



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 49

3rd Session

34th Legislature

HANSARD

Tuesday, October 20, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 Fall Sitting

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, October 20, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Members of the Legislative Assembly to help me in welcoming individuals who are here today for our tribute to Small Business Week.

As well, thank you to our Business Advisory Council. I would like us to welcome: Craig Hougen, Denny Kobayashi, Neil Hartling, Paul Kishchuk, Mike Pemberton, the executive director from the Agricultural Association, Jennifer Hall, and from the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, Susan Simpson.

I would ask everyone to welcome them here today for our tribute.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

Hon. Ms. Frost: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to Poverty and Homelessness Action Week.

It is a fact that living in poverty or having poor access to housing negatively affects a person's health and well-being. We know that addressing poverty and homelessness is a community-wide effort that requires the full spectrum of support. In recognition of this, Housing First is a best-practice approach to ending homelessness that centers on moving people experiencing homelessness to independent and permanent housing with supports.

We are pleased to say that Housing First welcomed its first tenants in February 2020 and currently has 18 residents. The Community Outreach Services team is another support, which consists of outreach workers, social workers, and landlord engagement specialists who actively work to find and maintain appropriate housing for clients. An outreach LPN provides nursing supports to clients, many who require subsistence use of mental health supports.

The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is another piece of the housing continuum, a 24/7 low-barrier facility offering a broad range of services, including targeted services to vulnerable and at-risk persons.

One of the most critical supports in our community though is the Anti-Poverty Coalition. For many years, the Anti-Poverty

Coalition has dedicated a week in October to raising awareness and promoting action to end poverty and homelessness in Yukon. It is a week of events and discussions, including the extremely popular event Whitehorse Connects. Whitehorse Connects provides a number of health and human services for those who are homeless, living in poverty, or among the working poor. It is happening now until 2:00 today at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre and at Shipyards Park.

The theme of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week this year is systemic racism. If you see it, this is no laughing matter. This is a very real issue here in the Yukon and across the country. This is a timely topic and one that institutions and governments across the country need to address.

As a Yukon First Nation person, I know very well how important it is that cultural safety and humility be the foundational element of all government departments. We must promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of all Yukoners, no matter one's ethnicity or gender, by ensuring a continuum of quality, accessible, and appropriate services.

In closing, I want to give thanks and extend my appreciation to the many non-profit organizations and the individuals who support them and who are making a difference. While government most definitely has a role, poverty and homelessness are matters that need the whole involvement of the broader community.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition for their work and dedication as Poverty and Homelessness Action Week in the Yukon takes off, beginning and running throughout the week.

The coalition is set to host a number of events for Yukoners to take part in during this important week, which began yesterday morning with an opening prayer and sacred fire at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre firepit. This year, events are aligned as a continuation to two very important global dates: World Food Day on October 16, and the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on October 17.

Poverty and homelessness are especially impactful, knowing that they exist throughout our communities right here in the territory. Poverty takes many forms and is different no matter where you look, but it still surrounds us. As winter sets in, it is crucial for Yukoners to take part in the food and clothing drives throughout the communities, and if you have a chance, see if an organization can use your time as a volunteer.

Whitehorse Connects is taking place today between the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre and Shipyards Park, bringing health and human services to vulnerable Yukoners, some of who otherwise may not have access to a number of the services offered. Winter clothing and warm layers will be available at the KDCC, and organizers and volunteers posted at Shipyards Park will offer a pizza lunch, portraits, and door prizes offered simultaneously with services from the outreach van. Of course, Whitehorse Connects might look a little different this year, but

we are pleased to see it go ahead and the two venues offering the space required.

There will be small events and panel discussions taking place throughout the week, as well as a closing ceremony and a family-friendly outdoor movie screening to close out the week at Shipyards Park.

We would like to thank the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition for the work they do throughout the year — especially the work they put in to organize Poverty and Homelessness Action Week every year since 2005.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP in acknowledgment of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. This week's theme — "Systemic Racism — Do We See It?" — challenges us as individuals, as communities, and as service providers. It tasks us to recognize our own biases and the biases that exist around us. It asks us to take a look at the systems we know through the eyes and experiences of others.

I think that the quote of Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition Co-chair Bill Thomas in yesterday's press release really lays it all out — and I quote: "We know that systemic racism is complex, emotionally charged, and highly sensitive." "As an organization that is working to end poverty and homelessness, we continue to hear distressing stories about the treatment that black, indigenous and people of colour experience when dealing with our health, housing, education and justice systems."

My hope is that, by the end of the week, by participating in discussions and panels, we're able to look outside ourselves and understand the perspective of another. Systemic racism exists in Canada. Pretending that it doesn't won't solve anything.

Let's open our hearts and minds to the hard conversations that we need to have in order to end the systemic racism around us.

Applause

In recognition of Small Business Week

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Small Business Week and the Business Advisory Council. Small Business Week is being recognized across Canada from October 18 to 24, Mr. Speaker. For more than 40 years, the Business Development Bank of Canada has coordinated this national celebration of entrepreneurship and their significant contribution to the economy.

The theme this year is "Forging the way forward". As we find ourselves in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic and the economic repercussions, this is a theme that resonates Canada-wide.

In March, entrepreneurs and businesses were grappling with public health and safety measures enacted to keep Yukoners safe. Some businesses were ordered to close and others were faced with a marked reduction in the number of customers overnight. Many business owners and operators used this opportunity to flex their creativity, some pivoted their operations out of necessity, while others took time to reimagine

their businesses and identify new ways of conducting their businesses.

Wood Street Ramen, for example, closed temporarily and focused on developing their online order capability through an app. Coast Mountain Sports developed an online store as part of their new website. These are examples of some of the actions local businesses took to mitigate some of the impacts of the pandemic.

Other entrepreneurs participated in programs designed to help businesses succeed. Yukon University launched a program called PIVOT in response to the effects of the pandemic. Seventy-five local businesses received assistance through more than 40 coaches and experts, with approximately 25 percent of those businesses based in rural Yukon. This program was also adapted to provide assistance to tourism businesses and it was called Elevate.

NorthLight Innovation is another organization serving Yukon entrepreneurs. Building on the program's past success, YuKconstruct is offering its third start-up boot camp this fall with a cohort of nine businesses that are currently participating in this early stage market validation training program.

In addition to these initiatives, the Yukon government announced the Business Advisory Council as part of the economic stimulus package to support local workers and businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The council was established on March 25 to provide a voice for Yukon's business community. More than 30 members representing chambers of commerce and a host of retail, tourism, personal services, mining, forestry, construction, allied health, and aviation businesses gave their time to a concerted effort to navigate these uncharted waters. The council engaged the business community on a weekly basis through teleconferences over a course of six months — to monitor the economic impacts of the pandemic and gather data, provide local business intelligence, identify best practices and recommend mitigation strategies to counter the pandemic's economic impacts and give Yukon's business community a voice when it was most needed.

The Business Advisory Council also provided a platform for women in business and indigenous-led businesses to express their specific concerns and challenges to operating in these unprecedented times. To capitalize on the knowledge and expertise at its disposal and to maximize its efforts, the council formed six subcommittees that teleconference regularly to target businesses by sector such as small- and medium-sized businesses, regional economic development — including First Nation development corporations — agriculture and forestry, mining, construction, infrastructure, and tourism.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask — I know we have a limitation. I want to ensure that I just give the names of the individuals who are on this committee; I think it's important to do that. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the individual council members for the countless hours they have contributed to this process who are providing strategic advice.

The members are: Albert Drapeau, Carl Friesen, Chris Lane, Chris Milner, Craig Hougen, Curtis Shaw, Delmar Washington, Denny Kobayashi, Doug Terry,

Elaine Chambers, Graham Lang, Jackie Olson, James Smith, Joe Sparling, John McConnell, Kayla Morrison, Lorelee Johnstone, Marilyn Jensen, Mike Pemberton, Neil Hartling, Norm McIntyre, Paul Kishchuk, Peter Densmore, Chair Rich Thompson, Shari McIntosh, Shawn Wasel, Sonny Gray, Stanley Noel, Tammy Beese, Terry Sherman, and Wendy Tayler.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize all the business owners and entrepreneurs who have contributed to Yukon's growing and diversified economy. I also wish to extend my thanks to all those who have been involved with the chambers as well. They have done a tremendous amount of work helping to organize this.

I also would just like to highlight Craig Hougen. I know that Stanley Noel also worked with you — but he chaired the small business subcommittee for the Business Advisory Council and also established a strong buy-local campaign, and that is still ongoing. I appreciate that and I think it's important to also add that, this week — as we just heard in the tributes under Poverty and Homelessness Action Week — your work and your partnership with the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition on the "Home" strategy. With that, I know that it has taken a little bit of time to go through this — I apologize to the members opposite — but I think it's important to say a proper thank you. We wouldn't be in the economic situation that we are in now if it wasn't for the guidance of these individuals. Thank you.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to entrepreneurs across the Yukon during the Business Development Bank of Canada Small Business Week, taking place this week from October 18 to 24.

This has been a monumentally difficult year for small business in the Yukon — and actually across our country, Mr. Speaker. We have been fortunate here in the Yukon to have been affected only minimally on the health side with respect to the pandemic, but the economic effects for many have been just devastating. Many businesses are making it work. Some continue to thrive; others are running only on a percentage of the business they usually see. For a number of local businesses and operators, the effects of the pandemic and its economic hit have resulted in closure.

This week, we celebrate our local small businesses for their resilience and determination. Your success is a testament to the power of these qualities and the power of Yukoners. From the Business Advisory Council — we heard a little bit about them earlier from the minister — we would like to thank the individuals from across the territory who represented the industries and economic sectors that drive the Yukon for your part. Your work has been essential to ensure that the voices of the business community are heard throughout the pandemic and that their needs and situations are shared with different levels of government.

Now to our small business owners, operators, entrepreneurs, and of course their hard-working staff — with

so much uncertainty, you just keep it up, keep adapting, and doing what you need to do to make it through this.

To Yukoners: Continue to buy local and support your local coffee shop or restaurant, your local boutique, and your local bookstore. Support your fellow Yukoners and help them get through this so they can make their way through this time and once again thrive.

Applause

Ms. Hanson: I join my colleagues in rising on behalf of the Yukon New Democratic Party in celebration of Small Business Week. Each October, Small Business Week pays tribute to the entrepreneurs who contribute so much to our communities.

Small businesses provide well-paying local jobs within our territory. They bring energy, vibrancy, and uniqueness to our streets. Small business isn't for the faint of heart. It is for the brave, the patient, and the persistent. Small business owners are doers and problem-solvers. They are invested in our communities.

Our small business community is dynamic and responsive. They are the ones who sponsor sports teams and donate to fundraisers. They are our friends and neighbours, and they need us more than ever before.

We can all agree that it is always important to support the local businesses around us, but never more so than now. The uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic has made the normal challenges for small businesses even more daunting. Before ordering from a huge online retailer from outside Yukon, look closer to home. If we stop to ask ourselves "Is there a local option?", all of us can be part of the keeping alive of the many unique small businesses that are so central to a healthy Yukon economy.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling three legislative returns in response to Written Questions No. 6, No. 7, and No. 10.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling a legislative return responding to a question on October 13 from the Member for Copperbelt South regarding bats at the Ross River School.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 3

Ms. Van Bibber: I have for presentation the following petition, which reads:

To the Yukon Legislative Assembly,

This petition of the undersigned shows:

THAT residents and owners of properties along the Tagish River are asking to be reflected in the decisions made for the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area draft recommendations as this is our past, present and future existence and lifestyle and we are keen to protect this location along with the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area Steering Committee;

THAT Recommendation Number 21 to minimize disturbance on shorelines should have consideration for those who have properties with water access, and;

THAT Recommendation Number 22 should be revised to support one dock per lot and the availability of permits for residents;

THEREFORE, the undersigned ask the Yukon Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Yukon to ensure that realistic guidelines are created for shoreline use by residents so that water access is available, including each Tagish River lot being able to obtain a permit for a dock.

Speaker: Are there any further petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills for introduction?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports sports organization funding in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to table the implementation plan of the *Putting People First* final report.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Health and Social Services to immediately address the chronic understaffing and retention issue of registered nurses at Whitehorse General Hospital.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

School council elections and honoraria

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you and congratulations to all those who put their names forward and were recently elected to the 26 school councils across the territory. School councils and school boards have important roles and responsibilities in the governance of Yukon schools. They represent and advocate for students and families at their schools and bring community perspectives to the table with the school administration.

They are key partners in education, providing advice and perspectives on our territory's education system on an ongoing basis. Yukon school councils and the francophone school board have been key partners in ensuring that students could safely return to face-to-face learning, as well as adapting health and safety routines in each school community this fall.

We met regularly with school councils over the summer months of 2020. They provided valuable feedback, asked important questions, and advocated for their schools while planning for a safe return to classes. They worked with school administrators to provide input on school operational plans. They shared important considerations and offered creative solutions to ensure that schools adapted to the chief medical officer of health's health and safety guidelines and reflected the context of their specific schools.

In recognition of the critical role of school councils and the lack of attention to their remuneration, I am pleased to say that our government has increased the maximum honoraria of Yukon school councils and school boards. As part of our work with the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees, the Government of Yukon reviewed the honoraria paid to school council members and chairs as these rates have not been increased since 1991. A new regulation came into effect on October 1 that has now increased the maximum honorarium rates for school councils and boards. The maximum honorarium rates for school council members have increased from \$50 to \$80 per meeting, and for school council chairs from \$62.50 to \$100 paid per meeting attended, based on a 10-meeting schedule.

Each of the 26 new school councils will determine and set their payment rates at their first meeting up to the maximum amount. Many school council members choose to donate their honoraria to their school and they could continue to do so.

School council honoraria rates come out of the school council operating funds provided annually by the Government of Yukon. We are pleased to note that we have increased school council operating funds by \$52,050 per year to support these increased honoraria rates for the 128 school council seats plus guaranteed First Nation representatives.

Maximum rates for school board trustees of the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon were also increased by the same percentage.

Moving forward with these increases in honoraria acknowledges the important work that school councils and boards do to advocate for and support students, families, and school communities in the Yukon.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, school council members were asked to extend their regular terms until the school council general election could be held safely in the first week of October. Now new school council members will be joining their councils for the next two school years.

