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HANSARD

Monday, December 7, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 Fall 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

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Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Deputy Premier Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation
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
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Yukon Liberal Party

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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

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Third Party House Leader Takhini-Kopper King
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, December 7, 2020 — 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.

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Online we have folks from Sport Yukon because we are doing a tribute on the volunteers for the Arctic Winter Games. I made sure to wear my Sport Yukon mask today for that.

Also, we have two of the nearly 2,000 volunteers who were there for the Arctic Winter Games. We have with us today Ms. Lucy Coulthard and Ms. Moira Lassen — the treasurer and the general manager of the games — if we could please welcome them here today.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of International Volunteer Day

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Saturday, December 5 marked the 35th anniversary of International Volunteer Day, a celebration of the pivotal role that volunteers play in our world, first established by the United Nations in 1985. I am honoured to rise today on behalf of all members of this Legislature to pay tribute to this day and the many Yukoners who donate their time, skills, and passion to supporting the well-being and vibrancy of our communities and to acknowledge one specific group of volunteers that has been honoured with a prestigious award for their dedicated volunteering.

The theme of this year's campaign was: "Together we can through volunteering". Its focus was on the contributions of volunteers around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of all Yukoners volunteer in some capacity every year. On average, they volunteer an amazing 131 hours each year. They play a pivotal role in so many of our local organizations — from sports to the arts and to charities.

From the earliest days of the pandemic, our Yukon volunteers faced many challenges. From the first, they have shown incredible spirit in facing those challenges head-on. Many have adapted in how they deliver programs — some providing more offerings online. Some, like Volunteer Bénévoles Yukon, have worked to connect the volunteer community, to share information, and to provide mutual support.

One of the most public examples of rising to the challenges of COVID-19, and one that I witnessed first-hand, came after

the crushing decision was made to cancel the 2020 Arctic Winter Games. This decision came only a week before these games were set to start. We were all devastated — athletes, coaches, team leaders, Members of the Legislative Assembly — though we recognized the necessity of the decision, given our growing understanding of COVID-19 and its devastating potential.

The decision was also incredibly difficult for the host society's volunteers and staff, who had been gearing up to welcome contingents to Whitehorse from around the world for the games, marking 50 years since their inception in 1970. Instead of opening the games, these awesome volunteers were faced with the task of decommissioning the games before they had even begun. Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of this wonderful group who, sometimes through tears, accepted this task with grace.

I'm also pleased to let you know that the Arctic Winter Games International Committee recognized their efforts by awarding them the 2020 Hodgson Trophy. Typically, this trophy is presented after each game to the contingent that best exemplifies the ideals of fair play and team spirit. However, this year, the Arctic Winter Games International Committee awarded the trophy to the Arctic Winter Games Host Society volunteers and staff after observations of how the host society assisted with this difficult work. If you want to check it out, Mr. Speaker, the trophy is up in the Canada Games Centre, and it is a beauty.

As Doris Landry, operations coordinator of the Arctic Winter Games International Committee, shared with us — and I quote: "The sadness and disappointment was felt throughout the circumpolar north; your Host Society Volunteers and Staff carried on with the work that needed to be done, all the while supporting each other. I believe that the bridges built in your community during the planning of these 2020 Games will serve you well."

On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly, we thank them and all Yukon volunteers who continue to find ways to support our community, especially during this challenging time. Thank you, merci, mahsi' cho to Team Yukon. Together we can.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide Yukoners with a COVID-19 vaccination distribution and communication plan to reassure them of availability and access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motions?

Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

State of emergency in Yukon

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The state of emergency in the Yukon will be extended, under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, starting tomorrow, December 8, 2020. This extension follows the recommendation by the Yukon's chief medical officer of health.

The state of emergency was initially declared in the territory on March 27, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the state of emergency, we have been able to expedite a number of measures to mitigate the risk of importation and transmission of the virus and support the health, safety, and economic well-being of Yukoners. Without the state of emergency, the ministerial orders that have been issued would expire. This would mean, for instance, that we would no longer have border controls, we would no longer have the self-isolation requirements for those entering the territory, and we would no longer have enforcement of the health and safety measures in place to protect Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that we can continue to protect all Yukoners from the impacts of the ongoing pandemic, it is necessary to maintain the state of emergency. Extending the state of emergency also ensures that, on top of public health measures, all orders that we put in place to support businesses and individuals impacted by COVID-19 will continue — for example, the pharmacists authorization COVID-19 order, which allows pharmacists to extend prescriptions. Another order that would end in the absence of a state of emergency authorizes the extension of timelines under the *Societies Act*, which provides flexibility for societies and businesses to meet filing and compliance requirements, including the holding of annual general meetings when legislated timelines may be difficult to meet.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that extending the state of emergency does not indicate any change in the risk of COVID-19 to Yukoners. The state of emergency may be cancelled at any time, though our government believes it may be required so long as the pandemic continues to pose a risk to the health, safety, and livelihoods of Yukoners. We evaluate the need for the state of emergency on a monthly basis. We also regularly evaluate the ministerial orders issued under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* and will repeal any that are no longer necessary to the current pandemic situation. For example, we repealed the property tax relief order after the extended due date had passed. As long as the state of emergency is active, we can adapt and react quickly as a government to the impacts of the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, these measures remain important while we wait for an effective treatment or vaccine for COVID-19. It is equally important that Yukoners continue to diligently practise the “safe six” plus one — wearing a mask. We're asking all Yukoners to come together to protect their community during this pandemic and encourage each other to keep everyone's safety at the top of mind.

Like I said last week, while we continue to see cases rise, it is important that we all remain prepared. Our health care system is well-prepared to deal with the second wave of cases and, as noted last week, we have a terrific team of contact tracers with the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit that is doing excellent work to keep Yukoners safe and informed.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that Yukoners are ready and willing to protect themselves and their communities. I would like to give a big shout-out and thanks to all Yukoners for doing their part as we continue to keep our territory safe and healthy.

Mr. Cathers: After nine months of the Liberals undermining our democracy by bypassing the Legislative Assembly, we finally have the opportunity for the first time to vote on extending the state of emergency. The principle behind having that vote in the Legislative Assembly is what we've been asking for since the spring. That important principle is democracy.

The opportunity for MLAs to vote on the extension of extraordinary powers to government is an essential requirement in a democracy. Following early adjournment of the Legislature in the spring, we began to get a better sense of how the virus was moving. With government bringing in sweeping changes to existing laws, we began pressing them to allow for proper legislative oversight of their actions. Jurisdictions around the world were finding ways to allow parliaments and legislatures to work because of the importance of maintaining democracy, even in a pandemic. In contrast, here in the Yukon, the Premier was quoted on the radio as saying that we're “... not in a situation where we need legislative oversight for any of the actions that we've done so far.”

In almost every other part of Canada, elected representatives were debating the use of emergency powers and providing legislative oversight. We began to write letters to the Liberal government about needing to negotiate terms of the return of democratic oversight. They responded but never even acknowledged our request to meet to discuss democratic oversight. In debate recently, the minister said that he didn't understand our position. He wondered why we would insist on providing democratic oversight of the government's actions by saying — and I quote: “I am not sure if it's just a point of principle...” Yes, it is a point of principle; that important principle is democracy.

It is incredibly important and foundational as a principle, and that is what we've been fighting for since the spring. We proposed motions, amendments, and legislation this Sitting with the intention of respecting that principle. Government should not be able to unilaterally grant itself sweeping new powers and exercise those powers without democratic oversight. Unfortunately, the Liberals continue to show a lack of respect for our democracy. Last week, when we proposed an amendment to their motion that would have seen future extensions to a state of emergency voted on in the Legislature, the Liberals used their majority to vote it down.

Multiple times — starting in March — we have proposed all-party committees aimed at working together in response to

the pandemic. Every time, we have been met with partisan attacks or told, “We’ve got this.” Last week, we proposed a motion that supported the government’s negotiations on the vaccine asking for a greater than per capita share. We were again met with partisan attacks from the Premier. Today, CBC reported that the Yukon is not even getting a per capita share of the first vaccine deliveries. We are getting nothing — zero, none. We hope that the government will reconsider their top-down, go-it-alone approach and start actually respecting MLAs and Yukon citizens by working together.

Ms. White: I have a few thoughts in reply to today’s statement. I believe that we can all agree that we are indeed in the middle of a world pandemic and that these times are indeed unprecedented. It’s also true that no playbook exists for what the human family is currently facing.

We are hopeful that the minister’s decision to call Motion No. 359 for debate in the Legislative Assembly last week is the Liberal government signalling a willingness to work more closely with all elected MLAs on matters related to our collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I note that motion debate resulted in agreement by all members of this Assembly to extend the state of emergency.

We are hopeful that, in providing an opportunity for all MLAs to debate the extension of the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, the government has highlighted a precedent that we can expect in the future — one that will allow all elected members of this Assembly to voice their thoughts on an issue as grave as a state of emergency while in an authentic legislative Sitting. We will continue to support more opportunities for all elected members of this Assembly to be part of the decision-making process at a time when no Yukoner has been left unscathed by the impact of COVID-19.

To be clear, we believe that if you want to be democratic about a decision as complicated and as far-reaching as actions taken during a state of emergency, all members of this Assembly should have an opportunity to participate. The Liberals hold a majority. Even if we disagree in this House, they hold the balance of power, so why not hear from voices that are not their own?

We heard a lot from the minister last week about how, over the summer, this government had repeatedly invited members of the opposition into this Chamber to discuss relevant issues. However, he did not note that, if we had accepted the invitation, we wouldn’t be participating in an authentic legislative Sitting, but its hybrid cousin — one that would share similarities in appearance, but with glaring omissions such as the lack of any formal record of the discussions and the protection of elected MLAs’ ability to speak freely.

Mr. Speaker, the minister likes to use a sports analogy a fair amount when he describes the Yukon government as “team Yukon”. I appreciate that, as I played on a fair number of teams as a younger person, so I like to think that I understood team dynamics and the importance of leadership within those teams.

So, if I were to build on his idea of being on a team, I would suggest that each of us as elected members — all 19 of us — participated in the tryouts. We made the cut and were named to

the team. Each one of us has both the privilege and the responsibility to represent Yukoners while playing on this team. Teams practise together and work toward common goals, but coaching is critical. If a coach decides that eight out of the 19 players will be benched for the entire season without ever getting time to contribute to that common goal and to put valuable skills to work, I’m left to wonder if this is the kind of team that the minister wants to play on. More importantly, is this the type of team that Yukon citizens want representing them in the most serious battle that we have ever faced?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: You know, Mr. Speaker, our Legislature has already sat longer than most provincial legislatures for this past year, but somehow that is not enough. I tabled all of the correspondence that went back and forth. I disagree with the Member for Lake Laberge; we actually did correspond with the members opposite. We did say, “Let’s bring Hansard in so that we could have Hansard here, if we wanted to record this information.”

I disagree with the Leader of the Third Party that we wouldn’t have the ability to make it accountable or public.

Look, the act that we have doesn’t have this part about it — about engaging with other MLAs — but we have shown an openness and a willingness to do that. On the other hand, the act also doesn’t talk about our First Nation governments and our municipal governments, but you know what? We go and talk with those First Nation governments and municipal governments — that team — while First Nation governments probably in the neighbourhood of 80 chiefs and councillors, and municipal governments here in the territory have over 40 mayors and councillors — and we talked to them. None of them say to us, “Hey, that’s not good enough; you need to have it in a formal Sitting of the Legislative Assembly.”

What I am trying to say is that our focus can and should remain the health and safety of Yukoners. The members opposite want us to amend an act — no problem — but the way we normally go about amending an act is not on the fly; it is through an engagement with Yukoners to ask what they think. So, I look forward to having that type of engagement with Yukoners about what they believe would be the right type of act to support them during an emergency, because this Legislative Assembly is for them. Our focus will remain the health of Yukoners until such time as we are able to amend that act.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: COVID-19 vaccine

Mr. Hassard: So, this morning, the Prime Minister announced that several hundred thousand doses of the COVID-19 vaccine will be available in Canada before the end of the year. We also learned that the vaccines will be distributed to jurisdictions on a per capita basis, meaning that each province will receive vaccine doses in numbers proportionate to their share of the population. The Prime Minister also announced that the vaccine will not be sent to the territories for

the time being. The reason for this is because the territories don't have the storage and distribution infrastructure ready to go.

So, for the past several weeks, we have repeatedly asked the Minister of Health and Social Services specifically about this issue. So, today, the question is simple: Why was the Yukon Liberal government not ready to go?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Where to start with that?

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is correct in one thing in that, in this year, all Canadians will have access to vaccines. The per capita thing that the member opposite is speaking to — again, it's not as he is saying it. There is an original small amount of the Pfizer vaccine that's available right now that is going to be distributed to 16 or so individual sites — especially just to test the system. But the great news that we heard from the Prime Minister today was that those several thousands of doses will be available for Canadians before the end of this year, which is great. We're very happy to hear that this vaccine is rolling out and moving forward.

We're going to continue to work with the federal government and the provinces and territories. We have had conversations with the federal government this week, including the Prime Minister. While no vaccines have been approved yet by Health Canada, we expect to have information on vaccines for Yukoners and the distribution for Yukoners as early as this week.

The member opposite is correct that we are not on the list that are getting the December rollout of a particular vaccine, but we are still very confident on the timelines directly after Health Canada's approval that Yukon citizens will be provided with vaccinations.

Mr. Hassard: So, the Prime Minister, as I said, has announced several hundred thousand doses of the vaccine, but the Premier says that none of those are for the Yukon.

Last week, the Premier promised Yukoners that we were ready. He is quoted in the December 4 edition of the *Yukon News* saying — and I'll quote: "We can tell Yukoners confidently that we are absolutely ready for the distribution..." — however, this morning we found out from the Prime Minister that Yukon is not actually ready for distribution.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Yukon be ready, and when will vaccines be arriving in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, only the Yukon Party could be disappointed with the announcement from the federal government today. Again, Mr. Speaker, we've been working on procurement; we've been working on distribution; we have been working with our federal counterparts, provinces, and territories. Depending on which vaccine gets approved at what time, we are ready for all options.

