champagne, which, as I mentioned, was inadvertently missed in the motion wording.

We also believe that government working with the private sector to upgrade the Stewart tower to 4G would be beneficial, and if there are others that were not already addressed through the 4G project that I'm missing at the moment, we, as a general rule, believe that if the private sector is not going to be acting in those areas, there is benefit for Yukon citizens, Yukon businesses and public safety in government working with the private sector to expand cellphone service in those areas.

I would also note that, moving to my riding specifically, I have heard frequently from people in Grizzly Valley who are currently either without cell service, especially in the new Grizzly Valley area, and the area between the old Grizzly Valley and new, where there are a few residences there on farmland, those people have either no cell service or spotty cell service, and the addition of a tower in that area to provide service to as many people as possible would in fact serve a significant portion of the population because overall, through growth of the population at Deep Creek and in the new Grizzly Valley and Grizzly Valley itself, it is now probably the largest unserved community within the territory. When I speak of economic benefits, I'm referring to the fact as well that residences in the area and at least two of the businesses that are operating there are currently operating off satellite phones.

That comes not only at an increased cost per month, but, having used a voice over Internet protocol phone myself in the past, before cellphone service was in the Laberge area — the problem with calling from some voice over IP phones is that, depending on the phone and depending on the system and who you're calling, there are times where the link-up to have someone answer actually takes long enough that the person you're calling — especially if it's a business or a government facility — often decides that there is nobody actually on the line. That is not only an inconvenience in terms of people hanging up, but if someone from a voice over IP phone with those types of issues were to call emergency services, there is a risk that they could have the call-taker actually hang up on them in a time of emergency because all they heard was static and they incorrectly believed there was nobody on the line.

That's one of the reasons why there is value to that, in my belief — in expanding cell service there to reduce the need to use satellite phones. This is another opportunity that I would like to take to remind people that, with the expansion of 911 cell service territory-wide, on many satellite phones especially — those that have other area codes — 911 will either not work or will not get you to Yukon's call centre. Someone in fact needs to remember a longer number to dial. For most cases, the default number that will work wherever you are within the territory is the RCMP's direct line — area code 867-667-5555 — which reaches the same call centre in the emergency response building at the top of Two Mile Hill. While on a different line, it will reach the same people who are dispatching 911 calls.

For those reasons, again, we believe that there is benefit in this. We also hear frequently from Yukoners, including tourism operators, especially in rural Yukon, who would like to see a consistent service along the highway system. While we recognize that the cost of doing that overnight would be quite significant, we do believe — as the Yukon Party Official Opposition caucus — that building on the work that was done during our time in office by supporting a further expansion of cellular phone service would be beneficial.

We are encouraging government to work with the private sector to expand that service in areas, including, as I mentioned, Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake, Ibex

Valley, Junction 37, Mendenhall and Champagne, as well as upgrading the 4G service in the Stewart Crossing area and anywhere else that hasn't yet been upgraded that I have missed mentioning.

Last but not least, there are some gaps in service. I believe my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, is going to refer to some gaps in service within her riding. There are certain holes within the Ibex Valley area that, even with another tower, might not be addressed. We recognize that government and the private sector can't necessarily provide service to every house, everywhere and address every gap in cellphone service, but we do believe this is an area where those past investments and past government action have seen significant benefits in improving public safety, improving convenience and also having economic benefits, both for citizens and the private sector, in the event of an emergency from someone having a health emergency, to a wildfire, a home fire or an urgent situation involving perhaps a criminal event, having that access to emergency services through their cellphone does have significant benefits to them and to society as a whole.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. I hope to see the government support this motion or, perhaps if they're not willing to support it as it's structured, propose an amendment to it. If the government does agree to support it, we recognize that — while we would like to see those improvements as soon as possible, we do understand the need, in working with the private sector and the contracting system, that there might be a need to phase in some of these improvements. We do hope they recognize the value in this motion and the fact that it is simply proposing the third stage of expanding cellphone service to rural Yukoners and rural Yukon communities.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: My thanks to the honourable member for this motion. Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with a quote from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities that I believe captures the essence of this issue in the north: "Connectivity is now as important as roads and bridges to the sustainability of rural and remote communities... Broadband networks contribute to economic growth by improving productivity, providing new products and services, supporting innovation in all sectors of the economy, and improving access to new markets in Canada and abroad."

