



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Tuesday, March 17, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 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

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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 Dendys	Mountainview	Minister of Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board; Women's Directorate

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Yukon Liberal Party

Ted Adel	Copperbelt North
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Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, March 17, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: I recognize that parts of the Order Paper will likely not be proceeding, but for the record, I will call them, in the event that something has changed.

We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

Introduction of visitors.

Tributes.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to live up to its commitment to provide regular briefings from the chief medical officer of health to the Official Opposition and the Third Party, to share up-to-date information on the global COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic situation in the Yukon, and the ongoing measures being taken in response to this pandemic.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to follow the Government of Québec's lead and immediately provide \$573 per week to workers who have lost their income due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to implement immediate relief measures for parents and caregivers unable to access daycare services for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to immediately suspend rent and mortgage payments for Yukoners who have lost their income for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with private and public utility providers to:

(1) allow Yukoners who have lost their income to delay payments for electricity, heating, and Internet for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic;

(2) ensure that no Yukoner will see their electricity, heating, or Internet service disconnected for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

(3) establish a phased repayment plan for those affected.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to direct the residential tenancies office to immediately put a halt on all evictions for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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: COVID-19 coronavirus testing

Mr. Hassard: So, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario declared a state of emergency this morning. This afternoon, Alberta has declared a state of emergency, and Ottawa is essentially in lockdown. The WHO has said this is the defining health crisis of our time. Yet, the Premier tried to downplay the seriousness of this issue yesterday by claiming that there was no pandemic in Canada despite what experts say.

This comes after last week when the Premier said anyone who is concerned is paranoid. Also, the Health minister keeps sharing inaccurate information with the public. Yesterday, the minister said that test results are still being returned in a three-to five-day timeline, but we have seen multiple reports that say that they are not.

Can the minister tell us how many tests are now passed the three- to five-day timeline?

Hon. Mr. Silver: To clarify, I did use the term "pandemic" from Dr. Tam on Sunday night. What I will apologize for is information on a Sunday night that was maybe not as pertinent on a Monday. Again, that's not helpful language — so again, I apologize for that.

But at the same time, what's really important is that we do what Dr. Tam says. She has clearly told Canadians that now is the time to act to flatten that curve. COVID-19 is rapidly evolving and the impacts are being seen across the globe. Canada and Yukon are taking real precautions to keep people safe and to provide support to the people who need the supports that are based on COVID-19.

Mr. Hassard: We certainly didn't get an answer to that question, so let's try again.

If you call the 811 hotline — if you can actually get through — they will tell you that the test results can take six days or more. This is despite the fact that the Minister of Health and Social Services yesterday claimed that they were turning them around in three to five days. We've been asking the government since last week to take actions to enhance capacity to speed up testing.

What actions is the government taking to ensure that our tests are not delayed further?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm happy to respond to the question. The information — as the Premier noted, things are changing very rapidly in the country and in Yukon as well. So, as things evolve, clearly, the health and safety of Yukoners is our top priority. As Dr. Hanley stated, now is the time for Yukoners to come together as a team and to take action.

What I stated yesterday, what I stated a few days ago, and what Dr. Hanley, the chief medical officer, said a few days ago was that the tests will take three to five days. That's what we informed Yukoners about. We know that things have escalated since that time.

So, across Canada, 811 phone lines are experiencing extraordinarily high numbers of calls, and to ensure that Yukoners have access to their health questions, the Government of Yukon is further expanding the 811 health line, and I indicated that yesterday. We will ensure that we have a 24-hour confidential line, and we are encouraging Yukoners to proceed to the yukon.ca website if they have any specific questions around COVID-19. If they are displaying symptoms, we encourage them to please call 811 or call your health centres, and they will then arrange for the testing to take effect.

Similar to all of the other jurisdictions, we are working together on finding solutions as quickly as we can.

Mr. Hassard: Again, I will remind the minister that the question is about the timelines on getting those tests turned around. We have been asking the government to develop a contingency plan for over a week to deal with the backlog of testing. Initially, the government told us not to worry, but now Yukoners are being told that their test results are being delayed to at least six days and possibly longer. The experience in South Korea shows that if you conduct quick and efficient testing, you can get ahead of the virus, but that means that we need to take action now to enhance and speed up our testing process.

So, does the government have a plan to speed up testing, such as maybe diverting our testing to Alberta?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Coronavirus infections such as COVID-19 are diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms and are confirmed through laboratory tests. At this time, there are no capacity or supply issues in the Yukon. We are currently able to test every person who is showing COVID-19-related symptoms.

As noted, the people who are tested are tested in the same way that seasonal influenza is tested. The tests then go to BC to the BC Centre for Disease Control for laboratory testing. They have expended their capacity to complete the COVID-19 tests more quickly. In tandem, other labs in BC are now testing for COVID-19.

So, we are working with our partners. We are also shipping samples to BC on a daily basis. The member opposite is correct that the pressures have compounded across the country. The time has lagged a bit. We are working to expedite that so that — in normal circumstances, it's three to five days; we will ensure that we will get back to that. It is important to remember that we are still in flu season. If you are not sick, we ask you to stay home and we ask you to please proceed to a public health office to book an appointment if you have a symptom.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus preparedness

Ms. McLeod: Yukoners still have many questions regarding this government's response to the growing impact on our community from the COVID-19 pandemic. Yesterday's press conference and subsequent media created more questions than answers. Our offices have been contacted by concerned parents looking for clarification on how best to protect their children.

During the press conference, the chief medical officer reassured Yukon parents that, if their employment situation was such that they require the services of daycare or spring break camp programming, it was safe to keep their kids in childcare. In the next breath, it was also recommended that Yukoners avoid gatherings of more than 50 people. We know of at least one spring break program in Whitehorse that has almost 100 children registered.

Can the minister clarify for Yukoners: Is it safe to keep children in childcare currently?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would advise that we follow the direction of the chief medical officers. They have made it quite clear and have given us instructions for gatherings of over 50. If there are circumstances that the member opposite is aware of that don't fall in line with that, then it's important that we know and we can then inform the chief medical officer and work with our communities.

Currently, we have no cases in the Yukon. As of this morning, that is still the case. We will continue to work with the chief medical officer. We have supports for our childcare centres. We will do the very best we can to ensure that all of Yukon is supported, including the daycares. If there are circumstances that are presented, please let us know and we will work with you to the best of our abilities.

Now, the fact is that the chief medical officer is well prepared. We are well prepared to deal with any situation in the Yukon and we will continue to do that with our partners.

Ms. McLeod: I don't believe that parents have received an answer from this Minister of Health and Social Services. The cumulative effects of the pandemic event cancellations and social distancing on our economy are not yet fully known. Consequences for the tourism and hospitality industries have been front of mind since the announcement of the cancellation of the Arctic Winter Games, but the ripple effect is encompassing many more industries.

The advice to stay home and not congregate is not just affecting hotels, bars, and restaurants. The Yukon is home to many small businesses — many consisting of single, self-employed owners/operators who deal one-on-one with their customers. Yet counsellors, massage therapists, hairstylists and many more have seen their bookings evaporate overnight since yesterday's press conference.

Can the minister clarify the government's advice for Yukoners and small businesses? What are they supposed to do?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, whether it's our health care system or our employees or our economy, our efforts are keeping Yukoners in mind, which again we did announce a package yesterday with \$4 million being identified to support workers and businesses. We will continue to monitor the

situation and we are prepared to provide additional support as needed.

In that package, we talked about providing sick leave. We understand that workers need support. Those who are impacted by COVID-19 and who do not have leave benefits will receive paid leave for up to 10 working days to cover that 14-day isolation period.

There was a whole suite of other announcements that we made with exactly this in mind — with businesses and Yukoners in mind — whether it comes to waiving government fees, grants for event cancellation, tourism and marketing initiatives, culture industry initiatives, workers' compensation initiatives, and a business advisory council being struck. On top of that, two different announcements from the federal government — one of \$1 billion for health-related issues and another one of \$10 billion.

This situation is continuing to be monitored and what you're seeing is governments at all levels doing what they can with the information they have and developing phased approaches to relief as the situations require.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but I'm pretty sure that all of these business owners and all of these people the government says they are helping would like to know how they can get this help.

So, yesterday, this government announced a stimulus package to help Yukoners mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The Official Opposition members applaud this as a first step toward providing comfort and support for Yukoners, late as it may be. But, as I just mentioned in my previous question, the true fallout on Yukoners and Yukon businesses is quickly becoming more apparent, and yesterday's package will only scratch the surface. As we pointed out yesterday, the tourism sector is expecting a \$60-million downturn in their industry, and since that time, we have seen a major hotel in Whitehorse announce that it is closing due to the impacts of COVID-19.

Yesterday's aid package will not address all of these impacts. Yesterday's efforts were largely targeted to tourism. So, can the minister clarify for this House how the government's stimulus package will apply to small businesses and self-employed Yukoners in all Yukon industries?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I know that our Minister of Tourism and Culture would like to get to her feet as well to talk about initiatives for the tourism industry — but, again, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say in the second answer here is that Yukon is in a very good position to mitigate the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are taking a proactive approach to minimize the risks of COVID-19 and support Yukon businesses as the situation evolves. This involves a multi-phased, evidence-based approach to addressing both immediate pressures and long-term pressures.

We will continue to work closely with the federal government as well to ensure that Yukoners are supported. This includes leveraging federal aid to maximize relief for Yukon and Yukon-affected industries. We are working to have these programs up and running as soon as possible and information will be made available as soon as possible at yukon.ca.

In motions today, we heard specific suggestions from the NDP. I would like to know from the Member for Watson Lake what specific suggestions she has as well, and we could absolutely put that into our evidence-based approach as we work with businesses and communities and community leaders as well to make sure that we are well prepared for the next phase.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus preparedness

Ms. White: Yesterday, the Prime Minister of Canada said in a press conference — and I quote: "... all Canadians as much as possible, should stay home." This same message was said by the Prime Minister in this morning's press conference. Meanwhile, Yukoners haven't been told to stay home by anyone other than the Prime Minister of Canada.

Government workers are waiting to hear back or they are being denied the request to work from home, and shockingly, we heard that yesterday a community health centre was asked to organize a community meeting about COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, can this government tell us which advice Yukoners are supposed to follow — the advice of the Prime Minister of Canada or the advice given by the Premier?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Clearly, we have indicated here in this Legislative Assembly — we communicated to Yukoners that we are following the advice of the chief medical officer of health.

As noted, things are changing quite rapidly. So, we appreciate the concerns being raised, but we have also heard from many concerned Yukoners, and we are working around the clock to ensure that necessary measures are in place. We need to be community-minded and work together to manage the situation. We focus first on protecting the health and safety of Yukoners, and as elected officials, we certainly need to demonstrate leadership. It is important that we stay calm and that we manage the situation in a responsible, coordinated fashion. That means that we work with all of the resources that we have available, including our health centres. Our health team is working closely with our communities, and we will continue to work on our health-related plan. We certainly want to look at our pandemic health response plan, and we are doing that as we speak. It will evolve.

As noted previously, we have been at this for about a month now, and we will continue to work around the clock to ensure that we deliver the messages to the communities and work with our health centres and work with our leadership in our communities.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, that community wasn't Keno, so definitely more than 50 people would be in attendance.

Many Yukoners can't work at the moment because they have been sent home because businesses have closed or are shortening their hours or because they themselves are waiting on test results. Many of these people can't afford not to work.

In other jurisdictions, measures have been put in place to protect the people who can't afford not to work. Housing advocates all over the country have called for putting a hold on rent, mortgages, and utility bills. These measures need to be

implemented in Yukon immediately, not three weeks from now.

Mr. Speaker, will the government commit suspending to rent payments, mortgage payments, and utility bills for those who no longer have an income for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I want to thank the members opposite for the conversation today and for bringing more information into the fold as we prepare for the inevitable position that we will be in as the weeks and months come, but again, Yukon is in a different position from these other jurisdictions. Our hearts and minds go out to our friends and family members who live in other regions in Canada that have multiple cases of COVID-19.

We are in a good position, and we are taking a proactive approach to minimize the risks of COVID-19 and to support Yukon businesses as the situation evolves. Again, just yesterday we announced a package, a suite of options, and financial assistance for Yukoners as the situation currently exists. The conversations have not stopped; that is for sure.

We talked in the Legislative Assembly here about the federal supports. The federal government has made employment insurance changes to support workers in need. Federal funding is being made available to support the public health response as well. We are accessing federal funding as and when needed to manage the public health situation in our territory.

The Business Development Bank of Canada has announced small business loans and work capital loans for entrepreneurs. Our government continues to work very closely with the Government of Canada to access all available federal funding and to maximize existing funding opportunities as well to keep Yukoners working and to keep Yukon projects moving forward. That is extremely important on this side of the Legislative Assembly and we will continue with an evidence-based approach, working around the clock to support Yukoners.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, we could be in a much better position if the Government of Yukon recognized the reality of many Yukoners who may be facing rent and mortgage payments that they cannot afford. Yukon already has limitations on evictions during the winter months. If it is dangerous to leave people homeless during the coldest months of the year, it is certainly dangerous to leave people homeless during a pandemic. This government needs to step up and prevent more people from losing their shelter when they are supposed to self-isolate at home. Yukoners need to band together and support one another to get through this.

Mr. Speaker, will the government commit to protecting renters against evictions for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We always want to work to support Yukoners, and we will.