Mr. Speaker, what we're seeing right now with the prioritization is that national discussions about allocation of the first shipments of vaccines are identified and which key populations will be prioritized, and that is happening. This includes conversations with other territories, the public, and the health agencies across Canada to discuss the distribution and priority populations, specific to a northern context.

Mr. Speaker, nobody on this side of the Legislative Assembly or in Ottawa is saying that we're not ready. The only people who are spreading this misinformation is the Yukon Party.

Mr. Hassard: They weren't my words that the Yukon wasn't ready — they were the Prime Minister's words, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, we offered the Liberal government our support for the negotiating position with the federal government. We offered to pass a unanimous motion that would support exactly what they have been saying — that per capita distribution will not work for the north or for the Yukon. Yet this morning, we learned that it is exactly what the federal Liberal government is going to do. They are going to distribute this vaccine on a per capita basis. So, we know that the Premier failed to convince the Prime Minister. Rather than being prioritized as the Premier wanted, we have been bumped to the back of the line.

Can the Premier tell us why he let this happen to Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker — absolutely unbelievable. What I heard this morning from the Prime Minister is that they are testing an actual system on one particular vaccine that has very unique circumstances, and they're doing that to test the system.

The Yukon Party is trying to make it seem, because of this very strategic initiative that is being done by the federal government, that somehow that means that Yukoners are somehow put at the bottom of the list or they didn't get what they wanted. This is absolutely unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

If the members opposite will listen to the responses, we are very confident that we will have information about distribution and vaccines for Yukoners available this week, and we will give that information as soon as we get it. We have been pushing very, very hard on the national basis to push for a vaccine that makes sense for Yukon's unique circumstances. We have been making the case as well for early advanced shipment of all of our vaccines.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, time will tell.

Question re: Early learning and childcare programs

Mr. Kent: On July 15, the Premier announced that the Liberal government is developing a universal affordable early learning and childcare program modelled after the Québec system.

At that time, the Premier committed that he would release the details of this program in the fall. Well, Mr. Speaker, Christmas is just over two weeks away, and Yukoners have yet to see any details from the Yukon Liberals.

So, when can we expect the Premier to live up to his promise of providing details on the rollout of a Québec-style childcare program in Yukon?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm happy to speak about the extended childcare program and the universal childcare program. The Yukon government and, of course, the Department of Health and Social Services are working very closely with our partners. We in fact have a meeting this week with our federal

counterpart to have a discussion about the approach that we're taking. I would be happy to notify Yukoners that we are working on the universal childcare plan, as we've indicated, and we will make that known once we have the finalized plan in place, and, of course, we do that with our partners. I'm very pleased to say that we are on track to make that announcement shortly.

Mr. Kent: The Premier promised us details this fall and, as I mentioned, there are only a couple weeks left until Christmas — just a little bit over.

In mid-October, the department released an engagement report on early learning and childcare. That report states that the Liberal government is only at a very early phase of development of this program. Yet, as I mentioned, on July 15, the Premier said that there would be details released in the fall.

When can we expect to see the details of this new program?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We recognize the importance of childcare for Yukoners and the need to improve child learning outcomes and opportunities. The *Putting People First* report recommended that we work toward fully funded universal childcare education for all Yukon children, and we're doing just that. Our government has initiated steps to address this recommendation, and we are looking at options to improve affordable and accessible care that supports Yukon families. We are pleased to hear that Minister Freeland indicated that she is looking forward to continuing to work with Yukoners on this front. We will have that meeting this week with the federal minister with respect to universal childcare, and we will work toward universal childcare.

There are other initiatives underway that continue to support young families and young children in the Yukon. We have recently signed off on an extension on the early learning childcare bilateral agreement, with an extension of \$2.4 million to support Yukon families and childcare providers. This includes a significant increase in the direct operating grants for licensed childcare providers to stabilize the costs so that childcare centres are well-supported and families are supported. We will continue to work toward the implementation of universal childcare. Meanwhile, we are providing the resources to support our families.

Mr. Kent: Last week, the federal government announced a commitment to design a new national system modelled on the one already in place in Québec. It's hard to look at this timing and not wonder if, in fact, what the Premier really meant this past summer was that the Yukon Liberals were, once again, just waiting for direction from Ottawa.

Yukoners are looking for a government that leads, not one that follows.

The Premier has said that childcare is a priority for recovering from the pandemic.

So, again: When can Yukoners expect to see the universal, affordable childcare program that the Liberals promised would be available in detail this fall?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am very pleased and proud of the work of the Family and Children's Services unit, Health and Social Services, for advancing and moving as quickly as we have on the universal childcare initiative. The member opposite

has noted the model in Québec. We are looking at models and looking at Québec as the model of principle in Canada. Other governments have made this commitment and have not followed through on it. We are committed to following through on this initiative, as we have indicated to Yukoners.

I want Yukoners to know that we will deliver on the objective, as the Speech from the Throne has made known and the *Putting People First* report has identified. We will deliver universal childcare to Yukoners.

I am very excited about that. Once that is available, we will certainly roll it out to Yukoners and make them aware of it as quickly as we have it finalized.

Question re: COVID-19 vaccine

Ms. White: This morning, the Prime Minister announced that vaccination against COVID-19 could start as early as next week, pending Health Canada approval. This first vaccine delivery will not reach the territories because of the extreme cold storage required for the Pfizer vaccine. Other vaccines that are expected to be available shortly will be easier to distribute to northern and remote communities.

When asked about the plan for vaccine distribution, the Premier has touted the success of the recent flu vaccination campaign, which saw roughly 14,000 Yukoners get their flu shot. There is no doubt that the most recent flu vaccination campaign was a success, and we thank the staff who made it possible, as well as Yukoners who did get their flu shot.

That being said, for the COVID-19 vaccine to be effective, many more than 14,000 Yukoners will need to get vaccinated. How is this government planning to ensure that even more Yukoners get the COVID-19 vaccine than this year's flu shot?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The message that we heard today from the Prime Minister is that we all do need to work together. I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

This effort for distribution on the federal side is through the national centre for operations. The Pfizer vaccine has an ultra-low temperature consideration — as the member opposite referenced — and they are in the early stages of developing a small batch of this particular vaccine. The federal government strategically picked 14 distribution centres. We have communicated with Ottawa that we are ready, willing, and able for all vaccines, and we have made our preference known for Moderna. The small batch of Pfizer is more of an attempt to test the system for vaccination.

With that being said, though, based upon information and timelines shared by Health Canada, we are working toward initial vaccine rollouts that could arrive as early as January 2021. The member opposite did correctly state 14,000 for the flu vaccine. This is very helpful for us in figuring out our vaccine system, but again, if we get the vaccines that we need, certainly we will need much more than 14,000.

Ms. White: The Premier indicated last week to the press that it was his preference that Yukon receive all of the vaccine doses necessary at once. While this would certainly make determining priorities easier, it could present logistical challenges as well. The recent flu vaccination campaign ran for nearly two months and reached roughly one in three Yukoners,

so it's fair to assume that the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine has the potential of being much greater. This could create logistical challenges, especially if the vaccine that Yukon receives requires two doses.

Is the government planning to expand vaccine capacity of the COVID-19 vaccine in comparison to the recent flu vaccination campaign?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I think that requiring all doses quickly presents us with less logistical challenges than being in a situation where we didn't have enough for what we need. I also know that, during the flu vaccine, there were times when there were not a lot of lineups, which is really good, based on the new availabilities of that vaccine through pharmacists as well. It seemed like that system was very well-coordinated.

If we get the volumes of doses that we are looking for, we will be properly prepared. Preparations in the territory are already underway and this includes identifying storage space, the number of required doses, staffing requirements, and operational plans for distribution in Whitehorse and the rural communities as well.

There have been an awful lot of conversations on the federal level and on the provincial and territorial level with me, the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister of Community Services, and the Minister of Justice. We know that this will present some challenges, but at the same time, we know that Yukon government is ready, willing, and able to distribute vaccinations to Yukoners.

Ms. White: The success of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign depends not only on logistics, but on the participation of Yukoners. We know that Health Canada has a rigorous approval process that will ensure vaccines that are approved are safe for Canadians. Despite this, I am sure that the government is aware that misinformation around vaccines in general — and specifically about COVID-19 — exists.

Does this government have any plans to tackle vaccine misinformation and ensure that Yukoners get reliable, scientific information about the upcoming vaccination campaign?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes, we have already seen a federal Conservative MP penning a petition that calls on COVID-19 vaccines that actually do need to go through the health standards that the member opposite spoke about as being unsafe. We have seen Yukon Party staffers, as well, pen an article in the *Whitehorse Star* about how the public confidence is wavering on our medical experts' advice. I think that this is dangerous. One of the messages that we have discussed nationally is that — whether it's public declarations, new research, or the distribution of a vaccine — we need to have constant coordinated communication. We have an obligation as MLAs to get on board on this campaign and to also have faith in Health Canada's gold standard — as was mentioned today by the Prime Minister.

Ottawa also must provide clear information about the safety and effectiveness of every vaccine that gets approval in Canada. I encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly to share tested and reliable sources of information with their constituents. That's what we all can do together — talk about team Yukon. That's an extremely important piece right now —

because I don't disagree with the member opposite that misinformation is going to be our biggest hurdle moving forward with the distribution of the vaccine.

Question re: Legal aid funding

Ms. Hanson: Access to legal representation is at the basis of a fair justice system and legal aid can be an important component of that. Legal Aid provides access to lawyers for those who wouldn't be able to afford or find one. But while this service is necessary, we haven't seen it treated as a necessity. Legal aid in Yukon has been systematically underfunded for years. This causes delays in justice and limits the number of hours allotted to those who need legal aid. This isn't fair to Yukoners who can't afford lawyers. It undermines the fundamental principle that everyone is equal in the eyes of the law.

Does the minister believe that a just legal system relies on the ability of those before the courts to be fairly represented regardless of their ability to afford a lawyer?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I know that anyone who knows anything about me knows that legal aid is something that I have supported in the almost 30 years of my career here in the territory. I find it to be an extremely important service and my work, since coming to the honour of having this job, has been to support legal aid as best we can in increased funding throughout our time here. Legal aid funding is cost-shared, Mr. Speaker — something you also know about — by the governments of the Yukon and Government of Canada. The Government of Yukon has increased its funding each year to boost operational stability and to solidify the accessibility of this vital service here for Yukoners.

Ms. Hanson: Legal Aid was indeed given additional funding in the 2018-19 budget, but that doesn't help those whose legal cases require more time than what can be afforded by Legal Aid in terms of hours. Many cases take hundreds of hours to get through, and just the preliminary inquiry can take over 100 hours of work. This was a central issue toward finding legal representation for a case this past October. When lawyers working for Legal Aid aren't allotted enough time to work on cases, our justice system fails all Yukoners, not just the accused.

Has the minister reviewed the budget with a view to providing the Legal Services Society with the resources required to meet the demand for legal aid in both civil and criminal cases?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It is an important question from the member opposite, but there is a bit of a misunderstanding about how the funding works. Legal aid funding for the Yukon Legal Services Society is designed to provide stable core funding, or a core budget, for its regular operations. Of course, as noted in the preamble to the question, occasionally certain cases require legal services to be contracted due to either conflicts with Legal Aid staff or the complexity of these cases. These cases fall outside of the Yukon Legal Services Society's core budget and require the society and the Department of Justice to ensure that contract fees may be provided appropriately for either these

complex cases or cases where there is a conflict between the lawyers who work with Legal Aid and provide those services to Yukoners and those who might be otherwise brought in to do so on an occasional basis.

Ms. Hanson: Unfortunately, the operative words there were “may” and “may be”.

The fact is simple: Legal Aid is overworked. It can’t deliver the full extent of the necessary service that it provides when it’s understaffed and underfunded. The Legal Services Society was, until recently, splitting 600 or so cases among nine lawyers. While they have been able to now employ 11 lawyers, the number of complex cases has also been on the rise, and Legal Aid’s resources continue to be stretched as thin as ever.

A fair system requires fair representation. Lawyers need to be able to spend time on their cases. Without this, there can be no true justice in Yukon.

Will the minister commit to ensuring that lack of funding for Legal Aid does not prevent eligible Yukoners from receiving equal treatment before the law?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don’t disagree with any of the assertions by the member opposite about the importance of legal aid, the importance of legal representation, and the importance of fair and equitable distribution and the opportunity to make a case before a court of law. I have, in fact, spent my life doing that work and upholding those values.

Legal aid funding, as I’ve noted, is cost-shared between the Yukon territorial government and the Government of Canada. Total funding to Legal Aid has increased during our tenure here and my responsibilities with the Department of Justice from a little over \$2 million in 2016-17 to \$2.6 million in 2021. Every year, we look at the budget for Legal Aid; every year, the department asks itself and I ask the department: “Is this sufficient for Legal Aid as their core base funding? Is this what they need to provide services to Yukoners?” Every year, we make the decision to support Legal Aid.

Question re: School busing

Ms. Van Bibber: On November 10, the Minister of Education told this House that three new school buses had arrived in the territory and that they would be in service in two weeks. Her exact quote was: “... we anticipate the buses being able to be used within the next two weeks...” That was nearly four weeks ago.

So, why did the minister share incorrect information? What is the delay? What routes will these buses service?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Let’s be clear: When I gave the information — as I do on any given day — to the Members of the Legislative Assembly — or frankly, more importantly, to Yukoners — I give them the information that I have that is correct. It was correct at the time. The information that I had at the time was that it would take approximately two to three weeks to do so.

I should also say that I think I just answered this question on Friday, so I don’t have any information that is new over the weekend, but I can indicate that we have heard the concerns from families and we are working to accommodate as many students as possible on the additional buses.

I too am frustrated that they have taken longer than initially thought to get on the roads and to provide service to students. What I can say is that we have some 1,907 students assigned to school buses as of November 9, some weeks ago, and that we are working to assign the additional students who are — as I noted on Friday — not necessarily eligible under the *Education Act* or under the regulations to ride a school bus. Nonetheless, we are trying to provide that service to those students and coordinating with those families individually.

