



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 39

3rd Session

34th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, March 19, 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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

Yukon Liberal Party

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Terry Grabowski
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, March 19, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.**

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
At this time, we will proceed with prayers.

Prayers

Speaker's statement re social distancing in the Chamber

Speaker: Before we proceed with the Daily Routine, I would like to draw members' attention to the fact that the seating arrangements have changed in the House today to accommodate social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These measures have been enacted by the Chair on the strong recommendation of the chief medical officer of health, with whom I spoke this morning, and are similar to what is occurring in other legislative assemblies that are still sitting or are contemplating returning to sit for their own emergency measure debates.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

I don't believe that we do have visitors — introduction of visitors?

Tributes.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As the Minister of Education, I have a legislative return that I would like to file in response to a question by the Member for Copperbelt South on March 11, 2020. It is an answer to a question that he asked on that day.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to work with the Yukon Agricultural Association, Growers of Organic Food Yukon, the Fireweed Community Market, farmers, market gardeners, and processors to increase the production of locally grown food this year.

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

THAT, pursuant to Standing Order 2(5), the House be empowered to sit beyond 5:30 p.m. today for the purpose of:

(1) completing Committee of the Whole consideration and third reading of Bill No. 203, *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*;

(2) receiving the Commissioner to grant assent to bills passed by this House; and

(3) if unanimous consent is granted, debating a motion to adjourn the 2020 Spring Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, notwithstanding Standing Order 75(2).

I also rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT the House, at its rising on Thursday, March 19, 2020, do stand adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Thursday, October 1, 2020.

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 — Opposition briefings

Mr. Hassard: Across the country, governments have been providing regular — sometimes even daily — briefings to the opposition parties on their response to COVID-19. In Yukon, for two weeks, we've been trying to set up these regular briefings, and so far, we've only been able to get one.

Now, these briefings are important for the opposition members to relay accurate and up-to-date information to our constituents. So, will the Liberals agree to provide all parties with regularly scheduled briefings on our response to and preparedness for the pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Silver: In a nutshell, yes. We have been working with the chief medical officer — a request was put in to that medical office in support of having regular briefings for the opposition from their department. I hope the members opposite can understand how busy that department is right now. We are waiting for a response there. We will check back in today. I apologize for the lag.

But when it comes to our government specifically and those updates — we will definitely work with the opposition to make sure that they are updated and briefed accordingly.

Mr. Hassard: I will remind the Premier that we have heard this for the past couple of weeks, and it still hasn't happened. I would also remind the Premier that we're getting hundreds of questions from constituents on this topic, and all we're looking for is answers and information that we can actually pass on to our constituents.

When the Premier is having these conversations, will he in fact find out how regular these briefings will take place, as well as when they will actually begin to happen?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, we will look into the specifics of the questions from members opposite. We have been providing updates. We have talked about — not specifically to the opposition, but we have talked about the \$4-million package that we provided to workers and to businesses. We have talked about COVID-19 testing and the supports available online. We have talked about the business advisory council, which has been set up to work with the private sector business community.

We have talked about the federal changes — the federal employment insurance sickness benefits. We know that all of this information and all of these supports are available on yukon.ca and canada.ca as well, for the most updated information possible.

If passed, all of the publicly available information that we have available — if the members opposite can give us a sense of what other information that they're also looking for, then we would be grateful for that information. I guess the Member for Whitehorse Centre doesn't like that approach, but at the same time, we will continue to get the information out there, as we have, and we will endeavour to get regular briefings for the members opposite in this ever-changing world.

Mr. Hassard: Also on the COVID-19 pandemic, we have heard reports that the government is intending on using a local hotel as part of its pandemic response. We're curious if the Premier can confirm if this is, in fact, the case, or not, and will he provide the House with details on these proposed plans?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Great questions, for sure. I'm sure Yukoners are wondering how well prepared we are. I assure Yukoners that we are well prepared in Yukon. We continue to work with our chief medical officer — recognizing that the chief medical officers are extremely busy, and they are attempting to find the time necessary — and we will continue to work with them so that they can provide the opposition the information required.

A respiratory assessment centre is being considered here in the city, and it is going to be up and running in the next couple of days, and that will come out very shortly.

I wanted to just take a moment to say that our community is working really hard together. We have NVD, who has stepped up to the plate and is working with us. We are identifying a respiratory assessment centre, and that is an indication to Yukoners that we are taking the advice of our chief medical officer of health, working very closely to take best clinical advice on what should be seen with this respiratory assessment clinic, and we will work with our health professionals to ensure that happens.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus impact on economy

Mr. Istchenko: In light of what is going on in the world today and in the past few weeks, Canada's major banks stepped up and announced that they will help customers with difficulties being experienced by the outbreak through tools such as deferral of mortgage payments. This is good news for Yukoners, who have already been struggling with the fallout from their loss of business. But the economic impacts on the Yukon are huge, especially with the closure of the US border, which will really hurt my community of Haines Junction. Actually, it will hurt all of the Yukon, Mr. Speaker.

This government has only announced a tiny stimulus package that comes nowhere close to overcoming the massive decline that we are going to see in our economy this summer. We only need to look around to see local bars and restaurants closing and limiting.

Will the government be announcing stimulus to support restaurants and retailers? I think what is really important for them is: When will this happen?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is good to know that the members opposite think that \$4 million in immediate relief is puny — and also all of the other initiatives that are happening right now — billions of dollars flowing from the federal government — again, not enough for the Yukon Party, I guess.

I will say, as far as the border restrictions that the member opposite talked about, our government is working very closely with our partners inside and outside the territory to mitigate the potential of economic impacts in the Yukon. We absolutely understand the importance of the United States' market to Yukon, to our tourism industry, to our mining industry, and the effects long-term restrictions on discretionary travel could have on Yukon businesses.

I spoke with the mayor of the hamlet of Skagway just yesterday, urging him to give me a letter of what he assumes is essential travel — because, contrary to what the member opposite said, the border is not shut down. We are making sure that, by working with both governments, essential travel continues. It is my firm belief that workers are essential travel. It is my firm belief that migrant workers are essential travel, and we want to push the two federal governments to make sure that they keep the border open so that our economy doesn't suffer any more than it is already from COVID-19.

There is a host of other responses that were involved in the massive package from the federal government, but I will reserve that for my next answer to the member opposite's questions.

Mr. Istchenko: I think Yukoners are really looking forward to the Premier announcing these stimulus packages and I think they're wondering when.

As the government contract policy currently stands, they can hold off on paying contracts for 30 days after receipt. With growing uncertainty from the pandemic, many Yukoners cannot wait a month to be paid for services already rendered. With more and more government employees self-isolating, there is growing concern that there will — will there be capacity to even meet the existing 30-day timeline? There are also concerns if contract work will even be available going forward.

I'm just wondering, will the government commit to shortening the 30-day hold for paying out government contracts and pay Yukoners the money owed to them now to help overcome the economic uncertainty of this COVID-19 pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Silver: When it comes to the \$369 million in capital assets that are getting out the door in this current budget, what we can do together is get that budget passed so that we have that money flowing to the businesses that need it the most. Absolutely.

The member opposite talks about a stimulus package. We announced one this week. That stimulus package was \$4 million identified right up front to support workers and businesses. We will continue to monitor the situation as we prepare to provide additional support as needed. We've made announcements on sick leave. We've made announcements on

government fees being waived. We've made announcements on grants for cancelled events. We've put up money for marketing tourism. We put up money for cultural industries. Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board premiums — deferring for businesses that are impacted by COVID-19. We also have the business advisory council as well.

These are the actions that this government has taken. I don't have enough time to go over all of the announcements that affect support for businesses from the federal government, but they are lengthy and we are combing through the details as to how they affect Yukon businesses as we speak. More announcements will be coming. We're not even close to the apex of this yet. We know that we have much more work to do and this government is keeping that work done and we are very supportive and thankful for the support that we are seeing not only from the federal government but from our neighbour governments as well when it comes to the medical community — working with British Columbia, for example, is extremely important for Yukoners' health and well-being.

Mr. Istchenko: Yukoners, and we on this side, are very supportive that there are stimulus packages coming forward from the federal government, from this Liberal government and from other jurisdictions. I think people would just like a little more update on the details.

When it comes to the question about the contracting being paid, I believe we got an answer on that. We're just trying to help the government here.

As I mentioned in my previous question, banking institutions, corporations, business leaders, and the federal government, have all stepped up with plans to help the average person try to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, using tools such as loan forgiveness, tax holidays, and more.

Yukon municipalities are having similar conversations about what they can do within their power to help their citizens. They are concerned, and they want to help. Property taxes are due partway through Yukoners' summer, but we have already seen the devastating impacts that this virus is having on our tourism traffic and markets. We know that, this year, that will not be the case.

What does the government have in place to ensure that Yukon municipalities are in a financial position to do their part to support Yukoners who may have difficulty making ends meet this summer?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We have ongoing conversations not only with municipality governments but also First Nation governments and the federal government to make sure that all aspects of COVID-19 are considered and that the financial and medical and mental health supports are there.

The member opposite glazed over a few of the items that we're working on government-to-government. Again, with the federal government's announcements to support businesses, providing small businesses, small employers, a temporary wage subsidy of a period of three months — a great initiative from the federal government, announcing that all businesses may defer until after August 31, 2020, the payment of any income tax amounts owed before September 2020; export development corporations providing loans, guarantees, and insurance

policies to exporters; providing more than \$10 billion in additional support, largely targeted to small- and medium-sized businesses through the business credit availability program, and the list goes on and on.

We will continue to monitor the situation. We are continuing to work whole-of-government and with all other governments to bring Canadians together for solutions. One of the most important pieces of those solutions is our municipalities. We are absolutely relying on our mayors and our councils to provide us with the information that we need to help support Yukoners where they live. We were told directly from the Prime Minister's Office that they need to know the anecdotal information from the First Nation chiefs and councils and that they need to know the anecdotal information from municipalities as well. We will continue to support those governments in that pursuit.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus — working from home

Ms. White: Yesterday, public servants were informed of new arrangements with regard to working from home. In the memo to managers — and I'm quoting: "The goal of this directive is that as many employees as possible, taking into account operational requirements, are able to work from home in order to increase social distancing and aid in the prevention of the spread of COVID-19"

Mr. Speaker, it would seem that some managers aren't listening. Public servants are already e-mailing us, and they're upset that their requests have been denied, even though they're not in essential service positions and are entirely capable of working from home.

Can the minister tell us why public servants are being denied the option of working from home?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have been very clear with my responses to this COVID-19 crisis when it comes to the civil service. The health and well-being of our employees is paramount, and in order to bend the curve of this pandemic, we need employees to work from home, to get into their houses, and to get out of the workplaces. That's what we are working on very, very diligently within the Public Service Commission, and I commend the civil servants who are working so very hard in these unprecedented times, in these uncharted waters, to actually bring about change to the workplace and to our society.

The Public Service Commission takes the health and safety of all employees very seriously. Proactively responding to the COVID-19 situation is our top priority, and we are working collaboratively on several fronts in the government-wide effort to support the health and well-being of employees while ensuring that the programs and services that Yukoners depend on continue to be available to Yukoners through this crisis.

The situation is continually evolving. The commission is well-positioned to adapt as needs arrive through ongoing communications, implementation of new human resource initiatives, and regular collaboration with our partners. We are closely following the advice and announcements of the chief medical officer of health, and I hope to answer more on the next question.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, it's not often that I will agree with the Minister of the Public Service Commission. I agree that public servants should be working from home. The problem is that they are being denied. Youth programs have been cancelled, libraries are closed, and spring break has been extended for an additional two weeks. Families are already struggling with managing both caring for their families and work. Having the ability to work from home can ease the stress. Federal departments have deployed workers home. The City of Whitehorse has encouraged and supports their employees to work from home.

So, Mr. Speaker, why is this government, the largest single employer in the Yukon, denying public servants the ability to work from home, and when is this government going to be doing everything possible to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and flatten the curve by sending public servants home?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: An executive committee of deputy ministers established under the Yukon government's pandemic coordination plan, and on the advice of the Public Service Commissioner, has issued a work-from-home directive to facilitate Yukon government departments entering into work-from-home arrangements with their staff being implemented as soon as possible.

Individual departments are responsible for identifying which positions may be suitable for working from home, for implementing their business continuity plans, and for collaborating with Highways and Public Works to ensure that employees have the technology and tools required to carry out their duties if working from home.

Departments are now actively putting in place work-from-home arrangements. We recognize that this will take some time, but we are making best efforts to put these arrangements in place as quickly as possible to support social distancing.

Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, has a specific example, I hope that she brings it to casework so that we can actually deal with these problems directly and not deal in innuendo. So, please get us that information. I will be happy to look it up for her.

Ms. White: Having worked in this position for nine years and having developed the level of trust that I have with the people, I invite the minister to ask them to trust him in the same way.

So, Mr. Speaker, applications to work from home have been denied as of yesterday. Government offices are not set up to allow two metres of distance between desks, and shared workspaces are the norm for many government employees. Many public servants are feeling stressed and confused by the mixed messaging. They are hearing instructions that encourage them to apply to work from home, only to be denied.

Another quote from yesterday's memorandum — and I quote: "The impact COVID-19 is having on our work arrangements is rapidly changing and we need to ensure that we support our staff through these unprecedented times." It goes on — and I quote: "Working together we can continue to support our employees through this challenging and fast moving situation."

So, Mr. Speaker, how does denying non-essential public servants the opportunity to work from home meet any of these objectives?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of our civil servants is absolutely paramount for me. It is also paramount to society. The quicker we can get individuals out of the workplace and into their homes, the more effective our isolation procedures will be.

We, on this side of the House, have issued a directive. All of our deputies have been informed, and they are working as quickly as possible to methodically get civil servants into their houses to make sure that we can continue to provide the service that Yukoners depend on from this civil service.

The work of the Yukon government of delivering services to Yukoners in the midst of this pandemic is absolutely critical, and we have to make sure that those services continue. So, we are doing this methodically and carefully. If the member opposite has real information for me to deal with, please bring it forward. I would be happy to expedite the casework, because I want to know, and I want to make sure that this is going smoothly. So, please bring the information forward. Let's work together in the face of this unprecedented problem, and let's work together as the Government of Yukon, as civil leaders, to make this better and make this work.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Ms. Hanson: As we have heard already today, Yukoners have received clear messages about social distancing and the avoidance of large gatherings. On Monday, the chief medical officer and the deputy chief medical officer of health restricted large gatherings to groups of no more than 50 people. The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is one location that has more than 50 individuals receiving services, such as meals and programming, every day.

Mr. Speaker, what is this government doing to address the requirements for social distancing at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As we look at the concerns being brought forward from our community, we are taking everything into consideration, much as we are with the citizens who reside at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — the citizens who come there to use the facility. We are taking every precautionary measure, as we are with all of our facilities, so that every Yukoner matters and their health and safety is protected. We will continue to do that with our health professionals, with the great staff that we have at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. I'm really happy to say that the department is working hard to ensure that all supports are in place for all of our citizens in the Yukon, and we will continue to do that good work.

Many individuals from Whitehorse and the communities participate in activities at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, including meals and programming. Many of these individuals do not have secure housing and have to couch surf or move around to different families and friends' homes.

Yesterday, a UN expert said: "Housing has become the front line defence against the coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life or death situation..."

Mr. Speaker, what is the plan to support individuals who are homeless or couch surfing if they need to be safely quarantined?

Hon. Ms. Frost: For reference, we were speaking earlier about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and what's available there.

When we started this process, we had 12 to 14 citizens accessing that facility, and I'm happy to say now that we provide supports to 50 or more people on a daily basis for shelter, plus we provide over 300 meals a day, and we will continue to provide that service. We will ensure —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm sure the member opposite, if she would just stop for minute instead of being so aggressive all the time and listen to the answers, then we will get to the point —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: The Leader of the Third Party, on a point of order.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, that is inflammatory language. I'm going to go for Standing Order 19(i). It is abusive.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: The Minister of Health and Social Services is, to a certain extent, personalizing the debate. I would recommend that she perhaps steer clear of that.

I would also ask all members to listen closely when the member who has the floor is speaking. Sometimes I have difficulty hearing. I have difficulty hearing the member who has the floor by virtue of some of the other comments that are occurring off-mic. There you have it.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I will respond to the question that was asked. The question asked was: How many — and what are we doing at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter? What is available there for supports? I'm attempting to answer that question to say that we are working with the chief medical officer of health, and we are putting in place the measures necessary at all of our facilities that we manage in Health and Social Services.

Ms. Hanson: That was the first question. The second question had to do with homeless people who need to be safely quarantined.

This government has large numbers of auxiliary-on-call workers across government, but more particularly in Health and Social Services. We know that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is currently staffed by 37 auxiliary-on-call employees who are providing support and supervision to the individuals who are living at the shelter, utilizing the overnight emergency beds, and having meals. Auxiliary-on-call workers and casual workers are not entitled to paid leave.

Can the Premier confirm that auxiliary-on-call workers and casual workers will be entitled to the paid sick leave announced earlier this week?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Of course, we want to ensure that we have the necessary staff in place to provide the supports for all Yukoners when we are currently dealing with this situation that

we find ourselves in. We are bringing in the supports that are required. If we need to do more, then we will do that.

It's essential that we pass this budget so that we can secure the positions that have been identified. There are 37 positions, and we will continue to ensure that those individuals are providing services and stability at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We have a number of rooms set aside that will ensure security and safety of all of the clients. We have measures in place, and we will continue to work with the staff there.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus social distancing measures

Ms. Van Bibber: Today, the Speaker's office received advice from the chief medical officer of health to have us all rearrange our seating plan in these Chambers to account for social distancing. We have heard from many public servants that are concerned that they haven't received information yet on what steps they should be taking in their workplace.

Can the minister please tell us what the status of this work is and when it is expected to be completed?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm really happy to, once again, address this issue on the floor of the House. We appreciate the concerns being raised, and we have also heard from many concerned Yukoners, and we're working around the clock to take the necessary measures to protect the public.

The effort is happening in real time and methodically so that we do not 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 officials that public health is a lens through which these decisions must be made. Managers are currently working to get their staff out of the offices and into their new, decentralized residential offices in their homes as quickly as possible.

We have implemented the business continuity plan to make sure that the civil service and the hard-working people of this government — and they are absolutely working at breakneck pace under very trying times, supporting the regular programming, supporting this House, trying to work through the COVID-19 pandemic that we face, and also looking after their families as they go home from school and all the other issues that they have to face.

I commend them for their work on this. We are working very hard to make sure that we maintain the services that Yukoners depend on.

Question re: COVID-19 coronavirus — essential services preparedness

Ms. McLeod: As we discussed yesterday, the health care field is not immune to capacity challenges that self-isolation and potential exposure to the virus is imposing on our workplaces.

The Yukon's dedicated and tireless health care professionals work hard year-round. Yet, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, things are likely to get busier. If our health care systems depend on overtime and the use of Outside agency nurses under normal operations, it begs the question: What contingencies are in place if we need additional health

care staffing, particularly in a time of national crisis where Outside nurses will be in demand across the country and be inclined to stay close to home where they can assist their own families?

What is this government doing to ensure that Yukon has priority access to Outside-based agency nurses to respond to the pandemic?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We are working — of course, we have had the conversation with the union to look at providing additional supports here in the Yukon. We are also looking at contracting a nursing agency to provide the necessary supports to the Yukon. We are working with the physicians, and we are working on a virtual arrangement so that we can free up some time for more supports, social distancing, and necessary protections for all of our citizens. We will continue to work with the agencies and work with our health professionals to ensure that we have adequate support on the ground in the Yukon.

Ms. McLeod: In the event that the COVID-19 pandemic touches the Yukon, our medical system needs to be able to respond in a coordinated approach. We will need to utilize all of our dedicated health care professionals to the extent of their respective scopes. Our doctors and nurses will need to focus on their areas of expertise, and Yukon pharmacists, for example, must focus on theirs.

Yet, after years of talk and very little action, this government has not kept its promise to give pharmacists the ability to administer publicly funded flu shots or extend prescriptions. If a publicly funded vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available, there is still no billing system in place to allow pharmacists to administer the shots.

Will this government take immediate steps to ensure that Yukon pharmacists have the ability to administer publicly funded vaccines and extend life-saving prescriptions?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am not certain where the member opposite got that information, but I want to say that we did pass new regulations for pharmacists under the *Health Professions Act* that expands their scope of practice for them to better serve Yukoners. They can now adapt prescriptions, extend prescriptions, access and use lab results related to prescriptions, and administer injections. So, I'm just very happy that this is there. That wasn't as a result of COVID-19; that actually happened before this happened.

We just want to thank all of our front-line health care providers. We will do our best to try to empower all of them to serve Yukoners.

Ms. McLeod: I believe that the minister missed the point of the question.

Our office continues to be contacted by concerned parents regarding the confusing messages this government is sending regarding the safety of childcare during the pandemic. With yesterday's announcement of Yukon schools being closed for an extended period of time, many parents who are unable to work from home don't know what to do.

Despite the measures being taken to prepare for the pandemic, including self-isolation and working from home, many of our territory's dedicated essential services still need to

show up for work, which means that they will have to find or rely on childcare.

Can this government give Yukon parents a clear, uncomplicated answer on what they should do to ensure safe childcare arrangements for their children in the coming weeks?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Again, we rely on the chief medical officer to provide us with the necessary guidance. I believe that, only a couple of days ago, he made it quite clear with us. We will continue to work with our Family and Children's Services branch to ensure a safe and careful approach to how we deal with childcare centres.

At this time, of course, there are concerns from Yukoners and we always want to take that into consideration as we look at finding solutions. We have 67 centres, I believe, across the Yukon, and some have already elected to close on their own. He is working now on a specific solution for how we deal with childcare centres. We will work under his advisement with respect to how pharmacists are billed.

I do believe that the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes spoke very succinctly about the response to the pharmacist regulations in allowing them to administer and bill accordingly. That is currently in negotiations, but that will be resolved through that process.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I request the unanimous consent of the House to move, without notice, a motion that, pursuant to Standing Order 2(5), the House be empowered to sit beyond 5:30 p.m. for the purposes of:

- (1) completing Committee of the Whole consideration and third reading of Bill No. 203, *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*;
- (2) receiving the Commissioner to grant assent to bills passed by the House; and
- (3) if unanimous consent is granted, debating a motion to adjourn the 2020 Spring Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, notwithstanding Standing Order 75(2).

Unanimous consent to move without notice a motion to sit beyond normal hour of adjournment

Speaker: The Government House Leader has requested the unanimous consent of the House to move, without notice, a motion that, pursuant to Standing Order 2(5), the House be empowered to sit beyond 5:30 p.m. for the purposes of:

- (1) completing Committee of the Whole consideration and third reading of Bill No. 203, *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*;
- (2) receiving the Commissioner to grant assent to bills passed by the House; and
- (3) if unanimous consent is granted, debating a motion to adjourn the 2020 Spring Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, notwithstanding Standing Order 75(2).

