



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 85

3rd Session

34th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, March 4, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2021 Spring Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

Yukon Liberal Party

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
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Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, March 4, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

I would like to begin the 2021 Spring Sitting of the Legislative Assembly by respectfully acknowledging all Yukon First Nations and also that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

At this time, we will proceed with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper as they are outdated: Motions No. 273, 298, 305, and 331 and Motion for the Production of Papers No. 18, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre; Motion No. 232 and Motion for the Production of Papers No. 17, standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party; Motions No. 338 and 384, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North; Motion No. 301, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake; Motions No. 380 and 395, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge; Motion No. 365, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt North; and Motion No. 354, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek Centre.

The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as the actions requested in the motions have been taken in whole or in part: Motion No. 2, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek Centre; Motions No. 246 and 363, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge; Motions No. 227 and 364, standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party; Motion No. 369, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake; Motion No. 328, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre; and Motion No. 62, standing in the name of the Member for Kluane.

Motion No. 220, standing in the name of the Member for Kluane, was removed from the Order Paper as it was an exact duplicate of Motion No. 189.

Finally, Motion No. 403, notice of which was given on December 22, 2020, by the Member for Porter Creek Centre, was not placed on today's Notice Paper because the motion is outdated.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. Frost: Mr. Speaker, it is my absolute honour and pleasure today to introduce shah Gwich'in kat, shoh ihlih — I'm happy to see you here today to honour your son, your father, husband, nephew — Darius' mother, Norma Kassi, Jolene, Johnny — Darius' beautiful son — and his beautiful

wife, Tina, and my dear cousin and awesome brother, Danny. Thank you for being here for the family. Tookie, Arthur — it is awesome to see you here. Thank you for being here — of course, Dwight, for being here with Heather today and supporting her — mahsi' cho — and, of course, none other than the former chief of the Tahltan Nation and a really good friend to Darius Elias. Mahsi'.

Applause

Ms. White: In the gallery today, we have a friend of mine, Sylvie Salomon, who is here to witness today's proceedings and to be here to honour her son Max. Welcome.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Could we please welcome to the gallery today a constituent, Mr. Terry Sherman?

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would like to also welcome Mr. Mike Pemberton to the gallery today. Thank you very much, all of you, for coming. To see Darius' family and loved ones here is a great honour. Mēduh.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Darius Elias

Hon. Ms. Frost: On behalf of my Liberal colleagues and my community, I rise to pay my highest respects and honour to our sijaa, the late Darius Patrick Elias, who went on to dance in the spirit world with his ancestors on February 17, 2021.

Darius was born on March 17, 1972, to Norma Kassi and Vern Marion. He was a proud citizen of Vuntut Gwitchin and had strong ties to his father's people in the Tahltan Nation. Let's not forget that he was very well loved and respected by his extended family in Old Crow, Teslin, Northwest Territories, and far beyond.

To his stepdads, Jerry and Tookie, mahsi' cho for lending your hand in raising a wonderful man. Darius was affectionately described by his mother, Norma, as a born leader. He was charismatic, funny, and an all-around solid friend to many. He was incredibly passionate about spending time with family, sharing his knowledge and cultural ways of life, protecting the land and caribou, and of course those who knew Darius knew his love of hockey.

From a very young age, he was taught the traditional Gwich'in way of life from his beloved grandmother, the late Elder Mary Elias Gwahtl'ah Ti'. These two had a very special bond. As the firstborn grandchild, it was he whom she taught to look after the land and live off the land. I can hear her saying "Shi boy, gwinzii nan k'anyahtih." These teachings guided him forward in his chosen profession as a park warden and later in his career in politics.

These sacred teachings, spirituality, and his love of the land are truly what guided him and kept him grounded, even through his many challenges and adversities in life. His passion

and the teachings of his mother's people were passed down to his children and many youth of our community. Until his passing, he continued to teach these values of integrity and respect to the next generation. Get up early, work hard, be quick, be respectful, be careful what you think, be careful what you say, keep things clean, always give something back, and lastly, don't be greedy with your meat and share your harvest, especially with the elders and the single mothers.

His commitment to helping people lived at his very core. Whether it be sharing his harvest, helping youth, or advocating for the protection of the Porcupine caribou herd with international and global leaders, Darius was a voice to be reckoned with. He spoke with passion and dignity on matters of importance to him and his people, the Vuntut Gwitchin. His final words to the youth would end with — and I quote: “Niganaiinlyaa k'it tanihee — follow your dreams.”

He truly did it all and was always for the people. When Darius was asked to do something, there were no questions asked. In his early years, straight out of high school, he was introduced to our land claims process by two seasoned and dedicated mentors, Stanley Njootli Sr. and Stephen Mills. Both can attest to this motivation and his zest for knowledge, never shying away from those difficult conversations or the difficult tasks before him.

Darius loved the land he walked on, the mountain tops he hiked to. Through his connection as a park warden in the mountains of Kluane Park, he developed a strong passion for sheep. Divii chii kak nadhat — the one standing on the big rock. This was fitting because this was his Gwich'in name.

Along with his dedication in working for his people, he made many friends along the way and formed many special bonds that lasted a lifetime, including many of us here in this Chamber today.

Darius leaves to mourn his beautiful children: Rachel, Heather, Bohdi, and Johnny, their mothers, Tina and Mary, and his grandchildren, Mary, Trapper, and Nashton. Always thinking ahead, even before the children could walk, they were gifted their first pair of skates. Darius passed along his love of hockey and, equally so, the traditional knowledge he learned from his jijuu to those he loved.

For all his children, the yearly vacations they looked forward to were always at fish camp or hiking on mountaintops hunting sheep or travelling his beloved Dempster Highway searching for vadzaih or getting ready to head to Old Crow Flats to spend time on the land. Darius truly showed up for his family and embraced his nieces and nephews as his own. He supported, taught, and raised them to be proud and strong. In the same way, he loved and cared and protected his siblings: Rosetta Jolene, Chrystal, Denise, Jenny, Kayne, Kory, Kelso, Shelby, Shiloh, and Yudii.

Darius so loved all children and youth and was always making someone laugh, driving them to hockey practice, coaching, and especially this time of year, gearing up for the most important time: the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament. In fact, my good colleague, Minister McLean, assures me that he could be found making rosters and giving the executive

unwanted grey hairs doing his many trades and setting up his teams, sometimes months in advance.

Darius would coach, manage, and play and was integral in the North Yukon Eagles, Gwich'in Braves, and Gwich'in Spitfires. It didn't matter which team was playing; Darius was there to support, and all for the love of the kids. He believed in strong and healthy competition and truly recognized the importance of sport and physical activity and how important it was for young people to learn the values and principles of sportsmanship.

Leadership was always a part of who Darius was, and he took the values and the various roles he had very seriously. The one he held with the highest honour was his time in the Legislative Assembly from 2006 to 2016, when he served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Vuntut Gwitchin riding. I took my seat in this Chamber in 2016 as the MLA for the Yukon Liberal government, following on the heels of a giant, our friend and our colleague, Darius Elias. I am eternally grateful for the years Darius committed to his people and making his community a priority.

He was larger than life and touched so many people on life's journey, be it in the political career, sports, hockey, as a youth advocate or in the protection of our beloved caribou on the international stage. His voice resonated with pride as he spoke of his grandmother's teachings and the teachings that she shared with him at Zelma Lake in Old Crow Flats.

Darius was an amazing, influential, and loving leader who was always guided by the old ways. I am lucky to say that Darius was a mentor and guide to many of us. He blazed the trail for us to follow.

The Creator took you too soon. Like others, I too will miss you, especially your presence in the gallery, the odd times you would drop in to quietly observe me in action, mainly to see if I was doing my part to represent shah Gwich'in kat. As you silently observed and watched, I am reminded that dinjii naai datthak eenjit t'igwii'in — we do this for our people.

He will always be, to many of us, yiinjihidhoh'eh — highly respected — and we will now know him as our zheekat Gwich'in. Gwinzii gwitr'it gwadhanhtsaii — you did a good job — now rest easy. You are a warrior who led with empathy and passion and fought for your community. You were a part of the land and a part of the water, and to that you will return.

On behalf of our Gwitchin family, mahsi' cho to all of you for your love and support. If he were here with us now, he would remind us to Adik'anootih — take good care of yourself. Mahsi'.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister Frost. That was a beautiful tribute.

I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to our esteemed colleague and friend, Darius Elias. There really are no words to describe the overwhelming helplessness many of us felt when faced with the news of Darius' passing. He was far too young to leave us. The adjectives to describe this young man are dynamic, energetic, intelligent, and generous. To add further to describing him, he

was a passionate advocate and champion for his riding, his people, and his community.

Darius was the son of Norma Kassi, who was a former MLA for the same riding for Vuntut Gwitchin and a strong advocate for rights for her people in the north. Politics was obviously in his blood, as he decided to seek election in 2006. For 10 years, until 2016, Darius represented Vuntut Gwitchin as their MLA. During this time in office, he worked on many committees and was also Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole. He worked diligently and constantly for Old Crow.

After this time, he returned to his community, where he was elected deputy chief for his First Nation. This past June, Darius decided to retire from political life. But that didn't mean he was not going to continue to help. Throughout his years as a politician and as a spokesperson for his First Nation, he was passionate about the land, the animals, and the culture. As the modern world of change creeps to Old Crow, Darius was very active with the "protect the Porcupine caribou herd" campaign. He would expound on how these animals needed to be protected for the current and future generations as a vital food and clothing supply. He spoke well and often about the caribou, the river, the salmon, the flats, and all his people — especially the youth and the elders.