Question re: COVID-19 testing

Ms. McLeod: In late September, the Yukon government announced that it was working with BC to offer either a mouth rinse or gargle test for children ages four to 19. Our understanding is that this test has been available for children in British Columbia since mid-September.

On November 19, we asked the Minister of Health and Social Services to let us know if these were available for Yukon children and, if not, when we might expect them. In response, the minister said that she didn’t know but would look into it.

Can the minister let us know today if these are available here now?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Throughout our response to COVID-19, we have taken an evidence-based approach to testing. After receiving tests at the lab in British Columbia for communicable diseases, which is the gold standard for testing, we have moved very quickly to look at the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health in terms of our testing options here in the Yukon — in fact, to determine which testing options are best suited. The rapid-testing device is one way that we proceeded here in Yukon.

We have also looked at the swab tests and are reviewing the policies of implementing the saline swish-and-spit test currently in use in British Columbia, and we anticipate an update being made available by the CMOH. We are relying on his expertise. These tests are not yet available here, but we are committed to working with the chief medical officer of health and looking at the feasibility while BC continues its pilot project on that front.

Ms. McLeod: Now, of course, we did ask the minister this question about the testing on November 19, and the minister didn’t know the answer but would look into it.

Can the minister tell us — of the options that they looked at — what direction they are going with testing? If they are going to look favourably upon the gargle test or the swish test, when might we expect to hear something in that regard?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Well, the member opposite knows that, on November 19, I indicated that we didn’t know because it’s a pilot project in British Columbia. We are waiting for the results and certainly working with the chief medical officer of health to address the best solution and the best option here in Yukon.

I just wanted to make that note, because it’s not as if we’re just ignoring the requests. The chief medical officer and the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit are looking at this and the feasibility of it in collaboration with British Columbia — which, by the way, is doing a pilot project. I want to say that

we certainly take Yukoners' health as a top priority. We want to ensure that we have the best tests available and the best solutions available to Yukoners. We do that in collaboration with the experts. We use the gold standard as processed through the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control — and we do that in collaboration with our Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit as well. It is important to make that note in terms of working together with our partners to better understand the utility of these new tests and the options available here in Yukon.

Ms. McLeod: With the recent increase in COVID-19 cases around the country, many jurisdictions are exploring ways to increase testing frequency and capacity. The government has taken a policy against asymptomatic testing, but last week, the government announced that it was starting what it called “focused asymptomatic testing” — meaning that they would target certain people who do not have COVID-19 symptoms for testing.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services explain why the government has changed from the original policy of no asymptomatic testing to focused asymptomatic testing? Will they consider expanding it further?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to take this opportunity just to highlight the impeccable job that the communicable disease folks are doing. Of course, the chief medical officer of health leads that team and they have recently targeted asymptomatic folks in terms of testing in key areas. This advisement is done with the guidance of the experts in the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit, with the response to the recommendations to look at the contact tracing strategy throughout the Yukon — always looking for the guidance of the chief medical officer of health as we look forward to further testing in the Yukon.

I want to just acknowledge also that Yukoners are following through and doing their very best to follow the protocols to eliminate the spread of COVID. That's the best practice: Follow the “safe six”, wear your mask, and follow the protocols as they are set out for us. I think we will weather this storm until we get the vaccine in place here in the Yukon — which is going to be announced very shortly. I'm looking forward to making that announcement with the Premier to Yukoners.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (Mr. Adel): Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 205: *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Economic Development — *continued*

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to welcome our officials from the Department of Economic Development here this afternoon, Deputy Minister Justin Ferbey, and our Director of Finance, Beth Fricke, who is here with us today. I'm going to share a few updated statistics and then we'll cede the floor to the Member for Whitehorse Centre, I believe, to continue questions.

Last week, just reflecting on some of the comments I made, I wanted to take an opportunity to thank the folks in Economic Development in the communications shop because I sort of reflected on a whole bunch of different areas last week — most of the folks who are running programs and doing policy work and making sure our finances are in good shape — but whether it's preparing for the budget debate or it is the work they've done to communicate to Yukoners over the last number of months, whatever we get completed or put together within the department, it inevitably gets packaged up and presented to the rest of the world by the communications folks. I want to thank them for the work they've done. We've asked them on occasion to do even more over the last while, and they have risen to the occasion time and time again.

A couple of notes to share with you, Mr. Deputy Chair and members. As I rise today to speak to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for 2020-21, I would take this opportunity to provide some updates on the amounts that we have paid out to date in our various programs: the Yukon business relief program — \$5.9 million has been paid out to date; the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program — \$1.92 million to date; paid sick leave program — \$335,997; and our temporary support for events — \$1.87 million.

Our government's Yukon business relief program is helping local businesses survive the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure that they are in a position to restart and to recover. We have been working closely with our partners in the federal government to ensure that our businesses have access to the most comprehensive support as easily and efficiently as possible. We are regularly monitoring additions, changes to the federal economic support programs, and we are currently reviewing the recently announced Canada emergency rent subsidy and lockdown support that will review the Yukon business relief program to ensure maximum coordination.

We spoke a little bit about that last week. There were some really good questions from the NDP concerning the essential workers program. During that, we just shared the fact that we have had the opportunity to stack both — the territorial program was built first, and then we used that in conjunction with the federal program.

Our government's economic response has been timely and continues to meet the needs of Yukon businesses and Yukoners. The Yukon funding programs were a model for other Canadian jurisdictions as well as we were developing approaches to address the impacts of COVID-19.

We are maintaining contact with Yukon businesses, industries, and partners as we continue to monitor and address COVID-19 impacts, working closely with our federal counterparts to ensure that Yukon businesses continue to have comprehensive and efficient access to supports they need.

Again, I would like to thank CanNor. They have been really incredible to work with. I think that our team would say that they have been absolutely great partners, and I want to thank them and Sierra Van Der Meer. I know that their work and their understanding — although they are federal employees, they are so passionate about ensuring that we have the right supports here in the Yukon, as that is their home.

Staff in Economic Development have worked tirelessly to develop, implement, and deliver these programs, and they continue to monitor, adapt, and respond — which is really the way that we have tried to address things. When you try to build innovative programs, you try to move them quickly and you know that there are going to be times when you might have some problems or challenges with your programs — you want to tweak your programs, and that is truly innovation. The tough part when you're doing public policy is that people don't make a lot of space for you to make mistakes. When you are in the private sector and you are dealing with innovation, you try new things and then you learn from those mistakes. It is different for everybody in this Legislative Assembly. Every one of us is held to a little bit of a different standard. The people — the constituents whom we represent — have certain expectations of us.

In these cases, what I can say is that the teams have done a really good job of putting them out quickly with innovative approaches, but at the same time, we have had some tweaks and we will continue to pivot and do that.

What I would like to share, just quickly and before we cede the floor, are a couple of things that I think are really important to share with Yukoners. First of all, what we are seeing is a real

stabilization for business closure. We saw in the springtime — April — big anomalies. Business closure statistically is really focused on closing altogether or closing partially.

What we watched throughout the summer was that we had some businesses close in the spring — we talked about that here in the Assembly — but what we did see was that bounce back where businesses began to open again. I think that this has been really key. We are still in this situation. When you want to quantify where the pressures have been — we have had some businesses that have closed, many businesses that have opened, and at the same time in the tourism sector, you probably have about 150 businesses that are either directly supported by the tourism sector or on the sidelines, so the work by my colleague, Minister McLean, will really focus on that.

What I do want to share with folks today is that when you take a look and compare apples to apples — what I mean by this is that, when you look at our employment situation in the Yukon — the Bureau of Statistics has come out and said, "This is where we were, and this is how many people were in our workforce in February before COVID." We always put out that statistic based on benchmarking ourselves back then. Then we show statistically that, when we compare ourselves, though — from province to province and territory to territory — there are three things that really stand out. I think that it says a lot for the work of the public service.

The first is that our current unemployment rate is 4.2 percent. That is a leading statistic in the country. The next closest jurisdiction would be 6.4 percent. Again, that's where we compare ourselves, apples to apples, across all of the jurisdictions in the country. I think that it is a very important statistic to think about. Basically, for the last four years, we have had some of the strongest numbers when it comes to that.

Second — but more importantly, I think — is our participation rate. So, when we go to November 2020, we have the best statistical participation in the workforce. I think that really means a lot. Here, we are at about 70.7 percent of Yukoners who are available to work or are in there in the workforce.

As well, our employment rate — when we take into consideration Yukon's November employment rate, the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who are employed is 67. Again, this is the highest in Canada. So, with the best unemployment rate, best participation — I think those are three things that can really give you a sense of the health of the economy.

The other statistic I would just like to share is again from this morning — so it's very current — is concerning building in the Yukon. What we are seeing is that if we take into consideration January to September of this year and when we think about building either a commercial or residential building and then we go back and we take a look at the numbers for last year — so, of course, last year — September to January — when we think about residential and non-residential building and then we compare it to this year — so, of course, last year we weren't in a pandemic. We had a very strong economy. There was lots of activity here. Then we compare it — shockingly, this year — even in the pressures of a pandemic —

if we take a look at our residential building numbers and we compare them from January to October 2019 and compare them to January to October 2020, actually, what we see — on the residential side — is almost a 48-percent increase in values. That's pretty shocking. I mean, if you compare it to the rest of the country — the rest of the country is down 4.5 percent. We're up almost 50 percent. We see very strong growth in the residential building market. Of course, we just put some lots out. We see a workforce right now. We need to continue to focus on tourism. We continue to need to focus on diversity which, diversifying our economy — which overall is just a smart thing to do to reduce our risk from one sector to another, which — we saw what happened this year.

But I think there are some pretty strong indicators. Of course, we debate once in a while here in the House about GDP. I understand the difference of opinion.

But I'll close out by saying — early days — the Conference Board of Canada has come out — I know those numbers get restated. I'm just saying that the Conference Board to date have just come out with their numbers and what we're seeing is the worst-case scenario for the Yukon for next year — worst-case scenario, they're projecting it to be about 4.3 percent; on the high end, I believe, 7.7 percent.

Two jurisdictions in the country — again, Nunavut and the Yukon — are in a position for a bit of positivity. Again, in this year, slight — we'll take it. But next year — really seeing some potential growth. So, I think overall we're seeing some good indicators. That's not all of them; I know we can probably have a discussion about other ones today, but those are some things when you're thinking about economic development that you like to see. I'll leave it at that and cede the floor for questions.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the minister for his comments.

I have a couple of comments to make before I ask some questions. One, it's interesting to focus on GDP when I was under the impression that the Yukon government had actually acknowledged — going back to its inaugural throne speech — that GDP is only one aspect of the socio-economic well-being of a territory or of a community, and they had touted — which I have heard very little of recently — but the notion of the index of well-being as actually the more comprehensive measure of how well this territory is functioning on all levels.

I'm interested as well — I'm happy that the minister has access to November 2020 Yukon employment stats — I don't. I can't access them on yukon.ca. I can get October, because the numbers are different — the unemployment rate was 6.1 percent in October. So, if it's 4.2, great — but it would just be interesting if we all had access to the same data working forward. Maybe that's just a function of the website, but that's how it works.

I would just ask the minister — I have one comment, because the last time we were speaking, we had a conversation about the issues of regional economic development and I was putting forward the case of the importance of having people in the community in order to be able to understand and be able to advocate for the issues. I was struck by an analogy, as the minister was talking and as he — rightly — was speaking highly of the officials from CanNor — because a number of

years ago when I was in a senior management position with the regional office of DIAND — I don't know what it is now, but as it was then — when there was a change of government. Just prior to the change of government, we had been working, as officials — at the direction of the previous government — so a Liberal government to a Conservative government — that had decided that, after many, many years of having regional economic development agencies across Canada but not in the north, it was time to have one in the north.

So, we had gone through the process of getting approval for a new northern economic development agency modelled on what you see with BC, Saskatchewan, or Ontario — north and south — and OCOA in the Maritimes — that would be based in the north. It would have senior management based in the north and would also have the ability — just as the minister was saying — to build and reflect the needs, as we've seen so nimbly and so well with CanNor's response. I watched — only using the Tourism Industry Association's weekly call — but I watched how those CanNor employees were engaged in there and hearing and then responding within a week about what was going on and what the response of the federal government was.

Ironically, when that new Harper government came in, their initial reaction was, "Hell, what would we need a northern economic development agency for?" So, they canned it.

It took a number of years before CanNor was redeveloped. Imagine, Mr. Deputy Chair, how we would be addressing this if you had to deal solely with people out of Ottawa thinking about what is going on and trying to do it by conference call.

I use this analogy because I think it's similar. Whether you are in Watson Lake, Dawson City, or Haines Junction — if we want to see our regions develop in this territory, we need to actually reflect what is going on in those regions, similar to what we have seen happen across the north with the support that has been given through the federal government to CanNor.

I just have a quick question before I move on. As a matter of information, there was an OIC that came across my desk as I was sitting down, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just wanted to have the minister confirm if the order-in-council that was for the Yukon regional relief loan program is the \$12 million or roughly that, and if he could clarify the exact number that CanNor is providing. Is it a relief loan program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will do my best. I have some other information coming.

First of all, I agree. I think that there are some great points. Concerning that analogy, I think the member is absolutely correct. The member opposite makes a very valid point. It would have been a completely different situation — I think, and I agree — if we were in a position where our conversations, especially early in the spring, were being made to Ottawa or Gatineau. She is absolutely correct. I will take that experience and try to reflect on how we put some consistency into our committees. I think it is a great point.

A bit of background — the OIC that was spoken about is the regional relief and recovery fund. The government has continued to work closely with CanNor on this one. In May 2020, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency — CanNor — announced \$3.93 million in funding

under the regional relief and recovery fund to assist Yukon businesses with COVID-19 recovery. Government will host the loan program that will run from the fall of 2020 — so now we're getting ready to go live until March 2026, which is the full period. Applicants, I believe, have to apply by March 31 of next year. Businesses can receive up to \$100,000 in a loan. These loans will be interest-free and have principal payments deferred until December 31, 2022.