Our deep appreciation goes to all school council members and board trustees — both past and present — for their dedication and service to their school communities. Their commitment, efforts, and dedication are essential to the success of Yukon students and communities.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to this ministerial statement here today. I too want to take the opportunity to thank all the school councils, as well as the francophone school board, for their work — whether it's those who have served in the past, those who continue to serve, or those who are taking on a new role with the school council

or the school board. The work that they do and the advocacy that they do are invaluable. Without their voices and hard work, standing up for the schools and, most importantly, the students, the outcomes and results that we see would not be possible.

We were very happy to see an increase in the honoraria for school councils as well.

However, I do want to address some comments made by the minister in her statement. In the minister's statement, there was a picture painted of excellent collaboration and consultation between the minister and school councils while in fact those facts do not reflect the minister's version of events. A July 22 letter from the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees to the minister highlights the importance of the minister hearing from and listening directly to families, students, and staff regarding the challenges of COVID-19 and the reopening. The letter goes on to state — and I quote: “This unfortunately did not occur prior to the deliberation of those specific decisions referenced above.”

Then a quote from further down in the letter goes on to say: “Despite the commitment to share information as information becomes readily available, School Council members were not made aware of these decisions until they were publicly announced.”

On the topic of the minister's lack of consultation with school councils, a July 29 *Yukon News* article states that the chair of the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees was concerned with the lack of consultation. In that article, she states — and I will quote: “The association... has written a number of letters to the minister over the last few weeks, only receiving one response dated July 24 after changes for high school students along with school and bus guidelines were announced.”

The chair goes on to say: “The *Education Act*... clearly states in section 113 there is a duty to consult school councils on such changes. The association was not, she maintains.”

Another article from July 29, this time from the CBC, states that — and I quote: the “... chair of the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees said parents and councils were not adequately consulted on the plan. Their association had three meetings with the department, she said, but was told the plan on the same day as the general public.”

This is of course in addition to the hundreds and hundreds of Yukoners who have joined social media groups to protest the government's lack of consultation with parents, students, families, and school councils.

This isn't the first time the minister has fought with school councils or mischaracterized what they've said. All in this House will remember back in 2017 when this same minister released the school calendar 26 days past the legal deadline. When asked about this at the time, the minister blamed school councils for this delay; however, four school councils quickly corrected the record and wrote a letter to the minister complaining about her mischaracterization of the facts.

We do agree with increasing the honoraria for school councils and we thank the minister for saying kind things about them in today's statement, but we think that the minister's actions need to line up with her words. It's one thing to say that

you think school councils are important; it's another to actually consult with them, listen to them, and to properly represent your engagement with them or what their positions are.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, we also add our voices to the congratulations to those people who have put their names forward or let their names stand for election to school councils. The Yukon NDP was optimistic that this government had made a real move to recognizing the role played by Yukon citizens who put their names forward to serve on school councils and school boards.

Mr. Speaker, we agree with the minister that school councils play an important role and carry significant responsibilities in the Government of Yukon public school system. We too recognize that school council members provide a voice for students and families on matters such as new policies, school renovations, staffing needs and issues, school programs, input on the school calendar, and ever-changing emerging issues. School council members view their role seriously. We would expect that the government would have recognized the time and effort put into the preparation for meetings and talking with the school community members that these citizen council members put in. Council and board members chose to put their names forward, not to merely rubber-stamp the Department of Education policies. They are a grassroots democracy. Their input and time deserve more than token recognition.

Mr. Speaker, the increase announced today is just that — it's token. The minister says that the increase is long overdue and that is true, but if this government is serious about reflecting the important contributions these valuable education partners make to all of Yukon's schools, why did they choose to be so parsimonious in their support? Despite the clear recognition of their important role, the government chose to scrimp when it comes to compensation for these citizens.

A simple calculation reflecting inflation since 1991 would have increased the honoraria for school council members from \$50 to over \$100. When the math is done for the rest, one realizes that talk is indeed cheap. It would have been better if the minister had replaced the talk of appreciation for the dedication and services of school communities with tangible, up-to-date remuneration for that dedication and service.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: School councils and school boards represent and advocate for the students and families at their schools and share community perspectives with the school administration. They are key partners, Mr. Speaker, in education, providing ongoing advice and perspectives on Yukon schools. I'm not sure if the members opposite have ever been members of a school council, but I have — and other members on this side of this House certainly have — and I clearly understand the importance of that grassroots point of view.

We met regularly, Mr. Speaker, with school councils and the Yukon francophone school board over the summer months. We met biweekly with school council chairs over the summer. I attended several of those personally, as did department

officials every two weeks. School councils have asked for that to continue, and it will continue. That kind of input on a regular basis is critical for school councils to have, as well as the Department of Education.

School councils and the Yukon francophone school board worked with school administrators to provide input on school operational plans. They shared important considerations. They offered creative solutions. Their work was taken into context and taken into account in making plans go forward. The school reopening plan was developed thanks to the collective efforts of dedicated educational professionals, including school council members.

In the opposition's attempts to criticize me, they are calling into question the skills, dedication, and expertise of our education professionals and partners. Those folks don't deserve that. An extensive team has put in countless hours to develop a plan — a single focus being what is in the best interests of students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, school council members were asked to extend their regular terms. We thank them extensively for that.

They also had an opportunity to participate in an election that was delayed as a result of a ministerial order under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* — an excellent example of how that legislation could be used to the betterment of Yukoners. This is another example of how we use the authority under CEMA to provide flexibility and to respond to the needs of Yukoners. The opposition has consistently criticized our use of ministerial orders but has not taken the time to understand the purpose of them. This is a great example of how it benefitted Yukoners and the individual members of school councils. Again, I thank them for staying on in those roles. We have used ministerial orders judicially to respond to the needs of Yukoners throughout the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, our Liberal government has increased the maximum honoraria of Yukon school councils and school boards in recognition of the valuable work of these bodies. This is the first increase since 1991. It is based on cost-of-living increases.

We will continue to work with school councils and boards across the territory to support students to be successful in their learning during the ongoing pandemic and afterward.

I want to once again take the opportunity to thank all school council members, all those who put their names forward and participated in the recent election and the board trustees, who did the same. Both past and present members of school councils — their service to their school communities is invaluable. Their efforts and dedication continue to be essential to the success of Yukon students.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Hospital staffing

Mr. Hassard: Yesterday, the Yukon Employees' Union put out a press release indicating major concerns with staffing at Yukon hospitals. The release raised an issue at the Whitehorse General Hospital where four members of the

nursing staff resigned over a 12-hour period last week. The union says that the resignations are symptoms of a system on the verge of collapse. The minister indicated to this House yesterday that she meets frequently with the Hospital Corporation, and in fact she has a meeting upcoming shortly.

Has the minister followed up with the corporation to move up the urgency of this meeting to address what — according to the Yukon Employees' Union — is a critical situation, and when is that meeting to take place?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can advise Yukoners that we do meet on a regular basis with the Hospital Corporation. I indicated to the members opposite yesterday that we would be meeting with the CEO and we have done that. We will continue, to the best of our ability, support the Hospital Corporation.

I know that the Hospital Corporation is expected to appear before the Legislative Assembly. Specific questions with respect to strategic processes at the hospital — I am sure that they can reserve the questions for then.

There was a press release today with responses to the question on the floor of the Legislative Assembly — as we speak — from the CEO at the hospital, which addresses some of the questions here today. I am certainly not privy to respond to specifics at the hospital, but I can speak very broadly about the strategies around recruitment and retention.

Mr. Hassard: So we have been asking the government to adequately fund the Hospital Corporation for the last several years. Yesterday's statement suggests that the Liberals are still not providing adequate funding to meet the needs of our hospitals.

The news release states that they fear for the safety of hospital employees and vulnerable patients. The Liberal government has repeatedly said that they are focused on recruitment and retention of staff — as we've heard again today. While they will soon be entering the fifth year of their mandate, it seems the situation actually has not improved.

Can the minister tell us: Does she know what prompted the sudden resignations of nursing staff at the hospital? What specific actions does this Liberal government plan to undertake to address the situation?

Hon. Ms. Frost: To correct the record, the Hospital Corporation received substantive increases to their budget; in fact, I tabled that yesterday. Since 2015, the increase to the Hospital Corporation — 31-percent increase in their budgets last year alone. The increase was 8.9 percent. So, we are working very closely with the Hospital Corporation.

I do want to say that the CEO just recently — just today, in fact — released a media response to misinformation on hospital staffing. That was just released by the Hospital Corporation. I will not speak to that, but I will speak to the joint efforts by the Hospital Corporation and Health and Social Services as we look at recruitment strategies and stabilizing our health professionals — and doing that collectively.

Certainly, I acknowledge that there's a challenge. There's a challenge across the country. We are in the middle of a pandemic and there are approaches that we take to address in ensuring that every Yukoner is supported, that the health professionals are here on the ground, and that no service is left

unattended with respect to health care. I want to just assure Yukoners of that.

Mr. Hassard: Since early in their mandate, we've been telling the Liberals that their funding to the Hospital Corporation is inadequate. Now we're seeing staffing vacancies as a result.

Can the minister tell us when all of these positions will be filled?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Perhaps the member opposite didn't hear the response. The budget did increase by 31 percent since 2015 and 2016. We will continue to provide the resources that the hospital requires. I want to say that we have a very good relationship there. With respect to the notices that we have received from the Hospital Corporation — part of what went out was that, in the last year, they have recruited over 70 employees — 77 in fact. Just this last month, there were 15 new hires. These are facts, Mr. Speaker.

If the members opposite want facts, I'm sure that they can get that validation when the CEO and the chair appear before the Legislative Assembly. In the meantime, we do acknowledge that we are in the midst of a pandemic and we are working very closely with our partners to ensure that the health care needs of Yukoners are met.

Question re: Hospital staffing

Ms. McLeod: Yesterday in response to questions about staffing vacancies in our community hospitals, the Minister of Health and Social Services stated — and I quote: “We don't have any vacancies in Dawson City at the moment. At the moment, there are no vacancies in Watson Lake.”

However, a CBC article this morning states — and I quote: “The corporation said there are currently 10 full-time equivalent vacancies in nursing at the Whitehorse General Hospital, two at the Watson Lake Community Hospital and one at the Dawson City Community Hospital.”

On the one hand, we have the minister telling us that there are no vacancies in Dawson City and Watson Lake, and on the other, we have the corporation stating that there are vacancies in both of those communities. Mr. Speaker, who are Yukoners to believe?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to the positions, the nurses, and the vacancies, I can assure Yukoners that all of the positions that are left vacant in our communities — as we go through recruitment processes — like every jurisdiction, we go through the recruitment process, and if there is a vacancy, it is back-filled by a locum. We bring those supports in more particularly now under the advisement and direction of the chief medical officer of health. We will take that direction and proceed to ensure that Yukoners are well-supported, using the services that we have used historically.

I am sure that the members from the Official Opposition would be well-informed that this is the historical process. We always have to deal with vacancies in our system. As the vacancies arise, we bring in the locums and provide services so that Yukoners are not left without the supports until those vacancies are filled. This is no different today from how it was three, four, five, or 14 years ago.

Ms. McLeod: We asked the minister about staffing vacancies at the Watson Lake Community Hospital last fall. At the time, she stated that they would be filled by last October. Later on, access to information documents indicated that the minister misstated the facts at the time. This morning, the Yukon Hospital Corporation stated that there are two vacancies at the Watson Lake hospital and one at the Dawson City hospital.

Can the minister tell us how long these positions at these two hospitals have been vacant, and what specific actions has she taken to address these vacancies?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to vacancies in the hospitals, we work very closely with the Hospital Corporation and the CEO to address vacancies as they become vacant. We ensure that all positions are filled — either by permanent positions or, in the interim, by a locum position.

Now, with respect to in-time information — as I noted yesterday, we have a relationship with the Hospital Corporation. They control the recruitment strategies within the hospital. My job is to ensure that the government — Health and Social Services — is obligated to work with the Hospital Corporation to ensure that services are provided to Yukoners. That is the key priority. We certainly want to ensure that every Yukoner is supported in all of our communities so that they essentially can live healthy lives where they reside — particularly in rural Yukon communities.

Ms. McLeod: Yesterday we highlighted how some essential health care workers in Watson Lake are at risk of being evicted due to the Yukon Housing Corporation pet policy. These include two doctors and two nurses. This problem is made worse given the staffing shortages in our communities and at the Watson Lake hospital.

Can the minister tell us if this issue has been resolved yet?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Again, the Housing Corporation has a relationship with the Yukon Medical Association. By virtue of that, we have an MOU, and in Watson Lake, the physicians are provided housing. Some might argue — as we're hearing from some of the physicians — the opposite to that is “Look, there is a housing shortage across the Yukon. We need to look at alternatives.”

Clearly, the rules apply to all of the tenants in all of the units — no discrimination. We have a rule that applies to the social housing clients. That cannot change for those who reside in our units that are not a part of that social housing regime. We want to ensure consistency and we are working with the Hospital Corporation to address the concerns that have been brought to our attention on the units in Watson Lake.

Question re: Yukon Liberal Party donations

Ms. White: Yesterday the Premier refused to disclose who gave over \$100,000 in anonymous donations to the Liberal Party. This is unprecedented. No party in Yukon's history has received such a high proportion of their money from secret sources. When speaking to the media after Question Period, the Premier said that he would meet with his new treasurer and discuss what kind of information could be shared.

Yukoners deserve basic transparency from the Premier, so I will give him another opportunity to share that he has nothing to hide. Will the Premier now disclose who gave over \$100,000 in anonymous donations to the Yukon Liberal Party?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, the opposition makes it sound like it's one donor who gave \$100,000. I wish — but that's not the case.

We agreed that campaign financing reform is an extremely important issue, as I have mentioned before in the Legislative Assembly. There has been some work done at Members' Services Board by all three parties. However, that work has not been completed. We are into year 4 and into an election term. Now the member opposite is bringing it up here as a grandstanding issue, as opposed to their party bringing it to Members' Services Board, where we would love to have that conversation.

We are in favour of capping donations from corporations and unions. We do not support a ban on donations from anyone outside of the Yukon. Again, we are well within the current rules. If we want to change the rules, that means all three parties coming together and working on a new plan to change the rules when it comes to campaign donating.

Ms. White: The Premier keeps hiding behind Members' Services Board when I ask about \$100,000 in anonymous donations that his party received last year, and I think I know why. This board meets behind closed doors, and even though I sit on it, I am not allowed to discuss anything that happens in these meetings. It's pretty convenient for the Premier, isn't it?

\$100,000 — that's more than half of what the Liberals spent in the last election, and no one outside the Liberal Party knows where it came from.

Why does the Premier refuse to tell Yukoners who is financing his party? What does he have to hide?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I was very clear about who is financing our donations. We talked about our fundraising opportunities. We talked very openly with the media about that.