Yesterday, the Premier gave announcements about supporting workers during this time. We know that we are taking all necessary precautions while supporting Yukoners and Yukon businesses. I have had conversations with the department and the residential tenancies office about some of

the pressures that may exist over time and we are in conversation about them. Again, thank you for that. Most landlord and tenant relationships are long-standing and mutually beneficial. While disagreements arise between landlords and tenants, they may come to the residential tenancies office for help. The office offers a broad range of services, including education, mediation, and formal dispute resolution.

We recognize that this is a different time. We recognize that there are issues that are arising. We will work to support both the tenants and the landlords. I thank the member opposite for her suggestions and questions.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus impact on mining sector

Mr. Cathers: The Yukon mining industry has had a rough stretch of news. Exploration expenditures are expected to decline significantly this year, according to NRCan, and the Yukon dropped 14 spots to 23rd overall in investment attractiveness, according to the most recent Fraser Institute survey. Now the market turmoil during the COVID-19 pandemic has reached an extent that hasn't been seen since World War II.

What measures is the government planning to introduce to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the mining sector in the Yukon and the many Yukon families who depend on it?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, our minister responsible — we wish him well right now. We're eager to have him back to work soon, but even at home, the member is actively working with the community, with the mining community, and with stakeholders and making sure that, once again — whether it's in Energy, Mines and Resources, Economic Development, or the Yukon Development Corporation — the economy of all Yukoners, all business communities, and the mining community is number one in his heart and mind right now, and those conversations continue. We will continue to monitor the situation and we will continue to work with our partners in the mining community to make sure that Yukon continues to lead as a destination for mining in the world.

Question re: Continuous glucose monitoring

Mr. Kent: The continuous glucose monitoring, or the CGM, pilot project is wrapping up as we speak. Participants are very concerned about what will happen in a few weeks. Some of them are quite scared about not having access to this technology during the current COVID-19 pandemic. We've heard that the evaluation of the pilot is not finalized in spite of a looming deadline.

Can the minister confirm that this is the case? Can she also confirm for us if there a plan in place that will ensure that participants have ongoing access to this critical device while that work is being completed?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The evaluation, as noted by the member opposite, is wrapping up. We will certainly make an announcement shortly on that.

What I do want to say is that we have had and have provided support for — this was a pilot project to fund

continuous glucose monitoring for individuals up to 25 years of age, which began in January 2018. Historically, this was not available to Yukoners. We sat, we listened to the parents, we worked with the young people, we worked with our health professionals, and this pilot project took effect, really, to look at the essential services and ensure that we provide the necessary supports. The evaluation on the support network will continue. Once we wrap that up, we will make an announcement. At this moment in time, our priority is certainly on the health and well-being of all Yukoners.

Mr. Kent: I asked the minister if they would continue providing access to that device while they are doing that evaluation. I don't believe I got an answer.

As we have seen, some of the most vulnerable populations to COVID-19 include immunocompromised persons. Persons with type 1 diabetes are immunocompromised. So, earlier in Question Period, the Premier asked us for specific suggestions, so here is one: Can we please help cut through this aspect of health-related fear by ensuring that all persons with type 1 diabetes, including adults, have CGM coverage?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I will reiterate what I said earlier. We certainly appreciate the concerns being raised by members of this Legislative Assembly. We are also hearing those concerns from Yukoners, and we will take the lead. As elected officials, we must all demonstrate leadership, and it's important that we certainly stay calm, look at the pressures that are before us, manage the situation, and be responsible and coordinated in all matters.

Right now, the safety and well-being of Yukoners is at the top of mind for everyone.

The pilot project is something that is wrapping up, as indicated, and we will make an announcement very shortly. That announcement will coincide with the families and the working group that we have been working with.

At this time, I am not going to say whether or not we are proceeding. I will work with our partners and make that announcement when the conclusion has wrapped up and the pilot project has wrapped up.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus — working from home

Ms. Van Bibber: Yesterday, the government announced that people who can work from home should do so. The Prime Minister this morning told Canadians to stay home if they can. We have heard that, for many Yukon government employees who would be classified as non-essential, this directive is not being applied consistently across government. In fact, we have been told that Health and Social Services is requiring the deputy minister to sign off on anyone working from home and that this will slow any approvals down considerably.

What is the government's policy for allowing non-essential employees to work from home, and who decides what is essential and non-essential?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We appreciate the concerns being raised here this afternoon. We have also been in touch with many concerned Yukoners, and we are working around the

clock to take the necessary measures to protect our citizens, our workers, and the territory.

The human resource management team responsible for pandemic response has been mobilized and is coordinating the government's efforts to get people out of their offices and into their homes. At the moment, we still have no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Yukon. We are one of the few jurisdictions in this position. This disease, of course, will come to the territory sooner or later, and we are preparing to make sure that the health of Yukoners is protected.

The efforts that we are taking to get people out of the office and into their homes are part of our plan to limit public exposure to this disease. The effort is happening in real time, methodically, so we don't unintentionally jeopardize essential services, but the goal is to get our workers into isolation to hinder the spread of this disease through the community.

I have instructed my officials that public health is the lens through which these decisions must be made. Managers are currently working to get their staff out of their offices and into their new, decentralized residential offices — their homes — as quickly as possible.

Ms. Van Bibber: We didn't hear an answer as to who is essential and who is non-essential.

Last night, it was discussed during debate that the government's network capacity will only allow for 700 staff to work from home. The Minister of Community Services indicated that the government is now trying to acquire more servers to allow for increased capacity; however, if they had been proactive and taken action earlier, we would not be in this situation. That said, we are glad that they are taking action now.

Can the minister tell us when the extra server capacity will be installed? Once it is installed, how many government staff will be allowed to work from home?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The information that I have from the Department of Highways and Public Works, which has been working on this project for at least three weeks now, is that, once the new servers arrive — they were ordered weeks ago, Mr. Speaker — and are installed, all workers will be able to work from home.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the capacity is 700 and growing. The great staff at Highways and Public Works are working around the clock, putting in overtime to make sure that the VDI seats available to the Yukon government are going to more than double by the weekend. That is the hard work that this government and its civil servants are doing to make sure that we slow the spread of this disease through the Yukon.

We appreciate the concerns being raised by the members opposite, but we have also been in touch with many concerned Yukoners, and we are working around the clock to make sure that we take the necessary measures to protect our citizens, our workers, and the people of the territory.

Ms. Van Bibber: In yesterday's aid package, it was announced that the government would be providing support for Yukon workers who need to go into 14 days of isolation with paid sick leave. We have had several municipalities reach out to us to ask if they would be able to access these resources to help pay their staff if they are required to go into isolation.

Can the minister let us know if municipalities are able to access these resources?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As we have already said, we've identified at least \$4 million to support workers and businesses, and we continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as needed.

We understand that workers need to be supported. Those who are impacted by COVID-19 and who do not have leave benefits will receive paid leave for up to 10 days of work — enough to cover a 14-day isolation period — and that is all workers.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: In order to provide the House with more time to deal with government bills, the government private members are not identifying any motions to be called on Wednesday, March 18, 2020.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

We are resuming general debate on Vote 51, Community Services, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a 15-minute recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 203: *First Appropriation Act 2020-21* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is resuming general debate on Vote 51, Community Services, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Department of Community Services — continued

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I again would like to welcome back Deputy Minister Matt King and Director of Finance Phil MacDonald — just looking forward to further debate on Community Services. I will look forward to the questions from the members opposite.

Mr. Cathers: As I noted to the minister earlier, in the interest of recognizing the events that are going on in the world, in Canada, and in the Yukon with regard to COVID-19, we are expediting debate in some areas of our questions that we would normally ask — not knowing whether, at some point, the chief medical officer of health may make decisions that necessitate suspending normal business in the Assembly. There are a number of questions related to the response to COVID-19 that we are hearing questions about from Yukoners, and we have questions of our own that we believe are important to ask the government at this point in time.

Yesterday, when I rose in debate, I asked the minister a question about the surge capacity and asked the government whether they have taken steps to reach out to retired government employees, including senior managers, ADMs, and deputy ministers, who may be able to assist the government with the response to COVID-19. Those include individuals whose names I will provide separately via letter or e-mail — rather than bringing them up in the Assembly this afternoon, in respect of their personal privacy — to the minister. I can think of a list of people who have experience in these areas — in fact, in some cases, were directly involved previously in pandemic preparedness planning — and have already gone through the planning work that it seems parts of the Yukon government are only just starting now.

If the minister has any more information regarding that, I would be happy to hear it. I am concerned, as we have indicated before, with the slowness of the response by government to recognize that what was happening in China was spreading around the world and had the potential to become a worldwide pandemic that could touch us here in the Yukon.

The work that is being done currently around determining which staff don't need to go to work but can work from home really should have been embarked on and refreshed two months ago, if not earlier.

Moving to some other specific questions, Mr. Deputy Chair — the area of Emergency Medical Services is under the responsibility of the Minister of Community Services. I have several questions related to that area.

The first is regarding what information has been provided by EMS to paramedics and staff, both permanent and auxiliary on call. Secondly, what information has been provided to volunteer EMS responders in rural Yukon regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic may affect them and, in both cases, what steps they may need to take that vary from the normal protocols to respond to this situation? I will give an example of what I mean by "situation".

If there is a 911 call for anything — let's give an urgent example such as someone calling 911 to report chest pain. Normally, this is a situation of the utmost urgency. Paramedics, either in rural Yukon or in Whitehorse, would respond as quickly as possible. The call would be given high priority

because of the short time frames associated with that type of situation. But that leaves the question — considering that there are Yukoners who have currently been tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting results and others who, based on advice from the chief medical officer of health as well as the federal medical officer of health, are in 14-day self-isolation because of having returned from a trip outside the Yukon. In a situation where a call might originate from the household of someone where one or more members of the household are under self-isolation either due to a suspected potential case of COVID-19 or because of travel outside the territory and the concerns the medical officers of health have with potential contact with COVID-19 outside the country, what is the protocol for an emergency first responder in that situation? What steps are taken, if any, at the EMS dispatch stage to determine whether they are dispatching volunteers or paramedics to a situation where there might be someone who is under self-isolation? What steps are expected at the point of response at the household?

This is something — I know I have heard from EMS volunteers that, as of quite recently, they hadn't heard any information directly through government about revisions to their protocol or how to deal with those specific situations.

Can the minister explain what should occur in situations of that type and if that information has been transmitted to staff and EMS volunteer first responders? If it hasn't been shared, when do they intend to do so? Also, are they going to make it very clear — to the people who have questions about the instructions they receive — who they're able to contact within government who might be able to assist them with those questions? Because I think it's important to recognize that not only is there a risk if an emergency first responder comes into contact with someone who has COVID-19, there is the risk of that being spread to other first responders, to patients and within the community. That is one important part of the consideration.

Of course, the second part is, when we're asking either staff or volunteers to step into a situation where there may be risks to themselves personally, it is only fair and reasonable for government to ensure that they're taking the best steps they can to balance the need to respond to someone in medical distress with appropriate steps to protect the safety of the staff or volunteer first responders who are putting themselves into a situation that could potentially have negative effects to their health or to the health of their family or those around them.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: As I stated yesterday, the health emergency operations centre was up and running from January 28. Even from before that point in time, the place where the protocols get set for our EMS staff and for our health clinics in our communities is the chief medical officer of health and the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit. Together, they establish the protocols.

I know that memos went out — number one went out on January 16; update number two was on January 27. Then the health emergency operations centre was initiated on January 28. The third update went out on February 7, and the fourth went out on the 14th. We are now up to the seventh one as of

March 9. I won't read out those protocols, but those protocols do exist for our front-line providers, including our EMS staff and volunteers.

If they have questions, they would turn to their supervisor. Their supervisor would then turn to their regional supervisor. Again, this is all being directed under the health emergency operations centre. There are protocols in place. I think that it covers off such things as screening, personal protective equipment, and universal precautions. There are weekly situation reports and active caller and patient screening. There is a series of steps under that protocol.

At all times, we are working to keep our first responders safe and the public safe as well.

Mr. Cathers: I would appreciate if the minister could share those protocols with me. I won't ask him to read them into the record. I recognize that — in the interest of time — reading those protocols would probably take awhile, but in the interest of public disclosure, I would ask him to commit to providing me with a copy of those protocols that went out and the information that has been shared with first responders. This is something that — as I noted, I have heard directly from people who are themselves first responders. They have been concerned about the lack of information that they have received. I will take the minister at his word that information has been provided, but it may not be as widely disseminated or as clearly explained as may be intended. That is a genuine concern that I am bringing forward after having talked to EMS first responders about it who had not been satisfied with the level of information that they are receiving.

I would also ask the question — if the minister could provide me information about it — about how these protocols are affected for volunteer fire departments when they are responding to 911 calls. In a case involving fire or a motor vehicle accident, there could be a situation where volunteer fire department responders are getting into a situation where they might come into close contact with a person who is under self-isolation, either at home or in their vehicle. I would just ask the minister to provide me with information about whether there has been communication with volunteer fire departments about that. If so, could he please commit to providing that information to me through a written update?

One additional question that I will tack onto that — since there has been an issue in the past, and it is an ongoing issue — I am informed about some EMS volunteers still not having a full uniform kit — in some cases, after having been volunteers for quite awhile — and the department has struggled with figuring out how to address that. What is the department doing to ensure that volunteers have a full uniform kit? Do volunteers all have the personal protective equipment that they need to respond to a call that might include someone who was contagious with COVID-19?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: What I will share across with the member opposite is the link on the webpage. All of these protocols are available publicly; they are all on the website. So, I will share that across, and we will work to make sure to reinforce.

What I understand is that Protective Services — as a branch or a division of Community Services — teams meet regularly to share information that includes wildland fire management, the Fire Marshal's Office, the Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Measures Organization, and also building safety. They do work to try to make sure that the information is shared across.

