



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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3rd Session

34th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, October 8, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 Fall Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Deputy Premier Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Government House Leader Minister of Education; Justice
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate; Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission
Hon. Pauline Frost	Vuntut Gwitchin	Minister of Health and Social Services; Environment; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Highways and Public Works; the Public Service Commission
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Minister of Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board; Women's Directorate

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

Yukon Liberal Party

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
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Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, October 8, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

In recognition of Ombuds Day

Speaker: The third annual Ombuds Day is today, October 8, 2020. This international event seeks to improve public awareness of the Ombuds and their work. I know that a number of the staff at the Office of the Ombudsman wanted to attend today, but they are instead listening on radio due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

The theme for 2020 is “Ombuds: Unusual name. Important service.” The Office of the Ombudsman in Yukon was established in July 1996, when the *Ombudsman Act* was proclaimed. The Yukon Ombudsman is an officer of the Yukon Legislative Assembly and operates independently of government.

The role of the Yukon Ombudsman is to take complaints from citizens who feel that they were treated unfairly when accessing the services delivered by government or other public authorities, and to carry out confidential, neutral, and impartial investigations of such complaints free of charge.

The Office of the Yukon Ombudsman provides significant value to Yukon citizens and society. Ombuds Day is an opportunity to increase awareness and understanding of the value an Ombudsman brings to facilitating good government. Yukoners can learn about the role of Yukon’s Ombudsman by visiting the office’s website or by contacting the office directly.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Silver: There are a couple of DMs in the gallery today. I will introduce one. I am sure that they are both here for Elder Frost’s tribute. We have Deputy Minister Stephen Mills in the gallery.

Applause

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming my very dear Auntie Bertha Frost, Stephen’s younger sister, to the gallery today, and of course my Deputy Minister John Bailey, who is a long-time friend of Stephen’s as well. Thank you for coming today.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Stephen Frost

Hon. Ms. Frost: Drin gwiinzii, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly to pay tribute to the late Stephen Frost Sr., a Vuntut Gwitchin legend born to Clara and Harold Frost of Old Crow on April 5, 1932. Sadly, on September 6, at 8:50 a.m., we lost this amazing man.

In his earlier years, most Yukoners will remember Stephen as a good-looking, larger-than-life personality who arrived in Whitehorse from the far reaches of our Yukon’s north. Old Crow and the Vuntut Gwitchin were well represented when he arrived, decked out in his best traditional regalia lovingly crafted by his wife Ethel to race in the Rendezvous dog races.

It was at this time that he met his lifelong friends Wilfred Charlie and Sam Johnston, both fellow dog mushers. Our respected elder grew up among a large family of 10 children, while living a simple life on the land during a time of extreme hardship. It was during this time that he learned how important it was to work as a team and to let his silly personality get him through the harshest of times.

Donald, Stephen’s eldest brother, speaks affectionately about his little brother as the mischievous one. That twinkle and spark never left him. He carried that mischievous, flirtatious behaviour with him until his passing.

Stephen’s involvement in the aviation industry goes back many years, well before Air North was established and well before the airport was built in Old Crow. He had connections as an employee and as a volunteer to Trans North, Connelly-Dawson Airways, Great Northern Airways, and Northward Airlines. This was the connection that he took an honour in.

He saw a need to welcome you to Old Crow. You were never left to feel like an outsider or a foreigner while in our community. Stephen made many friends the world over, welcoming those who arrived in Old Crow with open arms, a hot cup of tea, and a caribou roast, while saying, “We all need you to know that you are appreciated.” Many of you will have been greeted at the airport in Old Crow and immediately invited for tea or a bite to eat.

Doug Phillips, one of his very dear lifelong friends, describes him this way: “His gift to his family, friends and community was that he cared so deeply for everyone he met. He made us all feel at home.” A life fully lived and led — it’s hard to find words to match the stature of this patriarch in the Frost family, and it’s hard to imagine Old Crow without Stephen. He was an avid storyteller, an excellent trapper, an amazing baker, an entertainer, and — most of important of all — a keeper of our legends, our culture, and our Gwich’in teachings. There are so many wonderful memories and collections of stories from those who had the honour of crossing paths with this wonderful, spirited elder. He loved his community and was a true ambassador of Old Crow but, more importantly, of Yukon.

Assembly of First Nations of Canada National Chief Perry Bellegarde stated — and I quote: “It is always tragic when family and friends lose an Elder, but a man like Stephen Frost... had an impact that reached farther than most...”

Stephen Frost was a leader — a leader within the community and a person of great influence. He accomplished so much and influenced so many in his 88 years. His presence will be missed at all community gatherings and meetings. He always started off his presentations by stating, “I am 80-something years old, and that don’t make me any better than no one. It just means I’ve seen a lot in my years.”

He lived through many world changes, but through his time, he remained steadfast in his commitment to our youth. He often spoke of how the Gwitchin are seeing evidence of climate change on the land and in the animals, with emphasis on the Porcupine caribou herd. “It is so important to merge traditional knowledge with science,” he said.

Stephen would often drop by the school unannounced for tea and stories just to see how everyone was doing and to spread some cheer and good energy among our youth. He had high expectations of everyone, especially when it came to cultural integration and teachings. He committed his time to climate change, his teachings, words of advice, and unwavering support will have profound impact on his people.

Premier Silver said — and I quote: “We lost a legend.” It’s true. He was to all of us legendary and larger than life. As his niece, I was often reminded by him, “Life is good and others have it worse off than we do, so keep doing your best every day, dearly beloved.” That’s what he said to everyone who he spoke to from his heart. We are millionaires. We have everything we need here and the land provides for us.

I will miss his kindness, his openness, his words of wisdom, and his guidance. We are all richer for having Stephen in our lives. Hai choo for the inspiration, and most of all mahsi’ to the community of Old Crow for sharing this special man with the world. Thank you.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have for tabling, pursuant to section 12(3) of the *Arts Centre Act*, the 2019-20 Yukon Arts Centre annual report.

Further, pursuant to section 103(1) of the *Workers’ Compensation Act*, I have for tabling the 2019 annual report of the Yukon Workers Compensation Health and Safety Board.

Further, I also have for tabling the response to a Tourism Industry Association of Yukon letter, received on August 24, 2020.

Mr. Cathers: I have for tabling a letter dated September 9, 2020, addressed to the Hon. Navdeep Bains, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry for the federal government, from Yukon Party leader Currie Dixon regarding the issue of XplorNet service, urging the federal minister to seek a solution with XplorNet so that Yukoners can continue to receive this Internet service.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 2 — received

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 2 of the Third Session of the 34th Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Leader of the Third Party on October 7, 2020.

The petition presented by the Leader of the Third Party meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 2 is deemed to be read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, the Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been read and received within eight sitting days of its presentation. Therefore, the Executive Council response to Petition No. 2 shall be provided on or before Thursday, October 22, 2020.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 16: *Act of 2020 to Amend the Condominium Act, 2015* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 16, entitled *Act of 2020 to Amend the Condominium Act, 2015*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 16, entitled *Act of 2020 to Amend the Condominium Act, 2015*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 16 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any other bills for introduction?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the current state of emergency. This allows for the continued assessment and management of Yukon’s response to COVID-19.

Mr. Gallina: I rise to give notice of the following motions:

THAT this House supports meeting or exceeding the targets laid out in *Our Clean Future*, including the greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy targets.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Yukon business relief program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT the chair and president of the Yukon Development Corporation and the chair and the president of the Yukon Energy Corporation appear as witnesses in Committee of the Whole prior to the end of the 2020 Fall Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the chair of the Yukon University Board of Directors and the president of the Yukon University appear as witnesses in Committee of the Whole prior to the end of the 2020 Fall Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Ms. McLeod: I rise and give notice of the following motion:

THAT the chief medical officer of health and the deputy chief medical officer of health appear as witnesses in Committee of the Whole prior to the end of the 2020 Fall Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the chair and panellists of the *Putting People First* report appear as witnesses in Committee of the Whole prior to the end of the 2020 Fall Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the chair and the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation appear as witnesses in Committee of the Whole prior to the end of the 2020 Fall Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the chair and the president of the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board appear as witnesses in Committee of the Whole prior to the end of the 2020 Fall Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

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

THAT this House congratulates Jamena James Allen as the new chancellor of Yukon University.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government and the federal government to work with Xplornet on a solution to prevent Yukoners from losing Internet service.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to improve communications in rural Yukon by working with the private sector to expand cell service.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to disclose the true cost of implementing tipping fees at its solid-waste facilities, including increased costs related to:

- (1) staffing;
- (2) brushing and clearing;
- (3) installation of power lines;
- (4) installation of phone service;
- (5) monthly charges, including phone and point-of-sale terminal fees; and
- (6) installation of the dirt berms that have been placed across the entrance to numerous roads, old gravel pits, and pull-off areas.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to disclose the true costs of operating the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, including increased operational costs, capital costs, and costs associated with Yukon Emergency Medical Services and RCMP responses to problems or emergencies at the facility.

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

THAT this House recognizes and congratulates those Yukon citizens who put their names forward and were elected or acclaimed to school councils.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with parents, students, and the MAD program community to find space adapted to their needs for the remainder of this school year.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to return the experiential learning programs to the Wood Street School as soon as restrictions related to COVID-19 are lifted.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Marshall Creek subdivision development

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I rise before the House today to highlight an important partnership with the Government of Yukon, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, and the Village of Haines Junction. As the territory grows, so does the demand for housing, so we are very pleased to partner with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations as they expand municipal infrastructure to the Marshall Creek Road in Haines Junction and prepare for future growth of the Marshall Creek subdivision.

The extension of water, waste-water, and sewer services to the Marshall Creek subdivision will assist in meeting their citizens' growing housing needs for years to come. The expanded service will provide services for 38 or more future

homes for Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizens and improve services for some of their citizens already living in the area.

Funding for this project is flowing through the Investing in Canada infrastructure program. The federal government is providing \$7 million, the Government of Yukon is contributing \$1.9 million, and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations are investing one-half million dollars. Mr. Speaker, I was very excited for Steve Smith and council when they were awarded funding for the project.

The Yukon government's Land Development branch managed the initial stages of the project with a custom-built collaborative design agreement with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and then turned the project over to the First Nations. The Champagne and Aishihik First Nations are completing the project through a transfer payment agreement. As well, the First Nations and the Village of Haines Junction have updated their water and sewer agreement to include service for the new lots and lift station in the Marshall Creek subdivision expansion. This will bring the regional system together while the new agreement provides an equal fee structure for equal service between the municipality and the First Nation lots.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to provide a snapshot of the project. It includes installation of 2,000 metres of water mains, 1,500 meters of sanitary waste-water pipes, a one-kilometre extension of Johnson Street, and one lift station to pump waste water from the new sanitary sewer system into the lagoon.

Work is well underway. Champagne and Aishihik First Nations crews cleared and removed trees around Johnson Street. Castle Rock Enterprises, the civil contractor, have done additional clearing and tree removal for the new roadway near the Marshall Creek Road, as well as Johnson Street and Jackson Street. Work to extend the sanitary sewer mains has begun and installation of water mains is scheduled to begin next week. This project is slated for completion in October 2021.

We recognize the economic growth opportunities provided by such projects and we look forward to future opportunities to partner with First Nations and municipalities to provide dedicated support for the development of land in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to building healthy and vibrant communities and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' expansion of municipal infrastructure to the Marshall Creek subdivision is a tangible example of this commitment.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you for the opportunity to rise in response to this ministerial statement today. I want to congratulate Champagne and Aishihik First Nations on moving forward on this project. They worked hard on this and it's good to see them get credit for this important initiative that will help more people get homes.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we've seen the issues of housing availability, land availability, and of course affordability increase significantly in the past four years.

According to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, the average price for a single detached home was \$546,000 this summer. This is an increase of \$123,000 compared to 2016.

As a result, many Yukoners have seen their dreams of home ownership disappear over the last four years. Obviously, a big contributor to this increase in prices is the lack of land available for housing.

With this project, this provides services for nearly 40 future homes, and I sure look forward to seeing it help alleviate these issues by ensuring that more people can achieve the dream of homeownership.

I also wanted to say that having Castle Rock Enterprises doing the civil work is a much-needed economic boost for our community in these trying times with the crash of our economy due to COVID-19.

Thanks to Kaaxnox Chief Smith and council for their vision and hard work getting this project up and running. Günilshish, günilshish, günilshish.

Ms. White: The project that has been highlighted by the minister is indeed good news — good news for the municipality, the First Nations, and Haines Junction citizens. I'm sure this type of good news would be welcomed in communities across the territory.

Yesterday, when we all discussed the importance of decentralizing Yukon government jobs, it was acknowledged by all that housing and lot availability remains a challenge in Yukon communities. When I looked to see the availability of lots in other Yukon communities this morning, it was eye-opening — none that I could find in Dawson City, two in Carmacks, two in Grizzly Valley, and six in Watson Lake. There are 12 country residential lots in Mayo, averaging between \$50,000 and \$90,000, but it's well known that this type of lot isn't ideal for everyone.

I know from conversations with the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation and the Village of Carmacks that there's hope of developing housing lots along the proposed bypass road. Like many ambitious ideas, this new subdivision will require the support of the Yukon government.

Mr. Speaker, there are examples across the territory of good ideas from those with first-hand knowledge on the ground, and I look forward to the success of the Marshall Creek subdivision being replicated in other communities.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the members opposite for their comments and their support.

I'll be happy to highlight that we have work going on across the territory — for example, in Dawson, Teslin, Watson Lake, Carcross, and in Carmacks, along with the Gateway project. We have been in conversation with Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation and the Village of Carmacks. I think that there is a great amount of work happening across the territory.

What I want to say is that when I looked at how much we're investing in lot development — I'll check the numbers for this year, but last year, when I stood up in this Legislature to talk about this, we were investing as much last year as happened in the final three years of the previous government.

That's a significant increase. It means that we are investing in our communities.

When I say we're investing in them — it's not typically us, the Yukon government — the dollars flow through us, but our ideal is when it is a transfer payment agreement; we're very happy with that — but at the very least, it's a tendered project which happens right there in the community.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Diesel energy generation costs

Mr. Kent: Last year, the government announced that they had cancelled their plans for a 20-megawatt thermal power-generating facility. The lack of a reliable long-term source of power generation to support a growing Yukon has put us on the brink of an energy crisis. We need to have enough energy in place in case of an emergency, especially during our cold winters.

The government's solution to this energy crisis is to rent diesel generators. In 2017, the Yukon Liberals rented four diesel generators. A year later, that went up to six diesel generators. Last year, they rented nine diesel generators. This year, they are renting a whopping 17 diesel generators. Last year, the cost of the rentals was \$2.2 million, and that didn't include the fuel.

Can the minister tell us what the cost of the rentals for the 17 diesel generators is this year?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I think the first part of the question was asking what our go-forward plan is as a territory. As Yukoners will remember, upon coming into office, the plan was to build an \$85-million to \$100-million diesel plant. That was the solution going forward. We heard loud and clear that Yukoners wanted a different solution and that is why we embarked on our 10-year renewable plan.

And that sets Yukon up to be a Canadian leader in sustainable electricity. It aligns completely with the plan that we have just rolled out, which is our climate change, green economy, and clean energy plan. Projects in the plan are needed, of course, to meet the growing needs of electricity in Yukon and to support this government's actions to reduce carbon emissions in the territory.

When complete, projects in the plan will supply, on average, 97-percent renewable electricity to Yukoners connected to the grid by 2030. Projects in the plan also account for 46 percent of Yukon government's emission reduction targets in 2030. We will all remember the damning Auditor General's report that we had to work to address, and of course this is part of that.

This will, again, be helping to reduce our emissions — and, of course, all of this is in collaboration with our communities and our First Nation governments. I look forward to question 2.

Mr. Kent: The record will reflect that the minister didn't answer the question. The question that I asked is: What is the cost of renting 17 diesel generators for the upcoming winter?