Darius worked across borders for all Gwich'in voices — Yukon, Alaska, and NWT — and people listened. His love of sports was contagious. He not only played, but he encouraged others to be involved in traditional games, as well as his beloved hockey. He gave it his all and he enjoyed the challenge and the friendships he made along the way.

A Gwich'in man who loved his dancing, jigging, and traditions, his moccasined feet would fly across the floor as the fiddles and the guitars played for hours. The beauty of the square dances and the jigs that everyone, young and old, participated in is certainly something to see.

That ready smile that lit up his face and his sense of humour were also legendary. He was always looking for the bright side, and even when life got serious, Darius made sure that everyone was taken care of and then he would try to lighten the mood. It was his way.

We send our sincere condolences to his wife — my cousin, Tina — his children, his mother, and extended family. Words are never enough when someone is taken from us. But we remember, we share stories, and we honour him. During these current times when we cannot properly gather and mourn as a community of the whole Yukon, it's equally sad. I don't think there's a place big enough, though, to hold all who would come from near and far to show their respect and care for those who are left.

As advice given to a newly elected person, Darius once said, "Always stay true to the people who elected you." The people who elected him have such a passion for their land, their families, and their language. The Vuntut Gwitchin are proud people and they welcome anyone who comes to their village with kindness and sharing. I have experienced this wonder, and when you leave, they say, "Come back."

As we experience death — the rituals and grief — each culture or family has their traditions and wishes to honour and organize their loved one's passing. I know that these past couple of weeks have been so emotional and hard to comprehend. Now, make sure that you take time to grieve and know when to reach out to talk. We share in your grief and we want you to know that Darius filled the days spent in this Chamber with his presence and his love of life, and we were blessed with having known him.

Go Flyers, go. Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Ms. White: Today, I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP to offer our thanks, respect, and admiration of Darius Elias — a man who lived his life to the fullest. Like any of those who had the good fortune of crossing paths with Darius, we were deeply saddened to hear of his passing. Darius loved his family, his friends, his community, the Porcupine caribou herd, and hockey.

Anyone who heard him speak in this Chamber knew that, when he rose to speak, you would be hard-pressed to not pay attention. He was a great orator. He would bring you along for the ride no matter what he was speaking about. But if it was about home, you could smell the river, hear the birds, and feel the breeze on your face through his words. When he shared his stories of the caribou, his eloquence could transport you along so that you could feel the vibrations of thousands of hooves as he described being surrounded by thousands of caribou, and you felt the awe that he felt. I know that I wasn't the only one brought to tears by his stories.

Just as Darius believed passionately about the importance of preserving the Porcupine caribou, he was equally eloquent when it came to his passion for sports. As an avid hockey player, he took a keen interest in making sure that all Yukon youth benefited from the health and well-being that active living presents.

Over the course of his time in this Assembly, he led a one-man crusade seeking government action to limit the sale of caffeinated energy drinks to kids, citing the serious documented adverse effects. He was relentless in pressing government to do the right thing, to stop the marketing of highly caffeinated drinks to youth. Someday, I hope that we in this Legislature will pass legislation recognizing his efforts to ensure the health and well-being of youth and to prevent marketing that targets their vulnerability.

Mr. Speaker, I was always delighted to spend time in Old Crow and see Darius in his place. I got to watch him interact and share his love with those around him, along with a lot of jigging, a lot of smiles, and a lot of laughing — because when Darius was laughing, he was never alone.

On one trip, he took me up Crow Mountain on a four-wheeler — which was kind of a funny story because, as you might imagine, he and I had never sat quite that close before and it started out with me trying to figure out where to put my legs and where they should go. Then I didn't quite know what to do with my hands, but he solved that problem by gunning the engine. He made so much fun of me when I nearly fell off —

which I deserved, because you obviously need to hang onto the person who is driving if there is nowhere else to hang on. He laughed and I laughed — and because we all know that his laughter was contagious, it was a very funny ride. He was kind and funny as he told me stories up the mountain.

Over the past short while since Darius' passing, we too have keenly listened and read the many stories that folks have been sharing. As these stories and thoughts are shared, together we are getting a more complete picture of the legend that is Darius Elias. Anything he did, he did it 100 percent, with his entire heart. He advocated for those who couldn't advocate for themselves. He stood up for his people, his community, and his family and for what he believed in. He left us too soon.

Rest in power, Darius.

Applause

Speaker: Would members and members of the gallery who are able please rise for a moment of silence in remembrance of Darius Elias?

Moment of silence observed

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling the *Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sitzings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees* dated March 4, 2021. This report is tabled pursuant to the direction of the Members' Services Board.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Mr. Cathers: I have several documents for tabling. First is a letter to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources dated February 16, 2021, entitled "Shallow Bay are proposed zoning — problems with the process".

Secondly, I have a letter to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources dated February 18, 2021, entitled "Potential impact of a 60-metre buffer from Horse Creek on Grizzly Valley homes".

I also have for tabling a letter to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources dated February 25, 2021, entitled "Potential impact of a 60-metre Riparian Buffer from the Takhini River" and a letter to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources dated March 2, 2021, entitled "Potential impact of a 60-metre riparian buffer from the Yukon River".

Finally, I have for tabling a letter to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources dated March 3, 2021, entitled "Negative Financial Impact of the Shallow Bay Zoning Proposal".

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

Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Mr. Adel: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling the *Twenty-fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Major Government*

Boards and Committees dated January 25, 2021, and the committee's 25th report dated February 29, 2021.

Speaker: Are there any further reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 206: *Third Appropriation Act 2020-21* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 206, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2020-21*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 206, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2020-21*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 206 agreed to

Bill No. 207: *First Appropriation Act 2021-22* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 207, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 207, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 207 agreed to

Bill No. 208: *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2021-22* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 208, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2021-22*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 208, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2021-22*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 208 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills for introduction?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to abandon the government's plans to impose a 60-metre no-development riparian buffer on titled property beginning with titled land in the Shallow Bay zoning area.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to respect the long-standing practice of ensuring that changes to zoning regulations provide new opportunities to some land owners and protect the current legal rights of all land owners instead of picking winners and losers, as the proposed zoning for Shallow Bay would do.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to visit farmers, greenhouses, and tourism businesses that would be negatively impacted by his plans to develop Stevens Quarry to gain a better understanding of those impacts before proceeding with any additional steps toward his goal.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to follow the BC government's leadership and put in place a residential rent freeze until December 31, 2021.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to reaffirm that long-term care in Yukon will remain a public, not-for-profit service and that Yukon will not license or fund for-profit long-term care.

I also give notice the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to take immediate action to ensure that proper fire protection is available in all Yukon communities.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to respect the spirit and intent of both the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* with respect to free prior and informed consent, as well as the land use planning process set out in chapter 11 of the *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement* by acceding to the January 26, 2021 request from the Dawson land use planning commission that mineral exploration not be permitted in the land use planning area, pending the finalization of the plan because "... decisions made prior to the completion of a land use plan may impact the commission's ability to develop recommendations for the appropriate use of land, water, and other renewable and non-renewable resources within the planning region..."

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to consult with parents, students, the Yukon Teachers' Association, Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and Autism Yukon prior to implementing any proposed policy decisions that remove a student's ability to access individualized education plans as prescribed in the *Education Act*.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works to pause all work related to the Alaska Highway upgrades through the Porter Creek corridor in order to fully consult with residents and business owners potentially affected by these upgrades.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motions?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Government of Yukon borrowing limit

Mr. Cathers: In October 2018, I asked the Premier questions about the debt cap and whether his government was planning to seek an increase to it to allow them to borrow money.

The Premier repeatedly told the Assembly that he had no interest in increasing the debt cap. On October 2, 2018, he said this: "I'll just say up front that we are not contemplating taking on any extra debt for our five-year capital plan." He also said: "... I don't think the member opposite is paying attention to it — that we are not contemplating borrowing."

Now we know that, just nine days after that, the Premier wrote to the federal Finance minister and asked him to double the debt limit to \$800 million. So, it would appear that the Premier misled the Assembly.

Can the Premier explain this, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Mr. Silver: What I can say to the Legislative Assembly is that responsible borrowing is absolutely part of strong fiscal management. It helps with the preservation of capital, liquidity on management, and also return on investments.

The Yukon government's current borrowing limit is at \$800 million, which was set by regulations under the *Yukon Act*, which is federal legislation. The limit was increased by the Government of Canada in September 2020 from \$400 million to \$800 million. This was accomplished through an amendment to the *Yukon Act* regulations. That debt limit was raised for all three territories at the same time. This debt limit increase allows for more financial flexibility that may be needed in the future to support a growing economy and steadily transition to a clean energy future.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard this question from the members opposite before. The debt limit has been raised by the Yukon Party on a few occasions as well. I don't recall them ever looking for legislative authority to do so in the past. We are happy to see that the debt limit has increased. Again, we use it for corporations, as the members opposite did — the Yukon Development Corporation, the Yukon Energy Corporation, the Yukon Housing Corporation, and the Yukon Hospital Corporation — to currently access a modest amount of borrowing room available in order to deliver their programs and their mandates.

I am happy to answer further questions from the member opposite.

Mr. Cathers: Well, we know that the Premier is happy with the double debt limit because he asked for it.