I also understand that our firefighters, under the Fire Marshal's Office, are always aware that they have to deal with risk management all the time, and COVID-19 represents a new risk, and I think that they have been incorporating it into their work overall.

I am just receiving a note that they also recirculated their standard operating procedures for blood-borne pathogens and infectious disease control to all the fire departments. All fire departments are equipped with gloves, N-95 masks, and the means to disinfect their equipment. There are protocols in place. I'm happy to make sure that those are available to the member opposite and to all Yukoners.

I know that in the past — with respect to uniforms for our EMS volunteers and staff — there were issues with uniforms. They were supplier issues. I know that when the deputy minister and I checked in with our volunteer crews, the last time I checked, those issues had been resolved. If there are ongoing issues that I don't know about, we're happy to address them. It is our job to try to make sure that our volunteers are well outfitted and that includes turnout gear like uniforms so that they can be safe.

I think that the problem is resolved, but if there is an ongoing issue, I'm happy to try to address it.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate the minister's response. There is indeed an ongoing issue that I had confirmed to me directly by a volunteer EMS first responder on the weekend. Despite being a volunteer for a while, they still did not have a full uniform kit. I know this has been a challenge at times for the government, but I would just encourage the minister to get to the point where the solution — which to me seems like a relatively simple path forward — ensuring that Emergency Medical Services always has some uniforms of all the common sizes in stock and has the ability, when new people volunteer or when someone who is a volunteer may have damaged equipment, to provide that to them in an expeditious manner. It is something that keeps coming up as a concern for volunteers, but it does seem to me that this issue should be able to be resolved.

Also, with the personal protective equipment, I would encourage government to ensure, from a training perspective, that they are taking the steps to reach out directly to staff, as well as to EMS volunteers, to ensure that everyone is comfortable with their current level of training familiarity with the use of personal protective equipment and steps to reduce the chance of themselves becoming exposed and infected if a patient has COVID-19.

I would also just ask the minister if he could indicate what steps are being taken by government, if any, since COVID-19 is expected to be in the Yukon in the near future — if it is not here already — and the potential that people may be

undiagnosed but being potentially transported in an ambulance or by air medevac — what steps are being taken respectively in ambulances and air medevacs to either test patients or to decontaminate after someone is on board either an ambulance or air medevac, since of course, as the minister knows, the test results are not immediately available?

There is the potential that many more patients will be transported in either that ambulance or plane between the time that a patient who is infected but not known to be infected was on board — and then the test results come back.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Today, here, I don't want to debate the health diagnosis stuff. I think it's really important not for me as a minister but for all of us as Yukoners that we have the chief medical officer of health. That is their job. I know that they are working directly with our front-line health providers. I have sat in on a number of those calls, so I am aware that this is ongoing. I believe that every ambulance, EMS, and volunteer person has the protocols on how to work with people who may have COVID-19. That includes disinfecting and transportation, et cetera. Again, I will just leave the health stuff to health professionals, and the protocols are all available.

I completely agree with the member opposite that we need to support our volunteers and staff, so let me just again on the floor here today say thank you to all of our EMS volunteers and all of our first responder volunteers. They do tremendous work for all of us as Yukoners. It is much appreciated.

The notion of having a pool of uniforms is a great suggestion. I also know, though, from talking with various teams, that they have different preferences now and then for what they would like — still all appropriate personal protective equipment as uniforms, but sometimes there are different choices. I leave that for them to choose. We will always do our best to support, train, retain, and recruit our volunteers.

I understand that our EMS have been provided with two COVID-19 infection screening tools. All of the ambulances are equipped with the appropriate personal protective equipment.

Again, I thank the member opposite for his suggestions and concerns.

Mr. Cathers: I would ask the minister to get back to me with more details in answer to the specific questions that I asked, including about what is being done and whether there is stepped-up cleaning and sanitation steps being taken in ambulances or air medevacs because of COVID-19. It is a question and a concern that Yukoners have.

I am not asking the minister, of course, to develop the protocols or the standards. I am just asking what they are and if they have changed — and, if so, how they have changed — because it is a concern that people have at a time when they are at their most vulnerable, potentially, and in an emergency situation. What steps are taken to provide for patient safety? As well, of course, there are the questions that I asked about what steps are taken to provide for the safety of EMS staff and volunteer EMS first responders.

Obviously, the minister doesn't have the information at his fingertips today, but I would ask if he would commit to getting back to me with that information separately — whether through a legislative return or letter, or, as he indicated, if some

information is available online with links to the website. This is a concern that I have heard from people and I am just wanting to provide that information to the public.

One of the things that I mentioned to the minister before is where government has been, in my view, making mistakes so far in the response to COVID-19 — seeming to forget some of the lessons that were learned in the wake of SARS and the epidemic in Ontario and one of the takeaways from that which was communicated by the federal government to all provinces and territories during the pandemic preparedness work that we did a couple of times during my time in government — the mistakes made in SARS included government not doing a good enough job in terms of internal communications to its own staff and external communication — including with other levels of government, with partner agencies, as well as with the private sector, the NGO sector, people who run day camps, with religious organizations, and with others who would be dealing with situations where there was a high potential for spreading if they weren't taking appropriate steps to manage and mitigate the situation.

What I have heard from a number of people across all of those areas that I mentioned in the last little while is that they are frustrated by the lack of information coming directly from government about what they can do. That is something that, again, I recognize that there are many people within government who are scrambling right now to pull together the best response to this pandemic as they can. I have noted, I think, that the plans should have been pulled off the shelf a little earlier. At this point in time, there is not a lot of point in dwelling on the past; we need to focus together on the future. I am simply identifying the concern that I have heard from Yukoners to the minister — trying to provide the suggestion based on the lessons learned from SARS that we had heard previously and encouraging government to improve its communication to staff and improve its communication to municipalities. I appreciate that the minister actually did respond to a suggestion we made there and reached out to municipalities directly.

I would ask him, as well: What has been done to keep local advisory councils in the loop? I would note that we continue to hear within the private sector, within the NGO community, and from pastors about the lack of communication directly from government. I have heard from retailers that, although they hear regularly from environmental health if there is a problem with what they are doing, they are not hearing proactive outreach from the government indicating to them what additional steps would be suggested to better improve sanitation and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

These are a number of areas that again I want to emphasize — although I am identifying room for improvement, I recognize that there are a lot of people working hard on this issue. I am just seriously encouraging the government to recognize the opportunity for improvement in those areas and urging them to step it up, because one of the lessons communicated to federal-provincial-territorial health ministers during my time as Yukon's Minister of Health and Social Services was that there were health and economic

consequences that occurred as a result of inadequate communication that could have been mitigated if that communication had been improved. I am just encouraging government to recognize where things haven't been as good as they could be yet and to take those additional steps to improve in those areas.

A big part of it, of course, includes that Yukoners in all of the areas that I mentioned have questions about COVID-19. Some people are fearful and some people are a little too blasé about the situation. Ultimately, in the absence of clear information coming from government and their employers, people look for the best information they can find. They come up with their own interpretations of it and it's not always clear to citizens how the general directions issued by the chief medical officer of health apply in their specific situations. The chief medical officer of health, of course, is one of the busiest people in the Yukon right now, dealing with this situation, and doesn't have the time to respond to every business owner's questions about their specific situation.

It is my view that government does need to, within its existing entities, ensure that there is good communication and proactive outreach to businesses, citizens, other levels of government and so on to ensure that people have the information they need and are not left to try to come up with their own conclusions, which can lead to unnecessary fear and unnecessary health or economic consequences.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am going to say that I think that government has been working early and hard. I appreciate that, when the member opposite is saying that government hasn't been doing enough, I think what he's referring to is that maybe we, as elected officials, haven't been directing the government to do enough.

I just want to say that, from where I stand, the public officials have been doing a tremendous job. Frankly, I think we are very lucky to have not only our chief medical officer of health but also the acting or assistant chief medical officer of health who did a phenomenal job dealing with some very tough stuff just a week and a half ago.

One of the challenges around this issue, I think, is that it is always true that there is work to do to improve communication, always. That is just a general truism, but especially right now in this dynamic situation. We really want to encourage all Yukoners to go to yukon.ca, because that is where we will get the most up-to-date information.

Let me note a couple of things. The first one is that, when I was part of the call with all municipalities last week, all of the local advisory councils were also invited. There were some challenges with the phone lines. We had to have some of the local advisory councils step off. I'm looking to loop back and follow up with them directly. I've talked with two of the three who were on the call since that call. I'm in e-mail exchange with the third.

With respect to the non-governmental organizations, I've flagged that with the department and I have been in e-mail contact with several of the meta groups to talk to them about their continued services. With respect to faith-based groups, I happened to hear someone in the office working to reach out to

them just yesterday. With respect to First Nations, I've said that we are using our protocols which we established under the Yukon Forum. That work is ongoing. With respect to municipalities and other communities, we now have daily calls set up with communities.

We are working very hard — I want to say that the public service is working very hard to make sure that information is getting out as quickly as it can. The challenge is that it's changing at all times. Even in this House, I've stood up and said, "The Arctic Winter Games are at low risk." And the next day, I was told by the chief medical officer of health that now it's moved to medium and to high risk. That moved the decision.

We just really need to help everyone to understand that the situation is fluid and the public servants are working very, very hard to make sure that the information gets shared.

The thing I want to say is that — sorry, one other group that it's important to communicate with — which the Member for Lake Laberge commented about — was internal Yukon government staff. That work is being led under the Public Service Commission and the communications team set-up under the emergency coordination centre.

As I said yesterday, the emergency coordination centre is now activated. We are adding extra resources to it. I know about my own department and resources that we put toward it. There is a subcommittee on communication and they are working hard to get that information out in a coordinated fashion.

Mr. Cathers: As the minister speculated, he is quite correct, of course. I was expressing concern with the delay in action at the top in terms of responding to this. I really do want to note, with regard to everyone involved, including the front-line staff and including the minister and senior officials, that I am sure that everyone is trying to deal with this situation as best as they can. I believe that it is my job to identify where I think that there have been areas that need improvement because this is an important area. In saying so, I recognize that there is good intention on the part of everyone involved.

In speaking to some of the lessons learned from SARS, I am just trying to speak to some of the information that I learned as health minister and that senior officials at the time learned from being involved in that preparedness work, recognizing that, as time goes by — something that might not seem a prospect — it is natural for government to get focused on working on other areas. I am just trying to share some information that hopefully will improve government's response to this.

It is important as well that there be leadership on these issues not just from the chief medical officer of health, but also from the Premier, ministers, and senior officials. Staff are concerned and the delay in terms of government at a senior level being able to provide clarity to staff about who can work from home, what steps we can take — particularly by those who have underlying health issues, compromised immune systems or a family member who does — with the delay in being able to answer the question now that medical officers of health have said that people should work from home if they can, who

exactly is affected by that and what is necessary to translate that concept into action?

I have heard from government staff who are concerned. I know that, in some areas, morale is low as people are facing genuine concern for what this may mean. I am just identifying this issue to the minister as an important one and issuing a reminder that, while government does of course have to let the chief medical officer of health do his job, the acting chief medical officer of health do her job, and respect what they hear from them, government cannot simply look just to the chief medical officer of health for leadership. The duly elected leaders need to take the appropriate steps to provide comfort and confidence to people who are facing a challenging time and to ensure that government takes the action that it needs to, both on the health aspects of this pandemic as well as on the economic aspects. That is challenging. I am not minimizing that challenge, but it is a time that calls for leadership, and it calls for leadership on the part of every minister as well as, to some extent, every member of this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Deputy Chair, I would also add to this that, while providing updates via global notes and on the website are important, it is also important to recognize that people who are facing troubling times — whether they be government employees, businesses that are affected by it, or others — are often looking for a person to talk to, not simply a website to consult. No matter how much work is done by internal communication teams or those updating websites, what the details actually mean are not always apparent to the reader, and people have questions about how it applies to their specific situation. They need to be able to contact someone and have their concern addressed and their question answered. It is important, in dealing with the response to a pandemic, not to forget the human aspect of it.

Mr. Deputy Chair, another question that hasn't been answered by the government — we saw the rollout of the stimulus package yesterday, but there are many questions about it. Some of my colleagues asked questions about it during Question Period — about what this meant for small business. We also have the question about what it means for municipalities.

So, beginning with municipalities, does this stimulus package that the government announced to assist with the impacts of COVID-19 include municipalities? If municipalities have staff who have to stay home because of either a suspected potential case of COVID-19 or due to self-isolation after having returned from a trip outside the country, does the stimulus announced by government include funding for municipalities? If so, what does that look like? What is covered and what isn't as it pertains to staff time or additional costs for municipalities?

Moving back to the private sector — there are tourism operators, particularly those who depend on cruise ship travel, who have already seen a major impact to their expected summer revenues. With the quickly evolving rules and restrictions having a negative impact on air travel, there are other tourism operators who a week ago may not have been foreseeing a major downturn to their summer season who are now looking at what's developing around the world and have great concern

about what the summer of 2020 will look like for their company. This includes people who have mortgages to pay, loans to pay, and other bills to pay and who are depending on a good summer season, which typically starts to ramp up not long from now. Now they are looking at that and they don't have a solution to address the financial challenges that they're facing.

In addition to that, that includes the retail sector, the restaurant sector, and bars that also depend on the tourism sector or on the mining sector or both to provide revenue in their shops, their restaurants, and their bars. Suddenly, they're looking at a year for 2020 that — not so long ago, government was predicting 6.2-percent economic growth for the year and a booming economy. Now those Yukon business — both large and small — are looking at the summer of 2020 and they're looking for answers to the questions that they have, because the summer looks a lot different from the way it looked a few short months ago.