I want to give a little bit more background on them. Each business can receive up to \$100,000. In calculating the amount of the loan, the department shall only consider the cost of which the applicant has not yet received any other government relief and assistance. The loan will be interest-free, as I said, and have principal payments deferred until December 31, 2022. The applicant can repay the loan fully or partially without penalty, except any interest payable, as specified.

If the applicant repays 75 percent — and this is a very important point — of the principal amount of the loan by December 2022, the balance equal to 25 percent of the loan to a maximum of \$25,000 will be forgiven. So, pay it back by 2022 — 75 percent of it on \$100,000, and \$25,000 essentially becomes a grant. If the loan is not fully repaid by December 31, 2022, the balance due, plus interest, must be repaid within three years, commencing January 1, 2023.

At this point, eligible costs for the loans — costs that will help to stabilize the applicant to mitigate impacts of COVID-19 that are not covered by other government COVID-19 relief measures — costs that have become due or have been incurred since March 15, 2022, and costs that are not otherwise ineligible for loans funded under the fund.

Again, it is pretty broad on the terms. Ineligible costs for the loans would be the costs related to refinancing on existing debt. Costs related to land acquisition would not be covered.

I am just going to find out one more piece of information here that I think is pertinent. I just wanted to check with the officials, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Part of this process is to have a third party administer this versus the department or the government. The request for proposals for third-party administration — that has closed. We went out around that. That was an important piece of this work. There were, I think, a couple of applicants. They are just evaluating the criteria. We should have that identified very quickly — who will be administering the loan program.

Just concerning the statistics — any of those new employment stats for the member opposite — they are on the Stats Canada website, but I will also endeavour to find out about the yukon.ca as well.

Ms. Hanson: I wonder why it takes a month to get from the Stats Canada to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics.

I thank the minister for clarifying how the machinery of the Yukon regional relief loan program is to roll out.

Just to follow up on a couple of the matters that we touched on last week or on November 30 last week — given the conversation that was occurring toward the end of the week with respect to the chief medical officer of health's advice that people work from home where at all possible. My understanding is that the Department of Economic

Development, according to the statistics that we were given at the briefing, has an FTE count of approximately 56. At the beginning or at one point, there were 10 people working from home or on a rotating basis working remotely.

Can the minister provide a current number and what the projection is in terms of trying to adhere to the chief medical officer's advice that, where we can, we have people working from home, particularly those who are working in common areas as opposed to in private offices?

When we were speaking last week, the minister was talking about the sick leave provisions. I just want to see if the numbers that he gave today correspond to the numbers last week in terms of amounts being spent. He said that \$335,000 has been spent so far in the sick leave. Last week, I was told that this represented 150 employees and 84 employers who had been approved to date. Has there been a change or an increase in that?

As well, the essential workers program — he indicated that was \$1.92 million, and the only area I was able to find a number in the notes that we had last week — and maybe I just missed it — was that the retail trade area was the biggest user of the program at \$637,000. Has the number remained static in terms of the essential workers program? Can the minister outline for us what additional communications — notably absent — and maybe that's just because the minister didn't reference it, but I can't find it anywhere in either my questioning or his response to it or his statement of what was going on in terms of the regional statistics; absent was any indication of take-up for that program in terms of the top-up from Dawson City.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, 54 full-time employees, approximately 15 to 20 working from home on a rotational basis. We've seen a little bit of an increase compared to where we were when we started this conversation. We were at around 10 staff and now we've gone up a little bit.

Concerning the paid sick leave — some of the numbers — I think we've updated what we have here. I'll start with the paid sick leave. Paid sick leave, right now, we're at 85 — that was the number of businesses — but we're up to 202 at this point. I'm going to — just for the record, the number that we had given — and there was a bit of a discrepancy, and I just checked with the officials — one of our numbers was booked to the wrong program, so the number is not \$335,000. It's a little bit less — it is \$333,967 — so it's a little bit less than it was previously. I think there was \$2,000 or so booked to the wrong spot.

The Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program update numbers are 105 businesses, with 1,744 employees. To date, in Dawson City, we are looking at \$27,737 of top-up for Dawson City for that program. Still, when I look through it, Destruction Bay, Eagle Plains, and Faro — still no uptake. I know that, this summer, the Minister of Community Services had spent a bit of time speaking with business owners in Faro — again, we can reach out in that case — and Teslin still as well. There are a couple of communities where we are not seeing an uptake on the essential workers program, but those are the most updated numbers that I have.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the minister for those updates. I continue to urge more communication with employers about the importance of facilitating the access by the employees for that top-up program.

Mr. Deputy Chair, toward the end of the session last week, we touched on the Yukon immigration strategy that's out for consultation right now. I believe that the minister said that it's out until December. It is also accompanied by a background paper, which has a number of statements and questions in it, trying to elicit comments from Yukoners across the board. I do have some questions before I get into that. I want to get an update because, when I look at what's on the government website with this nice blue sheet about the existing programs and statistics, I find that those statistics differ somewhat from the discussion paper.

I would be interested if the minister — so, there's targeted programming for francophone countries, where the Department of Economic Development supports l'AFY in their working to attract French-speaking nominees to come to the Yukon. The info sheet that comes from the immigration unit says that since 2007 — so the last 13 years — there have been 73 provincial nominees from French-speaking countries approved through the Yukon nominee program, which accounts for about almost six percent of Yukon's total number of nominees.

So, I have two questions: Is that number accurate — 73? Three questions, actually — any idea of how many are still resident in Yukon since 2007? What is the retention basically? I am looking for the retention rate. What is the cost of the program with respect to the contributions to l'AFY for managing this immigration program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'll just start by mentioning that, first of all, there is not a contribution that we put in place for settlement services and the support work by l'AFY. We did sign on. This was something that we signed onto in our FPT in — I believe it was 2018. It was in Manitoba when we came together and there was a number of jurisdictions that had the opportunity to take a look at this program. It made a lot of sense because the success that we've seen in the Yukon for francophone individuals who have made a decision to make Yukon their home — an extremely long history of that. As well, the retention rates have always been quite strong with that particular community, probably only second to Québec. I think that we've always had per capita our immigration numbers, probably New Brunswick and Yukon being very strong.

We don't believe that the numbers are incorrect. We will go back and just take a look and we'll cross-reference our numbers to make sure on that 73. This is something that a really broad number of countries give us the opportunity to have folks emigrate from. We think about, of course, France, and we've always had — I want to thank the folks at immigration. They do a great job. This year, they couldn't, but they've always done outreach. We usually always have representatives in Paris and France — the conference in Paris and then in Belgium as well — and we've continued to do that to try to make sure we just have those consistent relationships with francophone countries and definitely with individuals who are looking to move here.

Of course, this is broad. This goes into African nations and South America as well — so focused on immigration around economic immigration and that's really based on — part of the impetus for that is, when we talk about a population that's aging but also a situation where unemployment numbers — being able to continue to have a fulsome economy — that is part of our reasons to look toward those other jurisdictions.

I hope I got — I will clarify on the 73. We don't have a contribution, again, to l'AFY. I think those were the questions that were asked. I'm sorry if I missed anything; I'll get back to you if I did.

Ms. Hanson: I guess I'm confused. If there's no contribution to an organization to attend these immigration fairs or whatever, how is that resourced? What's the presence there for people to show up? I mean, they can't — if it's not Economic Development, who's doing it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The Department of Education.

Ms. Hanson: Right. We have this bifurcated system. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair.

One of the other areas that — there are a number of areas that I want to touch on. I want to touch on the Yukon nominee, the business nominee, and the community pilot project which are all described in this strategy. I'll raise a few questions that I would like to explore.

In the business nominee program — the document says that its intent is to attract business entrepreneurs to the hospitality, service, tourism, and arts and cultural sectors in Yukon. They have been successfully attracted in Dawson, Mayo, Faro, Haines Junction, and Whitehorse and talks about how these nominees have invested \$17.86 million into their businesses and 41 candidates have been nominated.

One of the important aspects of this is that the participants are required, Mr. Deputy Chair, to contribute a minimum of \$300,000 to their business in Yukon and have a minimum verifiable income or asset value overall.

I guess my question is: What assessment has been done with respect to the business nominee program? What work is done and follow-up is done with people who are accepted into the business nominee program to ensure that the successful integration into the community — that their business — that there is the kind of forecast success when either they're establishing a business or acquiring a business?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Part of the work that we're doing — which is important to note — as we go through this strategy, of course, it is the time to reflect upon our retention numbers and it is a time to reflect on the experience of the individuals — the clients whom we are working with. I think we can all — people have different experiences and we want individuals to have a chance to tell us where we can improve.

I think that is the same work around the business nominee program. I will speak to it a little bit. It is designed to attract and retain skilled international entrepreneurs. So, many of them are in a bit of a different situation from folks coming through the nominee program. As the member opposite had stated, there is a minimum investment there.

Entrepreneurs and investors arriving through the YMEP inject new capital, businesses, and business expertise into the

Yukon economy, increasing job opportunities and enhancing our economic diversification and growth within the territory. The program has successfully attracted business entrepreneurs to the hospitality service, tourism, arts, and agriculture sectors in Dawson City, Mayo, Faro, Haines Junction, and Whitehorse.

Between January 2019 and 2020, six new candidates were approved under the program to establish four businesses in Yukon, with a total investment of over \$5.1 million. That gives you a bit of a sense there.

I think that we have tried to ensure at all times that the folks who run our immigration programs are going back and having discussions and that they are there to help individuals as they go through it, but I can come back with a reflection upon systematically how we are speaking to some of these new business owners. We look at this program as an important tool to continue to have in our economy. What we have seen across the country, over the last number of years, are very successful family-owned businesses. In some cases, they have moved to the next generation, but after that, sometimes we don't see appropriate succession planning, and some of those folks provide a very, very necessary service in communities across the country. One of the things we have seen is that these particular types of businesses or entrepreneurs have the opportunity to come in and maybe take on some of that work where, you know, other individuals — or maybe even in the local economy, there wasn't an interest in acquisition.

There's definitely a role for this program. I would say that the member opposite — in her riding of Whitehorse Centre, there are, of course, great businesses that are owned by individuals who are very astute folks. Many that we are seeing in the Yukon have had really successful professional careers in their homes of origin and have now moved to the Yukon for a difference in how they want to pace their life or quality of life or just interest in what they're doing. They worked really hard for a number of years at a particular pace, and now they are looking to still be entrepreneurs and take on all that pressure and stress that comes with it, but also have an opportunity to have other businesses.

With that, we will come back to what the system is that we have in place to ensure the success for those folks and seeing if the integration is going well. Of course, we hope that, in most cases, they buy in. The previous owner might still be there in some cases, so it is our hope as well that those folks are supporting their new business partners so that they can maximize their experience. The more they integrate into the community and get their feet under them — I think it will lead to them being more successful in their business endeavours. It is a good point and we will get back to the member opposite.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the minister for that explanation. I do raise this because of the fact that, in my riding, there are a few people who are under the business nominee program. When I ask the question, I am pleased to hear the minister talk about follow-up with businesses to try to make sure that the government is doing what it can to not be an impediment or create impediments to the success of these folks who have demonstrated their business acumen and ability to run

businesses and who come to this country and territory with a view to contributing.

I want to know what the minister's department's role and responsibilities are as part of the whole-of-government response to reviews or surveys done. I am referring specifically to an initiative that is called the "Whitehorse Emergency Shelter 2020 to 2021 community safety plan". This community safety plan hasn't been implemented, but it does arise as a result of significant socio-economic impacts over the last two years on the area immediately adjacent to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter as the government is sorting out its internal management — the spillover effects on residents and businesses.

That culminated in a commitment over a year ago by government to work with area residents and businesses to develop a safety plan. So, the reflection of the businesses in a draft that was put out in March spoke to the fact that — and this is just on the notion of creating a safe and harmonious neighbourhood for shelter clients and neighbourhood residents and businesses. Businesses suggest that more effort is required to mitigate the impact of having a shelter located in a prominent downtown location, so they're looking for mitigation — not as the Minister of Health and Social Services said the other day of shutting it down; that's not what they're saying. They're looking for being able to work out an arrangement.

I can tell you that, in a meeting that I was at in August, it shocked people to see the difference between the draft that was done in March and what came out in May, because what it did is that it changed the language. When the community, the residents, and the businesses said that there was reduced consumer traffic in the area resulting in lower revenues and lost customers, the language was changed to there being a perception that there was a reduction in customer traffic and a perceived loss of revenue.

I would say — and the Minister responsible for Economic Development has been involved in business — that, as a businessman, you know if you have lost revenue or not. What does it say to the business nominee? That it's just your perception that you lost money — too bad, so sad? Is that the message? Is that the kind of messaging that we want those who are involved in good faith in the business nominee program to be conveying to others? We know that people ask others. It's word of mouth. People do ask, "What has your experience been?" I'm sure that the minister, as part of their communications strategy — and I would hope as part of what I heard him say about the immigration strategy is that our best validators for programs are those who have successfully gone through it and been part of the community. What's the role of Economic Development to ensure that the voices of the businesses, the business nominees, are accurately reflected in the government response? Because what is out there now has diminished the voices of those area residents and, in particular in this conversation, has diminished the voices of the businesses.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that it is a unique conversation that we are having concerning this one particular case, and it really focuses on the fact that, I think, both the member

opposite and I have a sense about whose experience we are reflecting on, and we will just — without naming a business.

First of all, I think it is important just to isolate that we are talking about folks who have gone through the business nominee program and have had a successful business in downtown Whitehorse and put a lot into it — as the member opposite is reflecting on the experience around individuals outside of their business and some of the challenges caused by those folks.

What I can tell you is that, when it comes to the survey — I know that it was the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Services that worked through it, but I have been at the table with my colleagues, primarily with meeting with the Whitehorse chamber. Those were the meetings that I have attended. Yes, I can go back and look — sure. I'm just reflecting on the question. So, I have met with the chamber and continued — it is a very complex conversation.