I will note for the record that it has been four years since the last election, and the Leader of the NDP has not brought this issue to Members' Services Board. If they are serious about doing something on campaign finance reform, then they would have done that by now.

I will also note for the record that the NDP were quite happy to receive over \$20,000 in donations last year from outside of the Yukon, and on the eve of the 2016 election, the NDP raised the issue — on the eve of the 2016 election.

During the debate on the topic in 2016, the now-Leader of the Yukon Party said — and I quote: "It's not lost on me and I don't think it's lost on Yukoners that..." — the NDP — "... were utterly silent over the past few years about this issue and now — in an election year — they choose to bring this up.

"Now, to me, it is nothing more than political grandstanding."

Not my quote — the new Leader of the Yukon Party. Again, here we are — a year out from the election — and here we have the NDP talking about this in the Legislative Assembly and not in Members' Services Board, where the conversation would be welcomed by folks on this side of the House.

Ms. White: \$100,000 — and I'm not implying where it's coming from; I'm just guessing. Do you know why? Because the Liberals are refusing to tell the public who gave them over \$100,000, so all anyone can do is guess. Is it the same company that gave them a \$50,000 donation in the last election? Who knows? Is it the company that gave the Liberals a \$12,000 fishing trip in 2019? Maybe — but it's anyone's guess.

There's an easy way to stop the guessing game, Mr. Speaker — and that is that the Premier can simply do the right thing: Show some transparency and tell the public who finances him, like everybody else. Why won't he do it?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, for the record, it's the party, not me particularly. I don't take the cheques. I don't know what happens over in NDP land, but that's not what we do here.

Again, if the NDP wants to talk about campaign finance reform, bring it up at Members' Services Board; we'll happily have that conversation. Mr. Speaker, we are campaigning well within the rules of the current campaigning requirements. We had a good year of campaigning — that's for sure. We have an active volunteer base that does an exceptional job of attracting people to our fundraisers. It's a real grassroots part of this party.

We believe in the people who donate for us and to us and we thank them for those donations. We would love to have the conversation with the members opposite. Again, I've been on the record here many times now talking about how we are in favour of capping donations from corporations and unions —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Silver: — if the members opposite would listen to my answers — we would love to have that conversation at Members' Services Board with all three parties that make this decision on campaign finance reform.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on Yukon tourism

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've discussed, the tourism relief package comes over 200 days after it became clear that the industry was going to be devastated this year. But the announcement yesterday was only for hotels. Instead of announcing all of the details for the tourism relief package at once, the minister has decided to delay future announcements. The minister apparently has decided that rather than announcing it all at once, they're going to spread out the announcements so the Liberals can get more press conferences for political gain. The industry is struggling. They need answers and certainty now.

Will the minister stop playing politics with the tourism relief fund and immediately announce the details for all sectors of the tourism industry?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thanks for the question. I'm happy to get up and talk about the work that we're doing with our partners to define the further relief programs and to continue working on a recovery program.

Yesterday, I spoke quite clearly about the themes that we have within our tourism plan overall. Those are: providing tourism sector leadership; rebuilding confidence and

capabilities for tourism; supporting the recovery of tourism industry operators; refining the tourism brand; and inspiring travellers to visit.

Members opposite have talked about us not taking action over the last 224 days, as the Member for Kluane put it. Well, we had the quickest response in Canada to ensure that our businesses were absolutely supported. That included tourism. We initiated an events cancellation program that was definitely something that folks needed at that time. We instituted sick leave. We made a lot of immediate responses. There are many more. I know that the Minister of Economic Development would be happy to get on his feet and talk about other details around the responses that we made.

Mr. Hassard: Instead of announcing all of the tourism relief fund at once, the minister is turning it into a multi-day event rollout. That type of photo op event planning may work outside of a pandemic — when entire economic sectors aren't collapsing around us — but the tourism industry is struggling today and they need answers today.

Hundreds and hundreds of workers in Yukon businesses are out of work or closing their doors, and these folks need details today. They need to know what is being done to keep the paycheques flowing. It has been 225 days, actually, since we first asked the minister to take steps to protect the tourism industry, and there have been enough delays. The time for action is now.

When can the rest of the tourism industry expect the minister to finally announce their relief package?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Our industry stakeholders, associations, and boards are absolutely pleased with the announcement that was made yesterday around tourism relief and recovery. We've been working with our stakeholders along the way. I met with them immediately after the press release and we spoke about the way that things would unfold.

We are absolutely working with the industry. We have done surveys and we are currently working with the Yukon Bureau of Statistics to analyze those for the other two relief programs. Over the last 225 days, I can tell the members opposite exactly what I have been doing. I had over 58 FPT meetings — 27 of them were specific to tourism — with Minister Joly. I attended over 19 TIAY-related meetings. I have attended many of the Business Advisory Council meetings.

In total, there were over 80 meetings that we attended since spring to ensure that Yukoners had the right relief in place. This is over and above exceptional Cabinet and Management Board meetings. So, I don't know what the members opposite have been doing, but I know what we have been doing.

Mr. Hassard: So, on March 9, we offered to work with the government on the economic recovery to remove the politics from this issue. The Minister of Tourism and Culture said at the time that the Liberals didn't need or want our support and her exact quotes were: "... it's business as usual" and "We've got this."

So, here we are, Mr. Speaker, 225 days later and the majority of Yukon tourism businesses still don't have answers, but yesterday the minister said that there is no room for politics on this topic. We wholeheartedly agree. So, I would like to

extend our offer once again to establish an all-party committee to work with the government on the economic recovery so that all parties can work together.

So, Mr. Speaker, is the minister and this government willing to accept this support?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I absolutely stand by my words yesterday when I said that there is no room for politics. The members opposite cannot secretly hope for the Yukon Liberals to fail. Again, if that is in fact what they are doing, they are hoping that all Yukoners fail. The entire COVID response has been about protecting Yukoners. It has been about ensuring that Yukoners have what they need. We have worked with our partners across Canada. That is why I just outlined to you how many FPT meetings I attended — and that is not including all of my colleagues on this side of the House. That was to ensure that Yukoners had what they need.

We have worked with the business community. We have paid tribute to them today. There were many people who worked with us hand in hand, and we will continue to do that as we move forward, because again — and I have said this before — this is team Yukon. It is absolutely team Yukon. The members opposite can laugh at that, but I believe in the spirit of Yukoners. I believe that we will get through this together. There is no room for politics in this — absolutely. Thank you.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on Yukon tourism

Mr. Istchenko: As discussed yesterday, the government announced a small portion of the tourism relief fund. While the rest of the industry has to wait for the Liberals and the minister to schedule another press conference, I would like to ask some questions about yesterday's announcement. This new funding for the accommodations industry goes only until the end of December, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister explain why the funding ends on that date? Is the minister expecting the tourism industry to rebound by the end of December or is the government sending a signal that they are opening the borders at the end of December?

Hon. Ms. McLean: As we stated yesterday in our announcement, we see the Yukon accommodation businesses as being hit very hard — and that is going to continue over the winter months. We know that. Many of our tourism businesses have maxed out on our current Yukon business relief programs. Right now, we have allotted \$2.88 million. We worked closely with the accommodation sector to identify the numbers that we have before us.

So, we did a tremendous amount of research on this. I can tell you that I have received good feedback from hotel owners and those who are managing these facilities. They are quite happy with the relief that is given now. We are continuing to work with our federal partners to provide further relief to all sectors of the tourism industry — but this particular area, in terms of protecting our infrastructure — which is accommodation — without accommodation and air travel, we do not have a tourism sector. That is why we announced this program yesterday in advance of all the details of the rest of the \$15 million.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, if every expert is saying that the tourism industry will not rebound by the end of December, why have the fund end then? Why make the industry go through more uncertainty? Why not just have it go until the spring so that businesses can properly plan for the next six months? This is what we are hearing.

Is the minister purposely just setting this up so that she can do another news release and another announcement on an extension?

Everyone knows that tourism isn't coming back by the end of December. The government needs to stop contributing to this uncertainty. So, will the minister agree in the House today to extend the accommodation fund until the end of March so that businesses can start planning and have some certainty?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We announced up to \$2.8 million yesterday, and it was part of a larger package of \$15 million. Now, we have tabled a supplementary budget that includes \$4 million toward relief and recovery. We are working within our financial act, and we have that supplementary budget before this House. It will be up for debate. I am really looking forward to having debate — if we can get past the current supplementary budget that we have been debating and debating. I think it would be great for this House to get on with some of the other business that is before us.

We have extended our Sitting to 45 days to allow for this good debate to happen, and we are absolutely prepared to do that. I am looking forward to it.

Our commitment — it was a clear, clear, clear signal to the tourism industry that we have supported and we will continue to support the businesses that are struggling right now. We recognize that. It is going to be a long recovery for tourism — not only in Yukon but in Canada and throughout the world. We are positioning ourselves for that.

Mr. Istchenko: The minister is absolutely correct that the businesses are struggling, and some of the businesses — my next question is related to the relief package — and some in the business community are actually asking me this question, and so are Yukoners.

In the supplementary budget that the Tourism and Culture department tabled a couple of weeks ago — and I do look forward to getting into debate — it grows the size of the Tourism and Culture department by nine full-time equivalent employees. Will those nine FTEs at the Tourism and Culture department be working on processing applications for the tourism relief fund?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think that I answered this question previously — but, yes, we have tabled a supplementary budget that includes nine extra full-time employees. That is in fact for borders. I know that I answered this question previously. These extra resources are going toward assisting with the border in Watson Lake and at the airport.

Again, we extended our Sitting for 45 days. We have debate that's coming around all of the supplementary budget — the second supplementary budget and we're happy to have those debates. I'm absolutely looking forward to it.

Again, this is something that — every department within our government has worked hard to respond to COVID-19.

This is Tourism and Culture stepping up to do our part in terms of working with the borders and ensuring that folks who are travelling through Yukon have the right information. They absolutely have been tremendous in the work that they've done. I want to thank them while I'm on my feet today for the work that they've done.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members' business

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, October 21, 2020. It is Motion No. 277, standing in the name of the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, October 21, 2020. It is Motion No. 289, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Hutton): Order, please.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of personal privilege

Mr. Kent: Just rising on a point of personal privilege. Earlier, I announced it was Motion No. 289. It is actually Motion No. 283, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North.

Chair: Order, please.

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

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*.

Department of Health and Social Services — continued

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to just acknowledge that I have with me the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, Stephen Samis. Karen Chan is the assistant deputy minister. I just want to welcome them here and I would like to get straight into where I left off yesterday with respect to the supplementary submission on Health and Social Services for the amount of \$5.246 million.

Specific areas of overages relate to some unforeseen circumstances within health. For the record, again, for Health and Social Services, there was \$2.3 million in COVID-19-related expenses, which made up 25 percent of the budget — \$1.3 million — and then, of course, health services.

Now, for the record, the total amount — just for the benefit of Yukoners — \$5.426 million — the \$74,000 that was up for question or debate a few days ago — the difference in what was presented and what was tabled makes up 1.41 percent of the overall budget. For the broader discussion — the overall budget — it is .00017 percent, which is an indication of the small percentage of what we are speaking of here today — no indication that it doesn't warrant a priority — because certainly that is where we are in this debate. The objective here is to help us get through some of the back and forth and resolve some of the questions specific to the office of the chief medical officer of health, the Health Emergency Operations Centre, Yukon communicable diseases, environmental health, the Emergency Coordination Centre, Yukon Hospital Corporation, continuing care, and licensed childcare. Those make up the 25 percent specific to COVID — the 50 percent specific to health, social services, extended family care agreements, Family and Children's Services, mental wellness, and the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. The other 25 percent is specifically for insured health services — and that is for the external hospital stays.

I certainly want to highlight that — comments around not being able to get through the supplementary — I am certainly open to debate on the specific topics that I have raised with respect to where we are around the legal obligations and the binding obligations to support our Yukoners — the citizens who travel outside the Yukon for medical care — and to support our extended family care agreements and more around supported services rather than apprehension and what we have seen historically — unexpected increases in support for mental health.

Of course, the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, given that we have one full year of operations — prior to that, it didn't have any programming designed around that. It was a shelter that was acquired by this government. So we are intending to now look at some primary and health care services and looking

at a total reform in terms of our collective responsibilities — that looks at elimination of some of the very fundamental issues that affect us, and that's systemic racism, inequities, and services that affect the vulnerable population, that affect our indigenous families, and that affect our seniors.

With respect to what we've seen historically to where we are currently and what we've done and what we've learned from COVID — I think we've certainly learned a lot and we acknowledge that our government has made some pretty fast and decisive decisions to implement and support those who needed it in a state of emergency and we implemented vital programs to ensure that Yukoners and businesses can weather the storm. We looked at rent supplements and rent relief. We looked at taking a team approach, working with our partners.

As indicated in the supplementary, we have clearly looked at historical concerns and of course historical practices when it comes to Family and Children's Services — the traumas associated with residential schools, the traumas associated with apprehension of our children, the traumas associated with the lack of services in our communities. I spoke about that when I was up last — about the fact that this generation — my children's generation is the first generation in my family where the children were not apprehended. It is an indication of what we had to do when we looked at Family and Children's Services' supports to individuals and families. We had to look at the extended family care agreements to ensure that children were rightly placed in their communities — void of racial discrimination, void of lack of services, and moving us in the right direction around programs and services.

I indicated that, as an indigenous person and as a rural MLA, it's my duty and my obligation to ensure that we certainly want to look at all of the services that we provide for Yukoners — that their services are met in a timely fashion and that we remove all the barriers as much as we can — specifically around the care of our most vulnerable populations, but also the care that Yukoners need as they are going through traumatic times. That means that, when they travel outside the Yukon, we certainly want to ensure that they have supports they need as they travel.

In my culture, in our Dinjii zhu' way, no one gets left behind. Everyone is brought along, no matter the circumstances that you are confronted with. I will always endeavour to do that — and that is to participate in a system of change. This was demonstrated through our *Putting People First* report — which we spoke about yesterday — and that comprehensive review that was done by an expert panel speaks clearly about a system that needs change.

This Legislature certainly is no different from what we have seen across the country, and neither is Yukon. The tribute today was really about reducing homelessness and systemic racism, but it also means that, no matter the circumstances of the individual as they present themselves to the health care field or to the health centres or to the wellness centres — those individuals need to be met. They need to be met where they are and supported.

The supplementary budget covers specifically the areas that were required in terms of the emergency measures orders.