With winter at our doorstep, Yukoners want to know that we are going to have the power available if it is needed. A

number of houses in Yukon, especially those in the community of Whistle Bend, are heated entirely by electricity. No one wants to be in the situation where it is minus 35 in the middle of January and they can't heat their home. Of course, we saw this situation occur in January of this year with a nine-hour outage, and it was a real problem.

It is becoming more and more clear that our territory is facing an energy crisis. So can the minister tell us how much was spent on diesel for the nine generators last year and how much is budgeted for fuel for the 17 generators this year — and, of course, answer the first question as to the cost of renting those 17 generators?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I was just trying to be respectful and answer the first part of question 1. The total cost this year — this winter, Yukon Energy will be renting 17 portable diesel units at a cost of approximately \$4.1 million.

What is important to note is that this is the insurance and safety for all Yukoners. The member opposite may remember the N-1 scenario, which means that, if your largest asset goes into a risky situation or shuts down, you need to ensure that you have a backup power supply so that you can look after all Yukoners.

Although \$4.1 million is a significant sum of money, when you are taking into consideration that you are ensuring the safety of all Yukoners on the grid, I think that it is an important investment.

I believe that if we had more of a visionary approach to our long-term planning when it came to energy, we wouldn't be in this particular situation.

Of course, with a significant rise in the economy over the last four years — even an economy that is fragile through COVID-19 but moving strongly — we are in a position where we are going to see a population increase and more demand on energy and power.

I am going to be very happy to share with the Legislative Assembly over the next 60 days our progress and our work with the Taku River Tlingit on our new plans moving forward with microhydro.

Mr. Kent: I thank the minister for answering the first question on the cost of renting those diesels, so hopefully in this final response, he is able to answer the second question, which was about the fuel expenditures for last year and the fuel budget for this year with those 17 generators.

Seven of those generators are being deployed to the Town of Faro. This means that we will have to ship them up the highway to Faro. It also means that, in addition to burning diesel fuel, we will have to truck that fuel up the highway to Faro to power those plants as well. The decision to put them in Faro will actually increase costs and emissions compared to keeping them in Whitehorse.

Can the minister tell us if the government compared the added costs and emissions generated from shipping the generators to Faro and trucking all the fuel to Faro versus keeping them in the Whitehorse area?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, a number of pieces to that — a number of questions.

I will come back to the Assembly with our costs from last year where it concerns our diesel use. I am happy to report on this year. Although probably all in the Assembly would have liked to have seen more sun this summer, we did have a tremendous amount of precipitation. With that, it meant that the watersheds in the Mayo area, the Haines Junction area, and the Whitehorse area — for all of our three largest assets when it comes to hydro — have now gone back to almost surplus levels. It has really met those levels ahead of where we thought that they would be at this particular time. We thought that it would be maybe two years of precipitation to get us where we wanted to be to max out.

As we look forward, we are pretty happy to see that, this year, we are not going to have to lean on the fossil fuels as much as we have had to in the past.

As to the last question — I will come back. I think it's more of a technical reason for having spread the diesel generators out. I think that it is maximize the efficiency of the grid. The member opposite may remember that, when he was responsible for this, it was important to have your assets spread out on the grid, but I will come back with the answers for that as well.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on education system

Mr. Cathers: Yukoners have been trying to get details from the Minister of Education for a month and a half about how the \$4 million from the federal government to support schools reopening will be spent. Many jurisdictions provide a detailed breakdown, showing the exact dollar values for specific expenditures within days — some within mere hours — of the federal announcement. The Yukon's minister still has not provided a comparable breakdown.

Yesterday, when we were trying to get this information, the minister provided a surprising piece of information — that being that the federal government has apparently still not given the Yukon its money. This funding was supposed to support reopening of schools. Our schools reopened 50 days ago, yet according to the minister, we still don't have the funding. This is both surprising and concerning.

Can the minister tell us what the delay from the federal government is?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am not going to speak on behalf of the federal government. The commitment was made that \$4.16 million would be provided to the Yukon Territory and that 50 percent of that would be provided to the territory in September. Those cheques don't get sent directly to me. I certainly will check and determine whether or not the funds have been received. It's October 8 — the commitment was made that those funds would arrive in late September, and the commitment has been made that the additional 50 percent would be sent to the Yukon Territory in January of 2021.

Mr. Cathers: It's surprising today that the minister is acting surprised and like she has no idea whether the money has been received or not, when yesterday, she told us — and I quote: "... we don't have a cheque from the federal government...", and she also said — and I quote: "... we have not yet received those funds..."

We were assuming we could take the minister at her assertion yesterday, and it's surprising today that she is denying any knowledge of it.

What we found out yesterday is that, despite being one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to reopen schools, we still apparently don't have the federal funding for reopening. Is the delay related to the fact that the minister has not been able to come up with a plan for the funding yet? Will the minister provide Yukoners with that detailed plan on how this funding will actually support the return to full-time classes?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm puzzled by the preamble there. I have no concern whatsoever that the commitment from the federal government has been made and that those funds are on their way to the Yukon Territory — maybe they have arrived. As I said, those cheques don't get opened by me. We will find out and we will confirm that for the members opposite, to their satisfaction, I would hope.

I have indicated on more than one occasion in this House — and I am happy to reiterate it for Yukoners — that it's incredibly important that the information regarding how those funds will be spent to the benefit of Yukon students is available. It is planned for the department to spend those funds in conjunction with the priorities noted by administrators and teachers in their schools.

That work is being done to come forward with how those funds could be expended to the benefit of students. A long list of items has already been determined — either funds that we've already spent over the summer for the school reopening plan — and those costs have been expended on behalf of schools and students. Of course, that funding coming from the federal government will assist with those. They include cleaning supplies, increased custodial services, PPE and gloves, reusable masks, hand sanitizer. I'm happy to continue the list when I have time.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of great importance to Yukon parents and to children. It's really quite surprising that the minister claims to be puzzled by her own words from yesterday when I read them back to her. She was the one who told us — quote: "... we don't have a cheque from the federal government..." and she also said "... we have not yet received those funds..."

So today it seems that she's saying that the Minister of Education yesterday didn't know what she was talking about.

Mr. Speaker, another thing that the minister told us yesterday was "No school will be required to provide PPE from its own school budget."

Can the minister confirm for us that this is in fact the case, and if it is, will any schools that have already purchased any of these items out of their budget be reimbursed by the Yukon government?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm happy to be able to confirm that.

What I'm really puzzled by is the idea that I answered questions yesterday and am then being asked them again today to confirm my answers from yesterday. I'm happy to confirm all of the things I said yesterday and repeat them today on the basis that, yes, schools will not be required to pay for those

kinds of items out of their own budgets in the event that those costs have been undertaken.

The department is working with each and every school in the territory to make sure that those costs are properly taken care of by the Department of Education, by the funds that we have in the Department of Education budget and by the funds that have been provided by the federal government for the purposes of responding to COVID-19 on behalf of Yukon students.

Question re: Off-road vehicle use

Ms. White: We were pleased to hear that off-road vehicle use was discussed at last week's Yukon Forum. The CYFN Grand Chief stated that there has been a noticeable rise in the traditional lands being disturbed by ORVs. Sensitive habitats and alpine areas are at risk and currently there is no protection for these sensitive environments.

The Select Committee on the Safe Operation and Use of Off-road Vehicles tabled a report in 2011. Since then, the Yukon NDP has asked, year after year: Where are the regulations and when will they come into effect? So here we are again. When will the minister share with the public the new regulations and tell Yukoners which regions will be protected?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The Government of Yukon is committed to addressing the environmental impacts of off-road vehicles by developing a new off-road vehicle regulation. Public engagement of the regulatory framework was completed in April 2019 and work continues with First Nations as we move forward to establish a new regulation in the coming months.

Friday's Yukon Forum gave me an opportunity to speak at the table to a number of First Nation leaders to let them know that our last step, before going into the work of implementing and building a regulation, was to ensure that we met our consultation obligations with them. We let them know that we would be reaching out to their lands staff, and it was an opportunity to speak at a high level about their perspective on this — the impacts they are seeing, the concerns they may have — and also giving a perspective of what we have heard after our consultation in spring 2019.

I look forward to question 2 and question 3.

Ms. White: I look forward to the regulations.

So Yukoners have watched over the years as environmentally sensitive areas have been negatively impacted by irresponsible ORV use. TOYA, or Trails Only Yukon Association, is an advocacy group that has long advocated for the protection of many sensitive areas throughout Yukon and they have continued to express disappointment by the lack of any concrete steps to protect any area to date.

The select committee made recommendations to mitigate environmental damage and cumulative negative impacts to sensitive wildlife and fish habitats. So can the minister confirm how the cumulative impacts on wildlife and fish habitats will be addressed in these new regulations?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: One thing that I have tried to do in this role is to ensure that I meet with all stakeholder groups and that is even in the role of Energy, Mines and Resources minister. It

might be anyone — from the Yukon Chamber of Mines right through to CPAWS — or the consistent meetings that we have had over the years with the Yukon Conservation Society as well as with Trails Only Yukon Association.

I would first have to say that I don't believe that the statement made by the Leader of the Third Party is accurate when speaking about their dissatisfaction. I think that they understand — that particular group — that this is an extremely sensitive topic. They understand that it is important to move with a regulation that is going to work for all Yukoners.

Yukoners know that, with this summer alone, we have had a banner year in off-road vehicle sales. It is near and dear to people's hearts to be able to get out into the backcountry, but they also understand that we have to understand how to do that in a respectful manner. Again, I just wanted to reflect on that because, in my conversations with the group, they have been very respectful and they have not shown any displeasure.

The "what we heard" report is available for Yukoners to look at on the Engage Yukon website and includes a wide range of input from Yukoners on the management of off-road vehicles.

I look forward to question 3.

Ms. White: I will just remind the minister that question 2 was about cumulative impacts on wildlife and fish habitats and how those were going to be addressed in the new regulations.

Besides the recommendations on the protection of environmentally sensitive areas, others were made by the select committee. Another recommendation was that government review penalties for environmental damage caused by motorized and non-motorized means. In addition, penalties should be appropriate to the damage done. Penalties need to not only be appropriate, but they also need to be enforceable.

Will the new regulations address appropriate penalties, and will they include enforcement measures?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I appreciate the reflection from the Leader of the Third Party on this committee; I appreciate that. I have read through the Blues and the comments that were made by members of the opposition on this particular topic and their stance on where they thought they would like to go from a policy perspective.

In all cases, when we are looking at regulations such as this, we try to work with our partners, coming together — such as the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Department of Environment — to understand the potential impacts that we work through. When it comes to the enforcement side of things — and maybe what you would call more of the "hammer" on any of these kinds of regulations — that again comes back to work that is done through Motor Vehicles.

The work can be done with the regulation through Energy, Mines and Resources — I am sure that it will be a spirited conversation this fall as we continue to talk about this — and then, again, looking at the Motor Vehicles rewrite. I know that my colleague will speak to that — where we have an opportunity to look at more policy pieces that can help with enforcement and the fines system.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter services

Ms. Hanson: This week, the Premier announced that Ottawa will contribute an extra \$12.4 million to Yukon through the Safe Restart Agreement. Of that amount, \$4.7 million will be directed toward vulnerable populations. The Premier said that this money would go toward prevention measures at long-term care facilities, as well as toward the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

Can the Premier indicate if this means that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter will no longer be staffed almost exclusively by auxiliary-on-call employees?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I appreciate the question from the member opposite and the opportunity to expand a bit on the northern supports package. As the members opposite know, this is the northern-specific component of the Safe Restart money that was negotiated over the month of August with the Council of the Federation and the First Ministers' meeting.

Our government has remained focused on providing protection for Yukoners and supporting them through these challenging times. The money that was received — the extra \$12.4 million — has been split into two categories: \$7.7 million for health care and \$4.7 million to support vulnerable populations.

The member opposite is correct that the additional funding for vulnerable populations will help to address needs at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and in community shelters and also for promotion of infection control in long-term settings as well.

We don't have specifics to announce today on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. That is not how we will do it. We will do it through the Minister of Health and Social Services' department when it comes to the specifics of the funding, but I will say that what we see here with the northern support package is a recognition from the federal government that costs when it comes to COVID-19 and health care in general are more expensive with northern considerations. We are happy to see that consideration on the federal level.

Ms. Hanson: A few months ago, the government considered stopping meal service at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter over the winter months. Their plan was to direct all residents to pick up meals to go from the non-governmental organizations that have been filling the gap since the pandemic started. Luckily, the plan was put aside after many people pointed out the lack of compassion this showed toward vulnerable people on the eve of winter.

One way to ensure that people will have access to meals while maintaining physical distance would be to offer multiple sittings for meal service at the shelter. This would allow for smaller groups and sanitizing to take place between meal services.

Will the government confirm that the government plans to rely exclusively on meals to go is no longer being considered for the winter?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will offer for my Minister of Health and Social Services to comment on the third part of this answer, but I do want to reflect on the first question.

The member opposite speaks to plans that were made during a global pandemic. Of course, when we make plans, we have to make sure that we are providing the services that we can as safely as we can to the vulnerable populations.

But back to the funding for health care — what we are going to do with this money, moving forward, is supporting the territory's three hospitals and rural health care services. We're going to help the chief medical officer of health to maintain and to enhance services related to the pandemic. We're also going to address the emerging and growing needs in mental health and substance abuse treatment, including support for those front-line delivery services.

What we are saying here today is that the additional money on this northern support package is going to help the Department of Health and Social Services to be able to continue down their mandate of making sure that our most vulnerable people have the services that they need, the supports that they need, and the meals that they need. If the Minister of Health and Social Services, on the third answer, can expand on programs specific to the vulnerable populations when it comes to meal programs and others and will be happy to continue to give information in the Legislative Assembly on that file.

Ms. Hanson: Wandering the streets and looking for a place to eat a bagged lunch is hardly compassionate. After a long-delayed community-engagement process, the government released a Whitehorse Emergency Shelter community safety plan last May. Many local businesses and area residents felt disrespected after the government watered down their concerns in the final version of the plan.

One thing that the plan highlighted was the importance of supporting good community relations between all parties to ensure a thriving downtown community. Residents young and old, non-profits, shelter users, and small businesses are all part of our community and deserve to be heard.

Many community partners have called on the government to work with them to develop a good neighbour agreement to foster understanding and communication in the community. Will the minister respond to this positive suggestion to improve community relations around the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I do want to just commit to Yukoners that we have reached out extensively with our partners with respect to meals and ensuring that we meet all of the COVID-19 requirements as established by the chief medical officer of health. We will always ensure that those whom we support — the vulnerable populations — are well-supported. That may mean making some adjustments to the services we provide, so I just want to give a shout-out to our partners for ensuring that our clients are well-supported.

We are committed to putting people first to make sure Yukoners do not have to struggle to find the right door when accessing services. The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter provides a number of social supports under one roof. We are compassionate, Mr. Speaker. We are there and we are supporting over 80 people a day. Historically, we saw 13 to 15 people a day.

I want to just say that with respect to the additional supports that we provided — there are many. We always had an opportunity to look at consultation and engagement with the businesses surrounding the shelter, recognizing that it takes all of the communities and it's all of our responsibility and not solely resting on the shoulders of the government. We will continue to do the good work with our partners to address the plans going forward.

Question re: Rural waste management

Mr. Cathers: There is a serious issue affecting my constituents outside city limits as well as other people and businesses south of town. I have written to both the Minister of Community Services and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources about it. In late summer, the two companies that have been providing commercial garbage services outside city limits informed customers that they would no longer be providing the service. This is directly impacting Yukon farmers and a number of other businesses including tourism, fuel, and retail, and it's also affecting homeowners and residential tenants. Some of the Yukon's largest food producers are being negatively impacted.

In my letters, I urged the government to work with the City of Whitehorse to find a solution that allows farms and other businesses outside city limits to have access to affordable commercial waste disposal service.