The member opposite reflected on a delay. I think that work — and again, I might have to clarify and ask the deputy minister, and we may have to work with the department. But as I understood it, the strategy was built out with Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and, I believe, the City of Whitehorse.

One of the things that I can reflect on from this year is the fact that the department had reached out, I believe — I am not going to speak on — as it was reflected in the meeting was — there were other stakeholders — to ensure that this plan was ready to go into implementation. I will leave it to my colleagues to get into more of the detail.

Again, I think that this is a unique situation. I don't disagree with anything that we talked about earlier — about sitting down with folks and talking about their experience — but I do think that it is important for anybody who has — if you have invested internationally. You get to know that this is a complex situation. I don't have a solution today for it, and I was part of those meetings. I think that what comes to most people's minds when we talk about this — some folks will say, "Just make sure there is some security around these businesses."

I'm not saying that the member opposite feels that, but folks — when you get into these discussions. Then it says that people who are clients of the shelter — we just have to move them away from the front of the building and then they will leave that business or this business alone. As I saw very technically sound individuals from Justice and Health and Social Services in those meetings — the next question is: Are you trying to build a perimeter? Is three blocks away where you want people who are our most at-risk citizens to be because then that doesn't affect that business, but then it's a little farther away — and we're talking about humans. I think that this is part of the difficulty on this. As well, it has been co-opened by two other levels of government — three other levels of government.

What I can say to the member opposite is that I will make sure that we're working with those folks. I have, on occasion, sat with the folks you're talking about. There were concerns about other work that they were trying to get done at the federal level. I know we supported that.

Again, we're back to our department. At one point, I had the opportunity to speak with the federal minister of the day, Mr. Hussen, about this. I tried when I had the opportunity to take on the concerns of these folks. I guess everybody should have the expectation when they come and they invest in another country that they will have that. But having the opportunity for the Minister of Economic Development to go to the Minister of Immigration and ask, on behalf — to make sure that these files are a priority, which I will do. It doesn't matter who the folks are — we're going to work on behalf of everybody. I think that's important.

I also have an experience of investing in other countries and setting up businesses and what that's like and what the experience is like. Of course, it changes from country to country, but I think we do a good job of supporting the folks who come through these programs. I think we're reflecting on a very, very unique situation in this particular case — but again, we take the advice, and we will follow up with folks to understand what their experience has been.

Ms. Hanson: It was a question, Mr. Deputy Chair. My question is: Why would Economic Development change the language and thereby diminish the lived experience — the business impact — so that, when a document comes out that is the territorial government's document in May, it changes it — when the language was that the residents and the businesses say that there has been a "notable increase", they change it to "perceived". When they say that there has been an "increase", they say a "perceived increase". When they say that there have been lower revenues, they say a "perceived impact on local business" as opposed to "lower revenues and lost customers". Those are real and measurable if the Department of Economic Development was interested.

I'm pointing to these sections because its part of a multi-page report. There are only three action items that deal with the community and businesses. I'm presuming that Economic Development is interested in the businesses part of it and would have had a role in at least reviewing that and maybe saying, "Whoa — why would we want to do that?"

When we take one of those businesses, as the minister is aware — and highlighted in the insert that they put up in the *Up Here*, the magazine that I asked the question last week about — the insert — highlighting that business as a contributor of social enterprise. It's doing business in an innovative way and trying to be environmentally active, engaged in this community — and growing that business. Trying to grow that business against odds — why would Economic Development diminish it in the final report so that, when we get to what will happen next, there is nothing about dealing with the economic impact? It's all about funding another 12 studies internal to government — consultants' fees for more internal work — as opposed to, two years on, there being a financial impact in the community.

So, where, since August, has the consultation and the conversation been with those area businesses about how we collaboratively work to establish a good neighbour arrangement between an entity funded by and operated by the Government of Yukon? We talk about a whole-of-government approach. How do we make that real? I can tell you that, over

the last two years, it's not being felt in my riding; it's not being felt.

My first question is: Why would Economic Development countenance that diminishing of the experience — changing the language so that it basically makes it all fine? Don't worry, be happy. Well, that's not what's going on. Why would the real language used by people not be reflected in the government's document?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: In order to be accurate in this debate, what I am going to do is — we will reflect on it. Yes, I understand that the member opposite has a report. What I understand is that the plan was put together by three other levels of government. I understand that Justice and Health and Social Services were the leads. I want to look at how the contributions, if any, were put in place from the department. I want to be able to reflect on that so that I can properly answer the question.

These are points that are in the document. I am not saying that I agree or disagree with those points. I am just saying that, yes, I understand that there are some points in this particular document.

The member opposite said “I assume” on a couple of occasions. Let's not assume. Let me go back and find out what the contribution was. We don't want to have a debate based on assumptions. I get it that the member opposite is asking how I am handling the responsibility of Economic Development around these impacts. I have shared that I have been at the table with the chambers — primarily the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, as they have been the lead on the discussion. I do understand that it is a very complex situation. I do understand that there has been some disruption. In all cases, our department — starting with my role and others — is to continually work with business owners, whoever they are, to try to help them through these pieces.

Let me get back to the member opposite on the specific question about the language that was used in the draft and the language that was used in the latter. I would agree that it is a worthy endeavour for me to take a look to see that. I would say that I would be aligned in some of the reflections that the member opposite has made, based on reading through the material and the work that she has done as an advocate on this particular file.

Ms. Hanson: I appreciate the minister's undertaking to follow up on this because it is important. Having represented this riding for almost 10 years, it is important to me that the social cohesiveness of this downtown area, which is so vital to how we reflect out to visitors and residents alike — that we find a way to make this work. I am surprised at times by the fraying patience of some of the — today we are talking about businesses, but I can tell you that it extends beyond that.

I just have a few more questions. You guys rotate through them so quickly. The immigration strategy also highlights the Yukon community pilot, as it's called, and it said on page 12 that a new pilot program is being launched in January 2020. We have heard the minister speak to this before — talking about the Yukon community pilot as a new stream, under the Yukon nominee program, allowing for more flexibility for both employers and nominees in specific Yukon communities.

I do have a number of questions with respect to this new approach that provides nominees with a work permit for a specific community, rather than a specific employer. As you have heard in this House, although the strategy talks about “several employers”, I believe it was on the record as three in the same community. It talks about how this pilot project reflects the unique labour market conditions in Yukon communities and is responsive to the needs of employers for seasonal workers.

So, a number of questions: It was to be launched in January 2020. Did it launch? How many, if any, nominees are involved in that program? What are the arrangements for a nominee going to X community, who may be working for up to three employers? That would provide assurance that they actually have employment that sort of fulfills their criteria of what we would think is 37.5 to 40 hours a week of full-time employment. If they don't, how are they expected to live? Who has the responsibility to ensure adequate housing for employees who are taking a rather vulnerable — potentially vulnerable — assignment to go to work for up to three employers in a community? Is there a requirement for a commitment by those three employers — or up to, or the several employers — to provide a minimum number of hours so that somebody can live?

I raise this as we look across — particularly in provinces like British Columbia and Ontario where, as it says here, the needs of employers for seasonal workers — where we have seen the exploitation of seasonal workers, with huge health consequences in this pandemic. So, we are not always going to be in the pandemic, but we will always have the exploitation of seasonal workers — unless we have some pretty clear expectations of employers who employ seasonal workers.

I'm looking to find out what safeguards are being built into this system so that it's not simply something where you can bring in cheap labour for a few months and then off you go. What are we looking at in terms of trying to ensure that it's beyond the seasonal workers? As I understood it, the nominee program was to create a situation where somebody could then apply for residency and then become a citizen, which we've seen so successfully over the years through the Yukon nominee program and a changed demographic in the Yukon.

Those are my questions with respect to — at least now, until the minister triggers a few others, no doubt — the Yukon community pilot.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: A quick background in the program and then I'll get into the four questions that were the rest.

The Yukon community program is a new stream within the Yukon nominee program. It's a new initiative with the federal government that provides flexibility to employers and Yukon rural communities where seasonal and part-time work is a fundamental part of the local economy and essential for local economic development.

The program was launched in January 2020 in the participating communities of Dawson City, Carmacks, Carcross, Haines Junction, Watson Lake, and Whitehorse. Up to 50 nominees will be eligible through the program to receive work permits enabling them to work for up to three employers

or hold up to three different occupations with a single employer in a participating community on a year-round basis.

Given a COVID-19-related freeze on applications from March to June, only one application has been approved under this stream so far. Employees can either create a single position with up to three occupations that together equal one full-time position or up to three employers in a single community can create one full-time position for one person.

What's key to understand with that is that we were seeing — communities like Carmacks would be a great example, where you have a real bustling group of businesses and when you drive through Carmacks — in one case, you have one employer — probably the biggest employer in the private sector in that community, but they own multiple businesses. So, how can they provide a full-time job to someone? In some cases, the individual might have to work in two of the businesses. So, again, really trying to find a great opportunity for the folks coming in and, at the same time, the unit worked very closely with employers and the Yukon chamber to identify how to deal with this.

We are in a bit of a different world in the sense that, when we launched this, there was a tremendous amount of pressure. If you remember, we were in a situation where businesses were having a very difficult time finding individuals, especially in the hospitality sector. We were in spots where — I was asked questions here where we had individuals who were having a hard time even opening for their full hours. That's partially why we announced this program for a business that was under that stress. Part of it was because we wanted to make sure that we were illustrating that we were listening to those individuals and that we were going to meet their needs with this program.

There was a lot of pushing at the bilateral level, even as we committed to getting this program out in January. On at least one occasion, I made a phone call to remind the federal minister of the commitments that were made on their behalf with us, again, pushing this. Of course, then we got into March and we were in a different situation. We have had one individual. The whole process is to ensure that we have full-time employment.

I am going to go through a couple of specifics that can help answer some of the questions about responsibility and guaranteed employment — things like that. There have been questions about how this program is different from previous programs due to the lack of uptake. Workers who are nominated under the program must meet the following minimum requirements. They must: have a guaranteed job offer in Yukon that meets the economic and other core criteria for nomination; have a valid work permit or student visa if in Canada at the time of the application — so we had some folks who were in school and we're starting to see a real increase at Yukon University with students moving in who then, while they're here, look for the next stage in their life in Yukon; provide proof of qualifying work experience; meet the language requirements for the skill level of the position; intend to live in the Yukon; and apply to the Government of Canada for permanent residency within three to six months of starting work. The community program will help meet our government's goals on labour shortage.

I think we've done a good job just reflecting on what that looks like and why that is. The arrangements — we usually have — for lack of a better term — it's a contract, essentially, that gets written out and it highlights — it's a tripartite agreement setting out the employment conditions and obligations for the business. Yukon government monitors the tripartite agreement to ensure consistent employment.

I don't have an answer on the housing. I know that, in our communities, the employers seem to do a really good job — whether it be Dawson or Carmacks and other places — of providing that. I want to be able to get a proper, fulsome answer to talk about if it is part of the conversation, which is important. I'm going to get back on — to find out what that looks like. I think we can reflect on other nominees and what their experience has been, even though we've only had one.

So, yes, guaranteed employment — the arrangement is the tripartite agreement. How many? Just the one person. Then we're going to get back to you on the housing piece.

This is something that, I think — early stage. The department has had a lot of kudos for the work that they've done since March — all very, very, very warranted. I have to say that this was another one where folks were very innovative because what we were seeing in other jurisdictions — primarily, there was the Atlantic pilot. Those four provinces were having a really difficult time. They had one particular seasonal industry and having a real hard time finding people for that industry — at the same time, for full-time work. It was kind of a mix between fisheries and agriculture. The pilot program was negotiated between the federal government and the Atlantic provinces. It seemed to be quite successful. We looked at that.

There was also a conversation that was happening across the country about specific programs that could be identified in urban areas. We also heard about this rural program. It was rural and northern. It was rural, and I think that the team did such a good job. The federal minister arrived here in the morning and it was called the "rural program", and by the time he went to his hotel in the evening, it was the "rural and northern program". So, everybody did a very good job — from the multicultural centre through to the chambers — ensuring that the federal minister of the day understood the need that we had.

The challenge after that was that there were some criteria that we had to work through, and that criteria really focused on having larger strategies out of your chambers. Really, they were looking for chambers in some sense to help run it. We worked through that. It took a bit of time on the policy side, and then we had the opportunity to put this program in place.

Will we need a program like this? I am not sure. We are going to run it. We will see what the uptake is. Inevitably, the jobs have to be in place in order to have the participants. If the jobs are not there, there will not be participants or clients. Our nominee numbers last year were really good. It was the first time that we tapped out on what our total allotment was. I think that we have to see a recovery in the tourism sector. The tourism sector really was driving the development of this program. We will have to see what happens as we get through the next spring and summer and if we see a rebound. We will see if there is a

real use for this — getting feedback as we go through the strategy work.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the minister for that answer. It addresses quite a few of the questions that I had.

What is the duration of the Yukon community pilot project and who will be involved in assessing it? Are there criteria available anywhere that we can see?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to get back to the member opposite. Part of it is that we were given a letter of understanding which gave us the opportunity to move through the new stream. I want to go back to just ensure that the bilateral agreement is finalized.

The bilateral agreement will, I think, highlight — I think that it is a two-year pilot, but I want to ensure that I have the information. We had a letter of understanding that gave us the opportunity to do the new stream. There was some negotiation on particular components that was still underway. I'll get back to the member opposite on that.

Ms. Hanson: I appreciate that and I look forward to getting that information. I think it's imperative that, when governments establish pilot projects, they actually have some objective criteria by which to evaluate it and generally a time frame for it. I'm sure there is, and I look forward to receiving it.

I have just one final question before I move on. As we talked about, the Economic Development immigration strategy is out for consultation. I asserted, but maybe I'm wrong, that the consultation will be completed at the end of December. When does the government anticipate having its new economic development strategy available for review?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I just want to confirm that it is a two-year pilot — the answer to the previous question. I'm just confirming that it does run until the end of 2021. Whether we'll go back and try to request an amendment on that — potentially because we lost a half year of the pilot time period — we'll leave that to the officials to see if it's worthy to bring it back to the table once we see what the uptake is and see what the interest levels are.