I would be happy to debate that. I would be happy to debate the social services element. Of course, the most important thing that seems to be of interest to the opposition is the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. I would be happy to have some really great debate on how that is doing right now — the services that they provide — and the clients who are there whom we are now supporting on a daily basis. Pre-COVID, we had in excess of 350 meals provided a day. We had more than 70 people some nights, who sought shelter.

Our last point-in-time count indicated that we had 195 individuals who have defined themselves as “homeless”. That is an indication that we need to make some adaptations and adjustments to ensure that those individuals were not left without shelter, that they were provided food, and that they were provided a safe place to go on a nightly basis.

The continuing care facility is also a huge element of this supplementary budget. It talks about the costs that we had to put in place to ensure that long-term care homes had the appropriate supports to ensure that our seniors were supported.

We are extremely proud to say — in our national meetings with the federal minister and ministers across the country — that we had not one senior affected by COVID-19 because of the measures that we put in place. In fact, the Yukon is being held up as a model, whereas other jurisdictions are having some really detrimental impacts and effects of COVID-19 in their care facilities. That was because the resources had to be put in place to ensure that we had extra staff there — and extra cleaning staff there — that we put in the measures to support the seniors. We certainly did not ever want to compromise their health and well-being.

With respect to ensuring that every life matters — that is the fact. This supplementary budget is a reflection that every Yukoner’s life matters, and the debate up for today of the \$5.246 million and the overages on the supplementary — that specifically was required to ensure that we provided the essential supports and services for Yukoners during this time. We also had realized early on that the excess of children in our group homes was not acceptable — absolutely not. I will not ever want to see my child go through what I went through or any other indigenous child being apprehended or a child who is found to be in a position where the parent is not able to keep the child. We have to look at bringing the child back home and repatriating the child into their community.

Mr. Chair, the child and the supports we bring into the community are critical and essential. It’s necessary to our mental wellness supports. The counselling and supports that we brought into the communities were really intended to do just that. It’s about the department moving forward. I want to acknowledge — as I’ve acknowledged before — the difference of \$74,000 from what was submitted on day 1 — the difference was the rounding of the numbers, which I understand is common practice — but I have tabled the exact numbers and I am happy to talk about that — the exercise of justifying why the overage was necessary — and to remind Yukoners that we have an opportunity to make fundamental systemic changes, as succinctly reported by the independent expert panel on social and health services.

I have been given a pretty clear mandate that I must change the foundations that made us foreigners in our own land. We have a two-tiered system, which seems to be very much alive and well in the Yukon today. The treatment is still really there and we need to look at indigenous women and children. We need to look at our care models. We need to look at our seniors, and we need to ensure that our responsibility as a government is to ensure that we use our resources to provide services that are effective and sustainable and that eliminate health inequities and improve health outcomes for all Yukoners.

I will stand here to give voice to the people who have been underserved for far too long. I’m clearly open for discussion and debate today on the supplementary budget as presented. I would like to ask the Official Opposition and members if they fundamentally disagree with the submission — which they’ve stated previously — if they can clarify for us — then that means essentially that they do not agree with the supplementary as it was spent specifically on our legal commitments to ensure that health services were provided for the patients who had to leave the Yukon for supports and the children — having to repatriate them.

I ask that, Mr. Chair, for some indication of their support or non-support for the budget.

Chair: Order, please. Thank you.

Is there any further debate on Health and Social Services?

Ms. McLeod: I guess, before I get into questions, I just want to — the minister wanted to tell us what a minuscule amount this budget allocation was. In terms of the overall Health budget — and yes, we all agree that it’s a large budget, but I think every Yukoner will also agree that \$5 million is not lint in your pocket. So we take the \$5 million seriously — just like we would take \$1 million seriously and just like we take \$450 million seriously.

To start with, I would like to ask the minister if she could tell us whether or not there were any internal reallocations of monies that are not reflected in this document today.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I apologize — I had my timer on to keep track of how much time I had left.

With respect to the question about whether or not we knew what was in the vote and whether or not those things were moved around — certainly, as standard practice within the system, usually the department works within its vote. In circumstances when we go over the vote, then the discussion comes forward for debate. What we are seeing today is that the department worked within its vote allocation and determined that, at the end of the year — as we hit COVID — we were seeing an excess of requests coming in specifically to COVID and establishing the emergency centres and the support to the chief medical officer — but at the same time, we received the invoices and the indication from our external providers later on that there was an allocation needed to cover the medical travel and the extended supports there. Those things would have not been known in the previous year.

It’s very similar to the extended family care agreements. Those things were actively moving to ensure that we supported the communities.

So, with respect to the question — we worked within the vote and, after the fiscal year, realized that we had some overages. We presented that for consideration.

Ms. McLeod: At what point will those reallocations show up? Will they be identified in the next budget cycle?

Hon. Ms. Frost: What we are seeing today — what is up for debate is the \$5.246 million. I presented the budget in the Legislative Assembly — the detailed breakdown. So, I'm not certain about the members opposite — around what happened previously and in the previous year in terms of how we work within the allocation.

The specific question today around the \$5.246 million — is that a specific question to a specific line item? I would be happy to respond to that.

Ms. McLeod: I note that the minister is refusing to answer that simple question, which, incidentally, applies to this budget allocation.

I have some questions around the Health Emergency Operations Centre. This is a \$262,000 line item. I am wondering what the time allocation was for this \$262,000, given that the pandemic was only acknowledged by this government in about mid-March.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to the Health Emergency Operations Centre — clearly the Member for Watson Lake would know that we were in the middle of a pandemic, operationalizing the supports on the ground to ensure that we provide the vital services to Yukoners to ensure that they were safe.

The operations centre worked very closely with the chief medical officer of health under the direction of the deputy minister. Of course, the oversight and guidance around setting that up involved the good work of the Minister of Community Services as well in ensuring that we collaborated with all of the departments throughout the month of March. We knew early on — of course, this started way back in January — so there was a good indication to Yukoners and to the rest of the world that we had to be prepared for the potential of a national pandemic — as we all should have been aware of as individuals, but as a government keeping track of what was happening on a national scale, with an indication of how this might potentially affect Canada and Yukon.

As we were responding to the potential for having an international competition occur in our small city by virtue of that, this could have detrimentally impacted and affected our smaller communities. We had representation from many countries. The response to that would have started in February — in prepping and meeting — of course, I will not speak for the minister responsible for sports — but I know that they were working very hard with the chefs de mission and the countries to ensure that we were responsive and had the supports on the ground here.

The most difficult decision was when the Arctic Winter Games were cancelled, knowing that we needed to put in place very quickly measures to ensure that the Health Emergency Operations Centre was operationalized. Those considerations were early on in the new year — and of course the whole centre was set up in March. We had to mobilize very quickly and move

the staff. The operations centre certainly played a key role in supporting the chief medical officer of health as he developed public health guidelines and supported businesses and organizations as part of his plan to protect Yukoners.

It was critically important that we looked at the Respiratory Assessment Centre as well. As well, we had to look at the self-isolation facility. We had to quickly move as we were evolving. By the same token, we had to look at our population base, and we had to make sure that we had the services available to our vulnerable populations — so mobilizing more supports. The Health Emergency Operations Centre was really set up to do that — focusing on ensuring that our government continued to coordinate and make public health responses and to look at communications and ongoing operations and policies as we were working with our municipalities and our First Nation communities.

Certainly, in March, we had to also start looking at resources, and we had to look at our employees and deploying Health and Social Services staff over to the Health Emergency Operations Centre to operationalize it and to start looking at the logistics of supports needed for Yukoners.

Also, early on, we had to really look at our *Civil Emergency Measures Act* and our plan. That meant that the team had to work very hard and fast and to move quickly at the height of a pandemic. Specifically, of course, our communications staff but also our critical health staff had to move over to support Dr. Hanley because he doesn't have all the supports. That was how it was established, and the resources that were allocated — the \$262,000 — were to ensure that we had those resources on the ground.

I can say that the isolation facility certainly came in handy when we had the Québec couple who showed up in my community in the middle of a pandemic. That is just an indication to Yukoners that the system worked. It worked well because they were gone out of the community the very next day and they were secured and put into our isolation centre. That, I think, is a good — kudos to the coordination centre, Dr. Hanley, and the staff for moving very quickly and the key role they played in ensuring that we developed the guidelines around his recommendations and ensuring that we support our critical services.

At the same time, we had to work with our education system because we were closing down the schools to accommodate the Arctic Winter Games. All of the schools were closed at that time and we had to deal with that, and that's part of this question.

So, the member opposite asked a question about the Health Emergency Operations Centre and when it was deployed. It's important for Yukoners to know why it was deployed and why it was necessary to spend \$262,000 on this particular line item.

Ms. McLeod: I kind of think the minister was trying to rewrite history there for a while. The question was: Given that a state of emergency was declared on March 26, the \$262,000 covered what period of time? Was the whole month of March when that money was spent? Was it from January, as the minister tried to indicate?

I'm interested to know when this money was spent. How much of it was on rental? How much was for staffing?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm certainly not trying to belittle anything or underrepresent. I'm not trying to give — as the member opposite is suggesting — this is very critical. It's very important and it's very necessary.

The resources that were spent on the Health Emergency Operations Centre were necessary. It was necessary that we operationalize the centre, that we brought in the staff, and that we moved over the supports to ensure that the chief medical officer of health had the resources around him. We had to move our staff over from Health Services and of course communication services. There was a huge amount of resources brought over. Specifics on how much was spent on staff and how much was spent on — I can tell the member opposite and for the benefit of Yukoners that, on March 23, the Health Emergency Operations Centre coordinated its public response. At that time, the HEOC brought together resources from across government. At its height, more than 80 employees were working on the operations, planning, logistics, and finance. Now, there was a critical support team that was brought together.

With respect to the supports that we provided specifically from Health Services — we certainly had to ensure that the deputy chief medical officer of health was supported, as Dr. Hanley was not available at that time. We had to bring in the resources around the deputy chief medical officer. With respect to when this was spent — I indicated that we were starting the planning in February, and then, from February, we went to the end of March. In most of March, the HEOC was operationalized and of course we extended the resources then. The calculation of what we have before us today — what it cost us during that time was \$262,000. The self-isolation facility of course was required for many Yukoners to be isolated from March — from out-of-territory. It was not geared only to Yukoners. I'm keeping that in mind with the specific breakdown. We had to deal also with the March break as we were dealing with the pandemic.

Ms. McLeod: If I understand what the minister has told us just now, about 80 employees were brought over from health, which would suggest to me that none of the staffing costs are in this \$262,000, given that those staffing dollars are already accounted for in the main budget of Health and Social Services. Would it be fair to say that \$262,000 was for rental and facility usage?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would say that the 80 individuals whom I mentioned — the 80 staff who supported the Health Emergency Operations Centre came from all over the government. Maybe the member opposite isn't aware, but during a pandemic, the whole government participates. Everyone came together to support Yukoners.

With respect to how much we spent on each individual who was mobilized over — that was costed out against that department. With respect to additional supports that were required, we certainly had to bring additional supports in. With respect to the rental of facilities, we had the old library set up — here in this very administration building — and we also had

to set up the emergency response respiratory centre and the testing site. As part of that, we also had to look at ensuring that we had the facility readily available — the hotel and the self-isolation centre. There are many factors considered in this budget.

Ms. McLeod: I didn't really get an answer to my question. I took the minister at her word when she said 80 staff from health were taken into this Health Emergency Operations Centre and the associated activities. If they came from all over the territory and all of government, that's great — I don't have an issue with that; that is good.

But I still don't have a breakdown of these numbers. Perhaps the minister is unable to tell me what that breakdown is. I am happy to finally get an answer on the timing of it, which was from mid-February to the end of March. Perhaps we will never know how much was staffing and how much was for facilities.

I am going to move on to the Emergency Coordination Centre. "Social Services for deployed staff..." — so if the minister can just explain that statement — I'm not sure if that means that Social Services staff were deployed to the Emergency Coordination Centre or if they were — I will just ask the minister to explain it.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm just seeking clarification. Given that the responsibility is a dual responsibility between Community Services and Health and Social Services and the budget is to support the Health Emergency Operations Centre and the staff who were there — the Emergency Coordination Centre — as I indicated earlier, there were 80 staff deployed to the centre to support the centre from across the government.

The member opposite is indicating that she wants a specific breakdown of how much that costs — the \$23,900 that was intended under this particular line item was intended to support the staff who were deployed to ensure that they were well supported. There was a lot of overtime accrued given the critical time and the crunch that they were under to ensure that we operationalized the centre. The supports were there. There were some concerns around capacity, but there were also the necessary requirements to communicate out to our communities. The support was there specifically for the staff and Environmental Health Services, and that was what that \$23,900 was for.

Ms. McLeod: So, I understand that this line item says "Social Services for deployed staff..." but I still don't know, from what the minister said, what that is. Are we talking about wages? I actually have no idea. I have no concept of this.

If the minister could explain to us what "social services", in this regard, is — this money, \$23,000, went for social services. What were they?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The \$23,900 covered the overtime that the staff were required to work to set up and mobilize the centre. That is what this is for.

Ms. McLeod: Excellent.

I am going to move on to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. The Hospital Corporation was given \$170,000 to assist with their pandemic responses. When did the Hospital Corporation ask for that money?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Certainly, the Hospital Corporation would have worked closely with the chief medical officer of health, as we did, and that would have been early on in February — working on setting up and mobilizing the hospital to ensure that they made the adaptations necessary to eventually deal with a pandemic. It would have been in late February and throughout March.

Ms. McLeod: Okay — so the Hospital Corporation asked for this money in February. Early February was what the minister said to start with, so I guess — I am not going to go there. I am not going to go there because this was an overspending amount, and I suppose if you knew about it, you could have planned for it, but I won't go there.

Continuing Care, \$255,000 — I understand that this is for staffing costs. I presume that it was for all of the continuing care facilities. How many extra staff did that translate into?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to the previous — don't want to talk about the Hospital Corporation. The same holds true for the Hospital Corporation as holds true for continuing care and all of the centres. They all had to mobilize and put the staff in place to ensure that supports were readily available.

Of course, Continuing Care — the \$255,000 was to support the Continuing Care staff to ensure that residents of our long-term care homes had the appropriate supports and were safe. Of course, we have to pay, in these circumstances, overtime. We had to bring in extra security. We had to bring in extra cleaning staff. That was all to ensure that the residents, the seniors, and the families were safe and well-served.

Ms. McLeod: I'm going to assume then that the extra security and cleaning staff were temporary positions. How many were there?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have that answer. What I can say is that they were brought in to support. Specifics — I can tell the member opposite that, in Continuing Care, there was \$255,000 spent. We have a few care facilities. We have one in Dawson City and a few in Whitehorse, and of course, we have to provide supports to the Thomson Centre, Birch Lodge, Copper Ridge Place, the Whistle Bend continuing care facility, and McDonald Lodge in Dawson City.

