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HANSARD

Tuesday, October 13, 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
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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
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Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Highways and Public Works; the Public Service Commission
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Minister of Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board; Women's Directorate

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Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
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Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change that has been made to the Order Paper. The following motion has been removed from the Order Paper as the action requested in the motion has been taken in whole or in part: Motion No. 222, standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party.

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: We will proceed with the Order Paper.
 Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Cathers: I would ask members to join me in welcoming a constituent to the gallery, Peter Wojtowicz.

Applause

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Fire Prevention Week

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal Party and the Yukon NDP to talk about fire safety. This past week was Fire Prevention Week. It is so important to protect ourselves and our families from fires that could easily be prevented. This year's fire prevention theme is "Serve Up Fire Safety in the Kitchen". It turns out that, here in Canada, cooking is the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries. Unattended cooking is the biggest culprit.

Mr. Speaker, I have personal experience in this area. When I was a young adult, my girlfriend and I were cooking, and we left the stove unattended while we read the paper. We smelled smoke and made some mistakes, as a pot with hot oil burst into flames. We did manage to get a lid on the pot and put it out, but only after I got a pretty nasty third-degree burn. I learned the hard way.

Here are some simple safety tips for all of us so that we can learn differently from how I did: never leave your cooking food unattended; use a timer to remind you that you're cooking; always turn your stove off before you leave or take a nap; keep an oven mitt and a pan lid nearby; keep kids and pets away from cooking; and keep anything that can catch fire away from your stovetop. Preventing fires from starting, being alert to fire, and knowing how to get out fast in the event of a fire saves lives.

If you haven't already, make sure that you install smoke alarms outside all sleeping areas and on every level of the home, including the basement. If you are a tenant, make sure your landlord installs them — it's the law. Test smoke alarms regularly. It just takes a few seconds and can save lives.

Have a home fire escape plan and practise it with everyone you live with, even your pets. In the event of a fire, listen for the sound of the smoke alarm. You could have only minutes to escape safely once the alarm sounds. Learn two ways out of each room. Make sure that all doors and windows leading outside open easily and are free of clutter. Go to your outside meeting place, a safe distance from your home.

More information about fire safety and prevention is available online at yukon.ca and on the Protective Services Facebook page.

In the Yukon so far this year, eight percent of our home fires have been cooking-related and this is an improvement, considering that some years it has been as high as 18 percent.

So this tribute goes out to our dedicated folks in the fire service and to all Yukoners who are making fire safety in their kitchens and homes a priority.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Fire Prevention Week and to recognize that the theme this year is "Serve Up Fire Safety in the Kitchen". Those working to educate children, individuals, and families are focusing on this campaign. The theme is a reminder to all that a leading cause of fire in the home is unattended cooking.

Fortunately, there are a number of actions that can be taken to minimize risk in your home, including staying in the kitchen when you are cooking, using a kitchen timer to remind you of how long something is cooking for, and keeping anything ignitable a safe distance from the stove. As well, it is important to recognize the importance of not throwing water on a grease fire — put a lid on it and turn off the stove. It's always a good idea to have fire extinguishers handy in the home.

We have a great network of people across the Yukon who work to protect our families, homes, and communities from fire, including staff and volunteer firefighters who dedicate their time and expertise throughout the year to being on call as well as responding to emergency situations. I would like to recognize and thank all of these people for the work that they do, including the work that they are doing in training to be ready for an emergency call. As well, thanks go out to the Yukon Fire Marshal's Office, municipal fire departments, and volunteer fire departments across the territory for the work that they do.

The Yukon is also home to a number of other crews that train and mobilize each summer in response to wildland fire suppression, and our thanks are due as well to Wildland Fire Management crews, Yukon First Nations Wildfire crews, as well as volunteer fire departments across the territory that play a role in keeping our communities and neighbourhoods safe from fire.

I would like to encourage Yukoners to take a moment to educate themselves on preventing fires in their homes — especially their kitchens — as well as having an appropriate escape plan and fire extinguishers and other materials handy in case there was a fire in their homes. Safety starts with you, and there are many steps that you can take yourself to improve home safety.

Applause

In recognition of International Day of the Girl Child

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to International Day of the Girl Child. This is a day to focus attention on addressing the challenges that girls face in promoting their empowerment and fulfilling their human rights. The theme that UNICEF has created for this year is “My voice, our equal future”. I love the balance of this theme between individual power and collective responsibility. When I think of “My voice, our equal future”, I think of the incredible girls using their own voice in an incredible way right here in our community, our territory, our country, and around the world.

I also think of all the strong, resilient women already in leadership throughout our territory. Yukon is full of women who are change-makers and boundary-breakers. We are lucky to live in a territory with so many strong women in leadership and positions of authority.

Strong women are around me in this Legislative Assembly today as MLAs representing our citizens. They are all over our territory — First Nation chiefs and council members, mayors and municipal councillors, elders, traditional knowledge-holders, teachers and other professionals, matriarchs, entrepreneurs, artists, tradespeople, business executives, and leaders in government. These women have paved the way and have provided the example for young girls to set their own path. When girls are supported, they have the potential to change the world as tomorrow’s leaders, mentors, and change-makers.

Today, I would like to acknowledge and highlight a conference that a group of young Yukoners took part in last February — Pinoys on Parliament was the first and largest Filipino Canadian youth leadership conference. This conference hosted 200 delegates across Canada to participate and make a difference in their home communities. Nine Filipino Yukoners attended the event and were able to represent the north and connect with fellow youth and leaders from sea to sea to sea.

The *Whitehorse Star* interviewed one of the participants, Ira Mamis. Ira is a Yukon University student and a board member of the Canadian Filipino Association of Yukon. I think Ira’s words are a great example of the strength that young women have and they are reflective of this year’s theme, Mr. Speaker. She told the paper — when asked what she looked forward to about the conference — and I quote: “I am very passionate about newcomers and immigrants, youth empowerment and creating meaningful change in the community. ... At the Pinoys on Parliament, I am most looking forward to having powerful and enriching conversations, creating networks, and collaborating ideas with like-minded individuals who share an equal passion in our culture, identity and Filipino representation.” Ira, like many youth advocates in Yukon, is using her voice for the benefit of all Yukoners. She is working to create a more equal future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on some edifying numbers published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. When I was doing the research for this tribute, it was striking

— and I thought it needs to be said that before the pandemic, 129.2 million girls ages six to 17 were out of school. Today, because of COVID-19, an additional 12 million children will never set foot in or see a classroom ever again. Out of those 12 million, nine million are girls. We know for a fact, Mr. Speaker, that education is one of the key components to keeping our girls and women safe. I am worried for these 138.2 million girls who will never be offered this opportunity.

This made me think about how lucky we are to live in Canada and to call Canada our home where our youth are protected and offered equal access to education. We should wake up every day and remind ourselves how lucky we are to be in Yukon, a place that is safe and where our girls are watched over and empowered.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child. We observe this day each year to bring attention to a range of female-specific challenges that girls face around the world. According to the United Nations General Assembly, the day is meant to recognize girls’ rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world. The International Day of the Girl Child focuses attention on the need to address the challenges that girls face and to promote girls’ empowerment and the fulfillment of their human rights.

In Canada, emphasis is being placed on online violence. As we deal with COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines across the country, we have seen an increase in online activity among our young people. There is a need to ensure that girls are free to be online without the risk of facing harassment and abuse. Over half of the girls in Canada between the ages of 15 and 24 have experienced online abuse and harassment. This is not acceptable. It’s hard enough growing up — our girls should not have to be burdened with this harassment, lower self-esteem, loss of confidence, and mental or emotional stress. Girls and women are nearly twice as likely to suffer certain mental illnesses, such as depression and types of anxiety. Often these issues stem from self-esteem and perceptions about body image, often centred around the Internet and social media.

This year, it’s even more important than ever to keep an eye on your children’s online activity but also on them — their demeanor, their emotional state, and their reactions. Their well-being, Mr. Speaker, is in our hands. Talk openly about the dangers and risks associated with being online, and be open to listen if they’re willing to talk.

Remember that, while it is so important to continue to raise awareness about the issues that disproportionately affect girls, it is even more important to ensure that all of our children — not only the girls — are raised to have respect for themselves and for others.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child.

2020 marks the 25th anniversary of when some 30,000 women and men from nearly 200 countries arrived in Beijing,

China for the Fourth World Conference on Women. These delegates were determined to get the recognition that the rights of women and girls are, indeed, human rights.

The conference concluded with the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the most comprehensive policy agenda for the empowerment of women that the world had ever seen. It should be no surprise that, in the years following, it has been women who have pushed this agenda of equality and it is women leading global movements on issues that affect all people. Women and girls have never stopped working and they continue to be at the forefront of movements that sweep the globe.

Today's more than 1.1 billion girls are poised to take on the future. Every day, girls are breaking boundaries and barriers, tackling issues like child marriage, education, equality, violence, climate justice, and equitable access to health care. Girls continue to raise their voices for the future that they deserve, and they continue to prove that they are a powerful and unstoppable force. There are many young girls in our communities, in our country, and around the world who are speaking up, becoming leaders, and lighting the way.

Our girl children face many odds — not the least of which is to know that they have the right and the ability to lead movements that change the world, just like the strong women in whose footsteps they follow. Our job is to not only ensure that these girl children have the support, the education, and the safe communities and opportunities to continue to grow to become our future leaders, but we as adults and as leaders need to call out the progressively more ugly and violent hate speech that has been and is directed at girls who dare to speak out and to take a stand on the issues important to them.

So, we salute the girls who make us uncomfortable and who challenge the status quo. They do it all with the commitment and clear-eyed vision of the unjaded. As leaders, we are called to stand with this unscripted and unstoppable power that is the girl child.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Silver: Pursuant to section 9 of the *Public Service Group Insurance Benefit Plan Act*, I have for tabling the annual report of the joint management committee.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have for tabling the 2018-19 Yukon College annual report, which is tabled pursuant to section 16(3) of the *Yukon College Act*.

I also have for tabling the *Department of Education Annual Report 2019*, which is tabled pursuant to section 5(h) of the *Education Act*.

Mr. Istchenko: I have for tabling a letter from the residents of Nygren subdivision requesting a 500-metre greenbelt buffer zone around the subdivision.

Speaker: Are there any further documents for tabling?
Are there any reports of committees?
Are there any petitions?
Are there any bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the Yukon mineral exploration program stimulus in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to identify areas in which to build new moderately sized campgrounds and to identify current campgrounds that have space for expansion.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to schedule regular road maintenance to campgrounds, perform site maintenance through the camping season, ensure that boat launches and docks are constructed or upgraded at each campground, and complete major upgrades to campsites during the shoulder seasons.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to freeze current campground daily and permit rates for Yukon citizens and to ensure free camping for Yukon seniors.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motions?
Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon employment rate and economy

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, 2020 has been a challenging year all-round, especially for Yukon businesses. Economies in Canada and around the world continue to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is a lot of uncertainty about the weeks and months ahead. However, when you look across the country, Yukon's economy is doing relatively well and there are many encouraging signs despite some of the major challenges that we have faced.

The price of gold went above \$2,000 US this summer, which bodes well for mining and exploration in the territory. Yukon's mining industry has taken a proactive approach to ensure that health and safety are at the forefront of mining operations throughout the territory, and it has continued to contribute to Yukon's economy throughout the pandemic.

Robust strength in the mining sector is one of the reasons that Yukon is expected to see positive GDP growth in 2020. Retail sales are still strong, and residential building construction is booming compared to previous years, driven in part by an increase in available lots throughout the territory. Residential building construction has already exceeded last

year's total, with \$74 million worth of building permits issued through August of 2020 — over 81 percent higher than in the first eight months of 2019.

Residential investment data shows that growth last year has been a mix of both new construction and renovations. Both single-home construction and investment in multiple-dwelling buildings has seen a boost, with year-to-date permits growing by 29 percent and 42 percent respectively. Yukon is one of only two Canadian jurisdictions anticipating GDP growth this year, and it really speaks to the strength and diversity of Yukon's economy leading up to this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, new figures released on Friday show that our unemployment rate is once again the lowest in Canada at 6.2 percent. We are almost a full three percentage points lower than the Canadian average and the only jurisdiction below seven percent. This is testament to the strength and resiliency of Yukon's private sector. Yukon business owners have shown incredible determination and perseverance over the last several months. I want to thank them for all that they are doing to keep Yukoners employed and to keep providing the quality goods and services that Yukoners have come to expect from local businesses.

Earlier this year — like every place in Canada — we did see several businesses close. By June 2020, we began to see openings of new businesses significantly outpacing closings. I hope to see this trend continue. Together with the Government of Canada, we have rolled out several programs to assist businesses, notably the business relief program. More than 430 businesses have used the program at a cost to the Yukon government of \$5.1 million.

There are positive signs as we continue to navigate the storm that has been brought on by COVID-19. There continue to be challenges, of course, but we also have reason to be optimistic about the territory's economic future. I encourage all Yukoners to continue to buy local and support community businesses and organizations. We are all in this together and together we will get through it.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the minister's statement on the state of the Yukon's economy in 2020. This statement is clearly in response to the question we have been asking of this government about their plans for economic recovery. The minister paints a very rosy picture of the current state of the economy; unfortunately, it increasingly seems that the Liberal government is out of touch with reality when it comes to what many Yukoners face.

While of course we are happy with the price of gold and the success of mining and construction — and the success of other businesses during this downturn — not all Yukoners or Yukon businesses share this rosy view. Compared to this time last year, we have hundreds more Yukoners out of work, and compared to this time last year, we have hundreds less businesses open in the territory.

We have seen businesses reduce their operations, lay off staff, cut costs, and try any number of things to keep the lights on. For many businesses, the coming winter months bring even further challenges and uncertainty. We have even seen Yukon's

airline raise alarm bells about what the conditions could mean for their workforce.

Many businesses in my riding use the summer months to save up enough money to get through the winter. This year, they barely held on through the summer. The prospect of entering the winter with nothing but the hope of government support is a frightening experience. I have heard from businesses in my riding that they want to be able to work their way out of this, but it's hard to see how they'll be able to do this.

This isn't just a challenging year or a temporary downturn as the minister would have us believe. For those in the tourism industry, this is a crisis as their industry collapses.

It's not just tourism. We have heard from businesses — many in other sectors — that are facing tough times. Many Yukon businesses that were closed or forced to close this year have seen huge drops in their business. This is particularly true for businesses in the medical services or personal services industries. We've heard from dental clinics that are down as much as 84 percent at certain points through the lockdowns. On top of the reduced revenue and lower business opportunities, many businesses face considerable cost increases on things like PPE or infrastructure upgrades.

I also note that the minister spoke about the uptick in the residential construction industry. He claims that this is due to his government's ability to get lots out. This is another area where the government is out of touch. There is an incredible shortage of residential and commercial land for development. We have heard from businesses that a lack of access to commercial and industrial land in the territory is blackening their ability to grow. This lack of land is driving up housing prices and making it even more difficult for Yukoners and their families to get ahead.

While the road ahead will be difficult, we believe that there are solutions that will help us on the path to economic recovery. We have always been willing to work with the government, but they have refused these offers. On March 9, we offered to establish an all-party committee to allow MLAs to work together and to face the economic recovery together. We thought that if we took the politics out of this we would be able to find consensus on some clear measures that could help our struggling private sector. Both the Yukon Party and the New Democratic Party were on board. Unfortunately, Liberals used their majority to shut down the idea of us working on this challenge together. Now the government is trying to use these most recent statistics to distract from the real-world impacts to many Yukoners and what they're living.