Will the minister please tell me whether the government is seeking an agreement with the city to resolve this problem and support the resumption of commercial garbage service in the Whitehorse periphery?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the member opposite for his question. This is a real concern for folks north of town. We have been working to resolve it. He will know, I think — because several of his constituents wrote to me and I made sure to copy him as I wrote back, saying that, yes, we would get on it and work on it. I said right away that we would work both with the department and the City of Whitehorse. I can say that I spoke earlier this week with the Mayor of Whitehorse and we talked about the issue and potential solutions. I have also spoken directly with my deputy minister on this very topic. I know that he is in close contact — as are our Community Operations folks — with the City of Whitehorse folks.

I also know that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources met — even last night, I think — with the farming association.

We are working toward getting a solution. I hope to have more shortly. I can respond more in supplementary responses, but just to say that yes, we are working to try to work with the city to try to get a solution for the folks north of town.

Mr. Cathers: I do thank the minister for that answer. I am pleased that he's committed to seeking a solution. This problem is already having negative impacts and will continue to do so as long as it continues.

Some farmers and other business owners are struggling to adapt to the loss of this commercial garbage service. As the minister knows, farming profitably during our short growing season is hard at the best of times. If farmers in my riding are

left without commercial waste disposal options, they will have to either take time out of their day to personally take garbage to the Deep Creek solid waste transfer station or resort to other less desirable options such as burning, burying, or dumping garbage elsewhere.

Directing garbage to the Deep Creek solid-waste facility is not a logical option because for garbage coming from businesses on the Hot Springs Road, taking it to Deep Creek would literally result in a 40-mile side trip on the way to the Whitehorse landfill. The increase in both costs and fossil fuel emissions which result from that make it an illogical option.

Will the minister please tell us how quickly he's committed to seeking this agreement and if he has any sense of how long it will take to reach an agreement with the city to facilitate resumption of service?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It's difficult for me to give commitments on timelines because of course there are private waste haulers. It's a private sector business and it's a relationship with the City of Whitehorse.

But I will say that I think — as I gave in my first response — that we have been working diligently to try to find a solution. At all times with solid waste, the more that we keep it separated, then the better it's going to be. One of the challenges of course with farm waste is that there is animal waste within it, and so that is maybe the toughest part of this problem.

So I'm not able to give a timeline because it isn't all directly under my control. But at least I hope I'm giving a strong indication that the department is working diligently with the City of Whitehorse and with the farming community.

Mr. Cathers: I'm pleased to hear the minister agree that it's a problem. I do want to emphasize the urgency and also remind him that, for businesses and others who are having to adapt in this, having information about how long this disruption will occur would be valuable.

Some of the residential tenants affected by the loss of service don't even have a car, so the loss of it leaves them without any good options for waste. Farms and other businesses that have lost garbage service need governments to work together on a solution.

As the minister knows, the city is not technically responsible for garbage from outside city limits, but ultimately, garbage which is dumped at a YTG transfer station ends up in the Whitehorse landfill anyway, and it does not make sense to take garbage on a 40-mile side trip from the Hot Springs Road to Deep Creek and back on its way into the landfill in Whitehorse.

So I'm pleased that the minister is committed to working on this. If he is not able to tell us when he expects a solution will be in place, I would encourage him to update us on that as quickly as he can and provide the House and, indeed, people affected by it with an update expeditiously.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I do commit to reaching out with information as I have it available. I will say that I was in conversations on it again yesterday. I think that this is an important issue. I'm happy to work on it. I agree that the City of Whitehorse doesn't technically have the responsibility for solid waste that is outside of its boundaries, but we are trying

to work on a whole-of-territory plan around solid waste where we try to make sure that the field is as level as possible so that we work hard to deal with waste in a reasonable fashion. The campaign we're talking about is doing the heavy lifting that we all need to contribute.

I appreciate that this is a challenging situation and I again stand to commit to work on it and of course to keep the Member for Lake Laberge informed as the situation evolves.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

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

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 204, standing in the name of the Hon. Premier.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to rise this afternoon to begin debate on the *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*, otherwise known as Bill No. 204.

This *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* is an exercise in dealing with unexpected and unavoidable costs — the very definition and intention of supplementary estimates. The latest supplementary estimates were almost entirely a result of costs necessary to deal with unexpected weather conditions and additional costs to care for Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, in these supplementary estimates, you will see very early costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which began late in the fiscal year. While some will see these things as just dollar figures, we see it as keeping projects moving while at the same time keeping Yukoners safe. In total, \$7.6 million in additional operation and maintenance spending was required to address all of these needs.

There is no additional capital appropriation for this time. The entirety of the spending in the third supplementary estimates is contained within Health and Social Services as well as Highways and Public Works. The additional work required at Health and Social Services cumulated in the \$5.2 million as a result of greater demand primarily related to hospital stays outside of Yukon, as well as for extended family care agreements and increased demand for mental health services. In addition, part of the increase for Health and Social Services can be attributed to COVID-19 as the department quickly established the Health Emergency Operations Centre to ensure that all communities and support services were prepared to take care of Yukoners.

In Highways and Public Works, the department required \$2.4 million for unanticipated maintenance activities, higher utility costs, and the government's initial response to

COVID-19. This work included costs for acquiring personal protective equipment — PPE — overtime needed to address the demand for technology, and support in order to equip staff to safely work from home, as well as additional cleaning costs.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a responsible increase in spending when compared to the total budget presented in the 2019-20 mains and *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*. These changes are forecast to result in a deficit of \$26.2 million, which reflects only a minor change overall from the \$18.6 million forecast in *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*. The year-end net debt is forecast to be \$68.4 million.

Overall, these changes will show a government responding to the needs of Yukoners while also responding to a global pandemic that none of us could have foreseen. Planning for unexpected events is never easy, but I am proud of how our government and Yukoners have responded. We will touch on this in greater detail through the 2020-21 *Supplementary Estimates No. 1*.

I do look forward to further dialogue and I welcome further discussion on these budget changes around *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*.

I do want to, once again — before I cede the floor to my colleagues across the way — give recognition to both the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Highways and Public Works for their extraordinary work collaboratively in the past several months as we chart unnavigable waters from any times in the past — specifically with Highways and Public Works' ability to get the public service to work very, very quickly at home.

Virtual clients are something that the department was working on for quite a while and had an aggressive schedule to begin with, with getting the virtual clients out there. You can imagine that, when we started to shut down some of the doors for health concerns in Yukon, that need was obviously expedited. What we saw from the department was a public service that was up for the challenge, and it's pretty amazing how quickly the department got to work.

With Health and Social Services as well — you can imagine that the crux of spending for COVID-19 would have come out of Health and Social Services. To see that department respond and adapt in a time where the public servants themselves were so dedicated and moving forward on such an amazing initiative with their new plans anyway. The amount of work that has been done, even before the independent review, on turning things around from acute care to collaborative care, the mental wellness supports that they were putting in place, and then moving toward a fundamental shift in how we look at health care moving forward, and then on top of that, to be hit with a pandemic — this department's ability to respond and to work collaboratively with others — again, truly amazing work. I'm just very, very grateful to be the Premier of such a responsive and dedicated group of public servants.

With that being said, I will cede the floor to my colleagues for comments and I'm happy to get this discussion underway.

Mr. Cathers: As I noted yesterday in asking the Premier about this, it's also important to note that the spending that

occurred — which is outlined in this appropriation act — was in fact illegal. It contravened the *Financial Administration Act*, and despite the Premier's dismissal yesterday of this is just "some rules", the *Financial Administration Act* is the law, and not following the law is serious.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Premier if he could answer this in his final remarks: How many times has his government broken the *Financial Administration Act* since taking office?

I would also mention — this would begin debate on this budget bill — that it is unfortunate that the government chose to call this bill for debate this day. This Sitting began with all parties talking about collaboration and the Government House Leader told CBC — quote: "We've always taken the position that constructive work together is far more productive..."

Now, yesterday, in the interest of collaboration, our House Leader told the Government House Leader that two of our MLAs had to leave this afternoon — one to vote and one to attend a funeral — and today, the government deliberately chose to call a bill that deals with the two departments that they are the critics for. The only new appropriations in this bill are matters related to the items which our Health critic and our Highways and Public Works critic would deal with. But despite that advance notice and the fact that the government has a long list of other business it could call, they deliberately chose to avoid the critics for those departments.

I would also note that it has really been an unfortunate pattern this year that the government has talked a good line on collaboration but they're only interested in collaboration on their terms. We proposed an all-party committee at the start of this pandemic to deal with the pandemic response. They shot us down on that request. We tried again in May with another proposal. Again, they shot down the idea. Of course, we saw again yesterday that the third time the Official Opposition has suggested an all-party committee related to the pandemic response, the government shot it down.

Now, they did propose their own all-party committee on the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, but we know that there were fundamental flaws in that committee — that not only would the committee not report until August of next year — which may be after the next territorial election and, if not, will be on the verge —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: The Hon. Premier, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm really trying to find out how this relates to the actual budget and to the second reading speech — if the member opposite can make his point and move on to the substantive work that we're supposed to be doing here today.

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

Mr. Cathers: If the Premier would have allowed me to continue, he would have seen how it's directly relevant to this budget bill. It's disappointing that, after seven months of avoiding the Legislative Assembly, the Premier is so quick to try to shut down debate from other members.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: Debate on budget bills is generally seen in this Legislature as being fairly expansive, and members are generally allowed to loop back to the subject matter. So, yes, we'll allow that to occur — although I would agree that I wasn't immediately hearing the connection between the Member for Lake Laberge's most recent comments and Bill No. 204.

The Member for Lake Laberge.

Mr. Cathers: With regard to Bill No. 204, it's important to note the fact that the spending that is contained within it was not lawfully done. That is something — as the Premier will recall, I asked yesterday for a fulsome breakdown of the list of expenditures. Again, we acknowledge that some increased spending related to the pandemic was required, but it's our understanding that much of the spending that went over vote, in breach of the *Financial Administration Act*, was in fact not directly related to the pandemic.

I would also point out as well that, even in a pandemic, breaking the law is still breaking the law. There are options the government has available to it if it's going to go over a vote, including convening the Legislative Assembly to pass a budget bill so a department doesn't exceed its voted authority.

To that end, we have seen the reluctance of the government to face the Legislative Assembly, which they could have done to avoid situations like this where they breached the *Financial Administration Act*. We also saw that, when we have proposed collaboration, they have shot us down repeatedly. They have recently proposed their own committee on the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, but the timelines of it and the participation of the Minister of Community Services really make it a farce to suggest that committee will be effective in reviewing government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic or be of use, considering that Yukoners are concerned about what is happening now, and that includes both the current fiscal year and the fiscal year that wrapped up in 2019-20, which is covered by this budget bill. Yukoners who have those concerns about the way government is acting now and the effect of it on their lives don't want to wait another year before they see action.

So, fundamentally, we see that, unfortunately, the Premier and the Government House Leader and others talk a good line about collaboration, but they're only prepared — their idea of collaboration is that they dictate the terms of collaboration and the other political parties are simply supposed to agree with them; yet, when we suggest something, they're not willing to work with us — even when we are offering, in the spirit of collaboration on an issue that's important to all Yukoners — that being the pandemic and its response — to actually work with the government and try to collectively help the territory do a better job of coping with the pandemic, balancing both the public health needs with minimizing the negative impacts to businesses and involving public input into how that response can be improved on.

Unfortunately, what we have seen here is concerning. I will again note — I will ask the Premier when he rises to tell the

House how many times his government has broken the *Financial Administration Act* since taking office.

Ms. Hanson: In rising to speak to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for 2019-20, I just want to reiterate some comments that, unfortunately, the Deputy Minister of Finance had to hear from me because of a really serious concern that I have with the presentation of these estimates to opposition members. Opposition members are expected to be able to be informed and to be able to ask informed questions about budgetary matters. When we get a document that says, basically, “trust us” that “this is what it is” — \$2.4 million for a whole litany of things but not how much on any particular aspect on anything. It is \$5.2 million for Health and Social Services, again, with a sentence. Each one of those things has a sentence. It is not helpful. It is not respectful to the opposition.

I will note that the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for 2020-21 does provide a bit more information, but not a whole bunch. In health care and public health, we get \$33 million with a sentence beside it. In terms of accountability, I am not sure that it passes — well, I know it does not pass even the basic test.

Mr. Speaker, I come back to the Premier — the Finance minister’s — opening comments with respect to *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* and comments made in these sentences that describe what the money is used for in the 2019-20 budget year. I note that the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* came into force and effect on March 27. I will be interested to know what portion of the \$2.4 million was spent in the last four days of the fiscal year and what portion of the \$5.2 million was spent — I think it is important to be able to attribute expenditures to the right source.

I mean, that is what you would expect — ministerial accountability to be able to demonstrate that we know what we are spending it on and how much. How much was spent prior to any authority that might have flowed from the various ministerial orders and regulations that were passed, pursuant to CEMA, prior to any authority being set out by either those orders-in-council or other regulations? Because I don’t think that Yukon Members of the Legislative Assembly or Yukon citizens should be asked to take anybody’s word for it. Simply to say, “Jeez, we had an increase in maintenance activities” — well, how much of an increase in maintenance activities? Because surely there is an amount that corresponds to the amount of money.

We responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with such things as personal protective equipment. How much of that was expended prior to the end of the fiscal year, Mr. Speaker? Because we are talking about the fiscal year that ended March 31, 2020 — not into the summer, not into the fall — that is another fiscal year. None of that information is provided to us, as Members of this Legislative Assembly, and through us — through the public documents that the Yukon citizens should be able to rely upon.

There are other issues I would raise, but to me, that is the gist of it. Really, if CEMA came into effect on March 27 pursuant to — and if it says that it provided to do all things

considered advisable for the purposes of dealing with the emergency, including but not limited to protecting people and property and to requisition or otherwise obtain and distribute accommodation, food, clothing, and other services — a number of these things that consist of an enforcement of the law — none of those, as I recall, were in place March 27 to March 31 — but perhaps the Minister of Finance would be able to elucidate on that.

To me, the critical factor here is that we are asked to review and approve \$7.6 million in additional spending, which ostensibly, according to the Minister of Finance, largely accrued during those four days. So, I would be most appreciative if he could give us that information.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This afternoon, I am going to speak briefly about the Department of Highways and Public Works supplementary budget for the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to treating tax dollars with the utmost respect. Our department is charged with maintaining the safety and efficiency of Yukon’s public highways, bridges, air strips, buildings, and information systems. We maximized the spending of our budget to provide the best possible service to Yukoners. We don’t want to leave anything on the table when it comes to safety and ensuring that Yukoners are connected to their family, friends, doctors, homes, and communities.

However, despite diligent care and attention, sometimes situations arise that derail your plans. Over the last two years, Highways and Public Works has been working on a very tight budget. This year, our rapidly changing climate and COVID pushed our budget beyond our capacity to absorb new costs. Snow, higher electricity prices, and late fiscal COVID mitigations make up more than 66 percent of the total that the Premier has just announced. To quickly summarize, the end of the 2019-20 fiscal year gave us unanticipated weather late in the year, significantly higher electricity costs, and a global health crisis. As a result of these factors, our department spent 1.7 percent — or roughly \$2.4 million — more than budgeted on operation and maintenance this year. I would like to talk about that in a bit more detail.

Our department is vulnerable to weather events. This year’s heavier than normal snowfall led to unexpectedly high costs for highway maintenance. Yukon saw extraordinary levels of snow along our road network, much like the torrential and continuous rains that we saw this summer. These unanticipated heavy snowfalls required extra winter maintenance activities to keep our highways safe and open to our citizens. These events were not normal. This year, we spent \$800,000 more than the average over the preceding three years maintaining our highways through the winter. That’s a significant increase. As I have said, climate change is real, and I have the receipts to prove it.