We have senior residences as well. We have to work with ensuring that we provided supports around those facilities in other communities.

Ms. McLeod: I'm going to move on to licensed childcare. This, of course, is a line item of \$630,000.

Can the minister tell me how that was allocated or what its intention was?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With the childcare centres during the pandemic, we had to keep the childcare centres open for essential workers.

So, the \$630,000 was spent on ensuring that the direct operating grant and the supports that they customarily receive under the extended early learning agreements were continued and that we never jeopardized or compromised the childcare centres. We covered the basic supports, but we also ensured that their rents were covered, even though they were not receiving children in the childcare centres. In fact, we put in more resources and gave them more resources to ensure that they had

the necessary supplies to ensure that sanitation was a priority. Yukon was one of the very few jurisdictions that kept licensed childcare programs open during COVID-19, and it was one of the first jurisdictions to implement a robust funding model for the COVID-19 response specific to childcare centres.

We provided the enhanced direct operating grant funding to licensed childcare programs in Yukon. In total, we provided nearly \$4 million from March to the end of June. That is after the fiscal year, but prior to the fiscal year, we had to continue that so as not to jeopardize the facilities. That is still continuing, Mr. Chair. Ongoing supports are currently being offered. We will certainly ensure that we continue supporting them.

The additional funding of \$100 a month received for additional cleaning supplies is still there. We will continue to support the parents and caregivers as the childcare centres resume. They all, for the most part, have resumed full operations, but they are still getting the top-up funding to ensure that they have the supports, so we will see the increases continuing on there.

Ms. McLeod: My recollection of childcare centres is that they were, in fact, closed. Of course, government stepped forward and provided some ongoing funding to ensure that they did not fold or go under and that their financial obligations were met. Subsequently, of course, we reopened daycares for emergency staff.

What was the period of time that the \$630,000 covered? Was it the month of March? Was it two weeks in March? I am just trying to get a sense of that.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The childcare centres remained open for essential workers, and they received all of the supports that I have mentioned. That is part of this continuation of the licensed childcare centres — that we supported the childcare centres to make them readily available to essential workers — but at the same time, those centres that chose not to receive children were still getting the same amount of funding that they were receiving in January and February. There was no disruption of that. We were the first jurisdiction in the country to do this, and we continue to do that today. We are giving additional services and supports.

I want to just acknowledge that, because none of the centres were closed. They were still receiving the funding and the base funding that they were receiving previously.

Ms. McLeod: I'm still looking for that period of time that the \$630,000 covered. Was it for the whole month of March? Was it for half of the month of March or even previous to March?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I want to just say that the pandemic happened in January. Yukon mobilized in February. The question is: When was this? Well, certainly, the supplementary request is for the previous fiscal year — so this funding and this request would have been from the previous fiscal year, meaning that because the pandemic happened at the end of January, certainly we were mobilizing and working with our care centres. That would have been in mid-February to the end of March.

So, I'm not sure if the member opposite understands that the timing of the pandemic correlates with the COVID budget,

which is 25 percent of the request. Specific questions around how much was spent on overtime, how much was spent on continuing care, what type of basic supports were provided — we provided the necessary supports, and it all happened pre-March 31. That is what the submission today is for.

Ms. McLeod: Of course, I am well aware that this is supplementary funding for fiscal year 2019-20. I get it; I understand it. I know why I am here.

In March, we know that the government did not believe that we had anything to worry about. For the minister to try to say that this funding stretched back to January is a bit of a stretch.

As far as I know, it was business as usual for all daycares for January and February. I don't know how far into March that there was a cessation of business as usual for them, but I do know that it was business as usual for the entire rest of the country until March — I shouldn't say that; let me backtrack that — for the Yukon.

So the minister seems to be somewhat affronted by requests for specific information on how money was spent — and that's not the thing I want to ask at this point. I'm just trying to find out for how long a period does \$630,000 cover for Yukon's daycares? So I would like the minister to answer that.

The World Health Organization declared a pandemic on March 11. We were not in a pandemic situation prior to that date. If the \$630,000 was from the last three weeks of March, I would like the minister to confirm that.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm quite taken aback by the comment that we didn't have anything to worry about.

Well, certainly, we had a lot to worry about. We had a world pandemic — and if anyone was in tune with what was happening on a national and international scale, we knew that there was a pandemic happening. We had to mobilize early on in the Department of Health and Social Services. The chief medical officer of health and the mobilization of the Health Emergency Operations Centre happened well before we declared the emergency here. I want to just take a moment to acknowledge that because the staff worked above and beyond to ensure that Yukoners were well-supported. The resources provided for the childcare centres were to ensure that we provided supports to all childcare centres across the Yukon.

There are many childcare centres. There are day homes and childcare centres. In fact, we worked with the daycare centre in Watson Lake. We worked with the NGO communities and the Little Blue Daycare in Dawson City through a pilot project. We continued to support those daycares through the pandemic. Even though they were not accepting children in their daycares, they still received all of the funding on a monthly basis. This funding — the \$630,000 — was to ensure that we kept the daycares open and that they were supported so that they could mobilize and reopen when we were at a time when we wanted to reopen childcare centres.

We started planning the Arctic Winter Games certainly many, many months ago — pre-COVID. We cancelled the Arctic Winter Games on March 7. The cancelling of the Arctic Winter Games required a lot of forethought and a lot of

planning — but at the same time, we had to take into consideration the recommendations from our chief medical officer of health. That meant that we had to do the due diligence leading up to the implementation of the emergency measures process and setting up the resources and supports. That is what this funding was intended for. It was to ensure that the childcare centres remain open amidst the pandemic.

Ms. McLeod: Today, actually, we got something cleared up that we had tried to get cleared up some time ago, which was whether or not family day homes would be covered. The minister has confirmed today that yes, they are.

I applaud the government on working with daycares and family day homes to provide them with the funding they need to keep them afloat. But you know what — I'm going to continue to disagree with this minister when she tells me that they have been working since January on a pandemic when — as I said — the World Health Organization declared a pandemic on March 11 and it was right here in this House that the Premier said there was no pandemic — his words — so revisionist history.

I'm going to leave the daycare issue because I have a sense that I'm never going to get an answer on this. Perhaps it's just an unknown — an unknown \$630,000 is what it is.

I'm going to move on to mental wellness and substance use — which are the exact words that are in here. The description is “Unexpected increases included supports for mental health”. “Unexpected increases” — can the minister explain to me what those unexpected increases were? That has a value of \$365,000.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Mr. Chair, I would just like to note for the record that certainly the comments previously about fundamentally disagreeing with the position that we've been working since January — certainly, we want to always be prepared for the potential for Yukoners to be affected. That's part of good business planning. Good planning and defining a case are two different things. So, we certainly had to make sure that we have the structures established — so putting that off as insignificant, I think, is not acceptable.

I do want to say that the department — and of course the staff who dedicated their lives during this time to respond appropriately to the pandemic — went above and beyond and did a lot of the planning and a lot of the preparation to respond appropriately to the potential for the pandemic and when it would arrive. As Dr. Hanley so succinctly put it, it's not “if” it arrives, it's “when” it arrives. The “when” is the time you need to be prepared and have the resources to support the pandemic. That was what this \$1,300,000 was spent on and covered all of the specific areas in question.

With respect to the question around mental wellness supports — just referring to the supplementary submission — “Unexpected increases” for supports for mental wellness services — for the record, that was \$365,000. As the member may be aware, in the middle of a pandemic, you have to make some fundamental changes and shifts to align with the core needs of Yukoners — no longer were you able to have in-person counselling supports; no longer were you able to have community visits. You had to work virtually, which means we had to mobilize and we had to make some adjustments.

At the same time, we had to work with the referred care centre. The referred care centre had to provide services there. They're there to provide really critical supports to our most vulnerable community members — ensuring that they had the supports available as well. Our mental wellness hubs in all of our communities had to make some adjustments there, as well, ensuring that we had necessary supports.

During that time as well, not only were we in the middle of a pandemic, but we also saw significant overdoses related to the opioid crisis that we're in. We had to make adaptations and adjustments in ensuring that we were protecting our staff, but we also had to make sure that we were protecting Yukoners while at the same time not disrupting services — not disrupting the critical services that are there to support and save the lives of Yukoners.

We certainly wanted to ensure that we were well prepared to deal with the crisis, and the government and, of course, our partners looked at this state of emergency, made some rapid adjustments, and looked at vital programming to ensure that Yukoners were supported. The adjustments to the mental wellness supports were one of the critical areas where we had to make adjustments.

That particular line item for mental wellness supports is \$365,000, and that covered the whole of Yukon. As we know, there are four hubs in the Yukon and 22 counsellors. We have supports across the Yukon, so we had to make some adjustments.

We were seeing some rises in the opioid crisis, and that happened since January. So, we had to make some adjustments. I am happy to say that the resources were available at that time. As I indicated in my opening comments, I certainly don't want to leave any Yukoner without the supports that they essentially need.

Ms. McLeod: I just want to share with the House another quote that I found from March 16. The Premier in the House said: "Let me be specific as well: There is not a pandemic in Canada yet." I just wanted to share that. I thought it was kind of interesting.

The minister was telling us that about \$365,000 for unexpected increases included supports for mental health — but as the minister spoke about it, the minister related it to the pandemic. If I take the layout of this document, that falls under Social Services — which, I presume, covers the entire fiscal year of 2019-20 and is not related to COVID — because if it was, I would expect to see it up above, under COVID-19 expenditures.

I don't know if the minister wants to adjust any of the statements that she made in this regard, but according to her own document, \$365,000 was not COVID-related; it was system-wide. If the minister added supports through the mental wellness hubs throughout the year, I am happy to hear that information; I look forward to hearing that information. But, according to her own documents, it had nothing to do with COVID-19.

I will wait to see what the minister can say in response.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am actually quite shocked. I am surprised that the member opposite would suggest that mental

wellness supports are not a part of the COVID pandemic. We know — everybody knows, Yukoners know, the members opposite have indicated — that Yukoners are under immense stress right now. Adjustments had to be made. Supports had to be on the ground. We are in the middle of a pandemic. The member opposite is suggesting — maybe they don't see it as a crisis, not a pandemic. We certainly see it as a pandemic. We see it as a crisis. We are in the middle of a crisis.

We have made significant changes in how we do our business here in Yukon, as indicated here in the Legislative Assembly. Suggesting and playing it down is, I think, not doing anyone any justice. The mental wellness supports that were necessary — were necessary previously and are even more essential now — are certainly not something that I want to underplay. I think that it is of the utmost priority, and of course, it has everything to do with the budget line item as we presented it. There are specific areas — we budgeted things — the COVID expenses, above the 25 percent. Those that were directly related to Health Services and those that were related to Social Services — generally speaking, if the member opposite was to look at the budget, the general mains, she would see that mental wellness is classified under Social Services. For the benefit of reporting, and the benefit of putting on the record, what we saw under mental wellness supports and services — we certainly don't want, for purposes of transparency and purposes of ensuring that Yukoners are supported — and, of course, for the record — mental wellness supports and substance use always fall under Social Services and that is how it is classified in the supplementary request.

If the member opposite feels that it is better suited and better fits under COVID and should not be defined where it generally is housed, that is for another debate.

I do want to say that the difficult decision sometimes is to look at our crisis, look at COVID, and then look at the mental health parameters — because, as we look at COVID, we are also in the middle of a mental health crisis. Individuals are self-isolating; individuals are having a very difficult time.

A lot of people are losing their jobs. A lot of people are staying home. There is self-isolation, and there are essential needs and core needs of Yukoners. I don't even know how to respond to the suggestion that it's not related to COVID-19. Well, mental wellness is certainly related to COVID-19. It certainly relates to an individual's psychological well-being in the middle of a pandemic — to ensure that supports are readily available. I will always ensure that, as we look at Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services supports — we had to bring in additional resources and additional supports. We have to ensure that the communities' needs were still met during this most difficult time.

As we look at the extended family care agreements, those families have to be well-supported. The children had to receive the supports that they needed as well as the grandparents and the grandmothers — ensuring that significant changes and improved services that were needed — in particular, the Referred Care Clinic as well. We saw primary care clinics across the Yukon. We saw complex mental wellness and psychological concerns that had been brought to our attention

mobilizing very quickly under the advisement and direction of our staff and under the direction of the chief medical officer of health, ensuring that we continue to expand the scope of services provided by our hub staff to include counselling for adults, children, youth, and families and, of course, substance use counselling, relationship counselling, trauma counselling, and community supports.

In some of our communities, we have seen quite a rise — it's quite sad — in suicides. The teams had to mobilize. We had to bring teams into the communities during COVID. We had to bring emergency response teams and critical incident teams into our communities. Why is that? Of course, COVID is escalating everything. It's escalating the financial pressures on the family. It didn't always call for COVID expenses, but because we are in unprecedented times, we had to make adjustments.

I really am at a loss. Of course, we want to ensure that we always support Yukoners and, in particular, the families during major crises like this. We are in the middle of a crisis, and we will continue to support Yukoners.

Ms. McLeod: We get presented with the document by the Minister of Health and Social Services. This document clearly lays out that COVID-19 expenditures are at 25 percent of this budget allocation, Social Services is at 50 percent, and Health Services is at another 25 percent. Now, if Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, for \$365,000, was COVID-related — fine. That's not the problem. It's just that, according to the minister's documents here, it's for Social Services for that budget year. So, I get it. It's for COVID. We'll move it up to the right spot on the paper.

I have a question regarding the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. A line item for \$837,000 — again, this is one of those things that's listed under Social Services for 50 percent of this budget allocation. I can only presume that it was for the budget year of 2019-20. So, maybe the minister can tell me right now, before we even start, whether or not it's for 2019-20 or only for the month of March during the pandemic.

Hon. Ms. Frost: That's quite interesting.

Just for reference, the COVID expenses were specifically intended for COVID-related expenses associated with how we responded to COVID. Mental wellness supports generally sit in the category of Social Services. Moving it up or moving it down — the fact of the matter is that it sits in Social Services. We had to make some adjustments to that line item to accommodate the additional pressures.