For years, the Premier denied having any interest in increasing the debt cap. When the debt cap was doubled to \$800 million, he pointed to the federal government and tried to deny responsibility. Now we have learned that the Premier himself actually wrote a letter to the federal government on

October 11, 2018, asking for the debt cap to be raised. Previously, on October 24, 2017, was another time when the Premier denied wanting to increase the debt cap. Here is what he said then: “These are some tough decisions to be made moving forward, but to answer the member opposite’s question: Have we touched the debt cap? No. Do we want to? No, we don’t want to. We want to make sure that we work inside of our means...”

Yet, Mr. Speaker, he turned around and did the opposite when he wrote to the federal minister to say — and I quote: “...I would like to request that our limit is raised to \$800 million.” Why did the Premier mislead the House?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I’m not misleading the House at all. I do want to live within our means — absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Yukon has an AA credit rating from Standard & Poor’s Global. The debt limit increase does not mean that the government has incurred or will incur that debt itself. Four of the corporations account for the bulk of the current total debt. That current total debt is \$228.4 million, as reported in the 2019-20 Public Accounts: Yukon Development Corporation, \$166.2 million; Yukon Hospital Corporation, \$29.8 million; Yukon Housing Corporation, \$2.2 million; and Yukon College, \$1 million.

We could ask members opposite who incurred most of this debt, and the answer would be the Yukon Party.

Now, we do have a debt increase to \$800 million. We have talked about how we are approaching an energy cliff, and we also have a 10-year plan from the Yukon Energy Corporation. Again, if we increase this limit, that’s one thing. The debt that is on the books so far — the majority of that debt is from the Yukon Party.

Mr. Cathers: As the Premier well knows, the government was using about half of the previous limit, but the Premier asked for that to be doubled. This is despite the Premier repeatedly telling the Assembly that he had no interest in touching the debt gap, but he secretly wrote to the federal minister and asked for that to be doubled.

He told the House this on October 2, 2018: “I’ll just say up front that we’re not contemplating taking on any extra debt for our five-year capital plan...” and that “... we are not contemplating borrowing.” But in his letter of October 11, 2018, he says this: “... I would like to request that our limit is raised for \$800 million. This will be sufficient to address our capital requirements for the next few years.” This is the opposite of what he has told the Legislative Assembly and Yukon citizens.

Can the Premier offer an explanation for how this situation could possibly be anything other than a choice by him to deliberately mislead the House?

Speaker’s statement

Speaker: The Member for Lake Laberge knows well that is not appropriate, and he will refrain in the future from using the final words that he just did.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, reasonable borrowing is absolutely a part of strong fiscal management. We have the

lowest borrowing so far of all three territories. The majority of that borrowing was done under the previous government’s hand. We have a current borrowing limit of \$800 million. The member opposite would have you believe that we were not vocal about the fact that the borrowing limit was increased.

We’ve been up in the Legislative Assembly many times talking about that increase. Talking about increasing your borrowing limit is not necessarily spending that debt. We’ve also talked about how, yes, we want to live inside of our means — absolutely. We are working with the federal government when it comes to climate change to see if we have alternatives — maybe there is federal funding. There are two mandates for climate change — the federal government’s and ours — that are very closely assimilated. COP21 in Paris — the Paris accord — there are some massive energy incentives on the horizon. We would love to look at a myriad of different ways of working with the federal government, and hopefully the First Nation governments as well, to make sure that we get off of this energy cliff.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we increased the debt limit. It was the Yukon Party that increased the majority of the debt that is currently on the books as we sit here and speak. That increase, again, was from the Yukon Party — a couple of different times with no legislative oversight, but now they are saying that we need the legislative oversight.

Question re: Yukon First Nation procurement policy

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, last December, the Minister of Highways and Public Works told this House that he had conducted extensive consultations with the business community on the First Nation procurement policy. He even claimed that he had conducted one-on-one consultations with businesses before announcing the policy, yet he was unable to tell us a single company that he had actually spoken to. Since that time, the Yukon Contractors Association has written a letter to the minister indicating that the government did not consult the business community.

Mr. Speaker, why did the minister misrepresent the views and level of consultation that took place with industry?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I’m happy to talk about the issue of First Nation procurement on the floor of the House this afternoon. It was in 1993, Mr. Speaker, that the conservative Yukon Party leader, John Ostashek, signed the *Umbrella Final Agreement* with Dave Keenan, Robert Hager, and Judy Gingell. They signed the agreement to make sure that we made good and brought the First Nations into our economy — chapter 22, Mr. Speaker. For 27 years, our First Nations have been waiting to be part of the Yukon economy, and this government this year has taken that step and brought them in through the First Nation procurement policy. We worked government-to-government with the First Nations for the first time to bring that policy into play. We worked respectfully with it. We informed the business community that this was happening. We have improved procurement consistently since we came to office, and we have worked very, very tirelessly to create relationships throughout the territory with our business

community and with our First Nations. We are working together, Mr. Speaker. This is in stark contrast with the acrimony and lawsuits that we've seen in the past. I'm happy to talk about this further.

Mr. Hassard: But actually, today we are talking about this minister's mishandling of this file and misrepresentations of the views of industry, which is unfortunately a reoccurring behaviour for him. You will remember that, back in 2017, the minister made false claims in this House and to Yukoners that he had consulted the aviation industry on the airports act, but he was later forced to take the embarrassing step of completely retracting that statement and even deleting the press release from the government's website because it simply wasn't true.

Now we are seeing the minister mishandle yet another important file and misrepresent the views of industry once again. It has actually gotten so bad that we are now receiving reports from contractors that Liberal MLAs and ministers have started to disparage and blame this minister for his mishandling of this file.

So, will the minister admit that he messed up and apologize for falsely claiming that he consulted industry on this policy?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I disagree with the preamble that the member opposite has just presented on the floor of the House this afternoon. Our government has built strong, respectful government-to-government relationships with Yukon First Nations to foster reconciliation. That is what we are doing. We are creating economic reconciliation with our First Nation partners. We are currently and have been since the policy was signed at the Yukon Forum — which we have handled consistently since coming into office. We have held 16 First Nation Yukon Forums, and because of that work and because of the relationships that we have built with Yukon First Nations, we have managed to sign agreements in Liard, Ross River, Carmacks, Dawson, and Mayo-Tatchun. We have signed these agreements because the First Nations trust and respect the work that our governments are doing together, and so they have managed to do this. Those agreements, Mr. Speaker, including the Teslin bridge, have brought more than \$430 million of new money into the territorial economy, benefiting all businesses and benefiting all citizens. That is the bigger pie that we are talking about when we work together, and that is what we are going to continue to do.

Mr. Hassard: Again, we see no answer from the minister.

Now, we know that he has developed a reputation of fighting with industry and misrepresenting their views and the level of consultation that has taken place. As we have said, this isn't the first time that this minister has been caught providing inaccurate information on important government files. Not only has he alienated industry, he has now started to alienate his own party, as members of his own Cabinet and caucus are complaining to constituents about him.

The economic recovery of this territory requires a team and competent leadership. Now it's clear that, due to the minister's mishandling of this file, the government is no longer a team.

So, will the Premier show competent leadership and remove this minister from Cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I vehemently disagree with the characterizations made by the Leader of the Official Opposition this afternoon. It seems that the Yukon Party can't help but stoke division in our territory; we've seen it for years. We have seen it on the Peel. We have seen it in the legal cases that they have lost. We see it in the inability of them to build the Teslin bridge in 2014, and here they are now — they're trying to stoke division in this team. Well, this team is united, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues and I have worked so hard together, and I will stand shoulder to shoulder with them any day.

Currie Dixon was the architect of the failed Peel plan and landed the Yukon Party government in Supreme Court, where they lost. The Yukon Party approach to First Nations is animosity and litigation, Mr. Speaker. We have a different approach. We have a different way. We are working together for the benefit of all. I have been working with the business community since early January, working on the implementation of this plan — that those talks are fruitful — and now we have decided to extend the procurement execution until the beginning of October. That's so we can work together and foster the relationships that this government thrives on. The benefits are already being seen by the business community — \$430 million of new money in the Yukon economy that Yukon contractors are bidding on right now.

Question re: Minimum wage

Ms. White: A few weeks ago, the government announced that it was rejecting a \$1.24 increase to Yukon's minimum wage — the recommendation that came from Yukon's Employment Standards Board, an independent board made up of representatives from Yukon workers and employers. Instead, the minimum wage will go up by only 14 cents to \$13.85 an hour.

So, I have a simple question for the Premier: Does the Premier believe that it's possible to live on a salary of \$13.85 anywhere in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, we have followed all the letters that we got directing us on the minimum wage from the Employment Standards Board. I'm not sure — there seems to be some misunderstanding about it. Since we've been here, the minimum wage has gone up by about \$2 and 70-some cents — I think around a 20-percent or 25-percent increase over the past several years.

There's a living wage as well, and we've closed the gap with the living wage by about \$2.50 — nearly \$3. The minimum wage is not the living wage; they are different things completely.

I'm happy to answer further questions, but we continue to take the recommendations that have come from the Employment Standards Board. Their last recommendation to us was that, this year, the minimum wage would go up by the cost of living, which it will do on April 1.

Ms. White: Sadly, within all of those words, I didn't hear an answer as to whether or not you could survive on \$13.85 an hour.