So we're happy to see some positive indicators in our economy, of course — but what we really want to see is a plan for economic recovery. We owe that to Yukoners and to all those keeping their businesses afloat by dipping into personal savings. Buy local, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. White: The economic impacts of the pandemic have been radically different depending on who you speak to. This is true on the world stage and it is true right here in Yukon. The wealthiest corporations and individuals have seen their profits

skyrocket while many people living paycheque to paycheque suddenly lost that paycheque. Small businesses have closed, tourism operators are struggling to stay afloat, and many service industry workers have yet to see signs of recovery.

During the pandemic, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments recognized that the lowest earning workers — those who are paid less than a living wage, without any benefits like health coverage or a pension — were suddenly essential. With this realization, we saw the creation of a subsidized top-up in the Yukon, meaning that those who were earning less than \$20 an hour could qualify for up to an additional \$4 an hour for 16 weeks. But apparently these workers are not essential enough to earn a living wage beyond the 16-week subsidy. These workers who are on the front lines of the pandemic and who never had the freedom of staying home where it was safe are back to earning less than a living wage, despite being told that they are heroes and that the work that they do is essential.

How does this issue fit with the minister's statement, Mr. Speaker? How is this fair? How is this a just recovery? The answer is that it isn't fair and that it isn't just. What is worrisome about the tone of the minister's statement today is that, when he talks about GDP growth, that is cold comfort for the hundreds of workers who can't make ends meet because their wage is below the poverty line. Our economy won't recover until we fix the crack in the foundation that the pandemic has highlighted. Suggesting that we will get back to normal isn't good enough because "normal" never recognized the economic gaps that continue to grow. Until a hard day's work earns a living wage for everyone, our economy will be unbalanced. Until those who have lost their jobs or have been forced to close their businesses can support their families, something drastic has to change.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that this year has been challenging. While the opposition is quick to point out — the points about the Spring Sitting and the ability to work together — I know that, in the role of the Minister of Economic Development, I am also always open to work with my counterparts. I know that the Member for Kluane on occasion has given me direction and good advice on previous work that has been done in his riding. I definitely made sure that this was tabled and used in our last conference in the Kluane region.

I don't believe that I am painting a rosy picture. I am sharing numbers, because the numbers do matter.

At the end of the Sitting, the opposition worked, but our government has been working tirelessly to manage this pandemic and support Yukoners. Not a day has gone by since March 19 that our team has not been in touch with Yukoners and businesses to understand the challenges that they are facing and to find ways to help them through these difficult times, so we are constantly in conversation with those many sectors that were touched.

Less than a week after the House adjourned in March, our Liberal government established the Business Advisory Council to ensure that the needs of Yukon businesses and communities were heard, and we worked to address the economic impacts of

COVID-19. Hearing directly from the business community helped us to be responsive to their needs. I want to commend my colleagues here who continue to work with Air North week by week — as was touched on by the member opposite — and how important they are to this economy. We have stood by them through this process.

We were able to tailor our support programs in a way that ensured that effective support was provided where and when it was needed. I want to thank all of the individuals who contributed to these important conversations over the past seven months. Local businesses are the heart of the Yukon economy, and it has been vital to get their advice to better support them through these difficult times.

We also work closely with our partners, including the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, to provide comprehensive support to Yukon businesses. At last count, the Yukon business relief program has provided over \$5 million.

Mr. Speaker, we remain in the grip of COVID-19, and we are by no means out of the woods yet. I continue to work shoulder to shoulder with the Minister of Tourism and Culture together with the Tourism Industry Association — as we did this morning — to find ways to support that sector. This important point is to put things in perspective.

As I said — and as the Member for Kluane said — we are in a crisis. That's how it was characterized. I want Yukoners to think about that. As I said, if you compare it to other jurisdictions, Yukon is doing reasonably well. We know that there are vulnerable areas, but putting things into historical perspective is important. Yukon's average labour force year-to-date is higher now than it was in 2016. Yukon's average employment year-to-date is higher than it was in 2016. Yukon's average unemployment rate year-to-date is lower than it was in 2016. So, Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Kluane said: We are in crisis. Still, think about that: Even in this crisis, these economic indicators are better than they were during the Yukon Party's last year in office. That's something for Yukoners to think about.

Yukoners and Yukon businesses are resilient and community-minded, and together we are going to pull through this.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on education system

Mr. Hassard: Parents are still waiting for news that this government is committed to a full five-days-a-week reopening of our schools. Without a plan to fully and safely reopen schools, you don't have a plan to reopen the economy — at least not for hundreds of working parents who rely on schools and childcare to ensure that they can actually get to and stay at work. We have seen report after report that the parents who will bear the brunt of this are more likely to be women.

For the last week and a half, we have asked the government what their plan is to fully and safely reopen schools, and they

cannot provide any detail or information beyond saying that it is a priority. Now, it is great that it is a priority, but Yukoners need a plan.

Can the Minister of Education — today — tell us when high schools in Whitehorse will go back to full time?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am quite often puzzled by some of the preambles to the questions, and clearly all schools in the Yukon Territory are open for full-day classes for elementary — K to 9. In most places, K to grade 12 are open full time. The three larger high schools here in Whitehorse are, of course, on a half-day rotation for students between grade 10 and grade 12. It is important for Yukoners to know that and to not get an impression that schools are not open full time across the territory.

Of course, our first consideration in planning for the 2020-21 school year has been the health and safety of students and staff, Mr. Speaker, and ensuring that all schools remain low-risk learning environments for Yukon students based on the advice of the chief medical officer of health. We have had to adapt programming for some grade 10 to grade 12 students at the three larger high schools in Whitehorse. These adaptations are based on the advice of the school administrators and the health and safety guidelines for schools to ensure safe spacing, management of traffic flows, and limitations to mixing of groups of students.

Mr. Hassard: If the minister was paying attention, the last question was actually about if she could tell us when high schools in Whitehorse will go back to full time.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker — people won't be able to get back to work full time permanently unless schools are able to go back to full time as well. To top it off, the new busing schedules are leaving some families behind. They cannot get to school as usual and parents are forced to take time off work to get their children to and from school. In fact, the president of the Yukon Teachers' Association said on CBC this morning — and I will quote: "We still have kids who aren't getting to school on a regular basis because of busing."

The fact is that this is placing a burden on parents — and in particular women, families with young children, and low-income families — and it will slow any economic recovery.

What is the government's plan so that parents won't be forced to choose between their jobs and their children?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It's critically important that — as a matter of fact, it's a requirement of the *Education Act* that school busing be provided here in the territory. There have been health and safety guidelines produced for school buses. The health and safety of our students and staff are our priority. The school busing for the 2020-21 school year has had to be adapted to follow the chief medical officer of health's health and safety guidelines for school bus operations during the pandemic — which, I hasten to remind my colleagues across the way, continues.

These adaptations are to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to keep communities safe and to keep students safe on their way to school and on their way home from school. Adjustments have had to be made. I should confirm for all Yukoners listening and parents and students that this has been an

extremely difficult job, but all students who are eligible to ride school buses under the *Education Act* and through the practice of the Department of Education and their regulations have been provided and are being provided school busing.

Mr. Hassard: Something else that continues is the lack of answers from this minister.

A proper economic recovery depends on schools being fully and safely reopened. This includes classes full time, and this includes proper and working bus schedules and options for families. It's becoming more and more clear that the government does not have a plan to fully and safely reopen our schools beyond these vague talking points. Can the minister at least tell us what conditions must be in place for Whitehorse high schools to return to full time and for busing to be fixed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Planning for the secondary program adaptations has been complex and does take time. It is ongoing. Many student school districts and jurisdictions across Canada, I hasten to remind us, are facing these same challenges of meeting cohort and/or spacing guidelines while still offering a variety of course electives.

We are developing different scenarios with the secondary administrators and experts in education, with an eye to identifying what resource applications are necessary or what implications there are for different options when planning to go back to school — things like teachers and staffing implications, the organization, the courses, the space, the facilities — all while keeping their schools running so that learning continues, keeping students safe. We are asking a lot of our school administrators. We are asking them to do this work with the Department of Education with a view to having the grade 10 to grade 12 students return to full-time school. That work is ongoing; it is happening every day. Yukoners deserve to know that it is a top priority to have those children back in school full time.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on education system

Mr. Kent: Last week, we asked the Minister of Education how the federal funding for school reopening was going to be spent. In response to why she wouldn't provide a detailed plan, the minister first said that she was working with school communities and partners to determine how it would be spent. Then she said that the money hadn't arrived yet. A day later, she said that it might have arrived. It now turns out that about \$730,000 of that federal funding has already been committed as of September 30. Of this, over \$90,000 was spent on a line item called "continued learning". Activities under this line item include — and I will quote: "Move to Wood Street; Costs of move; Fit up and IT costs." It would appear that the Minister of Education has used some of the federal funding meant for school reopening to pay for moving MAD students out of the Wood Street Centre.

Can the Minister of Education tell us how much of this money went toward that and why she chose to spend the funding in this way?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It seems that providing school spaces for the grade 8 students for which there was no room at

F.H. Collins and the requirement then for the experiential programs to move to Porter Creek Secondary School are clearly related to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why those funds were allocated and spent in that way.

Mr. Kent: Last week, we asked the minister if any of the PPE or sanitization would come out of the existing budgets for schools. The minister indicated at the time that this was not the case; however, since then, we have heard from at least one school that had to spend money out of its existing budget and they were hoping to get reimbursed.

We have also had several parents from one elementary school here in Whitehorse reach out to us to indicate that, as part of the school supply list this year, parents are being required to provide hand sanitizer. It looks like at least one school has had to download the costs to parents.

So can the minister tell us why parents are being forced to bear this cost while the federal government is giving Yukon \$4.1 million specifically to cover items like this?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our government is focused on protecting Yukoners and supporting them through these challenging times. I think I was quite clear last week in answering these questions — or similar questions, at least — that the federal funding and the funds that are allocated to the Department of Education for this year will in fact be used on many occasions to provide proper protection for students and for staff in the building. That includes, of course, PPE, proper masks, hand sanitizer, et cetera.

I am not sure what list the member opposite is referring to. It would be a great suggestion for parents to have hand sanitizer and masks in backpacks, but it is certainly not a requirement. Those will be provided by the Department of Education.

Mr. Kent: So, this was on the school supply list that went home with students for their parents to purchase for the upcoming school year — so that, to me, indicates that the department — or particularly that individual school — is asking parents to provide that rather than the government providing it. Perhaps the minister can clarify that in her final response.

The question that I did want to ask goes back to the MAD program and the fact that parents and students have asked that MAD be relocated from Porter Creek Secondary School. So will the minister use any of the \$4.1 million for school reopening to support the relocation of MAD to the Guild Hall or the Yukon Arts Centre?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I note that much of the criticism that has come from the other side has been that these decisions about how to abide by and how to comply with the chief medical officer of health's safety requirements for children to return to school have been done unilaterally in some way. That is, of course, not true, but that is exactly what the member opposite is now asking of me in the basis of that question.

We will work with school communities going forward. We will work with the experts in education. We will work with our partners in education — with administrators — on our plan going forward to return students to school full time — that is for grades 10 to 12 — and to make sure that children are in a safe environment and that they are provided all of the things that are needed in this very unusual time in order to run schools

safely and to provide spaces for students to continue their learning, because that is what this is all about.

Question re: Affordable childcare

Ms. Hanson: Back in July, the Premier announced that a universal childcare program was coming to Yukon. In August, the Minister of Health and Social Services announced it a second time when she endorsed the recommendations of the health care review. Despite the ongoing pandemic and the need to support families, parents have yet to see any sign of universal affordable childcare.

We know that the cost of childcare has been going up at a rate faster than inflation for years. Demand for childcare in Yukon has also risen, as parents are trying to work from home or are doing shift work. There is a clear need for universal affordable childcare in Yukon.

So, Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell this House when universal affordable childcare is coming to Yukon?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. I certainly want to acknowledge and recognize the childcare centres. I know that we provided the necessary support to continue on throughout the pandemic, ensuring that they had the resources to stay open — but we also want to acknowledge that we have continued support to March 31. The federal government just recently announced universal childcare as one of their key priorities. Of course, we recognize the importance of childcare for Yukoners and the need to improve children's learning outcomes and opportunities.

In the *Putting People First* report, the recommendation was that we must work toward fully funded universal childcare education for all Yukoners. 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 doing that as we speak. I look forward to the second question.

Ms. Hanson: We are fortunate that Yukon has a Child Care Board established by legislation. The board represents childcare professionals and the public. It makes recommendations to the government on childcare policies. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that this government refuses to listen to the Child Care Board or to even request their expert advice prior to making decisions.

Instead of following through with evidence-based decision-making, it would appear that this government prefers to write policy in a vacuum.

Can the minister confirm whether or not she has asked the Child Care Board to make recommendations on the implementation of universal affordable childcare in Yukon?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to consultation and engagement — I believe that we have done a great job of consultation and engagement on all issues relating to children, and we will continue to do that. As the review progresses on universal childcare, there are other initiatives underway that continue to support children and families. We want to acknowledge, again, that we have a one-year extension on the early learning childcare bilateral agreement. We will continue to fund childcare centres.

In the meanwhile, we want to ensure that we have an implementation strategy and evidence is important for sure — as is engagement, which is fundamental in everything we do. We certainly want to assure Yukoners, including the child development boards and childcare centres, that we are going to work with them. I can say that the deputy minister has met with the Child Care Board and we will continue to meet with them, as we do with all childcare centres.

Going forward, we have committed and will continue to ensure that we have the consultation and engagement in effect.

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, the Child Care Board is not a childcare centre. It is a body established by Yukon law to make recommendations to the minister.

The minister can continue to ignore them — but at her peril. In 2018, the Government of British Columbia invested heavily in making childcare more affordable throughout the province. They reduced costs through both a fee reduction program and an affordable childcare benefit program. Québec, which the Premier used as an example when he announced universal childcare, has fixed childcare fees through the use of publicly funded facilities.

Mr. Speaker, since the Premier made the initial announcement in July, can he clarify when affordable fixed childcare fees are coming to Yukon?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the member opposite for explaining to me the difference between childcare centres and the Child Care Board. I think Yukoners are well aware that we have childcare centres that are privately owned and they certainly need to have a voice as well. I just want to acknowledge that there will be an opportunity for everyone to participate. We certainly do not want to move without their input.

The extension of the early learning program at \$2.4 million is a significant increase toward ensuring that licensed childcare providers — the cost for their centres — are stabilized. We also want to ensure that the implementation of universal childcare is done effectively and that it aligns nicely with other jurisdictions.

We certainly want to ensure that we are aligned with the federal government as we come to the end of our early learning contribution for this year. We are in the thick of negotiations with the federal government on universal childcare. When that is concluded, I would be happy to let the Legislative Assembly know — but in the meanwhile, the partners will be involved in that process as we move toward universal childcare.

Question re: Diesel energy generation costs

Mr. Hassard: Our territory is facing an energy crisis. Last week, it was revealed that the Liberal's plan to address this crisis is to rent diesel generators. In 2017, they rented four. The year after that, it was six, and last year, it was nine. Now this year, it's 17. The cost of this is \$4.1 million a year — plus fuel, shipping, set-up costs, et cetera. The minister told the media last week that he hopes to curb their use over the next 24 months while official Yukon Energy documents indicate that the Liberal plan is actually to rent diesel generators until 2028. That's another eight years.

Can the minister confirm if this is in fact the case?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As the member opposite reflected on, the word I used was “curb” and that's exactly the statement that I made to the media. This is about, over a period of time, reducing our need for rentals. Of course, this goes back again to 2016 — the end of 2016 — coming into this role and understanding that the plan was to build a \$100-million diesel generation facility. That's not what Yukoners wanted. Yukoners wanted to see something a bit more visionary, and I think that Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable energy plan sets Yukon up to be a Canadian leader in sustainable electricity by 2030.