Our department also manages and maintains an impressive portfolio of buildings, and again, the winter saw some of the coldest winter months in recent memory — back to normal, really, Mr. Speaker. We were down to minus 30, almost minus

40, for a significant period of time, and that cost us more in electricity than we had seen in the past several years.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic — a once-in-100-years event — has also played a critical role. The pandemic forced late-season procurement of personal protective equipment and increased personnel expenses to manage the safety measures the pandemic required, including ICT support to facilitate the shift to working from home. I know the technical staff worked night and day and weekends to build — almost from scratch — the capacity to allow thousands of people to work from home. Then they worked night and day and weekends to support and refine those systems so Yukoners got the financial support they needed to weather the pandemic.

It's actually an incredible story, Mr. Speaker — one of thousands of public service stories within this government during the pandemic — and it deserves recognition. Together, the investment in deploying technology and support, PPE, additional cleaning, and other safety measures were significant, but it was a necessary investment. They allowed our department to maintain the continuity of many of its vital services — but it pushed us beyond our finances, and that is also a serious issue.

Adding to the fiscal problem was the time it took to find jobs to accommodate the changes to Queen's Printer and Central Stores. The department expected cost savings through implementing the recommendations of the Financial Advisory Panel in April, but our insistence that no existing employee would lose their job through the changes and working with the union took longer than expected and led to the department carrying personnel costs for a few months more.

It was an important investment in our people, and as I have said, our people are critical to our government and retaining that talent is essential, so the project team took the time needed to get this right for our employees.

The culmination of these unusual events was going over our O&M budget, and that became very hard to avoid. I have communicated to the department the importance that this government places on strong fiscal stewardship, and this is something we always keep top-of-mind. Self-reflection is a vital part of improving ourselves and our systems.

The department is encouraged to act, assess outcomes, and take measures to fix any problems that occur. As part of the process, we're now implementing rigorous oversight and improved forecasting processes to guard against this happening again — especially with the tightening of our budgets. I have every confidence that we will learn from this and be better prepared than ever to deal with the unprecedented times we face ahead.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm here today in the House to speak about the supplementary budget for Health and Social Services for 2019-20. The department has been instrumental in ensuring that we have developed a budget that supports Yukoners. I want to thank them for their hard work.

As always, this supplementary budget aligns with the ultimate goal of Health and Social Services: We must work to ensure that comprehensive and coordinated programs and

services meet the people's needs at all stages in their lives and to support the well-being of Yukoners.

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

Health and Social Services did go over its appropriation for the 2019-20 fiscal year. Unlike many departments within government, Health and Social Services is legally obligated to pay for certain services which we have no control over. This overexpenditure can be attributed to increased demands for insured health services related primarily to extended hospital stays outside of the territory in the second half of the fiscal year.

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

While we work to bring Health and Social Services closer to home, for some situations, Yukoners require specialized care and support only available in larger centres. Additionally, there are 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, these are the reasons 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 pandemic, as we rushed to establish our Health Emergency Operations Centre and ensure that all community supports and services were prepared to care for Yukoners who may be stricken by this unknown virus. We had to spend money. This was well spent — providing personal protective support equipment for our hospitals, our health centres, our long-term care homes, our childcare centres, and for essential workers. We had to put in place a testing centre, 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 first few weeks of fiscal year 2019-20. Within the department, we had to 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 some things — such as the pandemic or meeting the needs of a very sick Yukoner — that we can't control and can't plan for. We watch carefully throughout the year to manage 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 ensure that we are positioned to manage our appropriation. For example, we instituted a formal comptroller framework to assure a more rigorous accounting and oversight across the department. Everything that we do within Health and Social Services is to serve Yukoners. The welfare of all Yukoners is of utmost importance to this government and we continue to look for ways to best support our territory.

Our government is citizen-centred and people-centred, and 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 some of the highlights within the supplementary budget. If there are questions, I would certainly be happy to respond to them — but just a gentle reminder that in the first year in office we received a bill from our service providers in southern jurisdictions for health care to the tune of \$2.2 million. That came in June, and we had to find the resources within Health and Social Services. So I'm sure the Member of the Official Opposition will clearly know how important it is to rely on the specialized supports outside of the Yukon that are unaccounted for, which we certainly need to take into consideration as we look at our budgets going forward and we continue to bring the specialized support services to the Yukon to better accommodate the needs of Yukoners.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard on second reading debate of Bill No. 204?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I want to thank all members for their comments. I also noted in my opening comments today that these estimates are an exercise in dealing with unexpected and unavoidable costs, which is the very definition of the intent of the supplementary estimates. These latest supplementary estimates were almost entirely the result of costs necessary to deal with unexpected weather conditions and additional costs to care for Yukoners. The estimates contain the very early costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which began late in the fiscal year.

The member opposite seems to think that we didn't do any spending on the pandemic before the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* was invoked. That is not true, Mr. Speaker — the pandemic started in late February or early March, and so costs were definitely being accumulated at that point. Overall, these changes show a government responding to the needs of Yukoners while responding to a global pandemic — none of that could have been foreseen.

The Member for Lake Laberge asked how many times the particular infringement of the FAA happened under our watch. The answer is twice — it happened this time and it happened once before, where it was a similar situation — where there were extenuating circumstances with out-of-territory medical costs. But I will extend the answer and give him more information. The amount of times that it happened under the Yukon Party was eight — just for his information, which he should already know.

Also, the Member for Whitehorse Centre spoke about the briefing — and what I will do is speak with my deputy minister and ask about the briefing, with the lens to make the process more reflective of the expenses.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to get into general debate and into the more specific, substantive debates of the departments with the ministers and their teams.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Ms. White: Disagree.

Ms. Hanson: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, six nay.

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

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 204 agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, 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

Deputy Chair (Mr. Adel): I will now call Committee of the Whole 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.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 204: Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20

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

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm very pleased to rise this afternoon to begin debate on the *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*. Before I begin, I would like to welcome to the Legislative Assembly, for the first time, my Deputy Minister of Finance, Mr. Scott Thompson.

I want to thank Scott for fitting in so quickly. Scott came into the job, ready with our — a lot of the substantive work was already done for the mains budget with Chris Mahar and her team, and Scott came in ready to talk about a decrease in the small business tax credit from two percent to zero percent and other cuts to income tax, initiatives for small business investment tax credit — and then, lo and behold, a pandemic hit. It has been under his leadership in the Department of Finance that we've maintained the fiscal acuity that we have to date. As someone coming into the Yukon, by all accounts, he has been a really good fit to the team and a really good fit to the Yukon as well.

It's one thing to learn all the acronyms and to learn how this government works, but it's another thing to make sure that it's very important to understand things like the pronunciation of First Nation governments and different things like that and getting out to the communities — Scott has been out to the Yukon Forum. He is just a wonderful complement to this team and it's really good to have him here. So thank you very much to Scott for his leadership.

Bill No. 204 is the third supplementary estimate for the past fiscal year. Overall, these changes show a government responding to unexpected challenges such as weather, regular health care needs, and initial work on an unprecedented global and territorial emergency of COVID-19. This is an increase in spending over the main estimates of 2019-20 and an additional increase over the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*.

The 2019-20 *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* forecasts an increase of \$7.6 million in operation and maintenance, with no changes to capital spending. These changes are expected to result in a revised deficit of \$26.2 million. The final figure can

be confirmed with the tabling of the Public Accounts in a few weeks. Overall, this is a minor change as a result of additional expenses within the departments of Highways and Public Works as well as Health and Social Services. The net debt forecast for the year-end is \$68.4 million.

While those are the overall numbers, I will get into some details for the Committee. As I mentioned, the two departments affected by the supplementary estimates increase are for the two departments, Highways and Public Works and Health and Social Services. For Health and Social Services, \$5.2 million is required to meet the greater demand primarily related to hospital stays outside of Yukon and for extended family care agreements. In addition, Mr. Deputy Chair, the Health and Social Services additional appropriations include funds for increased demand for mental health services, as well as increased costs for social and community supports throughout Yukon.

Last on the health side are expenditures attributed to quickly establishing the Health Emergency Operations Centre to ensure that communities are supported and services are supported and well-prepared to care for Yukoners during this pandemic. This also includes costs to put a testing centre and self-isolation centre in place.

Moving to the Highways and Public Works department, we have \$2.4 million required to ensure that Yukoners receive the services that they count on and to meet the challenges arising from winter road maintenance and the initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the former, Mr. Deputy Chair, Yukon saw heavier-than-normal snowfall later in the year, which required more winter maintenance activities to keep highways safe.

Of course, once again, there was the COVID-19 pandemic — undoubtedly one of the greatest public health crises of our lifetimes. Like governments around the world, the speed with which COVID-19 reached Yukon forced action from our government very late in that fiscal year. This led to expenditures on things such as PPE — personal protective equipment — overtime to support increased demand for ICT support to facilitate employees working from home, and increased cleaning.

This third supplementary estimate addresses additional costs for a government continuing to move forward as much as possible while keeping Yukoners safe.

The bulk of the additional spending required to support Yukoners, their health, their businesses, and their well-being will be in the first supplementary estimates for 2020-21. I invite members of the committee to save specific questions and discussions on that spending for when that bill is being debated — but, with that said, I am pleased to enter into general debate on the *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20* and thank the members opposite in advance for their questions. I will endeavour to answer any question that I receive in general debate with the help of Department of Finance staff. I also invite members to direct their questions to the appropriate departments following general debate, and individual ministers and their teams will be able to provide detailed responses.

Mr. Cathers: One area in which we find ourselves in agreement with our colleagues in the Third Party is about the reduction in financial information that government is presenting. As the Premier will recall, the leader of the NDP — the Leader of the Third Party — raised earlier in this Sitting the fact that there has actually been a decline in financial information being provided under this government's watch.

I know that the average person listening may not have had the time to read for themselves the budget bills or be clear on what information is typically raised and presented. I will just make the analogy for people to understand that, with some of the costs that we are talking about — while the Premier has said that he has provided an explanation, we haven't seen the details of that. What I compare the current situation to — an analogy — is if you were having a house built and you were quoted the total cost for construction by your contractor and you said, "Well, I want to see a breakdown of that", and you looked at the elements in there and they said, "Well, we have countertops, we have flooring, we have this, and we have that" and you said to the builder, "Well, how much am I paying for the countertops, and how much is the flooring that you have included in this? What is the actual cost of that?" and the response was "Well, I have already explained it." That is very similar to what we are dealing with here.

We are talking about taxpayers' money, and we are talking about \$7.6 million of it that was spent without lawful authority, and the Premier, in response to that, has been very defensive and has argued that in the past — he is not the first person to have not followed the *Financial Administration Act* as a Premier and been awry of it and that this somehow excuses it continuing.

The government is supposed to follow the law and the *Financial Administration Act* is one of the most important laws when it comes to government spending and doing so lawfully. As I mentioned earlier during my introductory speech, for some of these matters, it is not a matter of whether the government couldn't have spent money that they needed to spend — it is that they couldn't and shouldn't have spent it without coming to the Legislative Assembly first and getting the authorization of the Assembly before the money was spent.

It is very similar to how the Premier — when in opposition — promised to do a better job in areas like the use of special warrants and he was critical of previous governments for using special warrants, but then he broke the record for the issuance of special warrants in a single year, with two warrants totalling almost one-half billion dollars. It is a case of promising one thing to the public and not following through, because this Premier and this Liberal government — with regard to transparency — did promise that they were going to improve transparency.

An example of this that is actually from the very fiscal year that we're dealing with this budget bill from — the 2019-20 fiscal year — in October 2019, in the Premier's Speech from the Throne, one of the quotes was: "Yukoners have a right to know what their government is doing. This government is committed to being transparent and open about its decision making."

With regard to this money — yes, we recognize that it has already been spent, but in the areas where government went over for the fiscal year, we would argue that government should always be transparent about its spending, but the onus for transparency actually increases when government has found itself awry with the *Financial Administration Act* and has not followed it. In this case, we are dealing with two departments that violated the *Financial Administration Act* — two ministers — the Minister of Health and Social Services and the Minister of Highways and Public Works — who bear personal responsibility as ministers for spending under their authority. Of course, the Premier — as both Premier and Minister of Finance — is also responsible — in keeping with the Westminster parliamentary tradition that ministers are responsible for the actions of departments when it occurs in those areas.

Again, we are asking for a breakdown of this funding, and that includes both the \$5.2 million in increased funding under Health and Social Services and increased expenditures under the Department of Highways and Public Works.

We would also like to know what the total was that those departments went beyond what they had authorization for, and what I mean with that is that we have heard from multiple people that, in fact, there were significant overages in Health and Social Services especially. It's our understanding that money was transferred from other government departments that otherwise would have lapsed money in this appropriation act to cover off the increased costs where our spending was out of control in Health and Social Services and in Highways and Public Works.

We would like to know what the total list is of the amounts that went beyond what had been authorized in the budget previously and in the supplementary estimates for the 2019-20 fiscal year. What's the total cost of the list from both Health and Social Services and Highways and Public Works of how much they went beyond their vote authority, what it was for, and how much money they received from other departments to help bail them out?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Deputy Chair, it stands to reiterate again that we are responding to critical health and safety needs for Yukoners. The supplementary estimates, again, requested \$7.6 million in additional operation and maintenance spending. Of course, of that, Highways and Public Works required the \$2.4 million, and then Health and Social Services, the \$5.2 million.

With Highways and Public Works, the total amount included in the *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20* is approximately \$800,000 for additional winter maintenance costs due to heavier than normal snowfall in the Whitehorse area in February and March. This added to costs incurred due to a heavier than normal snowfall, as we said. Interestingly enough, Mr. Deputy Chair, this time last year, a lot of extremely intelligent folks were very, very worried about water levels and precipitation. What a year since — all winter long, in areas like Dawson, folks said that they hadn't seen snow like that in an awful long time — if at all — and also into the summer — well, it's good weather if you are a duck.

In one year — we heard the Minister responsible for Yukon Energy Corporation today expressing the same thing. We thought it was going to take years to get back up to the water levels that we are back up to now. It was quite the dump of snow, especially in areas like Dawson, in late 2019, and what we're seeing here is the Department of Highways and Public Works making sure that the roads are still safe for Yukoners and making sure that the snow removal and other expenses due to that snowfall were continuing to be done by the department.

Costs related to COVID-19, as I mentioned a couple of times now — things such as additional PPE, additional ICT support for the people who are working from home and the needs that they have there, and property management costs for increased cleaning requirements — added up to approximately \$336,000. We had electricity rates increased, as well, causing spending to be more than budgeted. That was about \$438,000 more than budgeted for our increased electricity rates.

The remainder for that particular department, which is under \$800,000 — about \$792,000 — resulted from the delay in anticipated savings associated with changes to certain operations that did not materialize until later into the fiscal year. Again, the Minister of Highways and Public Works can go into much more detail on those items in Committee of the Whole.

When it comes to Health and Social Services, the amount included in the appropriation for Health and Social Services — \$5.246 million — came about as a result, as I explained, of unplanned, unanticipated, and unbudgeted costs later in the fiscal year. This year, some large, unanticipated bills came in for insured health services after the fiscal year ended, but they had to be accrued back to the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Although most COVID-19 impacts absolutely were felt in this current budget year — the 2020-21 fiscal year — the immediate response by Health and Social Services definitely added additional costs amounting to about 25 percent of that — so between \$1 million and \$1.3 million of the appropriation, of the total request. Another 25 percent of that total is attributed to insured health services costs — paying for Yukoners to get the care that they need outside of the territory, mainly for extended hospital stays.

Some of these costs came to light after the fiscal year had ended. The remainder — about 50 percent of that total — is to cover higher than anticipated demand for supports to children and families through legislative programs. This included support for children and families through extended family care agreements, which supported children's care in family environments and also increased demands for social and community supports and mental health services.

I think that is the breakdown for the first question, and I will cede the floor to the member opposite.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate that we are starting to get a little more information. Although it still hasn't hit the level that it should, I do appreciate that the Premier is providing some additional information.

I would ask how much the government spent on the pandemic response in the 2019-20 fiscal year, and if the Premier could let us know what the portion of the major cost items were under their — he made mention of the Health

Emergency Operations Centre and I believe he also mentioned personal protective equipment and cleaning. If we could get a more detailed breakdown of what those expenditures were and the total amount as — we got a fairly ballpark number earlier during the briefing about what those costs were.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would ask the member opposite if he could speak up a bit. It's very hard to hear him over here.