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Motion to sit beyond normal hour of adjournment

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move:

THAT, pursuant to Standing Order 2(5), the House be empowered to sit beyond 5:30 p.m. for the purposes of:

(1) completing Committee of the Whole consideration and third reading of Bill No. 203, *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*;

(2) receiving the Commissioner to grant assent to bills passed by the House; and

(3) if unanimous consent is granted, debating a motion to adjourn the 2020 Spring Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, notwithstanding Standing Order 75(2).

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, pursuant to Standing Order 2(5), the House be empowered to sit beyond 5:30 p.m. for the purposes of:

(1) completing Committee of the Whole consideration and third reading of Bill No. 203, *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*;

(2) receiving the Commissioner to grant assent to bills passed by the House; and

(3) if unanimous consent is granted, debating a motion to adjourn the 2020 Spring Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, notwithstanding Standing Order 75(2).

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly for their collaboration with respect to this matter and for the opportunity to speak to this. I will be very brief.

I think we all agree — not speaking for anyone else — that the budget is, in fact, critical to Yukoners — Bill No. 203, which is noted in this motion. It is critical for certainty going forward in what is currently an uncertain world. It is critical for programs and services to continue. It is important and critical for businesses to know that the Yukon government's five-year capital plan, for instance, will continue and to give security to Yukoners, with respect to the spending authority of the government going forward and the direction that is set out in this particular budget for 2020-21, to indicate the route ahead — which is changing hourly, as we know, but nonetheless, it is a critical signal to Yukoners that the government and this Legislative Assembly agrees to be supportive of their security and peace of mind.

I would like to thank the parties for agreeing, as I understand is the case, to stay late tonight to work on behalf of Yukoners for the purposes of providing this budget certainty going forward, well into what is beyond the current spending permitted by the other bills that we passed earlier this week. None of us have an idea of how long this situation will last, and it is important that we signal to Yukoners that the government is strong and it is debating and then ultimately, hopefully, passing a budget for 2020-21 for the purposes of signalling forward how the government will maintain the course and adjust, as necessary, to all of the issues that are coming at each of us every single day — each Yukoner every single day — and that the security of their peace of mind is critical going forward.

Mr. Kent: Granted, these are extraordinary times that we are living in right now, and those extraordinary times

sometimes call for extraordinary measures. Obviously, earlier this week, we expedited debate, eventual voting, and then passage on the interim supply bill and the supplementary budget from last week, and we look forward to debating in Committee of the Whole today the Health and Social Services and Education budgets and other departmental budgets as much as we can so that we can provide some scrutiny around that.

I'm hopeful that, this fall when the House reconvenes, whether or not all departments have votes in the supplementary budget that we expect to see this fall, the Premier will provide access to particularly those ministers and officials during general debate of the departments that we perhaps aren't able to touch on in the work that we're going to accomplish up to and beyond 5:30 p.m. today.

We are supportive of this motion that is before the House before and I wish all Yukoners to stay safe, be healthy, and as a resilient bunch of citizens and individuals who we are up here, I know that we'll emerge on the other side of this stronger than we were going in.

Of that, I am certain. Again, these are extraordinary measures that we're doing, and Yukoners can rest assured that we will do our job in the time today and into this evening to get answers on some of those bigger departments that we have identified to come before Committee of the Whole today.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the motion?

If the member now speaks, she will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard on this motion?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank the member opposite for his comments and for the collaboration going forward. I would also like just to take a moment to thank all of those who support this Legislative Assembly. We are making a decision to do this work in collaboration today and beyond the hours that might normally be required. There is a great thanks needed to all those who support this process — our staff in each of the offices and our staff in each of the departments who will be required to be here. In particular, I would like to express our thanks to Hansard and to all of the members of this Legislative Assembly for the purposes being here, working together on behalf of Yukoners. I think that, in extraordinary times, as the member opposite said, extraordinary measures are required. I hope, and I know, that we're always here on behalf of Yukoners and that won't change today, but I appreciate the support of all that will allow this process to play out this afternoon.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of the House to move, without notice, a motion to adjourn the House at its rising today until October 1, 2020.

Unanimous consent to move without notice a special adjournment motion notwithstanding Standing Order 75(2)

Speaker: The Government House Leader has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of the

House to move, without notice, a motion to adjourn the House at its rising today until October 1, 2020.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Special adjournment motion

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move:

THAT the House, at its rising on Thursday, March 19, 2020, do stand adjourned until 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 1, 2020.

Speaker: It has been moved:

THAT the House, at its rising on Thursday, March 19, 2020, do stand adjourned until 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 1, 2020.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will be extremely brief with respect to this collaboration between the parties. This morning, conversations between the leaders and the House Leaders have taken place, and I'm pleased to present this on behalf of the Legislative Assembly and the government today for the purposes of providing some certainty as we go forward with the important business of this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Kent: I, too, will be brief and suggest that — hopefully, as this situation passes — the House Leaders can get together during the recess and come up with a plan. I mean, we would be looking to seek the maximum number of days for that Fall Sitting — and I believe that maximum number is 40 — just so we can take care of and get answers to some of the business that we weren't able to do in this abbreviated Spring Sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

Speaker: Is there further debate on the motion?
If the member now speaks, she will close debate.
Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, I will take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Legislative Assembly and all those who support us in this work. There will be alternate ways for the members of the opposition to seek information, alternate from the House Sitting that we are speaking about today — opportunities to do that. We certainly commit to providing answers to their questions and as much information and cooperation going forward as possible. We expect, as suggested by the member opposite, that there are a lot of ways that this can happen, and we are certainly committed to making sure that our government is accountable.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a 10-minute recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Health and Social Services

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to just take a moment and ask my support staff to come in and take their seats. I am pleased to present the 2020-21 main estimates for Health and Social Services. I have with me today Deputy Minister Stephen Samis and ADM of Corporate Services Karen Chan. The budget for Health and Social Services is entirely dedicated to serving Yukoners' health needs — both mental and physical.

In light of the global pandemic we are dealing with, we can all agree that ensuring Yukoners' health needs are met — it is absolutely essential that we do that.

I will keep my remarks short today so that we can proceed as quickly as possible, keeping in mind that the chief medical officer of health declared a public health emergency in our territory yesterday. That has urged us to focus our efforts on responding to that emergency.

I am joined by my great staff here who will help to provide some information as we move along here as expeditiously as we can. I know that they are both extremely busy with local, national, and regional coordination here in the Yukon. The efforts of our health care system to manage the COVID-19 situation is, of course, top of mind for everyone. In particular, they are both working tirelessly to identify our territory's needs now and in the coming weeks and months so that we can effectively leverage federal government supports to manage health care needs in our territory. As the situation develops, that work is extremely pressing and absolutely critical.

This budget was prepared before the global pandemic emerged. That federal funding will help us to protect the public health of Yukoners in the short term. We appreciate you joining us today to help explain the 2020-21 budget for Health and Social Services. In this budget, we are requesting \$448,580,000

in operation and maintenance funding, an increase of 4.5 percent over the last fiscal year. We are requesting \$12,815,000 in capital funding, bringing our total appropriation request to \$461,395,000.

Estimates in this budget include funding for a shingles vaccine for Yukon seniors. It also includes support for those already enrolled in the pilot constant glucose monitoring project. More broadly, the Health and Social Services budget provides funding for NGOs and non-profits, long-term care facilities, emergency shelter in Whitehorse and in our communities, the Housing First residence in Whitehorse, community health centres, social assistance, the public health initiative, and staff salaries including for nurses and front-line staff. It also includes funding for our hospitals.

Last year, we heard concerns from the Yukon Party about Yukon hospital funding. I am proud to say that, as we have every year since coming into office, we have increased the funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation so it can continue to provide acute care for Yukon citizens, in addition to programs such as medical imaging, lab work, surgeries, and chemotherapy, as well as the extended orthopaedic surgery program.

We will continue to work closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to respond to their changing needs as the COVID-19 situation develops. Just this morning, I spoke to the chair, and we'll continue to have that ongoing dialogue to look at their needs as well.

The last thing that I would like to note is that we appreciate the work of the MLAs to expedite the interim supply bill this week. This will ensure that funding is in place until the end of May. However, that bill only includes \$100 million for Health and Social Services — not even a quarter of the budget needed to ensure that we can continue to meet the needs of Yukoners at all stages of their lives.

We are anticipating additional costs as a result of COVID-19 mitigation efforts. We are tracking the spending so that we can work with the federal government to recover our added costs.

But, let me be clear, the interim supply bill does not provide the department with enough financial flexibility to address the current situation beyond the next few weeks.

In the coming days, we are opening a respiratory assessment centre staffed by physicians and health care providers where people can be tested for COVID-19. That will be coming out shortly.

We are also working on a separate space that, if the need arises, could be used to house Yukoners who need to be isolated and are not able to do so in their own homes or in their own communities.

We are also expanding the 811 line to increase capacity. We have activated an online self-assessment tool and are improving the website to ensure that Yukoners have easy access to key information.

I cannot stress strongly enough how quickly people are working. The Yukon public service is meeting daily with First Nations and municipal governments to share information. The Yukon government is working hard to keep Yukoners safe and

is, of course, keeping health at the top of mind of everyone as we manage the situation. To that end, I ask the opposition parties to please act responsibly and move as quickly as we can through the budgets and to be specific on the questions that they would like to ask, and I will do my best to respond appropriately to the questions.

Ms. McLeod: Now, in last year's budget, there was a line item of \$100,000 to conduct a study or survey regarding homelessness in Watson Lake. Last November, I wrote a letter to the minister regarding this funding and what its status was. The minister referenced that a fulsome assessment was being undertaken by Help and Hope for Families Society of the housing needs for Watson Lake. This study was anticipated to be finished at the end of 2019. I wonder if the minister could now give us an update.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Actually, that study is due to be completed at the end of April of this year.

Ms. McLeod: If I understood the minister, the date was extended beyond the end of 2019 until the end of April 2020.

Hon. Ms. Frost: It was always April 2020.

Ms. McLeod: I am just going on the basis of the information received from the minister previously.

With respect to that report that is not due until the end of April, I wonder if the minister could tell us something about the capital request of \$500,000 toward this project.

Hon. Ms. Frost: If I can ask the member opposite to be more specific — because I am not finding that in my materials. If I can't find it today, I will certainly endeavour to get that information at a later time.

Ms. McLeod: It is located on page 5 of the five-year capital plan, which says up to \$500,000 for a Watson Lake Housing First project, with \$3 million or \$4 million committed for next year. This just struck me as a bit off since the report is not done or expected until the end of April. The minister can respond to that at her leisure.

I have a question about the mental health hubs. First of all, I would like to know if they are fully staffed.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am just trying to get the specific information. I do know that we have the four mental wellness hubs — Watson Lake, Carmacks, Haines Junction, and Dawson City. The objective is to ensure that we have reduced the wait times for mental wellness supports in all of our communities. Our objective is certainly always to ensure that we have a full staffing complement in each one of those centres.

I would be happy to provide specific details on how many positions we have. The very specifics — we have already shared that, but I can get back to the member opposite. The current staffing in our communities — in Dawson City, we have three mental wellness counsellors, a youth/child counsellor, a clinical psychologist, a mental health nurse — we are recruiting for one mental wellness support counsellor, two support workers, and the list goes on. I can provide the member opposite with the information. We currently have all of our hubs staffed.

Like every other sector of our government, there are vacancies. We will continue to fill those vacancies as they arise,

but rest assured that Yukoners have the support they need for mental wellness supports.

Ms. McLeod: I have a question about the staff themselves. The minister can respond by letter if she wants to detail the positions themselves; however, my question is about the staff and whether all of them work out of the hubs themselves. For instance, if a mental health nurse works out of a hospital, are they considered to be part of the mental wellness hub?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The staff have their own separate offices in the communities out of the hubs. As we do with every community, we look at a collaborative care model. We work with our hospitals, we work with all of our health care staff in our communities, and we will continue to do this. For this specific instance, the mental wellness hubs have their own offices established in each one of the communities identified.

Ms. McLeod: If I could get clarification — by way of letter is fine — about the positions and where they are working from, I think that might be helpful for people, because I didn't get that they all work out of the mental wellness hubs, although I get that they have their own suite of offices.

When we were in debate earlier on the concept of the mental wellness hubs, the minister indicated that there would be a report generated that would speak to the effectiveness of the mental wellness hubs and how they are addressing and meeting the needs of Yukoners. I'm wondering if that report is available.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Keep in mind that the mental wellness hubs were non-existent just three short years ago. We established the mental wellness hubs to provide really essential services and supports to our communities. Every year as we look at the hubs, we look at efficiencies, and we work with our communities around their community wellness plans. We want to continue to undertake that review with the respective communities.

We are just now, through our comprehensive health review and through other measures, looking at all of our program services to ensure that they efficiently and effectively meet the needs of each one of our communities. The member opposite spoke earlier about the \$500,000 that is actually identified in the Yukon Housing Corporation budget. I would be happy to speak to that when I rise to speak to the Yukon Housing Corporation budget.

Ms. McLeod: Just my thought on this deferring discussion to another department — I just find it a bit odd, since it's generated under Health and Social Services and this government likes to talk about a one-government approach. I will leave that there.

If I understood the minister, then — that there has been no report generated to talk about the effectiveness of the mental wellness hubs, as the minister had indicated would happen within a year of their staffing, I guess, rather than at their creation. I will talk a bit more later about the health review itself.

Some of the things that I would like to hear about when we are talking about the mental wellness hubs — something about client loads from community to community, where the four

hubs are, and whether or not all of the staff are being fully utilized, which might indicate that there is a need for additional staffing. Of course, we can't know that unless we know what the numbers are. So, if the minister could expand on that a bit.

You know, when I am trying to establish where the mental health workers are located, I would also like to know how many of them are travelling workers — so they may reside in Whitehorse and service Mayo and Watson Lake or whatever the case may be.

Hon. Ms. Frost: A very interesting line of questioning — wanting to know what the positions are, where they are, whether they reside in the communities, and where they travel. As I indicated, I can provide that information, but those are very specific details, and it will take me some time to respond. I would be happy to do that if that is the prerogative of the member opposite.

There are a number of positions that we shared with the House previously, and I would be happy to do that again — very specific, detailed information and a map on where all of these positions are identified and the supports that they provide to Yukoners. We have expanded the support services to all of the communities. Every community has a support individual in the community — be it a mental wellness counsellor or a social worker — which we haven't had previously. So, we look at efficiencies in each one of our communities. We look at designing and being adaptive in order to meet and provide services in the best way possible and so that it evolves with the community and the community surrounding it.

Each one of our communities is very unique unto itself. It is imperative that we work with the communities. We have since added more positions to what we originally identified with our mental wellness hubs. I am very proud of the great work that is happening in our communities — introducing rapid access counselling throughout our communities. The wait time and delay time now has gone down to 72 hours, and we are trying to make that even shorter. If it's imminent and you need support, we will make sure that you get the support required.

We also now provide support to All Genders Yukon, collaborating with services in other sectors of our society, not just through the mental wellness hubs. We have other contracts as well that work to ensure that we provide the good work and the support to all Yukoners, no matter where they reside in the Yukon.

We are adding additional funding to the hubs in 2020, so we have an additional \$400,000 for that. We are looking at the comprehensive health review, and the recommendations that come out of that will give us a good indication of what is happening in our communities. We said that we would review the hubs as required, and we will continue to do that and have a look at each one of our local communities, ensuring that we have the necessary supports and adjust to their needs.

Ms. McLeod: I recognize that these are specific questions, but they are the responsibility of the department, so I can't apologize.

Every week when I go home, I hear from people who say that the mental health supports are not sufficient to meet their needs, which is why I am asking the question and why I'm

looking for a report that the minister can point to that says, yes, the hubs are fully staffed and that, yes, they are fully deployed and that perhaps the government is satisfied that it is enough. I think, if we had a report by an independent body, that might help us decide that.

I appreciate the minister mentioning five new mental health workers. As I understand it, those are fully dedicated workers for the Yukon Review Board, so I am not entirely sure how that helps out our mental wellness hubs.

I am going to move on.

The minister spoke about the — I guess, before I move on from mental health, it begs the question — with so many people out of work now and people wondering how they're going to pay their bills, wondering how they're going to pay the rent, I can only imagine it has led to a great deal more mental stress. I'm wondering what new initiatives have been put in place for all Yukon communities to deal with COVID-19 and those associated stressors.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Like the member opposite, we do care about Yukoners. We care deeply about Yukoners, and we will ensure that we provide the supports where supports are needed. We want to really assure Yukoners that we are working really hard and we are working around the clock. I want to just hold up my hands to the public servants in the government and all of our mental wellness support sector. We are working very closely with our service providers to ensure that they are on hand. They are an essential service in all of our communities, recognizing that people are under immense stress, and the stressors that they feel, we feel as well.

I feel it. My little community of Old Crow is feeling it. So, every community is having some major challenges. We will certainly ensure that we provide supports in time. We have been doing that every day with our conference calls, taking a collaborative health approach, and communicating to our communities, through our Association of Yukon Communities reps, through our coordinated health approach.

Now, I had just mentioned — when we talked about the mental wellness hubs — the rapid access response counselling. The objective of that is to provide the services very rapidly. The member opposite speaks about COVID-19 and the imminent stresses people are feeling. That's the objective of the rapid access counselling support.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for her response.

In talking about the health review, I believe a report was due to be tabled at the end of this month. Is that on track?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes.

Ms. McLeod: When will that be? What is its future? Is it going to be released to the public? Is it going to be released to the Legislature? Just how is it going to be handled?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The independent expert panel is on track and we will, once we receive the report, look to the review and make the determination through the appropriate channels. When that is revealed, I will let the member opposite know.

Ms. McLeod: So, there is no plan to — I don't know — tell anybody outside of caucus offices, I guess, what is in the report, which I find distressing. Even if it were a matter of being

tabled in the House, I would find it a little alarming if it's not going to be revealed until October of this year.

Is there anything in this year's budget to reflect any of the work initiated by the health review?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Let's just say that suggesting that we're not going to tell anyone is inappropriate. The independent expert panel did a very great job of consulting with Yukoners, seeking their input on efficiencies of health programming and supports. It's very important that we take that into consideration. They've gone above and beyond and they've really gone out to look at Yukoners and seek their input. Certainly, we will take all of that under consideration and it would be — at this moment in time, we haven't seen the report. So, when we see the final report, of course the adjustments will be made and we will look at the report for additional resources if required.

So, at this point in time, no.

Ms. McLeod: I mean, the obvious question for me to ask is when the health review will be implemented, but I can already see where that answer would go so I won't even ask that.

A couple of questions about home care. In this year's budget, there is an additional five full-time employees for the home care program.

According to the officials, 0.5 of an FTE is for administration, particularly to do with the scheduling of staff for weekends. That leaves 4.5 positions. I'm wondering where those positions are located.

Hon. Ms. Frost: As we look at home care, we also need to look beyond home care. We need to look at the supports we provide to Yukoners who want to re-enter their homes or the re-enablement units at the Thomson Centre — so we look at the whole care — not just acute care, but how do we transition the client from the hospital to home? That means that we make some adjustments in ensuring that we provide necessary supports to our citizens who choose to remain at home.

In the last four years, the budget for the home care program — from 2015, there was \$5,833,000 and, this year, we have \$9,863,000, and that's really an expansion in the scope of care. We're looking at nursing staff; we're looking at home support workers; plus we have weekend supports as well. We also need to consider that, in every one of our communities, we're providing family support workers and similar positions to our communities. The home care program provides care coordination, regional home support, community-based nursing, and regional therapist services — so trying to coordinate that efficiently so that we can maximize opportunities for resources and supporting our clients.

All of those positions are out of Whitehorse, but by virtue of that, they support the communities as well.

Ms. McLeod: I am not clear on where those 4.5 new positions are. Are they all located in Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes, all the positions are in Whitehorse, and as I noted, we are working with our communities. We have alternate positions in our communities. These individuals will also be working out of Whitehorse and supporting our communities.

Ms. McLeod: Now, if I had some folks in, let's say, Watson Lake who wanted to know what improvements have been made to home care programs in their community in the last year, what can I tell them?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm not certain that I'm speaking very specifically about Watson Lake. I don't know that specific information, but what I can tell the member opposite is that home and community work is essential to supporting the work of the aging population and we have identified that in our aging action plan — of course, emphasis on the home philosophy. How do you stay at home longer? We will continue to ensure that we provide supports and enhancements to all of our citizens, no matter where they reside in the Yukon, and that is the objective of this increased funding — to ensure that we have positions supporting the communities.

I'm not sure about Watson Lake, but if there is a specific question, I would be happy to respond to that.

Ms. McLeod: I used Watson Lake as an example, but it could have easily been Dawson City or Mayo or Carcross — anywhere outside of Whitehorse.

My question is about whether or not services and supports have been increased in the rural communities — rural Yukon. I appreciate the motherhood statements about the goals of the program and I support them — absolutely — but I do know that, for some of our folks, they are getting an hour a week and it is not enough. So, I am looking for whether or not there have been any improvements for them.

I know that these things were brought up when there was a panel that went to talk to some of our seniors and elders to find out what their thoughts were about the home care program. I never did see a report on that. I appreciate that there has been an increase in funding and I thank the federal government for that, actually, because they pumped about \$5 million into this program, which leads me to another question, of course. I believe it was last year that there were \$210,000 of those federal dollars that went into this program. I am wondering: In this year's budget, how much of the federal funding is added to the home care budget?

Hon. Ms. Frost: All of the funding is Yukon government funding.

Ms. McLeod: My question is: What happened to the federal funding that they announced?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I just wanted to speak specifically to the budget. So, we've increased the budget from last year. There are significant resources in this year's budget — \$680,000, to be exact. We will continue to work with our federal colleagues, and if there are resources available, we will ensure that we get access to some of that funding. At this moment in time, what I presented is the budget that we have available here in the Yukon.

The bilateral agreement included the \$680,000.

Ms. McLeod: I'm a little bit mystified then, because there was a big press release regarding the additional roughly \$5 million for mental health supports and \$5 million for home care, which was supposed to be paid over a 10-year period. My question is: Where's the money?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The \$680,000 from the previous budget is still there in this year's funding.

Ms. McLeod: So, by my reckoning, then, that is \$680,000 plus the \$210,000 from the previous year — is that the sum total of the money that has been received from the federal government for home care through their announcement?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The current budget for this year is \$9,863,000 to provide support to all Yukoners. That's inclusive of the federal funding that we've received.

Ms. McLeod: Just for clarification, did the minister say that the budget of \$5 million was entirely federal funding?

Hon. Ms. Frost: No, that's not what I said.

Ms. McLeod: Thanks. Maybe the minister can clarify that, because she just referenced a \$5 million-and-change budget figure, when, a few minutes ago, she said the budget was \$9 million and some.

Hon. Ms. Frost: That was from 2015 — the funding that was in the support program at that time. I was referencing the increase to where we are currently and the expanded scope of care for all Yukoners through the mental wellness hubs, through the counsellors within every one of our communities and our social workers in our communities. That's what this covers.