So, in the package announced by the Premier yesterday, one of the questions I've heard — and I received phone calls last night and again this morning — from Yukon businesses is who it applies to and who it doesn't apply to. What is covered? Is any of it retroactive? As it pertains to staff — if staff of a business are staying home due to either a suspected potential case of COVID-19 or a real case of COVID-19 or staying home due to having been outside the country and taking that recommended 14-day self-isolation period, can small businesses receive funding for assistance with those staff costs? How much can they receive? What are the limitations around it — because of course the salaries and the remuneration of the staff affected vary from business to business.

What small businesses have from yesterday's announcement is a photo op and a number and the vague prospect of hope but a complete lack of detail about who can apply, what you can apply for, what is covered, what isn't, and how long it will take for government to provide that assistance.

In some cases, I have heard from companies that are concerned about the end of this month, with mortgage or loan payments, and bills that are coming up. They are looking for answers. It includes as well — as the minister knows — there was a recent large spike in electricity rates, home heating fuel has gotten more expensive, and commercial heating fuel has gotten more expensive as a result of the carbon tax.

For Yukon companies — both small and large — who are looking at the next few months and the summer with questions: Can the minister provide any details or clarity on what this stimulus package does and doesn't cover and who Yukon businesses need to contact to apply, as well as how long it will take for them to receive some assistance under this funding pot?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, yesterday, the Premier stood up to announce support for Yukon workers and Yukon businesses. The Department of Community Services and my role there is not going to be the lead on working with Yukon businesses. However, I know that the principles that the Premier was talking about were that this was the short term, that there was ongoing work — medium term and long term. For example, he talked about pulling together a business advisory committee to talk through how the details should work and

what next steps would be needed. Of course, I'm sure that there will be questions there around COVID-19. It is another way to keep connected with the business community.

I will leave that for the Premier and other ministers who will take the lead on that.

With respect to the isolation paid sick leave, we made the announcement to support a 14-day isolation. Today, the Premier spoke in this Legislature and said that it was for all workers. That includes municipalities. There are details to be worked out. We are working on those right now. It is important to us to make sure to resolve those quickly in order to help Yukoners right away.

We understand the hardship that is being faced. We recognize that it is not unique to the Yukon. We recognize that it's not unique to Canada; this is happening around the world. Our job is to support Yukon workers and Yukon businesses. I don't have additional specific details today. What I do have is our commitment to working to get that money out there for Yukoners so that they are safe and secure during this trying time.

I am in conversation daily — all the time right now — around how to get this package out there for Yukoners. We will happily share details very shortly.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate that the minister does not have all the answers. I know that some parts of it are, as he noted, under the lead of the Premier or other ministers. I would just note that, since parts of the response, both the EMO response and coordination, do fall under the Minister of Community Services and the Employment Standards provisions, such as the 14-day paid sick leave, they do relate directly to his portfolio. To be completely frank, since I'm hearing from multiple businesses that are very concerned about what the next few weeks and the next few months in the summer will bring for their businesses, I wanted to ask the questions at the earliest opportunity I had.

If the minister is not able to answer them, hopefully, we will be able to receive a response from the Premier or one of his colleagues as soon as possible, because this is a matter of very serious concern for a number of Yukoners who are wondering about, as I mentioned, what the next few weeks, the next few months, and this year will look like for them. There are people who have lost their jobs or suspect that they are at risk of doing so. That includes people in permanent positions and people who may have been in part-time positions — but whether they are full time or part time, a lost job is still of great concern.

The paid sick leave — there are people who are being paid right now, and who I am aware of, by Yukon businesses that are asking the question of whether or not they will be able to receive assistance for the cost of those wages. For some of those businesses, as I mentioned, the end of the month is looming and it is of concern for them.

I am going to move on to a few other areas related to where the government has made life more expensive for Yukoners. Especially in light of this economic hit that Yukoners are facing — the employment insecurity and loss of jobs that Yukon employees as well as businesses have faced this year — I am

going to touch on two areas where the government has increased the cost of living and could repeal it. One is the government's plan to introduce tipping fees at all Yukon dumps managed by Community Services — some of those fees are scheduled for April 1. Will the minister consider pressing the pause button on those fees because of this economic downturn and delaying those costs to a future year, recognizing that — for citizens who have lost their jobs or are facing a significant financial blow to their businesses — in some cases, they are genuinely worried about bankruptcy? Can the minister give them a bit of a break and scrap the tipping fees, or at least push them off until after the pandemic?

Secondly, we have the carbon tax as well, which the Liberals have enthusiastically supported. That tax aimed at reducing fossil fuel emissions is something that has also impacted the cost of home heating fuel, the cost of transportation of goods into the territory — including basic food supplies — and the cost of construction, and it is impacting especially those who have limited income. Will the government consider asking the federal government to repeal the carbon tax or set it aside for the time being, with the economic impact caused by this pandemic? I would note, it is actually already having a pretty significant impact on fossil fuel emissions but, more importantly, it is having a very direct entire impact on the financial security of Yukoners and people across this country.

Two other areas — one is where the carbon tax exemption does not apply to farmers who are using propane to heat their buildings, including a constituent of mine who faces a significant increased cost every year as a result of their inability to get an exemption or a rebate for this.

I previously wrote to the Premier. I raised this with the Premier in the fall. I wrote to him in the spring, asking him how farmers using propane can get an exemption from the carbon tax. When I wrote to him, I noted that, since Yukon farmers are currently falling through a gap in the exemption system, if your government is not able to resolve the problem, will you agree to raise this issue with the federal government and ask them to fix it?

I got back an answer from the Premier simply telling me that the exemption doesn't apply to certain parts of farming. Unfortunately, at this time, for farmers who are affected by this cost, which includes people other than the person who raised it with me, it's increasing the cost of helping to produce locally grown food in the Yukon for the Yukon which, especially in a time of economic impact and uncertainty as we're facing now, has an inherent value.

Will the minister commit to looking into this matter and to seeking a carbon tax exemption for Yukon farmers who are falling through the gaps in the current system, including going beyond the propane question to ensure that there are steps taken to get rid of the increased costs that are being paid — for everything from chicken feed to fence posts and so on — and that have made it more expensive for Yukon farmers to produce locally grown food?

I know that I have asked the minister a number of questions in close succession about where government — either the

territorial government or the federal Liberal government or the two in concert — has made life more expensive. Will the minister agree to take a look at those areas that I have mentioned and give Yukoners a break in those areas by setting aside the tipping fees, seeking a repeal or setting aside the carbon tax during this period of economic uncertainty, and ensuring that farmers who are currently falling through the gaps are addressed through change to the structure of the carbon tax on rebates?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am a huge fan of local agriculture. I totally think it is a great, great thing from a whole range of perspectives, but it is not really Community Services. Even though I am a very big fan of local agriculture, I am going to stick to Community Services today.

Tipping fees are one of the things that the Department of Community Services is responsible for. One of the realities is that our waste system across the territory is not sustainable at the moment, and one of the challenges with that waste system is that we are producing a lot of garbage, but we are not really paying for it. We desperately need to try to divert waste. We need to get to “reduce”, first and foremost. After “reduce”, we really need to get to “reuse”. After “reuse”, we get to “recycle”. Once those are exhausted, we get to the waste side. I think that the overall purpose of the program — it was the Association of Yukon Communities that came to us, and even some of the local advisory councils and unincorporated communities came to us and said, “Look, this system with waste isn't working.”

Most of the Yukon pays for garbage, but some places do not. What is happening is that Yukoners go to find those places where garbage is not paid for and then just say, “Hey, it's free here.”

So, we do want to introduce a tipping fee across the territory, in all of our communities, to do two things. One is so that every Yukoner is paying roughly the same amount so that we all share the cost. Even though the costs to governments are very different between Whitehorse, Teslin and Tagish — those places have very different costs — what we are saying is that all Yukoners should pay a roughly uniform amount so that it is level across the board but also that it puts a price on pollution — you pay as you throw. Effectively it encourages and fosters this notion that we will try to reduce, first and foremost.

The good news is that the amount of money that we are talking about is not large; it is about a buck a bag. So, it is not a big burden. I don't know, for the members opposite — at least from comments that I have heard in this Legislature — I don't think that they support a tipping fee generally. I don't think that it was supported before now. I don't think that it is supported now. That's okay; it is fine; that is their perspective. We have worked with municipalities across the board to introduce this. I remember early on in my role as minister being told, “Enough talk; get to the action.” This was the first significant recommendation after tires and e-waste.

Will we look at the situation with COVID-19, understanding that there is a difference right now in our communities? Yes, for sure; we will look at that. I don't have an answer today. I do want to say that we will be sensitive to timing — to look at this — but I do not want to give an

indication that we're not committed to moving forward with the tipping fees broadly because I think that they are an important piece. I have asked the ministerial Solid Waste Advisory Committee to also work on recycling because that system, territorially, is also in dire straits.

We are working on multiple fronts. Tipping fees was a first step. There are other steps that will come.

Can we think about how it will roll out as a result of our current situation? Absolutely.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate the minister's undertaking to look at it, although he and I have debated many times in the past how much of an impact tipping fees will have on increased illegal dumping, which I and many others believe it will. Aside from the philosophical debate on tipping fees, I would point out that, at a time like this, when we have seen the world change in a short time — with the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism market, on the stock market, and on the economy as a whole, including the new measures that occurred just in March, which will have a dramatic negative effect on the Canadian economy as we attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19 — for anyone who is facing an economic hit as a result, whether it's losing their job or seeing a financial impact to their business — some are concerned that they may face bankruptcy — when you have taken a big economic loss, a tipping fee is just one more cost that you can't afford when you don't have money.

The government has an easy option to deal with that — but as I mentioned, I would also urge them to look at other areas and other fees that they have imposed to consider — even if they aren't prepared to repeal them permanently — setting them aside while Yukoners are going through this hard time.

We have seen as well the changes that I see in the *Whitehorse Star* today — that Air North, one of Yukon's largest employers, is making changes to its flight schedules and is seeing an impact to operations as a result. Noting that the big picture, as Air North president, Joe Sparling, is quoted as saying: "I think the big picture is the situation is changing by the day..." — it's important for government to recognize that some of their previous plans may need to be revisited, and I would encourage them to recognize that where they can reduce fees and costs and make life easier for Yukoners is an easy way to start, but those extra costs will make a big difference to Yukoners whose lives and livelihoods have been negatively impacted by the economic impact of COVID-19.

I am going to move on to two other areas, Mr. Deputy Chair. One is the area of the municipal landfill liability. Can the minister tell me what is occurring with regard to that issue? The second is the issue of land development, which is under the minister responsible. Can the minister tell me in which areas land development is planned to occur in this current fiscal year? As a result, what lots are expected to be developed and in which communities, including in rural Yukon? Which communities will see new lots — and a breakdown of what types of lots are being contemplated in each of the Yukon communities where there is land development planned for this construction season?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks for the question on rural land development. Let me begin with our overall investment in land development. This year, we will be investing \$29 million.

That is what we are budgeting. Just to try to put that in comparison or in perspective, when I looked it up, 2014 was just over \$10 million; 2014-15 was \$2.5 million; 2015-16 was \$3.3 million; 2016-17 was \$7.7 million. That total is \$24 million. So, this year, we will be investing more than in those four years combined, because we recognize that there needs to be a lot of investment in land development across the territory.

COVID-19 aside — and the problems that we're addressing with it — we have had a lot of pressure on all of our communities to make land development or lots available. Again, within municipalities or in all communities, we go and talk with that community, in particular with municipalities. They're the lead for us on where they want lot development and timing. We do the work to develop the lots. Here is a list of priorities for this year:

Carmacks, for residential and industrial development projects — our target is to tender construction in this coming fiscal.

Dawson City — the north end development project is currently in detailed design phase. The target is this fiscal.

The Dome Road residential and industrial mix and infill subdivisions — we completed planning discussions late last year in December 2019 and we're hoping to develop a master plan this spring.

Destruction Bay — there is some planning work which has been completed and we have zoning underway to establish next steps.

Faro is always a different community because they've had an oversupply of developed lots and so we work with them in a different way.

We have a "what we heard" document out on Grizzly Valley and we'll be working on the next steps this year for the remaining 11 lots.

In Haines Junction, our work is being tied to the official community planning process.

In Keno — it's always fascinating to go to Keno. The last time the Premier and I were there actually was to make sure that there was some clarity around boundaries and lot lines and there is some zoning work underway.

In Mayo, we're doing urban infill and some small developments nearby Mayo. Our target is to have lots available this summer.

In Ross River, there is zoning underway. We just completed some planning there.

In Teslin, we're partnering with the First Nation and the municipality — there is another list I could get at here under that.

In Watson Lake, we have country and urban residential and industrial development projects targeted for this year.

Effectively, we are trying to work in every community.

Mr. Cathers: I would just ask the minister if either now or later he could provide numbers associated with those lot developments that he outlined. If he doesn't have it at his fingertips, I am happy to receive that later.

I do have a number of more questions. I could easily ask the minister questions all afternoon. In the interest of expediting

debate on the budget, since we don't know what's going to happen with potential developments in the Yukon related to COVID-19 and in the interest of sharing time with the Third Party, I will conclude my remarks and thank the minister and his officials for the answers that they have provided. I would ask if they could get back with the additional information I requested as soon as possible via either legislative return or letter.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: In terms of numbers, if I could give those quickly right now — for Whistle Bend, our total budget is \$17.4 million, and for Whitehorse outside of Whistle Bend, there is another just over \$2 million. In rural land development, the investment we are making is \$7.4 million. There is an additional \$2 million that goes toward planning, design, scoping, and some admin work. The total, again, is \$29 million.