Again, in general debate, we will give some general specifics. We do have the departments that will be available, with the department and the members of the public service there, to really go back down into more details.

The member opposite spoke about something to do with a transfer from other departments. We are not aware of any transfers to those departments from others — which is what the member opposite is insinuating — other than what may have already been occurring through the normal course of business, as the member opposite would be clearly aware of as a former minister of this government.

When it comes to the one quarter of the Health and Social Services third supplementary request for 2019-20, we had a breakdown of some money here — for example, some of the money would have gone to the office of the chief medical officer of health, for staffing, for extending expenses. You can imagine, with a medical emergency announced early and both Dr. Elliot and Dr. Hanley springing into action, there were definitely some program expenses that were incurred early. There was also money to the Hospital Corporation to support its initial necessary operation changes and enhancement to be able to operate safely during the pandemic. There was also money that was allocated through this third supplementary for staffing and operations of the Health Emergency Operations Centre, the respiratory assessment centre, and the self-isolation facilities. As the member opposite is yelling off-mic that it wasn't set up then, that's right — she's correct. But at the same time, the anticipation of this definitely was not something that was budgeted for in the mains and it was definitely something that we would have to be considerate of to make sure that we did have those centres opening. Staffing and overtime at the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit had a little money attached for that — about \$10,000 or something like, I recall — and then support to licensed child care providers through the direct operation grant as well.

So a little bit of a breakdown of some of the areas there — again, the dollar values and these types of things can be discussed through Committee of the Whole when it comes to the departments when the ministers are up with their department officials.

Mr. Cathers: One of the reasons I'll be asking some of the questions in general debate, rather than breaking into departments as the Premier would prefer, is that when it comes to matters, including what reductions in other departments may have been transferred over to Health and Social Services or Highways and Public Works — as we've heard from multiple sources — those departments don't have appropriations in this act. We've been through this before with this Liberal government where, if we wait until we're into a specific line item on a supplementary estimate or into a specific budget, the

minister may say, “Well, you should have asked that in general debate, because it is not a question for their department.”

So, I will be asking a number of these things now. The reason I’m asking — for people who are listening, who are not familiar with the budgetary process and exactly how it works — is that, while we are seeing increases for two departments, what we’re not seeing in this supplementary estimate are lapses or reductions in spending for other departments. Now, we are aware of a list of things that the government had committed to doing in the 2019-20 fiscal year that ended up in the didn’t-get-’er done pile. When we are aware of those items, it does leave us wondering why we are not seeing reductions in those departments, since some of those matters do not appear to be accounted for in previous supplementary budgets.

An example of that, which I will ask about is that we are aware — based on the advertising that the RCMP have been doing — that it seemed they had vacancies during this year — that not all the positions were filled, including some that they were advertising for locally related to staffing the emergency response centre and their public safety answering point — or, in layman’s terms, the 911 call centre — and we’re not seeing reductions in personnel for that being returned by the Department of Justice.

So it does leave me wondering where money such as that went. Did it simply go to increased spending in that department, and if so, what was it for? Or is it — as we have heard again from multiple sources — related to cost overruns in other areas of the Department of Health and Social Services in particular but to a lesser extent in Highways and Public Works?

If the Premier could comment on that question specifically about the RCMP — I do note that the Premier mentioned that he wasn’t always able to hear me. There appears to be something going on with the audio here. I am talking in my normal conversational voice. It is not my pattern to want to raise my voice in talking to the Premier instead of talking and asking questions in a more normal speaking pattern. So, if there is anything he can’t hear, I am happy to repeat the question and hopefully the bugs in the audio will get worked out.

Again, if the Premier could explain why we’re not seeing things such as that item for the RCMP that I mentioned as reductions for the Department of Justice, that would be appreciated.

Hon. Mr. Silver: As we discussed, the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for the year 2019-20 — these are the two departments that need new spending authorities. The others that he’s mentioning for this year do not. As he knows, Public Accounts will show the money that has lapsed for 2019-20.

Mr. Cathers: That’s neither an open nor transparent answer.

The Public Accounts — I’m assuming that the Premier will table them sometime this month — but we haven’t seen those yet. I would assume that in fact the Public Accounts are prepared. If the Premier would like to table that now or send over an advance copy, we would be happy to go through that during debate if that would aid the conversation and avoid the Premier having to ask for information from officials or go through his own briefing notes.

But it would appear to us that there are likely to be reductions in the spending of other departments. The fact that we don’t see any reduction in spending contained in this supplementary estimate does leave us wondering: What happened to that money? Why are there not reductions, for example, in the Department of Justice due to unfilled RCMP positions?

It leaves the question as well about lapses — indeed, across government in other departments — where there are positions that government has created as part of its pattern of growing government that they have not in all cases filled. Why are we not seeing any amounts lapsing for personnel from those departments that have vacancies and have the money approved for those positions without the positions being filled? The money had to go somewhere. Where did it go?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Deputy Chair, again, as the member opposite knows, those lapsed funds — if there are lapses — those will be tabled with the Public Accounts. I do recognize that the member opposite has not seen the Public Accounts yet. The reason for that is they haven’t been tabled yet.

But that’s where the lapses would be. There will be lapses of course. I mean, this happens every year. It would be amazing to get everything right. We’re not there. We’ve seen lapses in previous governments as well. The Public Accounts are where those lapses will be shown, just like when the member opposite was in government — perhaps less than there would have been if there weren’t COVID costs — but again, the Public Accounts are exactly where those lapses will be shown.

Mr. Cathers: Let me recap for people who are listening.

Not only has the government spent the money — and spent it without legal authority to do so — but the Premier won’t tell us about lapses in other departments that have contributed to the lowering of the overall ask that the government has come in with, and he is telling us to wait for Public Accounts — that this will make it all clear. But the Premier can wait until the end of this month to table Public Accounts, if he chooses to do so — and I expect that he will probably drag it out until the last minute.

So as I am up here in debate — and I of course can’t speak for the Third Party — but I would assume that they would also be likely to feel that, when we are having the debate right now on this appropriation act, this is the time when it would be helpful to have the information about spending and lapses — not three weeks later when we get the Public Accounts and have to pore through what typically amounts to about a 400-page document that those of us who are Finance critics have to go through and try to follow the money moving between departments and being lapsed.

So it’s not very useful here today for the Premier to refuse to answer the specific question about whether there was lapsed money in the Department of Justice related to unfilled RCMP positions and how much that amount was or how much money has lapsed across other departments for unfilled positions. That is information that I’m sure the Finance minister has access to, and there is no good reason why he can’t share it with not only members of this Legislative Assembly but with the public.

There is nothing confidential here that is going to compromise someone's personal privacy. It's just information that the Premier doesn't want to share.

Again, I am going to give him the opportunity to live up to his commitment to Yukoners, answer the specific questions that I asked. In fact, any other information that he is able to provide would be appreciated because — as I have noted and as the Third Party has noted — the amount of information available under this Liberal government related to the finances and related to the budget has actually gone downhill. Members have less information than they did, say, five years ago.

Hon. Mr. Silver: It wasn't that long ago when I sat in opposition as a critic for Finance, and I don't recall the Yukon Party — the Yukon conservative party — giving the Public Accounts information that he is asking now for me to give before the Public Accounts were tabled. So it's interesting that, somehow, now that he is in the opposition, with us doing the exact same process that his government did, we're now giving less information. So I'm trying my best to understand the logic, but I'm falling short in my understanding of that.

As he does know, the Public Accounts process is a long process that determines the proper amount to be allocated to each department for that fiscal year. We are working on that information. I don't know if they would — he's saying that we somehow might elongate the process unnecessarily. That's an interesting approach; we're not going to take that approach. We will make sure that this information gets done. We are obviously working with the Office of the Auditor General in this process. As the member opposite also knows, we have embargoed information, and then we will put the Public Accounts out the way that we're supposed to — the way that the government has for decades. At that time, the member opposite will have absolute access to that information.

Somehow, I think the member opposite is trying to make it seem like we're hiding some information, whereas, really, we're doing the exact same process that his government did when he was in government. Lapses will be shown; we will absolutely show those lapses. We will get the Public Accounts out as soon as possible.

Mr. Cathers: That's an interesting response from the Premier. I have to remind him that what I'm holding to is the government's own words and their commitments — including in their current Speech from the Throne, which was issued in October 2019, the same year that the budget bill we're debating covers — that promised to be more open and more transparent. It's interesting that the Premier's and his colleagues' words ring hollow. They sound good in a throne speech, they look good in a press release, and when they're doing the photo op, everyone seems to feel good about their commitment. But there's no follow-through.

Indeed, as I pointed out, it's not often that you hear the Leader of the Third Party — the Leader of the NDP — pointing out that there was more information and more transparency provided by the Yukon Party when we were in government. But as she acknowledged early in this Sitting, the amount of information accompanying budget bills has gone down under this Liberal government.

So, so much for sunny ways and "Be Heard". There's less information being given to the public and being given to members.

The Premier was trying to suggest that I was demanding that the Public Accounts be released now and suggesting that this was the norm. The Premier knows very well that this emerged from me asking for a specific piece of information related to spending. The Premier, who has access to that information, refused to tell me about lapses that relate directly to this budget bill, saying to just wait until the Public Accounts come out. Well, I don't have the Public Accounts. I assume that he has a copy of it now that is complete. He is welcome to send it over if he would like to. He is welcome to table it during debate right now if he would like to. But if he doesn't want to provide that full document, he could answer my first question and just provide the rather small, specific piece of information that I asked for about spending that directly relates to this budget bill.

Again, when we hear reports from multiple sources about government overspending — related to Health and Social Services especially, including and especially related to the debacle at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — we want to see the information that relates to that. We want to understand where other departments may have reduced their spending and transferred it to health to help this budget bill be less embarrassing for the government about how out of control spending is in other areas.

Again, I asked for information about the lapses that I would have expected to see in Justice due to unfilled RCMP positions. I would again ask for that information, and I would ask the Premier for the cumulative totals by department of the personnel lapses due to unfilled positions. Again, he has the opportunity to provide two very simple pieces of information about spending the taxpayers' money.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I didn't hear a new question there. I've answered the member opposite's question: The lapses will come in the Public Accounts. There is no new question there.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, refusing to answer a question is not an answer. The Premier refused to answer my question.

I will move on to another specific question. In the 2019-20 *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*, with the variances we were shown for the fiscal year at that point, we saw additional funding in Energy, Mines and Resources. An additional \$320,000 was added to the operation and maintenance budget to meet obligations related to class 1 notifications. Again, as a side note, we note that the government did not do an estimate of the increased costs to placer miners or to prospectors of the impact of their class 1 notification system and the imposition on them of lost time, paperwork, and other expenses related to it.

But, again, I'll return very specifically to the amount that was added in the last supplementary estimates, *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* related to the 2019-20 fiscal year. There was \$320,000 added to operation and maintenance in Energy, Mines and Resources to meet obligations related to class 1 notifications. Did the government spend all that money?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I see what the member is doing. We're here to debate the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*. That's a great question for Energy, Mines and Resources. Energy, Mines and Resources will be up here to have a fulsome conversation about their budgeting process, but we are debating today here, in general debate, the spending for two departments for fiscal year 2019-20. The question that he is asking has nothing to do with either of those departments' spending in 2019-20. Information that he wants, as well, will be coming in Public Accounts or, if he really wants the answer to these questions, he definitely can ask other specific questions about budgeting and the allocation of those dollars in the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, if that's what he's asking. Again, right now, we have two departments for debate here in *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, and they are Highways and Public Works and Health and Social Services. I can answer some general debate questions here. I'm happy to do so, and I'm happy to use the time here in the afternoon and into the next days, if we have to, with the other two departments specifically and with the ministers responsible answering questions about those departments.

Mr. Cathers: Well, I would ask anyone listening to judge how open and transparent that answer was.

The game that the Premier and his colleagues tend to play when it comes to budget bills is that — the amount I'm asking is related to spending by Energy, Mines and Resources. It's related to spending by Energy, Mines and Resources that was forecasted to occur in this fiscal year that we're debating — the 2019-20 supplementary estimates. *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* added that amount for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. From a procedural standpoint — as the Premier knows very well — in the Legislative Assembly, if you have a supplementary estimate and you wish to ask questions about a department that isn't asking for new appropriations, the time to ask that question about another department is in general debate.

That is exactly what I am doing. I am not talking about a different fiscal year. I'm talking about money. I'm looking at the handout provided to us by Energy, Mines and Resources during the briefing on Energy, Mines and Resources, *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*, and I am asking about a specific item and whether that money was spent or not. If that money wasn't spent, of course, the question, as the Premier knows very well, is whether it was transferred to Health and Social Services or to Highways and Public Works or spent on something new.

There are two reasons that the government should be answering this: first, in the interest of transparency about the money, and the second being in the interest of letting the public know whether things that the government said they were going to do actually got done in the 2019-20 fiscal year or whether they were added to the Premier's couldn't-get-'er-done pile.

Again, I am talking about a very specific item — very directly related to the 2019-20 fiscal spending. The amount in Mineral Resources — an additional \$320,000 — was added to the operation and maintenance budget to meet obligations related to class 1 notifications.

The question is: Did they spend the money or not? If the Premier doesn't have that information, he need look no further than his minister, who is also present here in the Assembly. I am sure that, between the two of them and in concert with officials through electronic means, they can get that information pretty quickly.

Again, it's a simple question. Is the Premier going to answer it, or is he going to resort to a spin cycle and refuse to tell the public whether government spent this money on public business?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will let the member opposite in on a little secret. In my binder for Finance, we have tabs. Those tabs are for briefing notes, and I do have a position here — number 9 for Public Accounts — and if I turn to that, there is nothing in it. The reason why there is nothing in it is because the Public Accounts have not been tabled in the Legislative Assembly yet. I promised the member opposite that the Public Accounts will have the information that he is looking for. We will be open and transparent and use the direct process of Public Accounts. The member opposite knows that there are lots of conversations before those things get delivered here in the Legislative Assembly. There are calls in with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. There is a whole bunch of scrutiny with the Department of Finance and working with all of the other departments to make sure that the numbers all match up.

When we get the Public Accounts document in our hands and we put it in here, then the member opposite will have the access to the information that he's looking for. The member opposite knows that, but he wants a narrative, and that narrative that he wants so desperately is that we are not open and not transparent. He has made up his mind on that already. I'm not going to convince him here today of anything else, but he does know the process. He does know that, once the Public Accounts are out, he has every single opportunity to ask questions about every single page of the Public Accounts document and we will be happy to answer those questions.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Deputy Chair, that sounds an awful lot like the Premier is saying, "The truth? You can't handle the truth."

We're asking for information about finances. We're talking about a substantial dollar amount, not just spending on paperclips, for example, for a specific office. This is a perfectly reasonable question, and the Premier is simply choosing not to answer it. It is unfortunate that, after physically distancing from democracy for seven months, the Premier is not willing to provide this information.

Again, that question is left unanswered. I'm sure I'm not going to get a different response from the Premier related to it, but I'm going to move on to another specific question — again, directly related to spending, not only in the Department of Health and Social Services, but in other departments. The first question is: What was the total cost of operating the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter? How much money did the Department of Health and Social Services spend on it? How much was spent by the Department of Highways and Public Works through Property Management? As well, were there other amounts spent by other departments to support the operations of this

Liberal government's failed Whitehorse Emergency Shelter management?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would just like to get the member opposite to clarify. Is he talking about the total budget for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter for the year? I just want to make sure that I heard him properly.

Mr. Cathers: Yes, I'm asking: In the 2019-20 fiscal year, how much money did the Yukon government spend operating the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter? Whether that money was allocated in Health and Social Services or Property Management, or some other department that they funded it out of or supported its operation with — what's the total number spent on the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, and how much was spent by each department?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I don't have that information in front of me right now as we are talking about the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for 2019-20.