Projects in the plan are needed to meet growing demands on our electricity in Yukon and supports our government's actions to reduce carbon emissions in the territory. Yukoners will remember that the Auditor General provided a damning report. So not only was there not a visionary plan to move forward, but there was also a lack of vision when it came to reducing emissions. Bringing those together with my colleagues, we focused on this 10-year plan as well as our climate change plan.

Projects in the plan also account for 46 percent of Yukon government's emission reduction targets by 2030 by helping to reduce emissions in our heating and transportation sectors and using renewables.

I look forward to questions 2 and 3.

Mr. Hassard: Hopefully, we will get an answer to the first question in the subsequent answers from the minister.

The cost of renting diesel generators last year was \$2.2 million, plus additional costs such as fuel, shipping, and set-up. This year it was revealed that Yukon will be renting 17 generators at the cost of \$4.1 million plus those same expenses. Yukoners still do not know what was spent on the rental of the four units in 2017 or the six units in 2018.

We originally asked the minister this question last fall but have not yet received an answer, so I am wondering if the minister can tell us now how much money was spent renting the units in 2017 as well as in 2018.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that one thing we have always been very forthcoming about over the last number of years is always making sure that the leadership at both Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon Energy Corporation has an opportunity to sit here and have questions asked by the opposition. That, of course, will not change this year.

Again, in the winter of 2017-18, four units with a total capacity of 7.2 megawatts were rented. The total cost was approximately \$700,000. I think that answers the first question.

In 2018-19, six units with a total capacity of 10.8 megawatts were rented, and the total cost was approximately \$1.72 million. In that particular year, we spent \$300,000 on our set-up, which will bring it to just over \$2 million, and our fuel cost was about \$220,000.

Now, it's important to also remember that there were diesel Mirrlees engines that had passed their prime and have been removed, so we do have these diesel generators. I think that, although Yukoners want a permanent solution, what I'm hearing from Yukoners is that they don't want us to build a

megadiesel plant. We have heard that loud and clear — even for members in the opposition who were behind this — their own constituents don't want to see it.

I look forward to question 3 and some more information.

Mr. Hassard: Last week, we also asked what total fuel costs were associated with the last three years of diesel generators, and we asked how much is budgeted for diesel for the rentals this year. We did get an answer about the 2018 fuel, but we certainly don't have all of the information.

Could the minister tell us how much was spent on fuel for these rented diesel generators for those other two years, and how much is budgeted for this year?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, 2019-20 — nine units with a total capacity of 16.2 megawatts — so you can see that trend where a strong economy and a growing population means more need for energy and making sure that we have those diesel generators as backup for the safety of Yukoners.

The total cost was approximately \$4.3 million that year and the set-up costs were \$2.4 million. The fuel cost was \$1.9 million. Again, as I reflected on last week, we are in a much more favourable situation this year where we see water levels in all three watersheds, where we have big assets that produce clean energy now back to where we want to see them, and where we are going to be able to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels — LNG and diesel. In 2021, 17 units again were rented. Of course, because we haven't gone through the year yet, I don't have those fuel costs. I look forward to the officials coming in.

Once again, the bigger conversation piece is that Yukoners wanted to see a better plan. Yukoners wanted to see something that was in line with their values. I will stand here day after day and say that what I have come to learn from Yukoners is that they wanted to see a clean energy plan. They did not want a megadiesel plant. I think if that is what the Yukon Party will stand behind — is that where they're coming from — they need to say that to the public — that they would go back and build a megadiesel plant if they were in this position.

Question re: Ross River School remediation

Mr. Kent: Originally, this year's budget was supposed to include \$4.6 million for Ross River School remediation. We have since been informed that \$3.1 million of that has been cut from this year's budget.

Can the minister tell us what the remaining \$1.5 million is being spent on this year and why \$3.1 million was cut from the original budget?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am happy to talk about Ross River School this afternoon on the floor of the Legislature.

This has been a saga long in the making, Mr. Speaker. I will say that the multidisciplinary team — including an architect, a structural engineer, a geotechnical engineer, and a surveyor — continues to inspect the school quarterly. The latest building condition inspection report, completed in September, confirmed that the school remains safe for occupancy for both teachers and students. So the prime importance that I have — and that my colleague, the Minister of Education, has — is that

the school remains safe for occupancy. That is where our focus has been throughout our whole mandate.

Work will continue on the existing school to keep it safe and help prevent structural movement. Structural repairs were completed last fiscal year. These included miscellaneous bracing and reinforcing projects. We anticipate spending \$1.5 million during the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The work includes designing the thermosiphon and cooling system, designing the mechanical room project, continuing with more tie-down insulation in the roof, further bracing in the roof and crawlspace, and continuing to monitor and inspect the facility. There are also remote sensors, which are monitoring the building elements throughout this project.

We want to make sure that this school is safe for staff and students; we will continue that work.

Mr. Kent: I am glad that the minister brought up safety issues because those issues related to the Ross River School are well known. It has unfortunately been sinking into the ground, which has caused some staff and students to worry about their safety in attending that facility. However, over the last year and especially this summer, the issue of a bat infestation at the school has become a major problem. There have been complaints that you can hear the bats crawling in the ceiling and even bat feces being found around the school and within reach of the students, which is why we thought it was concerning that the budget for the school remediation had been cut.

How much money is in this year's budget to address this bat infestation at Ross River School and to clean up and remove this safety hazard?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to be very, very clear: The safety of the building is our prime concern. We want to make sure that building is safe for staff and students. I want to take away any suggestion that the school is not safe, because that is not the case. The school is monitored quarterly. We have remote sensors in the school, and we are working diligently to make sure that the safety of the staff and students is guaranteed and that the school remains safe.

Mr. Speaker, I was up in Ross River and I talked to the staff and students about the bats that they saw in the siding of the school. That was a year ago. I wasn't aware that the bats had come back, but I will look into that and get an answer back to the member opposite.

The question, though — we have not cut the budget for safety in the school. We are staying on top of that file and making sure that the school is safe for staff and students.

Mr. Kent: I can assure the minister that the bats have indeed returned. My colleague, the MLA for Pelly-Nisutlin, has just informed me that, in fact, they have never left the school.

That said, will the minister direct funding to deal with the bat infestation in the Ross River School to ensure the safety of children, especially since he knew about this bat infestation, as he said, a year ago?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, as I have said a couple of times in this House this afternoon and certainly many times before that, the safety of the staff and students at the Ross River School is of prime concern to us. I will do everything in my

power to make sure that continues, so that's what we will do, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of government private members' business

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(7), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of government private members to be called on Wednesday, October 14, 2020. They are Motion No. 236, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt North, and Motion No. 237, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek Centre.

Speaker: We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Hutton): Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 204: *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Cathers has 11 minutes, 52 seconds.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise here again as the Official Opposition Finance critic. We are hoping to get a little more in the way of answers than the Premier was willing to provide last week when we discussed this budget.

Again, we see that, for a government that has really talked a good line and done all the right virtue signalling around fiscal transparency and being open and accountable, when it comes down to the brass tacks and we actually ask for information on

what spending has occurred and raise points — such as the fact that, while we are seeing increases for two departments contained within the supplementary estimate, we are not seeing lapses or reductions in spending for other departments — despite the fact that we are aware of a list of things that government committed to doing in the 2019-20 fiscal year that ended up in their growing didn't-get-'er-done pile. So, while we are aware of those items and we know that the spending didn't occur on those projects or initiatives — but we don't see offsetting lapses or reductions in the revised supplementary estimates coming before the Legislative Assembly — it does leave us wondering where the money has been reallocated. We have certainly heard reports from multiple sources about cost overruns in terms of the government's mismanagement of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, among other initiatives. Yet, when we have asked for transparency — as I did during debate on October 8 — the Premier, in response to my request for information about that lapsed funding when we were debating the budget bill — the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for the year 2019-20 — refused to provide that information and suggested that we should just wait for the Public Accounts. But as he knows, that is neither an open nor transparent answer. So I asked the Premier about a number of the areas where we would have expected to see some funds lapsed. I asked him about the status of projects, including projects that were outlined in the government's budget highlights for the 2019-20 fiscal year. When asked about the status of spending on those projects, the Premier — on Thursday, October 8 — repeatedly refused to answer those questions, which is certainly not living up to the government's commitments to Yukoners around openness and transparency.

The Premier has had the weekend to get in a better mood — to have some turkey and be thankful about the many things that we do have to be thankful for in the territory — and I would hope that he has had a change of heart and that he will begin this afternoon's debate by providing the answers to the questions that I asked about the status of government spending in the 2019-20 fiscal year, including the specific questions that I asked about project and program spending, as well as what departments had lapses that appear to have been reallocated to help cover the bill for overspending in the Department of Health and Social Services and Department of Highways and Public Works.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you to the member opposite. Again, we are here to discuss the third supplemental of the 2019-20 budget. There are two departments up for debate today in general debate, both Health and Social Services and Highways and Public Works. I'm happy to answer any questions when it comes to the spending in the supplementary budget. As the member opposite knows, when the Public Accounts get published, it will be tabled here in the Legislative Assembly and at that time we will answer all the member opposite's questions when it comes to lapses at that time.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Chair, that's unfortunate. The Premier has an opportunity to be open and to provide information about what is the public's money — not the Premier's money nor the Liberal Party's nor the Liberal

government's money but the public's money. He claims that he'll provide the information later on, but unfortunately, we've seen this movie before. Every time we ask questions in the Assembly about finances, the Premier tends to do one of two things: He either dismisses the question as unreasonable in his view or he tells us to ask at a later time. But, when we ask later, we either get another non-answer, a dismissal, or a Liberal talking point about why we shouldn't be asking that question in the first place.

A few examples I asked about: Why there aren't reductions, for example, showing in this budgetary bill in the Department of Justice due to unfilled RCMP positions since we know that they've had some challenges filling them? We have asked as well about spending in another area related to that. I asked about specific funding in the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources that was added by this government in their previous supplementary estimates — *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*, for 2019-20. Again, in this, relating to areas that are very directly important to the lives of Yukon's small business owners, we know that the government imposed a class 1 notification regime that has been very difficult for placer miners and prospectors.

We know that they did so — that the timing of their announcement was when they hoped that the public would miss it — last year, right before Christmas. They slipped out that bad news announcement and we saw that they added \$320,000 in the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to the O&M budget related to helping the department meet its costs related to the new class 1 notification system. As we learned from budget briefings from officials, there was absolutely no analysis done by the government or a cost estimate of what the implications would be to Yukon small business owners in complying with this new administratively complex system.

I asked the minister about spending related to that budgetary item, and he said again that there is plenty of time to get that information from the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. Will he provide that information now or is he simply going to again stand and refuse to provide this information to the public?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I don't think I heard a question there. I just heard a lot of talking points about something that he asked about before. If there is something specific that I can get for the member from a particular department, I would be happy to, but I don't think I heard a specific question there.

Mr. Cathers: I was recapping. I assumed that the Premier was paying attention on Thursday when I asked him the question. He will find that on page 1335 of the Blues.

Again, I asked on Thursday about the amount added in the last supplementary estimates for the 2019-20 fiscal year — *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*. There was \$320,000 added to operation and maintenance in Energy, Mines and Resources to meet obligations related to class 1 notification. A question I asked at the time, after giving the same explanation I just gave, was: Did the government spend all that money?

Hon. Mr. Silver: He is getting closer. He is now talking about *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*, which is close to what we are here to debate — but it's actually *Supplementary*

Estimates No. 3. I do have information for him on Supplementary No. 3 if he wants to ask a question on that, because that's the general debate we are on right now.

If there is some information that we can get him from the department specifically about spending before the Public Accounts, we will endeavour to do that as well — but, again, I think Yukoners would like us to use this time to talk about the allocations in *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* of 2019-20. That is why we are here; that is why department officials are here.

If the member opposite does not want to speak about *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, there are ways in which we can answer his specific questions right now by getting him answers from the specific departments that he is looking for answers from — if he actually is looking for those answers.

Otherwise, I am happy to give him more information on *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* — two departments there — Health and Social Services and Highways and Public Works — with some spending to the tune of about \$7.2 million; I believe that is the number. It has been so long since I have been asked a question about Supplementary No. 3 that it is hard to remember, but if he does have any questions on Supplementary No. 3, we are happy to answer.

Mr. Cathers: When the Premier would try to fool this House and have the Yukoners listening believe that debate on a budget bill is only supposed to be about new spending contained in that budget bill — but it is also about an opportunity — the opportunity — for Members of the Legislative Assembly who are not part of Cabinet to ask questions related to the government's spending throughout those departments, to the program decisions they made, to the things that they said they would do which they didn't get done, and so on. We are using the opportunity that is set up for that, which is general debate on the budgets — particularly for any departments that don't have new appropriations in the bill — and what we are seeing here is a pattern that the Premier just doesn't want to answer the question, so he is desperately trying to paint the question as unreasonable.

I asked him a number of questions about very specific dollar amounts that, again, were going directly off things that were outlined in the government's budget or in handouts provided by departments related to their budget for the 2019-20 fiscal year. Again, this is in association with *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* or with the main estimates in the spring — and the Premier wouldn't even tell me the status of that spending — whether it occurred or not. It certainly reinforces everything that we have heard from whistleblowers within government departments about the government playing fast and loose with public spending in terms of being secretive and reallocating spending to cover embarrassing cost overruns in other program areas.

If the Premier wants to be transparent, he can live up to his campaign commitments and actually answer the questions. There is a long list of them. I'm not — well, maybe I will go through all of them this afternoon. We'll see. But I put a number of questions into the record on Thursday. The Premier has yet to answer any of them. As the Premier will recall — despite his spin to the contrary — there have been times when he, as

member of the opposition, asked questions of ministers when we were in government, and if we didn't have the information at our fingertips, the next time that department came up for debate, we would then typically provide answers to the Premier's questions.

The Premier liked to say, when in the opposition, that "the devil is in the details"; it was one of his favourite sayings. Now we are asking him for the details, and the Premier is again refusing to provide that information. I am going to reiterate a few of the questions that he didn't provide us answers to on Thursday and remind him in case he was not listening at the time. I was referencing a handout provided to us by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources during the briefing and asking whether specific spending had occurred.

If that money was not spent, of course, the question is where it was transferred to — whether it was also within the department, or whether it was on spending such as the cost overruns in Health and Social Services and in Highways and Public Works.

We saw a consistent pattern on Thursday — question after question, the Premier refusing to answer them. Again, some of those specific questions that I asked — what was the total cost of operating the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter in the 2019-20 fiscal year? It is a simple question. How much of that money was spent by Health and Social Services? How much was spent by the Department of Highways and Public Works? Were there other amounts spent by other departments to support the operation of the Liberal government's failed takeover of this emergency shelter? What is the total expense that Yukon taxpayers paid in the 2019-20 fiscal year for that facility?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I would take my record — and let's look at the previous Premier's response in general debate. I don't think that what we saw from the previous Premier was answering very specific questions on very specific departments. I think that, instead, what we got was a lot of berating of the question-asker for asking the question. I am not going to do that. I am simply going to say that I will do what the member opposite said that his government did, which is that, when the department responsible for that funding is up here, ready and available, they will absolutely answer that question.

We have definitely talked with the departments since the last time we sat here in general debate, and they have all these questions ready for answers. But for me to just give the numbers here is one thing; for the departments to be able to expand and talk about the good work of the public servants — I think that might be why the member opposite doesn't want to ask the specific questions to the departments. He doesn't want to get into that debate with the actual departments. He wants to try to — I don't know — maybe make it look like I don't have that information — which I don't, so I guess that is clever.