Just so I'm extremely clear for the record: The funding of \$5,833,000 was from 2015. This year, we have \$9,863,000. A portion of that came from the federal government. The objective is to provide centralized support to all Yukoners to ensure that they have mental wellness supports, and it ensures that we have rapid access counselling under the current situation we find ourselves in.

Ms. McLeod: I guess I'm just trying to get clear on the funding that the federal government has contributed with regard to money for mental health supports and a separate pot of money for home care.

The federal government was very specific about those two programs when they announced their funding. In the budget documents from last year — I believe it was last year — the budget documents — the supplementary information that the department provided specifically laid out \$210,000 recoverable from that program. I believe the minister is indicating that, this year, it's \$680,000, but what's less clear is whether or not that went specifically to home care or if it was more broad-based or that it was funnelled into additional mental health supports — I can't follow the money.

Hon. Ms. Frost: A bit of crossover between home care and mental wellness — I can answer the mental wellness questions separately, but the home care budget — I just gave a very specific answer on that. \$680,000 comes from the federal government, and the home care — pardon me, the mental wellness question was asked earlier. I gave the specific answers on that one.

Ms. McLeod: Okay. Roger that. I'm not talking about mental wellness in this case. The minister has said \$680,000 federal dollars in this budget for home care, which should leave in excess of \$4 million remaining to be received from the feds under a 10-year program.

Does the minister have any idea at this time as to how this is going to roll out?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The member opposite is speaking about \$4 million over 10 years. I am not exactly clear what the member opposite is speaking to, so if she could be more clear, I would be happy to respond to that question.

Ms. McLeod: Maybe I should back up a bit.

Does the minister remember the announcement of \$5 million and change — I don't have the exact figure — that the federal government announced as a contribution to the Yukon? It was a 10-year program. Let's start there. Let's establish that figure.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am just seeking clarification here.

We received funding for the first five years. Where we are right now — it ramped up to where it sits currently at \$680,000. We are negotiating the next five years. My understanding is that, in the year coming, we will get another \$684,000 exactly.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you very much for that. I am sorry if I am blasting you from time to time.

I want to just move on to daycare. I thought I heard the minister reference earlier, in the last couple of weeks, that there were improvements being made to daycare funding. Can the minister tell us something about that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The early learning childcare program was negotiated under the mandate of Minister Duclos, and Yukon receives \$7.2 million in funding. That will roll out over three years. We have come to the end of that term. We now have a one-year extension on that agreement. I do believe that the amount is \$2.3 million. I will clarify that, but the extension has continued on. We will see that in this year's budget. There is no disruption to the early learning childcare program funding.

Ms. McLeod: I appreciate that information. So, there is \$2.3 million for this one-year extension. If I understand the minister correctly, that is simply to maintain current funding levels. What happens at the end of this year? Is there going to be a drop in funding for childcare?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The funding that we're negotiating with Canada is a continuation of previous years' funding. The objective is to get another three years of funding, and that's what we're negotiating right now. We want to ensure that we get sufficient resources here in the Yukon, a continuation of what's there right now. There will be no disruption of services.

Ms. McLeod: Is there anything in this budget that will increase funding to childcare centres, either through the direct operating grant or through subsidies or other mechanisms?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With regard to rural childcare, the question is whether or not the funding will be maintained at the same level or increase. We are working through the department, looking at the funding that we have right now and ensuring that the funding remains consistent for all of our communities.

We are negotiating currently with the federal government for the continuation of the early learning childcare budget, which we hope to finalize. I hope that there are the increments that we have asked for.

We have also taken an extended measure, and that was to look at our rural childcare program and a special review of the Little Blue Daycare and the Watson Lake daycare.

These programs are the only non-profit licensed childcare programs in rural Yukon. We've worked with the communities to ensure the sustainability of these pilot projects, and we will continue to provide the supports there. I'm really happy with that. We have, as of January 2020, significant resources in the budget to provide support. On January 14, 2020, in fact, we had \$92,173 of a direct operating grant provided to these two childcare centres. My understanding is that we had \$581,000 approximately for the pilot project.

Ms. McLeod: So, I understand that the minister is negotiating an additional three-year funding agreement. I presume this one-year extension will form part of that and that the current levels of funding will continue. I did not hear that there would be an increase for any childcare centre, and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong on that.

Now, given that childcare centres are affected by COVID-19, what kind of instructions have been given to childcare centres on how they should be managing both additional cleaning or social distancing or limiting numbers? If the minister can comment on that.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I just wanted to make a comment. The member opposite is not used to holding the mobile mic. I have a hard time hearing you because you're moving the mic around. If you can just speak into the mic, that will be really helpful for me.

Now, we are working with — again, negotiating with the federal government on the funding for the childcare centres, as I noted. My intention is to ensure that we provide the necessary supports.

We are working with the chief medical officer on the childcare centres and ensuring that we actively work with Family and Children's Services to ensure a safe and careful approach to childcare centres during these times. With children, care and safety is an utmost priority for all of us.

Childcare centres and parents are asked to be vigilant about monitoring their own symptoms and to practise good hygiene. We will sit and work with the chief medical officer, looking at working with the 67 childcare centres we have across the Yukon. That is being monitored very carefully as we speak.

Ms. McLeod: I can appreciate that it is difficult to listen to somebody waving around a microphone and it's equally difficult for me to speak into it — so I like this arrangement here.

How is the information on how childcare centres should be managed being relayed to them? Has an official directive gone out from the Department of Health and Social Services or from the chief medical officer?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Just conferring with the staff here around the chief medical officer's recommendations. My understanding is that they are having a meeting with the chief medical officer to speak very specifically about this, and so we will await his instructions. We have staff in Health and Social Services who work with our childcare centres as well. We ensure that they receive all of the current and pertinent information to ensure the health and safety — which is on the forefront of everyone's mind — and that we certainly practise good hygiene and be vigilant about monitoring our own

systems and practising frequent handwashing, sanitation, and all of that.

Ms. McLeod: I just want to stress how important I think it is for this information to be directly relayed to all childcare centres so that nobody is falling through the cracks and the health and safety of our families is being safeguarded as best as it can be.

I have a question about cataract surgery. I know that there has been an infusion of money into the program and we have managed to reduce wait times by some considerable bit. I would like to know what the wait time is today — right now, this month. Is it six months? Is it a year? The concern is that there are people in the Yukon who are obviously being denied driver's licences because they are awaiting this surgery. So, it's a matter of some urgency — if we can update them on how long the wait time is for Yukoners today.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The wait times for cataract surgery — I can get that information, but with the specifics on the budget around cataract surgery — I am just getting the numbers right now, but there is an increase. As part of year 2 of the plan, Health and Social Services is providing the Yukon Hospital Corporation with \$644,000 in funding to ensure Yukoners' access to ophthalmology services. We are ensuring that they provide that cataract surgery wait times are reduced as process of enhanced supports through the Hospital Corporation.

Ms. McLeod: I look forward to getting that information from the minister.

Just a question about the Whistle Bend continuing care facility — it's my understanding that there's a provision for a family-led advisory group to work with the staff at the care facility. I'm wondering if this has been set up and is in operation.

Hon. Ms. Frost: That is still active at the Whistle Bend continuing care facility, and we're ensuring that we have similar supports throughout all of our care facilities.

Ms. McLeod: The group is set up; it's running; it's operating. Is it comprised of only family members, or how many staff are on that board?

Hon. Ms. Frost: There is one in every home.

Ms. McLeod: In this budget, there is \$1 million for renovations to the Whitehorse shelter. Can the minister tell us about that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The funding identified — the \$1 million — for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is to do some renovations and retrofits on the exterior of the building. That is being done, of course, through consultation with our community groups, so that is where the funding is going.

Ms. McLeod: Will this work be tendered? I am wondering when we might expect to see the tender.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes, it is going out for tender.

Ms. McLeod: In the budget documents, there are probably more than two line items for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Can the minister tell us what this year's operating expenses are for the Whitehorse shelter?

Hon. Ms. Frost: What was in the mains in the 2019-20 was \$1,000,200 and that was a reflection of when we took over the facility and the lack of program service supports. That

increase in 2019-20 mains of \$2,361,000, for a total of \$3,561,000 — that covers personnel and program supports there.

Ms. McLeod: I have a few questions about 22 Wann Road. Can the minister confirm the date that youth began moving into the home and a little bit about how many youths are in the home and when it's expected to be at capacity?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The day programming for the facility is fully operational. We've identified three individuals who will be moving in very shortly. The day programming has been in operation for quite a bit of time now.

Ms. McLeod: Can the minister define "shortly"?

Hon. Ms. Frost: That's happening this month.

Ms. McLeod: When we talk about a day program operating at that facility, where would one find out about the programs that are available, how they can be accessed, and who they apply to?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to the budget for the transitional support program, we've provided the resources in the budget to ensure that we work very closely with our staff to ensure that we have support programming for youth to engage on a daily basis. We have the day programming, we have the transition units for the older youth, and then we have some more controlled programming for youth who are younger, allowing for more family interaction as we indicated in our submission.

Ms. McLeod: Thanks for the clarification on the programs that are being operated, but I wanted to know how people — citizens — find out more about the program.

For instance, where will they find the information on how to access the program? Who qualifies to participate in the program? If I was a parent and was looking for some help for a child, where am I going to find that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With the questions around the sharing of information, I am happy to respond to that sharing of information with the specifics around the budget. We do have the resources in the budget to provide the support — the staff complement for ensuring that the children are, of course, engaged in the process and are aware that these services are available to them. We do that through Family and Children's Services. Every child within the care of government or who is in our community who needs supports can access the services offered in situ at day programming.

Ms. McLeod: I understand then that you need to go through Family and Children's Services if you want to access programming at 22 Wann Road.

There were some renovations being done to the facility. I think it was fencing. Are the renovations completed? Maybe, as an aside, is the fencing done?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The renovations began on that facility because we identified a need for this service in the Yukon. The in situ program offered out of the facility on Wann Road is intended to provide supports and services to those young folks who wouldn't be able to access programming elsewhere. It is day programming. The renovations were completed. We are offering services on a daily basis. We have individuals in the coming days who are moving in. We are very pleased about that

and just want to commend the staff for doing such a great job in getting that facility up and running to provide these much-needed services to our young people.

Ms. McLeod: I didn't quite get a clarification on whether or not the renovation was the fencing, but I will let the minister get back to me on that.

I am wondering what the O&M is for one year at 22 Wann Road.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm not prepared to answer a question about when the fencing is going in or if it's not going in. I think the objective is to ensure that we provide safe, appropriate facilities for our young people. The O&M expenditures for the facility — I will endeavour to get that information to the member opposite. At this moment, I don't have it at my fingertips, but I would be happy to provide that.

Ms. McLeod: I wasn't questioning the need for fencing. I guess I'm unclear as to whether the renovations were the fencing and, if the renovations are done, it might, by extension, mean that the fencing is done. That's all I'm trying to establish.

I didn't get the O&M cost, but I'm not sure if the minister said she would get back to me with that or not, but if she can clarify that the next time she's up, that would be great.

I have a couple of questions about the new services that are being offered at the Watson Lake and Dawson City community hospitals. Of course, it was great news to hear that ultrasound services were going to be offered in those two communities. That's quite a relief for those rural Yukoners who do not have to travel to Whitehorse to get that service.

I'm wondering, though, a couple of things: What is the annual cost to provide those services? How fully subscribed to is it? I mean, is it being utilized to its fullest capability? Is it a travelling service, or is it available seven days a week, more or less?

Hon. Ms. Frost: It's a total of \$60,000 — \$30,000 per community.

Ms. McLeod: Does the minister know whether or not the programs are fully subscribed to or what the uptake has been?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have that information in front of me.

Ms. McLeod: I'm just going to wrap up here shortly to give the Third Party an opportunity to participate in this discussion, but I have a question about medical travel.

The numbers aren't in the budget documents. The minister may wish to let me know this under a separate correspondence, but I would like to know the costs for medical travel budgeted for this coming year — that is, travel within the territory and travel outside the territory — and how that compares with last year. I understand that there has probably been an increase in the number of trips that were taken, but I would like to know what the financial numbers are on that.

Given COVID-19 and the need to stay home and whatnot, how are rural medical needs being met when a specialist is required?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would be happy to provide that information to the member opposite — what was in this year's budget compared to last year. The medical travel is being

reviewed currently under the comprehensive health review — noting that we do provide services and supports continuously to Yukoners for medical travel in and out of the Yukon and internal to the Yukon.

Ms. McLeod: How is all this travel being affected by COVID-19?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Well, that is evolving, Mr. Chair. We have very competent staff who are tracking all of the pressures that we are seeing right now. In the coming days as things ramp up here in the Yukon, we want to ensure that we provide all necessary supports to Yukoners. We will continue to do that in good faith. We certainly don't have that number, and we would not have that number as of today, nor would we have it in a week. We would continue to track and monitor as we see COVID-19 — we currently have zero cases in Yukon. If and when we do, we may see pressures, and when we do, we will manage appropriately.

Ms. McLeod: I want to thank the officials for helping us out here today in our debate. I'm going to turn it over at this time to my colleague.

Ms. White: Just before I get started today, I just wanted to make sure that I welcomed and thanked the officials from the Department of Health and Social Services. I can only imagine what the rest of your days look like right now.

Before I begin my questions, I just want to express my gratitude and, at that same time, my disappointment for anyone who has to be at work. My gratitude to the many public servants, the Health and Social Services workers, those who work within Yukon government, Yukon hospitals and health care centres, and the non-governmental organizations who all, in the normal course of things, work in challenging times, but right now, it's beyond that.

To be clear, these are not normal times, and all involved in working together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic have our enduring support and admiration. Equally, Mr. Chair, I want to express my gratitude to the staff hidden away in the Hansard office, because while we're here in this Assembly, we have the luxury of spreading out with some form of social distancing, but the dedicated staff in the Hansard office, who have faithfully recorded the proceedings of this Assembly, are forced to work in a cramped space without the luxury of our social distancing and the pressure.

I just want to make sure that I acknowledge the hard work done by public servants and the appreciation that we have for the work that they're doing.

My first question for the minister is: What has the Department of Health and Social Services determined as essential services during the pandemic?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am just seeking some clarification around the business continuity plan for Health and Social Services as we look at our health plan, defining what constitutes essential services. The department is working very closely on identifying essential services — group homes, hospitals, nurses, continuing care — all of the essential services that are required to ensure that we provide appropriate health care for all Yukoners.

Ms. White: So, in the list that was just given — but when we look at the department in a broad stroke, how is the department determining if a position is able to work from home?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I do believe that we've responded to this question previously during Question Period, but Highways and Public Works, the Public Service Commission — every department is working very closely through the deputy minister's office and through our HR complement to ensure that we have the supports necessary to allow our staff to work from home and still provide supports. That is something that is done through each department.

I'm very happy with where we are right now — ensuring that staff are supported. They have the resources available to them, and that's kind of where we are right now.

Ms. White: So, within the Department of Health and Social Services, how many applications have been handed in with the request to work from home? How many have been approved? How many have been denied? How many have yet to be processed?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Right now, the mandate or the direction has gone out to the ADMs. By virtue of that, they work with the directors and their human resource directors to ensure that we identify and work very closely with our staff. We will continue to do that through this crisis that we find ourselves in. Of course, we are certainly wanting to ensure that we will work with every individual who presents to safely work from home.

Ms. White: My question was: How many employees so far have made that request? How many have been accepted? How many have been denied?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Specific to the budget, I can't answer that right now. I think those are very specific questions that the member opposite is asking about. How many individuals? That changes on a regular basis. I don't have that information, and I won't have that information today, nor will I have it tomorrow. We will work with our department. We will work with Highways and Public Works and with the Public Service Commission.

The majority of the staff provide direct services or will provide services and will work from home. The application process is changing. We will ensure that we consider all the applications that we receive and support the staff to work from home.

Ms. White: Just to be clear, we have been told over and over again that this budget does affect the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has yet to be explained to me exactly how. Having the minister's assurances and telling me that the questions aren't related to the budget — I believe that they are. That is the reason why I was asking, and that's fine.

One of the things is that we have asked about getting briefings from the chief medical officer of health or their office. One of the reasons to get the briefings is so that we are up to date with information. You can imagine the surprise when opposition members found out about a respiratory assessment centre that will be opened at the Yukon Convention Centre via a press release. Maybe the minister can tell me more about the

new respiratory assessment centre that will open at the Yukon Convention Centre.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to COVID-19, as we work to set up the assessment centre and ensure that we provide support to all our communities, the costs associated are being considered. I just want to thank our ADM of Corporate Services for doing such an amazing job in accumulating and acquiring — and keeping really great track of all of the pressures that we are seeing right now. The budget that we speak of today is the budget to keep the government and Health and Social Services flowing smoothly. That includes ensuring that we have funding supports for our shelters, our long-term care facilities, our hospitals, Family and Children's Services, home care — everything that is in the budget is intended to get us through the year.

If there are additional pressures, we are tracking that and doing the assessments as they come in.

With regard to briefings, my understanding is that the chief medical officer was not able to provide the briefing to the members opposite. As they can imagine, he is extremely busy, and we are attempting to set that up to ensure that they get the briefings that they require.

Things are moving quickly. The clinic and logistics will be in place at the assessment centre. That announcement is ours to make. We are working with Community Services to ensure that we provide in-time supports to Yukoners. It's not something that is negotiable; it is something that is necessary.

Ms. White: Just to be clear, the press release went out. It says, "Respiratory assessment centre to open at Yukon Convention Centre". It's dated March 19, 2020. I'm asking questions about this. I imagine that part of this is underneath the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services, therefore, the Minister of Health and Social Services. I'm just asking for some details. Could I get some details about the respiratory assessment centre please — details that can be shared with the general public, information that can be listened to right now from the radio? Could the minister share with me, please, the details about the respiratory assessment centre that was announced today via press release?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The respiratory assessment centre — the discussions began earlier in the week. The assessment centre is set up to provide supports in response to COVID-19. We have the new clinic identified through the Yukon Convention Centre. Again, I want to just acknowledge the Northern Vision Development group for providing us with the resources and the space to ensure that we provide support to do the testing at that centre.

The funding is not identified in this budget because this is a new pressure, so the budget was built, designed, and written and identified resources prior to this happening. We are working to determine all of the pressures and the assessments are being done by our team at Health and Social Services and through all the departments to track and assess and to put that request forward to ensure that we get appropriate resources from the federal government to offset those costs.

In the meanwhile, we are going ahead to fund and finance the assessment centre and any other supports we require to

ensure that we provide appropriate help and clinical support to all Yukoners throughout the Yukon. We want to just — we are working through the details of that. The press release went out, and I would be happy to speak more about that once we have an opportunity to speak more to Yukoners about that.

Ms. White: Just to be clear, when the minister says that she's happy to speak to it when she has a chance to speak more to Yukoners, does that mean that, if I ask more questions right now, there will be no answers forthcoming, because there needs to be a press release or an announcement before I can ask these questions?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The specific details of what is happening at the assessment centre are currently being worked out through the various means through our chief medical officer and health professionals. This is something that they requested, because they wanted a secure facility and secure site to ensure protection and control of the spread of COVID-19.

The specifics around what is involved or how that works and functions are not something that I can respond to here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. I will work to get more specific details with the physicians and the nurses who are on the ground there and also around the functionality of that and disperse that information out very broadly and very quickly. That just happened this afternoon, but there is certainly more to come. As soon as more information comes available, we will share that on the website through social media and through every means possible to direct Yukoners to this new facility.

Ms. White: I appreciate that answer. There was more information there than the first time, and that is what I was just looking for. How is that information going to be shared out? It is going to be through social media — I appreciate that. I didn't expect the minister to be able to tell me the ins and outs — as we in this Chamber are not medical professionals — but I was looking for more answers, so I appreciate that I got those.

Knowing that COVID-19 is often — some of the symptoms are respiratory — will Yukon have a respiratory therapist brought in to be staff during this pandemic time?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Certainly, I will take the advice of the medical professionals, and if there are additional resources required, we are working with our contractor and bringing in agency staff. We are working on virtual supports as well and working with our physicians. So, we will work with our chief medical officer and the professionals to identify what further supports they require.

Ms. White: I don't know a lot, but I'm pretty confident that a respiratory therapist needs to be physically present in order for them to be able to support what is happening. I'm glad to know that if the request is made, and that is a critical position that needs to be filled. I am relieved to know that the department will look at that, as required.

I have some questions about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Some of the questions that I have right now — it is just trying to understand more. I was told the greatest piece of advice about the emergency shelter by someone who was a front-line worker, and they said: "Look, it can't be all things to all people."

The reason why I'm bringing that up is because, really, one physical space can't be all things to all people, unless it was a really, really, really, really large physical space — and by that, I mean the size of a community. It can't be all things to all people.

So, I wanted to know answers to some pretty simple questions about the emergency shelter. I want to know who the emergency shelter serves. Who is the client? What is the emergency shelter's mission statement? What's the strategic plan? Is the plan for Yukon government to run it forever? Is there a plan to try to get it transferred to NGOs?

So, those are the questions: Who does it serve? Who are the clients? What's the mission statement? What's the strategic plan?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Was there another specific question? Was I hearing another question?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Ms. Frost: Okay. So, the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is responsible for the shelter facility as the member opposite is aware. It's a new endeavour for the Government of Yukon. We are working — and we have been since the beginning — with our community partners in ensuring that the range of initiatives that we provide at the shelter meets the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.

Some of the short-term actions we're taking are really just to ensure that we provide balanced support through mental wellness, social supports, and health supports. We brought some of those broader community supports into the shelter and we will continue to do that.

With respect to a mission statement, the shelter does not have — given the department and this new initiative, we have now, in this budget, secured the permanent positions for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter to carry us through for a period of time until we can work with our NGO community to eventually take over the facility. At this point in time, we've gone out and we didn't get the support, so we will continue to work with our partners in our communities. That is always the objective — to look at being as open as we possibly can. If someone should come forward from the NGO community who wants to participate — say in the kitchen, as an example, or the shelter — well, that option is always open.

Ms. White: The reason why I asked about a mission statement is that mission statements are like guiding principles. The reason why I'm asking for a specific mission statement for the emergency shelter is that, in the response that the minister just gave me — I mean, I appreciate what was involved, but — so, my question is: Is the emergency shelter a sobering centre? Is it an emergency shelter? Do they deal with harm reduction? What population does the shelter serve? Is it about sobering? Is it a sobering centre? Is it an emergency shelter? What does the shelter do? What is their mission statement?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I do want to bring us back to the budget for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. What do we have currently in the budget to provide supports to the shelter to ensure that we expand the scope of practice? What I can make note of and say is that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter now is supported by Justice. It is supported by Community Services,

Highways and Public Works, and, of course, Health and Social Services. The collaboration around that and the multi-sector community that participates in the centre is to ensure that we provide appropriate services and supports.