Ms. White: I am just going to draw the minister's attention right now — we were told that supplementary information from the Department of Community Services would be available through the Finance page. I am on the page that says "Departmental/Corporation Detail" and it has Executive Council Office, Education, Health and Social Services, Justice, Highways and Public Works, Public Service Commission, and Tourism and Culture. I do appreciate that the minister has just read off all that information, but we have been told in the briefing, I believe, that this was the department or where I was supposed to look for it online. I appreciate it that the minister has it, but there's a lot of information that is not available that we were looking for.

We were told to find it through Finance and I'm on the Finance page and it's not included. So, I am just going to put that out there. Times are different, so I will just put it out there that it is not where I had hoped to find it.

I am just going to get right into it. In Question Period, the minister referred to conversations that he was having with the residential tenancies office around the COVID-19 stuff that is going on. So, as he may remember, a very short amount of time ago, I asked about government measures, for example, to stop evictions. The minister responded that he was having conversations with the residential tenancies office. I am wondering if he is able to elaborate on those conversations here.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I thank the member for pointing out — we will work to get that information up and online. Thank you — and my apologies that it is not right there. I know that we have it prepped by the department, so I will just check to make sure where it is. I will also make sure to both make it available for all members of this Legislature and to get it up online.

What can I say about COVID-19 and how it may impact our tenants and our landlords? We have seen some concerns across the country, and I just assume that those concerns are also here in the territory. I haven't heard about them specifically, but we haven't come under the same pressures here as a territory yet, but I can just anticipate them.

We sat down in discussion around what that looks like and how to — I guess I am just going to say "respond" today. I don't have a specific — like, "Here is our game plan..." I do want to say that we identified that there were concerns. We just want to

make sure that, when we have citizens — Yukoners — who are dealing with isolation, they are safe and able to be secure in their home.

I don't have any other details that I can share at this point — just that we are working.

One of the things that I will say is that, across all departments, we sat down to identify where we thought the pressures would arise as a result of isolations, and this was one of those areas that fell under the responsibility of Community Services, so we initiated that conversation.

Ms. White: I do appreciate the minister's assertion that the information is coming, but we are in debate on Community Services right now, which puts me, for example, at a bit of a disadvantage just because the information that I would like to have is not there. I will just leave that in that way.

I will push the point that I was trying to make with evictions. The point that I have been making for a while now is that, when people don't earn paycheques, they can't pay rent, and in two weeks' time — April 1 — rent is due. So, this is why it is critical. I don't expect that landlords are going to be able to float that — I don't. I don't know what the answer is, but I do know that, in two weeks' time, people need to pay rent, so that is a concern.

If, in the budget document, we go to page 6-14, it is Community Development and Land Development. I just have a question. It says "Development Costs" and it says, next to "Whitehorse Residential", that it is \$19,481,000, and then it says that the cost of land sold in Whitehorse will be \$21,766,000. Am I to understand, then, that the government will be making a profit of \$2.285 million on the sale of land in Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer is no. What shows up in the budget — so, for example, on page 6-14 of Community Services — when we're talking about Community Development, Land Development — when we look at the cost of land sold, that can be land that was developed in the previous years and is sold this year. We have a policy of cost recovery — or each time that the price has been set, it has been set on the cost of the land development. There is some latitude, for example, to go to the market price, but in every instance in my role as minister, we have set the price at the cost for which it was developed.

The disconnect between this is not that there is money being made. It's that it was land that was sold now and developed previously, which should reflect the costs of that land as developed because that's how the pricing was set.

Ms. White: Would that information have been in the supplementary? Would I have been able to break it out? I guess what I'm asking for is: How many lots — or what is the cost of the land that was done previously and that is expected to be sold this year compared to the land that is developed this year and expected to be sold?

Right now, reading this, there is no more information; there is no additional information. I'm left doing the math and then asking the questions.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just checked with officials to understand whether or not, in the supplementary information

that we are working to get for the members opposite, that breakout would be there. I don't think it is. We can work to provide that information to get a detail about the breakout of what is in each of those values.

What I can say — and I'll just make it very clear here — is that each time I have been asked — I work, for example, with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources who deals with land sales. Community Services deals with land development.

Each time that there have been any lots go onto the market, as far as I understand it, we have put them out there at the cost of the development of the lots themselves. So, we are not seeking to make any money. Clearly, I am aware that the cost of lots is expensive in the territory and that it is part of the issue around land affordability. The way that we work at this is to try to get a range of sizes of lots so that there are some that are more affordable so that there is a spectrum of lots available and that we do not in any way try to make money on this. It is not seen as revenue generation; it should be revenue neutral.

Ms. White: I am just hoping that the minister, when he does make that information available, will have those breakdowns to better understand those numbers.

On page 6-15, where it talks about "Professional Licensing and Regulatory Affairs" — it is fascinating only because I work with someone who has had eye issues. Because there have been eye issues, there has been a really strong relationship developed with optometrists — that being the fact that, if something happens with their eyes, they need to see an optometrist. I can say that it has been experienced once here as it was happening — which are aura migraines, which means I can't see. It's very interesting. It is very fascinating. I have also seen the optometrist for weird eye things.

The reason I bring this up is that there was an e-mail sent to optometrists on February 17 that was talking about how there had been approval to develop a change to the optometrist regulations and that, in order to clarify that appropriately, certified optometrists are permitted to exercise independent management of glaucoma. That is actually a really big deal. Part of that is that, when the visiting ophthalmologist comes through, if our optometrists are able to do all the pretesting ahead of time, it means that cataract surgery is much quicker. We have a long wait-list, so this is an important thing.

I guess this is kind of twofold. I am wondering where we are in that process. I think that, unfortunately, the current situation right now about why these regulations are so important is absolutely in the context of glaucoma. The condition needs to be accurately and repeatedly monitored. If the visiting ophthalmologists start coming up, then one would hope that the optometrists in town could do the work, so I just want to know where we are in updating the optometrist regulations.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We are working to update the optometrist general regulations because we recognize that glaucoma care in the early phases is something that optometrists can provide. The more that we can divert across to optometrists, the better the health outcomes will be for Yukoners around their glaucoma treatment ahead of time.

I met with several optometrists to discuss this issue. We are working for this regulatory change. Our timeline, as best I understand it right now, is for this summer — to get those regulations in place. We think this will be a strong win on all fronts. Work is underway now. The last update I had was that it was progressing as expected.

Ms. White: On the same page, we have the Employment Standards and Residential Tenancies office, which is one of my favourite topics of conversation, because it turns out that there is a lot more need for support than I would have expected initially.

Instead of going through the Hansard search right now to find it, I'm sure that the minister will remember that we've had conversations previously about buried oil tanks in mobile home parks. I am going to ask this because there is an issue. A mobile-homeowner actually went to the residential tenancies office to try to go through a dispute resolution process with their landlord about a buried oil tank. In the end, they were told that was not the process for them — that there was no money that was going to exchange hands and that there would be no penalty. But I disagree, because the cost of removing a buried oil tank and the mitigation required is quite a lot. I can say here that the unfortunate truth is that the sale of that home fell through when there couldn't be a guarantee that everything was A-okay. So, I wanted to talk with the minister today about buried oil tanks in mobile home parks and about where that responsibility lies.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the member opposite for the issue she raised to the office. One of the challenges is that the residential landlord tenancies office is not typically involved in the sale of properties. We are involved in these disputes between landlords and tenants. There is a disagreement. From my perspective, it still rests on this very technical question of who is the owner of the tank. I've heard two perspectives brought to my attention. Not surprisingly, those perspectives depend on who is raising them, and I am still working to resolve that technical question.

I'm sorry that I don't have an answer today, but I am looking to get clarity around that fundamental question because it will result in a difference in which way this all falls. If the piece of property is deemed to belong to the mobile home park owner, that is very different from if it's found to be on the property of the mobile home. I don't have any further answer available today for members.

Ms. White: When I sent this e-mail to the minister initially on February 10, I got a response saying that they would be checking with the department and we would get together and talk about it. The honest truth is that I didn't follow up, so I'm also to blame there. But this is a couple of months in the process — and it wasn't that the residential tenancies office had anything to do with the sale; it's that the sale that was lined up — and a deposit had been made — did not go forward because of the issue with the oil tank.

It's interesting that the minister says right now — I mean, this comes back to the conversation that I have regularly about mobile-homeowners, which is that they are viewed as renters. The question would be: If I rented an apartment, do I own the

land outside the apartment? Do I own the land around the building?

I'm just going to put that there, and I will not make the minister do this with me right now, but we will at some point in other offices, which is: Who is responsible for the land under the act — the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act*? I've said that I missed the mistakes when we passed it in 2012. I did not realize how adversely it would affect homeowners at the time; I do now. Mobile-homeowners underneath the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* are viewed as renters. Therefore, they do not own the land. That is the crux of this question.

So, I will leave it there. I look forward to a follow-up conversation after the minister has the ability to catch up with the department and we can talk about buried oil tanks in mobile home parks.

One of the conversations that I had recently in communities that I've been through is, of course, about housing, and the minister can appreciate that. We just talked about lot development. I know from the briefing — I've been told that there were going to be 154 lots in Whistle Bend; in Dawson, it was the Dome, and it was the north end, and there were talks regarding the east end and all of that, which I do appreciate. One of the challenges is that, when the minister was listing off the communities before, I missed part of them. How does the department work with the communities as far as identifying areas and then the timing in which those lots will be developed?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just to back up for a second, I recall getting the letter from the member opposite, and I did actually follow up and come down to her office. It just happened that day that she wasn't there.

I did have a conversation with staff in her office about it, and I think both of us — her staff and me — were still planning to follow up to try to get resolution on this specific question. I don't think that there is any question about who owns the land, but there is a real question about who owns the ancillary property.

If, for example, I'm a renter, and I go out into the yard that I happen to rent and I put up a tent, that's mine; but the real question is — this is a piece of buried infrastructure, and I just don't know who the owner is. It makes a big difference on how this question resolves. I just need to get that. I will look to others to provide me with that professional response.

With respect to how we work with communities, they split along sort of three lines. First of all, with municipalities, we follow the lead of the municipality. We see them as the owners of their official community plan, and we ask them about where their priorities are. We then work through that list of priorities. I suppose that there is also a recognition about pressures. Where we have more growth pressures, we will try to put more resources into that municipality.

We are in conversation with all First Nations because, as the Minister of Justice is aware, we have been working to make it so that the Land Titles Office will work for our First Nations, and that is in progress and moving ahead. It is very positive news. But, again, we would work with the First Nation around

their land, and there is a list of First Nations that we are working with in support of them and development.

Finally, if it is an unincorporated community — if there is a local advisory council, we would work with them, and if not, we still try to have conversations within the communities.

The main way to think of this is that, wherever there is an official community plan, we are directed by that official community plan.

Ms. White: When the minister was answering questions before about some of the rural lots being looked at to develop, one of the places that the minister mentioned, I believe, was Keno. The question I have — and, I mean, this plagued my friend Jim for quite a long time — is that there is no potable water source in Keno. The water is delivered right now to the community.

How is government developing lots when Keno is on water delivery? I believe, also, that it is the Government of Yukon that is doing the water delivery. How can we develop lots in a community where there is no potable water at this point?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just two things — I am not trying to be picky, but there is potable water in Keno. It is delivered there.

The challenge is that we have had wells or a well there where, I think, it was probably arsenic levels — it was not potable. There was an attempt to drill a second well. Again, it didn't pan out. What we do is provide water delivery.

That is the reality of the situation. I don't think that it means that we shouldn't seek to invest in or work on the development of Keno — again, by talking with the community — but I do think that it is an issue.

We have other places in the territory where we don't have public wells. It is our job to make sure that people have access to water. We do that in a couple of ways. One is through the rural well program to support the development of wells by individuals. Second of all — and it depends on the community and the situation, but we make sure — Keno used to have a well which serviced the community, but then, through testing, it came up as not safe by today's standards. There was an attempt to drill a second well. That didn't work out, so the solution is to provide drinking water by delivering it.

Ms. White: In previous sittings, the minister mentioned transfer facilities that were going to be shut down. Could he please give me a list of those again?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The four are the four smallest transfer stations around the territory. They are Keno, Johnsons Crossing, Silver City, and Braeburn.

Ms. White: Can the minister tell me how many people are in the area that each of those transfer facilities service? So, how many people from the surrounding or immediate areas would use those facilities?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will work to get those numbers. I know that, when we produced the Solid Waste Advisory Committee report — or when I received the Solid Waste Advisory Committee report on solid waste which I think I tabled here — at the back of that report, there was a listing and it had numbers for each of the communities. I'm happy to try to get that for the member opposite.

I will also note that some of those numbers are debated. Let me say that. I just want to be careful that — well, even note Silver City — and some of these numbers that I'm listing here in the table — they're listed as estimates. We don't have accurate counts through statistics, but here we go: For Silver City, the estimate is 10; for Keno, we have 20; for Braeburn — 25; and Johnsons Crossing is 25 — although I will note that Johnsons Crossing, in correspondence with me is letting me know that they believe their population is closer to 50.