Again, I am here ready to debate and speak of Supplementary No. 3 if the member opposite has any of those questions. Otherwise, all of the other questions that he has asked a few times now — we have definitely read those and heard those. The departments responsible for that funding will absolutely answer those questions when they have an

opportunity here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. We will leave it that.

It is interesting that the member opposite says that we are failing in the attempt for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Again, we have gone over this ad nauseum. The Yukon Party built a building without a program; they do that a lot. There is no real consideration of operation and maintenance or who the clientele is that they will be serving — the Yukoners whom they are going to be serving — in that building. It was quite a mess.

What we did as a department — again, I really want the minister herself to be speaking about this, because her knowledge of all the work that they put into the emergency shelter is extensive. It is really a testament to the collaborative care health system that we have created in the absence of one under the Yukon Party.

Mr. Cathers: I have to wonder at how the Premier is out of touch with reality. Did he just claim that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is a collaborative health care facility?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Can the member opposite repeat his question?

Mr. Cathers: My question is about how out of touch the Premier is with reality. Did he just tell this House that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is a collaborative health care facility?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Chair, again, what we have done in health care, if the member opposite cares to listen to my answer, is that we have changed the health care system from acute to collaborative in many different capacities. I will include the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. When you take a look at what they've done with the upstairs floors, they have included housing as a concept. I don't know what the members opposite were going to put upstairs at the emergency shelter. I don't think that they knew because they didn't have a plan.

If you are asking if connecting with the department of housing is in some way a collaborative approach to health care, I would say so. I would say that, as opposed to waiting for someone to be sick and treating their acute needs, creating a house that is more than just bricks and mortar — but is a concept that is part of the security — is definitely a part of a healthy community. I would definitely say that adding housing into the continuum of care and expanding on it would definitely, in my mind, be a consideration of collaborative health care.

I have asked that question of the member opposite — his Minister of Health and Social Services — in the Legislative Assembly when I was in opposition. His answer to collaborative care was, "Well, we collaborate all the time. Nurses talk to doctors; doctors talk to nurses." I think we've come a long way from that approach when it comes to collaborative health care.

Mr. Cathers: Again, that's another talking point from this government, but talking points are effectively useless when it comes down to what they're doing for the public. The Premier just claimed that his government has changed the health care model from an acute model to a collaborative one. Perhaps he

could offer some other examples of this that exist somewhere beyond his imagination.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I guess — here comes back the insults from the member opposite, and I guess that's just the hallmark of the Yukon Party, despite what their new leader says.

I guess he doesn't consider EMS working with housing, working with social workers, and working with mental health workers to be an example of collaborative care. We'll just leave it at that. He's wrong; it is.

Mr. Cathers: I'm just asking for specifics. Again, the Premier gave a really short, one-sentence explanation about EMS working with housing. Could he actually give us some specifics on that? A one-line explanation may sound good. It may even be well-intended, but it doesn't really give us a tangible example. What's government doing? What does that mean on the ground? What's the effect of that?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I answered his question. He asked what collaborative care is. I explained to him — clearly, they didn't know — that working together to make sure we address healthy communities up front and expanding our consideration of care to consider aging in place as opposed to having everybody in an institution. That's another example of looking at the communities. We've also worked with the Referred Care Clinic and addictions treatment. Again, I don't know why I need to explain to the member opposite why these things are examples of collaborative care; they are.

When it comes to housing specifically, I think the department has done an amazing job of creating safe and affordable housing for Yukoners as a priority. We're making significant progress toward this goal, knowing that a house is a basic necessity and that all Yukoners have a right to it, which is a fundamental change compared to the previous government. Over our past three and a half years, our housing investment and activities have been guided by the Safe at Home plan — the housing action plan for Yukoners — and we'll continue to use these plans for guidance moving forward.

Again, the member opposite makes it seem like these things aren't happening — the Housing First model and mental health workers in our Housing First centres — all of this is happening. The member opposite just might not know. Working in partnership with other governments and public sectors — more than 135 affordable housing units in various stages have been completed across the territory — our first-ever Housing First residence. Again, as we take a look at the continuum of care — when you put Health and Social Services and housing together as a concept, that is what we are seeing here. We are expanding the knowledge of both departments by working collaboratively together. We are also expanding the programs and services that we can get out the door by not waiting until somebody is sick to consider them in part of our health care model.

Again, Mr. Chair, these are all things that we are doing. If the member opposite doesn't think that the emergency shelter and the rooms available there are part of a bigger plan, then that is too bad on him. But, really, what I have seen was a department and a team working together to make sure that they collaborate on an understanding that — it is one thing to have

separately a housing association where it is about, you know, affordable or social housing, but what we have seen, through the minister and her teams, is that this concept has been elaborated upon. It is complex now — it is very complex. It is a sophisticated approach when it comes to dealing with everybody, from our most marginalized individuals — to make sure that they are best suited to have a hand up — to also those people who are having trouble making ends meet — and then to that bigger, overall picture — everything from mortgages through to — like I said — these initiatives that we spoke about, including the loan program, extended care beds for seniors — and I can go on — the Challenge Cornerstone Housing project. Again, the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter now has 20 apartment units — 20 apartment units, Mr. Chair — to provide stable, permanent housing.

Again, I am bewildered as to why the member opposite wouldn't think that this would be part of collaborative care or that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter would not be part of a housing continuum when they have 20 apartment units in that building. I'm baffled, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cathers: What I am asking the Premier on these items that he introduced — talking about collaborative health care — are details — just the same as with the financial information. A talking point is not the same as a plan. A talking point is not the same as details.

The work doesn't end when the press conference is done. With these initiatives — with the talking points that the Premier provided us this afternoon, there is some stuff in there that sounds good, but we are asking for details about what government is doing and what the effect is.

We know, for example, that, in the area of the mental health hubs, they announced that with great fanfare. They shoved aside Many Rivers, because they wouldn't find a way to work with that NGO — just as they, with the Salvation Army, weren't able to work with that NGO — part of a growing list of NGOs that have had a fractured relationship with this Liberal government. With that mental health hub announcement, we know that, despite great fanfare, the follow-through wasn't there. There have been gaps in those services and, in some cases, more gaps than were there under the previous service provider, Many Rivers.

When the Premier was talking about aging in place and referring to collaborative care, including referred care, addictions treatment, and housing — all of those things existed under previous governments. The Premier strung them together in a few-sentence explanation that sounded nice, but we are asking for details — not talking points. Can the Premier actually tell us what the government is doing in the area of collaborative health care, what they have actually done related to aging in place — to translate the talking point into changes that benefit Yukoners — and, in the same case, in the Referred Care Clinic, addictions treatments and housing. What have they actually done? I want to make sure that the Premier knows that I am distinguishing that — not what they have announced but what they have actually done and what they have delivered on.

Hon. Mr. Silver: So, we mentioned the Housing First model. That is something that we have done. It's not just a speaking point; it's something that we have done.

We have talked about mental health workers in Housing First — again, not something that is just a speaking point; it is something that we have done.

Working with our French community on a bilingual French health centre — an amazing initiative from the department.

The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter now has the transition units at WES, a change to a Housing First model — accomplished. It is something that we have done.

The new medical travel care coordinated unit — that is a collaborative care model. It is something that we have done.

Again, the member opposite is spinning and not going anywhere other than to elongate general debate, which is his strategy here.

Many Rivers — under forensic audit. That happened during a time when that actual audit process was part of his watch as well. The Referred Care Clinic is now working with the Sarah Steele centre and the shelter to ensure more integrated services for people living with addictions — again, something that we're not just saying but something that we're doing.

Mental health services have been expanded from one NGO — now under police investigation — to two NGOs that are focused on the mental health of transgendered Yukoners and their families, plus the mental wellness hubs. Again, these are not speaking points, but these are things that we are actually doing. If the member opposite doesn't believe that this is collaborative care or that these aren't more than just speeches from a pulpit — well, then he is completely misinformed. It is bewildering.

This is not to mention things that we are working on, such as the Normandy project. We are working on 47 units of mixed-use and mixed income building in Whitehorse, which is going to help us support clients throughout the continuum. We are very proud of that.

But let's double-down here on the bizarre implication from the member opposite that we are not doing anything on mental health. Let's talk about that. We have made phenomenal progress compared to where we were. Are things perfect? No, absolutely not. This is an extremely important sector of our community and something that was utterly underfunded from the previous government. Now that they are in opposition, it seems to be their number one priority.

When we took office, there were only two rural mental health workers for all of rural Yukon — from Old Crow all the way to Watson Lake — two. They were located — where were they located? Well, they had to travel quite a bit — so they obviously lived in one community each and they had to travel quite a bit. You can just imagine if you are living in a small community and you have to wait for the mental wellness nurse to come back to speak to them about very, very important issues of mental wellness. That is just a woefully insignificant level of attention when the Yukon Party was in power. Now mental wellness is one of their biggest things. Interesting — interesting turn.

We now have 22 positions focused on mental wellness and health located in four new community hubs in rural Yukon — that's rural Yukon. Additionally, we have child and youth counsellors with master's-level training who work in every Yukon community.

When the Minister of Education introduced the redesigned K to 12 curriculum, it included social emotional skills and strategies to strengthen student resilience and well-being. We didn't see that in the Yukon Party — didn't see that.

Right now — pandemic or not — the supports are there. Opposition members have underserved Yukoners on mental wellness and mental health supports for years, and this is a new-found interest. It's very encouraging and welcome that they have a new-found interest, but they're very, very late to this party; that is for sure, Mr. Chair.

Those mental health services have been expanded — like I said — from the one NGO that is under police investigation now to two that are focused on mental wellness. We've expanded the attention to include our transgendered community.

The home care budget has almost doubled since 2016 when the members opposite were in power, which supports aging in place. We've established the reablement unit at the Thomson Centre to help people remain in their homes. Since that opened, over 80 percent of our patients going through the reablement unit have returned home rather than staying in care in hospitals and going into long-term care. That's amazing; it really is. As we all know, elders are the bloodline to our communities and it's so important that they have the ability to age in place — again, that's not something the opposition was interested in. An expanded day program at the WBP — we've opened palliative care there, which is collaborative care as well — that's Whistle Bend Place.

These are examples of real initiatives that are actually happening. The member opposite doesn't like to hear that. He'll make it seem like these are just talking points; they're not just talking points. These are programs and services for our citizens. They're extremely important programs and services — sometimes for our most vulnerable citizens — and they're not just speaking points. They're actually dollars and cents going into these programs.

Now, again, we're here to speak about the dollars and cents of the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for 2019-20. Again, I have an opportunity to elaborate on those costs, but the member opposite doesn't want to hear about it. The member opposite wants to — I don't know. He has been up now two days in a row in general debate on two items — for Health and Social Services and for Highways and Public Works. He has refused to ask any questions on those two departments — on those two specific departments — for this supplementary budget.

We can talk about philosophy comparatively — about this government versus that government — all day, if that is what he wants to do, but if he really does want the numbers that he was speaking about earlier, there is an opportunity to get those numbers from the departments when they appear in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Cathers: It is very interesting that the Premier claims that I don't want to talk about those two departments, and yet when I ask questions about those departments, he won't provide an answer and he won't answer questions about the other departments — which, as the Premier knows, general debate on a supplementary budget bill — if a department is not asking for new money — is the only chance to ask about that department.

The Premier seems to find two days excessive to talk about \$1.5 billion in spending — over a billion-and-a-half dollars in spending by this government — and the Premier is impatiently dismissing it.

Speaking of dismissing — the Premier is very dismissive of Many Rivers and the service that they provided to Yukon communities for 50 years. The Premier repeatedly, in the government's narrative, treats the mental health services provided by Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services — previously the Yukon Family Services Association — as if they were nothing — as if they were absolutely nothing. In comparing the new mental health hubs that have been created by the government, the Premier creates a false equivalency by suggesting that there were no other services in place prior to this government's decision to grow government instead of working with an NGO.

The Premier has repeatedly made mention of Many Rivers being under police investigation. Really, regardless of the issues that may have occurred toward the end and challenges, what should be recognized is the role of the board, the volunteers, and the employees — for decades — provided by that organization and the service that they provided to Yukoners across the territory. But, unfortunately, the Premier has dismissed that contribution and that service and treats it, in his narrative, like it was literally nothing. That is disrespectful to the people who provided that service and who have done good work throughout the territory.

It really is unfortunate, Mr. Chair, that we see this dismissive tone from the Premier. He has indicated that the departments will answer some of the questions I asked at a later date. Well, we will simply see whether the Premier actually follows through with that, because he has become quite known for making commitments and then failing to follow through on them. Again, I would just ask the Premier, when he stands next, to apologize to employees of Many Rivers and volunteers and staff throughout the years for how he so callously dismissed the 50 years of service provided by that organization, its staff, and its volunteers.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Chair, if the member opposite gets a dismissive tone about me explaining the supports that are provided now by the two NGOs that have picked up the slack after a police investigation, then he is absolutely not correct. I didn't have any dismissive tone for that NGO. I merely told the member opposite exactly what is going on right now, and that is a lot more mental wellness and mental supports than under his government. Do I recognize the work of Many Rivers? Yes, absolutely. Have we been on the floor of this Legislative Assembly countless times thanking them for their service? Yes. Should I do it again? I will absolutely do it again. We believe

that they did, for 50 years, an excellent service. I worked directly with Many Rivers when I was a teacher in Dawson. I know exactly how well they worked with clients in the rural schools and rural communities as well.

I was also a teacher at Robert Service School when the previous government cancelled supports for rural communities through CATS, which is an extremely important program. I saw the member opposite's government cut the programming for CATS — you know, put it in place for a year. When you have these most marginalized students who have fallen through the cracks, you try your best to do everything you possibly can inside the school setting and it doesn't work, and then an organization comes up from Whitehorse and provides that service — the individuals there were amazing — absolutely amazing. The amount of work that they did in a year was exponential. Then the Yukon Party cut that funding and set those kids back decades.

Again, I know the good work of the NGO community; I absolutely do. I also know that we have a responsibility — whether we are funding NGOs or funding that internally through Health and Social Services — to make sure that we have the best programs and services provided for our most vulnerable people.

Another example of that would be working with CYFN and the First Nations on the Honouring Connections program, helping to reunite children and youth with their families and their communities. We're building bridges where the opposition cut programs and funding.

That means that we are supporting reconciliation in action. We've created extended family care agreements enabling children to remain in their communities with their extended family instead of coming into government care. I'll stand here all day long and talk about our record on mental health and programming in rural communities compared to the previous government — all day long — because I have what the member opposite doesn't have to back up my statements — the facts.

These are important initiatives. We are putting heavy investment into our youth, into these agreements — like the extended family care agreements, for example. I'm very proud of the work that the public service is doing to provide professional services and programs for our children and our most vulnerable populations.

Mr. Cathers: Well, the Premier just said that he has the facts to back up his claims, but that's what we've been asking him to provide — the facts to back up his claims. As one of my colleagues just noted to me while the Premier was speaking, if the Premier really is so appreciative of Many Rivers and the work that they did, why didn't he direct his ministers to work with Many Rivers to help them through their problems and come into compliance properly, instead of actively working to shut down Many Rivers as this Liberal government did?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Chair, we've had this debate in the Legislative Assembly. The member opposite is painting a picture that is simply not the facts. Again, we work with the NGO communities, we work with our professionals in psychiatry, psychology, and social work, and we honour the work that is done, whether it's through an NGO or not. What

we know here as the facts is that, under the Yukon Party, our group homes were full. They're not full now.