Again, I'm not going to speak specifically to a mission statement. Perhaps there will be one identified in the future. At this moment in time, we are working with our partners to ensure that we provide the necessary budget supports to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

Right now in the budget, we have \$2,361,000, plus the \$1.2 million that existed previously and was given to the Salvation Army, for a total of \$3,446,000 to provide shelter, emergency supports, and programming supports to the clients who frequent the shelter.

Ms. White: The reason that I am asking the questions is that the \$3.5 million earmarked for the shelter — there are programs associated with that, there are efforts, and there are ideas. Is it a sobering centre, or is it an emergency shelter?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The question was: Is it a sobering centre? The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter provides diverse sets of supports, services, and programs. There's an AA program run from there, we have two paramedics in there, we provide health care, we provide life-skills training, we provide food services, we provide shelter services, and we provide housing services. So, there are a multitude of different supports, based on the principle of harm reduction. We do not turn anyone away. We provide supports to the majority of individuals, unless they present as being unsafe or harming others. There may be circumstances where we have them removed from the facility, but those are extenuating circumstances.

The objective is harm reduction principles, ensuring that they are never turned away and are given all the supports that they require.

Ms. White: Is it run as a zero-barrier shelter or as a low-barrier shelter?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm not sure of the line of questioning. The member opposite knows it was designed as a low-barrier shelter. Was it that before? Probably not, but our objective is to ensure that we provide supports through the budget for the Housing First initiatives — so those who are medium acuity and those who are high acuity — we have supports for individuals where they are within the community, regardless of whether it's a low- or high-barrier shelter. We try to ensure that supports are in place for the individuals as they present to Health and Social Services.

Ms. White: The reason why I asked the question — is it zero barrier or low barrier? — is the fact that you can actually put behavioural expectations on folks. If we're saying that it's low barrier, you can have rules. You can have expectations, and you can ask people to meet those.

The minister might shrug off the question, but the reason is that I fundamentally believe — especially based on conversations with NGOs who deal with populations who are often in rough spots — that you can set behavioural expectations.

So, when I asked the question of whether it's zero barrier or low barrier, it was for that reason. There was a distinct reason for it.

I wanted to know if, at the shelter, they are doing harm reduction work. By that, I mean, are they offering a needle exchange?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The expectations — as individual citizens who come to use the facility — there are rules in place. Of course, behavioural expectations are essential. Those are some of the principles with which we govern. We want to ensure that it is a low-barrier shelter and provides supports. Part of that is ensuring that we have a needle exchange program. We have a great partnership with Blood Ties Four Directions. They provide the exchange program. When they are not available, we offer that service to the shelter as well.

Ms. White: One of the reasons why I'm asking if there is a needle exchange run out of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is because it seems like, from the outside looking in, it is a replication of services. I say this because harm reduction and the equipment that is required is already — Blood Ties is already the expert. They have been doing it for 40 years. Blood Ties also has federal funding to run a satellite clinic, as required.

My question about the needle exchange is: Is that happening between the hours that Blood Ties is open, or are needles only being exchanged and handed out when Blood Ties is not available or the outreach van is not available?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The objective is to use the service that is available through Blood Ties. In the event that they are not available, we do provide the service through the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

Ms. White: One of the severe things — and the reason why needle exchange programs require the level of training that they do — is the level of risk. I know, for example, that hepatitis C can live outside the body for 72 hours and HIV for a much shorter amount of time — something like three hours. Have there ever been any incidents at the shelter — a needle prick, for example?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can't answer that question. With specifics to the budget that we are debating today, the services and programs that we provide for the clients at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — we have identified \$3.46 million in the budget to provide program service supports. We try to ensure that it is flexible enough to provide the services.

With regard to the needle exchange and the future, that will evolve as the shelter evolves.

Ms. White: \$3.5 million — that would cover things like a needle exchange program being run out of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. I think, if the minister was to take a look and have a conversation with the officials within the department, the answer would be that there was a serious incident in the last 12 calendar months; there was a needle prick. The reason I bring this up is because an operation like Blood Ties, which specializes in harm reduction, has not had any for more than a decade. It's something to consider as to whether or not we replicate those services.

Mr. Chair, just moving on — actually no, not moving on yet. A question today in Question Period was: How are we making sure that both the clients who access the emergency shelter and the staff who work there are safe? So, again, we have talked about how our social distancing at the Chamber is two metres. What is being done or what measures have been put in place at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter in this time to keep the clients and the staff there safe?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As we look at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and we look at the clients coming and going — being that social distancing and hygiene is important to all of us — sometimes the individuals who reside at the shelter or who frequent the shelter may not have that ability. So, we want to ensure that we provide necessary supports at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. We are working under the advice of the chief medical officer and ensuring that we have the measures in place at the shelter to protect the clients who frequent the shelter. That means the kitchen and how we serve food is a good example. The checking in and out of clients coming in — those who present as having some symptoms will be quarantined or can be quarantined with the necessary medical supports around them so that they can be appropriately supported.

Ms. White: If a client presents at the shelter and is exhibiting symptoms, where will they be safely quarantined or cared for?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We have a number of options. We have a health preparedness plan for the Yukon. We also have a community preparedness plan that we worked with Community Services on. All the departments are working around the clock to ensure that every Yukoner is protected and that we have the necessary quarantine facilities available. We are currently working on that right now, as we speak, and ensuring that we have appropriate spaces available to us in the city, but we also need to ensure that we provide that support in our communities.

Recognizing that the question is specific to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, we have secured the rooms that are available on the very top floor, and it is being assessed through our chief medical officer, and the plans are being implemented around where we can safely quarantine individuals, should they present with symptoms.

Ms. White: I guess then there is a benefit to those housing units having been empty underneath the government for such a long time; now they can be used for something else. I guess that is a benefit.

I am just looking for clarification here. Was it through the Department of Health and Social Services that the housing emergency support line was funded?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am not specifically clear on the question around the housing support line. I do know that we have housing navigators. We have supports through our income support office and we have supports through our various departments — so I don't know the specific answer to that question. If the member opposite could be a little clearer, perhaps I can respond to the question and find the notes with respect to identifying the supports in the budget, specific to the question.

Ms. White: The housing emergency line was run by Victoria Faulkner, FASSY, and Blood Ties Four Directions together. It was a 24-hour support line that could be accessed by clients or landlords in trying to keep people housed. I am unsure if the funding was through the Department of Health and Social Services or elsewhere, and I am just looking for that clarification.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have the answer, but I will endeavour to get the information that the member opposite is seeking and collaborate with the Women's Directorate to see where that's at.

Ms. White: The unfortunate truth is that it has been cut. I just didn't know what department it came from. The unfortunate truth is that it was a line that was definitely utilized and it has been credited with keeping at least two people housed for the last year, which is important.

Moving on to the Housing First project: How many residents are currently residing at the Housing First project?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Can I just ask the member opposite to — I didn't catch the last question. If she can just please state it again and I will listen more intently this time.

Ms. White: I was just asking how many residents there are at the Housing First facility.

Hon. Ms. Frost: We have eight individuals there.

Ms. White: When asked at a briefing, we were told there were nine. Has there been a change since the briefing?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I believe so, yes.

There are a number of individuals who have been approved to move in and some choose not to. When the information went out, that's what the numbers were being based on.

Ms. White: How many staff work the daytime hours at the Housing First facility? What hours are those? Are we talking between 8:00 and 4:00, 9:00 and 5:00, or 8:30 and 4:30? How many folks work there during the day?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The question about staffing, there are currently — in the budget for this year for the Whitehorse — the Housing First project, there is \$604,000 in the budget to provide supports to people living there who are medium-acuity clients, and this \$604,000 covers the staff.

Currently, we have two staff who work during the day, and then we have one who works overnight. We are always ensuring that there are supports in place for the clients, but also what's important to note is that we have supports through our social supports network and through Health and Social Services for the clients. We have not only the individuals who are physically in the space there providing supports, we have supports through Health and Social Services, through our income support offices as well, and through the housing navigators. We also have additional supports through the Yukon Housing Corporation. There are always wraparound supports to ensure that the individual is successful.

Ms. White: Are those wraparound supports available after 5:00 p.m.?

Hon. Ms. Frost: A very exciting initiative in the Yukon — we have never seen a Housing First project like this. As we provide services and supports to the clients, we want to ensure that they have the supports they need 24 hours a day, when they

need them. Therefore, when we look at all of the supports that we have available in Health and Social Services, in our community, we're very proud of the modern progressive approach that we have taken to ensure that the housing needs of individuals are met and that they are successful.

We want to make sure that the tenants are successful in their forever home so they choose it to be their forever home. We will ensure that they have the supports available to them.

Ms. White: What I'm trying to get to is whether or not there is more than one nighttime staff member. The reason I ask is that my understanding is that, for best practices across the country, you don't actually have a one staff ratio to that number of clients. Is there a willingness to look at bringing in a second staff member on the night shifts at the Housing First facility?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The department has worked on the staff complement. Of course, safety is always in the forefront of our minds as we look at our staff, but we also need to ensure that the clients are successful. Those assessments have been considered.

Ms. White: I'm just going to put in the plug that, if something goes sideways in that building and someone is in crisis — or, heaven forbid, something is happening to multiple people with multiple people in crisis — I can't imagine having one person having to try to not only deal with that, but then to be able to debrief or be able to talk it out after. I am putting it in the pitch that it would be great to make sure that this is more adequately staffed at night to make sure that the staff are supported.

Maybe I will let the minister respond to that before I ask the next question.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Given that this is a permanent housing facility for the clients who choose to rent the apartments, this is not a group-home-type setting where we require — always — supports for the clients. We have measures in place and prohibitions in place to ensure that: (1) the staff are staffed; and (2) we provide supports and services to the individuals who choose to rent the apartments in the Housing First facility. We have protocols in place. We want to ensure that everyone is safe and that it is a successful initiative. Certainly, we will take the recommendations under advisement.

Ms. White: How many social workers are on staff at the Department of Health and Social Services?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have that in front of me, but within the budget, we have incorporated additional supports for community social workers which we haven't had previously, so you will see a bump from previous years.

So, I don't have that specific number. I don't know how many social workers are on staff, but I will be happy to look at providing a little more support on that. We have social workers in all sectors of our departments, such as Continuing Care, support networks in the communities, and supports through Health Services, through our Family and Children's Services, through Continuing Care — multiple departments have social workers. Of course, the hospital has social workers as well. We provide a lot. Where they are and how many — I can certainly endeavour to get that information.

Ms. White: I look forward to getting that answer.

The next question I have about social workers is: What is the turnover? It's a highly stressful job. There is lots going on, so what kind of turnover is there for social workers?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't know the answer. Specific to the funding and the resources that we provide — like everything else, it's a high turnover. Perhaps that's the observation of the member opposite. I don't know that this is the case, but we certainly ensure that we provide supports through employee assistance and through other means so that we are successful — so that the staff we have in place are successful. I'm not sure that I have specific answers to that question.

Ms. White: The minister is right. From my understanding, the turnover of social workers is quite high. If, for example, we were talking about a smaller human who lives in foster care, how many social workers does the minister believe the average kid should have in a year? How many social workers should one child within the care system see in a year?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm not sure what that line of questioning is about or what that has to do with the budget, but if there's a specific question about the budget and the funding that we have available in the budget to respond, I would be happy to do that.

The question is very specific around how many social workers we have, the ratio — I can't respond to that very specific question, but there are protocols established for supports and ratios, as the member opposite was trying to get at earlier, under the Housing First file.

I'm not sure what the purpose of the question is and how it then relates to the budget. As we go ahead and look at the budget and supports available to meet the clients where they are, there will be times when we require more supports for a child, more supports for a different client, and we have responsibilities for the Child Development Centre as well. I'm sure that the member opposite may want to ask about that. Every child is different — and their unique needs are being met — and that means that the ratio may fluctuate.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy Chair (Mr. Adel): Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: Just before we left off, we were talking about the number of social workers within the Department of Health and Social Services. The minister asked why that was relevant to the budget. My answer is that the money for those social workers is contained in the budget. The budget pays those social workers.

When I was asking about the acceptable number of social workers per child — here is a real-world example: Is it acceptable that one child have upwards of seven social workers in a two-year span? When I say “social workers”, I am talking about social workers who are specific to that child and are supporting them through their circumstances. Seven in a two-year span — is that an acceptable number?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As noted by the member opposite, the budget pays for social workers. The budget pays for many things, and the objective here is for us to get to the specifics of the budget.

The question around seven social workers in a two-year span for one child — I can’t answer that specific question. If there is a relevant question to the budget, specific, I would be happy to respond to that.

The member opposite may find it humorous, but what I indicted earlier is that there are specific needs of children in different capacities throughout the government and we will ensure that the child is supported. If there is a concern, then we would be happy to work with our members of Yukon to address a specific concern that should come up; we would be happy to address that — but specifics to the budget, specifics to how many social workers we have — we certainly have resources available in the budget to provide support. Every Yukon community now has a social worker, which we didn’t have previously. We now have supports throughout all of our facilities and all of our departments to provide the necessary supports — a lot of them are social workers. I certainly want to ensure that we have resources available to cover that.

Ms. White: I think that what the minister is referring to is the complete shock that I voiced with one of her answers, and I say this in terms of — if we want to talk about the budget and we want to talk about the Department of Health and Social Services — the programs that are funded through the Department of Health and Social Services are relevant. When I am asking about social workers, I am actually talking about social workers in relation to children. To me, that actually is worthy of discussion. When I’m talking about if it is acceptable — the high turnover of social workers for one child — it is because in the Family and Children’s Services branch, in my understanding, the practice is supposed to be based on trauma-informed care.

So, maybe I will ask that question: Is the practice at the Family and Children’s Services branch — is it trauma-informed care that they practise?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes.

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. So, if it is trauma-informed care that is practised at that branch, in that specific branch, then relationship-building is very important — building a relationship with a child so that you are trusted is important.

So, when I used the example of seven social workers in two years’ time, that is not trauma-informed care. That is building up a trust with a child and then breaking that trust with a child. There is another example: I can say that — I know, in one instance, there was one child in a two-month span who had nine social workers who they spoke to — nine — including

people who had no idea about them at all. This young person was supposed to open up and share each and every time.

So, the reason why I am asking about the turnover and the statistics and the numbers of social workers is because I think that it is relevant because, when we are talking about a budget the size of the Department of Health and Social Services, it also affects programs. So, that is big and that is why I am asking the question.

One of the things that is included in the performance plan under Yukon indicators — it says children and youth in continuing custody of the director has decreased by 49 percent — it says from 142 in March 2018 to 73 in March 2019. I want to know: Where did all those kids go?

If that kind of number is decreasing, where are those children now?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Of course, it’s important, when we look at the relationships with all of our children and all of our families ensuring, through Family and Children’s Services, that we provide appropriate services and supports — as I took office and I was given this very special mandate to ensure that we provide support to Family and Children’s Services across the Yukon, we had almost 400 children in care. The number has decreased significantly. Why is that? It is because we have worked very closely with our communities; we have worked at systemic changes; we have worked with our First Nation communities. We have extended family care agreements now in place that allow really embracing the children’s needs where they are and ensuring cultural integrity and that decisions are made to best align with the needs of the child.

We have taken the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission — the MMIWG. We have taken a lot of initiatives to ensure *Child and Family Services Act* implementation and the review of the act to ensure that we are essentially looking at services for our children. We have over 149 recommendations that we are taking into consideration and growing discussions with our communities, with our First Nation governments, and different approaches to delivering child welfare and supports throughout the Yukon.

Recently, we had further discussions around Bill C-92 and how that will be implemented. So, there is lots of really great work happening in the Yukon. If there’s one specific case historically where a child, over the course of two years, had seven social workers — well, that is problematic, for sure. I’m not denying that. What I am looking for is to ensure that we have addressed the systemic barriers and issues of indigenous children that we have seen historically. The number the member opposite — it’s not common practice in the Yukon. It’s certainly not common practice — and if it is, then it’s something we try to curb and address through a strategic approach in delivering family and children’s services.

As of October, we had 133 children living in extended family care agreements. That’s unprecedented. It’s unprecedented because the children are now safely put back into their communities with their extended families, living lives of cultural integrity with their grandparents, aunts, and their uncles. That is a huge initiative. I want to just commend the department for doing a really great job in that. I also

acknowledge the communities for reducing the children we have in care. The ones who we do have in care and who require specialized supports — we will ensure that there is the necessary complement of staff available to support those children.

Ms. White: What kind of auditing happens within the department? So, case files — things like that. How does the department look into, on a case-by-case basis, whether or not the department is meeting the requirements of those children?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Great question. As we move into this role here as the government — as the Liberal government — we had some major issues, certainly, with Family and Children's Services around children in care, around the services and supports they were being given or not given. So, lots of growing discussions around different approaches in delivering child welfare support services throughout the Yukon, so huge opportunities for systemic changes. We've undertaken that by going through the Child and Youth Advocate office into the review there.

We've had the Costanza report that really looked at some of the systemic issues and we've now triggered the *Child and Family Services Act*. We had an independent body that travelled across the Yukon to seek some feedback on the services we provided and which provided us with a lot of recommendations that we will then take under advisement and ensure that we provide supports. So, there are a lot of quality assurances in place and protocols in place, and everything that we do is really about ensuring that we provide services. We're constantly looking at the internal review process and looking at efficiencies. We now have a further initiative with Kwanlin Dün, for example.

We have a facility there, and we are working with them to ensure that their children are supported. No longer are we being kicked out of the communities, but we are being embraced to work with the communities through the various quality assurance processes that we have established and the relationships that we have established. We do that at a minimum, I understand — every two years, an internal review is done, and we always look for efficiencies. We are looking for improvements.

Ms. White: It was my understanding that, last year, a person was hired to do the early learning framework for the Department of Health and Social Services. It is also my understanding that this was supposed to be finished in the summertime, but an extension had been granted until December. Can the minister tell me the status of the early learning framework?

Hon. Ms. Frost: That work has been done.

Ms. White: Is that publicly available?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can't answer that question specifically, but I will endeavour to get the answer for the member.

Ms. White: My understanding is that this was just to develop the framework, but there was no implementation plan required with that. Is there money in this year's budget to create an implementation plan for an early learning framework in Yukon?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The curriculum framework, or the licensed process, is shared with the Department of Education. I am not sure at this moment in time of the cost or where it is. I will certainly endeavour to get back to the member opposite with that information.

Ms. White: I would appreciate getting that information back. I will ask when I have the chance in Education. That is an example of something that could be included in this budget — but not necessarily as a line item. That is what the questions are for.

Inclusion Yukon had received money from government to have a respite house. That money has been cut. My question is: Why? What kind of program audit was done before that money was cut?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Perhaps I can ask the member opposite to provide a little more clarity around the respite house and where that was previously located. I don't seem to have that information. If I'm missing it, then I would certainly work to get that information to her.

Ms. White: Again, I'm not 100-percent sure if it's within the Department of Health and Social Services, although I imagine that's where it would be. It was with Inclusion Yukon, and it was a house that was run, offering respite for families who have adult children with disabilities. I am wanting to know how they reached that. By the action across the way, possibly the deputy minister has that answer.

Hon. Ms. Frost: My apologies for the delay. I am just trying to find the specific information around the respite house. It was actually through Inclusion Yukon. The respite home funding was cut, and my understanding is that there was very limited access to the services in this home and that the best option presented was to provide the services for respite care elsewhere.

It was done through Social Services with the input of Inclusion Yukon.

Ms. White: If that is the case, where are respite services being offered now for families who have adult children with disabilities?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am just seeking clarification. Each family is given the resources that they need. Of course, it fluctuates depending on their needs for respite care. The member had specifically asked about supports. That is continued through individual agreements.

Ms. White: How many staffed group homes are there for adults in the territory?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have that specific number in front of me. I have the information specific to the budget and specific to the briefing notes. I wouldn't be able to respond to how many staff we have at a facility. I will endeavour to get that information.

Ms. White: I didn't ask for the number of staff; I asked for the number of group homes for adults. I believe that this is directly in relation to the budget. I am just looking for the number of adult group homes.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't specifically have that information in front of me. We have homes and supports for all of our clients. We have Options for Independence. We have the

facility on Hoge Street — or Hanson Street. We have a number of facilities available. I would be happy to provide very specific details. At this moment, I don't have it in front of me, but I would be happy to provide that.

Ms. White: The reason why I am asking right now about this is because, within the supplementary information under Social Supports, Disability Services, and Children's Disability Services, it does talk about the Adult Disability Services caseload. It talks about things like that. One of the things that we see here is that currently there is cash provided for meals, and what we see is that the Ledge cafeteria actually does a great deal for their proud clients — in middays, actually, lunches are provided to clients. So, my question is: With the cafeteria closing, where are these clients going to go for that one meal a day, or will that program cease to exist?

Hon. Ms. Frost: There are a number of NGOs that we work with as well, and the specific question about how many group homes and such — we will get that information. It is very similar in linking it back to the Challenge Disability Resource Group and the supports that they provide to the Bridges Café and the options there. My understanding is that there are current discussions happening with them around how they are going to support their clients who frequent and work in the Bridges Café. Continuing on with that, once the café closes, that might mean catering services and some other options that they are considering.

Ms. White: I am not talking about the social enterprise or the work itself. It is that, at any time on any given day, you will see a whole bunch of folks going into the cafeteria who are actually accessing the meal program. So, my question is: What happens to the meal program when the Ledge shuts down? So, the Challenge program that runs the cafeteria that is open — what happens to that meal program when it shuts down?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Challenge made the decision to close, and we are working with them to ensure that the support is there for the clients, of course.

Ms. White: In the supplementary information under Family and Children's Services, early childhood and prevention services, childcare services, it talks about childcare subsidies — approval for a month is \$400. Can I please get a breakdown between Whitehorse and rural for that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: My understanding is that information is not broken out between Whitehorse and the communities, but I'll work on getting that.

Ms. White: I'll just put in the pitch that it's important to see how many people are accessing the childcare subsidy or how many cases per Whitehorse and rural communities.

One of the things that has been highlighted to us over and over again is that, for people who work in the gig economy — so people who work on a contract basis or don't have regular work — they actually have to apply to the childcare subsidy program month after month, because their wages will change. I know one thing that happened under this minister was, for example, under her other portfolio, Yukon Housing Corporation, they ended up looking at the previous year's earnings, and that's how rent was adjusted.

Is there a willingness within the department to look at the childcare subsidy in a similar way, to be able to look at a person's previous year's earnings so that the monthly application — because it's quite arduous, the application process — ceases to be a monthly requirement?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the member opposite for the recommendation. That is something we will take under consideration and advisement as we look at the program area. I see now where the member opposite was finding the numbers on the childcare services. We will work to break that apart so it makes a little more sense.