Ms. White: I was in Teslin last week and actually got to meet a couple of folks from Johnsons Crossing. One of my favorite things to do is to visit transfer facilities. I've been to quite a few and they're set up in a different way and they all look different. Then the folks at Johnsons Crossing shared a letter with me that they sent to the minister on February 27 that includes, I believe — without counting them right now — approximately 80 folks who use that transfer facility. I know that there was a meeting set up with the minister and his officials for April 1 and I know that has been postponed now, which I do appreciate in the situation. But I wanted to know: Was there a willingness to have that conversation out there with the folks of Johnsons Crossing to maybe re-evaluate those numbers — because there is a big difference between 25 and 80?

Some of the things that had been highlighted for me was that, if you want to talk about climate and you want to talk about a climate emergency, driving your garbage 55 kilometres into Teslin or the 130 kilometres toward Whitehorse — it would be probably 100 kilometres toward Whitehorse to hit the Marsh Lake facility — it just didn't make a lot of sense to folks. They had questions around — you know, they used to be able to recycle more in that one and now they can recycle less. It used to be set up better. I was told that the youngest person on the block is 64. The lids used to be easier to open and things aren't now and so they just wanted to know that there was going to be a conversation.

So, if the minister could talk a little bit about the Johnsons Crossing transfer facility, I would appreciate that.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Actually, I have been to Johnsons Crossing twice for this conversation — I am happy to go again. The first time, we had a good meeting with local residents. I disagree with some of the positions that the member opposite has just posed, but I will say that the community definitely would like me to look at the numbers, which we are happy to do. I will also say, though, that there is a big difference between 25 and 80, or 25 and 50. My sense of the numbers was that the 80 included all people over time who used the facility, which includes people who are there in the summer. It wasn't year-round residents. If I am going to start counting people — how I count them, I hope, is similar across all of the communities that we are counting. It is one of the challenges. Johnsons Crossing also notes that they provide a service for tourism. Keno would also say the same thing — so would many of our communities talk about this service.

The point that I am going to challenge is that, when I live in Marsh Lake and I drive my garbage to the solid waste transfer station, I don't try to do it just as a stand-alone trip; I

try to do it in conjunction with other travel. So, if I am heading to go for groceries or there is some other reason I am going past the landfill, I could stop in at the landfill. So, the thought that it is increasing greenhouse gas emissions is interesting, but not I think how it plays out in reality. It is also possible for any community — and for example, again, I will reference Keno. When the Premier and I were there discussing with community members, we said to them: "Well, if you want to organize as a community so that you hire a business to take your waste away, then you don't necessarily have to do the trip." That can be done effectively. That does happen across the territory in several locations where community neighbourhoods get together and organize for landfill services. So, I'm not sure that we have to go there with respect to greenhouse gas emissions.

I will say that all the facilities that I listed — Keno, Johnsons Crossing, Braeburn, and Silver City — are ungated and unstaffed. We want all facilities across the territory to be gated and staffed — because we recognize that what happens is that people just look for wherever they can put their garbage for free, but it turns out that garbage is not free. It costs — and it costs all Yukoners. We want to get away from is this notion of "Hey, if I put it here, it's free." By the way, we are also significantly increasing fines for those people who dump illegally. I would have to check on the numbers, but I believe it is fivefold — that is what we are doing with the increase in fines.

To the premise of the question from the member opposite: Are we are willing to meet and talk with the citizens of Johnsons Crossing? Absolutely. Are we willing to look at this to try to decide whether it is the right choice to close Johnsons Crossing? Absolutely. Am I willing to entertain their perspectives? Absolutely. But, overall, we want to get to a regionalized waste management system across the territory.

Ms. White: I guess the one thing that had been highlighted to me by the folks who I was talking to — there were a whole bunch of things — for example, they are in a high bear traffic area. Storing garbage and waste on their property for long periods of time waiting for them to have a reason to go into Teslin or to drive into Whitehorse was part of the problem. It is interesting — the Member for Kluane just pointed out that there is a garbage truck that goes from Destruction Bay into Whitehorse and they actually stop and pick up the Silver City waste on their way. They are not just driving past and emptying it; they are stopping to pick it up. That is an example of how things can add on.

When we got the briefing, we were given ambulance call-out numbers. I was just hoping that the minister could give those to me again, mostly because I got some of the information down but not all of the information. So, I am looking for the ambulance call-out numbers for 2019 — both in Whitehorse and rural — and the medevac numbers again, please.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We are still compiling some of the numbers, Mr. Deputy Chair, but our Whitehorse total ambulance calls for 2019 are just over 8,000 at 8,038. Our rural total ambulance calls — 1,721; transport by a medevac team within the territory — 500; and out-of-territory — 600. The

total amount of medevacs is 1,100 and the total annual EMS calls for 2019 were 10,860.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for those numbers. If anything, what that shows — especially when we look at the rural numbers — is the amount of work that rural volunteers do in their communities. Does the minister have a sense of how many EMS volunteers there are outside of Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We have a total of 109 EMS volunteers in our rural communities at last count. Alongside that, we do have several EMS staff as well in Dawson City and Watson Lake, because they have a blended model. So, they each have five paid staff. Within Whitehorse, we have 29 paid staff and we have another 23 on the air ambulance. That is a total of 62 staff and a total of 109 EMS volunteers by last count.

Ms. White: That 109 is a number to celebrate. I think that's just an example of community caring about community.

Are there any auxiliary-on-call EMS attendants?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We do have auxiliaries on call. Under primary care paramedics, we have a total of approximately six auxiliaries on call. We have another sort of halftime position — that is a critical care nurse. Under medevacs, we have another four and under “critical care paramedics and other”, we have just over one auxiliary on call.

Ms. White: So, I'm trying to understand how — not how scheduling works — but I'm sure, over time, the patterns are visible. I just want to know, does EMS collect data? By that I mean, you know, recognition of what kind of calls or where the calls are located. Is there data collected?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Absolutely, data is collected about calls. I have at my fingertips today the incident volume from 2019. I wouldn't have a breakdown about location in front of me. At some point, when you get down to more and more granular information, you're starting to deal with privacy issues. But yes, data is collected for all of EMS.

Ms. White: So, appreciating privacy — which I do — one of the questions that I have is that, in the Budget Address, it says that — and I quote: “... we have already seen a reduction in visits to the emergency room...” and that it is because of the shelter. I wanted to know if information was collected about the amount of time EMS was called to the shelter. I am just wondering if there is a number.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, there were numbers collected pre and post putting the two positions in the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We saw about a 50-percent drop in ambulance visits as a result. It is a significant difference. Yes, we collect that data for sure.

Ms. White: Would it be possible for the minister to share that data with the opposition parties?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have some information here, and I will provide it as I can. I know that before we put the two EMS paramedics into the shelter — from January 1, 2019, to September 30, 2019, we had a total of 920 emergency calls to the shelter. I am correcting myself from just a moment ago. To date, we have seen a 60-percent decrease in Emergency Medical Services responses to the shelter as a result of having those two paramedics there. Let me be clear — it is not always

two paramedics there — it is two paramedics who provide hours at the shelter, so they would spell off.

Ms. White: The minister just gave me numbers from January 2019 to September 2019. Do we have something from October 2019 to the present day?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will have numbers. I will ask the department to get me a number that I can share across — but just working out the math, a 60-percent decrease means that there have been significantly less calls over time. I'm happy to get the number for the member.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that, but when the minister says that there is a 60-percent reduction based on the math that he's doing on numbers that I don't have — it is just about sharing the information. I would never consider myself a math lead, so to have it broken down is really a benefit to me. Unlike some people in this Chamber, I was not a math teacher. I barely made it through math. I probably could have used the help.

Just to focus on the two EMS employees — the two paramedics at the shelter — what a fantastic addition. Bringing front-line health care workers to a place where people need front-line health care — no criticism at all, nothing but compliments. I am just curious about the numbers.

Again, as I said in the briefing, I hope that those folks are supported because it is not easy work. It is substantially different than other EMS work would be. It takes very special people to do that work — period — and even more special people to be in that situation, so full credit to them.

Looking at the Community Services website, it gets very complicated. For example, on the Community Services website, it says — I'm going to talk about the old website, even though I didn't like it. I did like things better — because, for example, on the Community Services website, one of the challenges is that it says “Waste and recycling” and then it has “Contaminated sites”, but if I remember, contaminated sites are under the Department of Environment.

There is a head nod over there, so I am right that it is the Department of Environment.

But it does talk about garbage and hazardous waste disposal. One of my favourite things, of course, when we talk about recycling is the extended producer responsibility — or EPR — list. Then, of course, two government departments were at all the consultations, and it was two ministers who did it. I can't remember who was responsible for what, so I'm going to ask if the Minister of Community Services is responsible for the extended producer responsibility list.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It is the Minister of Environment who is responsible for the regulations around things like the extended producer responsibility list. Really, it is the list of products that we are trying to do stewardship with. Typically, it is the Department of Environment that deals with the regulation, or it has been to this date. It is the Department of Community Services that deals with the operations of those regulations. We work together — that is the way to describe it. So, for example, I believe it was the Member for Whitehorse Centre who asked questions about the extended producer responsibility last time, and I said that, working with the Solid Waste Advisory Committee, we were excited and hopeful that

we would be able to get to extended producer responsibility and that the way we would do that is in partnership with a neighbouring province. I should have said at that time that it was the Department of Environment and the Department of Community Services working together.

Ms. White: I appreciate that it is always multi-layered — the old government systems.

So, under the Department of Community Services website, it says “Services and information” and it says: “Borrow and return library materials”, “Find water treatment plants”, and “What can I recycle and where?” The only reason that I’m highlighting that is that the Department of Community Services is responsible for substantially more than those three things. The challenge, of course, is that navigating through the yukon.ca website and trying to find other things that the minister is responsible for is a lot more challenging.

Some of the things that we had been hopeful for — in getting information about that supplementary information — were, for example, through sport and recreation or through different grant programs — so there are different things. That kind of leads it to that challenge. The reason why I’m highlighting it is because, as I’m here on the computer looking for the different things that I want to talk about, I can’t actually find them on the new website. Again, I’m not an IT person either, so that’s also part of the challenge.

One of the questions that I have — and now I’ve confused myself, because I have both departments — is: Is the Department of Community Services responsible for the diversion credits that used to exist?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I understand completely the challenge. First of all, I affectionately call the department the “kitchen sink department” because it’s like, “Oh, is there something in government — where does it go? If we don’t know clearly, well, let’s pick Community Services.” The Premier keeps saying, “Well, yes, you guys are ‘finance lite’ or whatever. You should take this.” So, we do a lot of very wide-ranging things, so it makes it challenging.

I also want to say — and I can appreciate us, as folks in this Legislature, and our history at navigating the website — that it’s honestly not where we started when we were trying to create the new website; it was to try to think of citizens first.

The citizen doesn’t want to ask the question about which department — whether it is Community Services or Environment, or EMR or Community Services. What the citizen wants is — they think about a topic, and so that is how the site is being designed so that it is more intuitive for the average citizen — not for us who have long been engaged around governments. It is more accessible from a mobile perspective. You can track how many people are accessing the government website on a mobile device, such as a phone or an iPad, and it has grown exponentially. It is surpassing computers as the means to access, so it is different.

The specific question was around the diversion credit system. Is the Department of Community Services responsible for it? The answer to that is yes. I am happy to answer questions around the diversion credit system.

Ms. White: We are going to dive down into the diversion credits. I would like to know the amounts and which organizations are collecting them. This was a really big deal a number of years ago, and the reason why it was such a big deal is that, as the recyclers were struggling to deal with recycling — because, as we know, recycling is not free, although we have all been trained to think that it is free. One way that the processors were surviving was through collection of the diversion credits. They were increased at one point in time because the system was going to collapse. So, if we could just talk about waste diversion and the waste diversion credits for a bit, that would be great.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have some numbers here. I am happy to get more or to see where the questions go. \$400,000 is for the designated material regulations for tires; \$450,000 is for electronic waste processing and transportation; \$200,000 is for the household hazardous waste program; and \$650,000 is for waste diversion in the territory. It’s quite a range. There is also \$40,000 that goes toward Zero Waste Yukon to support them in their efforts to promote waste reduction.

Ms. White: One of the things that I asked during the briefing — and I’m just looking for the minister’s thoughts — in the previous Sitting, the minister came out announcing that there would be an energy retrofit program that would go onto the municipal taxes. I obviously had questions about it then and I still have questions now. I did get a great briefing from the officials, but could the minister tell me where that process is at, who were the conversations with, and what are the next steps forward?

Deputy Chair: Would Committee members like to take a break?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: We’ll break for 15 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is resuming general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King asked about the energy retrofits program. The department has been working on it. Just to remind everyone, we have already been able to get energy retrofits for institutional buildings — for example, the Legislative Assembly. What we can’t use federal infrastructure dollars for is either commercial or residential, so we want to develop a program that will support commercial and residential buildings. We want to make sure that it is working with the good energy rebate program, which the Energy Solutions Centre provides and which covers off about 25 percent of retrofits. We want to facilitate getting at that 75 percent through a loan. The idea is that the homeowner or the commercial property owner will get the advantage of lower energy costs over time and that will offset their ability to repay that loan.

We are still in the design phase of the program. There are still questions that are being worked through. The main two ideas that we are looking at is a local improvement charge or working with existing programs with Yukon Housing Corporation. We haven't finalized it, but we have had good conversations with municipalities and we have heard some of the important issues that they want to make sure are addressed through this program.

Ms. White: Just as we get started again after that 15-minute break, I would just like to congratulate the hard-working folks in the Department of Community Services who miraculously got the supplementary information up online. I raise my hands to them in that effort. It was a little bit delayed for my liking, but I do appreciate the good work done to get that out there as quickly as they did. Kudos to the department for that; it is appreciated.