This Liberal government's decision to scrap a \$1.10 increase to the minimum wage is a textbook example of their approach to consultation. They asked an independent board made up of business and work representatives to review the minimum wage, but they didn't like what they heard, so they commissioned a different report that would tell them just what they wanted to hear. Workers and businesses know that a living wage benefits everyone. They know that no one wins when workers have to rely on the food bank to feed themselves or their families, but this government continues to refuse to listen.

This decision will cost Yukon's lowest paid workers more than \$2,000 over 365 days. How can the Premier justify his decision to keep \$2,000 out of the pockets of Yukon's lowest paid workers?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: What I will do is table what we got from the Employment Standards Board so that it can be here and registered with the Legislature.

The board did send a letter with suggestions. We wrote back to them for clarification and then they gave us direction. I'll table that — no problem.

The member opposite asked about how we support people — no, pardon me — she asked about whether someone can live on that wage. Of course, it really depends on whether you are a child who is living at home and starting to work or whether you are raising a family on your own.

There is a document that is produced each year by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition called the "Living Wage". I'm hopeful that they are able to get back with that project again this year. It's very informative for us. We look at the recommendations that are in the back and talk through — whether it is the Minister of Health and Social Services, whether it's Yukon Housing Corporation, whether it's a range of programs that we work at to try to make life affordable for Yukoners.

I'm really happy about one of those ones, which is universal childcare. I look for those ways in which we support all Yukoners.

Again, we'll table the correspondence from the Employment Standards Board.

Ms. White: I hope that he tables both reports.

Front-line workers have sacrificed so much since the start of this pandemic. The government even recognized that you can't live on the minimum wage by providing some essential workers a \$4 wage top-up. This program, which was entirely funded by Ottawa, was only available for eight months. Front-line workers are essential all the time but not just for those eight months.

There are lessons to be learned from this pandemic. A key lesson is that some of the lowest paid workers are always essential to our economy and they deserve a living wage, but this government hasn't learned. They just took a giant step back by rejecting a \$1.10 increase to the minimum wage. This is more than \$2,000 a year for Yukon's lowest paid workers.

How can this government justify taking away over \$2,000 a year from workers that they called "essential" during the pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Actually, what we did is that we took the recommendation from the Employment Standards Board; that's what we did. Again, I said that I would table that. No jurisdiction in the country has the minimum wage as the living wage. We have the fourth highest minimum wage in Canada. It's higher than the other territories. I appreciate that the member opposite is advocating that it go higher, but this does not indicate that we don't support workers in the territory, as we did throughout the pandemic, as we will continue to do through a suite of approaches that we have presented here around affordable housing, around universal childcare, around many of the fronts.

We'll work with partner governments to support with this — for example, the Safe at Home program and municipal and First Nation governments. We will continue to work to support all Yukoners to make sure that they have the ability to live their lives well in the Yukon.

I understand that the members opposite want me to say something different from what I got from the Employment Standards Board, but that's what I got. We're one of the few jurisdictions that still increases our minimum wage yearly by the cost-of-living increase.

Question re: Opioid crisis

Ms. White: This year, there have been three confirmed opioid deaths between mid-January and mid-February, and we're awaiting confirmation of a possible fourth death. In one year, from 2019 to 2020, the number of opioid overdose deaths doubled — a total of 36 opioid-related deaths since 2016; 36 friends, siblings, parents, children, and neighbours lost. This number doesn't include the Yukoners who died away from home. The magnitude of this tragedy cannot be overstated, yet the government's response, especially when compared to other public health crises, is nowhere close to what it should be. The solutions exist. Safe supply provides a safe medical alternative to street drugs. It's proven to save lives.

When will this government's response to the opioid crisis reflect the magnitude of the tragedy faced by so many Yukon families who have lost a loved one to an opioid overdose?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am pleased to rise today to speak to the opioid crisis that we are in the middle of. We have had some major challenges over the course of the last year. We have seen significant health challenges associated with mental wellness. It is tragic for sure — in recognizing that we have lost a number of individuals in our communities due to the opioid usage in our territory.

What we have done in terms of addressing the issues that we take very seriously on this side of the House is exploring what a safe supply chain would look like for Yukon. We are also working very closely with the chief medical officer of health as we look at implementation of our opioid strategies here. We have expanded supports with our partners, working with Blood Ties Four Directions. We are working with the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We are also looking at the Referred Care Clinic in terms of demonstrating effective responses to opioid usage. We are working very closely with our health centres, our NGO partners, and our communities,

wanting to ensure that we have all of the harm-reduction methods, commitments, and safe supplies identified in our territory.

Ms. White: I am sure that folks are excited to hear that we are still exploring the options.

So, even one death from an opioid overdose is too many. These are our neighbours, our family members, and our friends. Opioid addiction doesn't care who you are, what job you have, your income status, or your background. So, for two years now, the government has talked about a safe supply for Yukon, and the minister has just said again that they are exploring the options and working with partners — and it goes on and on and on.

Mr. Speaker, people are dying. We need action now. In fact, we needed action years ago. Safe supply works. It saves lives, and it is already in place in other Canadian jurisdictions. What is this government waiting for, and when will this government implement a life-saving safe supply program in Yukon?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am pleased to rise today to speak to Yukoners to let Yukoners know that this government is 100-percent committed to addressing the opioid crisis in our territory, within our communities. Recognizing that there are drug supplies in our communities that are not safe, we are taking measures that are necessary — exploring and expanding drug-testing capacity.

We are certainly reminding individuals to please not use drugs alone — don't do it alone and have a naloxone kit present. We are certainly looking at increasing our capacity within the Yukon.

We continue to explore the safe supply chain. We are taking every possible angle, and we are also in the process of looking at a wet shelter here in the territory. I can advise Yukoners that this has not been considered historically. It is part of our action plan going forward and we aim to implement that.

We continue to support Yukoners where they reside within their respective communities, and we are bringing the services and programs to the communities. The ideal vision for Yukon is to have a safe consumption site, and that is the direction that we are receiving and the recommendation. I want Yukoners to know that we are committed to providing supports that they require where they reside.

Ms. White: I am not sure that was an answer that I would cheer about. We can't afford to lose more members of our community. Blood Ties Four Directions provides drug testing seven days a week through the outreach van, but the funding for that very same van's extended hours expires this summer. They also train and provide naloxone kits to Yukoners requesting them — among many other services — and they have been leading Yukon's response to this crisis.

Blood Ties has also been advocating for years for this government to enact a safe supply. These approaches have a proven record of saving lives from overdoses in communities across Canada. When will this government end the exploration on a life-saving safe supply program and listen to the folks on

the front lines who are doing the heavy lifting when it comes to the opioid crisis and finally implement a safe supply?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to again reiterate to Yukoners that this government is committed to providing Yukoners with the supports that they require. There is certainly a stigma associated with drug use and, as the member opposite indicates, this is certainly not something that we want to celebrate; this is something that we want to work toward eliminating. We want to work to expand drug-testing hours, which we have done with our partners. We are looking at the options — as recommended by the strategy presented by our chief medical officer of health in collaboration with our partners — harm reduction, take-home naloxone kits, public awareness and education, opioid surveillance, opioid pain management, and to look at drug-testing services.

As well, it's important to note that a safe injection site in the Yukon is necessary. It is needed and this government aims to address a wet shelter and a consumption site in the Yukon to ensure that we don't lose any more lives. That is what we are committing to Yukoners to do — to ensure that we support them where they reside in our rural Yukon communities — particularly those who have been left out of decisions historically.

Question re: Fixed election dates

Mr. Cathers: In 2016, the Yukon Liberals committed to a fixed election date. Last fall, they tabled legislation to bring forward fixed election dates but not until 2025. The Premier said that fixed election dates — and I quote: "... will strengthen our democracy by being open, fair, and transparent about when the next election will be held."

Will the Premier live up to his promise in 2016 and his words from a few months ago and tell Yukoners when the next election will be held?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I agree with the member opposite — I am very happy that this Yukon Liberal team did put in the legislation necessary for fixed election dates — something that the opposition did not do. I don't remember — as the prince and princess were going around Yukon — the Yukon Party talking about when they were going to call elections. This is definitely an election year. We are hearing great names coming forward from all parties. I want to urge Yukoners to get out to vote when the election does happen. It is extremely important this year. Under the Yukon Liberal government, we have an elections list and it has identified thousands of people who don't normally vote in the Yukon.

We on this side of the House are going to definitely help to get the vote out for those folks who may not have historically voted. There are more options to vote.

Today is not the day that I'm going to be announcing the election. Today is the day that we are announcing a budget that we are very, very proud of. Of course, the members opposite don't want to talk about that; they want to speculate about elections.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, last fall, the Liberals made the case for fixed election dates, but conveniently, their bill does not apply to them. The Member for Porter Creek

Centre said — and I quote: “By eliminating the guesswork in elections, Yukoners will be able to be more engaged and up to speed...”

Does the Premier agree with the Member for Porter Creek Centre that knowing when the election will be will allow more Yukoners to be more engaged and up to speed? Does he acknowledge that, by refusing to actually tell Yukoners when the election will be, the Premier is in fact contradicting several members of his team? A simple question: Will he live up to his own commitments and the commitments made by his colleagues and just tell Yukoners when the next election will be?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am very proud of our record on this side of the House as far as certainty when it comes to a lot of things. When it comes to electoral reform, when it comes to fixed election dates, and when it comes to sitting dates in the Legislative Assembly as well, we have moved the needle further on a lot of these topics than the other two parties together, Mr. Speaker. It’s not our fault if the members opposite don’t want to work with us when we go into these pursuits.