With the question around the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — is this COVID-related, specifically to March? No, it isn't.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you for the response. The \$837,000 — was that money designated for general revenues for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter or was it project-oriented?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The question around the budget that was allocated to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — just for the record, we have had one full year to manage the shelter. For the record — previously, the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter was owned by the Salvation Army. The members of the Official

Opposition built a facility for almost \$14 million and handed it over for a dollar with no programming. There was no programming support around that shelter — no resources — giving them \$3.2 million every year. That \$3.2 million was allocated to the Salvation Army to provide services to the most vulnerable population to feed, house, and clothe them, and to provide them with essential services on an annual basis. In January a year ago, we acquired that facility with discussions and with direction. In working with the Salvation Army, we re-acquired that back. Why? It was because they were not able to provide the essential services that were necessary to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in our city.

The members opposite may refresh their memories back a bit to realize that the objective of a shelter is really to ensure that we address and meet the most vulnerable needs of all Yukoners. What we saw historically was 13 people a night. Most people were locked out, services were not provided, and there were, in fact, no services and no programs — or very little. It's not a surprise to the members opposite; I am sure that they are fully aware that the Salvation Army, under their principles, were not able to allow certain things to happen because they are a Christian-based organization. They're not an NGO in the community; they're a Christian-based organization and they were there to provide services under their parameters.

The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the reacquisition of that to Health and Social Services was intended to provide critical and essential services to the most vulnerable in our community. What we saw in this last year — we saw a significant increase in the clientele — the folks who were coming there. The budget that was set aside by the previous government of \$3.2 million annually to provide services to 13 individuals — well, all of a sudden, we saw an increase in the shelter. We saw an increase of 350 meals a day. We saw an increase of upwards of 70 folks coming in on a daily basis. We couldn't take more because the shelter is only built to accommodate 25 individuals on a nightly basis. In fact, we had to put in cots in some of the rooms; we had to make conversions. We had to convert some of the rooms into shelter beds — predominantly for women. Most of the women in our society were not well supported at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. In fact, there were no women there. We were seeing an increase in youth at the shelter so we had to make some adjustments in those services.

Now, to speak about providing services for significantly more individuals — the \$3.2 million that was set aside by the previous government to finance and support 13 individuals — 13 individuals — was not appropriate. It was not sufficient. Why? Because all of a sudden, we were seeing significant increases. We also saw a need for emergency measures teams, so we brought in emergency measures teams. We started working with a referred care centre. We started working with Blood Ties Four Directions. We started bringing in more naloxone training. Mental wellness support counsellors were there. We brought social workers into the emergency shelter. That was to look at ensuring that the clients who entered the doors were never turned away — that they were always embraced and welcome and that we always were attempting to

support them so that their core and basic human rights were met.

Asking the question about if mental wellness and substance use — was this only for COVID? It is never only for COVID. This is an overexpenditure for the whole year. I referred specifically to the COVID expenses. The mental wellness and substance use has unexpected increases because we see unexpected demand and pressure at the emergency centre. Of course, that means that we have to open the doors and folks are feeling more welcome. They are feeling very much a part of the centre now, and services are aligned to meet their needs.

Ms. McLeod: So, the question was about whether or not \$837,000 — whether or not that overexpenditure from approved funding was for general revenue to cover off O&M for the shelter or if it was project-related. Was there some project that was going on at the shelter that needed this overexpenditure, let's call it? I am just looking for that simple answer.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am not sure that I understand the question. Is this funding for projects? I can say that I just went through a whole explanation of why the funding was necessary to provide services to the clients. It meant that we saw an increase in usage at the shelter. We brought in more capacity. We brought in more supports. We had to look at ensuring that we were able to stabilize what was otherwise a shell — a facility without resources and without programming — in fact, we were not able to support the clients who were here in our city. They had nowhere to go — all of a sudden, they had a place to go.

Of course, the supports and services for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, the mental wellness supports, and the family and extended children supports — were put in place for our vulnerable population. Many of these supports were for our indigenous communities and our indigenous community members. The extended family care agreements, as I indicated earlier, cover 80 percent of our indigenous children in care under the extended family care agreements.

The thing with the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is that we are seeing a significant increase in our vulnerable population. They need to be provided the services and supports. That means, of course, that we needed to bring them in. That means that programs, supports, food, shelter, and resources were now readily available. The overexpenditure of \$837,000 covered that whole year of 2019-20.

Ms. McLeod: I'm going to leave it. I want to thank the officials for being here today. I don't have any further questions on this supplementary overspending budget.

We had a bit of a discussion this afternoon about the pandemic and when it was declared and maybe when it wasn't. I want to draw the House's attention to a *Whitehorse Star* headline from March 13. March 13, you will recall, is when the Premier said that there was no pandemic, so the headline that day was "Parties demand action; premier brands the YP 'paranoid'". Well, isn't that something?

I just wanted to leave that with you again. Thank you to the officials, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I just would also like to say for the record that for the clients whom we serve under the supplementary request — specifically for Social Services and, of course, Health Services — the supports were not there previously. This supplementary request is to really look at ensuring that we meet their needs as they present themselves. The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is no different. The clients at the shelter were not historically funded. I am happy and proud to say that they are now welcome in a space that they can call their own. They are there and we are meeting them. Is it perfect? It is not perfect. Will we work on improvements? We most certainly will work on improvements as we do.

We have learned a lot from COVID. We have learned a lot from this exercise in terms of how we can do things differently, and we do that with our partners always in mind, ensuring that Yukoners' lives are first and foremost and that we provide essential supports that are necessary.

Chair: Is there any further debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services?

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

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$5,246,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$5,246,000 agreed to

Department of Health and Social Services agreed to

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works in Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*.

Department of Highways and Public Works

Chair: Is there any general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to welcome my officials to the House this afternoon. We have Paul McConnell, my deputy minister, and Jody Woodland, who is our numbers fellow.

We are here to discuss the supplementary budget for the 2019-20 fiscal year. As I have said, we are committed to treating tax dollars with respect. Our department is charged with maintaining the safety and efficiency of Yukon's public highways, bridges, airstrips, buildings, and information systems. We maximize 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. This year, our rapidly

changing climate and COVID pushed our budget beyond our capacity to absorb new costs. As a result of these factors, our department spent 1.7 percent, or about \$2.4 million, more than budgeted on operation and maintenance this year.

I know that the members opposite have questions and I know they want some answers, and I am prepared to do that this afternoon. So, I will open it up for debate with very little intro.

Mr. Hassard: I, too, would like to thank the officials and welcome them to the Legislature this afternoon. I am sure that they have been waiting patiently for the last couple of days and are very happy to be here. It is great to see them.

Mr. Chair, my first question for the minister is with regard to the new online bidding. Yukon Bids and Tenders, I guess, is the name of the new platform. I am curious — we know that the Government of Canada uses MERX and the City of Whitehorse uses Bonfire, so I am curious why Highways and Public Works chose to go with Bids and Tenders rather than aligning themselves, preferably, I guess, with the city. That would have made sense, since we do hear complaints from contractors that the city and YG don't line up, traditionally — maybe if the minister could give us a little bit of insight into that.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I really want to thank the member opposite for the question this afternoon. I want to remind the member opposite that what we are talking about is the supplementary budget for last year. This is the last budget. Bids and Tenders came into effect later — as a matter of fact, this fiscal year. We are having a budget discussion about the Supplementary No. 2, and I'm more than happy to endeavour to get him an answer for that question at the appropriate time.

Mr. Hassard: Very well, Mr. Chair. I honestly thought that it came in before the end of March. My apologies on that one — but I certainly am happy to move on with a few other things.

I am curious if the minister would be able to provide us with an update on the Carmacks arena.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Again, I thank the member opposite for the question. I do encourage him to ask that question during Supplementary No. 2 of my colleague, the Minister of Community Services, who is actually overlooking that project. That is not a Highways and Public Works project.

Mr. Hassard: I was just hoping that the Minister of Highways and Public Works might have had some valuable insight for us with regard to that particular project.

Moving on, I'm wondering if the Minister of Highways and Public Works could give us some insight on a couple of other projects, one being the Old Territorial Administration Building in Dawson City.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. It's a great project. I'm more than happy to talk about it in Supplementary No. 1 — the next budget. It doesn't have any bearing at all on this supplementary discussion this afternoon.

Mr. Hassard: I was certainly hoping that the minister would have been a little more forthcoming since it was in fact started in 2019. I guess I will see if he's willing to expand on that or if he's going to stick to that one.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Again, this project is — I don't even believe it has been tendered yet, Mr. Chair. If it has, it's in the throes of being tendered. It is a project for 2020-21. I'm happy to discuss it at our next budget discussion.

Mr. Hassard: Would the minister be able to tell us if there was any design work or anything done on that project in the previous year, as it was in the five-year capital concept for that year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Chair, I will endeavour to get an answer to the member opposite on that question. I do want to remind him that we are talking about the supplementary budget from the end of last year, which has to do with about \$2.3 million in O&M, and I'm happy to discuss that item this afternoon.

Mr. Hassard: I would also like to remind the minister that this is our opportunity to talk about all projects that took place in that fiscal year. I certainly hope that he will bear with me and provide us with a little bit of context into some of these projects.

I'm wondering if the minister could provide us with some information on the Wolf Creek bridge replacement project.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am told that project was successfully completed in spring 2019 — if it's the same project. I will endeavour to get — yes, the project was successfully completed in spring 2019.

Mr. Hassard: I know that in the Legislature the other day, one of my colleagues asked the minister about the issue with bats in the Ross River School. I believe that he tabled something today in regard to that issue, but unfortunately, we haven't been able to see it yet. I am just wondering if I could be put on record — if the minister could tell us how much was spent in the budget dealing with the bat issue in the Ross River School and where we are with that issue.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm more than happy to provide a preview of the legislative return we've provided this afternoon. I hope the members opposite find it soon because it was tabled this afternoon, but I'm happy to read from it this afternoon. I will say that the health and safety of students and staff is our top priority in all our facilities, including this school. I've said that on many occasions and I'm not going to undersell that in any way, shape, or form.

Mr. Chair, the bats are nesting in the exterior roof of the school. They're not in the school; they're actually on the outside, just in the perimeter of the roof. They're there regularly. Highways and Public Works is using a portion of the \$135,000 maintenance and material budget to help mitigate the presence of these bats in the school. As the member opposite I'm sure is aware, bats are a protected species, so we can't actually — we don't want to do anything that would harm the bats, but we are making sure that we've installed fencing around the perimeter of the school — and you can see that in many of the photographs that I've seen online and everything else. The fence has been installed for quite a long period of time to keep anybody from getting anywhere near the bat guano that might be falling out of the soffits. We've taken protection to make sure the kids don't get contaminated or get into the bat guano — bat feces — around the entire perimeter of the school.

We're working collaboratively with the local biologist who is monitoring in the area and who will inform us of additional mitigation options as they arise, and we're exploring other options to prevent the return of the bats next year, including the installation of bat houses so they have a nest during their migration and wire mesh to prevent entry into the exterior roof.

As the member opposite, I'm sure, is aware, bats are a migratory species. They will be there for a period of time and then will move on to their next location.

Mr. Hassard: I certainly hope that they move on sooner rather than later, but I'm not so sure that will happen.

I had a question for the minister regarding the electronic signs on the Alaska Highway. They've been in place for a while now, but they are still not functioning. I'm wondering if the minister could give us an update as to why they're not functioning and when we may see them functioning in the future.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Again, no spoilers this afternoon. I'm more than happy to answer the member opposite's questions on the Supplementary No. 1 on the second appropriation. That is really where this project resides.

I am happy to do that once we get to that discussion as soon as we pass this one. Mr. Chair, I'm happy to answer the member opposite's questions, but I will do so at the appropriate time. Right now, we are talking about the last supplementary from last year.

Mr. Hassard: Maybe the minister isn't aware of the signs that are on the Alaska Highway both north and south of Whitehorse. Some are around Teslin and Haines Junction. Some are around Whitehorse and Jakes Corner. Those certainly aren't signs that were put up during this fiscal year, so I'm hoping that maybe the minister can rethink that one and have some information for us.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I really thank the member opposite for his question. He is, of course, right. I am so excited about the other signs we're putting up this year that I neglected the signs we put up before. They are smart information signs. They are there to warn motorists about upcoming potential threats on the highway. They will be used sparingly as conditions merit. They are part of our new smart information system on our highways.

Mr. Hassard: I guess the part of the question that the minister didn't answer is when they will be functioning.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I missed the last bit of the member opposite's question, but I have had it clarified, so I hope I get it right this afternoon. The member opposite was asking when they will be functioning. They do function right now. They function when there is a need to have the signs up there. We are trying not to bombard motorists with all sorts of messaging, so when there is a need — such as caribou on the highway or whatever — we will activate the signs and let motorists know that this is happening.

Mr. Hassard: I guess I just assumed that they must not be functioning when we see mobile signs being taken out to talk about COVID-related issues, such as ensuring that people remain two metres apart, et cetera. I just assumed that they would use the signs that are already in place.

Another question regarding those signs is: Would the minister be able to provide us with a final budget on what those signs cost to install?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will tell my good colleague on the benches opposite that I will endeavour to get him an answer on the cost of those signs. I have put the question to the department already. When I get that response, I will endeavour to get it to him.

As far as the location of these temporary signs that we see, they were placed in very specific locations to accommodate some of the measures that we taking under COVID. That is why we are using those temporary signs and not the permanently installed signs that we have in those places. They were for specific needs. We had a few temporary signs that we were able to deploy, and that measure helped my colleague, the Minister of Community Services, to deal with the pandemic.

Mr. Hassard: Another question that I had for the minister was regarding Jersey barriers. I know that last year the government used two of their \$1-million contracts to keep these items produced locally, and I certainly understand the importance of that, but we had asked where these Jersey barriers would be placed throughout the Yukon. The minister told us at the time that they, in fact, had a plan as to where they would all go. We have yet to receive a copy of this plan that the minister spoke of. So, I am wondering if he could elaborate for us today on where that plan is and if we would, in fact, be able to see a copy of it, as we asked for in the past.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am happy to talk about our roadway maintenance safety improvement program that has been implemented by this government. It started in 2019, so I'm happy to talk about it this afternoon.

Mr. Chair, the Government of Yukon takes the safety of those using our territory's highways very seriously. We have implemented a new program that will improve the quality and efficiency of highway and roadside maintenance throughout the territory. The program will result in better sightlines and right-of-way visibility, improved lane delineation, fewer hazards in the right-of-way, and the installation and maintenance of more roadside barriers along our highways.