We've worked with our NGO community. We've worked with health care providers in all of our communities to make sure that we have the programs and services provided. If one particular NGO is under investigation, that doesn't mean that we pack up and go home; that means that we move on. Where one is under investigation, two have been initiated through funding to make sure that they not only do the good work of that particular agency but also expand the programs and services to include our transgender community as well. We're very proud of that.

Again, the proof — just looking at group homes in general, people in care compared to people back with their families — this is an extremely important fact that the member opposite would glaze over.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Chair, I know that the Premier doesn't like to be reminded of the Liberal record, but in fact, in looking at Many Rivers as well as the Salvation Army, we see a situation of two NGOs that were well-respected throughout the territory for providing services for decades. They worked constructively with governments of every stripe until the Premier and this Liberal government came into office and worked actively to shut them down.

This government has talked a good line on not growing government and talked about getting out of the business of doing business, but we know what the record is when it comes to NGOs. That includes that, with both Many Rivers and the Salvation Army and despite the fact that governments of every stripe previously could work constructively with those NGOs and achieve benefit for the community, they instead chose to actively go out of their way to shut them down and to replace them with government employees. We still do not have an answer from the Premier on how substantial the cost overruns are at the government's Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We have heard reports from whistleblowers of government moving money from one pot into other areas to hide the extent of the spending that this government has had related to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We have seen the Premier repeatedly deny — or actually refuse to provide the details to answer that question.

Mr. Chair, it is really very unfortunate that the Premier, instead of answering straightforward questions about the budget, chooses to rise again and again and claim that it is unreasonable to ask the question or that it might be reasonable to ask the question later, but it is certainly not reasonable now. We are talking about public money. Whether the Premier dislikes the question or dislikes the questioner, this does not change the fact that this money belongs to the public. This Liberal government took office claiming to want to improve openness and transparency, and we have now seen the member of the NDP publicly state in this Legislative Assembly that there is less budget information available under this Liberal government and that, despite her concerns with the previous government, it has gotten worse under this Premier.

The Premier has gone in the opposite direction from what he promised Yukoners. There is a very simple solution. The

Premier can actually live up to his campaign commitments and rhetoric about openness and transparency and answer the questions that I have asked about the finances today and on Thursday. Here is his opportunity.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, giving the member opposite an opportunity to ask the questions of the department — I guess time will tell if the departments actually answer those questions or not, but they will. They are instructed to answer those questions. They have the budgetary answers at their fingertips. They also have the ability to expand and to explain those dollar values, more so than myself in general debate as we talk about Supplementary No. 3, which is exactly why we're here today.

I am going to go back to the Many Rivers comment from the member opposite, which is completely untrue. It is a complete falsehood from the member opposite. It is unbelievable that he would say it in the Legislative Assembly.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Cathers.

Mr. Cathers: The Premier has just very clearly and very deliberately violated Standing Order 19(h), charging another member with uttering a falsehood. I ask you to have him retract that comment and apologize for it, as has been the long-standing practice in this Assembly.

Chair: Mr. Silver, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Chair, we are in a predicament here. The member opposite is saying that I'm doing something that I'm not doing, which is a lie. Is there another way that I can get around that?

Withdrawal of remark

Hon. Mr. Silver: Maybe what I will do is I will retract the statement, Mr. Chair, and I will correct the record. How does that sound?

Chair: Thank you. Mr. Cathers, continue please.

Mr. Cathers: Again, what we are seeing here is a very defensive and, in fact, combative response from the Premier now to questions that I'm asking, but I would challenge any Yukoner to go through Hansard from Thursday — and whether they would ask the same question that I would have asked or asked it in the same way — and look at the questions being asked about the finances — including, for example, costs for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, the specific initiatives that government outlined to us as new initiatives and cost pressures within departments in this current fiscal year — and when we asked the follow-up questions about the status of that spending, the Premier dismissed them. The Premier dismissed my questions on the government's own budget highlights when I asked about the status of that spending.

Again, what I would encourage every Yukoner who is listening or reads this to do is to step back from the politics and step back from whether they would have asked the same question that I did or phrased it a different way and ask this question: Is this the public's money? Does the public have a

right to an answer about this spending? Do they think that their Premier should answer that question or dismiss it?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The member opposite is wrong — when it comes to less information as opposed to more — we do provide more information. That's not the same way that they did their information. They did a lot of bragging about what they were going to do, and then, if you looked at the Public Accounts, they accomplished maybe half of that. So we decided not to do that. The Public Accounts are a very telling document, and we can't wait for it to be tabled here in the Legislative Assembly because it tells you how much — compared to the Yukon Party — they would come out with these big, flashy pictures saying that they are going to accomplish all these things, but then they wouldn't accomplish all of those things.

What we have done is that we have included a fiscal update — an economic update — that is, this time around, close to 20 pages of information. It is different from the members opposite who sometimes may have or sometimes may not have put that information in there, but it is different. To say it is less — I disagree.

To also say that we didn't work with Many Rivers — again, false. That is completely false. Again, people listening in — hopefully they will understand that the member opposite has a certain perspective that is false. We did try to work with them. We tried very hard to get them back on track, actually. The board resigned. If they didn't resign, they were going to assume the debt. That is what happened there.

NGO funding — again, when it comes to funding for NGOs — it has increased, not decreased. It has increased — again, false information.

The Salvation Army is not an NGO, for the record — it is a church. But again, we thank them for the work that they did do. As a classification — just to correct the record — they do a lot of great work — that's for sure — but the programs and services that we are providing right now to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter are more than they were under the Yukon Party and their arrangement.

We are housing about 80 people a night right now over at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. The member opposite says that this is a complete failure — again, false.

I think there was another question. When people read the Blues or listen to the transcript today, what I have offered the member opposite is an opportunity to get more information from the department if that is what he chooses. I have general information right now on the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*. I could say that, when it comes specifically to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — for the substantive purposes of what we are debating today — I believe that there was some funding in this budget. So, I can give him the numbers today for the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3, 2019-20* — under Social Services, there were unexpected increases, including supports to mental health.

I don't think that the member opposite is actually listening right now, but that is okay.

There were increases to mental health of \$400,000. That was including the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. There was an increase there as well to provide services. There were

significantly more individuals at the shelter during the COVID times and during the times when this budget was being figured out.

Again, the Minister of Health and Social Services will be here, as a department, after we finish general debate. If the member opposite cares to ask these questions of the minister responsible to get the in-depth information that he is looking for, he will get that — if he chooses to ask those questions again during the department debate. I don't know if he will or not.

But, again, we do have some general information here for the *Supplementary No. 3*. We have offered the member opposite the opportunity for his other questions to be answered based on the departments. That information will come forward despite the member opposite making it seem — because I don't have those numbers in front of me now — that somehow that means that we will not give him the answers later. It is simply not true.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Chair, again we see the Premier with a very defensive/combatative response. I am asking for the information. He says that they will provide some of it later. In fact, with some of it, we will hope that he lives up to this word, but for any of these questions that we have asked about finances — again, I would encourage people to look at the question and ask themselves the simple question: Do they believe that they, as a citizen, should have the right to the answer to that question if they asked it? If they believe the answer is yes, that information should belong to the public — especially, I might point out, coming from a government that claimed they were going to be more transparent — then I would ask people to consider the answer to the question: Why is the Premier refusing to provide answers to these questions? Any one of those questions — if the Premier had asked for those answers to come from the departments so that he could provide them in the House, departments would provide that information to the Premier, and the Premier knows that very well.

Certainly, for questions I asked on Thursday, there was ample opportunity to answer at least some of those questions, even if some of that information took longer than the weekend to get a response to. What I am pointing to is not just that the Premier didn't answer 100 percent of the questions that I've asked but the dismissal of the majority of those questions as something that he's unwilling to answer.

Now, the Premier claimed that the government has had a good record with NGOs, but I remind him that this is not what the NGOs say. We remember that Health and Social Services had frozen budgets for NGOs and that some of them were forced to go public on the steps of the Legislative Assembly building to make Yukoners aware of their funding situation. Again, these are NGOs that had a good relationship not only with the Yukon Party governments but in fact with governments of all stripes, but there has been a lack of willingness by this Premier and his colleagues to work with them on solutions — instead they seem to see NGOs as a problem, not as partners in helping Yukoners.

So, it really is unfortunate that we don't seem to be getting much in the way of answers here this afternoon. The Premier bizarrely is trying to suggest that I don't even want the answers

to the questions, but I can assure him and assure the public that every one of these questions about government spending is a question that I would very much like the answer to. Again, for people who are wondering, much of this relates to the fact that we've heard repeatedly from whistleblowers in government departments that the government has moved money within Health and Social Services and from other departments to cover massive cost overruns related to their mismanagement of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We're asking for the information to either prove that or, if the Premier believes it's incorrect, to provide us with evidence to contradict that statement, but that is what we've heard repeatedly from whistleblowers. When a government is refusing to tell us about lapses in other departments, refusing to tell us the status of projects that they announced in their budget highlights, it certainly is adding to the air of government secrecy and unwillingness to provide reasonable answers to reasonable questions. That is very unfortunate, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I'm happy to answer the questions on lapses with the Public Accounts like the members opposite did when they were in government. I'm happy to expand on the numbers that I just gave on the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — the \$800,000 that is being provided for services for servicing significantly more individuals. That's a number from the Supplementary No. 3. I don't think the member opposite heard that, I guess, but I gave him the answer that he's looking for when it comes specifically to the Supplementary No. 3.

I will say that in general, as well, the budget has been increasing when it comes to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We went from about 13 people per night when the Salvation Army was there to about 40 to 70 per night. That's why it's costing more. It's because people are feeling safe and they're welcomed instead of being turned away — and they were being turned away under the previous government. They feel like they matter rather than being locked out in the cold. The meal program has been increased as well, which would be an increased cost as well, as have services available to the shelter from social work to mental health supports. Again, having a big presence of EMS there looking after people — the RCMP have told us what a godsend that has been.

Again, we're doing more — for sure. I could go on about the specific differences between care under the previous government and this government, but specifically when it comes to Supplementary No. 3 — which is what we're here to debate — I did mention that there was, in this budget, \$800,000 for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter that is there providing services for significantly more individuals. I don't have the breakdown of that number past that amount. However, the good news is that, if we finish up general debate, directly after me here today — if the member opposite does want the answers to these questions, bizarrely or not bizarrely asking that — if he does, then the minister will show up with her department and expand on those dollars that are in the Supplementary No. 3 budget — so again, answering his question, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cathers: I would just remind the Premier that he has twice referred to the absence of the Minister of Health and

Social Services. That's contrary to the Standing Orders. I would just remind him of that fact.

The Premier has assured us that we will get more answers later. I'm a little bit dubious of that, based on past performance, but I will warn the Premier that if we don't receive answers to the questions that I've asked about the supplementary budget for 2019-20 at some point prior to going into general debate on the budget itself, he can expect that we're going to be asking those questions again if the government won't provide us with the answers.

One very specific one — the Premier mentioned \$800,000 for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We know that the total cost of that facility is substantially higher than \$800,000. That is simply one part of the cost overruns.

We're asking for what the total costs are of running that facility, and that includes the budget for Health and Social Services, money spent out of Property Management, the allocation from Emergency Medical Services which came out of Community Services — and indeed, any department that is providing resources to that. The Premier knows the answer to the question as to which departments are supporting its operations. We are just asking for that information.

Mr. Chair, I could go on for hours with additional questions related to this budget. I am going to save some of them for general debate on the other supplementary budget in the interest of allowing my colleagues — critics for Health and Social Services and Highways and Public Works — the opportunity to ask questions this afternoon while they are here — especially in case the government does, as they did last week, schedule debate on those matters when they know it will be inconvenient or impossible for my colleagues who are critics of those departments to actually attend.

So I would leave it at that for now and just note to the Premier that we will be following up on these matters. If we receive the answers — and if they are solid, fair, and full answers — we will take that information and be happy to receive it. If the government refuses to provide us answers or provides us answers that are incomplete or suspect, I will put the Premier on notice that he can expect that he will be hearing from us on that.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you to the member opposite for his questions today. Just a comment that he did make about an explosion of costs at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — or however he phrased it — again, I am happy that the Minister of Health and Social Services will be up and able to talk about the costs for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

I will say that what we have been seeing here is that, every year under our government, NGO funding has increased by a few million dollars — increasing every year for the cost of living as well. That has never happened before, especially under the previous government.

We appreciate the support that the NGO communities give us on our behalf. Point-in-time counts when it comes to homeless populations are declining. So the money that we are spending — and balancing the budget pre-COVID-19, by the way — a year ahead of schedule — is in the proper manner to make sure that we are giving people a hand up. That is being

proved in the data. We could go back as far as 2016, where we had 219 people identified as homeless. Those numbers are decreasing substantially since then. In 2018, it was down to under 200 to 195, and we are continuing to see declines in these things. We are seeing declines in more of what we need to offer for people who are homeless, because the supports we are putting into there to get people into homes are working. We are seeing our ability now to offer more community supports because of that.

So I am sure that the Minister of Health and Social Services would love to expand upon that as we get into Committee of the Whole on the specific departments.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*?

Ms. McLeod: Since I actually want some answers to some questions, I guess I only really have one question for this minister and that is: Will he be making the Minister of Health and Social Services available to answer questions that are being put to her today?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am getting a little perplexed about the question. I think I have stood in the Legislative Assembly today about eight times to say that the Minister of Health and Social Services will be available to answer questions today. I assume that would have answered the member opposite's question. I apologize if I don't understand her question now, but we are now, I assume, coming to the end of general debate — the next step on the Order Paper for today — yes, Health and Social Services — minister available, coming up right now.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*?

Seeing none, we will proceed to clause 1 of the bill. The bill's schedule forms part of clause 1. Among the bill's schedule is Schedule A, containing the departmental votes.

The matter now before the Committee is Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services.

Would members like a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 204, *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Health and Social Services

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am here today in the House to speak to the supplementary budget for Health and Social Services for 2019-20. Before I begin, I would like to introduce the department staff who are here today. I am joined by Stephen Samis, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, and Karen Chan, Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services. They, along with the whole department, have been

instrumental in ensuring that we develop a budget that supports Yukoners. I want to say thank you — mahsi' cho — to all of them for their hard work.

As always, the supplementary budget aligns with the ultimate goal of Health and Social Services, which is to ensure that comprehensive and coordinated programs and services meet the needs at all stages of Yukoners' lives to support the well-being of all Yukoners.

In this budget, we are requesting \$5.246 million. This additional funding is required to fund the legislated and required services for Yukoners. The last quarter of 2019-20 represented a significant challenge to all jurisdictions, and Yukon was not exempt. In fact, we faced additional challenges as we worked to put in place our COVID-19 response. Those early weeks in March only further stretched the year that had already seen its challenges for my department.

Health and Social Services did go over its appropriation for the 2019 year. Unlike many departments within government, Health and Social Services is legally obligated to pay for certain services over which we have no control. These overexpenditures can be attributed to the increased demand for insured health services related primarily to extended hospital stays out of the territory in the second half of the fiscal year.

Yukon citizens outside of the territory for services and supports that cannot be provided locally are still covered by our health care insurance program — one or two extremely ill individuals, a neonate who was medevaced south, a serious accident resulting in an extended recovery and rehabilitation stay — they could be any one of us — and these costs are high and unpredictable.

While we work to bring health care services closer to home, for some situations, Yukoners require specialized care and support only available at larger centres. Additionally, there were increased costs associated with social and community supports throughout the Yukon, as well as increased demands for more mental health services. There were increased costs for extended family care agreements with Family and Children's Services. While this increased financial pressure is not the best news, this is the reason for it.

My department has worked extremely hard over the past several years to ensure that First Nation children are not brought into care unless there are no other options. That more and more First Nation children are now being cared for by family and community is a very positive step forward. Our success in this approach has resulted in financial pressures to support the children and those supporting the child.