We have set sitting days, Mr. Speaker, which never happened before. We have the new legislation as well that does have fixed elections dates moving forward. This is the same question that the member opposite asked several times during the 45-day session in the fall. We’ve answered that question, talking about how this is important to have these fixed election dates — things that the Yukon Party never contemplated. We’re moving the needle on these things and we’re very happy to see Elections Yukon as well have a permanent registry. We’re very happy to see COVID guidelines coming out from there as well.

Again, when it comes to these things, we moved the needle further than the Yukon Party did in 14 years, and we did it in four.

Mr. Cathers: Well, there were a lot of problems with the Premier’s preamble, including that he forgets that it was the previous Legislative Assembly that established the process for a fixed voters list, not the current government.

The Premier crashed the electoral reform bus by refusing to work with other Members of the Legislative Assembly and insisting on unilateral control.

Just a few months ago, the Minister of Community Services told the Assembly that Yukoners deserved to know when the next election will be held. He said — and I quote: “... one of the things that we’re trying to do with this is to provide clarity and certainty that will allow Yukoners to plan.”

He said it was essential that Yukoners — whether they were individuals, businesses, or public servants — have the foreknowledge of when the election will be. So, does the Premier agree with his minister? If he does, will he take his minister’s advice and just tell Yukoners when the next election will be held?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, we’ve had this question asked from the member opposite many times in the Legislative Assembly. We’ve answered this question many times in the Legislative Assembly. We’ve said, as well, that if we move the set election dates in this term, he would be the first one in the

opposition talking about how we changed the goalpost midstream.

We are moving on these commitments and we are doing more on these commitments than the Yukon Party did in 14 years. We believe that these set of dates — I do agree with my colleague. We believe that these set dates do make sense. We put the legislation in to make sure that would happen.

We also put in place set days of sitting. I would sit in opposition and not know when the Yukon Party would call the Sittings of the Legislative Assembly. Simple things like that went a long way for the certainty for the public servants preparing for legislative Sittings. We have done more on these things than the opposition did when they were 14 years in government, and we will continue to move these goalposts. We do hope that we get another term in the Legislative Assembly and we do hope to continue to do what the members opposite refused to do.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 207: *First Appropriation Act 2021-22* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 207, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 207, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 207, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I present our government’s fifth budget, the main estimates for the 2021-22 fiscal year. It is an honour and a privilege to be here on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta’an Kwäch’än Council to deliver yet another budget focused on improving the lives of Yukoners.

It also comes at a critical time as our territory navigates the COVID-19 pandemic, which has presented unprecedented challenges for people of our territory and around the world. At the best of times, a budget creates conditions that allow individuals to thrive as the economy grows. In times of uncertainty, a well-crafted budget can provide the stability needed to steer through turbulence while charting a course toward calmer waters.

Our government remains focused on protecting Yukoners and supporting them through these extraordinary times. Now, with the prospect of brighter days on the horizon, we are forging ahead with investments that will ensure a prosperous future for our territory.

This year’s budget includes estimated spending of \$1.786 billion. Capital spending accounts for \$434 million — a record amount. This is 17-percent higher than last year. Operation and maintenance spending is expected to be \$1.35 billion.

We have included \$15 million as a COVID-19 contingency in recognition of the potential for changing circumstances as we navigate the pandemic. The 2021-22 main estimates show a deficit of \$12.7 million that is entirely the result of economic and social supports as well as health services for Yukoners in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Along with the budget, I am pleased to once again present a five-year capital plan outlining how our government will prioritize the interests and needs of Yukoners through the procurement, management, and delivery of capital projects. The plan considers northern construction realities, aligning capital needs with the strengths of the local businesses in order to maximize the benefits for all Yukon communities. Our government's increased transparency around capital planning has improved coordination with our First Nation, municipal, and private sector partners and helped us to make the best use of federal funding to meet the needs of Yukoners in all communities.

I am also pleased to present a fiscal and economic outlook for the Yukon that shows that our economy is poised to experience robust growth in the coming years. The strong foundation that our government has built over the last four years, combined with swift and comprehensive relief measures, has allowed our territory to weather the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic better than most other jurisdictions. Despite unprecedented challenges, Yukon is one of the only jurisdictions in Canada to experience GDP growth in 2020, with growth projected to continue an average 4.7 percent per year out to 2025. This budget builds on the strong foundation that we have developed over the past four years and continues us on the path toward a brighter future for the Yukon.

Having returned the territory's finances to a sustainable path, we are taking significant steps to build a healthier, more vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive territory for the benefit of our people. We know that investing in Yukoners brings the greatest return. Their well-being is the foundation of Yukon's prosperity.

Just one year ago, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon was poised to host thousands of athletes and spectators from around the circumpolar north for the 50th anniversary of the Arctic Winter Games. Two days after presenting the 2020-21 main estimates, the games had to be cancelled to protect public health. Two weeks later, our first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the Yukon. That was a turning point for our territory, and the past year has presented countless challenges for Yukoners. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Yukon families, businesses, governments, and organizations on a scale never before seen.

In times of crises, it is essential that government provide strong leadership to protect the health and safety of citizens and help them to maintain their livelihoods. Our government responded quickly and decisively to the pandemic and worked tirelessly over the last 12 months to keep our territory safe and healthy.

We declared a state of emergency under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* to ensure that we could act quickly to protect and to support Yukoners during an utterly unpredictable time. The state of emergency provided the authority to establish

controls at our borders, including self-isolation requirements for those entering our territory to mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the Yukon. We introduced measures to help Yukoners impacted by the pandemic, including protections from eviction, assistance with rent, and extended deadlines for tax payments. The office of the chief medical officer of health, Yukon communicable disease centre, and countless dedicated health care professionals across the territory have gone above and beyond to provide expert care and advice that has kept the residents of our territory healthy and safe.

In addition to providing for the health and safety of Yukoners, we prioritize economic supports to protect Yukon businesses and mitigate the impacts on local employees, employers, and organizations. Many important events — like the Arctic Winter Games and the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament — had to be cancelled on very short notice. We provided compensation to the community organizations that could not have foreseen that their planning and preparations would be thwarted by conditions beyond their control. We waived fees and supported local bars and restaurants impacted by the pandemic. In true Yukon spirit, we changed the Yukon nominee program criteria to support employers and nominees throughout the territory.

We worked with the federal government and local employers to provide a wage top-up for the essential front-line workers that kept our communities functioning — because, for them, staying home from work was not an option, provided that they were not sick. Our paid sick-leave program sparked national conversations and served as a model for employee support. The Yukon business relief program is recognized as the best and most generous in the country. As of February 2021, we have provided more than \$7 million to over 615 businesses across the territory. We also partnered with the Government of Canada to ensure that comprehensive relief is available to every Yukon business that needs it. We have allocated more than \$11.4 million to ensure that these programs are available to provide ongoing support this year. We will continue to provide support as needed.

Mr. Speaker, small businesses are the heart of Yukon's communities and the backbone of our economy. We delivered relief programs in close partnership with the private sector to ensure that the right supports are available when and where they are needed.

We also worked closely with the tourism sector to ensure that our tourism operators have relief from the pandemic and will be prepared for visitors to the territory as soon as it is safe to do so. Our government recognizes that tourism is a vital part of our economy, and we are committed to supporting the sector through this pandemic and beyond. With input from the Tourism Advisory Board and the Tourism Industry Association Yukon, we developed the tourism relief and recovery plan. It will provide up to \$15 million over three years to ensure that our tourism sector rebounds stronger than ever and that Yukon remains a world-class tourism destination.

Like tourism, Yukon's mineral sector is a major employer, and its activities have a ripple effect across the territory's

business communities. When the pandemic hit, we declared mining to be an essential service because of its role in providing much-needed material into the global supply chain. We also boosted investment in mineral exploration and worked to provide mining companies flexibility in safely accommodating employees to ensure uninterrupted activities. Yukon's mining industry took a proactive approach to ensuring that health and safety remained at the forefront of mining operations throughout the territory. Mining has continued to contribute to Yukon's economy throughout the pandemic. Under the leadership of John McConnell, Victoria Gold went into commercial production in 2020. Additionally, the historic Keno Hill mine went back into production last fall, becoming the third operating mine in the territory — a sure sign of the strength and resolve that has characterized Yukon's world-class minerals sector for more than a century.

Mining and tourism both rely heavily on air transportation to provide benefits for Yukoners. Aviation is critical to our modern northern lifestyle, keeping our communities connected and helping to grow our economy. Our government has supported Yukon's aviation businesses by waiving commercial fees and working collaboratively with the federal government to provide operators with financial support to maintain essential services.

In addition to historic investments in Yukon's aviation infrastructure over the past four years, over \$10 million in support funding was made available to our local aviation industry in 2020. Air North, in particular, has shown great resiliency and community spirit throughout the pandemic. Our local air carriers continue to improve our quality of life and are so very important in our territory's future.

Last year, we allocated over \$107 million to manage the pandemic, supporting Yukoners and providing relief to protect our economy. Our proactive and comprehensive response helped to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our territory while keeping Yukoners healthy, safe, and employed.

We have allocated nearly \$50 million in this year's budget to continue to support Yukoners as we look to emerge from a year of unparalleled uncertainty. There is no way to be fully prepared for the wide-reaching impacts of a global pandemic. Fortunately, the fundamentals were in place that have allowed our territory to navigate the pandemic confidently while staving off the most dire consequences.