The minimum wage also falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Community Services. I have to say that I was actually quite surprised by the economic evaluation of the proposed changes to the minimum wage that came out of the Economic Research branch from the Department of Finance. I say that in terms of the language. Instead of talking about "increases", it talked about "hikes". It had the language of "danger zone" highlighted. The reason why I bring this up is that the report that was done by the Employment Standards Board that was given to the minister in 2018 didn't use language like "hike"; it used language like "increase". It didn't use language that, I have to say, is quite inflammatory.

I just wanted to know — and I am not sure if the minister is going to be able to answer this — if, in reading this report, what were the minister's thoughts on some of the language that was used?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I did request that the report be done for the Employment Standards Board. I would like to thank the Employment Standards Board for the work that they have been doing and continue to do. I have read so many reports now from a whole range of places on minimum wage. It seems like there are two perspectives. Let me share a story: When I shared that report with the Employment Standards Board — of course, it was written for them — I thought that, as a document that was shared with them, I should make it more public. I asked that it be posted. I sent it to labour organizations that had been in conversations with me about minimum wage and I sent it to the chambers that had been in conversations with me about minimum wage. When I met with the chambers, they told me that they thought that the report wasn't strong enough. It always appears that there is this range of perspectives.

It is not for me to judge about the report. I felt that the report had attempted to be diligent in doing its analysis, and I felt that this was of value to the Employment Standards Board, and I think that they can draw their interpretations about the report and the contents therein.

Ms. White: The language to me — I am just going to highlight the language of "hike" instead of "increase", "danger zone" and such — I don't know that it helped the conversation around minimum wage, to be honest, because for those on the other side of the spectrum, it was frustrating, to say the least.

I have talked about this before and I have asked this question before — the difference between community librarians and librarians who work for the Department of Community Services or Yukon government — and it is about parity — so, believing that the work done by one is the same work that is done by another and are worth the same. But we know that librarians in communities work for societies, and the librarians who work in the City of Whitehorse work for the Department of Community Services.

So can the minister let me know how the parity is working right now between community librarians and urban librarians?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The difference that I understand is not about whether they are rural or urban — rural or Whitehorse. The difference, as I understand it, is who is employing them. When I go and talk to community libraries and when they meet and I discuss with them, this is an issue that they raise. One of the challenges is that their board decides how they will be compensated, and their board is able to choose to pay them further. However, the natural outcome of that is fewer hours.

When I was involved in my own community establishing a small library in Marsh Lake — we called it the Marsh Lake Little Library — we chose not to become part of the government system, and we just left it more like the community libraries that you see around with all the little boxes — just like a neighbourhood library — a drop-off and borrow — passionate volunteers who are there.

One of the reasons that we chose that was because we wanted to be able to have as many hours as possible and not have any of the government parameters that came with the notion of joining the system. The driver isn't always about parity. The driver is about what we are able to — or how much service is able to be provided. That is at the discretion of the boards in the communities. So, it happens through a transfer payment agreement that goes to those boards.

The one thing I will say is that, not through this budget but in the last budget, we were able to increase the amount of dollars that went to our community libraries. But it still was not as much as they would hope for, so I will acknowledge that our community libraries are always trying to stretch their dollars as much as they can.

Ms. McLeod: I just have couple of items that I want to address. One of them of course is to tag onto what the Member for Takhini-Kopper King was speaking about and that is the community libraries.

I recognize that there was a small increase to community library budgets and the one I'm most familiar with of course is Watson Lake. Now, one of the major concerns for that community library was the lack of ability to provide wage increases to the staff. Really, the message from government was, "Well, you know, it's up to you to decide if you want to pay your staff more and get rid of some or keep the staff you have and not give them a raise or at least as much as what they would like."

Now, when we look at the library in Whitehorse, of course, these are civil servants who work there, and they automatically get increases to their wages very year like every civil servant

does. I would like to know what the government's thoughts are in providing these same increases to community libraries so that their staff can get the cost-of-living allowances and the automatic wage increases that other civil servants enjoy.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Well, I thank the member opposite for the question. I note that, in the previous government's term, there was no tying libraries to the cost-of-living adjustments nor paying our community libraries at a similar rate to public servants. That was also not their choice. I don't think it was necessarily that the community libraries would have to drop jobs if they were to choose to pay more money, but I do think it would impact the number of hours that a library is open. Look — the discretion is the library boards'; it is their judgment about what to do with the funds. I am happy to answer questions about the amount of dollars that go to our community libraries. I will always do my best to try to get more money for our community libraries because I feel that they are incredibly important. We were able to get an increase to our community libraries last year and I will continue to work to get an increase.

Ms. Hanson: The issue here is really not whether or not just the community libraries have received an increase, but it is the societies, and it's all the NGOs both in Community Services and in other government departments. Not only is government not considering the issue — let alone parity or CPI or whatever index or measurement you want to use to determine what might be an approximation of the cost-of-living adjustments — but when we look at the contributions to the entities, they are static.

So, the Volunteer Bureau — 67, 67, 67, and 67. In fact, over the course of three or four years, that is a negative. The minister knows that. The Association of Yukon Communities — 100, 100, and 100. Over four years, that is a negative. What is the rationale for not even acknowledging that these non-governmental entities, just like the minister's department and the minister's wages, should reflect that there are increased costs of delivering and working with — local advisory councils, as well, 72 across the board. It was actually 73 and went down to 72. So, what is the rationale?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It is not uniform that the number is the same year over year. It is often the case, but it isn't a given that it will be the same. Typically, these transfer payment agreements are around specific services or things that the not-for-profit sector does, so that is typically where the dialogue goes. I have met with all of the groups that the member opposite listed in her question and have had dialogue with them.

With respect to the Association of Yukon Communities, typically, that conversation has been around municipalities first — so through the comprehensive municipal grant, which did get increased through our negotiation with municipalities. Of course, the Association of Yukon Communities derives most of its revenue through municipalities and a little bit through local advisory councils, not through us as government. So, increasing the comprehensive municipal grant automatically increased — I will follow up with the Association of Yukon Communities to find out directly, but I believe that there is a relationship between the comprehensive municipal grant and their portion. So, the dialogue around the comprehensive municipal grant was initiated through the Association of Yukon Communities.

With local advisory councils, I have said to them at all times that I am perfectly willing to entertain a conversation around if they need an increase. I just asked them to let me know what their situation is.

With respect to Volunteer Bénévoles Yukon, I have met with them several times to talk about what they are doing, and my conversation with them is around trying to build the capacity of NGOs and to support them in supporting the not-for-profit sector, and I have worked very closely with them.

The answer to the question is that we are open to having those conversations on a case-by-case basis and I am happy to talk with the not-for-profit sector about their needs.

Ms. Hanson: Well, in fact, Mr. Deputy Chair, I have heard from a number of NGOs that there is a lot of talk about NGOs — sometimes two NGOs — but what we see, when I look at this budget — and when we get to Health and Social Services, which will be next, we will see the flatlining again. So, what does talk do if it doesn't result in a change? I will leave it at that.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate the minister and his officials here today. I just have one question that has come up from a constituent of mine, and I think I have the right minister here — just with the consumer and corporate affairs responsibility. It is with respect to fuel pricing in the Yukon at the pumps, gasoline pricing. A constituent of mine sent me a text last night that showed the gasoline prices in Edmonton. Right now, it is 69.9 cents a litre, which obviously is quite a bit lower than here.

In talking to my colleague from Pelly-Nisutlin, he pulled up a chart that shows, pre-tax, what companies are paying — Edmonton rack pricing, so it is buying right from the refinery — for regular gas. Regular unleaded gas is 32.8 per litre, and then adding onto that, of course, the additional taxes — transportation, carbon tax, and those types of things. Alberta, I am assuming, has the same carbon tax rates that we do since they are both imposed by the federal government, so that should be similar.

Then, again, my colleague from Pelly Nisutlin was mentioning that freight costs are approximately 20 cents per litre — just a round number. So, we're looking at some of the trajectory of gasoline prices throughout Canada and the provinces over the last number of months. They have obviously gone up and gone down, and Yukon, for the most part — except for the recent 13-cent-per-litre decrease — has pretty much been flatlined. It was at 142.9 for the longest time, and now it has dropped to 129.9 in the Whitehorse area. It's different, obviously, in the communities.

I'm not advocating any government interference in the market or any type of action like that, but I think what my constituent and others would like to see is some sort of an independent review. Again, if I have the right minister, or if you could refer it to one of your colleagues if this isn't in your department — but some sort of independent review of the gasoline prices here in the territory and why they are fluctuating in other parts of Canada but seem to remain steady here, I would certainly appreciate it if the minister would commit to that independent review. Obviously, there are a lot of things going on in the government right now with the COVID-19 concerns,

but this is something that I think would be important to not only my constituent, but to other Yukon consumers if that's something that the government would take a look at.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I think this is the Department of Finance. It's not Community Services. I would just direct that question over there.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that from the minister. If he could just pass that request to the Minister of Finance so I don't have to get up and repeat that when that department comes up, that would be great. If we could get some sort of a response from the minister, that would be great as well.

Mr. Hassard: I had a question for the minister regarding the Faro fire hall. We know that it was cancelled last year due to being overbudget. I know that the minister had been — or the department had been — in talks with the municipality. I'm curious — I didn't see it in this year's budget, and I don't see it in the five-year capital concept, so I'm wondering if the minister could give us a bit of an update as to what the situation is there.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I recently went to Faro and had a meeting with the mayor and council. We discussed the issue. The issue wasn't just that the prices had come in high, it was also that the new municipal government felt that the scope of the project had been a little bit too much — a little bit too big — and that maybe things needed to be scaled back a bit. The project was rescoped. They asked me to give them a sense of the timeline on the project. I recently called Mayor Faber back up to say to him that my sense of timing was, provided that we get all of the necessary approvals on our side, that the project would go ahead for this tendering sometime this fall to start work in the following building season.

Ms. McLeod: I just have a couple of questions regarding rural lot development.

I know that the minister stood up to tell us which rural communities were seeing some activity and further went on to explain how much of the budget was going to that end. This year, rural land development is \$5 million to \$10 million. Next year, it will be \$5 million to \$10 million and then really nothing from there on out. It's just minor amounts of money as far as lot development goes.

The question is: Which communities will see lots for sale this year and how many lots?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will have to get back to the member opposite about what our projection is for the numbers of lots in communities. I think I read into the record that the amount that we are investing in our rural communities is just over \$7 million. That \$7 million — I'm not sure — I anticipate that, over time, we will always be investing in rural lot development — but can I just note that this \$7 million is just under what the previous government spent in 2016-17 for all lot development across the territory? It surpasses by two times what they spent in 2015-16 and surpasses by nearly three times what they spent in 2014-15. That is for rural lot development. We are spending \$29 million on lot development in the territory.

Okay, I will happily try to get projections for the number of lots that we think that will get us in each of the rural

communities and what our projection is. But it is a significant number; it is not a minor number, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Ms. McLeod: I am sorry if the minister thought that this was some kind of criticism. Obviously, I am happy to see lot development going on in rural Yukon and what is happening this year is, of course, what is important to me.

I appreciate that there is lot development going on, but I still have not heard any numbers as to how many lots are going to be up for sale for rural Yukoners to purchase. I understand that the minister will get me that information and I appreciate it.

Mr. Istchenko: I have a question for the minister that references lotteries. I have had this conversation with the minister before, but I don't think we got anywhere a few years ago.

The non-profit societies — and I want to expedite this and bring it forward for my constituents. It needs to be brought up again. There are a lot of non-profit societies that go and apply for a licence and more and more and more — when they apply for a lotteries licence — whether they are applying for raffling off a side-by-side, or a fat-tire bike or something they are doing or whether they are holding a poker run event or they are looking to do 50-50 tickets — there are all kinds of stuff that you can apply for.

The issue that I think organizations — and not just in the riding of Kluane, but also in Whitehorse and everywhere else is what you can use the proceeds of your raffle for is being interpreted differently from how it used to be interpreted under the act. I have read through the act, and the act is quite vague — probably for a reason — and I will just give you an example.

In my riding, we are not allowed, as a service organization, to donate money to Skate with Santa. Now, Skate with Santa is probably one of our top three big things. It is on December 24, just the day before Christmas. Mr. and Mrs. Yukon hold an event. We go skating and the Lion's Club would donate \$200 or \$300 to buy teddy bears for the kids. We can't do that because Mr. and Mrs. Yukon don't have a charitable organization under Community Services with all of their paperwork filled out, so we can't donate to that. We couldn't donate an AED to the school, even though we were told all the schools were full. We put one in there, but we had to put "property of the St. Elias Lion's Club" on it.

I just want to bring this to the attention of the minister. He can get up and say a few words if he wants, but I think it really needs to be looked at — how the YG staff are interpreting the licensing act and what people are allowed and not allowed to donate in their communities. Not everyone is a registered charitable society, but if you want to donate to the fire department — well, the fire department actually gets government funding, so you can't donate to the fire department for Share the Spirit. There are lots of things like that. It is becoming quite difficult. You are starting to see non-profit societies that want to volunteer in their community and raise money for things just dissolve their societies because it's too difficult.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just to back up a second for the Member for Watson Lake — again, I am happy to try to get

numbers. What I heard her talk about was that this was a minor amount of money. I heard the word “minor”. So that’s what had me trying to establish that this was significant. I do have numbers in front of me about what is available in the lot inventory right now around Watson Lake and other communities. So I have three country residential and one commercial lot available right now. Her question, as I heard it, was: How many lots are we going to make available — as in develop with the investment? I will get those numbers and projections, and I will get it for the whole of the territory — all our communities — because I think everyone is interested in knowing those numbers.