Ms. White: I am still on the supplementary information. Now I'm looking under "Social Supports", "Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services" — Whitehorse. I would like to know, under the intensive treatment program, how many offerings — how many women's programs have been run and how many men's programs have been run — or are expected to run, I guess, in 2021?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I will go back to the department and find that specific information, but my understanding — and I'll validate this — is that the program is offered now on a 12-month basis and it runs continuously. It rotates between the genders, but I will verify that and get the very specific details for the member opposite — but it is run all year long. Every month, there is a program being offered.

Ms. White: Under "Social Supports" — "Income Support", "Employment Training Services", "Community Outreach Services" — it says "Income Support" and we have both Whitehorse and the region. I would like a breakdown of the numbers — so, the number of adults accessing, the number of seniors, the number of families, and the number of children who are captured under "Income Support".

Hon. Ms. Frost: We'll endeavour to get that specific information, of course recognizing that it may be a little challenging. We can get some general data.

Ms. White: The good news is that I won't need it soon. If I could have it before October, I would really appreciate that — before we come back in.

The reason why I'm bringing up social supports, especially income support, is that it's a good indication of where our community is as far as poverty. It also is reflected almost equally and the numbers of — the increase at the Whitehorse Food Bank. That is the reason why I was looking, especially for the number of children.

I've talked a lot in the Chamber about my admiration for the HCOS team, or the housing and community outreach services team, and I'm happy to see that in the social supports, it says that community outreach services — it's anticipated that there will be an expanded staff capacity. It says, as an example, that an additional social worker will be attached to the program — so, if the minister could just take a minute to talk about the success of community outreach services.

Again, I think it's important to note that this team didn't exist before. They are fluid and flexible. They work on the ground. We have a community outreach nurse who has a backpack and sees people where they are at. The housing

support team is fantastic. It all started out of the Department of Health and Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The intention of providing supports to those who are in need is not to address poverty, but to try to provide supports when they need it. Some individuals come to the department for supports that are temporary, right? Or they are having a difficult time this month, but might be successful next month. We have a lot of initiatives in place that support families in ensuring that they are successful by any means that they come to us. That means that we gauge all applications. We engage the supports to child enhancements and to our bilateral agreements with our communities. We look at our supports through early learning childcare and, through the direct operating grants and subsidies and so on, we ensure that we provide those supports. We recognize that we have a growing population, so the income support pressure is also growing.

I appreciate the question. The community outreach services we currently have active per month are 75 clients.

Ms. White: One of the highlights in the Budget Address was talking about ensuring that there was a more collaborative and integrated health care system. It talks about the success of the nurse practitioner in the community of Mayo. During the very tough Blackjack inquest, there were recommendations made, including having nurse practitioners in communities. It was about the continuity of care. In the budget, it says that there is a view to expanding this to other communities such as Carmacks in the coming years. What I want to know is when the intention is to have a nurse practitioner in the community of Carmacks, as recommended in the Blackjack inquest.

Hon. Ms. Frost: To the question, we have a nurse practitioner in Mayo, and the objective is to look at collaborative care throughout our communities. We want to ensure that we provide specialized support throughout the Yukon. Carmacks is next in the queue, not specifically because of the Blackjack inquiry. It came out prior to that in our work with Chief Blackjack around his community wellness plan and the mental health hubs there and the continued support for his community. We just want to commend him for his support but also his diligence in identifying what his community needs are.

This year's budget has permanent funding for the nurse practitioner in Mayo, and we are looking at more nurse practitioners across the Yukon. The next in the queue is Carmacks, and that will happen as we have those discussions with the chief of that community.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that answer and look forward to the time that we have a nurse practitioner in every community because of the extended scope of practice. I was in this Chamber before we had certified nurse practitioners and had conversations with those who were losing the skills. I do look forward to a time when our communities are best served with the Swiss Army knife of nurses. They can do anything, and it is a big deal.

I am going to move to community hospitals at this point in time. Knowing that we have both the Dawson City hospital and the Watson Lake hospital, I want to know if those community hospitals are ready for the COVID-19 pandemic as far as staff

numbers, equipment, supplies, and, most importantly, testing capabilities.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would say that, under the leadership of the chief medical officer and management at the Yukon Hospital Corporation, both community hospitals are very ready. We have zero patients in Dawson City today and two in Watson Lake. We are working with our health centres as well in those communities to ensure that we have the necessary supports.

Ms. White: That is great. I hope that this is indeed the case.

One of the challenges coming out of the communities that has been reflected to us — to me and to, I'm sure, others in opposition — is that communities have been having a hard time accessing the information about what is happening.

The last time I looked at the website of the chief medical officer of health, it was talking about purple heroin, which I don't disagree with. I think it's an important thing to talk about.

The minister has said previously that now you can find everything on yukon.ca, but how is information about COVID-19 — the request of people to keep social distance and what that looks like and preparedness — getting pushed out into the communities?

Hon. Ms. Frost: There are various means with which to do that. We are using social media; we have used Facebook; we have used Twitter; we have ads going out in the newspapers. We are working very closely with the inter-agency committees. In every one of our communities, we're working through the health directors within the communities. Every day at 4:00 p.m., there is a Yukon-wide call that has representation from the municipalities and from the First Nation leadership and First Nation communities. We have EMO representation from each one of those communities. They participate in the calls.

I would feel confident in saying that we are getting as much information out as required, and we are working with the communities so that they can have their own community preparedness plan in place. Participating on that call is Community Services, and Health and Social Services. The chief medical officer is on the call and EMO is on the call specifically to have the discussion on COVID-19.

Ms. White: One of the concerns that has been highlighted in communities — for example, a community like Ross River, which doesn't have access to a hospital. It doesn't have a community hospital, and having been contacted by folks there — so the real sense in some of those communities is that information is actually not getting out.

One of the risks is that, when people are sharing bad information, it's worse than sharing no information at all, in my thought. I appreciate that the minister talked about social media, Facebook, and the Internet, but is information being printed out and put up on bulletin boards or put out in communities that maybe don't have Internet access — not everybody is on the Internet, to be honest.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The calls every day have representation from the majority of the communities. I had a call in the middle of last week with the chief medical officer, with every one of the communities participating on the call.

We have now established a team specifically for community supports, and that has representation, as I identified earlier, from the chief medical officer, Community Services, EMO, and Health and Social Services. That is to work with our communities. Specifically, we work through the inter-agency committee, our health directors, and our registered nurses in the community. We have established the means to get the messages out. We certainly want to make sure that we do this broad and wide, and ensure that we have posters up and calls are made. Community health centres are getting the information out. We are taking every possible means to disseminate the information. We will continue to do that as this evolves and ensure that current, in-time information is shared.

Mr. Hassard: I have a couple of questions for the minister regarding NGOs and their year-end financials. So, we understand that some of the NGOs have had e-mails sent to them as recently as today and yesterday from the Department of Education, Health and Social Services, and possibly others asking for their year-end financials.

So, I am wondering if the minister would be amenable to giving the NGOs some type of flexibility, some type of additional allowance, in light of the pandemic that we're currently dealing with here in the territory.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Absolutely, we will work with the NGOs to ensure that they have the resources necessary to continue with their program funding and program supports.

Mr. Hassard: I don't think the question was necessarily about the resources. It was about allowing them some flexibility in providing or filing those year-end financials.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I believe that the Premier made that abundantly clear — that whatever we have as supports out there — that we will work with our NGO community and all of our communities to be as flexible as we can during this very difficult time in Yukon.

Mr. Hassard: I have some questions regarding personal protective equipment for health care workers.

As we know, there have been issues of shortages across the country, so if the minister could provide us with some information about what the government has done to ensure that our community health centres have enough protective equipment — is the minister able to share some information on the total amount of stock that we have in the Yukon and how long that stock is expected to last.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The Department of Health and Social Services is working very closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation, Emergency Medical Services, and other branches of the Government of Yukon, including Community Services, which is responsible for emergency measure supports.

We do currently have appropriate supplies of personal protective equipment. As necessary, we will continue to monitor our stockpile. We are working with the national emergency stockpile system to ensure that we have support and supplies when we need it. That is being monitored regularly. Currently, we have sufficient resources. It is being monitored consistently.

Mr. Hassard: Along those lines, we have seen the global supply chain in turmoil as a result of this pandemic, with

a major shutdown of pharmaceutical companies in Asia. We have heard reports that supply chains of prescriptions could be and possibly have been impacted.

Would the minister be able to provide us with some insight on what efforts the Government of Yukon has undertaken to actually protect the supply chain of prescription drugs?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Currently, like every jurisdiction, we are working through the federal government to ensure that the supply chain is not disrupted in any way, so I can assure the member opposite that, of course, all of that is at the forefront of everyone's mind. We want to make sure that we have the resources available here in the Yukon.

Mr. Hassard: I'm not sure the minister got that one, but we'll move on, in light of the time.

With respect to supplies for the pandemic in our communities, I recently received a picture from the Pelly Crossing Health Centre showing their pandemic supplies, and it's actually two old cardboard boxes — not very big and not a lot of stock inside those boxes. It is certainly not very reassuring.

Can the minister tell us what further supplies are available for community health centres? Are all health centres in the Yukon stocked this way? If not, which ones can the minister confirm and assure us are stocked properly?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We do have sufficient supplies, and I wouldn't rely on a photograph. I would rely on the supports and the professionalism that's happening across the Yukon. I want to assure Yukoners that all of the resources are available. Should we run into a challenge, we will ensure that we bring the supports there. We are working very closely with the Hospital Corporation on the distribution of supplies — personal protective equipment, anything that we need in our health centres. We also have great staff in the health centres, nurses who have many years of experience who will ensure that we have intact, ongoing preparation for COVID-19. The risk of COVID-19 is still low in the Yukon. We still have no cases as of today, which gives us a little breathing room. It gives us flexibility to work with our health professionals, ensuring that we have the necessary supports.

One photograph of a small area — I would look at the broader picture and look at what's happening in the communities with the First Nations, with the health centre, with EMO, with Health and Social Services, and with the Hospital Corporation. There is a lot of really great work happening, and we are pleased with the effort that's happening across the Yukon and assure Yukoners that we are taking this very seriously and ensuring that they have the health supports they need.

Mr. Hassard: I am in the process of sending that picture over to the minister with one of the pages. I appreciate them taking that over, just for the minister's information.

Moving on — I had some questions regarding testing on COVID-19. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how many tests have been administered so far. How many of those results are yet outstanding?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I wish I knew that, but I don't. That's the chief medical officers; there are two. The chief medical

officer, Dr. Hanley, is working very closely with our communities around the strategic supports in our communities around pandemic planning. Dr. Elliot is dealing with the medical side of things and she's doing all of the really great management. Specifics around how many tests were done, how many responses were back — I can't answer that question. I wouldn't endeavour to do that here in this Legislative Assembly, but I will rely on their guidance and their expertise to ensure that Yukon is well prepared and that our communities are well prepared.

When we look at collaboration and we look at the efforts, I think that, just a few days ago when the question was asked about how many tests were sent out — when Dr. Hanley and Dr. Elliot conversed with media — I do believe that they made an indication that there were well over 200 tests sent out. But I will pass the message on and hopefully they can provide some clarity around that.

Mr. Hassard: I'm not sure what kind of clarity the minister would like me to give on the question. I mean, I asked a simple question: How many tests have been completed? How many of those results are still outstanding?

My understanding is that the chief medical officer reports to the Minister of Health and Social Services. My understanding, from the minister herself, is that they have been working very closely. I would certainly hope that, during the — I'm assuming — daily briefings for the minister from the chief medical officer, she would actually be finding out those exact answers. I would certainly hope that she is taking enough interest in this important scenario that she would actually be asking those questions so that, when the media or the Legislature poses those questions to her, she can actually provide accurate information.

I think it's quite appalling, actually, that the minister would say that she wouldn't have that information.

I see the officials passing her some information, so maybe I'll sit down and give her another opportunity and see if we can provide a better answer to the Legislature on that one.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Speaking of appalling, I think the member opposite, sitting in that chair for a number of years — 14 years, in fact — the members opposite have gone through epidemics like this — H1N1, as an example. We do not have current up-to-date information. I would not have that information.

My main objective is not to panic Yukoners but to ensure that we provide the supports to Yukoners. We certainly have daily discussions with my deputy minister and with the chief medical officer around resources necessary and available to Yukoners to ensure that every community is supported and ready to deal with the pandemic, should it come here to the Yukon. Sending a photograph with a shelf of some personal protective equipment is not an indication of the great work that the community is doing in all of our communities.

In fact, the nurses are working above and beyond, as are our community's Emergency Measures Organization and our health professionals, and I want to just say that is what we are doing. We are working together, and having specific details is up to the minute, I think — as I said, Dr. Hanley has indicated

that we have over 200 tests that have gone out, and it's changing on an hourly basis. It's not something that I'm going to stand here and take criticism on, because it's not acceptable for us to get into a debate on a budget bill to speak about how many tests have gone out.

What we have to ensure that we have resources in the budget to support our communities, and we are doing that.

Mr. Hassard: It's interesting that the minister wants to talk about how hard the nurses are working. I certainly agree, but it's unfortunate that their minister won't follow their lead and actually get to work herself.

We have listened to health ministers across this entire country who are working with their chief medical officers of health and providing accurate information to the media or to their respective legislatures. The minister would rather stand here and accuse me of something for the 14 years that I have been in this chair — well, I have not been in government for anywhere near 14 years — so, clearly, she doesn't have that information either.

Would the minister be able to provide us, at any time, with accurate information as to how many tests have been administered and how many outstanding results we are waiting for?

Hon. Ms. Frost: So, what is most important for Yukoners to know — as of this moment in time, the information that we have from the chief medical officer is that we have no cases of COVID-19 in the Yukon.

We are preparing our pandemic plans in our communities. We are working to ensure that we have health supports available and that we have a community plan in place. We have zero cases identified. Certainly, on a daily basis, I have a conversation and a meeting with the chief medical officer, and we talk about many things. We talk about services that are available in our communities. What is it that we need to do to support? We take under advisement and consideration all of that.

How many tests are done? It fluctuates. The last information that we had from the chief medical officer was that there were over 200. How many specifically — 211? 250? I don't know. I probably won't ever know that, and it is not something that I can let the member opposite know. He finds humour in the fact that I don't have that information at my fingertips. It is the information through Dr. Elliott. She controls the tests that go out and the results that come back. She monitors it on a daily basis. The last information that she advised us of is that we have over 200 tests that have gone out. We have a number that have been returned — all of them are negative. That is the information that we want Yukoners to know, and we will continue to test individuals as they present with symptoms. We will work through our health centres and the health professionals. That is what we want Yukoners to know.

Mr. Hassard: The minister seems to think that I'm finding this funny. Well, I find this anything but funny. This is absolutely appalling. I cannot believe that the Minister of Health and Social Services, who talks about working so closely with the chief medical officer of health and has briefings with

him on a regular basis, has no idea and says she doesn't think she will ever have any idea about how many tests have been administered and how many results we're waiting for.

Honestly, I have no idea how to respond to that. I guess I will choke on that one for a few minutes and try to move on.

With regard to the testing and the length of time for the tests to be completed, we heard initially from the government that these tests would be turned around in three to five days. Is the minister able to at least tell us how many tests were actually completed within that three- to five-day benchmark?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I will say again that the chief medical officer manages the tests that they administer. They are sent out. The results come back, and we have received the number today. That changes on a daily basis. I am not prepared to stand up here and give out — every day, these are the tests that have gone out, and this is what has come back. This is not something that I am prepared to do here.

What I am prepared to do is ensure that we work with our chief medical officer and that we work with the BC Centre for Disease Control in ensuring that all of the tests that have gone out are returned as quickly as possible, recognizing that there have been challenges given the escalation of this across the country. BC is also experiencing significant pressures, so we are working on getting the samples out. Every day, samples are sent out; the results come back.

Originally, we had indicated that the turnaround time in average, normal circumstances is three to five days. That has increased. My understanding is that, based on the increased supports from the BC control laboratory, this has reduced significantly. We are very pleased with the extra support that they have provided to us.

Mr. Cathers: First of all, I am rising to ask questions here this afternoon. As members know and as has been talked about a number of times today, of course, we are expediting debate on the budget in the interest of ensuring that departments do have the resources that they need at this time in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

I just want to start by recognizing that, in the Department of Health and Social Services, in the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and, really, in every government department right now, there are a lot of people working very hard on the response to COVID-19, trying to get in place plans to minimize the health risks as well as the economic impacts of it, recognizing particularly that some of the front-line staff are working very long hours right now.

As well, recognizing the recommendation coming out from the chief medical officer of health about staff working at home if they can, I recognize that there are managers, people within the Public Service Commission, and others who are working hard trying to finalize the government's plans regarding who can stay home and work from there and what steps can be taken to ensure that business continues while minimizing the health risks. To all of the people there — the health professionals and others — who are working on that, I just want to express my thanks for their efforts on behalf of this territory.

It certainly is an unusual thing that we are all facing here. The social distancing seen in the change of the layout in this

Chamber is quite evident, and it's a little bit surreal after the years that I've spent in this Assembly to see it the way it is today.

I just want to ask a few questions related to the pandemic response, recognizing that the government is working hard right now to rise to the challenge that is being faced. I have a few questions about the details of that.

During the briefing on the Department of Community Services, we were advised that the medical health emergency coordination centre was activated on January 28. As the minister and officials will know, there are two parts in a public health emergency. The health aspects are under the direction of the chief medical officer. There is also a role within government for the Emergency Measures Organization, which, in the event of an emergency of any type including a health emergency, has an important role to play. So, during the briefing from Community Services, we were advised again that the medical health emergency coordination centre was activated on January 28, but it seemed that the structure within government under EMO was in the process of being set up. Recognizing that EMO itself is under Community Services — but of course under the Incident Command System and structure — the departments that they would be responsible for working with include Health and Social Services.

Can the minister advise whether the Incident Command System and structure has been activated under EMO and, if so, when that occurred?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate that it was part of the answer. Could the minister indicate when that was activated — the date?

Hon. Ms. Frost: It is done now. It's in effect right now, as we speak.

Mr. Cathers: I hope that the minister can get back with that information later, but I guess that's the answer that I'm going to get for now.

Another important element of a response, of course, is the surge capacity of the system to bring in people to assist with the additional volume, especially from the health side but also from the management and coordination side.

Can the minister please indicate when they began ramping up the efforts to engage retired doctors, nurses, and other health professionals? Is she able to provide any information about the status of that effort?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Bringing in staff from across the government to work with the chief medical officer — and, of course, the physicians are working with us as well to rotate through the assessment centre.

Mr. Cathers: I would appreciate it if the minister would commit to providing more information later via letter or legislative return. I do note that, as touched on by my colleagues earlier, we would appreciate receiving additional information so that we can pass it on to the people who contact us, both about the advice from the chief medical officer, as well as the answers to other questions that people have related to their jobs if they work for government or for the private sector, so that we are better able, as MLAs, to work together with the

government in assisting Yukoners who are concerned and have questions.

I also recognize, in saying that, that some of the government employees, health professionals, and others who would be required to contribute to that information are themselves extremely busy at this point in time. I certainly don't want to see the critical health response suffer while they provide briefing notes, but I would just note that we are interested in being part of the solution and the response, and the more information that the government is able to provide to us helps us answer the questions of constituents, helps allay their concerns, and helps to ensure that we have a well-coordinated response to this pandemic.

As I mentioned earlier in this Assembly during debate with the Premier, one of the lessons learned from SARS in Ontario was that some of the problems that occurred — both health and economic — were the result of communication internally to government and externally not being as good as it should have been. That has already been a problem so far in the government's response to the pandemic. I also, in saying that, recognize that people who are dealing with that — there are many people throughout government who are working very long hours right now in response to the pandemic. Since we are where we are, I do want to make sure that those people understand that we do appreciate the work they are doing and the long hours that they are putting in.

It is a concern that the communication has not been as good as it should be and that government does not seem to have pushed the button on ramping up this response as early as they should have. I do, again, in noting that, just want to say that we recognize that we are where we are today, and I appreciate the work of everyone who is working long hours in this area.

I want to ask a specific question of the minister regarding community testing. If people go through the self-assessment or call 811 and determine that, based on what they hear, they should get tested for COVID-19, can the minister indicate in which Yukon communities testing is available?

Hon. Ms. Frost: All communities.

Mr. Cathers: I am pleased to hear that response. I could ask a lot of other questions related to pandemic preparedness here and other areas of the Department of Health and Social Services, but recognizing the shortage of time we have here this afternoon and in the interest of ensuring that all departments have the resources they need and are able to have their focus directed on responding to this pandemic rather than on supporting their ministers here in this Legislative Assembly, I just want to conclude by thanking, again, everyone who is working hard on this response — whether they work for government or others, such as physicians, nurses, and others within the health field and those working for the Hospital Corporation, who together, I know, are doing their best to respond to this pandemic and to keep Yukoners safe.

In conclusion, I would just urge all Yukoners to recognize the importance of doing their part, including following the advice of public health officials and avoiding unnecessarily buying more items than they need and contributing to completely unnecessary shortages, like the recent toilet paper

shortage we have seen in the Yukon. There was absolutely no need for there to be a shortage of that. While recognizing and appreciating the concerns that some people have, it is important for everyone to remain calm and to respond in a thoughtful manner, doing so based on the advice of public health officials.

With that, I conclude my remarks here on this and thank the minister for the answers she has provided here this afternoon and urge her to get back with the other answers as soon as that information is available.

Hon. Ms. Frost: In response, we negotiated a contract over two weeks ago with agency nurses. We are bringing in retired doctors. We're working with Yukon College to speak with them about the LPN program. As I understand it, there are 18 nurses there. Looking at the supports — I want to just acknowledge the nurses and doctors and the folks who are coming forward to lend a hand to work together to find solutions. We are calling on all resources from across the government.

Yukon's medical system will remain diligent in ensuring that we have the supports available across the Yukon with respect to testing and how quickly tests are turned around and how many tests are done. We have full confidence in our health care team and we are working closely with them to ensure that we all take necessary precautions and that tests that are necessary are done.

We have recently put in the self-assessment tool to eliminate some of the unnecessary testing. We're trying to use the tests that are available for those individuals who present as having symptoms. I want to just thank the chief medical officer of health and their team for working so hard and acknowledging that there is a lot that we have to do yet, acknowledging Yukoners for their diligence and patience and everyone just for working together. I think that says a lot about where we are in the Yukon.

The chief medical officer indicated that the supports are available in the Yukon and that we are well prepared. I have full confidence in the team, despite some of what was said earlier — I will not consider any of that because we, as elected officials, need to demonstrate our commitment as leaders to work together on finding solutions for Yukoners. I will stay the course and I will work with the professionals who advise me on a daily basis. I acknowledge the two chief medical officers for doing just that.

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

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

Mr. Kent: Mr. Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, cleared or carried

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 15, Department of Health and Social Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$448,580,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$12,815,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$461,395,000 agreed to

Department of Health and Social Services agreed to

Chair: The matter now before Committee is Vote 3, resuming general debate on the 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.

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

Recess

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

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

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. McPhee has 16 minutes, 50 seconds.