We have seen GDP growth every year that our government has been in office, and the Yukon has had the lowest unemployment rate in the country during that time. The tax cuts that we introduced, starting in 2017, are saving businesses an estimated \$12 million, including \$2 million per year, starting this year, thanks to the small business tax rate dropping to zero percent as of January 1.

Our government's commitment to sound fiscal management ensured that we are positioned to deliver swift economic and social supports that have protected local businesses and bolstered vital sectors of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest factor by far that has kept the Yukon strong throughout the pandemic is the people who call our territory home. Yukoners have made immense sacrifices

over the past 12 months to keep our community safe. Yukoners have shown tremendous strength and resilience in the face of great adversity. Our collective efforts as Yukoners have minimized the spread of COVID-19 in the territory, keeping our case count low, and allowed us to lead the country in immunizations.

The coronavirus has tested the mettle of all Yukoners. They have responded with characteristic passion, resolve, community-minded spirit, and sheer determination that sets our territory apart and makes it such a wonderful place to live.

This year's budget puts Yukoners first by making life more affordable and invests in a healthier, more vibrant and sustainable future for all Yukon communities.

Last year, our government endorsed *Putting People First*, a road map to transforming Yukon's health and social services system into a more integrated, collaborative, and person-centred system that will better meet the needs of all Yukoners.

With funding in this year's budget, we will continue to implement the report's recommendations to enhance health and social service delivery throughout the Yukon. These investments will support Yukon's dedicated team of health and social service providers to deliver enhanced services to Yukoners in a more sustainable way for years to come.

We are committed to supporting Yukoners throughout their lives, starting with birth. New midwifery regulations will come into effect this spring to allow licensed midwives to safely support mothers through pregnancy, birth, and the post-partum period. This is an important step toward realizing our government's commitment to providing regulated and funded midwifery services as a birthing option for Yukoners. \$400,000 is included in this budget to integrate midwifery care into our existing health care system in a way that's safe, sustainable, and complements existing services.

We have also included \$677,000 to match federal funding under the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program to support prenatal initiatives in the Yukon.

Our government believes that all children should have access to affordable, high-quality childcare and early learning opportunities. To support Yukon families and make their lives more affordable, we are investing more than \$25 million toward early learning initiatives. This includes \$15 million to support a new universal childcare program for the Yukon that will put more disposable income in the hands of families, saving them, on average, \$700 per month, per child. A family with two kids would have an additional \$1,400 in their pockets starting this spring. This will support Yukon families and, in particular, will help women who have been hit hard by the pandemic — and men as well.

We will also expand to full-time early kindergarten programming in all rural Yukon communities. To support these initiatives and to ensure stronger coordination and collaboration across our early learning services, we are moving the Child Care Services unit to the Department of Education.

Education contributes to healthy, productive lives, and these initiatives will support Yukoners throughout their learning journey. We are also making significant investments in education facilities to support the growing number of

families raising children in our territory. More than \$10.5 million is budgeted this year to begin construction of a new elementary school in Whistle Bend. This will be the first new elementary school in Whitehorse in over 25 years, situated in the city's fastest growing neighbourhood. Following the successful model of the new French first language high school in Whitehorse, we look forward to this project providing economic opportunities and benefits for Yukon's private sector.

A total of \$8.7 million is budgeted for new learning spaces and modular classrooms, including \$4 million to add new learning spaces to the Robert Service School in Dawson City. This will ensure that the school continues to meet the needs of students and staff in the community. It is also increasingly important that learning opportunities are flexible and adaptable to remote learning. We have included more than \$2.6 million to improve online and digital learning technologies that will support modernized learning and teaching in all of our schools and a further \$1.9 million for supports to ensure that our students are successful in their learning during the pandemic.

As the territory's population continues to grow, our government is committed to providing quality programs and services to meet the needs of all Yukoners. Plus de 6 millions de dollars sont alloués dans le budget de cette année pour améliorer la façon dont nous offrons des services et communiquons avec le public en français. This was part of a \$28-million agreement with the Government of Canada to support French language services across government over the next five years. An additional \$1.5 million is included to begin work on a bilingual health centre in Whitehorse that will improve care delivery for Yukon's francophone population and will provide another opportunity and option for those seeking health care.

Since taking office in 2016, our government has prioritized inclusion, equality, and respect for all Yukoners. We believe that our territory's increasingly diverse population is a sign of its strength, and we have taken a multi-faceted approach to advance inclusion and to support Yukon's LGBTQ2S+ community. We've updated Yukon laws with more inclusive language, made it illegal to discriminate based upon gender identity and gender expression, and removed the requirement for sex reassignment surgery before a person can change the sex on their birth registration. We have provided funding to improve counselling services for transgender, two-spirited, non-binary individuals and their partners. The Yukon was the first jurisdiction to offer free training to health professionals to provide compassionate, culturally sensitive transgender care. Last year, we banned conversion therapy in the Yukon. We are proud to continue to work to advance inclusion in the territory. This year, we are providing \$120,000 to Queer Yukon to continue their important work to ensure that the Yukon is a strong, vibrant, and inclusive territory.

We have also worked with Yukon's LGBTQ2S+ community to develop an action plan to improve inclusivity throughout government, both as an employer and as a public service provider. Our government has a vision of healthy, vibrant communities where Yukoners feel safe and welcome

and are able to live their best lives. Supporting greater inclusion and equality of LGBTQ2S+ Yukoners in our community is an important step toward realizing this vision.

Advancing equality and safety in our territory also involves supporting the wellness and healing of family members of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. Yukon is the first jurisdiction in Canada to develop a strategy to respond to the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Changing the story to uphold dignity and justice, Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy outlines a territory-wide approach to addressing violence against indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people. Over the next decade, we will change this tragic national story from one of grief, desperation, and loss to one of healing, grace, and reconciliation. This is my government's pledge to all Yukoners. To help build capacity to implement this important strategy, we are providing \$300,000 to Yukon's indigenous women's organizations that continue to demonstrate leadership and advocacy while providing vital supports to survivors and family members. An additional \$600,000 is allocated for the indigenous women's equality fund.

We are also budgeting \$60,000 to continue the sexualized assault support line — a 24-hour confidential, toll-free Yukon-wide support line for victims of sexualized assault. This is part of the sexualized assault response team — SART — initiative that our government introduced to provide wraparound supports for victims where and when they need them.

When we took office in 2016, our government recognized that Yukoners throughout the territory urgently needed better mental health supports. We opened mental wellness and substance use hubs in four rural communities to expand access to mental health supports. We hired more than 20 mental health workers to help meet the needs of Yukoners, following years of inadequate services.

This year, we continue to invest in the wellness of all Yukoners. We have budgeted more than \$70 million for social supports, mental wellness, and substance use programs. We have also included \$5.7 million for a new secure medical unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. A further \$3 million will support the implementation of IHealth — a modern, integrated health information system that will enhance Yukoners' experiences in the health care system and improve health outcomes across the territory. Making shingles, HPV, and COVID-19 vaccinations available free of charge for Yukoners is another way that our government is investing in preventive health care and the well-being of Yukoners.

While *Putting People First* will transform Yukon's health and social services system, Yukoners still need to travel outside of the territory for certain specialized medical care. More than \$1.4 million will make medical travel easier and more affordable for Yukoners. This year, we have doubled the medical travel subsidy to \$150 per day for multi-day travel and have expanded the eligibility destinations to allow more flexibility for patients.

In addition to helping Yukoners travel for medical care, we are also increasing supports available in rural communities.

Nearly \$2 million in this year's budget is to improve front-line health care and health system supports, including three additional community health nurses and two new nurse practitioners in Yukon communities. It will also enhance end-of-life care by providing direct funding to Yukoners in rural communities who have progressive, time-limiting illnesses.

Enhancing programs and services for Yukon seniors and elders will help them age in place in their own homes and communities, surrounded by family and friends. This budget includes nearly \$87 million for continuing care, home care, respite care, palliative care, and community day programs for seniors and elders across the territory.

In 2019, we declared a climate emergency in the Yukon — a clear acknowledgement that climate change is real and that we all — governments, industry, businesses, communities, and individuals — need to take action against this crisis. Yukoners are passionate about climate change and want to make sure that we do our part to make a difference. They recognize that a cleaner future for our territory is a stronger future and a smarter future and that addressing climate change presents new opportunities for innovation and economic growth in our territory as well.

Declaring an emergency is one thing; taking the necessary actions to address it is another. Yukoners want action and our government is listening. Last fall, we released *Our Clean Future* — an ambitious Yukon-wide strategy to address our changing climate in a comprehensive and sustainable way. With clear targets and tangible actions to reach them, the strategy marks an important turning point for the Yukon as we collectively take steps toward a more resilient future for our territory.

Our Clean Future includes 131 actions that our government will take over the next decade to address the impacts of climate change while building a green economy and ensuring that Yukoners can access reliable, affordable, and renewable energy. The strategy aims to: reduce Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent; generate 50 percent of our heating needs from renewable sources; reduce off-grid diesel use in communities by 30 percent; and ensure that 97 percent of electricity in the territory's main electricity grid comes from renewable sources, even as the population and economy continue to grow. It also sets a target of net zero emissions for Yukon's entire economy by 2050.

Developed in close partnership with Yukon First Nations, transboundary indigenous groups, and Yukon municipalities, *Our Clean Future* is truly a collaborative effort that will establish that Yukon is a global leader in the fight against climate change.