We did mention that — when it came to the specific funding for Health and Social Services for the third supplementary request for 2019-20 — we had approximately \$265,000 for staff and operations for the Health Emergency Operation Centre and the respiratory assessment centre and self-isolation facility — these are the things that we should be talking about today, because that's what we're here to debate — *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* — whereas, the member opposite wants to maybe catch me off guard and say how much there is for something else that's not in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*.

That would be a pretty big binder if I had all of the funding allocations for the mains for 2019-20 in front of me for every department. I do know that it was an amazing turnaround that the Department of Health and Social Services did under the leadership of the current minister, because there was really no programming at all for the centre when we took it over — which is kind of crazy, if you ask me — if you're going to build a building, cut the ribbon, and not have a programming design for that. The amount of work that the minister has done in her dual portfolios — with housing as well — that was pretty prolific work — changing the whole concept of a bricks-and-mortar structure as to a home as a concept when it comes to the overall health of an individual. That's what we do in this government — collaborative care — compared to the previous government's acute care — waiting until you're sick and dealing with that.

We really stepped up the game when it came to the emergency shelter. I don't have those numbers in front of me right now. I do have numbers available for general debate for 2019-20 *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*.

Mr. Cathers: As the Premier knows very well, any of us who have been ministers know about the excellent support provided to us in the House by department staff when we're doing budget debate, and that includes when we're asked about specific items. Typically, someone in the department who is monitoring and listening to the debate will be positioned to get the answer and to e-mail or text it to either the minister or the DM so that they have that information at their fingertips — unless the government has made a deliberate choice, as it

appears this Premier has, to simply refuse to answer the question.

Ultimately, the Premier will find that the public will judge him on this government's lack of transparency and the fact that the Liberals promised to be more open, promised to be more accountable, but have actually gone in the opposite direction and been the most secretive and least transparent government in the past couple of decades here in the territory.

Again, I asked about the costs of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. First, the Premier said — when I asked him questions — that I should be asking questions about the departments that are in this budget. Now I ask him a question about departments in this budget and the Premier won't provide an answer.

We know that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter management has not gone well. We know that government, after refusing to work with a non-governmental organization — part of this government's pattern — most notably with the Salvation Army and Many Rivers where, instead of supporting an NGO and working with them, including to address any problems that might have occurred, the government preferred to shove them aside, see them shut down, and hire more government staff in the Department of Health and Social Services. Despite their claims, this has often resulted in less services — for example, in the area of mental health, there have been gaps in services because of the government shoving aside Many Rivers.

The Premier has had a few minutes here to receive information from officials and to reconsider his approach. I am quite sure that the cost overages for running the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter have been a topic of discussion with Cabinet more than once. I am sure that this topic is something that has been brought to the Premier's attention by both the minister and Finance officials. It just seems that he really doesn't want to let the public see how bad the situation is in terms of cost overruns for the government's mismanagement of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

Again, a simple question: In the 2019-20 fiscal year, how much money did the Yukon government spend operating the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I can assure the member opposite that the whole of government is not rushing to their devices to provide this information to the member opposite because what they are prepared to do right now — and they spent a lot of time preparing, actually — is to talk about this particular appropriation at this particular time.

This is not to say that we won't answer the questions when those ministers and those departments are here, ready, willing, and able to answer those questions. This is just a rinky-dinky kind of strategy from the member opposite where he knows very well that he can ask questions and get answers here and now, but he decides that he doesn't want to do that. He has a narrative in his mind and he is going to hold on to that narrative. He's going to ask questions that he knows he can ask the departments, and the departments will be here to answer those questions. He knows that the Public Accounts will be out and

the answers to those questions will be in those Public Accounts, and we'll get on with it.

Now, if he wants to spend the afternoon creating his narrative — colouring in the lines — then I think the judgment of Yukoners will be on him and not on us. We will provide the information in the right places. The departments spend an awful lot of time preparing for Committee of the Whole debate. My deputy minister is an extremely busy person working in the department. The Department of Finance is on the line right now, but they're not rushing to answer questions that are going to be readily available. Better answers are going to come at a better time to the member opposite.

A better answer on lapses will definitely come when the Public Accounts come out. A better answer to those specific questions about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter would be served through talking to the Department of Highways and Public Works. There would probably be a combined cost as well. Even Community Services might have some specific answers and probably would like to elaborate on their support — the collaborative support — that they would supply for this particular facility — and also Health and Social Services, obviously.

But I don't think the member really wants that. He wants to make it look like I'm holding information, when really, we have information here on general debate of the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* and we're happy to give him the information that we have here today.

Mr. Cathers: For those who are listening, the information that we were provided about the spending in the budget — the information in the handout we received was a one-sentence explanation for \$5.2 million in spending and another one-sentence explanation for the spending in Highways and Public Works. The budget bill itself doesn't tell us what this was spent on.

The Premier can try to use his attempt to spin the issue and bandy about with terms like “narrative” and “colouring in the lines”, et cetera, but I'm just asking for information. I'm asking for information that belongs to the public. It's the public's money. The public has a right to this information. The public doesn't give a darn whether the Premier doesn't like me or doesn't like the questions I'm asking. People who want information about this want to know the answer.

The Premier is well aware that downtown business owners and many others have been unhappy with the management and mismanagement of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the problems that it has created in the community. I'm quite sure that every department that has anything to do with this facility has a briefing note about the facility and that the minister and deputy minister of every department and the Minister of Finance know how much money is being spent on the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, but the Premier is asking us to give him a pass and that, after the House votes on this money, he may tell us later.

For every business owner who is concerned about what is happening at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, for every employee of a nearby business, for everyone who has seen the

problems spilling over into the downtown core — they have concerns about the management of that facility.

I am asking the Premier to start with answering one simple question: How much money, in the 2019-20 fiscal year, did the government spend on operating the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I am quite willing to expand upon the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, or spending for music, art, and drama — he probably wants to bring up MAD next. If we want to talk about spending in any of the departments, we have departments that can answer those questions — absolutely.

Today in the Legislative Assembly, we are here to speak about the 2019-20 *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*. We have provided the information and breakdown of that funding in general. We have the opportunity this afternoon, hopefully, to elaborate even further by presenting to the Legislative Assembly the ministers responsible for those departments, and the team from those departments as well, to allow more information, but the member opposite clearly does not want to ask them those questions. He wants to ask me about the costs in 2019-20 for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, and he knows that the complete costs for that year will come in the Public Accounts, and we can definitely talk about it at that time.

I will say that there was definitely high demand this year at the emergency shelter. The minister instructed me that the complete effort was to make sure that we take great efforts to not turn people away, and we didn't. So, yes, there will be costs associated with that. To assume that I would have that in front of me right now — I don't. However, the minister and her team will expand on the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, and the Public Accounts will compare what we spent to what we budgeted. The member opposite knows that.

I am completely willing to have that conversation and completely willing to answer those questions on the Public Accounts when they become available and completely willing to have the ministers responsible for the allocations that he is seeking answer questions on those particular costs and expenses.

Mr. Cathers: The record stands for itself. The Premier refuses to answer the question about how much money the government spent on operating the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. He is clearly not going to change his mind and answer a perfectly reasonable question, so I'm going to move on to another perfectly reasonable question about government spending in the 2019-20 fiscal year.

In *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*, an additional \$2.1 million was added to operation and maintenance funding for the Wolverine mine to construct, commission, and operate a water treatment plant at the mine site to mitigate environmental impacts associated with the contaminated mine water, and these funds were recoverable from securities held, according to the information provided by the department.

That's \$2.1 million in spending that the government, as of the last supplementary estimate for this fiscal year, told us they planned to spend. It's a simple question: Did they spend the money?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* does not have any money allocated into it for that specific endeavour.

Mr. Cathers: Again, the record will show that the Premier refused to answer a perfectly reasonable question. It is clear that he is either deliberately withholding information or he doesn't know, and that does raise a question about the Finance minister — whether he's being secretive by choice or simply believes that the public doesn't have the right to know.

The public does have a right to this information. Again, it's a simple question about a couple of million dollars of spending that the government added in their supplementary estimate. I asked whether the project was done. The Premier wouldn't tell me. The Premier knows very well that, procedurally, if we want to ask questions about a budget bill and that department doesn't have new appropriations, we're supposed to ask those questions in general debate. That's what I'm doing. The Premier doesn't want to talk about it. He only wants to talk about the things that he sees as good news, or the bad news that he can't avoid telling the public.

As we touched on earlier, this government talks a good line about collaboration with other parties, but they only want to do that after they dictate the terms and refuse to cooperate on terms of reference for committees, whether they are all-party or other.

It reminds us of the government's botched ham-fisted attempt on electoral reform where they refused to even share the terms of reference with other political parties prior to forming the commission. They insisted on being the ones who appointed all of the members to that commission. They had the opportunity to work with us. We offered to work with them, and at every turn, they looked for a new opportunity to poke the opposition and poke the Third Party in the eye by refusing to work together.

I am going to go on to another area. I will give the Premier a few questions just to make it easier to get that information all at once by grouping them together. The Premier should be able to guess where I'm going with this because it is all from items that the government added in their previous budget bill that he won't talk about today. There is money in Energy, Mines and Resources for forest management for the Trans Canada Trail agreement. It was 100-percent recoverable. The project increase was some \$29,000. The simple question is: Did they spend the money?

Another project — the Canadian Agricultural Partnership agreement, with some of the money recoverable from Canada — \$75,000 in new spending that they added in the last supplementary estimates. I have a simple question: Did they spend the money?

Last but not least, there is the agricultural regional collaboration partnership agreement — they added \$71,000 in the last budget. Our opportunity from a procedural standpoint in the Legislative Assembly to ask about this money is during general debate on this budget bill. The simple question is: Did the government spend the money?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, whether it's Wolverine or any of these other issues — all of which are not in the supplementary estimates that we are debating right now. These

are great questions to ask of the departments responsible. If he actually wants the answers — I don't really think he does; I think he just wants to make it seem like we are being unaccountable here.

We have lots of documents in front of us in order to discuss the spending in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, which is what we are in general debate on.

If there are some specific philosophical questions on government that I can help him out with, sure, but when he asks about whether or not appropriations were made — he knows the process. There is a general debate in the mains where we have a long conversation about spending and the difference between the Yukon conservative party and how they would spend and our government. Of course, we would answer those questions at that point. There are opportunities to speak, after the Public Accounts become publicly available, about lapses or allocations — as to whether they are spent.

One thing I'm really proud of, compared to the Yukon conservative party, would be that when we promise that we're going to build a certain amount of capital assets — looking at the Public Accounts comparatively — and I urge anybody listening in to compare — we do a much better job than the Yukon Party did. They would talk about a lot of things that they would want to build, but then at the end of the year, there was a huge percentage of failure in those endeavours. We have really tightened that up. I know that the member opposite likes to make fun of the five-year capital plan — which is hugely embarrassing, really, when you think about the public servants who put their blood, sweat, and tears behind that — it's a great plan and it's a great way for us to really hone in on our skills and to be able to, on the mains, say that we want to build this much in capital assets and then, when Public Accounts come around, we can take a look and see what we've accomplished.

Again, the member opposite knows that there's a time and place to ask specific questions. If he used the Legislative Assembly properly that way, he would get the answers that he's looking for, but of course he knows we're here prepared and ready to speak to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* — which is serious money — about things that are hard to talk about. Overspending is never easy to talk about — especially in two different departments. We have the departments ready to get into the specific debates once we get past general debate, but the member opposite does not want to do that. He's going to continue to ask me questions outside of the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*.

We're here, ready, and prepared, to talk about the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*. So if he wants to ask me questions about the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, we will absolutely give him general answers now and specific answers in those departments.

Mr. Cathers: Except for the convenient fact that we can't ask about the specific departments, because if we save a question until later, the Premier will point out that we should have asked the question when that budget bill was being debated.

The Premier knows very well that, from a procedural standpoint, the time when debate is intended on these matters

and questions should be asked — if he wants — whenever we take a break — he can go ask the Clerks for help on understanding the intent of the process, but if he has been paying attention, he knows very well that, if you want to ask questions related to spending in a fiscal year and if the department doesn't have new money in a supplementary estimate, the time that you're procedurally expected to ask questions is during general debate.

The Premier has invented a new Liberal rule that he won't talk about money that was spent in other departments that aren't asking for new money. He won't talk about money that the government previously said they would spend and tell us whether they spent it or not — and by the way, he also won't give us a full breakdown on the new appropriations asked for in this bill, because he would rather we asked that question later of the ministers when we find out whether we get an answer or another Liberal talking point about why they won't give us the answer and how we're very unreasonable, apparently, for daring to ask them for this information about the public's money.

For the Premier to question whether I want this information — well, I do want this information. If he wants to avoid me asking specific questions for information during budget debate, there's a simple solution: Provide us more information. Then, if I already have a breakdown with more financial information, I'm not going to ask a question about something that's apparent. Again — as the NDP have acknowledged — the amount of information provided by government has gone down under this Liberal government and the Premier. He smiles, laughs, and dismisses it, and he claims that this is not the case. That's just his version of calling it fake news.

So spending — the government told us that they were going to spend in the 2019-20 fiscal year — Energy, Mines and Resources, 2019-20, *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* — they told us that they needed \$200,000 in additional funding for strategic alliances related to the First Nation Gateway project agreements. We know that the Gateway project is well behind schedule and that the government made commitments that it hasn't been able to fulfill. The question is about that money: Did they spend it or not?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The Gateway project is an amazing funding allocation in partnership with this government and the federal government, which was given to us — and I have described it in the past as a Rubik's cube, the way that the previous government, the Yukon Party government, negotiated that deal.

In my opinion, it would have created so much lateral violence among First Nation governments. It definitely was designed by a government that really had no idea about reconciliation — maybe no interest in actually spending those dollars — because it was bizarre for that much money to be allocated in a way — again, this is the Harper government and the Yukon Party — it just made no sense, and it took us a lot of time in the very beginning. It took a lot of time for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to untangle a lot of knots that were developed through the Yukon conservative party in the previous administration when it came to reconciliation and

when it came to working on Energy, Mines and Resources and First Nation governments and the amount of work that was done to get us to a place where now the agreements are flowing in. It is pretty exciting, actually. It is pretty exciting to see the impact benefit to the communities, having First Nation governments working hand in glove with the Yukon territorial government to upgrade our roads, to make sure that the money is well-allocated with partnerships. It is really good to see.

It did take a lot of time. I will agree with the member opposite that it took some time to get that on the way, but maybe we will disagree as to why that happened. But I tell you, it took the current Ottawa government to really have to sit down and listen and understand why this was an impossible situation. The good news with that — we reinvigorated the Yukon Forum — which interestingly enough is a legislated forum that is supposed to meet four times a year. It was created back in 2004, and the previous Yukon Party 2.0 — I think they met once and decided, "We'll never do that again." We had to repair that relationship as well for the Yukon Forum.

We have met four times a year, every year. We have countless working groups. We have JSEC, the executive council that works with the administration and the technicians in the First Nation governments. Really, it is that ability to come together as governments, as technicians — from the deputy ministers, the CEOs, the Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations, individual chiefs and councillors — a lot of hard conversations, and a lot of work has been done.

In that arena, we have also spawned newer ideas as well like, for example, Yukon Days. Yukon Days, under the Yukon conservative government, the Yukon Party — if there was a First Nation component, it was definitely not in trilateral meetings with the federal ministers — that is for sure. So, we have changed that as well. We go together to Ottawa to meet with the federal ministers. When you have the chiefs at the same table as the federal ministers and the territorial ministers talking about things like Gateway, what you get is flexibility and what you get is the federal government saying, "Oh, okay, I'm not hearing two different things from two different governments," which happened quite a bit in the past.

When it comes to Gateway, I would love to talk in general debate about what Gateway is. Now, to expect me to have the numbers for that department in front of me now — I don't. I do have the numbers in front of me right now for the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*. The Public Accounts — again, we'll give the member opposite the information he needs for the end of the accounting for the 2019-20 year.