Department of Education — continued

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm joined by Alison Thom and Nicole Morgan from the Department of Education. I would like to welcome them here today and to thank them for their support in answering the questions that may come from the members in the House today.

I won't be using the rest of my time. I think we got to some questions the other day and to some introductory remarks, but I will take my seat and turn it over to the members opposite.

Mr. Kent: I would like to also join the minister in welcoming her officials here to provide support and thank them for coming in beyond normal business hours, as we are in anything but normal times.

When we last had Education up, we were speaking about two hypothetical scenarios — whether the schools would remain open after spring break, or whether they would be closed after spring break. Obviously, with the announcement yesterday by the chief medical officer of health and his recommendation and the government's action on closing the schools until after Easter, I have some follow-up questions with respect to that scenario.

When we asked about this in Question Period the other day, I asked the minister — obviously, students won't be returning to school after the March break is over, but it sounds to me like teachers will, to work on — I believe her words were

“the continuity of learning”. A couple of questions from that — obviously, there may be some teachers who will be in self-isolation, depending on where they travelled to or if they did travel during spring break. But I'm curious: For the other teachers who are able to return to work, will there be an opportunity for them to work from home during this time?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: With respect to this question, we'll use the time — the teachers — I won't go into the self-isolation issue. That is, I hope, obvious. If individuals need to stay away, they can do that. It will be a decision of the administration of an individual school to determine who should be there — who are well — who should be there and who should not be there and likely to address social distancing and those kinds of issues. We'll use the time for principals and school staff to assess program impacts and plans for measures needed for students to ensure their continued learning.

School staff will continue to be paid, of course, and will be expected to return to work on a date that their school is scheduled to reopen, unless they need to be isolated. School staff are Yukon government employees and will be supported to work from home when possible to do so, and an update was sent to parents and to school councils and to school staff yesterday with respect to the details of this.

I can also indicate that there was a more than two-hour meeting with principals across the territory — lots of them by phone — that seemed very satisfactory. They were all very pleased to be supported in this way, and the superintendents, the ADMs, and the department staff are working with individual principals and teachers, as needed. There will be some returning from outside of Canada and outside of the territory who will need to be self-isolated, and it will be a team effort by the educators at the schools to determine what's necessary.

The focus, of course, is on continuity of learning, as I said the other day. With respect to students, we have a departmental committee for continuity of learning that will focus on that, and they are tied into a continuity of learning committee in British Columbia. So, it is a massive effort, together, to make sure that students aren't adversely affected by these class delays.

Mr. Kent: So, just if the minister can clarify for them so that I can pass it on to any educators who reach out to us: It is up to the school? If they feel like they want to work from home, they need to submit whatever paperwork — I'm assuming that there will be some paperwork to submit — they submit it to their administration, presumably their principal or vice-principal — and that will be the final decision? It won't have to go up beyond them to the superintendent or director level or ADM or deputy minister? It will be done by the principal at each school?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Classes, of course, are suspended, but teachers can enter the school. We were quite careful that schools weren't closed. We know that they have resources there. We know that it will be important for teachers to be able to congregate there in a safe way during this period of time to work together and support each other. Principals are working to contact their staff and to clarify individual teachers' return to work and how that might happen — but certainly, we are

supporting teachers to work from elsewhere if that is appropriate in the circumstances and they have the resources and the ability to do that to support their students.

Mr. Kent: If anybody does reach out, I obviously will refer them to the administration at their school.

A couple of other groups of employees who will be affected by this closure — first are the substitute teachers. I am just wondering what provisions are made for them — perhaps the minister can explain to me what will happen for the substitute teachers during this stoppage. Obviously, they do have work in and out of the schools, but is there anything to protect or to give them any financial cushion as we move through this uncertain time?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will just go back to the last question for a second because I want to make sure that I'm clear that administrators are working with their own staff. They are working with their superintendents as well. It's not that there is an issue of an approval chain and it's not to put any barriers in place, but they are working as a team together. The superintendents are working with the administrators to make those determinations with respect to staff. They are clarifying their return to work with respect to teachers who can stay home. I just wanted to note that because I don't think I did.

With respect to the current question, we are working with the Public Service Commission and with the human resources part of the Department of Education, as well as with the Yukon Teachers' Association, to determine the effect on teachers on call and what that effect might be going forward depending on how long the situation lasts. It may well be that, if their finances are ultimately curtailed as a result of COVID-19, they could be eligible for many of the programs that are coming from the federal government as well.

We are mindful of the fact that, as contractors, the TOCs will likely be financially impacted. I guess that, as it plays out — and I don't like to speculate, of course — it might be that more teachers on call will be required if and when we return to school this year or when classes are resumed as a result of teachers being away for extended periods.

I think that it is a bit up in the air, but we are dedicated to working with teachers on call and making sure that we understand fully the impact that this situation has on them.

Mr. Kent: The other group of individuals who will obviously be affected are the school bus drivers. Not only do they provide service to and from school for students, but often for field trips and to support those classes that are undertaking those activities. I am just wondering if the minister could clarify for us, with respect to the busing contract with Standard Bus Yukon, is there a provision for them to continue to get paid during this stoppage, or will they not get paid unless they are providing the service?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The period of time between now, as a response to COVID-19 and the chief medical officer of health's advice — but the opportunity exists for us, as a department, to take the time between now and April 15 — it's still March break for many of the schools — to basically put in place plans for the length of the suspension of classes. That

length of the suspension will determine how we can continue to abide by this situation.

I don't have a direct answer with respect to the contract. I haven't looked at the contract for Standard busing, and to be frank, we have not had an opportunity to do so, but — as the federal government has said and as our government has said — we will support individuals and companies, businesses, that are adversely affected by COVID-19, particularly financially, and we will continue to monitor our response. I suspect that we will meet with Standard busing in the not-too-distant future as the result of this situation, and we will be having conversations with them about maintaining their service and making sure that they are provided for.

Mr. Kent: That was going to be one of my questions: Will you meet with Standard? So that's good. I'm glad to hear that will happen, and my colleagues and I will reach out to our contacts at Standard and let them know that they can expect an official or someone to contact them from the Department of Education.

With respect to — again, these are all COVID-19-related questions — the upcoming school council elections, is there any change anticipated in those at this juncture? Obviously, Elections Yukon has a role to play there as well. Have there been any discussions with Elections Yukon around what the school council elections would look like and if there are any changes anticipated? I believe they're coming up in May of this year, if I'm not mistaken. If I am, the minister can correct the record on that.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We have not had discussions in the fast-paced last 10 days with Elections Yukon. I shouldn't say this: I have not spoken to Elections Yukon. I know that the department has been in touch — I know that we have had some preliminary conversations about dates in May 2020. At this point, the effect of COVID-19 is not known with respect to the elections. If it is at all possible, we will again follow the information and the direction of the chief medical officer of health, and we will confer with Elections Yukon and what they need to make sure that the process is as smooth as possible. I don't anticipate a delay at this time, but as we all know, that situation is changing quickly and it may be that May is a date that is too soon. More importantly, can elections be held during that period of time in a way that is safely structured to make sure that all of the medical concerns are taken into account?

I appreciate the question; I think that it is an important one. It is not something that I can answer at the moment, but I am mindful of the importance of school council elections going forward in a timely way in a safe environment.

Mr. Kent: I am just hoping — obviously, we are moving rapidly through our deliberations here today, so if there are questions that I ask that the minister doesn't have the answer to, if she could provide them in writing when those answers are available, I would appreciate that. I am assuming that the Leader of the New Democratic Party would also want a copy of any responses, and when she has her chance, I would appreciate those answers as well, if there are some issues outstanding.

The minister mentioned earlier that they would be doing some work after spring break, leading up to the end of Easter — some planning on potential further closures. I know that it is the chief medical officer of health who would make this recommendation, but will the minister of the department be in contact with Dr. Hanley, so that decision — if there needs to be an extension to the school closure or the suspension of classroom activities — I just want to make sure that this decision is communicated to parents in a timely fashion. I mean, they are fortunate to get about a week-and-a-half's notice, which I think is appropriate for them to try to make other arrangements. I'm just hoping that the minister or her colleagues will work with the chief medical officer to make sure that there is enough lead time for parents to make alternative arrangements if that school closure goes beyond the Tuesday after Easter.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate those comments. We agree. As a matter of fact, in our conversations with the chief medical officer of health, one of the reasons that it was recommended to go to April 15 is that it wasn't the Tuesday right after Easter, because it's almost impossible to communicate over periods of time with families who are not connected to the school or to classes at the school at the time. Part of the reasoning — one is that making the call as it was made yesterday was to give families as much notice as possible. The fact that it went to April 15 was to make sure that, in the event that it does not need to go beyond that, we would have an opportunity to describe that and make sure that notification of that was given out to families because, over a long weekend like Easter, it is almost impossible to get that message out.

We are in communication with Dr. Hanley on a regular basis. I'm not sure how Dr. Hanley and Dr. Elliot are managing, because a lot of people are in communication with them on a regular basis, but currently, of course, we are. We're working on several scenarios that might unfold as the information comes in.

We've committed to providing parents with regular updates. Yesterday, we wrote to parents individually, to school councils, to First Nations, to community education partners, to superintendents, to administrators, to teachers, and to families to provide as much information as possible. We've committed to continue doing that, and we appreciate everyone's patience and understanding as we work to provide supports to continue student learning in this unusual situation and to implement the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health.

Mr. Kent: I know that things are moving very quickly over at the department with respect to what we're dealing with, and I just wanted to thank the deputy and all of her staff for being very adaptable, I'm sure, and moving so quickly on all of these things.

One of the other questions that I was curious about is if there are any considerations being given to summer classes. I'm sure that every kid who isn't listening right now is shuddering to hear me say that, but are there any considerations being given to summer school if this closure or suspension of class time continues for a longer period of time?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm not sure if the member opposite wants to be known for bringing up the idea of summer classes, but I'll let him worry about that. I make light of it only in that all options are being considered — again, the period of time between now and April 15 — for an opportunity to explore all options, but we are constrained by the collective agreement, as well as by the *Education Act*, and we're working closely also with the BC ministry for their guidance and assistance.

Like everyone here, I likely hope that the suspension of classes will be short-lived. We will take each step as it comes, considering the options as they unfold that are in the best interest of our students.

Mr. Kent: The minister spoke earlier — I think it was the last time we were up or perhaps in Question Period — about putting together some potential online learning plans. Obviously, that work will be undertaken by various schools in that time of the closure. I'm kind of hoping that she can give us a little bit of her early understanding of that. This is an infrastructure question, but is there enough bandwidth for every school in the territory, particularly those community schools, for this online learning to take place from those schools?

I guess that would be the question: Is there enough bandwidth on the Internet for online learning to take place in the community schools?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I want to be careful not to give the impression that we are looking at e-classes or online resources that aren't necessarily already available. We are very well-positioned with respect to mobile devices that are available at schools, so if someone didn't have access to that as a student, we might be able to sort that out for them. That became an issue — a well-resolved issue — last year at the Yukon Teachers' Association negotiations. We are looking to focus on continuity of learning. So, a lot of individual assessments — which go along well with the curriculum in Yukon schools as we speak — will need to be done by teachers and by teams of educators to focus on and support continuity of learning.

Yukon schools are able to provide a range of online learning opportunities through the Aurora Virtual School in high schools, and further work is underway to use online learning opportunities to ensure that students can complete their graduation credits in particular. Department officials are coordinating with the BC ministry on course credit options and online assessments, but it will really be focused on individual students and making sure that they can continue their learning.

Grade 12 graduating students will only need the grade 10 numeracy assessment, which is not a change but just a reminder, and we're working to ensure that students who have not taken this assessment are able to meet that grad requirement. For grades 10 and 11 students, BC has postponed the graduation assessment, so those will be caught up at a later time, hopefully.

We're looking at essential learning; we're looking at opportunities to meet families where they need it. I believe the question that I answered yesterday involved — what about families who don't have access to computers? As I have said, we have some good mobile devices — online learning tools that we hope will be able to do that — to assist and support families,

and also, we will meet families where they are — if they need paper versions of learning tools as well.

There will be a priority on course credits for grades 10 to 12 students, because obviously they will soon be looking to use those marks for their future. Grades K to 9 students will be focusing on the continuity of literacy and numeracy activities, which can be provided on paper worksheets, online activities, or games — all kinds of things that will be directed by our educators.

I am told by my colleague that the bandwidth in communities is robust and will support this kind of change, be it a short or longer plan, to make sure that students have access to their education.

Mr. Kent: I'm pleased to hear that because some — as we have heard from some of our constituents — either have limited or no Internet service in their area, so they will be pleased to hear that there will be paper-based resources available to them. I know that some have made the choice to move to home-schooling for the balance of the school year now, rather than wait to see if classes will resume, so we'll be able to pass that information on to them.

Just for those who want to register for home-schooling, is there a home-school coordinator at the Department of Education, or is there someone specifically tasked with that whom they can reach out to?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The coordination for home-schooling, either previously or now — there may be new interest from families for some of these options — should be addressed through the Aurora Virtual School. I think that is certainly something that can be done either working from home or online or e-mail or calls that can be responded to even in the current event of classes being suspended.

Mr. Kent: I think that will do it for questions today with respect to Education.

I do have one more, sorry — for the graduation ceremonies for this year's grade 12 class, are there any contingency plans being made in case the current orders of the chief medical officer of health persist into June when those normally would take place? If so, what are those plans?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I want to thank the member opposite for his questions because I actually have notes and they are all categorized as the top topics that need to be addressed, such as, of course, the school council elections, further school closures, and the other things he has asked about. Graduation is certainly on that list.

We have been speaking to the chief medical officer of health as this being one of the quick or soon-to-be-made future decisions with as much lead time as possible for parents. It is an unfolding situation. It is one of the top priorities for us to consider because of the nature of graduation ceremonies, gathering families, and opportunities for students to be together, which is so critical in their passing through a graduation ceremony and opportunity. It is, again, one of these decisions that is being triaged with the department with respect to how this process is unfolding. It is certainly something that I will commit to advising the members opposite about as soon as we know what sort of decision has been made — or even as we

go along, which decisions are being made in a timely fashion. We are very mindful of the fact that this has to be made for students to have as much lead time as possible. We are also very mindful of the fact that, if it is one of the items or events that can recover in the next few months, of the importance of it for students and families.

Mr. Kent: I guess I should ask the minister what else is on that list that she has. What are the other top topics? But I will just move on to some of these other things that I wanted to ask her about today.

The first one is on the inclusive education review that is underway — and I believe it is Dr. Yee who is conducting that review. Are there any changes to the timelines of that review, given the situation that we are in?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Another topic on the list — thank you, Mr. Chair. No adjustment to the timeline has been made at this time. There is clearly a recognition that it might have to be adjusted. One of the portions of the early phase of that review is to go to communities — to visit communities. The consultant and others — representatives from the Education department and education priorities at the Council of Yukon First Nations — for instance, the Chiefs Committee on Education — are involved in this review, as well as certainly educators and others. So, the gathering of larger groups of people will be prohibited for the time being. So, it could well affect the timeline.

We are currently talking to our education partners and determining how some of that work can continue or the portions of that work that don't involve large gatherings can continue and consultation and then potentially options for gathering that information, perhaps in a different way. We are committed to the timelines, because we think that this is a truly important review of inclusive and special education, and we don't want that to be delayed. But certainly it is equally as important. There's a balance to be struck so that information can be properly gathered from communities. The timeline is a question; it's still an open one.

Mr. Kent: Obviously the Yukon Teachers' Association had some concerns with how the initial stages of this inclusive education review were handled. I think perhaps other MLAs received letters from educators in their ridings. One of the quotes from the letter that I got is: "I'm deeply concerned that my government has made a number of important decisions about the review, it's process, and mandate without hearing from the voice of Yukon educators or the YTA."

I'm curious. First of all: Why was the decision made to not have teachers involved initially in the process like they wanted? What outreach and discussion has been had with them about this since the announcement of Dr. Yee's review?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm happy to have an opportunity to answer this question.

I think some of the misunderstanding — and I've tried to unravel this ball of wool a little in trying to see the perspective of the Yukon Teachers' Association. I know that the deputy minister has been in touch with the president of the Yukon Teachers' Association on more than one occasion to have this conversation. I think some of the misunderstanding came from

the Yukon Teachers' Association expressing an interest in being involved in determining the scope and the mandate of the review.

The review was committed to back in 2018. We knew that a portion of the review would be affected by the Auditor General's report that came out in June 2019, so there were some waiting for that to be the case. The scope and mandate of the review that's to be done and is being done comes from the recommendations of the Auditor General, to be clear. As a result, the phases were designed to meet that scope and mandate.

I think there was some misunderstanding at the YTA — and some criticism, frankly — that this was somehow decided without their input. We are following the recommendations of the Auditor General, and the scope of the review is focused there.

The initial phase of the review is information gathering. Teachers are — educators are — being spoken to during the initial phase. Because it's information gathering at that point, they are involved at that stage, and we will involve them throughout the process, because they are critical to this review. I have said that specifically in person and in writing to the president of the Teachers' Association, and I hope we're getting to a place where we all understand that.

The president of the Yukon Teachers' Association sits on the Yukon Advisory Committee for Education. The advisory committee on Yukon education was aware of this process, as well, as early as May of 2019 when we were trying to determine — waiting for the Auditor General's report — how we would proceed. They will have input at phase 1 — the advisory committee — as well as the president in her role there.

Teachers will be involved in the work that we do to respond to the recommendations going forward, and the recommendations provided by the consultant will be public, as well as a summary of what we heard. So, there are a number of opportunities.

I don't want to be heard to be saying anything, but we completely agree that educators are a contributing voice in this review, and they're not a voice like every other voice, but they are equally as critical as parents and families and the experiences of children, as well as First Nation governments and educators, and how we will manage to gather all of this information in one place and proceed with recommendations. I'm happy to have — I hope in the very near future — a conversation yet again with the Yukon Teachers' Association so we can resolve this. It's a perspective difference.

I think that it is something that we should sit down and resolve. I am concerned — and I expressed this also to the president of the Yukon Teachers' Association — that, with the perspective and the information that has been provided — that somehow we have not taken into account the voice, the perspective, and the expertise of educators in the initial phase of this review — is just not correct. I will continue to work diligently on resolving that perspective.

Mr. Kent: The minister mentioned that the initial work that was done was developing the scope of the review and that this is where there seemed to be some concerns from the Yukon

Teachers' Association at that time. Was that just done internally — determining that scope of review — or were there any other partners involved in developing that initial scope of this education review?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I want to be clear. The scope came from the recommendations from the Auditor General in the audit report and review of some aspects of the Department of Education and the services of Education in June 2019. Recommendation 70 from that report indicates that the department should "... conduct a full review of its services and supports for inclusive education. It should exercise a leadership role by, for example, engaging with teachers, parents, and specialists to determine how the Department can help teachers maximize student success. The review should include examining how best to: evaluate whether its approach to inclusive education is working; determine whether services and supports are having the desired effect; determine whether sufficient resources are in place to support inclusive education; prioritize students for specialized assessments; assess and track specialist recommendations; and assess and track teachers' use of recommended strategies."

That is recommendation 70 from the Office of the Auditor General. That is the scope and the mandate of this review. It comes directly from that. As a result, that may be one of the issues that's not entirely well understood, but those are the marching orders to the department, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Kent: The final question with respect to the review — and we asked about this at the departmental briefing — is if opposition members can be scheduled for a briefing once we get a better idea now of whether the timelines will be affected. Will the minister commit to providing opposition parties access to Dr. Yee for a briefing on her work?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Yes. I would be happy to do that.

Mr. Kent: When the minister mentioned the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education, I pulled up the minutes of the last meeting, October 30, 2019, and it said that the next meeting will be scheduled for sometime in January 2020 and then a further meeting in May. Did that January 2020 meeting take place?

Just while officials are looking for that response, I'm just wondering — if it did take place, when the minutes of that meeting will be available online as well.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The January 2020 meeting had to be postponed. The recent conversations around rescheduling that meeting were to align the advisory group with a meeting with the consultant, Dr. Yee.

Of course, Dr. Yee, who normally resides in Vancouver, isn't travelling here for that purpose. That meeting needs to be rescheduled. We're trying to line it up with her. Intervening circumstances have meant that we will try to figure out how to do that remotely or perhaps have individual members of the committee online so that it's not delayed unnecessarily.

Mr. Kent: In those same meeting minutes — again, this is the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education on October 30, 2019 — it talks about the attendance area review. I will just quote from the minutes. It says: "Discussed the

upcoming review this year. Department has compiled current information about attendance areas and will be coming to talk to School Councils no later than January 2020 to do an initial presentation and leave information with them to consider and then provide feedback to the department. Noted that it is unlikely that all attendance areas will need adjustment.”

Can the minister provide us with an update on that? Have all the school councils been talked to, and was it done no later than January 2020?

With respect to the note here that it is unlikely that all attendance areas will need adjustment, can the minister provide the House with which areas will not require adjustment?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The attendance area at work is ongoing. The catalyst, of course, is to determine an attendance area for the Whistle Bend elementary school, which has to be assigned an attendance area pursuant to the *Education Act*. The attendance area review of Whitehorse elementary schools is a by-product of that exercise and has connections to the government’s five-year capital plan, including replacing and renovating aging schools. Student enrolment growth, of course, is being taken into account with that. Attendance areas support the governance and the operation of schools. The *Education Act* requires that every school be assigned an attendance area, and part of that work is to work with each and every school council in discussion — some more closely than with others in the City of Whitehorse. As we proceed with the review, we still have to meet with any potentially affected school communities through their school councils to discuss their attendance areas and to hear from them before any final decisions are made.

Another factor in extending the timeline for this review or the work that is continuing to be done over this spring is that school council elections are due to be held in May, and new school councils will be in place for the new school year. It is a contributing factor, not a deciding factor, with respect to that work going forward. I don’t have a list of the school councils that we have — yet — met with, with respect to this, but I can confirm that the working group has determined where students are going to school and roughly where they live as a first step in this process, and that work will continue to be done over the next few months, with the opportunity to speak to school councils going forward. Everything is impacted by COVID-19 and the response to COVID-19, Mr. Chair, but we will continue this work as best we can — meeting in small groups or contacting school councils in an online fashion or written fashion so that we can have their contributions moving forward.

Mr. Kent: If the minister will just get us a list of which school councils have been talked to and which ones still need to be provided with the information, that would be great as part of some of the other information that we have requested here today.

I have a quick administrative question, and I believe it’s in the *Education Act* that an Education annual report has to be tabled — and I think it’s due to be tabled in the current Sitting, which ends in a few hours, so I assume we’re not going to get it today, but does the minister have any idea when that education annual report will be made available and what

process she will use to make it available to members of the Legislature in the absence of a Spring Sitting?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The annual report for the Department of Education would have been due by the end of April, and it will be available before that or at least by that period of time. It’s in draft; it’s being reviewed and will be ultimately printed. I have no difficulty providing copies to the opposition when it is available, and I think we need to take a look at the requirements of the *Education Act*. If it needs to be tabled in some other way or if it’s outside the parameters of the legislative Sitting, we’ll completely abide by all of those opportunities and figure out how to properly get this into the public domain.