Our government agrees with this sentiment and we are pleased to support the development of reliable communications infrastructure in rural Yukon. We understand the importance of reliable communications connections between our communities. We know that communities have voiced concerns over coverage and we are committed to finding affordable solutions that work for Yukoners.

Our government knows the importance and value of ensuring that all Yukoners have access to emergency services and proper communications infrastructure. We are pleased with the work done by the previous government through the Department of Economic Development for the 4G expansion project. There was a total of \$760,000 in funding, which

began in 2014 and will continue into 2018. In 2014, Economic Development issued an expression of interest to telecommunications providers to determine interest in providing 4G mobile service to Yukon communities. The expression of interest closed on March 24, 2014, with Bell Mobility as the successful proponent.

Currently, the department is exploring options with Bell Mobility to enhance coverage in some of the upgraded communities, such as Faro. With support from the Yukon government, Bell Mobility is in the final year of a four-year program to upgrade wireless services in all Yukon communities. This fiscal year, we are providing over \$289,000, which is the last of that funding agreement, to support the final year of this program as laid out by the previous government.

I am happy to share that these upgrades mean that fourth-generation cellular service will now be available in all Yukon communities and would like to thank the previous government for their work on this project. 4G is valuable for Yukoners, and it allows us to receive higher mobile speeds and utilize the latest handsets available on the market. This service is vital for connectivity and reliable connections. Currently, 4G mobile service is available in 18 Yukon communities and locations: Dawson City, Haines Junction, Marsh Lake, Watson Lake, Whitehorse, Carmacks, Teslin, Pelly Crossing, Burwash Landing, Mayo, Faro, Ross River, Upper Liard, Old Crow, Tagish, Beaver Creek, Ibex Valley and Takhini Hot Springs. Stewart Crossing will be the final community to be upgraded, and I am happy to say that 4G service is scheduled to be available in Stewart Crossing this fall.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission — CRTC — recently made a decision that defined both fixed and wireless broadband as a basic service. Our government is pleased with this decision and we fully support it. The decision also provided for a national contribution fund to help rural communities obtain these basic services that are on par with other Canadians. We anticipate that this funding may include opportunities to enhance connectivity along Yukon highways. We will continue to monitor the development of this program and look for any opportunities to further invest in communications infrastructure in Yukon.

Canada is also supportive of providing infrastructure to rural communities through their Connect to Innovate program. The federal program will invest \$500 million by 2021 to bring high-speed Internet to rural and remote communities in Canada. This program will support new backbone infrastructure to connect institutions like schools and hospitals with a portion of funding for upgrades and last-mile infrastructure to households and businesses.

Canadians will have the opportunity to innovate and participate in our economy, democracy and way of life using new digital tools and cutting edge services like telehealth and telelearning.

Canada also notes Internet access serves as more than just a convenience. It is an essential means by which citizens,

businesses and institutions access information, offer services and create opportunities that could otherwise be out of reach.

As I'm sure the members opposite know, in these communities, challenging geography and smaller populations present barriers to private sector investment in building operating and maintaining infrastructure, oftentimes making it cost prohibitive. I believe that the member opposite — I think what the intent of the motion or the portion when he spoke of private business — it was more about government. When he means working in tangent, it would be the private sector executing the work with likely financial contributions from government and of course the private sector completing the work.

As you know — and I think it was touched upon just by the member opposite when the motion was tabled — I think there were some gaps in the motion as the member wanted it to read maybe after consulting with his colleagues, whether it was communities like Champagne that was left out. I know the motion identifies a number of communities where they are looking for increased infrastructure. I think that he alluded to the fact that the Member for Watson Lake might speak to this and speak about other communities — I might be wrong, but I think that's what was mentioned — and also the Member for Kluane.

There are some gaps in the motion — so taking that into consideration, let me try to fix the motion. This is one of the reasons why I would like to put forward the motion.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I move:

THAT Motion No. 15 be amended by deleting all the words after the phrase "rural Yukon".

So the amended motion would read:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to continue to support the development of communications infrastructure in rural Yukon.

Speaker: Are there written copies?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Absolutely.

Speaker: Thank you. So the proposed amendment is that is moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to continue to support the development of communications infrastructure in rural Yukon.

So full stop? That's it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Full stop.

Speaker: If the minister could please have the copies of the amendment distributed.