It should go without saying that some of the overexpenditures can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, as we swiftly established our Health Emergency Operations Centre and ensured that all communities and support services were prepared to care for Yukoners who have been stricken by the unknown virus. This was well spent in providing personal protective equipment for essential workers in our hospitals, our health care centres, our long-term care homes, and our childcare centres. We had to put in place a testing centre and a self-isolation centre. In addition, we had to ensure that samples made it to the lab in Vancouver at a time when more flights

were cancelled than were flying. We had to ensure that we had additional staff in our health centres. We immediately enhanced our 811 services. These are just a few of the things we did during the past few weeks of the fiscal year of 2019-20.

Within the department, we take very seriously that we are spending taxpayers' dollars and that we report to the general public. What needs to be understood is that there are things — such as a pandemic or meeting the needs of a very sick Yukoner — that we cannot control and that we can't plan for. We watch carefully throughout the year to manage to our appropriation. We know and appreciate the seriousness of going over our appropriation. The department has continued to institute a number of measures to improve our budgeting processes and to ensure that we are positioned to manage our appropriation. For example, we instituted a formal controllership framework to ensure more rigorous accounting and oversight across the department.

Everything that we do within the Department of Health and Social Services is to serve Yukoners. The welfare of all Yukoners is of the utmost importance to this government and we continue to look for ways to best support our territory. We work hard to ensure that the money budgeted for the Department of Health and Social Services is spent in a way that supports Yukoners to lead healthy, happy lives.

These are the highlights of the Supplementary No. 3 budget for the Department of Health and Social Services for the 2019-20 fiscal year. We would be pleased to respond to any of the questions that the members of the opposition have.

Ms. McLeod: I want to welcome the officials to the Legislature today to help us out with some math.

I want to thank the minister for her overview of the Department of Health and Social Services. Of course, what we are looking at is a \$5.2-million cost overrun for the approved budget.

Since the COVID pandemic came into play in late March — which was the very tail-end of this reporting period — what other things changed? I mean, what changed that contributed to these cost overruns that could not be foreseen?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The total for the COVID expenditures in Supplementary Estimate No. 3 — the question was about unique expenditures associated with COVID-19.

The last quarter of the fiscal year, of course, presented a very significant challenge around the world and the Department of Health and Social Services stepped up, because this directly impacted us here in the Yukon. They stepped up and they delivered excellent services to Yukoners. The department was well positioned to respond to COVID-19 — and they did, with just over 25 percent of the budget — the \$5.246 million — which came to \$1.4 million of the unanticipated expenditures that the department faced related to COVID-19 — the work that the department has done to enhance mental wellness supports, to ensure that shelter services were in place, to serve the people who need it, to support childcare programs — and many other activities provided by the department — so very quickly reacting to unforeseen pressures.

In terms of the supports for the vulnerable populations, we have seen, over the course of time, significant increases — as

the Premier indicated earlier — at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. So we saw 13 folks being provided services. We have seen that significantly increase — sometimes up to 80 people a night. Of course, once COVID-19 hit, we had to find alternative services to make sure that we still provided the essential necessary supports to the clients. We also had to, of course, respond quickly to the pandemic, and we had to support the testing sites — the chief medical officer, of course, had to have increased staff and program expenses to respond to the emergency situation — resources were to put into that office right off the hop, so we had assigned \$40,000 there.

The Health Emergency Operations Centre — staffing and operations itself — the respiratory centre and the self-isolation facility had to be established. Those had to happen very quickly. This allowed for support of the territory's initial emergency operations. The support for the assessment of individuals with acute respiratory illness and support for safe places for people to isolate — so we had to put in the budget early on the resources, and that budget came to \$265,000.

The communicable disease centre — for staffing — of course, there was significant overtime associated with that. That was really to address the public's need related to COVID-19. Excessive pressures and quick response times meant that we had to support the overtime while we set up the respiratory centre and while we put the support around the chief medical officer of health.

Environmental health services — of course, there were requirements there as well under COVID-19 for related inspections across the territory, so there were resources put in there to support our environmental health services. We had \$10,000 assigned there. Social services for deployed staff to the emergency coordination centre to support COVID-19 was \$25,000.

There was also approximately \$170,000 for the Yukon Hospital Corporation to support its initial operation changes and enhancements to prepare for the pandemic and ensure the health and safety of patients, staff, and the general public. Additionally, there was over \$900,000 to support Continuing Care for staffing costs to ensure that residents of long-term care homes and residents in communities — as well as supports to keep childcare available for essential workers and to ensure that childcare centres would remain viable. We would not have had the same supports, services, and guidance during our response to COVID-19 without these additional expenditures.

Spending on the COVID-19 response in the last quarter of 2019-20 was unexpected and unbudgeted. As such, at such a late time in the year, it was almost impossible to reduce spending in other areas in order to compensate for the unexpected emergency spending. Yukon's response was very immediate, as I indicated many times in the Legislative Assembly. We had the Arctic Winter Games about to take off. We had a number of young people coming to the Yukon. We had to react quickly, and we had to put the resources and supports in place.

Immediate supports had to be made readily available. We had to reduce the risk for Yukoners. We are very proud of this work and proud of the communities for stepping up and putting

the supports in place in their respective communities. That included the municipalities and, of course, the First Nation communities as well. I just wanted to give some highlights specific to the \$1.4 million and how it was broken down for us.

Ms. McLeod: I couldn't really hear what the minister was saying when she started. The minister can correct me if I heard wrong — but I believe we were talking about \$1.4 million in direct COVID-19 response spending for the last quarter of — well, for March 2020.

Hon. Ms. Frost: That was the question asked and that was the response back. It's \$1.4 million that was broken down, and I would be happy to go over that again if it's required.

Ms. McLeod: During Question Period, the Premier stated that \$5.2 million was primarily related to costs of hospital stays outside of the Yukon, extended family care agreements, and increased demands for mental health services and social and community supports throughout Yukon. I'm going to have some questions about some of these cost items.

Can the minister describe or give us a little more information about why so much more money was needed for costs associated with hospital stays outside of the Yukon? What was the dollar value of this?

Hon. Ms. Frost: For insured health services this year, the cost was \$1.3 million. I can get the overall number for the year, but I think it was in excess of \$9 million — somewhere around \$9.5 million — for hospital stays outside the Yukon. As the members of the Official Opposition would know — and, of course, during the first year that I was in as the Health and Social Services minister — we received an invoice from external service providers, which would be, of course, the Providence hospital in Vancouver, the BC cancer care clinic, and the BC Children's Hospital. There's a hospital in Calgary as well. We had an invoice in May/June of \$2.2 million that came in late in the year — and we had to make adjustments and accommodations for it — that wasn't budgeted for.

This is, as members would know, standard practice. It's very difficult for the service providers to get us the invoice for the full year, so what we've essentially done is to try to provide a projection on how much it will cost.

I think, clearly, I can say that the important thing here is that the unexpected events for 2019 were certainly not considered early in the year because they were unforeseen expenses related to the invoices for the service providers. Some of the things that we have done differently — we have now created opportunities to have services here in the Yukon. We are not always sending clients outside the Yukon, so one might ask, "Well, in 2016, if we saw a bill in May of \$2.2 million and it's down to \$1.3 million now, how did that drop happen and where are the cost differences?" The services for pediatricians, orthopaedic surgeons, and the repatriation of programs to the Yukon, I think, help to bring that cost down significantly.

Yukoners will always need specialized services outside of the Yukon, and we are still committed to ensuring that all Yukoners access treatment programs and supports that they require outside the Yukon. That includes, of course, expanded opportunities for us to look at hospitals and other care centres — Kelowna being one. Prince George specializes in cancer

care. There is an opportunity for us to work with them in Prince George as well. So, we are looking at alternative options. We certainly want to look at pressures, because what we are seeing is that there are times when individuals head to the southern centres and we don't have the services here, and the hospital stays are extended. A priority for our government is to ensure that we provide all supports here in the Yukon as much as we can, but there will always be the pressure to ensure that we provide enhanced services outside the territory.

Ms. McLeod: So \$1.3 million was spent on hospital stays outside of the Yukon over and above what was forecast. I'm just going to leave it at that.

I want to move on to extended family care agreements. I'm looking for the additional dollars out of the \$5.2 million that was channelled toward this to start with.

Hon. Ms. Frost: To respond to the question around the extended family care agreements, historically the Government of Yukon provided services to the indigenous families through the foster care system apprehension of children, and what we were hearing, of course, through our Child and Youth Advocate to our community family support workers and, of course, through our indigenous communities is that they wanted to see the children repatriated back to the communities. Rather than apprehension, they wanted to look at how to bring children back into the care of their grandparents.

When we took office in 2016, we were extensively overcrowded in our group homes. In fact, we had not enough foster care homes, and so we had to look for an alternative. The alternative was that we must look at extended family care agreements, and so we did that in 2019-20. The unexpected costs associated with that — and that covered, of course, the important social services, including supports for children and families. We looked at the extended family care agreements and tried to work hard to reduce the number of children in care. It also required us to look at supporting families through mental wellness supports, wraparound services for children as they were repatriated back to their communities, specifically to their grandparents. I have raised this in the Legislative Assembly historically. We have grandparents who live on old age security income support, and they get \$1,200 to \$1,800 a month and are raising two of their grandchildren.

The cost of living, as we know, in our communities is excessive. Particularly in my community, it would be absolutely impossible to have a grandparent with one income raising their grandchildren and still staying above the poverty line. That was part of the objective of the extended family care agreement. It was really about reconciliation. It was reconciliation to indigenous families. We recognized that there would be additional costs associated and truly believed that this was better for the children, for the families, and for the communities.

In meeting this demand and the support, we saw an increase in uptake, which was, in my view, money well spent. Why? It is because we didn't have children in group homes. We didn't have children in government homes. We didn't apprehend children. We went from over 200 children in government care in 2015 — prior to that, there were almost 400

children in care — and today we have brought that down to less than 100. We put the supports in place, and we have more children now in extended family care agreements than in government care. I see that as a success. Was it projected that we were going to see the uptake? It wasn't, so we had to respond. In my view, we have a legal obligation as defined under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report and *Putting People First* — many opportunities and many direct initiatives from the good work that we've done.

The *Child and Family Services Act* review indicated that this was what we must do, so that's what we were hearing about in terms of putting supports in place for cultural humility, cultural training, and cultural safety — ensuring that those who took in children in our group homes had the training and supports so that they could appropriately support our Yukon children, children who were born and raised in Yukon.

I am really pleased about that, and I look forward to further questions.

Ms. McLeod: Maybe I misremember, but I thought I asked how much money was allocated out of the \$5.2 million into this program. Of course, you will not find too many people who would not support this expenditure, but the minister referred several times to indigenous families. I am wondering if this program is only extended to indigenous families, along with the cost, of course, of the \$5.2 million.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The question is interesting. We have an obligation to provide support to all children, no matter who they are, no matter where they reside. If the choice of the family is to bring the children home, then we would support that family.

I raise, specifically, the indigenous children because the majority of the children — 80 percent of the children — who were in our care — in the care of the Yukon Party government — historically were indigenous children. That's why I raise that specifically, because we had to work really, really hard with our community partners. Of course, we had initiatives through Kwanlin Dün, for example, where we have no more coming into our community to apprehend our children — and putting in place rules. We spent, in the extended care family agreement last year through this overexpenditure, \$900,000.

Ms. McLeod: Of this \$900,000, was that solely related to more participation in this program?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The question around more participation in the program — certainly, as we look at children and look at bringing children back to their homelands, wherever that is, and into their families, of course there would be supports made available. It's certainly not something that we would overlook. \$900,000 includes supports for children and families through the extended family care agreement. It includes mental wellness supports, counselling supports, and additional supports — if you look at it through our standard practice of foster care, you take children, you apprehend children, and you put them into a foster care home. You would provide food, shelter, clothing, and essentials that the child needs. That would be support necessary to ensure this child's success.

The increased cost is to support the families.

Ms. McLeod: I'm going to move on.

The Premier had stated that there was further investment into mental health with this \$5.2 million. The minister, of course, referenced that, under the extended family care agreements, there was money spent on specific mental health and social service supports. Can the minister tell us: Of this \$5.2 million, how many new services or additional dollars were invested into mental health?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Of the \$2.6 million, approximately \$500,000 was spent on mental wellness supports.

Ms. McLeod: So, \$500,000 additional funding into mental health directly from the \$5.2 million — what did that do for Yukoners? That is my question. Was it for additional persons, or hours of counselling — whatever it was?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I guess I'm a bit baffled by the question. What did the mental wellness supports cover? What did it cover? Well, certainly, as you are repatriating children back to their families — children who were apprehended in care — you want to ensure that you have wraparound supports for the families so that the children can be successfully transitioned and reintegrated back into the community. Oftentimes, children have experienced traumatic events as they are apprehended and taken away from their communities, their families, and their grandmothers and grandfathers. Mental wellness supports and the supports provided to children and to families is to ensure that they are healthy and that the success of reintegration is there, and mental wellness support, really, is aligned with that.

It's about reconciliation; it's about repatriation. It's about ensuring that children are well-respected and well-supported in all of our communities.

So, the question, I find — I'm not quite sure. It's not something that I take very lightly. We have had many, many children, as I indicated earlier, who were apprehended. I indicated earlier that it was 80 percent, but it was actually in excess of 90 percent of the children in care were indigenous. We have brought that down to under 75 percent, and we continue to work hard. That's still a significant representation. Part of mental wellness and mental supports is about cultural humility, it's about cultural integration, it's about cultural training, and it's about supports to ensure that families are supported well as we bring back to our communities the children who have been, in unfortunate circumstances, taken away from their homes.

So, that's what I see in terms of psychiatric supports, mental wellness supports, nurse practitioners, child supports, child psychologists — all of these things would have been made readily available.

We also saw increased supports not just specifically with families and children — we had to put the resources around that — but we also saw an increase in supports that were required for Yukoners in communities. We had an emergency rapid response team that went out to all of our communities.

In fact, we've had teams go into Watson Lake and we've had teams go into my community as we've had young people who perhaps died through unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances. We would bring in our emergency response team and work with our communities. Those are unforeseen, and we would bring the counselling supports in. That's over

and above the counsellors who we have available through our mental wellness hubs that were referred to earlier.

We have 22 counsellors. Historically, we had two for the whole Yukon. We now have 22, plus we have social workers in every one of our communities. The increased support for Yukoners around addictions counselling, of course, and Naloxone supports and training — all of that is covered under this specific category.

Ms. McLeod: It seems a little difficult to get some hard numbers here. I understand the need for extended services for mental health supports. I am just trying to determine how that was provided if it wasn't through additional counsellors being brought on. I still don't have a sense of how that investment was put in place. I guess we can leave it at that.

The \$5.2 million — if I go back to the hospital stays outside of the Yukon — the \$1.3 million, I presume, was expended after the end of the fiscal year but was attributed back to the 2019-20 fiscal year, and that's why the money comes out like that. The minister referenced \$2-point-something million from 2016.

The balance of the money — I guess all of the \$5.2 million — I am looking at when all of that money was expended. Was it after the end of the fiscal year? Was it in the last month of March? Was it spread throughout 2019-20 — if the minister could give me some kind of concept of that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With the comments from the member opposite looking for hard numbers — I thought I had answered the question earlier — \$900,000 spent for extended family care supports and mental wellness supports and \$1.3 million for expenditure related to insured health services.