Over the next decade, in partnership with the Government of Canada, our government will invest more than \$500 million to implement this strategy and to create new jobs in our green economy.

This year's budget includes more than \$50 million for the implementation of *Our Clean Future*, with climate change, energy, and green economy initiatives across 10 departments and agencies. This substantial investment demonstrates our commitment to ambitious climate action that Yukoners have

asked for. These initiatives will address climate change impacts, advance adaptation efforts, and build resiliency in Yukon communities. \$16 million will support community-based renewable energy projects across the territory. \$14.4 million will make government buildings more energy efficient and switch to renewable sources of heating like biomass which will also help grow our local biomass energy industry.

\$1.2 million is dedicated to making Yukon First Nation housing more energy efficient. \$6.1 million is for energy rebates to help Yukon families and businesses adapt to renewable sources of heating and make their homes and their buildings more energy efficient. These rebates will also support local contractors and tradespeople in the Yukon's green economy. Our government is committed to building a strong, resilient, and clean future for our territory for the benefit of all Yukoners.

We all have a role to play in addressing climate change and we will continue to provide incentives to help Yukoners continue toward this collaborative effort. This includes nearly \$1.1 million for clean transportation rebates to help Yukoners acquire electric vehicles, including e-bikes, to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and our dependence on fossil fuels.

We will also invest \$500,000 in fast-charging stations to support electric vehicle use in our territory. Our goal is to make it possible to drive between all Yukoners communities in an electric vehicle by 2025.

Our government recognizes the great leadership from our youth, and we are taking steps to empower the next generation of leaders. More than \$100,000 will be spent on Yukon's first-ever youth panel on climate change. This will provide space for Yukon youth from across the territory to share their perspectives and give advice on Yukon's climate change actions. *Our Clean Future* is truly theirs and it is important that they play a role in shaping it.

Yukon Energy Corporation's new 10-year renewable electricity plan complements and reinforces the goals of *Our Clean Future*. It represents a bold vision for our territory's sustainability while reducing Yukon's carbon emissions. This year's budget includes substantial investments toward renewable energy projects identified in the plan. There is more than \$4.5 million for a grid-scale battery that will be the largest battery project in the north and one of the largest in Canada.

\$2.3 million is included to complete the Mayo-McQuesten transmission line upgrade. This has replaced fossil-fuel use with hydro-generated electricity to support local residents and promote economic development in the region. The upgraded line has additional capacity to provide reliable, renewable energy to ensure that Victoria Gold's Eagle Gold mine remains on-grid, reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by up to 53,000 tonnes annually. A further \$10 million is included to advance the Atlin hydro expansion project in partnership with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation.

Mr. Speaker, these are the largest investments in renewable energy in more than a decade. They set the course for a responsible and sustainable future for all Yukoners, and they are just the start. Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable

electricity plan positions the Yukon to be a Canadian leader in sustainable electricity by 2030 in collaboration with First Nations and development corporations. It will allow us to continue with the rising energy needs and help us to meet the 97-percent renewable electricity goal in *Our Clean Future*.

At the same time that we invest in a clean renewable future, we continue to strengthen and diversify our economy for the benefit of all Yukoners. From NorthLight Innovation, the first innovation hub in the north, to an innovative partnership with the Yukon First Nation Investment Corporation and Panache Ventures to support entrepreneurial and investor capacity building in the territory, our government's strong support of innovation and entrepreneurship has been recognized nationally. This budget includes more than \$835,000 for the innovative and entrepreneurship program delivered in partnership with Yukon University.

More than \$20 million is budgeted for construction of the Dempster fibre line that will connect more than 70 communities across the north and provide more reliable Internet services and access. This project will stimulate further growth of Yukon's knowledge sector and digital economy while contributing to community resiliency.

The newly formed regional economic development fund will provide nearly \$2 million to advance strategic industries and support regional economic development. There is \$3 million for community development projects that provide economic benefits and opportunities in Yukon communities.

One of the strongest areas of economic development is in the Yukon's agricultural sector. Last year, we released a new agricultural policy following several years of work and engagement with agricultural industry representatives, First Nations, and all Yukoners. *Cultivating Our Future* outlines how the Government of Yukon will support the continuing growth of Yukon's agricultural industry in the coming decade and enhance our ability to be more self-sufficient in food production. From beef, dairy, and poultry operations to community and First Nation-based farms and greenhouses, Yukon's local capacity to produce food continues to grow.

We also have a strong local restaurant scene that is eager to serve more homegrown cuisine. Together, we can increase Yukon's food security and support a thriving and prosperous agricultural sector.

Our government has built strong and respectful government-to-government relationships with Yukon First Nations to foster reconciliation. True to our commitment, we revitalized the Yukon Forum, and we have met with Yukon First Nation leaders four times each year since taking office in 2016. These meetings have allowed us to advance joint priorities that benefit all Yukoners.

Finalizing the *Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan* after 15 years of challenges under the previous government sent a clear signal to Yukoners and to all Canadians that our government is committed to respectful, collaborative partnerships and relationships with Yukon First Nations to support the people of our territory. The strong partnerships that we have developed during our mandate, guided by a joint priority action plan, have delivered tangible results, including a

memorandum of understanding on mining, a reset of the relationship under the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, and the resolution of long-standing issues around resource royalty sharing under chapter 23 of the final agreements.

By working in collaboration with First Nation partners, we have taken significant steps to advance reconciliation and to map the way forward for our territory.

At the last Yukon Forum meeting, leaders endorsed the Yukon First Nation procurement policy — a major step toward realizing the vision of chapter 22 of the *Umbrella Final Agreement* in achieving equitable and sustainable economic growth and prosperity for the Yukon. The new policy was developed through a collaborative drafting process with Yukon First Nations and was a first of our government, and it can serve as a model for future partnerships. Yukon's business communities support the goals of the policy to strengthen outcomes for Yukon First Nation people and businesses by providing opportunities for Yukon First Nation governments, businesses, and people to participate in territorial procurements.

This innovative policy will bring business opportunities for Yukon First Nations and advance economic self-sufficiency while moving government procurement policies in a more inclusive direction for all Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, Yukon's public service should reflect the population it serves. In 2019, we released *Breaking Trail Together*, a 10-year strategic plan to achieve a representative, diverse, and inclusive public service. The Government of Yukon is the single largest employer in the territory. It is important that we lead by example when it comes to employment equity. Increasing the representation of aboriginal people within the public service will honour our obligation under the final agreements, ensuring that the programs and services that we deliver are inclusive and meet the needs of all Yukoners and advance reconciliation efforts with Yukon First Nations.

As part of our commitment to reconciliation, we are pleased to be working in partnership with Kluane First Nation to build a new Kluane Lake school in Burwash Landing. \$500,000 is included in this year's budget to support planning and design of a new school that will accommodate students from kindergarten to grade 12. The Kluane First Nation asked for this school to be built in Burwash Landing more than 100 years ago, and we are very proud to be working in partnership to support Kluane First Nation citizens to learn and to thrive in their community.

Education is a key area of our reconciliation efforts. In partnership with the Yukon First Nations Chiefs Committee on Education, we established an Assistant Deputy Minister of First Nations Initiatives in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action 62. We also worked closely with the Chiefs Committee on Education to establish a Yukon First Nations school board, which will provide Yukon First Nations with greater control, authority, and responsibility over the education of their citizens and support self-determination.

We are also supporting First Nations' economic self-determination by enabling Yukon First Nation governments to register their settlement land in the Land Titles Office in a way that does not impact aboriginal rights or title. In 2018, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation received the first certificate of title for category A settlement land from the Yukon Land Titles Office. Last fall, we amended the *Land Titles Act* to support more First Nations to do the same. This is part of a broader effort to modernize the land titles system to meet the needs of all Yukoners.

Our government continues to make strategic investments to build healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities. We have allocated more than \$10 million for the new health and wellness centre in Old Crow. The new centre will be the first of its kind in Yukon, providing both health and social services with a collaborative care model.

A further \$1.4 million is allocated to complete the new Vuntut Gwitchin community centre as well as \$1.75 million for a Vuntut Gwitchin elders complex. More than \$2 million is budgeted for Kwanlin Dün First Nation's community hub to provide elders, youth, and other citizens with a welcoming, inclusive space to enhance vitalization of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation culture. More than \$3 million is budgeted for a new potlatch house in Beaver Creek, and \$500,000 will go toward a new Teslin Tlingit Council community hub.

We are also planning a new arts and heritage resource centre in Whitehorse to help preserve and showcase Yukon's rich history. Yukoners need municipal facilities that are modern, efficient, and environmentally responsible, Mr. Speaker. This year's budget includes \$3.5 million for a new public works building and fire hall in Faro, designed to exceed minimum energy standards by 25 percent. An additional \$3.5 million is allocated for a public works, fire hall, and emergency medical services building in Carmacks. More than \$3.8 million is included for work on a new public works and fire hall building in Watson Lake. \$1 million is budgeted for a new public works facility in Old Crow. More than \$2 million is included for upgrades and retrofits to facilities in Mayo, Teslin, Carmacks, and Whitehorse.