The motion is in order as to form and content.

It is moved by the Minister of Economic Development:

THAT Motion No. 15 be amended by deleting all the words after the phrase "rural Yukon".

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Once again, this is truly in the spirit of not excluding any communities. I'm glad the Member for Lake Laberge identified other communities.

As we speak about communities, I will also add that I'm sure the people of Grizzly Valley, if you ask them, would say that they are a community. I'm sure people of Champagne would say they are a community. So we talk about these other areas we have identified in the project as the 18 communities, but all these areas of the Yukon are unique and I would think the people in those communities — I support the businesses that are in that area in Grizzly Valley, which the member spoke about. There is a fantastic community there.

Carrying on, I have just a couple of words on the amendment. We will continue to work to improve communication services over the course of our mandate. We have talked a little bit about this over the last couple of weeks. We know that infrastructure takes time to get done and, more importantly, to do it right, and that is our commitment to Yukoners.

We understand the importance of working with partners to build a reliable communications network and we look forward to extending improved communications infrastructure across the territory, whether it be with our federal counterparts, First Nation governments, private industry or community associations.

Just to touch on that, even over the last 60 days, we have had two First Nation development corporations reach out to us and want to talk about telecommunications work within that highway corridor. We continue to do research on the fibre options. As you go through that process, a whole bunch of other interesting things come to light. There has been a series of other companies that have also reached out, not so much that they would serve the purpose or fill the gap of the fibre project or the reliability, but there are a couple of other initiatives.

We talked about the fibre redundancy. Nanosatellites — for those who don't know, they are small satellites, generally about one to 10 kilograms in weight, and they are deployed in low Earth orbit. They can be deployed as constellations of satellites that can deliver high-speed data service. We have had formal communication from at least one company looking to provide this service. In my due diligence and research to date, how far along the work in that sector is right now — the Minister of Highways and Public Works and I have received notice and we're looking into it. It has been a discussion, but some of these will be interesting options in probably the not-too-distant future.

That was a start-up communications company, Kepler Communications — which is planning the first Canadian nanosatellite system for telecommunications — and they are partnering with Iristel — which we have heard of here before — to provide services linking satellite services terrestrial wired as well as wireless networks. That is one option that could change the game a little bit.

The member opposite did talk a little bit about voice over protocol phones and some of the challenges with that. We also have Xplornet Services and of course we have seen that advertised. Xplornet provides Internet packages over conventional satellite systems to rural Canadians. Then, of

course, Ice Wireless has been in the news, has a presence and continues to look at increasing their infrastructure.

There is a series of other things that are happening — trying to keep pace of this. The evolution in this sector moves very quickly, but certainly in the spirit of working together on this motion — the idea of what is going to happen with the CRTC ruling now that we see that the federal government is putting money in order. There seems to be an obligation for service providers to undertake the important work of ensuring that Canadians in rural Canada have access to these services and quality consistent with other Canadians.

I would also just like to add that the Minister of Community Services, in his role as MLA for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, invited Bell's manager of real estate and government relations to attend a local advisory council's forum. We certainly could support the Member for Lake Laberge if it was appropriate to bring together an information session, maybe at Hootalinqua or one of the spots in his riding. The invitation was to provide an update on cellular service — discuss options and concerns and participate in a question-answer with residents. There have been some concerns with that already-existing service I think.

The Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes has continued to voice concerns to Bell, as received — good work on his behalf, and certainly we can help with those types of meetings.

I guess, in closing, Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to support the development of communications infrastructure in rural Yukon. We know that all communities matter. This infrastructure is important to support the well-being of Yukoners, help build the economies in rural Yukon, in Canada generally, but also to provide access to goods and services. We had a good example of that with those two businesses in the Lake Laberge riding.

Mr. Cathers: Being the amendment, I appreciate the positive comments from the Minister of Economic Development and Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources in terms of some of the work that has been done to date. While we do feel that this proposed amendment waters the motion down a bit — we would have preferred to see the minister and the government propose additions to the list, rather than deleting the specific reference to the communities and areas of Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake, Ibex Valley, Junction 37 and Mendenhall. We also recognize the generally positive tone of the minister, and I would state that while we won't be supporting the amendment, if the government does push it forward, which we expect will be the case, we will still support the motion as amended. While it does remove some of the specific commitments we wanted to see, half of a loaf of bread and positive comments about future baking opportunities is better than no loaf at all.