Since 2019, \$6.5 million has been allocated toward this program. We have brushed more than 750 kilometres along Yukon's highways, 5.5 kilometres of new barriers have been installed, and approximately 2,000 kilometres of highway lines have been painted. The program has increased the hectare area of brushing by 255 percent and the length of highways brushed by 70 percent compared to previous brushing programs. We did this because, in 2017, I did cut money out of the brushing program and learned how important it was to Yukoners. I started to ask questions about how long it took the department to brush the entire length and breadth of the Yukon's 5,000-kilometre-long highway system. They didn't have such a program, Mr. Chair. I was very pleased with the department's response. In short order, they managed to come together and create a program that will see all of our 5,000 kilometres of road given standardized — and have standard procedures to have it cleared and brushed.

Over the next five years, we should have the entire length and breadth of the territory's highways improved in all of these ways. I think it is a great program. I am hearing from the public how popular it is for motorists and how it is making a real improvement in the safety of our highways. I believe that you, Mr. Chair, have seen some of these improvements first-hand. That is that on our highway improvement program.

Mr. Hassard: I certainly appreciate the information on the brushing as well, even though that wasn't the question.

With regard to the Jersey barriers, the minister did mention that there was 5.5 kilometres done this year. I know that there are several hundred — maybe a couple of thousand — Jersey barriers south of Whitehorse between Whitehorse and Watson Lake sitting in various gravel pits. I am wondering if the minister could inform the Legislature as to this plan that he spoke about last year as to where these barriers would be placed. Does that plan still exist? Are we able to see this plan, or are we at least able to find out where these barriers will be installed along the south end of the Alaska Highway?

I know that a few of us have spoken to highways people who are unaware of where they are going, so hopefully the minister will be able to provide us with a bit of that information.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I appreciate the member's questioning this afternoon and the questions about this tremendous program that we put in place — a first for the territory. It's going to improve all 5,000 kilometres of our territory's highways. We put in standards so we can maintain it into the future. Once we get the first wave of this program done, we will be able to bring down costs as well, because we'll just be in a maintenance mode as opposed to sort of a constant state of perpetual brush-clearing. We will actually be clearing brush every single year, but we will be doing it in a methodical and thoughtful manner that will deal with the safety and perils that we find on the side of the road in a methodical basis going forward. I have provided an awful lot of information.

I think that, since 2019, we have placed 5.5 kilometres of concrete barriers, Mr. Chair, in just a single year. Going forward, we're going to be doing it over the next five years, and of course, more of those concrete barriers that we've obtained will be placed across the territory. The member opposite on the floor of the Legislature is asking a very specific question, and I will endeavour to give him an answer.

Mr. Hassard: So, my understanding from that answer is that those barriers will be installed over the next five years — if the minister could just clarify that for me when he's next on his feet.

Another question that I had was: If those barriers are in certain sections of the Alaska Highway that are now at a speed limit of 90 kilometres per hour, once those barriers are installed, will the speed limit be increased to 100 kilometres per hour — as the minister has talked about the extra safety, et cetera, that has been included throughout our highways with this extra work being done?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for his question this afternoon. As I said in my earlier response, I will endeavour to get him a response to his earlier question.

As far as speed limits go — Mr. Chair, I am certainly not a traffic engineer. I know that, despite all of his talent, Mr. Woodland is not a traffic engineer, nor is Mr. McConnell. I have some really talented folks inside the Department of Highways and Public Works. They look at all the criteria and set speed limits according to that — realizing, of course, that speed limits are a matter of — to my constituents, at least — grave importance, and we take an eye to all of the criteria needed to set our speed limits. I don't have a more fulsome answer than that for the member opposite this afternoon.

Mr. Hassard: Since we were talking about the Jersey barriers on the north end of the highway, I am wondering if the minister could update us on how much money was identified for what we traditionally call Shawkwak, I guess, in that time period?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Again, I appreciate the member opposite restricting his question to the 2019-20 fiscal year. I appreciate that, and I can tell the member that during that year we spent \$5.1 million on capital and maintenance costs along the north Alaska Highway.

Mr. Hassard: I'm wondering if the minister could give us an update on where he is at with the *Motor Vehicles Act*. I know that it has been some time since we have had some motion debates here on the floor of the Legislature, and the minister had informed us that the *Motor Vehicles Act* would be coming forward for an overhaul or a facelift — or whatever you may want to call it. I am wondering if the minister could provide us with an update as to where we are there.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As the member opposite has identified — and I appreciate his question on the *Motor Vehicles Act* this afternoon, because it is a very important issue. It's one that this government is tackling and it really should have been done a long time ago.

The Yukon's *Motor Vehicles Act* has not been significantly updated since it was first implemented in 1977. 1977 is a very long time ago. I could look up the cars that we were driving on the road back then, but they would be funny-looking things and probably a Pinto — something like that; we can bring it to life that way. It's a very old act and certainly very few of the cars driving around there — they would certainly be vintage and wouldn't be as efficient or reflect today's roads or motor traffic laws.

So, rewriting the act is necessary to improve the safety for all road users on Yukon highways. The new legislation will allow us to address long-standing issues with the existing act — and they're legion, Mr. Chair. We know what they are.

This large, complex piece of legislation touches on a wide range of issues important to Yukoners. The work to rewrite the act is well underway. Public engagement took place in 2019, with more than 2,800 responses provided by the public. We're committed to working with our stakeholders, municipalities, and First Nation governments to update this important legislation and make our roads safer. That's what happened in 2019, Mr. Chair. The work on the act is ongoing, and when we get to the next phase of our budget discussions, I'm more than happy to discuss what's happening this year with our *Motor Vehicles Act* rewrite.

Mr. Hassard: So we know that Highways and Public Works has set aside \$10 million for aviation with COVID-related issues. We know that \$3 million has already been spent and there is an additional \$7 million still in the hopper. I'm wondering if the minister could provide us with some information on where, when, and how that \$7 million will be spent.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We know that April 1, 2020, is an exciting budget year. I am more than happy to discuss it when we get to that budget year. Right now, we are talking about the supplementary budget. There were a few COVID costs in that supplementary budget. I am more than happy to discuss them here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly today. It doesn't contain the aviation funding that we have approved so far.

Mr. Hassard: Maybe the minister could give us an update on where we're at from his department's perspective on the Dempster fibre. I know that the Dempster fibre has kind of stalled due to permitting issues. I am wondering if the minister could update the Legislature on whether any of those permitting issues were related to Highways and Public Works or if they were permitting issues through other departments.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I really appreciate the interest that the member opposite is showing in our Dempster fibre line, which is well in hand and is scheduled to have work begun — this is a spoiler alert. This is a tantalizing glimpse at the next budget discussion that we are going to have. We can certainly discuss that in the future, and there are lots of good things to talk about there. What I will say is that, as of the time of this supplementary budget, we were in the process of negotiating with our partner, Northwestel, negotiating with communities up and down the highway, and putting the final plans in place for this fibre line. That work went really, really well in 2019. When we get to the next supplementary discussion, I am more than happy — Supplementary No. 1, *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21* — I am more than happy to talk about the work that has happened on the fibre line this year.

Mr. Hassard: I will just close by saying thank you again to the officials for being here today. We certainly appreciate it. Carry on.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works?

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

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Ms. Hanson: I would just appreciate it if the minister could, for the record, give a breakdown of that \$2,366,000.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you to the Member for Whitehorse Centre for her question this afternoon. I am more than happy to do so.

Highway maintenance costs and heavy snowfall late in the fiscal year resulted in spending on winter maintenance activities of more than \$800,000 over the average of the three preceding years. That was one thing — highway maintenance. COVID-19, the pandemic, led to expenditures of \$336,000 on things such as PPE, overtime to support increased demand for ICT support to facilitate work-from-home shifts, and Transportation Maintenance branch, which was costs to minimize crossover shifts, increased cleaning, et cetera.

There were electricity rate increases. These increases resulted in expenditures of \$438,000 overbudget. It was partially due to the extreme cold that we had in late January. The Leader of the Official Opposition referenced this in Question Period recently. As well, the Supply Services branch resulted in \$1 million of that increase overbudget. It was to do with anticipated and budgeted savings of about \$1 million. We were unable to complete the key changes until later in the year because we were dealing with our employees. We logged the savings early but didn't actually realize them until November. That resulted in \$1 million of that as costs.

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$2,366,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$2,366,000 agreed to

Department of Highways and Public Works agreed to

On Schedule A

Schedule A agreed to

On Schedule B

Schedule B agreed to

On Clause 1

Clause 1 agreed to

On Clause 2

Clause 2 agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. McPhee that the Chair report Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 204, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

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

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 204, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

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

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

Hon. Mr. Silver: I want to thank everybody for their comments in general debate and then into the substantive departments in the fourth appropriation. I will be very brief right now. I open up the floor to the opposition for closing comments in third reading before we go through the process.

I want to thank everybody for their comments and thank the ministers and the departments for their time in the debate in general and, as I mentioned, the substantive departments.

Mr. Cathers: We have had a fair bit of discussion on this legislation, this additional appropriation bill for 2019-20. What is unfortunate is that there are many areas where questions have been asked and we still don't know the answers. This fiscal year — while it does cover the start of the pandemic, most of the 2019-20 fiscal year was not a pandemic year. As my colleague, the critic for Health and Social Services and the Member for Watson Lake, noted, in some areas, according to information that the government provided us, some of the expenditures were not pandemic-related, but the minister says something different from the budget materials that they provided us. So, we are hearing conflicting stories in some areas as well.

It is important to note that this budget bill is doing cleanup for areas where the Liberal government failed to follow the *Financial Administration Act* and broke the law with overspending. In criticizing that and asking for accountability, of course, that does not mean that we disagree with every spending decision made by government within it, but that we are doing our jobs as opposition to require the government to be transparent with the public about why those decisions were made, what the money was spent on, how much was spent, and why.

Unfortunately, after seven months of refusing to call the Legislative Assembly back and physically distancing from Question Period and accountability in this Legislative Assembly, we continue to see the Premier and his ministers, under his leadership, refusing to share information about what public money was spent on. They have shared a little bit of information, but there is much that is lacking.

Budget bills are an opportunity to talk about the areas of spending within those departments, not just new appropriations in those areas. They are an opportunity to ask questions about policy, about programming changes, and so on. We have seen, unfortunately, first the Premier and then the Minister of Health and Social Services standing repeatedly and providing an excuse for why they wouldn't answer the question, but it wasn't

a very good excuse. Some of their excuses were factually incorrect.

As it relates to the pandemic portion of the spending, we do agree that some of that spending was clearly necessary. As I have stated before, as Finance critic and on behalf of the Official Opposition, in unprecedented times, we recognize that there is a need for government action, including public health restrictions and increased spending.

It is also a time that, along with that unprecedented spending and unprecedented restrictions, there should come increased public input and public consultation, increased democratic oversight and debate, and increased accountability — not less. Unfortunately, the Premier and his colleagues have insisted on going in the opposite direction and refusing to answer very reasonable questions.

We do have to recognize that there has also been some revisionist history here in debate during Committee. The Minister of Health and Social Services told my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, that pandemic spending went back to January. That's contrary to what we heard the Premier and several ministers say during the Spring Sitting. At the start of the Spring Sitting, one minister assured us that it was business as usual, and the Premier actually dismissed opposition questions about the pandemic and its impact on the economy as being paranoid. Within a few short weeks, his words did not age very well, as the Yukon government itself declared a pandemic following the March 11 declaration by the World Health Organization of a global pandemic.

I should note, as well, for context that the budget speech itself, when it was delivered in the spring, was outdated when it was delivered, claiming that the Yukon's economy was strong, talking about record tourism numbers, and predicting that those would only grow in 2020, which was on page 5 of the budget speech. We acknowledge the fact that this government was not the only one caught off guard by the pandemic, but unfortunately from the outset, there has been a lack of transparency, a lack of public process, and a refusal to work with the opposition. As of last week, we had offered on four separate occasions to work with the government as part of an all-party committee to deal with aspects of the pandemic response. My colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, offered that for a fifth time today and the government again shot down the request while bizarrely claiming not to want to be dealing with this in a partisan manner, yet refusing the offer of all-party cooperation.

Again, Mr. Speaker, in my third reading remarks, I'm just summarizing some of the discussion that has occurred.

There has been a lack of transparency and a lack of willingness to tell us about money that has been moved around within departments. Again, we have heard reportedly from government staff about money being transferred from other departments to cover cost overages in Health and Social Services unrelated to the pandemic. One that we have heard — and I asked repeatedly about, as did my colleague, the critic for Health and Social Services — repeatedly from whistle-blowers is that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is massively over its

budget and causing expenses not only for Health and Social Services but also other departments.

In response to us asking the question as to what the total cost was, the government has dug in its heels and refused to provide the total costs to us. They have given us a tiny portion of that cost that is reflected in the \$5.2 million in illegal spending by Health and Social Services, but that doesn't reflect what is being moved around behind the scenes in the shell game that appears to be going on here where we do not know what money has been moved between programs. There has been less information provided than has often occurred in the past about money moving within programs in departments and about transfers between departments.

In the budget that they've tabled — while we see the increases, we don't see the lapses that we would expect to see in a budget of this nature. The money went somewhere.

When government won't provide us a breakdown when we ask about specific items such as the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and they adamantly refuse to provide us with information about the total cost, it does leave us asking, "What are you hiding?" If it is public money and if you have nothing to be ashamed of, you should have no problem releasing that information. If you are proud of the programs you are operating, you should have no problems releasing that information. But if you refuse to provide the breakdown and refuse to provide total costs, it leaves us asking the question, "Why will you not share this information with the public? What are you hiding?"

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring your attention to Standing Order 19(g) — imputing false motives. I am sitting here listening, Mr. Speaker. I have heard "whistle-blower" — which would infer something done wrong. I have heard "hiding" funds over and over again. We sat here, and there was ample time to ask a multitude of questions on this particular topic.

That is an absolute point of order. I think it best that we carry on with the work that we have to do here and for the member opposite to get maybe more on track and in line with the thoughts that he is sharing with us today.

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

Mr. Cathers: I don't believe that there is a point of order. I was simply referring to information that the government won't share and asking why they wouldn't — and noting that, if there is nothing to hide, why not share it? I don't believe that I was imputing unavowed motives. I was asking a very simple question on behalf of Yukoners about why this information is not being shared.

Hon. Mr. Silver: The member opposite is talking about a shell game. He is talking about funds that only he believes exist. So, again, he is asking us to expose something that he is inventing.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: I will review Hansard and return to the House, if required.