Nearly \$1.5 million will also support work on a new public transit hub and bus replacements in Whitehorse. New buildings above ground are of no use without the infrastructure beneath the ground that allows them to function properly. \$6.2 million is allocated for water and waste-water upgrades in Dawson City and a further \$2 million for the Dawson reservoir. More than \$4 million will support upgrades to infrastructure in Haines Junction, including the town's water supply and lagoon. Over \$11.3 million is budgeted for a variety of water and lagoon upgrades in Mayo, Carcross, Ross River, Old Crow, Faro, Pelly Crossing, Carmacks, Beaver Creek, and Mount Lorne. To ensure that our communities stay connected, more than \$54 million is budgeted for highways and bridges, including the Nisutlin Bay bridge.

We will also continue to modernize Yukon's aviation infrastructure with \$16.5 million for airports and aerodromes from Watson Lake to Old Crow. Mr. Speaker, providing Yukoners with access to recreational facilities is essential to

promoting healthy, active lifestyles. In support of this goal, this year's budget includes funding for the pool in Pelly Crossing and arenas in Mayo and Carmacks.

\$600,000 is allocated for a boat launch in Burwash Landing. \$345,000 is included for a new Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in youth centre to provide programming supports and traditional activities, along with \$250,000 to support and design of a new Dawson recreation centre.

More than \$3 million will go toward Mount Sima's snowmaking and electrical infrastructure to help move the ski hill away from its reliance on diesel and support the ski hill's transition to greener energy. Over \$1.2 million is dedicated to the completion of a new, state-of-the-art skateboard park here in Whitehorse. An additional \$250,000 will go toward upgrading the biathlon Yukon facility on Grey Mountain and upgrades are planned for the Polarettes Gymnastics Club. There is also \$1.75 million for upgrades to the Mountain View Golf Course irrigation system.

On top of this, more than \$3.1 million is included to improve infrastructure and enhance the experience in Yukon's parks and campgrounds guided by our new *Yukon Parks Strategy*.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that sustainable affordable housing is foundational to the health and well-being of all Yukoners. While Yukon's population has been growing steadily for nearly two decades, the housing needs of our growing population have been overlooked in the past. Together with our partners across the territory, we have worked hard throughout our mandate to increase housing options for all Yukoners and invested in the development of over 600 homes to date.

This year's budget once again includes significant investments to make housing available for all Yukoners. \$8.5 million is budgeted for the completion of a new 47-unit community housing project in Whitehorse that will provide safe and affordable housing that meets the needs of families and individuals including vulnerable populations.

An additional \$2 million will help the Challenge Disability Resource Group complete their 53-unit cornerstone project here in Whitehorse. Our government has supported Challenge with this initiative for several years and we are excited to see it take shape in the downtown core. It will provide additional supports and affordable housing for those most in need in Whitehorse.

We recognize that vulnerable populations need increased access to housing in our rural communities too. Building on the success of Yukon's first-ever Housing First residence in Whitehorse, we are including \$1.5 million toward a Housing First project in Watson Lake.

We have also budgeted more than \$6.1 million for a 10-unit, mixed-use housing project in Old Crow — a first for the community. Last year, our rural home ownership program helped 14 households buy or build homes in rural Yukon and we have budgeted \$3.2 million this year to build upon that success.

More than \$1.4 million is allocated for rental supplements. This includes the new Canada-Yukon housing benefit, which

provides Yukon households with up to \$800 per month to help them afford to rent a home that meets their needs. Our partnership with the Government of Canada is helping to address housing needs in our territory, Mr. Speaker. We recently secured an additional \$40 million as the northern carve-out under the National Housing Co-Investment Fund. This will support community housing projects across the territory to meet the needs of all Yukoners.

An additional \$1.65 million is included to help homeowners to stay in their homes and to keep them in good repair. We have also budgeted another \$3.6 million for the housing initiatives fund. We introduced this program in 2018 to increase the availability of affordable housing in our territory and it has supported over 350 new homes across the housing continuum. Another \$2 million for the municipal matching rental construction grant will provide further support for the development of rental housing.

Mr. Speaker, making land available for development is another important way to meet the growing needs for housing throughout the Yukon. This year we worked with the City of Whitehorse to release more than 250 lots — the largest-ever lottery and tender of lots in Whitehorse. We have included more than \$30 million in this year's budget for land development projects across the Yukon, from Watson Lake to Dawson City and beyond. In addition to more than 150 residential lots, we are looking forward to releasing more than 25 commercial lots in Whistle Bend this year.

Work on Champagne and Aishihik First Nation's Marshall Creek expansion project is underway and will provide more than 30 new lots for Champagne and Aishihik First Nation citizens. Lots will be made available in Mayo later this spring and planning is underway on residential projects in Teslin, Dawson City, Carmacks, and Watson Lake.

Working with our partners across Yukon to develop lots will increase housing options while providing additional economic and employment opportunities in our rural communities. Investing in housing and in community infrastructure projects is one way of supporting Yukoners; making government more open, transparent, and accountable is another.

Throughout our mandate, we have focused on modernizing government to make it more responsive and accountable to the needs of Yukoners. True leadership is informed by listening, and we have expanded enhanced engagement opportunities for all Yukoners on issues that matter to them.

We have also worked very closely with municipal and First Nation governments to understand their priorities and support community-led initiatives and solutions. Since taking office in 2016, my Cabinet ministers and I have made over 450 trips to the communities to meet with officials, in addition to more online meetings during this pandemic than we ever could have anticipated. Rather than denying access to information, the government's default should be to disclose it. A new, modern *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* will come into force on April 1. It will make government decision-making more transparent, increasing Yukoners' access to information and strengthening privacy protection.

It is also important to know who is communicating with government regarding important decisions that directly affect them. We have created Yukon's lobby registry to make this information readily available to the public. Our government is proud to deliver on significant commitments that we have made to Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, this 2021-22 budget builds on the strong foundation that we have developed over the past four years and continues us on a path toward a brighter future for the Yukon. Since taking office, we have listened to Yukoners and we have taken action on issues that matter to them. Yukoners asked for a more people-centred approach to wellness. Our government dramatically expanded access to mental health supports throughout the territory and we are implementing the recommendations from the *Putting People First* report to help Yukoners thrive. These bold changes will move Yukon toward a more holistic and person-centred system and will position Yukon as a national leader in health and social care delivery.

Yukoners asked for investments to build healthier, more vibrant and sustainable communities for their children and families to live in. Our government expanded home care and developed an aging-in-place strategy with seniors and elders to help them live safe, independent, and comfortable lives, surrounded by strong, supportive communities. We have increased funding for childcare operators for the first time in a decade and we are now introducing universal affordable childcare to support Yukon families and put more money back in their pockets.

We have made historic investments in land development and supported over 600 new homes to increase housing options across the territory. We have made significant investments in community and recreational infrastructure in all communities to support healthy, active living.

Yukoners asked for an end to the divisive practices of the past that led to increasingly expensive legal battles with First Nations. Our government revitalized the Yukon Forum and built strong government-to-government relationships with Yukon First Nations on the basis of respect, cooperation, and partnership.

We've changed the character of the territory by establishing a National Indigenous Peoples Day as a statutory holiday, finalized the *Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan*, and worked with partners across the territory to develop a Yukon-wide strategy in response to the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Under our leadership, Yukon has earned a reputation across the territory and across the country as a leader in reconciliation that has benefited all Yukoners.

Yukoners asked for good jobs and a diverse, growing, and sustainable economy. Our territory has had the lowest unemployment rate in the country in addition to continuous GDP growth throughout our mandate. We have developed an ambitious 10-year strategy in partnership with municipal and First Nation governments to tackle climate change while building a resilient economy powered by renewable energy. We have made historic investments to modernize infrastructure in transportation networks to stimulate economic growth

throughout the territory while reducing the tax burden on businesses to help Yukon companies and entrepreneurs thrive as our economy continues to grow.

Yukoners did not ask for the COVID-19 pandemic to dramatically change their lives, Mr. Speaker. When it did, our government was there to support Yukoners through unprecedented challenges and provided relief measures to help our economy rebound swiftly. The past 12 months have brought into clear focus what is important and what is at stake as we look toward the future. By listening to Yukoners and by delivering on the commitments that we've made to them, our government has embarked on the path toward a stronger future for all Yukoners. This budget and its investments position the territory to move confidently and steadily toward an even brighter future together.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Merci. Mahsi'cho. Günilshish. Shāw nithän.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today as the Official Opposition Finance critic.

Motion to adjourn debate

Mr. Cathers: In keeping with a long-standing tradition on budget day, I move that debate be now adjourned.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge that debate be now adjourned.

Motion to adjourn debate on Bill No. 207 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled March 4, 2021:

34-3-71

Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sitzings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees (March 4, 2021) (Speaker Clarke)

34-3-72

Twenty-fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (January 25, 2021) (Adel)

34-3-73

Twenty-fifth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (February 9, 2021) (Adel)

The following documents were filed March 4, 2021:

34-3-53

Shallow Bay area proposed zoning – problems with the process, letter re (dated February 16, 2021) from Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Cathers)

34-3-54

Potential impact of a 60-metre buffer from Horse Creek on Grizzly Valley homes, letter re (dated February 18, 2021) from Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Cathers)

34-3-55

Potential impact of a 60-metre Riparian Buffer from the Takhini River, letter re (dated February 25, 2021) from Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Cathers)

34-3-56

Potential impact of a 60-metre Riparian Buffer from the Yukon River, letter re (dated March 2, 2021) from Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Cathers)

34-3-57

Negative Financial Impact of the Shallow Bay Zoning Proposal, letter re (dated March 3, 2021) from Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Cathers)