I do appreciate that the Minister of Economic Development is talking about some of the other technologies. I understand and do take as sincere his view that he wants to explore some of these alternatives before making those specific commitments.

We won't be supporting the amendment. We would have rather seen the government come forward with some specific additions to the list. If this amendment is made, we would also ask the government to move as quickly as is reasonably possible to come up with timelines for expanding cellular phone service in some of these areas. I do recognize the generally positive tone of the comments from the minister and appreciate that, even with the change, it would commit the government to continue to support the development of communications infrastructure in rural Yukon. We are pleased to see that much coming from the government, even though we would have liked to have seen the specific commitments, but understand where the government is coming from on that. With that I will conclude my remarks. I believe my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, wanted to speak on this, but I believe she is speaking on the motion after the amendment has been dealt with. I would just conclude my remarks and express some regret about the content of the proposed amendment, but thank the Minister of Economic Development for the generally positive statements by government on this motion.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the proposed amendment?

Amendment to Motion No. 15 agreed to

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

Ms. McLeod: I am rising to speak to this motion that was brought forward by the Member for Lake Laberge as now amended. The motion is in support of extending communication infrastructure to people without service in rural areas of Yukon. We have spoken about a number of communities across the territory that are currently in need of cell coverage and upgrades. Ultimately, we would like to see coverage extended along all highways in the Yukon and across all communities, incorporated or not.

I would like to touch on some of the areas in my riding that I have experienced concerns with first-hand and through my constituents. Junction 37, for those who don't know, is the area where the Alaska Highway meets the Stewart-Cassiar Highway. In this area, there are businesses that cater to the tourism sector, long-time residents and, of course, the travelling public. The residents and business owners of Junction 37, along with those in Watson Lake, have been advocating for a cell tower for that area for quite a number of years. While I know that Junction 37 has been removed from the motion — strictly speaking — what I don't know is whether or not the government would consider Junction 37 a community as has been referenced by the minister. I am hoping that Junction 37 will continue to be included in these discussions and that perhaps later in this debate, the minister can commit to this inclusion.

Watson Lake itself has some spotty cell service and could also use some upgrades to ensure no breaks in service, particularly between the airport and town where service is often interrupted.

I raise the issue of my riding first and foremost because not only is uninterrupted service a concern to my constituents, but to the travelling public, who, upon entering Yukon, are enthusiastic to get back within cell range, only to find out that as soon as you hit the town border, you are out of service.

There are a lot of long stretches on the highway across Yukon with no coverage at all and long stretches where a person may be stranded. A few years ago, I came upon a serious vehicle accident and had to flag down motorists for some time before I found one who had a sat phone so that we could phone an ambulance — my thanks to the travelling public who will still stop for someone waving their arms at the side of the road, because that's getting rare indeed.

This might not have been an issue 20 years ago, but then the territory was also much different, and while there may have been the same likelihood of accidents and the requirement for emergency services, there is now a reliance that the public has developed on their mobile devices. We have lived in a world of technology for a number of years and tourists driving north from other provinces or from the lower 48 are not necessarily used to experiencing breaks in cell service. They rely on their phones for directions, for keeping in touch, and most importantly for safety and emergency purposes.

I think it's important to ensure that, since the technology is available, it's accessible to all. I was speaking with my colleague, the Member for Kluane, and he has touched upon the lack of coverage in residential areas in his riding, such as Champagne, Takhini and Mendenhall. There are long-established, well-populated communities that have never had coverage. Residents have cellphones but no ability to actually use them without travelling long distances to get that service. There are a number of other areas in the Kluane riding that have poor or no coverage — Sheep Mountain with the Arctic Institute, local businesses and residents and the Parks Canada sheep-viewing facility.

There are a number of campgrounds in the area and throughout Yukon with extreme bear activity that would benefit greatly from having the assurance of cell coverage for safety concerns and, I might add, just for personal safety in campgrounds, because there is no control over who is using those campgrounds and how safe a person might be within them.

I would like to add that the expansion of cell service in every community outside the Whitehorse area, of course, was possible because of the investment by the Yukon Party government. Cell towers were simply not seen as economical for the communities, because the population base is low. Rural Yukon has appreciated and enjoyed the investment and I'm quite happy to hear today that this Liberal government is going to continue with those investments in rural Yukon and its people. It's certainly important for the benefit of public safety, for convenience and for economic benefit, and it is well worth doing.