As for the strategy work, I'm just going to read through a few things for the public record — not a whole bunch here.

It was time. Our previous strategy has come to an end. Economic immigration — you've heard me mention that a bit — is an essential tool for us to attract our skilled workers and develop a workforce that supports investment, economic growth, and diversification. It seems like it has worked very well over the last number of years for the Yukon. Since the Yukon *Immigration Strategy* was drafted 10 years ago, the territory's economy has grown and changed. We are updating the strategy this year to ensure that it meets the evolving needs of Yukon's employers and communities.

In the fall of 2020, as we've just talked about, we have engaged directly with program users and stakeholders. Their priorities and experience will help focus our efforts as we develop a new strategy.

The engagement will seek feedback on existing Yukon immigration programs, including the Yukon business nominee program and the recent introduction of the Yukon community

pilot and how the new strategy can help address issues faced by Yukon employers.

The engagement period for the immigration strategy has shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and is expected — it was going to start in September, and it is underway. In light of COVID-19 health and space requirements, an updated engagement process — and we touched on this the other day. It is just more online surveys, phone interviews, and virtual meetings to complete this. The input from the public engagement will feed the revised immigration strategy, which is expected to be finalized in the spring 2021.

Ms. Hanson: I thank the minister for his response, and I thank the officials for their presence here today.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line debate.

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Deputy Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, cleared or carried, as required.

Do we have unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$19,460,000 agreed to
On Capital Expenditures
Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to
Total Expenditures in the amount of \$19,460,000 agreed to
Economic Development agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Community Services — *continued*

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would just like to welcome back Deputy Minister Matt King and our director of finance, Mr. Phil MacDonald. I look forward to any further questions from the members opposite.

Mr. Hassard: I will not use his extra 14 minutes, I promise.

I have a question around the projects taking place in Old Crow. I'm curious as to if the minister could let us know if there were any community components drafted into any contracts for the projects taking place in Old Crow at this time.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just for clarification, when the member is asking about community components — if he can just flesh that out a little bit for me and I'll get an answer.

Mr. Hassard: I just mean in terms of hiring local people, hiring local contractors, renting local equipment — that sort of thing. I know that in Teslin, the community tends to get involved in the contracts to a certain degree to ensure that local components are used as much as possible. I'm just wondering if there was anything in regard to the projects taking place in Old Crow that might enhance local hire, local hire of equipment, et cetera.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Similar to the community of Teslin, the community of Old Crow often asks for a transfer payment agreement so that they lead the provision of the work within their community, which allows them to use their procurement policies and often leads to more local hire. It is pretty typical in Old Crow, I think, that you use the resources that you intend to have on hand.

We are doing work on the landfill, sewage lagoon, and the community hall. The sewage lagoon and the community hall — the larger projects — are using transfer payment agreements. Often in the communities, we ask the community whether they wish to go with a transfer payment agreement. It is our preference to do that. There is a challenge to us, which is that, as we are trying to plan our spending, sometimes those transfer payment agreements lead to those communities dealing with their own timelines that adjust and are somewhat out of our control. That is sometimes the challenge.

Mr. Deputy Chair, you will recall earlier this session that, when I spoke to the Member for Lake Laberge about some of the lapsed funding, it was really around the transfer payment agreements. It is not that the funding is not going to be spent — it is — but sometimes the timing of it adjusts and is not within our control. Overall, we are very happy when we can use this type of agreement with our communities.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate that from the minister. I am wondering if there is any type of follow-up from the Department of Community Services to ensure that businesses and local people are being utilized to their full potential. The reason I ask this, obviously, is because I have heard from

members of the community who don't feel that they are being utilized as well as they feel that they could be.

The other question with regard to Old Crow — I am curious as to if the minister could give us a bit of an update on the ice road. We have heard that the ice road going into Old Crow has been postponed for a year. How will that affect the budgets or the costs of the projects that are currently taking place, if it will affect them at all?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We always follow up with communities. Well, first of all, within the transfer payment agreements, we pass on the federal requirements that we are required to pass on around procurement. We work with communities to support them in their procurement, but effectively, we see them as the leads; we believe they are the leads. But I think that we do support them in how they're going through their procurement processes.

With respect to the ice road, the projects that I just discussed — the sewage lagoon, the landfill, and in particular, the community hall — they weren't banking on the ice road as they went through their procurement process. So, I don't anticipate significant impacts as a result of changes to timing for the ice road. There may be effects to future projects, but of course those — hopefully, people judge that as we go through any sort of tendering process, but none that I know of for the projects that we have on hand.

Mr. Hassard: In regard to the energy retrofits program that the government has announced and was intending to work with municipalities on through a local improvement charge, I'm curious as to if the minister could provide the House with any updates on where the government's at with rolling that program out and how the municipalities are all feeling about it — accepting it or — I guess just a general update on that, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This past weekend, I spent a couple of hours talking with municipalities on one of the quarterly Association of Yukon Communities calls. I did have a long and frank conversation with municipalities about it. The main two things that I hear — well, maybe three things, Mr. Deputy Chair, that I hear from communities — the first one is that right now they're pretty darn busy with COVID — dealing with COVID and the stresses of dealing with COVID. Right now, that's a challenge.

The second issue that I hear from them is that using local improvement charges to get at retrofit plans will add burden to their delivery of service on a community-by-community basis. Because municipalities or the property tax collectors and local improvement charges come back and pay back through the property tax, if there's a problem, it's usually the municipality that is on the front line of that and that is a burden to them.

The third main thing that I heard from them is that they all believe that this is a great initiative. They agree that Yukoners will want this and they think that it's a good thing from a climate perspective. They think it's a good thing from a community perspective. What we're doing is to work with them to try to make it a win to find some way to provide support or incentives for them, as a municipality, to have to deal with that

additional burden so that it doesn't become a download on them.

I also heard that we should take a little bit of a breath around it because right now those governments are dealing with other challenges around COVID-19. That's how I would characterize the situation right now. I'm happy to answer further questions.

Mr. Hassard: I'm wondering if the minister could let us know how many First Nations that Community Services has involved in this process and what the feeling of the First Nations are in regard to this program.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, with respect to the local improvement charges side of this, it is the municipalities and the territorial government that are the property-taxing authorities. That is where that conversation lies.

We have had ongoing conversations with First Nations about *Our Clean Future* and many aspects of it. When I did my round of community tours in the late summer and fall, I did alert First Nation governments to this initiative that was coming. There are still conversations that I think we definitely need to have because there is a range of questions around the ownership of land, who would be initiating it, and how that would work through on First Nation properties. There are still questions that need to be resolved, but we haven't had questions directly with First Nations around the local improvement charges side of this, in the sense that they are not the taxing authority.

Mr. Hassard: I think that the one area I might disagree with the minister a little bit on is, when the First Nation is the owner of the land in the municipality and pays the taxes to the municipality, if there are tax arrears from individuals, it is going to also place a burden on the First Nation.

Anyway, Mr. Deputy Chair, the only other question I had was regarding gift cards or gift certificates. There is no legislation that protects consumers when it comes to honouring gift cards or gift certificates. This was an issue that first emerged a few years ago when a local restaurant went out of business and had been raised with us again recently regarding a local travel agency. I am curious as to if the government is contemplating any protections for Yukoners in this regard.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We haven't had any direct conversations that I'm aware of. I will have a conversation with the appropriate branch and see what they've been discussing. If I have any information, I'll be happy to get it back across to the members through a legislative return or through a note across to them, but I don't have an answer specifically today.

Ms. White: Of course, I echo the welcome to the officials who are back today in the Assembly.

When we last spoke, the minister and I were talking about minimum wage and living wage and then we were so rudely interrupted by the end of the day. It just rolled around and then there was no opportunity to go back, but I'm always so grateful that we have Hansard to go back and refer to.

When we were talking about it, the minister was talking about how, in recent years — since 2016 — the gap between the living wage and minimum wage has closed. I just wanted to put on the record that, when we talk about a living wage as is calculated by the Anti-Poverty Coalition — it's important that

we talk about it — it's two adults working full time, accessing all federal and territorial support programs.

Since 2016, we know that the child benefit has changed drastically from the federal government; it has increased. We know that, for example, childcare subsidies have changed. There are a lot of things that go into that calculation. So, it's not just a matter of: People are better off for one reason; it's a whole plethora of reasons.

But the minister did say that they had accepted the recent recommendations from the Employment Standards Board about the increase. I would like to know — in the report from the Employment Standards Board from November 2018, it did have a table of recommendations. In April 2019, it was to go up 90 cents, plus the CPI. In April 2020, it was going to go up \$1. In April 2021, it was going up an extra \$1.10, which they were guessing, at the time, would be \$12.60, April 2020 would be \$13.80, and then April 2021 would be \$15.12. I wanted to know if it was this minister's plan to adopt the recommendation of the Employment Standards Board and increase minimum wage in April 2021.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: My recollection is that the Employment Standards Board wrote that first letter and didn't actually direct us to do anything. It was almost like their analysis. We turned around and asked them to please give us an order, and then they turned around and did give it to us. We followed that order. Then, as part of that order in the subsequent year — so for this spring 2020 — I understand that they gave us another order. I will wait to see if the Employment Standards Board makes another recommendation, but that is how we have been working — is in conjunction with them. So, I will just stop there and see if there are further questions.

Ms. White: I appreciate the information from the minister. When I was looking online, I didn't find the order from the Employment Standards Board. I found the report where it says, "Our recommendation is..." So, it's a recommendation based on the one piece — the document — that I could find. Again, it is an interesting time when we have the essential worker top-up — you know, up to \$4. So, if you made \$13.71 an hour, you would be making \$17.71 an hour, which is more than \$600 — or is \$600 — a month, which is a substantial amount of money. I have opinions about minimum wage, of course.

During the particular shutdown that we saw, kind of, in spring, Internet access at libraries was really important, and you could tell how important it was at the Whitehorse library when you would drive past and people would be in the parking lot in their vehicles accessing the Internet. We could have lots of ideas about Internet and access and availability and all the rest of it, but I think that, in this day and age, Internet is no longer something that should be for the privileged. It is becoming more of a basic necessity as far as communication and access to information.

So, one of the concerns that I had during the lockdown is actually from my time at the food bank when someone told me that they couldn't access the Internet anymore outside the library. I just wanted to know if libraries across the territory

kept their Internet available at libraries during the shutdown, when things were closed to the public.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am going to have to turn back to the branch to ask because some of the libraries are, of course, run by societies — although we try to support them — and there are differences. I know that my own library in Marsh Lake was trying to continue to provide that hot-spot service.

I agree with the member opposite that the Internet is becoming more and more essential to the public. I don't know specifically what was done with each of the libraries. I will get some critical information imminently, Mr. Deputy Chair.

I do want to say that I think that we all felt the closure of our libraries — from a practical perspective and also, I think, from a symbolic perspective — because libraries are often the heart of the community. People felt that loss keenly.

The branch has let me know that, in the community branches, it was available but that, in the evenings at the Whitehorse library, it was turned off at night. I can try to figure out if that is how it normally is or if it was different or not, but that is the situation that I have.

Ms. White: I sometimes can't read my own handwriting, so I can't imagine passing notes to someone under a timeline or a time crunch.

The reason why I was bringing up libraries and Internet access — and we saw this with the emergency phones that had been given to women by the Women's Directorate through women's organizations — is that having that access to information and the ability to access it were really important.

The minister just touched on something when he talked about hot spots. One of the questions that has been floated around by the Anti-Poverty Coalition is developing Internet hot spots in the communities in the territory and making sure that Internet is available to folks. Has the department looked into that at all?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to correct — I made a mistake a moment ago. I said that the Whitehorse library turned off at night; that's incorrect. The Whitehorse library is 24/7. It's the Watson Lake library that turns off at night just because of how they deal with the building.

The question is a great question. I'm going to have to turn to two of my colleagues to answer — the Minister of Highways and Public Works and the Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate. It's not something that my folks have been working on directly, but I'm happy to pass across a question.

Ms. White: I appreciate that. When I often get told that we're the one-government approach — no silos — so, if that information can be spread across, I do appreciate that because I think this is an issue that affects a great deal of the population, to be honest.

Earlier in this Sitting, we were able to do tributes to the opening and the hard work behind the F.H. Collins track facility. I did mention lights. It was pointed out to me again by someone travelling from Riverdale this morning that the lights are on. You're supposed to stay off the track when it's covered in snow because it is actually really bad for it, and you're

supposed to stay off the field when there is snow on it because it's really bad for it. My question is: Why have we got it lit up?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I'll just add a little bit more about libraries and then I'll move on to the F.H. Collins track.

I know that we did a formal assessment of the library facilities over the summer of 2019. We've been using that report to help with long-term planning so that we can keep the community libraries evolving with the changing needs of our community.

So, some things are purely library things, like books, but it's also about technology, about programming, and about how we connect with the community, schools, et cetera. I will let that go for now.

Moving on to the F.H. Collins track, we are using lights when it's dark. It's really about security. It allows, for example, for there to be cameras that can be mounted so that, if there is a problem, it can be sorted. The recommendation is to not turn off the lights. The experience with the facilities managers is that those areas that are not lit often end up with damage — sometimes by ATVs or snowmobiles or things like that — so it can be a problem. Even though we shouldn't have people on there in the winter, as the member opposite notes — and I know that she knows all about this stuff as her family is a strong advocate around track and field — the real costs would be if an ATV or a snowmobile got on there and chewed up that field. What I will note is that the lights that we put in are energy-efficient LEDs, so we hope that it's not an overly significant use of power.

They also double as lights for the grounds of the school, which also can be for safety reasons for young people in the area. I am always happy to look to see if there are other options that might work. I don't know of them yet, but this is the rationale that led to that choice.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer. It seems painfully obvious after I asked it — when we talk about vandalism — but I didn't even vandalize when I was a kid, so I would never go on a field like that. I sometimes think that I misspent my youth and there was more opportunity when I was younger. I appreciate that it makes sense that we don't want people to adversely affect the field, especially with the costs of repairing it. The minister is right.