Again, I'm not saying that I refuse to give him the information, as he's pretending over there. But there is a time and place for that information to be given — and it will be given, and it will be precise, as opposed to me trying to rely on memory or whatever. We're sitting here debating the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*. I'm happy to talk about Gateway, if the member opposite agrees that maybe Gateway is a good thing — I hope so. Does the member opposite agree that we have done more on Gateway than his previous government? Is he happy that we're repairing some damage

made with First Nation governments when it comes to the resource industry? I'm not sure; I'm really not sure.

But I do want to give credit to Grand Chief Peter Johnston. I want to give credit to the chiefs — not only on Gateway, but also on the experience of the last seven or eight months. There has been a lot of fear of the unknown as we all try to grapple with what's happening with the global pandemic, but through those conversations — weekly or sometimes daily — with the chiefs and with the mayors as well — we have grown as a government.

The member opposite continues to play this game of pretending that I'm not open and transparent, because I'm ready to debate the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* here — ready to talk in general about a whole bunch of topics, if that's what he wants to do — but we have matured over here, and we want to make sure that we have a debate on the supplementary estimates. That would be great. We would love to be able to get to the individual departments as well so they could have even more specific conversation about the allocations in front of us here today. Hopefully, the member opposite will work with us on that.

Deputy Chair: Order. Would members like to take a short recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Is there any general debate?

Mr. Cathers: As you know, Mr. Deputy Chair, when we left off, I had asked a number of questions about spending this fiscal year. The time, from a procedural standpoint, when we are supposed to ask about those questions is when we are in general debate on budget bills, especially for departments that aren't asking for new funds in the budget bill. Unfortunately, we have gone through a list and the Premier has refused to answer every one of them.

I am going to move on to another one, which is about how much money government spent on heating government buildings in the 2019-20 fiscal year. What was the cost of heating government buildings across government in the 2019-20 fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It probably comes as no surprise to the member opposite that I don't have that information in front of me right now. I do have information about the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* — Highways and Public Works and Health and Social Services. I'm happy to answer any question on that, but I don't have the specifics that he's asking for right now.

I do know that departments are ready. Once we do get past even the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, when it comes to 2019-20, we will have an opportunity to discuss the Public Accounts when they become public as well for that fiscal year. We also have a supplementary budget coming in for this fiscal

year as well. There will be a general debate for that, as well, and then there will be the departments — a lot more departments this year. I know that, in previous years, we've had very small supplementary budgets and not a lot of departments needing more allocations, which is great to see. It's great to have that budgeting up front — but again, an opportunity to answer the member opposite's questions from those departments when they appear.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, the time when ministers are supposed to answer questions about the budget and budget bills is when we're debating them.

Asking the Premier how much money the government spent on heating its buildings in the 2019-20 fiscal year is something you would think, especially for a government that has talked a good line about reducing fossil fuel emissions and having a climate change plan, that the Premier might be passingly interested in how much money the government spent on heating its own buildings in the 2019-20 fiscal year — what the actual cost was, not the estimated cost, but the final year number. We are dealing with a supplementary that deals with those final year numbers. How much money did they spend? Is the Premier actually telling us that he doesn't know, or is he saying that he just won't release the information to the public?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am extremely interested in the cost of climate change. I wish the members opposite were when they were in government.

When it comes to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, I can say something that is related to the question that the member opposite is asking about. There was an increase in the allocation.

Thank goodness we finally have something that is close to what we're here to debate today — from all the questions that the member has been asking. Electricity rates did cause increased spending in Highways and Public Works for the 2019-20 fiscal year. There is money in the supplementary estimates for the electricity rates increase that did cause spending to be \$438,000 over the amount that was budgeted.

Do I have the number for what was budgeted in front of me? I don't, but I do know who would — the Minister of Highways and Public Works, who will be up and available to speak about more detailed numbers for the Department of Highways and Public Works when it comes to the supplementary estimate for fiscal year 2019-20.

Mr. Cathers: Well, another swing and a miss from the Premier — again, I am asking about big numbers related to government spending. Sometimes, he says, "Ask again later." Other times, he just tries to imply that the question itself was unreasonable. The attitude that he is taking toward public transparency is really unfortunate.

I will ask the Premier another question about the costs of fuel for government vehicles. How much did they spend in the 2019-20 fiscal year, and how much of that expenditure was related to the carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Deputy Chair, I don't have that number available here now. When it comes to spending for fuel, it is not my department.

We could talk if the member wants to talk specifically about fuel. When it comes to the tax administration piece, that is a responsibility through Finance. If he has specific questions on carbon pricing, then again, we can talk in general debate about that, but the numbers he is asking me about — specific dollar values — I don't have in front of me right now, as we are prepared to debate the 2019-20 supplementary estimates for two departments: Highways and Public Works and Health and Social Services. I don't see any dollar values — let me just double-check, just to make sure — no, there is no money in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for what the member opposite is asking.

Mr. Cathers: Since the Premier now specifically invited me to ask about fuel tax-related matters, I will ask him again about one that I wrote to him on earlier regarding the issue of the changes that have been made to the government's policies that are negatively affecting farmers, around the interpretation of when they are eligible for the fuel rebate. I wrote to the Premier previously. The issue didn't get solved. The matter is still outstanding and it is making life tougher on Yukon farmers. It includes the department coming up with a new policy that denies farmers the ability to get a rebate for some of their fuel costs related to if they are doing work on land under contract rather than on land that they own or on land that they are leasing from someone else. They are having difficulty getting that portion of the fuel tax rebate back.

Can the Premier perhaps provide me with one useful answer this afternoon by telling me what he is going to do to solve that issue — or is he simply, again, going to dismiss the question itself as unreasonable, in his view?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes, I do remember that casework, and I do remember that we did answer the member opposite's question specific to his constituent. I believe the answer was around whether or not certain fuels could be exempt from carbon. The federal government was very clear with the exemptions: fuel that is being used for agriculture has an exemption to it, but there are other uses — personal uses of that fuel — that would not be exempt.

We are very proud in Yukon to be able to count some specific exemptions that made sense, especially if you live and work in a business that had a fixed price — like in the mineral industry and the mining industry, where you can't add a cost of pollution — a carbon price — on to the value of your commodity — but also in agriculture as well. It is good to see those flexibilities.

I do believe that I did — I know for a fact that we did answer the member opposite's question. What I can do, if he has lost that letter — the copy of that letter and the response and the answer on that — I can send him another copy.

Mr. Cathers: The Premier is confusing two caseworks. The one he was talking about is when the government provided an answer that was unhelpful to farmers who were using propane to heat their buildings. That wasn't the one I was asking about. I'm asking about the one where they gave an unhelpful response related to the government's fuel tax rebate program and the changes in policy that have occurred under this Liberal government — either at the direction of the minister or

at least under his watch — that have made it tough for farmers — or impossible, in some cases — to get fuel tax rebate money that they previously were eligible for — and used to receive — if they were doing work on a farm that they didn't actually own and were doing that either through having leased the land or under contract with someone else. They have been running into roadblocks trying to get that fuel tax rebate back due to an interpretation and policy that is actually contrary to the spirit of the act, if you read the act itself.

The Premier obviously doesn't have that one top-of-mind or at his fingertips, but I would ask him — and ask his colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources — if they're serious about supporting Yukon agriculture, to treat this issue seriously and to fix this policy so that Yukon farmers receive all of the fuel tax rebates that they previously were eligible for, which is not happening under the current government. It's entirely due to a policy interpretation that, in my view, is directly contrary to the spirit and intent of the act.

Another area — as my colleague, the Member for Kluane, reminded me of — is that we know placer miners are having trouble getting rebates, and they have found that the system has become more complex and more difficult. Again, that's affecting people, including the Premier's own constituents. I would ask whether the government is committed to taking any action to do something about that problem.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I appreciate the member opposite's concern in this particular issue. We will continue to update him if there are any advancements in policy when it comes to this. To say that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources somehow is not interested in agriculture is laughable — or that he or I are not interested in helping out the placer industry — that's absolutely not the case, no matter what the member opposite wants to pretend.

We did put an ad in the newspaper reminding the mining industry of the rebate deadlines, and we did speak at the general meeting with the placer community when it came to those rebates — a new system, for sure. I'm happy that the money that is used for placer mining can be exempted through a process. That money goes back to the industry, which really, in a year of COVID, was extremely important for our economy. I've been here in the Legislative Assembly thanking the families in Dawson and other communities — the ones who live year-round in Dawson, for example, the Favron family — being able to help other smaller organizations or friends and family who may be seasoning, even internationally, or are not in Yukon, getting back into camp, getting back safely into the community, making sure that during self-isolation — not only the Favrons, other families as well — looking after each other, making sure that they help support the smaller organizations. We have a really great community of placer miners up in Dawson, whether it's the smaller opportunities like Pascal McBurney or bigger operations like Mike Heisey or the two Mikes at M2 or Stuart Schmidt — another great example of somebody who is very community-oriented and cares about the environment and making sure that local hire happens. In the time of COVID, we're extremely lucky to have such a tight-knit community that enabled us to ensure that essential services

like mining were able to continue safely — extremely important.

I know that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources could have more to say specifically about policy when it comes to agriculture and the good work that he has been doing when it comes to making more lots available. I know that we're moving on some brushing right now in different areas to make sure that we have more farmland available to Yukoners. It's extremely important in the best of times, but now, in light of COVID, the ability to have a local diet, to not have to rely on supply chain management all the way through from the lower provinces, and to more produce and products here that could be locally available to our restaurants and to our citizens is extremely important, now more than ever.

I'm very proud of the work that the public servants in Energy, Mines and Resources have done in the department of agriculture specifically, as well. What a great team. I'm happy to see the initiatives moving forward in that department.

I could go on about Energy, Mines and Resources specifically. They have done some great work in launching *Our Clean Future* strategy as well.

There are 131 action items heavily focused on clean energy, clean transportation, and a collective approach. I could go on about the minister's hard work ensuring that placer mining exploration projects and the operation of mines could continue to work safely, but I will save that for the minister himself to answer very specific questions. Again, I appreciate the member's comments when it comes to a specific policy and urging us to go in a certain direction.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the Premier trying to deflect from the fact that they haven't fixed a problem that was brought to their attention by listing out the names of placer miners and others and by giving some nice-sounding words, but what I'm talking about here is a situation that is directly financially impacting farmers in my riding, and it hasn't been addressed.

I mentioned as well — just to clarify the issue with the placer miners — this was primarily related to not receiving rebates from the carbon tax which, as the minister knows, the government is involved in administering. In some cases, I understand from my colleague, the Member for Kluane, that when he and the Leader of the Yukon Party, Currie Dixon, were up in Dawson at the Klondike Placer Miners' Association meeting, this was raised by multiple placer miners. In some cases — the amount of money that they were waiting to get back from the government was in the order of \$15,000, which is a significant impact for some of those families — to be waiting because of a complex administrative system.

Again, in those areas, I would urge the Premier when he gets up not to just respond with his rhetoric about how great and rosy they are doing with everything and what a great job he thinks that he and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources are doing. My intention in bringing up these points is not even to specifically criticize those two gentlemen for intention but for the lack of action in fixing a real problem that they actually can fix by giving direction and appropriate resources to staff of their departments.

Again, I am going to touch on a few other areas that the Premier has been very unwilling — despite past practice in this Legislative Assembly. When there is opportunity to actually ask questions, the Premier has been unwilling to provide information about some of the specific items in other departments. I am going to ask the Premier a couple of ones that should be easy, because they were important enough to the Premier that he put them in the budget highlights for this fiscal year. There was \$8.6 million to continue work on the Yukon Resource Gateway project. Did the money get spent or not? If it got partially spent, how much?

There was \$5 million for the Yukon's diverse fibre line. Did the money get spent? Did it get partially spent? If so, how much?

There was also \$601,000 for work on several historic sites. Again, all of these are items in the Premier's budget highlights, the shortlist of things he thought were most important to tell the public about the government spending in this fiscal year. Did the money get spent or not?

Hon. Mr. Silver: When it comes to the rebate for placer mining, that rebate deadline just passed, and we are processing those rebates. I know there are some smaller organizations that definitely feel that having to collect the receipts and then get the money later is a little bit onerous, but at the same time, that money is going back into their pockets because of this Liberal government.

I will also say what a great year for placer mining this year. There was a high commodity price, and the costs were lower. What I did also hear from the placer community when I was up at their AGM was that, interestingly enough, the folks who are coming up are a lot of people who know the industry, know the area, and are happy to be working this summer. There was not a lot of turnover among camps. That was a really interesting piece of information that I got from the board members of the KPMA. It was a really good year for not losing staff or people switching into camps. They had a good year. They do have a rebate. The money does come back. They are exempt from that, and so the money comes back. We are processing those rebates, and that's the good news.

Again, when it comes to diverse fibre, yes, 2020-21, we showed lapses for this. We have talked about that; the minister has talked about that. Delays — we talked about it in the Legislative Assembly, so again, it's interesting that the member opposite pretends that he doesn't know this information, but the lapses were due to delays in getting permits done. We hope to get to that. That will be into the next year, and getting that important investment into our redundancy is very important.

I don't know about money budgeted in 2019-20. Again, I'm here with information for this particular *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, and there is no money in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for those initiatives.

Ms. Hanson: If we may, I would like to return to the 2019-20 *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*. I would like to go back to some of the comments that the Finance minister made and to seek some clarification. I had stated at the outset that when we received the documentation — one-page documentation — for the supplementary estimates, we had

expressed concern about the lack of detail. We have heard lots about that already this afternoon.

I want to come to a couple of parts of that. One is clarification of a figure given by the Minister of Finance which differs from one of the actual ones that we did get when we pushed and asked for numbers — which makes me want to reiterate yet again; it would be much better rather than having rollup numbers — that where there are discrete lines of activity that are covered in a supplementary estimate, we actually get that information when it is provided to the opposition. It is insulting not to have this information and to have to dig for it and to waste hours trying to get at it.

When I had asked my initial questions, when we were doing second reading, I had asked how much of the \$7.6 million that is covered in the *O&M Supplementary Estimates No. 3* was expended related to COVID matters. My understanding was that the declaration of emergency measures hadn't been made until March 27, so I had asked: How much of the expenditures were made pursuant to CEMA? If money was spent prior to that, when did it begin to be expended, and how much was spent on matters related to a potential emergency response?

My notes show me that, on March 10, opposition MLAs were offered a briefing by the chief medical officer of health — fine — so that is the middle of March. “When” and “how much” are really the key questions that I am looking for here — because some of these areas that the Finance minister has identified — yes, we know that it snowed a lot last winter and it was cold, particularly in January. So you can get that there were higher utility costs. It would have been very nice to have that broken out.

I am sure that the ministers will provide that, but do you know what? Again, if you want people to come into the discussion informed and actually have an informed discussion rather than sort of fishing trips, it would be helpful to have that information. I am hoping that we will see that in the future.

But specifically, when I see that they are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic on such things as PPE — and I get these general things about how it is going to be — we have a general idea. I guess my lack of ability to accept whatever numbers that have been given so far is — for example, the Minister of Finance said that 25 percent of the \$5.246 million had been spent because of billings due to — you know, we get these billings, and it's normal practice. We know that either the federal government or health — we are told that these are related to out-of-territory hospital stays. So that comes, in my mind, to about \$1.3 million. I was told at the briefing that it was \$884,000, so then I start looking for what else is not the same. Why can't I have those numbers? Why can't the Premier — the Minister of Finance — just table for the Legislative Assembly the breakdown for Health and Social Services — the \$5.246 million? Get it out of the way and just get it done, and then we can go into the more informed discussion with the respective ministers.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I do appreciate the member opposite's concern when it comes to the briefing process. I will admit that I am not aware of that process — as it was going on. I get a

post-mortem, I guess. I find out after the briefing has happened exactly the information that was shared or I will sometimes get some of the questions from some of the departments. I did make a commitment to the member opposite to take a look into the process, for sure.