Mr. Kent: I look forward to getting that document — I’m assuming sometime in April.

I have a few questions about the francophone school. We were told at the briefing that the final budget is \$35.2 million. That’s what we’re looking at, as far as the francophone school goes. Can the minister tell us what the initial budget was for the school? So, how far have we gone overbudget with this project?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The completion of the French first language high school is making significant progress. It is anticipated to come in on budget. The total projected cost of the school is \$35.4 million. This includes the contract awarded to Ketz Construction of \$29.6 million, plus a total of \$5.8 million in other costs required to build the school — project management costs, traffic studies, geotechnical studies, furniture and equipment, landscaping design, site work, and contingency costs, all in that \$5.8 million.

This amount also includes \$7.5 million in funding over three years from Heritage Canada to support the construction of the francophone high school community spaces. The information that we have, as of today, is that the school is on budget and ahead of schedule.

Mr. Kent: Sorry, Mr. Chair — I guess the number that I was looking for was: What were the original, I guess, cost estimates? Perhaps that is the better language to use. What was the cost anticipated to be? I mean, we can go back through Hansard and look at some of the other answers that we got, but when we first started talking about this school project early on in the government’s mandate, I think there was a substantially lower number given at that point, so I’m looking for what that initial number was.

I know that now we’re at \$35.4 million, but where were we when we started this? Like I said, I could go back into Hansard, but I would prefer just to get the response here from the minister today — if she has it, of course.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Those are the numbers that I have today, which is this current budget going forward. The costs — I don’t have the figure that the member opposite is looking for with me. I can provide it to him. I don’t want to guess at what it is. I have a memory of it, but I don’t think that is something you should rely on. We can provide it to him.

Mr. Kent: I will look forward to getting that number.

The school site where the francophone school is being built obviously houses Selkirk and F.H. Collins as well. Will any of the facilities that are being built — I am assuming that this is

where the outdoor basketball court is going, and there is the new track and field, the trades wing, and the weights facility there. Are any of the ancillary facilities to F.H. Collins going to be shared with the new francophone school?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: F.H. Collins, Selkirk, and the new French first language school education campus is an important part of education learning going forward for the future of Yukon education. The new school and its community spaces will provide modern, flexible learning spaces for students and community groups. The new school is part of the campus model, as I've noted, for Riverdale where groups, communities, and cultures can gather, learn, and play in a variety of facilities. The Government of Yukon will continue to work with all three school communities on the Riverdale campus to collectively implement the new campus model and to ensure that the needs of all students are addressed.

Input from the neighbouring schools has been and will continue to be incorporated into the new French first language high school in order to balance the needs of all the schools on the Riverdale campus.

We note that, while we welcome the contribution from the federal government to put some community spaces in the French first language high school, the outdoor basketball court, the track and field, the gymnasium, and the trades wings are, of course, attached to F.H. Collins Secondary School, but we hope that the communities can work together for the benefit of all of the students on that campus and can ultimately design and have a school community benefit for not only the Whitehorse education students but the community itself going forward. The ideal is that there will be cooperation between the parties.

Mr. Kent: Who will ultimately be responsible for booking those facilities, like the track and the field? Is it going to be the principal of F.H. Collins — I mean, often, the principals are involved when it comes to the gymnasiums and that type of thing. So, I am assuming that if somebody wants to use the field after school for any athletic activities — or even beyond the time when the city takes over — and they have bookings for those fields — I'm curious, I guess, who has the final say on those facilities? Is it the principal of F.H. Collins, the principal of the new francophone school, or is it something that is done between the two of them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am certainly happy to provide the information that I have. Again, I'm not always happy to answer hypothetical questions, but the plan is that the principals of the three schools are expected, of course, to work together for the benefit of all students with respect to facilities in their schools, and that is generally around school hours. With respect to after-hours, the joint user group agreement that we have with the City of Whitehorse and their scheduling of those kinds of facilities after-hours will be in place with respect to those facilities.

Mr. Kent: Just for officials, I'm going to walk through some of the capital projects on page 8-7 of the budget under "Schools and Student Services". I might be looking for some further details in case those are available. We've already talked about F.H. Collins Secondary School and the \$543,000, so there is additional parking lot work done and the basketball court. I would assume that there is paving to do at the French

first language school — the parking lot there. We had heard — and I mentioned this at the briefing with officials — that there might be problems with the city's storm sewer capacity at that site.

If the minister can confirm for us, is that the case, or can these parking lots be paved and the storm sewer issues be dealt with? Who is ultimately responsible, if those storm sewers need to be upgraded or expanded to accommodate additional water coming off of the hard surface there?

If I'm not mistaken, it's extremely close to the city's main water source as well — the walls there. I'm assuming that you can't leave it as gravel there, so I guess you might be stuck. You have to choose to pave it and expand those storm sewers, if possible — if the minister could provide an update — or if I have to ask a different department, I can do so in a letter.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As part of the overall plan for the Riverdale education campus, the Selkirk Elementary School staff parking will eventually be relocated behind the school. That has raised some questions about some of the infrastructure upgrades that are required for managing the storm water in that area, which the Government of Yukon is working on with the City of Whitehorse.

It hasn't yet been resolved for the 2020-21 school year. Until the upgrades are addressed, Selkirk staff parking will remain where it currently is in the front of the school, with visitor parking and school bus and parent drop-off areas. The site is a suitable option to provide appropriate parking for schools on this campus. We will continue to work with the school community to ensure that it meets their safety and functional needs.

Infrastructure upgrades are required to manage, as described, the storm sewers and storm water in the area. As noted by the member opposite, federal funding is being sought to undertake upgrades to municipal infrastructure. Highways and Public Works is leading this work, and the parking will remain where it is until that can be sorted out.

The three school communities on this campus will be sharing existing parking while these changes to the parking lot and the storm-sewer upgrades are underway.

Mr. Kent: Moving on in that same capital vote to the Burwash school, in previous years, there was \$50,000 assigned to the Burwash school, or the Kluane Lake School. It was a \$50,000 estimate in 2019-20. None of that money was spent, according to the forecast. In 2018-19, \$50,000 was the actual expenditure there as well. I am obviously curious about that. We can ask about that another time, but this year, it has jumped up to \$500,000. In previous budgets, that was going to be the amount for the construction of that school. Now it's gone tenfold into this year's budget. It says in the briefing package that we got from the department that \$500,000 is for the Burwash school for working in partnership with Kluane First Nation to relocate the existing Kluane Lake School to Burwash Landing.

Can the minister explain exactly what work is going to be undertaken for that \$500,000 expenditure? While I am on that same topic, looking at the budget documents, it looks as though the school that we had initially thought — and I will look back

to previous years' budgets — was going to be about \$500,000 has now gone up to between an \$11.5 million and \$18 million facility.

Obviously, there's a fairly big discrepancy between what we were led to believe was going to be spent on that school in last year's and previous years' documents to what has emerged in this year's budget.

I'm looking for an explanation — what exactly the \$500,000 is going to be spent on this year and why the cost has gone up so much.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As part of the commitment — let me just skip that for a second. I'll come back to it.

The funding in the 2020-21 budget — \$500,000 for the Kluane Lake Burwash school — is to continue consultation on the development of a functional plan that would form the basis and the early design work for the facility — what I hope is all of the funding needed to design that facility. As part of the commitment to reconciliation and long-term capital planning for Yukon schools, we are pleased to be working in partnership with the Kluane First Nation to relocate the Kluane school from Destruction Bay to Burwash Landing.

This comes at the request of our work with the Kluane First Nation. Originally, the conversation was to renovate an existing building, and that was early on in our conversations with them a few years ago — the \$500,000 — and whether that would have been sufficient or not is a question that has evolved.

Our officials are working together to move the project forward. Based on the five-year capital plan, as the member opposite has said, the project is estimated to be between \$11.5 million and \$18 million, but there is no information yet on space programming or potential enrolment. That is continuing to be worked on.

We will be identifying additional resources in the department's budget in future fiscal years to support the project going forward, and we can provide more details on the plan as these discussions move forward.

Part of the evolution of this project is that the functional plan is being done to match an early plan — but done by the Department of Education, and I want to get the title of that plan correct, if I can just have a moment — which was available last year and sets out functional requirements for modern learning spaces. Of course, the functional plan for this project now has to adhere to those appropriate situations and opportunities for learning.

It is a project that is long overdue. It is something that our government is committed to. I think that it is an appropriate evolution of education and reconciliation with that particular First Nation and an opportunity for students and families to remain, we hope in the future, in that area — for the opportunity to have their students educated near home.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Kent: Before the break, we were talking about the Burwash school. I think the minister said that there are no details yet on space enrolment and programming. Obviously, the work this year will develop a functional plan, which would help to determine that, but I'm curious as to how this number was arrived at in the five-year budget documents — the \$11.5 million to \$18 million — if there are no details yet on any of these other things. Again, we have heard from some in the community that it could be being planned for 125 students. Is that what this number is reflective of, and then, how was that number arrived at, I guess, if that is the case?

I'm just trying to figure out — if I was a contractor looking at this — saying that there was going to be an \$11.5 million to \$18 million project out in Burwash Landing in the next five years, then he might want to tick that off on his list of things that he might want to go after. But I am just not sure how that number was arrived at if none of this other stuff has been done first.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The estimate — I appreciate that is a wide estimate at this point that is included to give some numbers with respect to potential planning for the capital plan. It is based on the functional requirements upon which the functional plan will be based, and it takes into account things like — in terms of the design of the school — the size of classrooms required for so many students, of office space that is shared by admin staff, lobby space, and gymnasium — those kinds of things. As a result, the guidance of the functional report and requirements going forward sets a certain amount of that for estimation purposes.

I can indicate that the conversations with respect to the Kluane First Nation — without disclosing the details of those — have been around a centralized part of a school building and then an opportunity to add, with classrooms or learning spaces — previously known to the rest of us as “classrooms”, but modern learning spaces — with the idea of expanding those in the event that school enrolment grows, for instance.

Mr. Kent: Moving on to the modular classrooms — there is \$2.1 million in the budget. Can the minister provide us with a breakdown of where those modular — how many will be built for that amount they're anticipating? Which schools will they be deployed to?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We're working with Education to acquire five new modular classrooms. Two of those modular classrooms are complete and have opened their doors to students and teachers, as the member opposite knows, at the Golden Horn Elementary School. A tender for a third new modular classroom for Selkirk Elementary School was advertised on February 18 of this year and did close on March 12 of this year. We're planning on procuring two other modular classrooms.

The Government of Yukon is also working with the Dawson City school community to discuss space needs and explore ways to ensure that Robert Service School meets the needs of students, the library, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and residents of that community moving forward.

As the member opposite will know, the two modular classrooms at the Robert Service School in Dawson City late last year needed to be decommissioned and are not currently being used for the spaces that they were providing for the school in the past as a result of some mold that was discovered when renovation work started to be undertaken. As a result, that particular school and its needs have to be taken into account in this \$2.1 million budget.

Mr. Kent: Just to confirm — of that \$2.1 million, there will be three modular classrooms built and then renovations to the one at Robert Service School. So that means that there were two modular classrooms built last year. Can the minister just confirm that for me?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am happy to clarify that if I haven't been clear.

In the 2019-20 budget, the two portables were built and placed at Golden Horn Elementary. A portion of the sum of money from that budget was used to begin the process with respect to the Selkirk portable. The \$2.1 million that is in the 2020-21 budget will be used to deal with the Selkirk portables — so the completion and placement of the two Selkirk portables — that will likely end up at Robert Service School.

Mr. Kent: As the minister knows, other schools have requested modular classrooms or portables, including the Hidden Valley Elementary School. The Member for Lake Laberge brought forward a request again to ask the question of the minister about the potential for putting a portable at Hidden Valley School and if that is being considered. But then again, when I look at the five-year documents, there is nothing beyond this year for modular classrooms or portables, so I am not sure. Is this it? Is what we get this year for Selkirk and Dawson it, or is the five-year document just mistaken and missing some future portable construction?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We continue to, as a department, monitor the enrolment and capacity at the elementary schools in the City of Whitehorse very closely. There is an overall trend of enrolment growth. That won't surprise anyone here, and that's expected to continue. To provide more flexibility in the learning spaces in Yukon schools, the government has budgeted \$3 million over two years to build the modular classrooms that I have noted — some already done at Golden Horn, one expected at Selkirk, and we continue to plan for the new Whistle Bend elementary school.

The Department of Education is monitoring enrolment to help administrators and school communities plan for the changing trends for the short-, medium-, and long-term needs of Yukon schools. Some schools have increased enrolment, while others have decreased — families move, and neighbourhoods, and that sort of thing. One of the things that we spoke about earlier, the attendance area review, is an important part of this work. We have some schools where there

are many students who live outside the attendance area for whatever reason, and we need to work at that.

I have said before in this Legislative Assembly, and I'll say it again: The attendance area review — we won't be looking at moving students drastically out of schools they have come to know and love, but moving forward, we need to pay attention to attendance areas. With respect to Hidden Valley in particular — as the question makes reference to — Hidden Valley is not yet at its capacity, and we continue to work with that school community to have them use and modernize some of their available spaces and we can support that, as a department.

It is always important — it is an exercise that we have encouraged all administrators to do — to look at their available spaces in whatever school they are in, and how to better use or utilize spaces that maybe haven't been used for learning spaces before and think more broadly about that.

Lastly, I can note that there is pre-registration kindergarten growth at Hidden Valley and at Holy Family elementary schools — so, that area of the city — and we will work with the school administrations to determine space needs and staffing plans to manage that growth, as we go forward.

Mr. Kent: I apologize if the minister mentioned this and I just didn't catch it — but are there no plans beyond this year, then, for any portable classrooms? Because in the five-year document, it's a blank from beyond this year. Can the minister just confirm that there are no planned portables then, just given what is in front of us, as far as the five-year document?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: That is the document, as planned, before the member opposite. He is correct about those current figures in there. I would note, of course, that one — certainly with respect to schools and the Education portfolio going forward — one of the conversations we have regularly with Highways and Public Works and with my colleagues is that we are mindful of the fact that enrolment is potentially changing going forward and that future decisions might need to be made with respect to adjustments to that five-year capital plan, particularly with respect to schools.

There has been a long period of time without a new elementary school. We are not sure yet about the effect that a new elementary school will have and how families might move around and where the student enrolment will land as a result of a new school in a few years, but it is top of mind and something that is looked at all the time with respect to adjustments that might need to be made, going forward. But my colleague across the way is correct: That is the current amount in the budget.

Lastly, I will just note that Whistle Bend school is a key aspect in our work to address the growing enrolment in the City of Whitehorse.

Mr. Kent: In past years' Education debate or Question Period — or when I was engaged in questions with the minister — she talked about 700 vacant spaces in Whitehorse area schools. Perhaps she can just give us an update on what that number is now. Is it still 700, or where are we now with respect to the number of empty spots at Whitehorse area schools?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't have the number at my fingertips, and I will note that management of enrolment across Whitehorse schools — and Yukon schools, frankly, but we're

talking about Whitehorse schools in this question — is critical. I can commit to getting that number for you in some detail, and I would like to just note that, when you spread those empty spaces — if we can call it that — across a number of schools in Whitehorse proper, across K to 12 grade levels, it does tell a story, but it's a complicated one.

So, I can commit to providing that information to the member opposite.

Mr. Kent: I wanted to talk about the Whistle Bend school for a little bit here. The amount of money in this year's budget is \$1.575 million for school planning and design. Now, there's a generic scalable design that was in the budget a few years ago, and it was my understanding that it was going to be used for planning on the school as it is. However, the government put out a news release stating that the school would be a design/build by Colliers Project Leaders. We're just kind of curious: is the generic scalable school design that was apparently done by the department going to be used for this school, or is it going to be a design/build as noted in the press release? Also, what we were told at the briefing with officials — we're not sure exactly how this scalable school design will be used. It will be interesting to get some clarification from the minister.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The member opposite is correct. We had conversations regarding a scalable design. When that work was done, it resulted in a generic functional program; a generic functional program was the resulting document. That is being used with respect to this process for Whistle Bend school, but it is also a design/build project, which will build a design on top of a generic functional program, which I mentioned earlier today in answering the questions regarding Kluane Lake School. It is that functional program that helps scale projects like this, particularly schools.

The school design is based on a generic functional program, which will accommodate, in the Whistle Bend school case, between 275 and 425 students. I hope that clears that up.

Mr. Kent: When we first spoke about the generic scalable design, our party at the time and I, as critic, were critical of this approach based on what we had heard from some in the design community. I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, but she indicated that having that would save millions of dollars over the long run — having that generic design — but now it's a generic functional program.

Can the minister just clarify where we went from a design to a functional program? Then, I guess, if there were millions to be saved, how much are we anticipating being saved from this new generic functional plan that she spoke about?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think what we learned in that process, in answer to the question from the member opposite, is that the generic functional plan that was completed in 2018 is, in fact, the foundational document upon which schools will be measured. It is the first piece of work in the planning and design part of a school development. It considers the types of rooms, the required spaces, based on the range and number of students, ultimately going forward with the modern learning spaces. This school design must ultimately also accommodate different sizes of schools, geology, land that is available, and

those kinds of things. A generic functional program does provide guidance there and is based on the expertise of those in the business of building these kinds of facilities. Ultimately, the design will be based on that document.

There is a savings. It doesn't have to be done every time, obviously. This is an important resource that the Department of Education has not had before. Going forward, while it's not a scalable design, it's certainly the first stage in that process. I don't have the number with me to say or estimate what that would cost, but we can provide what the ultimate cost was with respect to that functional program. Clearly, that doesn't need to be done every time now.

Mr. Kent: It sounds like there was going to be a scalable design, and then they moved it to a functional program — after. Just a couple more questions about Whistle Bend school. Obviously, the planning started last year, with about a \$300,000 forecasted expenditure, down from a \$1.6-million overall budget.

We're looking at \$1.575 million this year, as was explained to us, for planning and design. I know that there's a committee that has been put together.

I have asked this question of the minister before. I'm curious why no current teachers or members of the Yukon Teachers' Association are on that planning committee, and then I will just get in a couple of other questions too. How much of that \$1.575 million is for school planning, and how much of it is for design?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We are currently working on the planning for the new Whistle Bend school with partners and representatives through a project advisory committee and with the Colliers Project Leaders as the owner's advisory for the project. As I have said earlier, that school will hold up to 425 students. More specifics will be determined as plans progress, building on the base requirements for an elementary school, with the consideration of input from the project advisory committee about school programming and cultural and community needs. We have heard recently, in our work with this project advisory committee, that more perspectives and broader perspectives are being sought by them. I should note that, of course, one of them will be educators', but I should note that educators from the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education did provide perspectives on modernizing learning spaces last year in the work that was begun on this school. On an ongoing basis, we work directly with a school staff on their facility needs.

Of course, there isn't a staff with respect to the new school yet, but we will be bringing in teachers and educators with expertise for the purposes of making sure that the school is responsive to the community's needs and to what we know about modern education going forward and all the important aspects of the educators' perspectives that are brought and will be brought to this project.

Mr. Kent: Let's move on to the Ross River School — \$4.6 million for remediation at the school. At the briefing, I asked for some details on that expenditure. There wasn't much in the written documents that we got from the department, but I'm wondering if the minister can just give us a breakdown of

what that \$4.6 million expenditure is and where it's going — how much is going to actual construction versus consultants versus whatever else has to be done with this.

I'm looking for a line item breakdown on that \$4.6 million expenditure.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I do understand that some of the breakdown with respect to this number was provided by the Minister of Highways and Public Works in his conversation at Committee of the Whole yesterday, but I'm happy to reiterate that. As we work with the Ross River School community to plan for a new school, we need to, of course, make sure that our top priority is that the building is safe, and the top priority is the safety of our students and staff. We continue to ensure that the current building remains safe and available for those folks — the students, staff, and the community.

The government is investing \$4.6 million for further stabilization work in Ross River School and is monitoring the school. The breakdown of that work includes: continuing inspections and reports; cooling of the crawl space at the Ross River School; work on the school roof and eavestrough; foundation monitoring to provide survey data; some electrical connections and mechanical repairs; and continuing to monitor the safety of that building for students.

Mr. Kent: This remediation project has about \$9.5 million to \$13 million booked for it over the next five years.

Is the government planning on making a decision on when to perhaps stop putting band-aids on this and make a decision on building a new school, rather than throwing \$9.5 million to \$13 million at the remediation of the existing school?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The figures in the budget with respect to the remediation of Ross River School are projections with respect to that opportunity. We certainly hope that some of those funds can be put toward a new school sooner than that, but the responsible thing to do is to include those amounts in that five-year capital plan.

We are working with the community to determine their desires and requirements for an educational facility in that community. We are taking their lead with respect to those discussions. I think my colleague mentioned yesterday that there need to be conversations regarding a site, there need to be conversations regarding other opportunities and other projects that might be built in that community so that economies of scale can be taken into account. We hope that this work progresses before the five-year projections in the capital plan, but it's the responsible thing to do to have those numbers there.

Mr. Kent: We'll check back in on that project as it progresses.

A couple of other things in the five-year portion of the budget documents here. There are two projects listed — a Whitehorse school replacement and an elementary school expansion. A couple of years ago, we had Holy Family and Christ the King in this document. They're no longer in here. Those are some of the projects. Obviously, there's a lot of concern that we're hearing from Whitehorse Elementary about the shape of the existing school and some things that need to be done. We have also talked in this House about a 10-year capital

plan for schools. The minister has raised it on a number of occasions, but we have yet to see that document.

When will these two schools be identified — which one is going to be replaced and which one is going to be expanded — and when can we see a copy of the 10-year capital plan? I believe that last fall, when we were in general debate on the supplementary, the Premier mentioned that it was an internal document at that time. I'm just looking for some clarification from the minister on if that document is nearing completion, and if so, when will it be done and made available to the public?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We work with each school community on planning for their facilities and the short-, medium- and long-term needs that they express and options, including modernizing learning spaces — I think I have said this before — to reflect student communities and Yukon First Nations ways of knowing and doing, which are important elemental factors.

The Government of Yukon has a five-year capital plan. That is what we're working to and will continue to work to. That includes school projects to ensure that all buildings are safe and available for many years to come. School projects in the five-year capital plan include a new elementary school in Whistle Bend, modular classrooms — which we have talked about already — in the short, medium and long term — Selkirk and perhaps Robert Service — working with the Kluane First Nation school to relocate that school, the new French first language secondary school, the additional site features near F.H. Collins, and ongoing stabilization work for Ross River. We have touched on all of these.

This five-year capital plan is the capital plan for Yukon schools and the Department of Education. All approved capital projects from the Department of Education are prioritized and managed through this plan, Mr. Deputy Chair. We work on the five-year capital plan to provide certainty and planning going forward, as I have mentioned already. Enrolment and circumstances in the City of Whitehorse give effect to adjustments that might be needed over time, but we are working to provide certainty for our school community and our business community going forward.