Thank you to the Member for Lake Laberge for bringing this forward and to the Liberal government for continuing to

support the expansion of services in all of Yukon. With that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard at this time?

Mr. Cathers: I would just thank the Minister of Economic Development on behalf of the government for committing to continue to support the development of communications infrastructure in rural Yukon. As noted, we would have preferred the specific amendments included within this to expand cell service, but we do appreciate the generally positive comments. In wrapping up my comments, I would just ask the government to work as quickly as it can to provide people in the area with a timeline on when those improvements will occur. It is something that I hear frequently from constituents, especially from the Grizzly Valley area and in Ibex — about their concerns. I know a number of my colleagues, including the Member for Watson Lake and the Member for Kluane, hear frequently from constituents about cell service as well, so I would just make that request in conclusion. I thank the government for supporting the principle of the motion, if not all of the original content.

Speaker: Thank you. 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. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 16 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.
Motion No. 15, as amended, agreed to

Speaker: Do we have one final motion for today?

Motion No. 79

Clerk: Motion No. 79, 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 act on distracted driving by:

(1) reviewing current penalties in the *Motor Vehicles Act*;

(2) reviewing and comparing penalties in other jurisdictions across Canada for distracted driving; and

(3) considering strengthening the *Motor Vehicles Act* by increasing the fines and penalties for drivers who put themselves and others at risk by driving while texting or talking on their phones.

Ms. White: I think this is an issue that, in this day and age, becomes more and more topical. I don't think that I really need to explain what distracted driving is because we see it every day — every time we're in the car, every time we're in traffic and every time we might just be out walking on the sidewalks.

It's challenging because presumably intelligent adults continue to drive on our streets and highways and in our communities while talking and texting on cellphones, while having animals on their laps, while steering cars with their knees, and I've seen people applying makeup.

In my riding of Takhini-Kopper King, I have Range Road, which goes through Takhini North, Takhini East and Takhini West, and it also goes through a school zone. I have seen people drive in the bike lane while talking on cellphones, I have seen them drive through crosswalks where kids are waiting. I have seen people run red lights while talking on cellphones, and I think we have all seen the people who try to pretend like they're not talking on cellphones while they hold their hands up against their ear. We have seen people at stoplights who are looking down to the crotch of their pants while not paying attention when the lights change.

This is far more common than it used to be. The problem is that we know that distracted driving kills. We see it on social media, we see it in news headlines, and we don't just see it in Canada — we see it worldwide. In this day and age, there's just no excuse for it. Drivers who text are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash or near-crash event compared with the non-distracted drivers. We know that checking a text for five seconds at 90 kilometres an hour is like you have travelled the length of a football field blindfolded, and none of us can imagine doing that on purpose.

Nearly 20 percent of all car crashes involve phone use. Interestingly enough, that includes hands-free phone use, and that's from the National Safety Council. Estimates indicate drivers using phones look at but fail to see up to 50 percent of the information in their driving environment, and that's also from the National Safety Council. Distraction was a factor in nearly six out of 10 moderate to severe teen crashes. It's sad that we know that a lot of those include fatalities.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on about the issue, and I'm sure everyone has stories that are a bit humorous because no one was injured but are shocking in the fact that it actually happens. Across Canada, there are a range of different consequences. First-time fines range from \$80 in Quebec to \$543 in British Columbia. Territories and provinces also use demerit points and the cost increases with subsequent offences.

To give members an idea, in British Columbia the first offence is \$543, a second offence is \$888, and they have demerit point deductions. In Alberta the fine is \$287, Saskatchewan is \$280, Manitoba is \$200.

In Ontario, it ranges from \$490 to \$1000; Quebec is the lowest in the country with between \$80 and \$100; Newfoundland and Labrador is \$100 to \$400; Prince Edward Island is between \$500 and \$1200; in Nova Scotia they have a three-tiered system, so the first offence is \$233, the second is \$348 and after that it goes up to \$578; New Brunswick is \$172; in Yukon, our cost for distracted driving is \$250; Northwest Territories is \$322 to \$644; and I'm not sure that Nunavut has legislation in place.