To say that my father is intimately involved with the construction of that place is an understatement. That man has spent hundreds of hours cutting tracks into grass and waiting with anticipation for that place, so I am well familiar.

Just because the view has changed a bit since the last time that the minister and I spoke — we did talk about alternate self-isolation plans and we did talk about mine sites, but it is relevant now, again, because on December 4, it was announced in NWT that there was one COVID-19 case confirmed at a fly-in, remote camp in the Northwest Territories.

You know, they are describing what their process is there, and I would like to know what our process is here. It is one thing if a person — well, I would like to know first if we can test for COVID-19 in a remote camp setting, and I would like to know, if someone did test positive, what that looks like. If,

for example, their physical health deteriorated, how does that look in Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer depends on which site we are talking about, because each of them have developed specific plans for their sites, but what every one of those plans has to have within it is the anticipation of what happens if someone gets sick. So, that sickness may be COVID or it may be something else, but in any case, they are going to have to have that as part of the plan. Some mines have looked at rapid tests, but we should not think of that as definitive. Rapid tests tell you at the moment whether someone tests positive or not. They don't tell you, for example, whether someone may have been infected and is going to test positive at a later date.

Sometimes the public thinks that, if we put rapid tests in there, we would never get a case. No — actually, it still is possible and we still have to have provisions to deal with those possibilities.

I can talk at a very high level about what goes on at the mines. They have a health team. That team is working there with them. I am not talking about the chief medical officer of health; I am talking about their own health team that they have provided for there. They have areas set apart for people if they become ill. They have provisions around treatment and evacuation if necessary — about separation. Sometimes it might be to monitor; sometimes it might be to evacuate. They have to have thought through how it will work with respect to neighbouring communities. There is a pretty fulsome plan, and then that plan is — and this has nothing to do with alternative self-isolations; this has to do with mines in operation. If you'll recall, this predates any application for alternative self-isolation.

The mine, in order to get back up and running earlier in the year, had to run over those plans with the chief medical officer of health and review them as robust and also generally then had conversations with neighbouring communities — both First Nation and municipality — depending on that set-up.

That's the high-level look at it. I'm happy to answer further questions as I'm able.

Ms. White: I'm not so sure that — I mean, there are probably additional questions if I had additional information. I just want to know that if something happens in Yukon there is a plan in place.

My colleague, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, was talking about the retrofit program that was initially announced was going to be paid back through property taxes. Because since that announcement, since we haven't moved toward the completion of that agreement, how are folks able to access? Are they accessing the retrofit money still through the Yukon Housing Corporation? The reason why this was, I think, maybe brought forward by the Minister of Community Services and celebrated in the way it was is because it was talking about a much longer payback time — but if the minister can tell me what people are doing in the interim until this comes to completion.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Today, someone could go down to the Energy Solutions Centre and work with them to talk about retrofitting their home. It's possible to do today. What's not

there is the ability to borrow money against your property through the government to support that retrofit. We refer to it as a "property assessed clean energy" type of program — a PACE program. But any individual could go and could seek a bank loan or some other form of loan to do that work. Of course, in ideal situations, the energy savings that you get can sometimes even outperform the cost of repayment on that loan. That's possible. We have low rates right now and some of our homes could really use an energy retrofit.

What we are trying to do is bring in a local improvement charge that would allow more Yukoners — more homeowners and more commercial buildings — to be able to get a loan that would help them to deal with the capital costs up front, then pay it back over time through property taxes.

The Yukon Housing Corporation loan program is still there. People can still use it. It isn't tied to retrofits or to this program specifically, but it doesn't deal with commercial properties, whereas the type of program we are thinking about trying to bring in would. It's still some ways off because we still need to work with municipalities, as I was saying to the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin. Municipalities have said to me to please be careful right now, as they are quite loaded with respect to COVID. We are trying to be respectful of that. We will try to work with them on ideas in the meantime. Maybe we will do a pilot in a community or two to see how it works. There are some ideas that are brewing, but as far as I understand it, the Yukon Housing Corporation program loans are still there.

Just to go back — I will note this question as well and talk to the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation to check in with her that I am still correct in what I'm saying. I'm happy to take that question to her on behalf of the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

Ms. White: There is no need for the minister to do that. I am well versed in the Yukon Housing Corporation loan application, as I applied for it twice. It was even, I would like to say, part of the reason why it went from \$35,000 to \$50,000. I spent some time with the deputy minister when he was in his capacity for that department for other reasons — so no need; I am well familiar.

The last question I have today — we have seen our neighbours to the west of us suffer some tragic calamities that are weather-related in Haines, Alaska. I know just based on questions from opposition members — and, of course, from you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and your motion — and the motion I tabled as well about supporting our neighbours in Haines, Alaska — I often say that if Haines was in Canada, I would live there, but it's not, so I don't. Is there anything in the minister's capacity as Minister of Community Services that he is able to do to support them? What are those discussions from the Yukon government's perspective right now in supporting our neighbours in Haines, Alaska?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer is yes. There are roles that we have, and I will just read out a little bit about it for the record. Of course, I also know that the Premier has reached out to the governor. I know that the Minister of Highways and Public Works has had several conversations. I know that the Member for Kluane was asking me questions late last week —

on Friday, I think — to see if we could help some Americans who were in transit and stopped because the highway had been closed. While the Minister of Highways and Public Works was in the House debating, I got a quick question to his DM on the side asking about when we could get that road open. He let me know that it was open then and I think the Member for Kluane got word to those folks, so there is a lot of work trying to coordinate.

So, Haines had declared a state of emergency following strong winds and heavy rains that led to flash flooding and multiple mudslides. The last I heard was that there were still two folks missing, sadly — although at first, it was six missing, so I am glad that those four other folks were located.

We now have the highway open, so we can escort aid vehicles from Alaska or to Alaska, if that is needed. We have reached out to the Department of Homeland Security in Alaska to offer additional assistance, and they thanked us, but they haven't come back to us with specifics. I know that there was a question around sandbags, and so we sourced some quickly from our stores to get ready to get to them, and I am not sure whether that has been asked for specifically.

The Yukon is a signatory of the Pacific Northwest Emergency Management Agreement between the governments of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and the Yukon. The agreement is intended to coordinate the sharing of emergency management resources and expertise in response to natural disasters and other emergencies, so there is a mutual aid agreement about how we work together. This, on top of COVID happening and restrictions around the border — but borders, as far as I understand them, will allow for essential and emergency services to move across. So, all we wait for, then, is the ask that comes. We have reached out and we have talked to them. We have let them know that we would be happy to try to help, but we want them to tell us.

We don't want to overload them with something that they don't need, and including — I have heard from a bunch of people who want to head down there and help out. I just think — whoa, let's wait and see if they ask for people power, because once you go across, you may need to isolate for 14 days and you might actually become a burden on the system for them rather than a support. There is a way in which we work together. We have done the initiation of that to let them know that we are standing by and ready should they need help.

One of the other things worth noting is that Alaska has other resources that they use. They have three Coast Guard bases, a National Guard, and five military bases. They haven't asked us for support yet. I think that they may be utilizing some of their own resources, but we are happy to help if we can in any way. Our hearts go out to the folks in Haines, and we can feel their pain as they deal with some of the tragedy that is there. They know that we are with them in spirit.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer. I am sure that the minister has had many phone calls as well, but I was contacted on the weekend by an individual in town who has friends in Haines. One of the things that the person in Haines had said is that the first thought, at first, was about the dozens of houses that were wrecked. Now, as it turns out, it's

actually hundreds. It is beyond imagination, really. The person was talking about how there was going to be a heap of essential things — from clothing to bedding to food, et cetera — that they were going to need. The person whom I was having the conversation with was trying to figure out if there was a way — Yukoners are generous, and we know that. We always have room and stuff to give. She was looking to try to figure out a way to put out a call for those essential items that the community needed and were identifying. She was trying to figure out how things can get from Whitehorse to Haines, Alaska.

I am wondering if, within the purview of the minister's responsibility under CEMA, he has any suggestions for that?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I know that Yukoners want to help, and I think it is great. I will look for ways in which to try to help make sure that the help is getting through in the right way. The main way in which we work is through our Yukon Emergency Measures Organization. They coordinate with the state emergency operations centre. In the role as Minister of Community Services, that's kind of the appropriate channel that I use.

People may have personal relationships with folks down there and they may hear of things that are needed, but in terms of coordinating something, I would use those channels. I'll check in with our EMO to ask what is being asked for or what we might anticipate to be asked, and then we can deal with the logistics of it once we get that.

I think that we need to rely on those appropriate channels, from a government perspective. There may be other ways that people can work personally, but if we're coordinating something, it really needs to be ensuring that we are lining up with our colleagues in Haines and in the US. We don't want to cause problems, as well-intentioned as they might be. We really have to follow their lead in telling us how to support them.

I'll leave it there for now. I do want to acknowledge Yukoners' spirit and how much they're willing to give to help our neighbours. That is heartwarming in the face of a tragedy.

Mr. Istchenko: I just want to follow up with something else. The Leader of the Third Party did bring it up, but I was inundated right after that by many people. They were heading down, they were loading equipment, and they were going. I was like, "Whoa, hang on a second. The road is closed right now, so you'll get in a line-up." That is why we did ask the question and I knew that it was going to come up, because we do have a big arts and business community in my riding who took the sales of some of their day yesterday. It was pizza day all day at the pub and all the proceeds went and the top spots and all the proceeds from a couple of days before down there, which is wonderful. I am sure that they can use that.

But I understand, when I asked the question, and I understand how things work — being involved with the military and the Canadian Rangers — that things do go through EMO, so my question, I guess, is: When it comes to the ask that comes back, how will EMO go about — and I will just give an example — say, if they start to need equipment, how will EMO go about — will they go off to third-party rental? Will they put a call out through the public? Those are some of the questions

— or do people need to get a hold of EMO and say, “Listen, I have this; if you need it, call me” — kind of — “We’re ready to go.”

Can I get a little bit more detail on it?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This is always a little bit of a chicken-and-egg question. What I will say is that — I think that, if EMO gets a request for something that we feel the public could support, we will put out a public call. If it is something that the business community could support — maybe that is more like equipment or things like that — we will reach out through the chambers. I think we would also work our own internal channels as a government to see what resources we have that we could be supporting and supplying.

So, it is really dependent on what they are asking for — so, sandbags for example. I’m not thinking that Yukoners are going to have sandbags lying around, so we look to our own stores. I think that is an example where we look internally, but I think it really is dependent on what that request is for.

I just will acknowledge here in the Legislature today, just as colleagues from across the way are acknowledging, that there are Yukoners who are willing to help out; we just need to ask. I will wait to see what it is that we’re hearing from Haines that they have identified as being needed, and we will try to be smart about that, about where we go. I don’t want to discount any of this caring and generosity from our community. I realize that it’s there and I am happy to tap into it — not so much to not have responsibility ourselves as a government, but to provide the opportunity to those people who want to contribute to have an opportunity to do that. That’s how I’ll think of it.

To date, the one thing I heard about was sandbags, but there is more to come, I’m sure. It’s still evolving as members opposite have noted.

Mr. Istchenko: The other issue that had happened — it was more federal with CBSA and I got a hold of the minister right away. There were two American travellers who were doing the right thing and they were travelling and they were at a local hotel in Haines Junction self-isolating, but they were there for three days and the requirement, of course, was 24 hours to go through. They got a call that they had to basically head toward Beaver Creek and get out of Canada. I want to thank whoever from across the way helped, but they got a call back from CBSA that said, “No, just stay put.” They realized that here we are in an emergency and it’s not like they were staying back on purpose. Maybe that’s just something that, moving forward, the department can make sure the next time they have a bilateral with the federal government that they realize that we could have these situations, especially in the light of winter and our two — Skagway and Haines — those roads and avalanches and it’s supposed to be a heavy snow year. We could have this again. It would be nice if those people know that they can just stay put and they don’t have to try to go back to the southern states or whatever — most of them are military travellers — or however that works.

I want to thank the department for everything.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It gives me a good chance to say thanks to all of our enforcement folks who have been working out there. When they come across a problem, they’re working

first to try to support Yukoners and educate and deal with the problem directly. So, I will be sure to pass across a thank you to both the CEMA enforcement team, our EMO folks, and also to CBSA.

We’ve had other instances over the summer. I heard about someone whose trailer broke down and I was getting calls in the middle of the night and I’m saying, “Look, it’s okay. Just be reasonable. I’ll try to get word in. I know you’re trying to do the right thing.” Those sorts of things don’t worry us; they really don’t. It’s when someone is purposefully flaunting the rules and putting others at risk — that’s what gets us.

With that, I just will say — because I think we’re getting to the end — so I would just like to take a minute to also thank the officials who have come in again today and I appreciate that they’ve helped support — to get some of this information for members opposite.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line debate.

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: Ms. White has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$9,501,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$275,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$9,776,000 agreed to

Department of Community Services agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: We will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Highways and Public Works — continued

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to thank, once again, my officials, Mr. Gorczyca and Mr. McConnell, for coming in to help us this afternoon to navigate the turbulent waters of Highways and Public Works. I welcome my colleagues' questions this afternoon. Without further ado, I'll let them get at it.

Mr. Hassard: I guess the first question would be: Why are the waters so turbulent in Highways and Public Works? Is there something that maybe we should know about? I guess we will wait and see.

I just have a couple more questions for Highways and Public Works. I, too, appreciate the officials for being here.

The first question that I had was in regard to CVIP inspections. Individuals used to be able to take a course and get certified to do inspections for motor vehicles. The rules have changed. You now have to either be a third-year or red seal certified mechanic in order to take the course and to be allowed to do CVIPs, so I'm wondering if the minister could provide the House with an update as to why that change was made.

I know that there were a couple of people who were on the list to get certified, but the course wasn't allowed or wasn't put out for several months, and as a result, people who were on the list are no longer eligible to get certified. I am wondering if the minister could give us a bit of information on that.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will endeavour to get the member opposite an answer to the question of why we have changed our requirements for CVIP inspections. I will get back to the member opposite with that.