During the end of the fiscal year, Insured Health and Hearing Services saw a substantial increase in the number of inpatient days billed for Yukoners treated Outside in BC hospitals. That is not unusual. The members opposite would well know that, given that they were in government for 14 years and they have seen this historically. As the member opposite knows, I indicated earlier that, in the first term in office, we saw a \$2.2-million invoice come in after the fiscal year that we had to account for, and we had to find the resources for. This is no different. The out-of-territory growth related to inpatient stays in BC hospitals increased by 26 percent over 2018-19. That is 26 percent over from the year previously that was not accounted for. It is a bit of an anomaly related to individuals with extended hospital stays — and of course we certainly can't speak specifically about each one of those cases, but Yukoners of course have diverse and complex health care needs, which means of course that the cost of receiving out-of-territory care is complex.

In 2019-20, 20,874 individuals had 1,499 inpatient hospital claims, for a total of \$12,500 in 10 days in out-of-territory hospital stays. The member opposite is looking for real numbers — those are real numbers. Of course, because of COVID-19, there was an additional delay in billing for out-of-territory claims, which did not provide Health and Social Services the information it needed to anticipate the increased costs. Now that we know that there was an increase from 2018-19 of 26 percent, we can now start projecting more

accurately going forward. We have a controller system now set up to better track the data. We are working more closely with our partners at our care facilities outside the Yukon to get a better alignment on the overages and the expenditures later on in the last quarter so that we can have a better indication, but we can't always anticipate that.

These pressures were felt late in the last quarter after we did our period 7 second supplementary. Of course, many increased health bills came in after that and that was after our 2019-20 fiscal period.

Ms. McLeod: Can the minister confirm whether the \$5.2 million was spent during the 2019-20 fiscal year? Or were those costs incurred after — or the billings received afterwards? I presume that the money was not actually spent in another fiscal year and back-billed, so that's not my question. My question is: How much of this money was spent in 2019-20 and how much wasn't?

Hon. Ms. Frost: For the record, the actual amount overall is \$5.246 million. The question was: How much was spent in 2019-20? A part of the supplementary request right now is — the expenditures incurred were seen in 2019-20 and the invoices received for the external or out-of-territory travel were received in this fiscal year which were attributed to last year's billings. So the \$5.246 million, for the record, is 1.1 percent of the overall budget of Health and Social Services. We want to get more accurate with data and numbers, as I understand, so that's just for the record.

As I indicated earlier, 2019-20 was certainly an unusual year for all of us. We will probably see this next year again, but with the overages for external hospital stays and the pressures that were seen in the last quarter — it appears that it seems to be the standard practice in terms of our partners in BC sending us the invoices after the year is out, and then we have to find the resources to bill it back to the last fiscal year. That is usually the standard practice.

I want to just say that now that we have the new medical travel coordination centre that will be established, we will be able to better estimate the allocation and reduce the costs associated with medical travel. That is the objective there.

Ms. McLeod: I just want to talk a bit about mental health. In 2019 and 2020, I believe there was a federal contribution toward mental health support, and that was part of a multi-year agreement. My question is: How much of that federal money was received in 2019-20? I would like to know where that money went and whether or not it factors into any of these other programs that the minister referenced today.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you for your patience. I am just trying to get the numbers and specifically how that was broken down. It wasn't a significant amount of funding, but we will certainly get the numbers. As I understand it, it was a small amount in the broader budget regime. Overall, the mental wellness support hubs, counsellors, and the supports across the Yukon are substantial. This was a small amount in that, and that would have gone straight into that budget.

Ms. McLeod: If I understand the minister, she will get back to us with the numbers for that funding agreement — but in addition to that and while this is going on, if we can get the

same numbers for home care which was also part of a multi-year federal agreement and, as well, the funding arrangement for childcare which was part of a multi-year federal funding agreement.

Just getting back to this \$5.2 million of the new expenditures, I recognize that some of this money was put toward services required under extended family care arrangements and agreements. What other mental health supports were funded out of this \$5.2 million, and what sort of services did the government receive requests for? I am wondering if there were any funding requests or service requests regarding family violence.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I certainly won't respond specifically to whether there was family violence associated with the expenditures. What I can say is that, as the families came forward and as we looked at our family extended care agreements, we anticipated that there would be important social services work that had to get done. We anticipated that the Family and Children's Services group would be directly involved with working with our indigenous partners.

In terms of arrangements to support reducing the number of children in care and ensuring that children remain safe and attached to their families, that was where the resources were spent.

Just looking at the additional costs and the specifics on how and what types of counselling supports and programming were needed, I would say that, no matter the circumstances and no matter the demand that was needed to support the children and the families, we wanted every family to have the opportunity to remain connected to their culture, their families, and their community. We have to ensure that the supports were there and that we had services readily available.

I do know that, as we look at supporting our families and our communities, we have increased mental wellness service supports as required. Of course, because of the higher uptake, we saw a significant increase in that so, of course, we had to put the supports in place without hesitation at all, because it meant that children were safe, children were healthy, and they had the essentials that we were obligated to provide for them — food, shelter, safety, clothing, and a right to a good education and a right to counselling supports if required.

The previous question was around how much money did we get in a bilateral agreement from the federal government for mental health supports. I can tell the member opposite that the number is very, very small compared to how much it's costing overall. The \$470,000 that we received in the 2019-20 budget from the federal government and the bilateral agreement covered, of course, services and went into the budget, and we covered the rest; the government covered the rest.

With respect to home care, I heard some grumblings — I don't know if it was a specific question, but I had heard something about home care. So, for the record, in 2019-20, we had spent \$680,000 on that program. I know that, as we signed off on our childcare agreement with the federal government in this last year — we have an extended program as well — we had received \$2.4 million.

Ms. McLeod: That last question that I asked about mental health supports — family violence — I did not intend for the minister to relate that question back to extended family care agreements.

Anecdotally, I have heard that women's shelters have been much busier during this time of COVID. My question is whether or not the minister's office has received additional requests for services or funding and whether or not, in fact, there have been further investments in that field.

I would like the minister to note that I wasn't grumbling about home care; I actually had some specific questions about home care and the funding that is being allocated to that program. I understand it was \$680,000 in 2019-20, which went into general revenues to cover off existing programs, so there was no additional investment per se; it was just included in the overall program costs. I understand that to be the case, so I did not have any further questions in that regard.

It is the same with the childcare funding of \$2.4 million. That went into general revenues. I understand that there has been some COVID money provided to childcare centres, but I suspect not in March, which this budget covers. We will be talking about that later when we get back to talking about the budget for this current fiscal year.

The minister made reference to a higher uptake in mental health services. I just want to know in what regard. Is that from the general public coming in and needing more help? How is that measured? Is it more clients seeking help or a greater number of hours? Could we just have some information about that so we can all have a better understanding of the additional number of people seeking help?

I will stop with the mental health issues for this go-round.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Just to put things in a bit of perspective, I in no way am never underplaying anything. I think the lives of Yukoners are really important. They are important to this government. It is important that we ensure that we provide essential, necessary human rights services to all of our families. We have a legal obligation to ensure that everyone is supported.

If we get a bill from BC for extended care and specialist care, we would have to cover that — whether we get it in June or in December. If we have gone over the appropriation to accommodate the increase — I gave the numbers, and it is really a lot of days — it is over 12,000 days for 20,800 individuals. That is a lot of people when we are seeing our population of 40,000 people. It means that we certainly have to put more resources into preventive care and that there is a requirement to look at collaborative care models in all of our communities to reduce the pressures on hospital stays. These are some efforts that we have to look at.

Of course, the funds that we receive from Canada are not a lot in the grand scheme of things. When you look at \$680,000 received from Canada for home care when we have spent over \$8 million over the fiscal year — we certainly need to do better in terms of getting the federal government to fund the supports. I also want to say that — with the home care initiatives and the home care program — we have been working very closely with our indigenous partners, and we tied this quite nicely to aging in place as a key requirement. We will continue to expand that

scope of service and practice, ensuring that the requirements of all Yukoners are met as we look at home care and home care supports.

We have seen — with respect to domestic violence — the budget itself doesn't cover domestic violence in this supplementary request, but we do have supports in our overall budget. We work with the Department of Justice, of course, and my colleagues, Minister McPhee and Minister McLean, from the Women's Directorate, in ensuring that we have supports for women. The Minister of Justice and the Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate — of course, we want to ensure they are directly involved in the planning overall to ensure that we take a one-government approach as we look at services and supports for those fleeing domestic violence.

We have increased mental wellness supports and we have increased home care. Overall, we have received some funding from the federal government, but we have gone far over that. We spend more on childcare than we receive from Canada. I think that it is a given that it is a requirement for us to look at ensuring that all our children and our families are well-supported.

Ms. McLeod: I only have a couple more questions today.

So, of the 884 hospital stays outside of the Yukon that were in the 2019-20 budget and subsequently covered off by a \$1.4-million overexpenditure, I heard the minister use the 26-percent increase in terms of the dollars that were being spent. I guess — in order to try to understand the issue — was there a 26-percent increase in the number of patients who travelled, or was this money more to do with the complexity of care or perhaps the longer stays? I am looking for a number, I guess, of people comparatively — I guess we can only compare it with the year before. If it was 884 in 2019-20, how does that compare with 2018-19?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The out-of-territory growth — as noted by the member opposite, I indicated that we had seen an increase of 26 percent over 2018-19. In this year — 2019-20 — the 874 individuals the member opposite refers to, you can imagine, spent 1,499 in-hospital days in BC, which of course accounted for — pardon me, that was 20,874, not 874 — 20,874 had 1,499 hospital stays. So that looks, really, if you break it down to be a total of about 12,510 days — and that is significant when you are in a hospital stay outside the Yukon. As I had mentioned earlier, we are seeing an increase in longer hospital stays — unforeseen circumstances that account for the 26-percent increase from the previous year.

Ms. McLeod: Of the \$5.2-million overrun in this budget, what's the dollar value that the minister can attribute to COVID-19?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I do believe that I said earlier that it's 25 percent of the budget.

Ms. McLeod: I have no further questions. I thank the officials.

Ms. White: So, I was just listening to the conversation and the minister listed out a bunch of different things initially but didn't talk about the number that was associated to it. By my calculations right now, with everything that has been

announced, we're at \$3,305,000. I'm just trying to get us up to the \$5,246,000.

In Environmental Health Services, the minister said \$10,000; Social Services — \$25,000; Yukon Hospital Corporation was \$170,000; Continuing Care staffing was \$900,000; mental health supports — \$500,000; hospital stays outside of Yukon — \$1.3 million; and extended family care agreements at \$900,000. The minister did initially talk about childcare programs with no number associated. She then said "vulnerable populations" and talked about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter without a number. What I'm just trying to do is get us up to the \$5,246,000. With the numbers that have been given so far, we're at \$3,305,000.

Maybe I'll start with the childcare programs that the minister mentioned. Can she please tell us how much of the \$5,246,000 is for the childcare programs?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The number breaks down, with the COVID-19 expenditures — 25 percent, at \$1.4 million. The Social Services support breaks down to \$2.6 million and the insured services is \$1.3 million.

The question specific to how much was spent on childcare — it was in excess of \$600,000 of that \$900,000.

Ms. White: Then for the vulnerable populations — the minister did reference the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter earlier, but I'm just trying to figure out how much of the \$5,246,000 is for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

Hon. Ms. Frost: It is \$800,000.

Ms. White: What was that \$800,000 for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter for? What did it pay for?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I do believe that, in general debate, the Premier responded to say that historically we have seen maybe 13 people a night at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We saw that increase to 40 to 70, and some nights there were 80 individuals. Of course, because of the increase in demand, we saw a 2016 point-in-time count — there was a 2018 count — every two years, we do a point-in-time count, but we missed it this year because of COVID-19. We saw the numbers decreasing, so we saw, in 2018, 195. Previous to that, we had something like 220 — so we saw an uptake in services for people. Of course, that meant that we had to expand the meal service program. We had to look at ensuring that we brought in the mental wellness supports for the clients. We had additional social workers assigned to the shelter, as well as addictions services and mental wellness supports. We also brought in emergency measures supports that we had to support and fund through Health and Social Services.

Ms. White: So, just trying to break down what the minister just said — 13 people in the past — 40 to 70 is kind of regular — it can go up to 80 people — and then there was a laundry list of the meal program, social workers, addictions services, and emergency measures supports — I was just trying to figure out that \$800,000. So, if that is the list, how much was spent on the meal program, the social workers, the addictions services, and the emergency measures supports?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have specifically how many meals were served and how much that cost. I don't have specifics on how much it cost for the specifics, but I can

certainly ask the department to get that number, if the member opposite desires to know. I am sure that we can break that down for the member opposite with respect to our social services supports and our emergency measures.

What I can say is that my good colleague from Community Services has collected some really great data for us where we are seeing reduced pressures at the hospital because we have emergency measures services at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, and we are seeing less pressure on the RCMP callouts as well. We are seeing less pressures at our managed Sarah Steele facility.

We are looking at \$800,000, but we are also seeing cost-savings elsewhere and we are seeing less pressures elsewhere. So I would suggest that the narrative around providing services to significantly more individuals in the vulnerable sector — that is required — also the demand for increased staff was required because we had to increase — the demand was there and we had to increase the staff at the shelter.

Ms. White: So, when I ran kitchens, I could break down the cost per meal — how much it would cost to feed a single person per meal. That is how, if you were selling them for a profit, you would figure out what your profit margin was. I would imagine that when you are running something like an emergency shelter — similar to the correctional facility — you have to figure out a cost per meal, because that's how you calculate and that's how you plan for the future.

So, sure — the minister offered — I would love a breakdown of how many meals have gone out and what the cost is per meal, because I would like to point out that I was given this list of things that worked into the \$800,000 — so yes, I would like a breakdown of what that is. This isn't a criticism. This wasn't a criticism. I was asking.

So, now we're at \$4,705,000 out of the \$5,246,000. I'm just trying to work my way through it.

With that \$800,000 that I was just told about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — earlier, the minister had talked about vulnerable populations and then she referenced the emergency shelter. So I'm just wondering if there are different monies set aside for a different — when she said “vulnerable populations”, if she meant just the emergency shelter. In the money — the \$4.7 million that I've talked about — I know that there is \$900,000 for continuing care staffing, so I'm not looking for that. I'm just trying to figure out — when the minister said “vulnerable populations” and then mentioned the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, is that just the \$800,000? Or is there additional money there?

Hon. Ms. Frost: No criticism taken. I just don't have that number in front of me.

I would say that the department breaks it down as they're doing the budgets. I think what we're seeing in terms of uptake on client services at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — I think we'll have a better handle on that this year. The objective is to try to get those supports throughout the community, through Housing First and through our multipurpose facilities.

Of course, with respect to vulnerable populations and our vulnerable sector — the supports that we provide to our communities and how that's defined is we have to support the

referred care clinic and we have to provide more naloxone kits. That's covered through here. We have the extended family care agreements — those are all vulnerable sectors that we're supporting. Does it capture every one? Probably not, but we're really trying to support families, communities, and those who would fall under the specific categories.

Something for Yukoners to keep in mind is that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — 2019-20 was the first full year of operation. We have learned a lot from that exercise. We have learned a lot from the services. We have increased supports. We have created more partnerships. We are now partnering with Community Services, community justice, Health and Social Services, and the Yukon Housing Corporation. We have external partners supporting us as well. The Referred Care Clinic is one. We work with our other sectors in terms of trying to bring community supports into the shelter. That is the objective there and the definition of why I refer to our vulnerable sector that way.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer. Another thing she referenced with that number is communicable disease staffing. She talked about that as if it was an additional cost, so could I have the breakdown please?

Hon. Ms. Frost: That was associated with \$10,000 in overtime for March.