It's important to note, that in Yukon our fine is \$250 and the loss of three demerit points, but we do not increase that fine with subsequent convictions and there is no "three strikes and you're out" rule in Yukon. I think some jurisdictions are considering that now. We do have a tier system when it comes to drinking and driving. With enough offences you are then found to be unsafe to operate a motor vehicle, and I think that's something that we can consider with distracted driving.

We also recognize that new drivers, or those in the graduated driver's licensing program, are not allowed to use any handheld devices with the capability of talking, texting or emailing and they're also not allowed to use any hands-free devices while driving. That's really important, but we also know that's not being enforced, because we've all seen people with a learner plate on the back of a car texting while at stop lights or talking on phones while driving. Although we have the rules and regulations in place, maybe the enforcement needs to be bumped up.

For those graduated driver's licences, if someone is found to be breaking that distracted driving rule, they will lose all their hours of driving experience that they have earned up to that point and they'll have to re-start the program. If you are a couple hundred hours in, that is going to have consequence. Is it enough consequence to learn the lesson? I hope so — I really hope it is.

I have a constituent in my riding whose daughter was killed in a distracted driving incident a number of years ago and through his lobbying, we have changed different pieces of legislation to help grieving families in situations. This one is near and dear to his heart, to the point that when his family drives around in their mini-van, the passenger has a camera and they take pictures of distracted drivers.

I know myself that I have at times been in the car and wish I had the ability to take a photo of what was happening next to me, but then that would also make me a distracted

driver. I can understand why, in RCMP vehicles, they sometimes have the dashboard cameras.

We hope that this motion is easily supported. What we're asking for in the motion is for a review of our current legislation around distracted driving. The addition of fines for distracted driving was done in 2011 and I would like to point out that cellphone technology has changed a lot since 2011, as has people's access to phones. In 2011, the number of cellphones and electronic devices was probably less in use than they are now. Knowing that it has been six years since this happened, lots of things have changed.

There is good stuff happening in other jurisdictions. We think some jurisdictions would rather not lower the fine that we have now. I think it would be good to look at whether we could go to multi-tiered penalties that we have seen — especially in Nova Scotia. I know that, having gotten a speeding ticket in British Columbia, I never sped on the Coquihalla again because it was of enough consequence — \$250 is a consequence, but is it enough of a consequence knowing that we have had incidents at crosswalks where pedestrians have been hit. We know that vehicles have been hit by distracted drivers.

I look forward to hearing other people's thoughts on this. I look forward to — hopefully — a successful resolution on the motion.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Cellphones and other electronic gizmos have become ubiquitous. They are captivating. We all know this. We have seen first-hand how phenomenal they are at capturing our attention, at pulling us in, and we all know why. They are a lifeline to our loved ones, they are a conduit to our friends, a window to those things that most interest us. They chime, whirr, beep, ding and trumpet at us every day and, if we are not disciplined, they will pull our eyes from the road for a second — one second. That is a sliver of time — a fragment — an insignificant amount of time of our precious lives, but that second is more than enough to end a life. We know this because, in this nation, it happens a lot — far too often. Two modern devices — cars and cellphones — have proved to be a fatal mix of technology. Combined with a car, the distraction of a cellphone is often calamitous. Why? Well, look across this floor.

Currently I'm roughly 14 metres from the leaders of the Official Opposition and the Third Party. It seems like a long way, some days longer than others. At 50 kilometres an hour, I could cover that distance in one second. That's how far you will go in that one second, once you've looked away from the road to your phone. It's not an insignificant distance and it represents a significant danger — a danger to you, a danger to the driver, to the next driver before you or in the oncoming lane, a danger to mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, family and friends, neighbours, dogs — a danger to everything and everyone around you. That one second of distraction will change a life — has changed lives, many of them.

Fatalities from distracted driving have surpassed those from drinking and driving. Today 25 percent of every

collision in Canada results from distracted driving — one in four according to the Traffic Injury Research Foundation.

When it comes to distracted driving, the Yukon is not special — not special at all. This cuts several ways. The territory has seen tragedies from distracted driving, and we have no reason to believe that one in every four traffic accidents stems from a glance away from the wheel.

The territory is also not special when it comes to penalties for distracted driving. In this one area, the territory is very similar to the provinces. If you're discovered driving while distracted — be it looking at a cellphone or applying makeup — you face a \$288 fine and three demerits. That legislation was implemented in 2011. It puts the Yukon squarely in the middle of the pack, compared to other provinces and territories. Last year, 117 Yukoners were assessed such a penalty.