Also, I said it was over \$7 million. Let me just clarify that it’s \$7.4 million for rural land development.

For the Member for Kluane in his important — all of these questions are important, pardon me. It was a good question. I will happily go back and talk with the branch to try to see about this and I think it’s whenever we are talking about any of our branches which deal with interpreting the rules out there, whether it be — well, on my side, it would be building safety and this group — but we want to, at all times, strike a balance between upholding the rules appropriately as they are written out there, but also understanding the realities of our communities. I think we can all appreciate that the small societies are there to try to support their communities and they are just looking for a way to do things within the rules — so to try to help them navigate that. I appreciate that question and I will happily work with the department.

Deputy Chair: Is there any other general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services? We’ll proceed to line-by-line debate.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Deputy Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

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

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

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$100,523,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$117,317,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$217,840,000 agreed to

Department of Community Services agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter before Committee is Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: We will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Education

Hon. Ms. McPhee: First, I would like to ask my colleagues to help welcome Deputy Minister Nicole Morgan from the Department of Education — in the big chair — and Alison Thom, who is our manager of budgets and financial planning at the Department of Education. I appreciate them both being here today to assist with some of the questions. I am very pleased, Mr. Deputy Chair, to rise in the House today to present the Department of Education’s 2020-21 budget.

Education has a lasting impact on the lives of all Yukoners and our communities. Education lays a foundation in our lives — the knowledge and the skills that we use to weave with our experiences and create paths in our lives. Our government is very proud to support this budget being put forward today. My intention is to review some of the highlights. I certainly won’t be speaking about all of the items in the Education portfolio, but I am happy to get to some questions as well.

Our government is proud to support, in this budget, with Yukon College, the establishment of Yukon University, which of course, is Canada’s first university north of 60.

There are a number of items in the budget as well that respond to the audit that was done by the Auditor General with respect to an education focus and was released last June 2019. There is important work being done to collaborate with First Nations on the implementation of the audit recommendations, as well as others in the education world.

Mr. Deputy Chair, in 2020-21, the Department of Education has a total budget request of \$217,719,000. Of this, \$192,995 is for operation and maintenance. This is a \$7,587,000 increase over last year’s budget. The remaining \$24,724,000 is for capital projects. This is a decrease of \$4,037,000 from the 2019-20 capital budget.

I will just do a brief summary, Mr. Deputy Chair, of some of the branches with respect to the expenditures set out in this budget. First, I will make reference to Schools and Student Services and the O&M portion of that budget. The Schools and Student Services branch delivers public school education for more than 5,500 kindergarten to grade 12 students across 30 schools here in the Yukon Territory. This includes the quality assurance of the operations of Yukon schools and the delivery of K to 12 school programs, including facilities and student

transportation. It is by far the largest — it includes the inclusive and special education programming for students with different learning needs. It includes student information systems, distribution of learning resources, and privacy management, and it includes apprenticeships and training programs and student financial assistance programs.

To support the delivery of this service to Yukon learners, a total of \$152,016,000 in the 2020-21 budget is requested for both O&M and capital. Of this total, \$127,692,000 is requested for O&M, which is an increase of \$4,980,000 over last year's main estimates. This increase is largely due to the Yukon Teachers' Association and the Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement salary increases for staff.

With respect to supporting professional learning for educators, we have in this budget \$1,861,725 for 2020-21. Mr. Deputy Chair, this includes the Government of Yukon contribution of \$475,000 to the Yukon Teachers' Association professional development fund.

With respect to recommendations from the Auditor General's report regarding school growth plans and the fact that they be enhanced, we have budgeted \$327,000 to support this work in this fiscal year.

There are a number of other topics I could touch on, but I will note the capital funding under the heading of Schools and Student Services — so I just spoke about the O&M — moving with respect to that branch into the capital fund, we have in the budget \$24,324,000 in the capital fund for Schools and Student Services that is requested this year. This is an overall increase of \$4,437,000 from last year. This funding will allow us to continue modernizing Yukon schools as set out in the Government of Yukon's five-year capital plan.

With respect to capital, the Whistle Bend elementary school has budgeted 1,575,000, requested to continue planning work for that new elementary school here in Whitehorse. There is a request for \$11,583,000 to complete the French first language secondary school. There is \$4,600,000 requested to continue remediation work on the Ross River School. There is \$500,000 for the work on the relocation of Kluane Lake School to Burwash Landing. There is \$2.1 million requested to build modular classrooms to provide flexible learning spaces and meet changing learning needs in Yukon schools.

Also in the Capital budget: \$543,000 requested to complete the additional site features at the F.H. Collins school site; school-based information technology is budgeted for \$2.283 million; playground equipment to enhance and replace some playground equipment at Yukon schools is \$50,000; \$100,000 for modernizing learning spaces within Yukon schools; a total of \$435,000 for renovations and repairs at various schools across the territory; \$485,000 for school-based equipment purchases; and special education equipment is budgeted this year at \$70,000.

The Policy and Partnerships branch of the Department of Education has, with respect to operation and maintenance — this branch develops and coordinates the standards, procedures, and quality assurance measures for Yukon's K to 12 curriculum, post-secondary, and labour market programs and

services in collaboration with Yukon First Nations and other educational partners.

There is \$25,453,000 requested for operation and maintenance and funding for these program areas. This is an increase of \$354,000 from last year. Again, that change largely comes from collective agreement salary increases for Yukon Employees' Union staff.

With respect to First Nation Initiatives and the operation and maintenance for that branch and moving on to that branch, a total of \$8,278,000 is requested for this newer branch of the Department of Education. This is an increase of \$1.922 million from the 2019-20 main estimates, from when this branch was first established.

As of 2019-20, the Government of Yukon has increased funding in this area of education in order to provide an additional \$1.8 million each year to Yukon First Nations to support capacity building and collaboration toward community-level and collective joint education priorities. This is an extremely important initiative. This includes \$1.5 million to support community-level joint education priorities with the 14 Yukon First Nations through education agreements and \$300,000 to support implementation of the joint education action plan and related collective priorities. This means an overall \$3,521,000 in First Nation education agreement funding is there to support joint priorities.

Turning to Yukon University, with respect to operation and maintenance and capital to support the work and the core funding of Yukon University — \$27,123,000 for Yukon University's operation and maintenance budgets is here. The Government of Yukon continues to provide consistent funding support for transition to the university of \$1.5 million annually.

The department is requesting \$400,000 in the 2020-21 budget for Yukon University's capital spending which will primarily be spent on new signs to reflect the university and to students and visitors as they arrive and throughout the university and throughout the territory. We hope that we will be able to celebrate in May of this year, but as we know, things are moving fast, so we will hope that will be an opportunity forthcoming.

Student Support Services delivers all of the department's programs and services, including finance and accounting, human resources, communications, and public engagement. A total of \$4,449,000 is requested for that branch's operation and maintenance budget, which is an increase of \$331,000 over last year, which is again largely due to the Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement salary changes.

I think I might be close to concluding. Certainly, there is not much description in my comments today about the importance of these programs, but I'm keen for the opportunity to be able to answer questions.

Mr. Deputy Chair, from before we even enter kindergarten to when we prepare for careers and community life after high school and post-secondary school of any kind, we need educational programs to be responsive to our learning interests and needs as a community and as Yukoners. I am happy and proud to support this budget for the Department of Education

to achieve those goals going forward. I will be very pleased to answer questions. Thank you.

Mr. Kent: I would like to welcome the officials. I thank the officials for the briefing on Friday. It was very informative. I appreciate getting some of the supplementary information, as well as the other handouts.

Anyway, I'll jump right in with the minister here. Obviously, a lot of attention is being paid to COVID-19, and with respect to the Department of Education, the last correspondence with parents came out on March 13 saying that they expected school to resume after the spring break. Given announcements in recent days from neighbouring jurisdictions like Saskatchewan and Alberta and then British Columbia today that they were suspending school until further notice, has that changed with respect to the Yukon? At this time, are we still expecting to return to regular classes following the spring break — of course, bearing in mind the recommendations made yesterday by the chief medical officer of health?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The health and safety of Yukon students and staff is, of course, our first priority. We are working to ensure that we are sharing the most current and up-to-date information. As the member opposite has noted, that is changing almost hourly.

We are currently in conversation with the Yukon chief medical officer of health and expect that we will plan for contingencies, adjusting operations as we go forward. As the member opposite knows — and probably all members and most Yukoners are aware — we are currently having a March break, which was previously scheduled. For most places in the Yukon Territory, it is for a period of two weeks and will end on March 27. We are working hourly with respect to the changes and the advice of the chief medical officer of health. We will follow that advice. I expect to have an announcement in the next number of days.

Mr. Kent: I didn't have this written down, but are there schools that only have a one-week spring break in the territory? What are the plans for them? If you could just flag those schools for us, that would be great.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. I will just go through it so it is clear.

Schools in Whitehorse, of course, all follow the same calendar. They are currently on a break from school from March 16 to 27, so a two-week March break. Most rural schools are also on March break from March 16 to 27, with the following exceptions: the Ghùch Tlâ School in Carcross; the Nelnah Bessie John School in Beaver Creek; and the Robert Service School in Dawson City. They each have a one-week break, which is from March 16 to 20. The Tantalus School in Carmacks is on a March break from March 16 to 24. All of those schools are currently not in school. The one exception is Kluane Lake School, which is on March break from March 23 to 27, so it would be beginning next week.

I can indicate that, with respect to that school, we have specifically communicated with the chief medical officer of health, and that has been approved by them at this time. There are nine students and three staff, so they are practising great hygiene and social distancing with respect to that school. It will

break on Friday. One reason, of course, that we have been working so closely with the chief medical officer of health is that we are mindful that some of the schools are scheduled to come back next week, and we will be working with Dr. Hanley and Dr. Elliott's office in the next 24 hours — and then some — to be on top of the circumstances with respect to schools in the Yukon.

Mr. Kent: Obviously, we are dealing with a couple of different scenarios. One is that the students do return to school following the March break, and then the other one is that we follow along with British Columbia — whose curriculum, I believe, we follow as well — and suspend school indefinitely.

I will deal with some questions around the vast majority of schools returning after their March break. I'm just curious as to if the minister foresees some sort of an increase in a couple of budget areas — one of which is with respect to substitute teachers. I'm sure that there are a number of teachers who, perhaps, went away for spring break, are out of the country in the US, and will have to self-isolate when they come home for a period of a couple of weeks — if that is being factored in.

Also, cleaning and custodian work in the schools — are there extra dollars being shifted toward that budget line item based on whether or not we are going to go back to school?

I will switch quickly to the situation where, perhaps, we are suspending school to follow along with what our southern neighbours are doing and what exactly that is going to look like. Will there be any online learning availability for the students, especially the students in grade 12 who are working toward their graduation or in the secondary school years?

Also, I have a question around homeschool resources for families. I know that my colleague, the Member for Lake Laberge, raised this with the minister previously — or raised it in a motion, I believe, actually. Is there an opportunity for paper-based homeschool resources to be provided to families to complement the online piece — because, again, some folks live in areas where the Internet isn't particularly fast?

I will leave it at that. I think that was all I had with respect to COVID-19.

Again, I recognize that I'm asking hypothetical questions, but it's the stuff that we're getting from parents as far as what the plans are going forward.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: None of us like to answer hypothetical questions because they are complicated and they often send us, perhaps, in the wrong direction, but these are questions that Yukon families have, that Yukon teachers have, that Yukon children have, that our department has, and that we all have. I certainly don't have any issue with trying to address them.

We are working very closely with the BC ministry. We will, as I've said, follow the direction of the chief medical officer of health.

First of all, I should say that there are no budgetary considerations with respect to whether or not we close schools or suspend school for a period of time. That's not a factor. It's about safety and the health of our children and staff who work in schools. While, yes, we need to look at that as an issue, it's not a deciding factor or determinative factor with respect to

making this decision. As such, we are following the chief medical officer of health's advice, which I'm sure does not have any issue or consideration of the financial implications.

That said, we do have folks at the department working on a potential cost for additional sanitizing, additional cleaning staff, and additional materials for them to do their job, and that is being considered.

The primary concern with respect to our Yukon schools, as I've said — besides the health and safety — is the continuity of learning for children and, in particular, the high school students, as has been mentioned in the preamble to the question. That's the top priority. It is one of the things that we will work on immediately in the event that schools do not come back after the current March break.

With respect to online learning, of course, that is being considered and would be enhanced with respect to the advice of teachers and their continuity of learning plans for not only, of course, high school students, grade 12 students — incredibly important. No one wants them to lose any of their credits or have their graduation impacted in any way, but it's also really important for kids in grades 2 and 3 to continue their reading, so we will be looking for continuity of learning for all of those students.

We are well-positioned with respect to online learning and with the opportunity for teachers to cost share — and cost-sharing of the program and teachers' abilities to provide work online. That is one of the pieces of work that is being done.

I am concerned about the time, Mr. Deputy Chair. Seeing that it is 5:24 p.m. at the moment, I will ask that you report progress. I hope that we will be able to return to these questions very soon.

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Adel: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Government House Leader's report on length of Sitting

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 75(4) to inform the House that the House Leaders have met for the purpose of achieving agreement on the maximum number of sitting days for the current Sitting. I am informing the House that the results are that there should be a maximum of 30 sitting days, with the 30th sitting day being Tuesday, April 28, 2020.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare the current Sitting shall be a maximum of 30 sitting days, with the 30th sitting day being Tuesday, April 28, 2020.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, seeing the time, 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. Wednesday.

The House adjourned at 5:29 p.m.