I can tell the member opposite some of the facts as far as the chronology of the events of COVID in the Yukon context to give some perspective as to how spending would have started flowing and then some numbers as well.

On January 30, the World Health Organization obviously declared that the coronavirus was a public health emergency of international concern, so you can imagine that the departments right away started to turn their heads away from regular mains budgeting to a pandemic and how that's going to affect the health and welfare of Yukoners.

Fast-forward to March 4 — the Prime Minister of Canada announced the creation of a Cabinet committee on the federal response to the coronavirus disease. At that time, we started looking to more federal meetings and more provincial-territorial meetings as this ramped up. The Yukon government reacted quickly and it began regular consultation with the chief medical officer of health at that time, which continues to this day.

Based upon advice that was provided by the CMOH, the decision was made to cancel the Arctic Winter Games on March 7 — a tragic day. On March 13, it was advised that all non-essential international travel be cancelled or postponed. On March 16, the government announced its first COVID-19 support measures. A few days later, on March 18, Yukon declared a public health emergency, which included a number of precautions around public recreational facilities, hospital visitations, and restrictions therein. On March 22, Yukon confirmed its first two cases of COVID-19.

At that time, the ability to respond, the ability to trace, the ability to make sure that we were prepared — amazing work by the chief medical officer of health, his team, and the Department of Health and Social Services.

The next day, the RAC — the respiratory assessment centre — opened in Whitehorse. You don't open something like that without a lot of prepping and planning, and that does cost money — money that wasn't allocated. Imagine trying to decide how to move forward with a respiratory assessment centre when you don't have that budgeted.

As of March 27, we had the formal state of emergency being declared. For the context of what we're doing here today, I won't continue on past that, because there are civil emergency measures orders and protections and a whole list of things from there, but I'll stop there on that.

We did say today here — as far as the cost breakdown — that, like I said, 25 percent of the overall costs for Health and Social Services were additional costs amounting to about \$1 million to \$1.3 million of the requested total for the fourth appropriation, and another 25 percent is attributed to the insured health services cost.

I will check back with the department if those numbers do not jive, I guess, comparatively — but these are the numbers that I do have in front of me: \$40,000 for the chief medical

officer of health for staffing and programs; \$170,000 to the Yukon Hospital Corporation to support its initial necessary operational changes and enhancements to be able to operate safely during the pandemic; an approval of \$265,000 for staffing, as I mentioned earlier, and operations of the Health Emergency Operations Centre, the respiratory assessment centre, and the self-isolation facility; staffing and overtime at the Yukon Communicable Diseases Control Unit was an additional \$10,000, approximately; and support to licensed childcare providers through the direct operating grant added approximately \$660,000 therein as well.

When it comes to just spending in general with the Department of Health and Social Services, the last quarter of the 2019-20 fiscal year obviously was presenting an awful lot of fiscal challenges. There were very significant challenges here but also across the world as well. Health and Social Services stepped up and delivered excellent services to Yukoners across the territory. We didn't hesitate; we acted. Those actions are being calculated now as far as the fiscal ramifications to the budget. The department was well-positioned because of that action that they did very quickly — they have done enhanced mental wellness supports to ensure shelter services are in place and supported childcare programs and other activities very quickly.

The expenditures in 2019-20 went for a variety of critical supports and costs as we began our response to the pandemic across the department. In order to respond quickly, approximately \$350,000 was used for some of these totals, as I talked about — the chief medical officer of health and his programming, the Health Emergency Operations Centre, the respiratory centre, the assessment treatment facility, and the communicable disease centre.

As I mentioned, again — as I'm looking at different documentation as well — there were approximations that came in early, and then there was more specific information as we got prepared for the Legislative Assembly and this Sitting. I apologize to the member opposite if there was a discrepancy between those numbers. We will make sure that the department has the most up-to-date numbers. As I committed to the member opposite as well, we will take a look at how the information in the briefings were given on this extraordinary situation. Hopefully, we will be able to provide the most up-to-date information to the member opposite for these briefings.

Ms. Hanson: I do appreciate the commitment going forward to get information upon which to assess, but listing a litany of various program areas is not financial information, and that's what we're looking for when we're talking about a budget. You do something, it costs something. You forecast that it's going to cost X amount — and maybe there are some unexpected ones. Obviously, we've talked a little bit about some of the unexpected ones. It would be helpful, when this information is provided to MLAs — so that we wouldn't have the discussion about whether it's \$884,000 or \$1.3 million. I don't know, because that's the only number I was able to get from that listing under Health and Social Services that was available. So that's why.

That's one of the reasons why — when it became clear that we were in the midst of a serious and probably long-term pandemic that has significant implications — we need to make sure that we have continuous oversight about how this is unfolding and why we called, from the very beginning, for effective legislative oversight over the implications and the implementation of the various orders that were being put into effect.

However, I'm not going to try to beat this one anymore because it's — I appreciate the fact that there will be forthcoming additional detailed information so that, when we get to the Department of Highways and Public Works and we get to the Department of Health and Social Services and I look at the supplementary estimate and I see that global number, I will actually have a piece of paper that will be tabled by the minister, perhaps in advance — wouldn't that be delightful — that actually says that this is how we got to that \$2.4 million and this is how we got to that \$5.2 million. That would be delightful. We would very much appreciate it.

Mr. Cathers: I'm pleased to have more time this afternoon to ask questions after my colleague — the member for the NDP — asked several questions that were important to her about this.

Again, for everyone who is listening or reading this in Hansard — realize that this is an area where, while our friends in the NDP — we do not always agree with them — we have many philosophical differences when it comes to government programs, but in this area, we agree that the amount of information being provided by government is inadequate and it has gone downhill during this Liberal government's tenure — during the current Premier's tenure. As I mentioned before — and as you will recall, Mr. Deputy Chair, from earlier this Sitting — it is not just me or the Member for Whitehorse Centre saying it — the Leader of the NDP herself acknowledged, during debate earlier, that the amount of information has actually declined.

Again, I am going to touch on specific aspects of spending that were in the budget — our opportunity as members to ask questions about the government's spending for the 2019-20 fiscal year is on the budget bill for the 2019-20 fiscal year. Were we to do, as the Premier is trying to suggest that we should, and save it for questions on the budget bill for the 2020-21 fiscal year, we can be quite sure — based on past performance — that the Premier or one of his ministers would tell us that we should have asked that question earlier and tell us that they weren't prepared to answer it then. Really, those excuses just don't fly.

Again, I am going to touch on some of the matters that were in the government's budget — in their highlights for 2019-20. The very short list of things that they put in the budget highlights — as we have touched on many times before, they have reduced the information shared with the budget about program spending containing the highlights from what used to be typically around an 11-page document — during the last budget that the Yukon Party government prepared — to typically four pages that are heavy with infographics.

But one of the things that did make the list was \$1 million to begin planning and design of a secure medical unit at

Whitehorse General Hospital. It is in the budget. It is in the budget highlights. Can the Premier tell me: Did they spend the money? If not, how much didn't get spent, and what is the status of that project? Has the government approved the business case and the operational model for that secure medical unit? What is the status of that project that was highlighted in the 2019-20 budget highlights?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I don't have that information in front of me, although it's really great to have these questions lined up in advance of Committee of the Whole when the specific departments will be here to respond. It would be one thing to have just that specific number, but what I would really like to also have is the ministers being able to expand and to highlight how important these particular initiatives are — and who better to do that than the ministers responsible and their teams when it comes to that part of Committee of the Whole, when the particular departments can be here to not only answer the specific question that the member opposite is asking politically, but also a bigger expanded answer when it comes to how important secure medical areas are and how important 1Health is and how they could expand on how we have turned around an acute care system into a collaborative care system?

I could give general answers here, but I would much prefer — and I think that the general public deserves — a more specific answer to that through the minister and her department.

Mr. Cathers: I do give credit to the government where credit is due — that some of the projects, such as the 1Health project — I'm pleased to see that they have been moving forward with that. I do have to remind the Premier that the bad news with that — tempering that compliment — is that I first began raising the importance of that project — which was then called the Meditech replacement project — in 2017. It took the government awhile to get around to supporting it instead of dismissing the need for it.

With the secure medical unit project that I asked about here — the question around it here is that it was in the budget highlights. It is shocking and disturbing that not only is the Premier refusing to answer questions about appropriations in the 2019-20 fiscal year, when it is — based on parliamentary tradition and rules, this is an opportunity for Members of the Legislative Assembly, especially those who are not part of Cabinet, to ask questions about government spending in the fiscal year for the budget we're debating. As the Premier will find — if he checks with the Legislative Assembly Office, they could remind him of what he has heard before — that procedurally speaking, if we want to ask questions about departments that aren't asking for new money, the chance to do it is in general debate. That's what I'm doing.

I have gone from asking about some of the items contained in the government's last supplementary estimates to talking about some of the highlighted elements that the government rolled out in their budget highlights along with the Budget Address. Again, the Premier is not willing to provide an answer.

With the secure medical unit project specifically, a project of that size would undoubtedly go to Management Board for approval. The Premier should also be aware of the status of that

project not only as a member of Management Board but as the chair of Management Board, unless the Premier is going to tell me that he doesn't chair Management Board.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Cathers: I am pleased to hear him say that he does chair it. Again, the question I am asking is: What is the status of the planning and design on this? Have they approved the operational plan and the business plan, et cetera? What is the status of the project? Is that \$1 million that was contained in the 2019 budget — has it been spent or has it lapsed? What is the status of that work?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, the member opposite knows the number. It is \$1 million. As far as Management Board and being the chair — yes, it is absolutely the same process that I'm sure the member opposite remembers from back in the day. There are definitely hundreds of pages per session or per Sitting. There are lots of different moving pieces there, for sure. I didn't take every single binder of every single Management Board submission or decision from that — the allocations of that and how that — because who knows what kind of questions the member opposite is going to ask about — a general main question in general debate for two very specific departments. It would be a lot. My desk would be covered from here to the ceiling with briefing notes, I would imagine.

Again, when it comes to the secure medical unit, I could give you some small information on that. But if the member opposite really cared about this particular issue, he would bring it up with the minister responsible, who has a lot more information on this specific unit. I do know that the money did go to the Yukon Hospital Corporation for the planning for the medical unit, but I really don't have the details in front of me from the Department of Health and Social Services.

The good news though, Mr. Deputy Chair, is that we are not saying that we are not going to answer the question here today in the Legislative Assembly. We are saying that we have a great place to answer that question, and it will be in the Legislative Assembly when the minister appears and can speak to that. Again — anecdotally or in general — I do know that we are still in the planning phase of the secure medical unit. I do know that construction is slated to start in 2021-22. But, again, if the member opposite really wanted to have an expanded conversation about this very, very important piece of the medical systems complement, then I'm happy to have that dialogue with the minister responsible and her expanded knowledge on this particular issue.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate that the Premier actually did provide a partial answer to that, which is nice to see this afternoon. It has not been the norm.

So, I will then defer it to debate with the Minister of Health and Social Services, but I will put the minister on notice that I will be taking the Premier up on his offer. I would like more information on this. We would like more information on this project. It's an important one. It was important enough that the government included it in its list of highlights for the 2019-20 fiscal year. I would like to know how much has been spent on it, whether the government has approved the business case and

the operating plan and when they did so, and whether they have approved the capital plan for doing the work to build it.

We would also like to know what the current estimates on the costs of both capital and O&M are. I realize that some of the forward-looking elements are probably just at the estimates stage right now. When the minister provides us with the information, if the minister does, we will recognize if something is presented as an estimate and we're advised of the risk factors around that estimate. We certainly will not be too rough on the government if those numbers do change based on the current estimates. We're familiar with class D estimates and those types of terms, and we recognize that those projects, by their very nature, can change, but it is an important project. It's one that the minister has committed to in the budget. The minister herself made a ministerial statement about advancing this project. So, if it's important enough to take the House's time for a ministerial statement saying that you are going to do something, then it's important enough to follow through and say what you are doing — preferably not in the form of a ministerial statement. Those are a very inefficient use of the House's time. We would prefer to receive that information — just the details of it — in written form or as part of the minister's speech on the subject. Simply getting the information, however it is provided, would be appreciated.

Another important area that was identified in the 2019-20 budget highlights was \$1.7 million for youth initiatives. Again, the question for the Premier is: Was the money spent or not?

We also saw \$3 million contained in 2019-20 for portable classrooms. I know that has been an ongoing issue, including for schools like Golden Horn and for the elementary school in my riding — Hidden Valley School — which has previously requested portable classrooms and has not seen that provided. They also have an issue there with some of the playground equipment that was removed from Hidden Valley School, and what replaced it was not really comparable to what they had before. They don't have as much equipment as they did previously. They had asked for more and were told that the department didn't have the money. If the Premier is able to provide any updates on that \$3-million line item — specifically what was done in 2019-20 — as well as any other information that relates either to the specific situation of schools that I mentioned or to schools in general, we would appreciate that information — and especially during a pandemic. The information about classrooms for children and playground equipment and those types of facilities is very top of mind for a lot of parents right now.

When you go aside from the discussion of the dollars and the cents and use large numbers and talk about terms in government language — when you take this all down to its very real level, all of the items in the government's budget come down to people. They have an effect on people's lives. If government says that it is going to do something and doesn't, it has an effect on people's lives. If they say they are going to spend money on something and don't, it has an effect on people's lives. If they overspend in a certain area, it has an effect on people's lives. If they are, as we are seeing in the area of — again, as I touched on earlier and we didn't get the answer

for it — the cost overruns that we keep hearing about related to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter when there are those management and operational problems — all of those things spill over and have an impact on people's lives.

There is money contained in the 2019-20 budget highlights — there was an allocation for \$58.1 million for social support, including disability services, mental wellness and substance use programs, and income support. I would ask again whether that money got spent, and if only partially spent, how much?

We have heard — and again, this relates to the current budget — about the gaps in mental health services. After refusing to work with Many Rivers and shoving them aside, the government rolled out — as a replacement for this NGO that provided mental health services to Yukon communities — its own mental health hub model and acted like there had never been anything there previously. We have heard some rather bizarre statements from the Member for Mayo-Tatchun and others on the subject that seemed to show a lack of awareness or a lack of willingness to acknowledge the services that Many Rivers used to provide in Yukon communities — and, in fact, did so for decades.

We know that the government's mental health positions and hubs in communities have had problems associated with recruitment and retention. We have seen government reports that have acknowledged the gaps in recruitment and retention and the problems with that. What I would ask about — in 2019-20, how often were these positions vacant, and how much money would the government have spent had they been staffed? How much money was either lapsed or reallocated to other areas?

It directly relates to something that's very important to parents and others across the territory right now because, as national surveys have shown, over half of Canadians report that their mental health has been negatively affected by the pandemic. It is a difficult time for many people, and there are varying degrees of that. There are many people who may be finding themselves less happy than they were before the pandemic but are still basically doing okay, but there are other people who are genuinely struggling and need help.

I would ask the minister to provide that information about what was there in the 2019-20 fiscal year. It includes the start of the pandemic. It does also include and directly relate to what services were there for mental health and what gaps were there in mental health supports prior to the start of the pandemic.

In the interest of giving him the time to do that and also seeing the time, Mr. Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Cathers 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 Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Mr. Adel: 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 Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

The time being 5:30 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until next Tuesday at 1:00 p.m.

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled October 8, 2020:

34-3-43

Yukon Arts Centre 2019/20 Annual Report (McLean)

34-3-44

Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board 2019 annual report (McLean)

The following documents were filed October 8, 2020:

34-3-32

State of Yukon's tourism industry, letter re (dated September 22, 2020) from Hon. Sandy Silver, Premier, to Neil Hartling, Chair, Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon (McLean)

34-3-33

Discontinuation of Xplornet Communications services, letter re (dated September 9, 2020) from Currie Dixon, Leader of the Yukon Party, to Hon. Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Government of Canada (Cathers)