Even as the territory is not special when it comes to distracted driving penalties, it is special in other ways. On the campaign trail last autumn, I heard again and again about how grossly out of date some of our other *Motor Vehicles Act* penalties are. Police and civil servants lamented how low our fines were for speeding, for example. In this and how low the fines are in some areas, we are lagging other jurisdictions. Speed is significant, Mr. Speaker. Why? It is because speed exacerbates the pervasive danger of distracted driving. If you're going 80 kilometres an hour in a 50 zone, the fine is, for many, negligible. At that speed, in one second, in that one glance, you will travel 22 metres — 22 metres is a great distance. A lot can happen in 22 metres. A lot can happen in one second.

In tandem with distracted driving, speed is an exponential danger. Fines are one tool in our box of tricks to encourage a change in behaviour — so is public education geared at changing behaviour — to get us to pull over to read the text or to make that phone call, instead of doing it behind the wheel. Educating people to change their behaviour takes time and it takes effort, and that's necessary. It's where society needs to go. We need to do better.

Better than one accident in four is caused by distracted driving. How do we do it? This is the question this motion niggles at. It calls for a review of penalties in the *Motor Vehicles Act*. This government is in favour of that. It calls for a consideration of strengthening the *Motor Vehicles Act* by increasing fines for distracted driving. This government is willing to consider that.

There are many other improvements and other refinements. These devices are still not even 10 years old in many cases. This is a new phenomena. We are adapting to these marvels that ding and whirr and relentlessly pull at our attention.

All jurisdictions are struggling with this same problem. We will work with these other provinces and territories to gather more information, data, approaches and tools to encourage our citizens to keep their eyes on the road and to keep their eyes off their electronic devices. A second is a long time, Mr. Speaker; it can change lives. It could change your life or the life of someone you love. We would all do well to

remember that the next time our phone chirps at us while we drive. We would do well to remember it every day.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Just briefly, before he leaves, I know I have a number of notes from a number of members who wish to acknowledge that our mayor, Mr. Dan Curtis, is present. Thank you for attending the Assembly today.

Applause

Speaker: Minister of Highways and Public Works, thank you for your indulgence.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm all done.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on this motion?

Ms. McLeod: Although on the blush of it, I guess this motion seems kind of simple and innocuous, but I think it goes a little bit further than that. I think it goes to maybe having a definition of what distracted driving is. I think it deserves a much fuller discussion.

Motion to adjourn debate

Ms. McLeod: On that note, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

Speaker: It has been moved by Ms. McLeod that debate be adjourned. Are you prepared for the question?

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I would request that we have the ability to vote on this prior to the end of the day.

Speaker: The motion to adjourn debate is in order — so question on the motion to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Disagree.

Some Hon. Members: Agree.

Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

Motion to adjourn debate negatived

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the motion?

Mr. Cathers: Again, as my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, was noting, this is a significant issue here that deserves discussion. Since it's extremely rare in the Assembly's history that we get to a fourth motion in line, a number of my colleagues were not fully prepared to discuss this motion. Usually the Legislative Assembly, on Wednesday, gets to somewhere between one to two motions, and very occasionally three, so we were anticipating that this one would not have discussion. Again, what I want to note in this area is that there are also some studies that have shown that some of the legislation about distracted driving may have actually had unintended consequences by causing people to hold cellphones lower. It has not necessarily changed the texting behaviour, but it has resulted in them hiding it, thus becoming an even worse hazard on the road. What we are encouraging here is that there should be a fulsome discussion of various evidence at the time, as well as, prior to moving forward with any specific areas in changing penalties in the

Motor Vehicles Act, we think that considering the viewpoints of Yukoners is important. We understand that the Liberal government is desperate for more ways to tax Yukoners and raise fines —

Speaker: Member for Lake Laberge, thank you.

The time being just past 5:30 p.m., this House is now adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

Debate on Motion No. 79 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following legislative returns were tabled May 24, 2017:

34-2-18

Response to oral question from Ms. Van Bibber re: Carmacks recreation infrastructure (Streicker)

34-2-19

Response to Written Question No. 14 re: proposed highway improvements at the Carcross Cut-off (Mostyn)