The Member for Lake Laberge, please.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In speaking to this budget — in talking about the costs — if anyone wants to look, you can look at the publicly available information and see the fact that even the Leader of the NDP acknowledged that there is less budget information available under the Liberal government than there used to be under the Yukon Party government. For example, the member mentioned a \$32-million line item in the next budget bill that we don't have a breakdown on which I have laid out. I have asked questions with regard to a number of the items within the current budget bill — as have my colleagues — and when we do not see within a department — such as Health and Social Services — according to the government's own handout in the spring, Health and Social Services was 35 percent of total operation and maintenance spending in the Yukon government — 35 percent of the total government budget. When we don't see a breakdown of the rather large numbers that were provided and when we are provided a one-sentence explanation for \$5.2 million in illegal spending in the information that they provided with the budget, it does leave us with questions. Unfortunately, no matter how much the Premier and the Deputy Premier may wish to suggest otherwise, they haven't provided the information there.

I know that the Minister of Highways and Public Works seems to be signalling that the government has been spinning its wheels with their excuses. I agree. The excuses are now getting weaker as the days go on.

Ultimately, in these areas, if the government is proud of their spending and happy to have it stand up to the test of sunlight, provide us a breakdown. It's very simple. But unfortunately, areas including but not limited to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — they just won't tell us what it costs.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues, the critic for Health and Social Services and the critic for Highways and Public Works, for the questions that they've asked on behalf of our caucus and on behalf of Yukoners. We are wrapping up debate on this legislation not because the government has answered all the questions but because we've simply run into refusal after refusal to share information on key areas. But we will return to that as we get into other areas of the budget.

Ultimately, in this budget for 2019-20 as presented to us in the spring when the government first delivered the budget, the budget was estimated to be \$1.5 billion at the beginning of the year. We have seen changes in that and we've seen increases. Again, the pattern that this government has had of talking about getting out of the business of doing business, but in fact expanding government at every turn — including in this fall supplementary that we will be debating shortly where they've added another 88 positions — the total amount for 2019-20 — I'm just trying to find that number in front of me here — but we were surprised at the size of the increase in government staffing in this fiscal year. The fact that they went over a record

budget despite having only the last roughly two weeks of the fiscal year covering a pandemic — that means that they can't just blame their out-of-control spending on the pandemic.

It's a pattern that we're seeing, unfortunately. Not providing that information that I referred to earlier and not providing the breakdown of the costs is part of a trend of secrecy that we've seen. Earlier in the House today, we heard the Premier again refuse to provide information about \$100,000 in political donations. They have hid the information about who provided that funding to the Liberal Party. Again, there are many questions but no good answers coming from a Liberal Party that ironically ran on being more open and more transparent.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Hon. Mr. Silver: I let this go as long as I could, but Standing Order 19(b) — speaks to matters other than the question under discussion. We're here to discuss a supplementary budget item for the 2019-20 fiscal year and the member opposite is speaking about Question Period today about topical issues. I would ask him respectfully to keep his comments and criticisms to the bill that we are debating.

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

Mr. Cathers: I made one very brief reference to a pattern of secrecy and referenced Question Period today. I believe that it was contextually relevant and not a greater departure in the budget speech than has been past practice in this Legislative Assembly, including by the Premier himself, who has often taken a bit of a wandering path to get to making his point here in debate. Sometimes he has fallen into the ditch on the way there.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: The preferred narrative of the Member for Lake Laberge with respect to this budget debate on Bill No. 204 — I don't disagree. I think that there is a context. It's certainly not the subject — what occurred in Question Period today is really not the subject matter of the budget debate on third reading of Bill No. 204, but you do have some ability to back up the narrative that you are putting forward. You have some latitude to do that, yes.

Mr. Cathers: Again, fundamentally, our largest concern with this budget is not just the fact that government had a record-high budget for the year and then went beyond it and broke the law in doing so. The excuse provided by the Premier is that he is not the first person to break the law.

Unparliamentary language

Speaker: Order, please. That word — I think that we have to deal with this at this time because I anticipate that it is likely going to occur in further debate over the course of the next 35 days. Accusing another member of breaking the law is unparliamentary language and is therefore out of order.

Chairs in the past have ruled on this matter a number of times. A recent example can be found in the Chair of Committee of the Whole's statement of April 25, 2012. In that example, the Chair said — and I quote: "Compliance with acts passed by this Legislature is an important issue for this House. Members must have the opportunity to pursue that line of questioning, if they believe compliance is absent or incomplete. At the same time, members have to keep in mind that the Assembly is not a court of law and that the House does not have that authority, or the appropriate processes, to determine whether an individual has broken the law."

"Reminding a member that he or she has a duty to uphold the law is in order. Citing instances where a law is not being complied with, in the opinion of a member, is also an order. However, it is not in order to inject into debate a direct accusation that a member has broken the law."

"If a member wishes to make a charge against another member, he or she must do so by way of a substantive motion for which notice is required."

I would, therefore, ask members to refrain from using that term during the debate going forward.

Withdrawal of remark

Mr. Cathers: If I phrased that in an unparliamentary manner, as you've indicated, that certainly was not my intent. I will rephrase that in a manner that I hope will reflect your ruling, which is that the Premier himself acknowledged that the government's actions did not comply with the *Financial Administration Act*.

Speaker: That's fine. That seems to be consistent with the position that I've taken.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, again, the Premier has acknowledged that the government's actions did not fully follow the *Financial Administration Act*, and it is our job to ask about that, but that overspending is not even our primary concern. The primary concern is the lack of accountability and the fact that — in dealing with not only the pandemic but debate during this Sitting of the Legislative Assembly — now that we've finally resumed sitting after seven months, it appears, in my view, that the government is largely using a pandemic as an excuse for not being open and accountable and hoping that people are paying attention to other things, rather than reading the news, listening to the radio, and asking the question: "Why won't the government provide that information?" Ultimately, we believe that this is not an acceptable reason for not providing that information.

If government's spending decisions, mis-budgeting decisions, or areas where they had intended something to happen and were unable to follow through — if those are embarrassing to government, that's part of democracy. Being open about what worked and what didn't and taking your lumps if you are in a situation where the public is critical of government overspending — that's not always pleasant, but it is the job of every Cabinet minister, if they've made a mistake, to own up to it and, if they believe that circumstances simply

exceeded their original projections, to be open with the public about what happened, why it happened, when decisions were made, and why they were made.

If the government wants to reflect on whether they would do things differently another time, that, of course, is fair game. It is also our job — and we will continue to do so — to analyze where we believe the government has made mistakes and where we would do things differently, including the fact that we would certainly be more open with the public about expenditures than the government is choosing to be.

It is unfortunate that — whether it be this budget or the pattern of issuing dozens of ministerial orders without consultations that are affecting people's lives — there seems to be a casually autocratic attitude on the part of this government. They don't like hearing it here in the Legislative Assembly, but what they are failing to recognize is that people out in the Yukon who are being affected by these decisions like it even less. People's lives are being affected by government spending, by government not spending, and by decisions being made through ministerial orders.

As I mentioned during debate previously, the details of a ministerial order can mean the difference between a business pulling through the pandemic and not. The same can apply to government spending, whether it is in this budget bill or the next one that we will be debating. Unfortunately, we are seeing the government batten down the hatches, refuse to provide the breakdown, and claim that it is unreasonable for us to even ask.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up here in debate. I am sure that — unless the Premier has suddenly taken a hard look in the mirror, had an epiphany, and decided to be more accountable — we are going to see him provide excuses but not provide a breakdown. It is important to note, as I did earlier, that, in the supplementary estimates, the Premier downplayed increased spending and minimized it — in my view — hoping that people would not read the total amount and do calculations on it, but if we look at the two budget bills combined, we see the additional \$7.6 million in this budget bill along with an increase of \$114.8 million in the next budget bill, which — in these two bills — is a \$122.4-million increase in government spending — both spending that has happened and projected spending — since the spring of this year. If you compare that on a person-by-person basis for the Yukon population, that relates to over \$3,000 in increased spending per person in the territory.

While we do not disagree that some spending was necessary, we believe that ultimately government has an obligation to be transparent with the public about what it spent their money on and why — and unfortunately, that is not what we've seen from this Premier and this Liberal government.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on third reading of Bill No. 204?

If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard on third reading debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I was trying to be brief, but I will have to address some of the ridiculous diatribe that we just heard from the member opposite.

I hope the member opposite has the courage to ask the questions that he asked in general debate on a 2019-20 budgetary item about the current budget when we have that opportunity — when the departments are here with all of the information that Yukoners need to have. I hope he does have that courage because what we have seen him doing the whole time is continuing to ask questions in general debate that he really knows are better asked through the departments. Then to complete his narrative — if his narrative were to be completed, it would be “See, I told you. They were unaccountable; they didn't answer the questions.”

He just finished up his statement by saying that we spent all this money this summer but we're not going to be accountable and we're not going to answer the questions. I don't know if he predicts the future or not, but we will have an opportunity here in this Legislative Assembly as we sit for 45 days — the longest session in known Yukon history, as far as I understand — to answer those questions. There will be an opportunity — absolutely. That's us being open and transparent. We are here in the Legislative Assembly to do that work.

Now, the member opposite can spend days in general debate asking those questions that should be asked of the departments and then say, “There you go; they didn't answer the questions.” He could do that all day long if he wants — and he has — however, a better use of the Legislative Assembly, in my opinion, is to ask those questions when he knows that not only would the member opposite get a specific answer to the direct question of a financial line item but also a comprehensive breakdown of those dollars — of exactly what those dollars are for.

So, I hope that he does have the courage to ask those questions where they're appropriately supposed to be answered; I really do hope so. We'll see; time will tell.

We also hear him saying something along the lines of a “shell game” for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter in budgets for this year. Again, we had that conversation in general debate for last year's budget for a supplementary budget of two departments where we did tell him exactly what the breakdown was for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter money that was allocated in this supplementary budget for that expense. No shell game — we told him — I told him in general debate and the Minister of Health and Social Services expanded upon that in the department.

But all of a sudden, people are telling him in the parking lot — people are saying that there is some kind of shell game going on. Again, if that is not imputing false or unavowed motives, I don't know. “Somebody in the parking lot told me something — there's a shell game going on.” That's democracy at its finest, Mr. Speaker — and research at its finest as well.

Let's move on to —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: I said I would review Hansard on that topic and I will return. If there is another issue, I will hear the Member

for Lake Laberge, but it will require a review of what was said 20 minutes or so ago.

Mr. Cathers: There are two things. I think that the Premier is contravening Standing Order 19(i) in his use of language; also, he seems to be directly challenging your ruling on Standing Order 19(g) by debating the ruling after the fact. Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to call him to order for that and remind him that, if we can't debate your rulings after the fact, neither can the Premier.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: It's a bit more complicated than that because there hasn't been a ruling yet, but I agree with your position that it is not of great utility for the Premier at this time to return back 20 minutes to the exchange that occurred at that point. I did tell the House that I would review it and return at the earliest opportunity.

With respect to Standing Order 19(i), the Premier is being critical and providing a different narrative, but I think that — right now — what I have heard so far is likely still just a dispute between members.

The Honourable Premier, please.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will keep on going here. Another comment that I wanted to go back to was where the member opposite was talking about lapses in the complete 2019-20 budget and saying that, because in general debate we didn't comment on these lapses, somehow again we are not being open, and somehow by not having that dialogue in general debate before the Public Accounts come into the Legislative Assembly to determine the lapses or lack thereof — that this is somehow us being not open or not transparent. Again, Mr. Speaker, it's just one of those narratives where the member opposite believes that if he says it enough to himself or in the Legislature or in social media, it becomes true. Well, I think Yukoners deserve a little bit more than that.

They deserve to know exactly where lapses will be recorded and where there will be continuing debate once those Public Accounts get tabled here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly in due process.

Again, the members opposite are trying to — I don't know if it's clever or not, but they are trying to make it seem like if I ask all of our questions here when they don't have that information through the process yet — and of course there is a lengthy process there through Management Board and with the Office of the Auditor General, and then it gets tabled and all that information will be there, open and accountable to the public. The members opposite will make it seem — because they're getting ahead of that process — that we didn't answer those questions on lapses and that means that their narrative is correct. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm here standing in the Legislative Assembly to tell you that it is not correct. That is not how it works, and the members opposite know that.

I will move on a bit here. The supplementary estimates enable us to make changes — even at the very late end of the fiscal year — which are required to meet the needs of Yukoners

and to deliver on those expected services in unexpected circumstances. Never has it been more important than in the onset of the pandemic that we continue to live through today. Supplementary estimates enable us to take the necessary steps to keep Yukoners safe while responding quickly to the needs articulated by our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to briefly acknowledge and respond to some other questions as well that we have heard in the Legislative Assembly throughout the last few days in debate on Bill No. 204 — raised by the opposition members.

With respect to the lack of public consultation with businesses, parents, and discussions about mental health, while this criticism largely pertains to debate on *Supplementary Estimates No. 1*, the government has engaged broadly with the public several times since the very onset of the pandemic. This includes engagements around education, NGOs, and community well-being. It also includes weekly government-to-government discussions with First Nation governments and Yukon communities. We also meet with the business advisory and tourism advisory committees made up of those businesses most affected by the pandemic. In total, there have been hundreds of meetings with stakeholders over the past seven months.

Mr. Speaker, we have also heard that the government was slow to recognize the pandemic — from the Official Opposition. Yukon's response to COVID-19 was as timely as other jurisdictions across Canada. On the guidance of the chief medical officer of health, we ramped up our response following the cancellation of the Arctic Winter Games on March 7.

Just one week later, we announced early support measures, including: approval to establish a sick-leave program that the nation is considering; establishing a grant program to address cancelled events; enhancing the tourism cooperative marketing fund; waiving, reimbursing, or delaying fees to stimulate business activity and relieve business losses; and other economic responses as well. These programs began to roll out at the end of March. As recently as today, hearing that it took 200 days to respond to the crisis — again, just a false narrative.

I would like to also thank the members for their contributions in debate for this bill. I would like to also acknowledge and thank opposition members for the concerns that they have raised during debate. While I believe that we have responded to the concerns based upon the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for 2019-20, I would once again like to issue an invitation to members to revisit some of the questions, like the lapses — ask once the Public Accounts are tabled later on this month.

I would like to close debate of this bill and move on, now that we have passed third reading.

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.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. White: Disagree.

Ms. Hanson: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yea, eight nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 204 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 204 has passed this House.

The time being 5:31 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:31 p.m.

The following legislative returns were tabled October 20, 2020:

34-3-36

Response to Written Question No. 6 re: expropriations of placer and quartz mining claims (Pillai)

34-3-37

Response to Written Question No. 7 re: Yukon resource gateway spending (Pillai)

34-3-38

Response to Written Question No. 10 re: land withdrawals and staking bans (Pillai)

34-3-39

Response to oral question from Mr. Kent re: Ross River School remediation — bat infestation (Mostyn)