Mr. Hassard: The other question I had was regarding the Nisutlin Bay bridge. I know that there is an RFQ out. I believe that it closes on December 10. I'm curious if the minister can provide the House with any updates on negotiations with the Teslin Tlingit Council and just any updates in general in regard to the Nisutlin Bay bridge.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I can tell the member opposite that we're in the midst of negotiations. I'm not going to comment on negotiations on the floor of the House right now. The negotiations are ongoing with the Teslin Tlingit Council on the Nisutlin Bay bridge. I believe that our officials are even down there this week continuing those negotiations. The talks have been positive. The member opposite is correct that the request for proposals is closing this month.

Mr. Hassard: If the RFQ closes on December 10 and the negotiations haven't wrapped up with Teslin Tlingit Council, how is that not going to affect the tendering process of the job? How are the proponents going to deal with that?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: That's a little clearer. First of all, I just said — and the member opposite corrected me gently, and I appreciate that. It is an RFQ, not an RFP. The RFP process is to come. We're currently in the middle of an RFQ.

We're going to qualify contractors, but the request for proposals will incorporate all of the rest of the work with TTC as we go along. We're currently working to qualify our contractors to do the job as we continue the negotiations with the Teslin Tlingit Council on all of the matters that have to be addressed going into the proposal going forward.

We will conclude negotiations with TTC before the request for proposals goes out, but we will have contractors in place who are qualified to do the work and we will work with them and the Teslin Tlingit Council.

These things don't happen — you start with step one, do the next, do the next. They are all happening in real time, but the work of the negotiations with the TTC, the Teslin Tlingit Council, will be finalized before we put out the request for proposals.

Mr. Hassard: Then I guess my last question for the minister would be: When does he anticipate the RFP to be going out?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As soon as negotiations with the Teslin Tlingit Council are finalized.

Mr. Hassard: I guess it's not quite my last question.

We have heard on numerous occasions about the greatness of the five-year capital concept — the importance of planning in order for proper budgeting to take place. Is that the planning process that is taking place? Well, when we get the negotiations finished, then we will go to the next step — or is there anything in between there?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: For the record, we have had this discussion over the course of the last several years. It is a five-year capital plan, not a capital concept. The member opposite continually uses the wrong terminology for the work that the department has done creating this document, which is a very useful document for contractors and the general public and apparently for the opposition to actually use in planning — be it questions for the opposition or projects for the contracting community or just knowing what is happening in the neighbourhood for the general public. That document is comprehensive. It is one of the first times that this government has ever used it. I, once again, am very glad to see the Leader of the Official Opposition using it.

Mr. Hassard: That was a great little spiel about the concept, the plan, or whatever we want to call it, but at the end of the day, the minister didn't answer the question. I would hope that the minister could provide us with some sort of timeline that he is anticipating, whether it be six months or three years.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The timeline is laid out in the five-year capital plan. I have every confidence that the timeline is still intact. The negotiations are ongoing. The tone of the negotiations is good and positive, and I have every confidence that the Department of Highways and Public Works and the Government of Yukon can reach an agreement with the Teslin Tlingit Council on the tremendous and important job of fixing the Nisutlin Bay bridge.

Ms. Hanson: When we left off on Friday, the minister had just commented that he lamented the fact that my initial optimism may have been whittled away during the course of his

responses. Indeed, they were. I am hoping that we can see a reviving of that optimism.

I want to pick up on my colleague's — the Member for Pelly Nisutlin — question with respect to how Highways and Public Works is addressing chapter 22 — where the *Teslin Tlingit Council Final Agreement* sets out the process for economic opportunities in their traditional territory, particularly as this government has made specific reference to the opportunities for aboriginal businesses — and we look at the development corporations. It is chapter 22.5.0, which speaks to contracting.

Are there any intentions for some limits and opportunities? What are they with respect to the development corporation for the Teslin Tlingit Council? It is one thing to have a government-to-government conversation, but there is a difference between the government and the business arm, which is the development corporation — which would then be guiding.

I was just joking with my colleague from Pelly-Nisutlin off-mic that there is a sense of *déjà vu*. This bridge went offline once before because of that lack of consultation and meaningful engagement with the community as a whole — with the Teslin Tlingit Council and with the development corporation, in particular. I would be curious as to what measures are in place to ensure that there are equitable opportunities for the Teslin Tlingit Council's economic arm and the businesses that flow from that which would be involved in contracting. That is the issue that was at play in this conversation so far — contracting.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I welcome my discussion with the Member for Whitehorse Centre again this afternoon. I am certainly glad to hear of her optimism. I hope that we can continue that through our discussion.

I believe that the question has to do with contracting and how it pertains to First Nation governments. It provides a sharp contrast between eras in this Yukon government administration.

I'm going to start this afternoon with my response touching on our First Nation procurement policy, which the department officials have been working diligently on for — actually, it has been two years. We had hoped to have a policy passed quite a long time ago. But in discussions as we launched this First Nation procurement policy within the department and reached out to First Nations and started those conversations — which were really, really well attended by many First Nations coming out on a regular basis, even through COVID, to engage with us on this policy — we realized the value in having this conversation with First Nations and their corporations about how the Government of Yukon does procurement and how the First Nations could benefit from it and developing a real conversation about how we can improve things.

Rather than insist on meeting the deadline, I asked how things were going and the department said they were going really, really well. I said, "Then let's keep the discussion going. Let's actually work closer together."

So, we didn't meet the deadline, but in not meeting the deadline, we actually came to a much better place with the First Nations in the territory and the Yukon government. There was

a real exchange of information and of collaboration. Recently, I have had First Nation representatives from the Ta'an Kwäch'an and from the Kwanlin Dün reach out to me and really thank me for the process that the Department of Highways and Public Works undertook. The sincerity with which the conversation happened and was allowed to grow was really, really rewarding.

The work that we have been doing — we started on the Nares River bridge project down in Carcross early in our mandate, and then it evolved into the First Nation procurement policy and is now moving into our work on the Nisutlin Bay bridge. It has been very, very instructive for me and has laid a very good foundation, I believe, within the Department of Highways and Public Works, within the First Nation community, and within communities throughout the territory in how to change the way procurement works in the territory.

This collaborative policy development with First Nations is a first for our government — for the Yukon government, really — and a demonstration of our commitment to reconciliation. We have had, since we got into power, four Yukon Forums a year throughout our mandate attended. It has been that work — those partnerships and the relationships that we have built through that process have been vital. It has worked its way throughout government, including the procurement policies of the government, and it represents meaningful action to help First Nation governments become partners in the Yukon economy in the shape of employment, training, and business opportunities. We see, as well, a representative public service work here. We see it in the way that we are changing procurement, and I think that you are going to see, in the coming weeks and months, more for us to say on that matter.

The Nares River bridge project, of course — I touched on that. That changed the way that we did procurement within Highways and Public Works. It was very collaborative with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, and it gave them a real say in how the project would get done and tangible benefits within a community, both in terms of economic development as well as training for employees. That built some human capital — some political capital — within the First Nation — certainly of the CTFN, but also in other First Nations that saw how we were willing to work together —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Deputy Chair: Member for Whitehorse Centre, on a point of order.

Ms. Hanson: The minister is speaking on matters other than what is at play here. The question was with respect to Teslin Tlingit Council, not about Carcross/Tagish First Nation, not about Ta'an Kwäch'an or Kwanlin Dün — with respect to all those First Nations. I was asking specifically with respect to the contracting provisions — chapter 22.5.0 — as they apply to the Teslin Tlingit, not to his general philosophy about Yukon Forum and everything else. I'm asking about the application of that First Nation's final agreement to the contracting opportunities.

Deputy Chair: Are you on Standing Order 19(b)?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Deputy Chair: Mr. Mostyn, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm so very disappointed in the member opposite this afternoon with this point of order.

On the point of order, what I'm doing is answering her question, because her question related to the Teslin Tlingit Council and chapter 22. I'm giving her an answer to chapter 22 and all the work that we're doing that feeds into the Teslin Tlingit Council with regard to the Nisutlin Bay bridge.

Deputy Chair's ruling

Deputy Chair: The Chair has listened closely to both of these. Although I'm not disagreeing with Ms. Hanson, it's kind of a circuitous route to the question that she asked, so I would ask the minister to please wrap it up and get to the point with the TTC, please.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I appreciate your ruling. Why I'm profoundly disappointed with the Member for Whitehorse Centre — who is, again, sort of pushing the bounds — I'm giving a very deep response to her question, and I'm very disappointed in the fact that she just wants a cut and dried response, which is really one of the problems that the First Nations have had with the way that the government procures and deals with them all the time — just get to the facts. It is usually much deeper than that and refers to relationships and whatnot.

When it comes down to the Teslin Tlingit Council, just last week, we had a joint presentation with the TTC to the community on the project. They were there. They were presenting alongside us because they are our partners, which leads into the work that we did on Nares and through the Yukon Forum and now into the Nisutlin Bay bridge. We have had lots of ongoing discussion last week and this week. We are down there again, talking to them and bringing them into this project. There is a project charter that was signed in 2019, government to government, which is a framework for discussion and negotiations for economic opportunities. Again, we sat down and had that discussion with them and set a project charter for this that lays out how they will participate and how they will benefit from this economically.

The TTC is also going to be a partner in our ranking of the respondents to the request for qualifications — so qualified contractors. They will also be a part of that — again, working together as one toward a successful conclusion for this project.

We are not rushing things. It's not just going to be "Cut to the chase and get it done". We are working very closely with our partners, as we have throughout our mandate, to build those relationships and to work and understand more deeply what the benefits are that can flow to the communities and to the government from those respectful conversations that we are having with our partners.

Ms. Hanson: It took us 15 minutes to finally get to a notion that there may be something happening, but we're not quite sure. At least we can take from it — well, I'm not sure

what we can take from it, but there is some indication of some activity, even absent an aboriginal procurement policy.

So, let's try something that the minister loves to talk about. He does love to talk, so hopefully, he can answer the question before the time is up today. The minister, in his conversation earlier in this budget area, had talked about the fact that there is a total of 5,000 kilometres of the Yukon highway system that is being brushed by this government, brushed — and I quote: "...brushed to a standard".

My question, Mr. Deputy Chair was: What standard and what criteria are included in contracts with respect to environmental and wildlife hazards? What holdbacks are provided in those contracts to guarantee that the work is done to that standard? The last part of that, Mr. Deputy Chair, is: Does that standard require uniform clearing of 30 metres, from centre line out, for brushing? I raise that because — the minister is very familiar with concerns I raised about Carcross Road and Tagish Road, but as I look up the north Klondike and I look around areas like Henderson Corner, if the minister is going to enforce a 30-metre clearance, you are going to see that encroaching right upon people's property — right through those trees, which are actually bird habitat that, in previous — that actually have had some protection under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*.

It's nice to have clear-cuts all across the highways, but what are the standards? How are they enforced? What criteria are included to ensure that environmental and wildlife hazards are removed and that environmental standards are maintained?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The member opposite is absolutely correct — I do like to talk about this subject. I do so because I know it's important to Yukoners. One of the reasons why — we're talking about rights-of-way — highway rights-of-way that are identified — the fact that there are barriers of trees in the right-of-way is because the brushing has not been done consistently ever. So, people have been allowed — had been left to believe that the trees are there — that they've been allowed to grow up. Some of the trees that should have been cleared out are huge; they're five or six inches in diameter. They should never have been allowed to get that big, but there has been no consistent approach to the 5,000 kilometres of highway that the member opposite correctly referenced in her opening remarks.

What we did — and Mr. Gorczyca was part of the team who worked on this project and I'm very glad to have him here this afternoon — they set up five classifications of highway. The brush-clearing is done to those standards set out in the five classifications. They're based on socio-economic factors, traffic volumes, tourism impacts, economic impacts — all of those things have gone into setting up five different categories of highway and then we look at those factors and we have standards.

So, Highway No. 1, which is through Whitehorse, will be cleared every single year to a standard from the centre line out and will be done every year. In areas with lower traffic volumes, with less economic activity, et cetera, we won't be spending all the time to do that work because there isn't the need. We will clear narrower on the highway because the cost

of doing it is expensive. We want to put the money where it is most necessary for visibility and everything else.

We have five categories of highway now. That classification system wasn't used before. As we go through, we then work — when we let the contracts, we look at stem height, vegetation control, clearance width, safety, and sightlines — all those different things — we give them to the contractor. The contractor must adhere to the migratory birds act when they are clearing the trees to make sure that they are not destroying nests or whatever else. They have to adhere to that law as well.

The end result will be that we will have safer highways that have better sightlines. We will have more consistency, so it won't be something like: Cody up at X location has requested brush-clearing, so we're going to go out and do it. It is set in a regular standard. It is done by this date and will be done within the next five years. We can say with certainty when the work is going to be done, we can say to what standard it's going to be done, and we can give those standards to contractors. This is a first for the government in terms of thoughtful and meaningful progression on a job that Yukoners find very useful.

We have heard from people — even last week I had a constituent tell me how much they appreciated the work and the improvements that they are seeing along our highways. Again, I think that it is really rewarding and is largely due to the great work of the Department of Highways and Public Works to bring some consistency, in a consistent application, to the issue of the condition of our rights-of-way, which has been neglected for dozens and dozens of years.

With that, Mr. Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Mostyn that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Acting Government House Leader that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Chair's report

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

Mr. Adel: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Acting Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Written notice was given of the following motions December 7, 2020:

Motion No. 368

Re: announcing tourism relief funding (Istchenko)

Motion No. 369

Re: releasing details of the universal childcare plan (McLeod)

Motion No. 370

Re: costs of implementing *Putting People First — the final report of the comprehensive review of Yukon's health and social programs and services* recommendations (McLeod)

Motion No. 371

Re: explanation of school bus delay (Kent)

Motion No. 372

Re: explanation of Yukon Hospital Corporation deficit (Cathers)

Motion No. 373

Re: Yukon Energy Corporation diesel fuel usage and electrical rate increases (Cathers)

Motion No. 374

Re: distribution of initial COVID-19 vaccines to Yukon (Hassard)