Ms. White: I am relieved to have a calculator, because that is very helpful. At this point in time, with everything that the minister has listed so far, we are at \$4,715,000 out of the \$5,246,000 — so if the minister could help me figure out where the rest of that money is, I would be grateful.

Hon. Ms. Frost: A question was asked earlier about the childcare supports. I had noted for the member opposite the \$600,000. There is an additional \$300,000, which covers the supplementary request for the remainder of the \$900,000. Insured health services is \$1.3 million — just for the record.

I can read into the record again the overall expenditures so that we have it correctly in the record: So for COVID, we had \$1.4 million; the chief medical officer of health — there was \$40,000 spent there; Health Emergency Operations Centre was —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would be happy to speak very slowly so that the member can get the numbers down. Of course, I don't intend to skip over it.

COVID expenditures is \$1.4 million; the chief medical officer of health was \$40,000; health emergency operations — \$265,000; the communicable diseases — \$10,000 was spent there; Social Services was \$170,000; childcare — over \$600,000; Continuing Care — we had \$300,000, I believe; and then Social Services, the \$2.6 million; extended family care agreements — \$900,000; Family and Children's Services — \$500,000; mental health — \$400,000; and of course \$800,000 went to the shelter — that accounts for the \$2.6 million; and the rest went to insured health services of \$1.3 million.

Ms. White: This is one of those times where “clear as mud” comes through. I was with us — I was there, and then I lost it.

One of the numbers I didn't have was the \$40,000 for the chief medical officer of health. So, just for clarification, was that just for the staffing or additional funding to that office?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I just want to say for the record, I know I provided the numbers and of course what I don't want is for there to be confusion. I would be happy to table the exact numbers, broken down, so that the members opposite have that information if the member opposite is amenable to that.

Ms. White: That would be glorious. I would highlight what we've seen just in this interaction — and I feel like I'm going to do the descriptive service that would happen on television — I have a series of papers in front of me and some of it is readable where you could see that I wrote down "Social Services — \$25,000", and then you can see this other sheet of paper where it doesn't look very coherent.

The reason I am trying to get the breakdown — and this highlights the same problem that happened — and it will happen again — I am just going to give the minister a heads-up — this will happen again, because in the briefing that we got for the supplementary for the 2020-21 budget, there is a line item that is for almost \$34 million, and it has no breakdown. So, I look forward to the minister tabling that document or making that available to opposition members because that is all that this has been — is trying to figure out what that money is. That will save everyone from me asking more questions trying to get that — so I look forward to that document.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Just for the record, the previous question that the member had asked about the \$10,000 for the chief medical officer of health —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Ms. Frost: Sorry, pardon me — \$40,000. We had to bring in additional support for the chief medical officer of health right early on, and that covered the deputy chief officer of health and the staffing supports around that.

I hear the member opposite in terms of needing more information — the \$34 million is a supplementary request that is coming. I would be happy, once we get there, to respond to those questions. For now, the \$5.246 million is broken down in this specific way, as I have described it. The majority of it was essential services that were required for citizens of Yukon and unforeseen pressures. Of course, we are working hard to address that, as I indicated, and we will continue to do the necessary due diligence.

Certainly, we don't want to go over the appropriation, but sometimes it is necessary. In this circumstance, I am doing my best to justify the overexpenditures as they relate to extended hospital stays — and the astounding number of over 20,000 Yukoners requiring that support is a justification of the services needed in time that is unaccounted for. I just wanted to make that note.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

If the pandemic has shown us anything, it is that the more information people have — the more information that is readily available, the fewer questions people have — and not to say that a supplementary budget has, like, fear, but when the information is easy to access, it can change the line of questions.

I would rather talk about the services in place at the shelter right now than try to figure out what happened to \$800,000. In the grand scheme of things, it is a lot of money, but it's not a lot of money if we're talking about people. If we had the breakdowns ahead of time, instead of trying to put together the \$5,246,000 and where it went, the conversations would be different, right?

Instead of the temperature elevating with questions that maybe don't feel relevant — it's just trying to get that breakdown. So if there was a possibility — I will put this pitch in — to get the breakdown of that \$33 million ahead of the debate that we have in here — I mean, that would be really helpful. If we don't think I can keep this \$5 million straight on these papers, \$33 million — or nearly \$34 million — is going to be worse. I just think that, when we make the information available, the conversations become more about the programs behind it as opposed to the cost of the program, because then we know what the program is already.

So, I thank the minister for her willingness to share this information. I hope that it happens in the next part as well.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the member opposite for the questions. We certainly want to make sure that we get as much information out — appreciating that we were in the midst of a pandemic, so a lot of the pressures were on Health and Social Services to provide in-time services to our various support centres and health centres — to all the services that we provide.

Knowing that the staff were doing their best to respond to COVID-19 and ensuring that we had in-time supports — specifically to the COVID-19 expenditures — I would not have been able to get those specifics until most recently. So the other stuff in terms of the lateness of the invoices received from external insured health services costs — that would have come in late as well. As quickly as we can get these things out — I would make the best efforts possible to do that.

Mr. Cathers: In rising to speak to the health portion of this budget — as the minister will know, the Premier and I have spent part of today and part of Thursday — I asked a number of questions. The Premier did commit to answers being forthcoming when the minister rose and I would invite her to provide that information now. It certainly would be appreciated.

I would also like to note for everyone listening or reading this in Hansard that, when we are asking questions about Health and Social Services, it's important to understand that, according to the government's handout that we were provided in the spring introducing the 2019-20 budget — according to the government, Health and Social Services is 35 percent of the O&M spending of the government. It is a very large department. The total amounts that we are seeing are close to half a billion dollars, and that is, again, a very large portion of the territorial budget. Its programs affect people's lives.

When we have asked about the changes in terms of where we believe we should be seeing some additional lapses based on past patterns financially — just to give people an example of what I am referring to — if we look at the government's handout relevant to Health and Social Services that they gave

us with the second supplementary budget — the one just previous to the one that we are dealing with here — that budget showed a change, compared to the previous budget bill, covering — in the course of a three-month period, the change in what government's estimates were for this department was significant. So, between the period 4 report and the period 7 report, we saw a \$12.8-million change in Health and Social Services, and the budget that we are dealing with now is based on a five-month period, not a three-month period. When we are seeing a change that is substantially less, it does leave us with some questions, because we know that variances occur — both upwards and downwards — in spending across a department of this size.

As the minister will recall, we also had the unfortunate situation during the spring where the main budget for the 2019-20 year was debated — that was the infamous spring where only 4.4 percent of the Legislative Assembly Sitting was spent debating two of the largest departments within the government — those being Health and Social Services and Education. That 4.4 percent to deal with both departments left us with many unanswered questions from the spring of 2019. Unfortunately, some of those are still outstanding over a year later.

People will be familiar with the old adage “follow the money”, but that is not, of course, the only method that is important in evaluating what government is doing. But it is a very important assessment of what government is doing with public money. As members of the Official Opposition, an important part of our job is to question the government on their decisions. My colleague, the Member for Watson Lake and our Health and Social Services critic, asked the minister a number of questions. Unfortunately, for some of them, she was not really satisfied with the answers to them in that they didn't completely answer the question.

In my capacity as Finance critic, I am going to ask a number of questions that are going to focus primarily on costs, statistics, process, and so on, because they are a part of how government deals with responding to people. It is very important for us to understand and for the public to understand if we are going to know what government did and come to an informed conclusion on where we would suggest improvement could be made in the future and where we think the government has done a good job.

I do want to note that, for staff of Health and Social Services, we recognize that there are people — particularly during the pandemic but before that as well — who work very hard on behalf of Yukoners and try their very best to provide high-quality services to the public. We appreciate, of course, the work of every dedicated public servant in Health and Social Services as well as in the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which is funded through Health and Social Services although separate from it. We appreciate the work of the staff, management, and health professionals there as well as at the non-governmental organizations that are funded by Health and Social Services that, while not directly a part of government, do form an important part of how the Yukon as a whole responds to the needs of our citizens.

With that introduction, I am going to start with a few specific questions for the minister — again, looking at the 2019-20 fiscal year. The first question is: What is the total number of staff for the Department of Health and Social Services? If the minister could either provide us with a breakdown by branch or commit to providing that soon via legislative return, that would be appreciated. Secondly, with regard to those staff positions, could the minister tell us about vacancies in those positions as of the end of the fiscal year?

The next question that I am going to ask relates directly to the pandemic, especially when the pandemic was declared in March. We know that there was lag time. The government was trying to figure out which staff could work from home and who was required to be at the office and figure out how to operationalize the concept that had flowed from the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health.

Could the minister tell me the number or the percentage of the staff — actually, both would be helpful — from Health and Social Services who were working from home during the pandemic in the earlier stages of it — in the March to May window? I would be interested in both what the initial number was and what it was at its peak, which I would assume was somewhere around the month of May. If the minister could provide a comparison to what that number is now a little later on in the pandemic, that would be appreciated.

I will just also ask her to explain what the process was regarding the declaration of a public health emergency and what involvement her department had in that declaration.

Secondly, we have seen the government issue dozens of ministerial orders under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*. Those, of course, are primarily under the authority of the Minister of Community Services, but as they directly relate to a health matter, we and citizens are wondering about who is involved in making these decisions and how that process occurs, including who provides the policy direction and the content of those ministerial orders and what the role is of the respective departments in doing that, as well as the separate role of the chief medical officer of health in regard to that. If the minister could start out by answering those questions, I would appreciate it.

Hon. Ms. Frost: There was a lot there. Specific to the employees of Health and Social Services, those members who worked from home and those members who worked in various sectors during the pandemic, I just want to say that the questions specific to the public servants' work — that is the responsibility of the Public Service Commissioner, the responsibility of the minister responsible.

I am sure that during this debate on the supplementary for Health and Social Services — I broke that down very clearly earlier. I can do that again.

The member spoke specifically about how we manage the budgets but wanted to know specifically about how many employees were in Health and Social Services. Currently, the number fluctuates, but we have in excess of 1,400 employees.

The member opposite also needs to be aware that the majority of Health and Social Services staff are front-line staff — essential services. That means that we have community

health centres, we have nurses, certainly we have the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, and we have childcare centres. We have social workers, we have child advocates, and we have youth support workers in our communities.

Many of our mental wellness hubs — we had to work around providing extended care agreements through that. We had to look at continuing care and our seniors homes. That required a lot of extensive adjustments to the staff complement there to better align with in-time supports as we came up against a pandemic. That meant that we had to bring in, perhaps, additional supports. That meant that we had to bring in additional cleaning staff. We had to certainly look at locking down the facilities, meaning that we had to put in the necessary cleaning supports within our houses. There are a few houses within the Whistle Bend continuing care facility. We have Copper Ridge Place as well, and we have to ensure that we have supports there, as well as at the reenablement unit at the Thomson Centre. We were still trying, through our medical staff, to support the clients as they looked at the essential services and supports there.

Certainly, we want to say to the member opposite that, as we look at the budget — and there were certainly a lot of questions yesterday and in general debate pressuring the Premier with specifics. We are certainly not afraid to respond to the questions.

I did that today for the Member for Takhini, who asked for a specific breakdown on how much of the \$5.426 million was spent on specific sectors of our society and specifically on COVID-19. We did that, and I said that I would table that. I would be happy to do that and to break that down. I can certainly confirm that we went over the appropriation for 2019-20 — acknowledge that to Yukoners, but it was necessary.

I just want to say again that the overall budget specifically for providing services for clients who required supports outside the Yukon — required additional supports — we had to, in the midst of a pandemic, still provide critical, essential services for clients who were required to travel outside the Yukon. Those clients who had cancer, for example — we couldn't keep them here. We had to send them to BC, and we had to work through a pandemic, which meant that we had to work through additional supports. So, staff fluctuated quite a bit. We do know that, through this pandemic, we had to work very quickly with the Public Service Commissioner to determine how many of the health care staff were front-line staff — who were essential service staff — working through, as well, the childcare centres and ensuring that we have supports there. We had approximately 25 percent of our staff working from home, but the rest were essential services.

So I don't have those specific numbers for the member opposite, but I'm sure that, given the opportunity, you can ask that question of the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission. Meanwhile, as we look at the specific budget breakdown for the \$5.246 million specific to Health and Social Services — I would be happy to respond to that.

I know that the Member for Lake Laberge indicated — and I take quite an offence to how the member described the

services for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — calling it a debacle, suggesting that the management was inappropriate, and referring to it being embarrassing for this government. Well, I have to say that is inappropriate, because these are essential service staff. If you refer to the October 8 transcripts from Thursday it clearly goes through this language that was used. I take great offence to that, because I think that's very inappropriate when we speak about the "problems" — the RCMP responds to "problems". You know, I don't see it as a problem; I see it as necessary supports and challenges that we have to bring in extra staff, we have to bring in extra supports, and we have to make the necessary accommodations at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

That meant, of course, that we had to transfer some staff because we had to make adjustments. You're seeing in excess of 80 people requiring shelter on a daily basis when, prior to COVID-19, we were providing over 300 meals a day. Those people just didn't go off somewhere; they were still there. They still required supports — in-time supports — but because of COVID-19, we had to make some alterations and adjustments.

The alterations and adjustments that were required meant that we had to make some changes. It's very difficult to say that we can give specific numbers related to COVID, but we can give specific numbers to say that we've always had the best interests of the community in mind as we look at ensuring supports that we provided previously and maintain that same standard with the same level of services, which meant that we had to bring in additional social workers, we had to work through our RCMP supports, we had to work through emergency measures, and we had to work through Dr. Hanley's office to come up with an alternative plan.

The questions specific to — instead of supporting NGOs — including to address any problems that might have occurred, the government preferred to shove them aside — well, I have to say that — then see them shut down and hire more government staff in the Department of Health and Social Services — that's absolutely not true. What is true is that we work very closely with our NGO supports — our NGO partners in our communities. I have to say that is not — in my humble opinion — a very appropriate thing to put on the record. The NGOs have had increased funding in the last year. That never stopped; they continued to get the funding and the supports.

The increase that they have seen in the last two years was to provide essential services to Yukoners. It is important that we get these things corrected on the record. This is not what Yukoners want to hear or what Yukoners need. Yukoners need to know that we are listening to them — that we are listening to them and doing something about it. We are not just putting pressures and misclassifying — inappropriately calling out — our public servants. The public servants have gone above and beyond, and I stand behind them. The public servants of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter have done an exceptional job.

Our NGO partners are going far above their responsibilities to meet the needs of their clientele, and I'm very proud of that. I don't want us to ever say that we have misappropriated, misrepresented, or disrespected anyone. Instead of putting that out there, I want to clarify for the record

that the claims that were made are, in fact, absolutely not true. I can say that. We have worked very closely with our partners and our NGO community.

I want to just conclude by saying that the appropriation for this year for \$5.429 million — I've indicated that I will provide it for the record and I will do that. I will very succinctly describe how it was all spent. Yukoners will be happy to know that the money was spent on essential services and necessary services to support them through extended family care agreements, through extended hospital stays, and through the additional mental wellness supports.

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

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. Frost that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Chair, I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. McPhee that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

Speaker: It has been moved by the 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 5:26 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled October 13, 2020:

34-3-45

Financial Accounting Report — Government of Yukon — For the period of April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 — Mercer Marsh Benefits (August 26, 2020) (Silver)

34-3-46

Yukon College 2018-2019 Annual Report and financial statements (McPhee)

34-3-47

Department of Education Annual Report 2019 (McPhee)

The following document was filed October 13, 2020:

34-3-34

Request for 500 meter greenbelt buffer zone around Nygren subdivision, letter re (dated October 6, 2020) from Wladimir Makar to Wade Istchenko, Member for Kluane (Istchenko)