The order of renovating or replacing priority schools will be based on criteria such as building age, seismic mitigation considerations, and operational needs.

Most importantly, I want to indicate that conversations with Yukon school communities about the long-term planning for their facilities are ongoing and will continue over the next few years as discussions are had about future school project planning and development. I think it is critical for Yukoners and members of this Legislative Assembly to know that we are working very closely with school communities to have conversations about their needs and the facilities that they work in and that their children and families spend time in and to prioritize those in the long-term plan for replacing and renovating schools here in the territory — not a practice that has happened in the more distant past, I will say.

I guess I really want to take the opportunity to note that the Whistle Bend project, in particular, is an exciting development going forward. While that's the case — and we're working with

attendance areas and school communities, parents, and teachers to make sure that this work is done in a very good way. It is also critical for us to work with school communities going forward, and it's an important change.

That Whistle Bend school decision has been made, but that doesn't stop the work that needs to be done with respect to what's next.

Mr. Kent: I just wanted to touch on a couple of other topics before I turn the floor over to my colleague, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

One is the Yukon Native Language Centre. I know there was a transfer agreement, I believe, from the Department of Education to the Council of Yukon First Nations when they took that over. I'm just wondering if the minister can point me to the line in the budget where that transfer payment is housed and exactly how much it is. Then perhaps she can give us an update on the certifications and the other work — the transition between the old model and now the new model of CYFN running the Yukon Native Language Centre — if the same amount of work is being done as was being accomplished before.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will note first, for the member opposite, that the line item with respect the native language program exists under the First Nation initiatives part of the Department of Education. It is a figure of \$1.135 million transferred to the native language program as part of a total budget for that branch of the department of \$3.521 million.

I can also indicate that the revitalization of First Nation languages and restoring First Nation responsibility for their languages is an essential part of the government's work toward reconciliation. It is the reason that we have determined that the Yukon First Nations should be and are now in charge of the revitalization of their languages as a critical priority for restoration and reconciliation. There are regulatory provisions in place that require candidates for aboriginal language teachers to meet fluency and certification requirements and that those are structured and determined by the Yukon Native Language Centre through their programs that promote First Nation languages, learning, and certification as is their mandate and increase fluency and proficiency.

The teacher certification regulations provide that a cultural certification may be issued to a person who has fluency in one or more Yukon First Nation languages, a native language instructor certificate or equivalent, and knowledge of the history and culture of Yukon First Nations. The department works to recruit certified candidates to fill vacant aboriginal language teacher positions. It does face challenges, but those individuals are certified by the Yukon Native Language Centre, and we are happy to support that work through the \$1.135-million transfer payment that is given to them.

Mr. Kent: I also wanted to thank the minister for the legislative return that she tabled today with respect to the number of students that were in the lottery. Obviously, we are approaching almost another full kindergarten class — who were in the French immersion lottery. As plans unfold, I know that the minister and the department are set for this upcoming

fall, but if we continue to get numbers like that on the wait-list, obviously they will have to look at some different plans.

Has planning started for either expansion of French immersion into other schools or increasing — that is what I am looking for. What kind of plans have started for expansion of French immersion to accommodate that growing number left out when all the lottery balls drop or however it's drawn?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Early French immersion is a popular program in Whitehorse, and it's offered, as the member may have noted, at École Whitehorse Elementary and Selkirk Elementary, and we continue to monitor and plan for the enrolment for this program and to recruit qualified French language teachers, which is a challenge on occasion — across the country, I might note, not just in the Yukon — to support all French second language programs.

We work with families whose children have requested but have not been placed in early French immersion to find a suitable option for their children. I appreciate that the member opposite has noted that and that the numbers this year will likely be able to be managed in that way by working with individual families and their preferences. There is, of course, the availability of French immersion in grade 1 and late French immersion in grade 6, which generally has the ability to encompass those students who would like to study in a French immersion manner.

All students who come toward that programming and may not be chosen or permitted initially through either sibling recruitment or the lottery are worked with on a one-by-one basis. We are working with the French second language advisory group and committee on this issue constantly. I should note that it's not just about kindergarten entrance of individuals, children, and families who would like to study French immersion. We need to make sure that our French immersion programming is stellar, available, and meeting the learning needs of students all the way through high school, including to the end of grade 12. That is an important focus.

I know that, when there is early kindergarten enrolment, the focus all seems to be on little kindergarteners and whether they'll enter the French immersion world, but the truth is that we need to make sure that those programs are available and viable throughout their school career.

Mr. Kent: We will touch a little bit just briefly on the Selkirk Elementary School. I know that the minister is aware of their concerns. She attended their most recent school council meeting and talked about the safety issues at the back of the school where the student drop-off is. They are looking for additional street lights and other aspects.

When I was looking at the budget documents, it does say school facilities, parking lots, et cetera; \$500,000 to \$1 million this year. Can the minister confirm that some of that money is going to the Selkirk drop-off area for improvements there — if she could do that — and then it looks like \$4 million to \$5 million in the following fiscal. If she could identify what fiscal year that is done and also provide some certainty as to where the city's responsibility ends on Selkirk Street with street lights, sidewalks, and even maintenance aspects and where YG or YG Education takes over responsibility for that. That would

be helpful. I know that this is something that the school council and parents in Riverdale have been asking me about for a while now.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: With some of the infrastructure upgrades, as I noted earlier with respect to Selkirk Elementary School, we're working on it with the City of Whitehorse. In my recent meeting with the Selkirk school council, I really appreciated their work on behalf of their school community and their work and support with the Department of Education — and we are supporting them in these conversations with the City of Whitehorse — for the purposes of coming up with the best possible resolution to these items.

They are ongoing. The determination for the line item that has been mentioned by the member opposite with respect to school projects could well include some of these opportunities for Selkirk Elementary. That budget item is permitted and determined by what we think will be the asks of schools and prioritization of that work over the coming year.

I certainly have committed to Selkirk that we will continue to work with them and support their efforts with the City of Whitehorse. I don't have the answer regarding where the Department of Education boundary and the City of Whitehorse boundary ends or where the two shall meet. It's part of our conversation going forward.

Mr. Kent: My final question takes us back to how we started today with respect to teachers who are looking to work from home. After we started our conversations today, our office heard from a teacher who has let us know that teachers are being told that they have to be at work on March 30 unless in quarantine — I'm assuming that is quarantine or self-isolation. Colleagues from other schools were contacted by their admin. This individual hadn't received anything from her school, but this goes against the global directive of staying at home.

Just for the record, that global directive that went out yesterday — from global notes on Wednesday, March 18, at 4:13 p.m. — talked about work-from-home arrangements: "Except as set out in section 5, each department will make best efforts to have in place work-from-home arrangements for its regular indeterminate and term employees by the end of the day on Friday, March 20, 2020." Section 5 is: "Employees who are carrying out critical or vital services for a department as identified in the department's business continuity plan that cannot operationally be provided from home, will continue working in the workplace."

I'm hopeful that the minister can give me some clarity on this so I can get back to my constituent who reached out to us and let her know — if she's not comfortable going back to school on March 30 — and I believe the minister said this earlier — that other arrangements will be made with the administration at the school.

This is especially important, given what else was just put on my desk, and it's a tweet that came across on March 19 — so that's today — and it says that Dunleavy announces that the Trump administration has confirmed that Canadian border closures will not apply to crossings to Alaska. That's extremely important. I know that the minister probably won't have any

background information on that, but I'm hoping one of her colleagues will.

The initial part of that tweet was that there were two new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Fairbanks. Neither were travel-related. Officials were trying to determine whether there are direct contact travel-related cases already confirmed in Fairbanks or, more concerning, community-spread. Obviously, we know that this virus is at our doorstep. So, I am hoping that the minister can give me an answer that I can provide to my constituent, and then either her or her colleagues can comment on what we've seen in this tweet — that the Canadian and US border remains open between Alaska and Yukon.

While the minister is conferring with her officials, I would like to thank them for coming. I would like to thank all of the support staff in the Chamber, in Hansard, and anywhere that is providing support to us as we work into the evening tonight to try to get a substantive portion of this budget debated so that we can bring it to a vote later this evening. Thank you very much.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I can confirm that we are supporting work from home wherever possible. I don't think it's appropriate for me to determine or try to comment on what an individual has been told by their administrator or otherwise. I would certainly encourage the member opposite to speak with me outside of this Chamber. Hopefully, we can get some details so that we can make a response that is specific to the concerns that were brought to his attention and put them in touch either with their administrator or make sure, if there is a misunderstanding about the directive or the plans going forward, that we can sort that out. I don't think that it is appropriate to do it here.

Lastly, I appreciate all of the questions. I won't comment on the border-crossing issue. I haven't read that material, but certainly there will be lots of questions, unfortunately, in the next few days about interpretations of things. We will work to support all of our Yukon teachers and all of our teachers on call in this uncertain time going forward. I appreciate all the questions today.

Ms. White: Mr. Chair, my colleague was certainly thorough, so my questions will be few.

I just want to start off with the Yukon grant. The minister and I have discussed before the programs that qualify under the Yukon grant. I was just doing some quick math. It says that the Yukon grant will cover you for 170 weeks of education, which works out to funding, right now — based on \$141 a week — of \$23,000.

We have talked about this before, Mr. Chair — I didn't go to university, but I paid \$15,000 for a private culinary school — that I was lucky, I guess, that I got hit by a car and I could use my insurance money to pay for school. My program — I think I ended up getting about \$500 from the Yukon government, and that was mostly because I had achievement grants and not because it was the Yukon grant. We have programs here at Yukon College — the environmental monitoring program is a great one.

I think, in this day and age, that it is important to recognize that trades have intrinsic value in society. Without trades, nothing happens. We grind to a halt. Of course, looking at

things like agriculture programs and meat-cutting programs. There are many different ways that education can look and it doesn't have to be in an education establishment like a college or a university.

One of the things that I have highlighted for the minister previously — and she told me that the department was looking into it — was that other programs should qualify. I have sent letters — for example, there is a young person who is going to flight school right now in British Columbia, and it is \$110,000. This kid is going to be a commercial pilot but doesn't qualify for the Yukon grant despite the fact that he grew up here and finished school here — and those things — because it doesn't meet the program requirements and there is also the point, too, that says it is 170 weeks, so that is great for folks who are looking at university for the longer term. But for people who are going to have that kind of financial outlay for something that will get them into the workforce or getting them out the other side, it seems weird to me that Education would put the parameters on what is considered education or not.

So, I just wanted to know what has happened since the last time we spoke about this — since it has been at least a number of months and possibly a year since we spoke about the Yukon grant and whether or not we were doing program evaluations to make sure that it would cover more people in their quest for education.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't think the member opposite will challenge the fact that the Government of Yukon student financial assistance programs do support many students attending post-secondary education in a variety of opportunities. Many of the ones she has mentioned are problematic for sure. I don't disagree — as the Department of Education doesn't disagree — that education is changing. We need to be adjusting to the future of opportunities for Yukoners.

The government will consider changes to the eligibility criteria in future reviews. There is work being done to determine whether or not some of that is regulation work that can be done or whether it requires legislative change. In the meantime, we have been working with Yukon University, suggesting adjustments to the program descriptions or designs that they have and the structure in their programming that would allow students to be considered under current legislative criteria — so, an opportunity to broaden that description a bit that will get us broader applicability to some students.

One of the challenging pieces with respect to this work going forward is that any changes that we make have to also be consistent and coherent with respect to the Canada student loan policy so that we don't fix something with one piece of legislation and then somehow adversely impact students who might have student loan applications as well through the Canada student loan program or act which provides for full-time students to be eligible for financial assistance. That work, I can assure the member opposite, is ongoing. Has it progressed as quickly as either of us might like? That hasn't been the case, but we can dedicate our commitment to making sure that as many students as possible can avail themselves of what is a very special opportunity here in the Yukon to have some

funding assistance with respect to their ultimate post-secondary education, whatever that might be.

Ms. White: The problem, as I see it right now, is that, although I appreciate that the minister has talked about new education, we have had airplanes and mechanics and carpenters and such for a very long time. It's just that, thankfully, now we're viewing those as viable careers. That maybe is a change in recent years.

One of the concerns I have is around the eligibility criteria. The example I'm going to use is — you know, as an 18-year-old or even a 19-year-old who started school, for example — family situations change, and to punish a young person because of the perception of where their parents may be or what their parents should be doing, I think, is kind of a dangerous path. As an example, let's say that we have someone who graduated from high school here, did their first full year of university away, and they came back to the Yukon, because this is their home.

In that time, a parent moved away out of territory, but that young person is still paying their income tax in Yukon, they have a Yukon driver's licence, they have a Yukon permanent address, they have a Yukon health care card — only to find out, once they have applied to school and are well into the program, that they no longer qualify because a parent moved out of territory.

My question is: When we're talking about someone at this point in time who is an independent adult, they're coming home to work full time, they're saving up their pennies so they can pay for school with the expectation that the Yukon grant is going to get them through, why is a parent included in that eligibility?

Again, there can be a whole bunch of different situations. I mean, I appreciate that often parents will be in a position where they can help, but they aren't always able, and so to punish a person who is maintaining their Yukon residency, who is coming back, is here when they're not in school — how does that fit into the eligibility of the Yukon grant?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I do appreciate the points being made by the member opposite. I just want to note that the *Student Financial Assistance Act* was amended in 2016 after extensive public engagement, including at that time expanding the eligibility criteria. I appreciate her point that it may not take into account everybody's circumstances. Making changes to the criteria does require legislative amendment and public engagement.

I also note — and I can attest to this because the appeals, once a decision is made, do come to my desk for the student financial assistance appeal process, which can take into account things such as are described by the member opposite — I certainly encourage individuals to take advantage of it. I have been very pleased with the way in which that board is operating. I have never met them or anything like that, but I certainly have noted that, when they write to me, they are taking into account individual students' experiences. I would say that perhaps in the past, when I was first given the opportunity to have this job, none of those came to me. Now, more and more, they come to me with a practical approach about the effect and truly the goal

of student financial assistance, which is to help students get their education and pay for it.

While it is not all perfect — and if there are individual cases, I would encourage the member opposite to bring them to our attention — certainly the overall point being made that individual circumstances sometimes don't fit into the box is a good one. It is certainly something we are trying to encourage in the department on a case-by-case basis so that the right decisions can be made.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that answer.

For the appeal process, what is the typical timeline on an appeal?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am not aware of that because, as I noted earlier, they come to me after that process has played out. We can inquire about what the typical time might be and provide that information to the member opposite.

Ms. White: I would appreciate that. The reason I am asking is that sometimes people get caught in situations that are beyond their control, including having made an appeal and having that postponed to a later date and still paying for school. I will send a letter.

You were talking earlier with my colleague about First Nation languages. I have questions about First Nation language teachers and how a teacher becomes qualified to instruct First Nation languages in Yukon schools.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: There are regulatory provisions in place that require candidates to meet fluency and certification requirements in order to become an aboriginal language teacher. That is the responsibility of the Yukon First Nation language programs under the YNLC, as it's often referred to. They have the responsibility for their languages, and that's an essential part of our government's work toward reconciliation. The funding for that, as I noted earlier, was transferred to them.

We continue to work closely with the Yukon Native Language Centre and the Council of Yukon First Nations on programs to promote First Nation languages, learning, and certification and on their mandate to revitalize Yukon First Nation languages and increase fluency and proficiency.

It would be through the Yukon Native Language Centre that these certifications are achieved. I encourage anyone who is interested to contact them.

The teacher certification regulation provides that a cultural certificate must be issued to a person who has fluency in one or more Yukon First Nation languages, a native language instructor certificate or an equivalent, and knowledge of the history and culture of Yukon First Nations. The department works to recruit certified candidates to fill vacancies of aboriginal language teachers, but as I've noted, that proficiency test — the certification — comes from the Yukon Native Language Centre for those individuals.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that. One of the reasons I'm asking is that, very recently, a school where all my nephews go — actually, now they are all in school, and that is pretty exciting. There was a note sent home saying that First Nation language classes had been cut in half, by 50 percent, for all students. So, they were getting an hour a week and then it was going to be cut down to a half-hour a week for the entire École

Whitehorse Elementary. In my understanding, it was because there were two teachers — it was a shared position — and one of the teachers hadn't been able to go through the process to get the fluency requirement or to get the certification. So, my question is: How does the Department of Education work with the First Nation Language Centre to be able to facilitate teachers being able to get that certification, especially if we are talking about reconciliation and the importance of including First Nation culture in schools? Language is an excellent way. Actually, it is pretty fun right now — my oldest nephew is 12, turning 13, and I have a friend who is going to the YNTEP program at Yukon University. They speak Southern Tutchone to each other, which is pretty incredible, and it's only because my nephew has been able to take these classes since he was a small child.

So, I wanted to know the role that the Department of Education has in facilitating those requirements to be the First Nation language teachers?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It is incredibly important, and I am pleased that the member opposite has mentioned reconciliation in relation to this issue. Yukon native language teachers must be both certified in a native language or Yukon First Nation language and be a certified teacher. While the situation that has been described is very unfortunate, we are not prepared to usurp any of the authority given to the Yukon Native Language Centre regarding their opportunity to certify who can teach language and culture on their behalf, to be quite frank.

As a result, it is a balance. We certainly acknowledge that fluent speakers are difficult to find. We're extremely encouraged by programs like the one at Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. It is an adult immersion program that is coming to the end of its second year, and they will produce what we hope is somewhere near — I think 12 is the number that I have; I could be wrong about that — fluent speakers, who will, after an adult immersion program, revitalize their language to that extent and hopefully be able to go forward and continue that.

The Yukon First Nation language programs at the Yukon Native Language Centre are certifications that the First Nations together have determined are appropriate levels of fluency and proficiency, and we certainly respect that going forward. We work closely with them. We fund them, as I noted earlier. I forget the amount — the figure was \$1.135 million or something like that. We support them in that way. We work closely with them as we recognize that having First Nation culture and language in Yukon schools is a top priority of ours going forward, and we anticipate that it will continue growing. Our work with our First Nation partners is built on reconciliation and built on the recognition that this is an important role that they have in our community, in our schools, as our partners and that we respect that going forward.

We encourage anyone who is interested in aboriginal language teaching positions to enrol in the Yukon Native Language Centre to obtain certification on their fluency and proficiency in a Yukon First Nation language, and we hope that will continue to grow.

Ms. White: My understanding was that, with the two part-time positions, there was the ability for the ongoing learning, including participating at that language centre to get that certification. Is that not how the two part-time positions were designed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very reticent to talk about this in particular or to guess about it. I think it is a personnel issue that has been brought to the attention of the deputy minister. I would be happy to talk about it outside of this particular venue and see if we can't provide answers for the inquiries that the member opposite might have going forward. I am concerned that this isn't the appropriate venue to deal with that. I wouldn't want to get the facts wrong, so I am happy to talk offline about this.

Ms. White: Has the conversation been had with the community of Ross River as to where they would like their new school to go?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The conversation with respect to Ross River School and what the future of the school in that community looks like has begun. My colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, and I were in Ross River last year with the opportunity to start those conversations with not only the school community but also the chief and council. I know that the Minister of Community Services has been to that community and had those conversations. The Premier has been in that community and had some of those conversations, so, yes, they are ongoing.

I wouldn't be able to say more about location or what they have determined are the needs of that school, but our conversations have been about encouraging a relationship with our government, listening to them very carefully, and determining how we can work together on this going forward.

Ms. White: I am happy to hear that so many ministers have visited. I think that, unfortunately, the community is going to be disappointed to hear that their win in the hand games is not going to get them the road repaired right away. The reason why I bring it is up is that they were really clear just the other week that they want to move toward the sun, and they don't want the school to be built on the permafrost. They want to be up the hill. It's pretty much that, and it's in a whole different story, because everything wants to go up the hill. I appreciate that, but I just thought I would put it out there.

I believe it was last year that the MP announced that there was going to be a new science building. At the time, it was called Yukon College, and now it's called Yukon University. Where are we in that science building? I imagine it's a combination of federal and territorial money.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The member opposite is correct — an announcement by then-Yukon College that they had secured federal funding and the federal government announcement of approximately \$26 million for a new science building. I know that work is being done at Yukon University with respect to the early planning stages. There have been conversations with Highways and Public Works about how this project should proceed. It is not anticipated at this time that the Yukon government will contribute significantly financially to that project, and we're working with the college on issues around

placement, land, ownership of land and buildings, of course, with the transition to a university. All of those issues are on the plate for conversation.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer.

To be perfectly honest, when I heard that the schools were closing until April 15, I actually thought that meant that schools were entirely closing to April 15 and that teachers wouldn't go back in March.

Some of the questions that I have right now — I mean, I have read some of what principals have sent out, and I am trying to understand that. One of the questions I have is: How will the Department of Education treat educational assistants or intensive learning assistant teachers or teachers on call?

So, typically, these folks are woven into the fabric of any school, and it helps make a school go, but what kind of reassurance does the department have right now that all of these folks who work within the Department of Education — what does the beginning of April look like for them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I just want to be clear. I appreciate that, for some folks, it might be a distinction without a difference, but there is a difference. The announcement yesterday was that classes would be suspended — not schools necessarily closed. The reason why we were careful to make that distinction is that we appreciate that teachers will be focused on continuity of learning for students. If they happen to be away at the moment, they may have resources in the school; they may have materials there. They may have the opportunity to work with other teachers who teach the same subjects or work with classes or students across the board.

Of course, educational assistants and learning assistant teachers who are employed full time at the school will be expected, like teachers, to connect with their administration to make determinations for their abilities to work from home. I've made that commitment several times here today.

With respect to teachers on call, it is one of the topics that we are currently trying to deal with. We have dedicated and committed — this government, our federal government — that individuals who are adversely affected in a financial way with respect to their work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will be worked with so that they don't suffer that financial loss and would certainly be eligible — if their contracts, for instance, were, in the past, a certain amount of reliable work and that is not available to them — they will likely be eligible for the federal programming going forward.

We have committed, as I did earlier today in answering this question, to making sure that we look at that individually and with the Yukon Teachers' Association. Our priorities, Mr. Chair, are to support staff to return home and to work from home, if at all possible, and to support students and their families. We anticipate that this work will be done. We spent two hours yesterday with the principals of all the schools in the territory, speaking to them about how this work can be done and about how they are required to reach out to their staff about how they can make these determinations in the best interests of their students. We expect that this work will be done.

The commitment, if I have to reiterate again, is to support staff as they return home — a good number of them are out of

the territory and perhaps even out of the country at the moment. We support them to work from home if at all possible, focusing on the continuity of learning for our students.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education?

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

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I feel like I earned it.

Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried

Chair: Ms. White has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$192,995,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$24,724,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$217,719,000 agreed to

Department of Education agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Yukon Housing Corporation

Hon. Ms. Frost: As the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, I rise today to present the 2020-21 capital and operation and maintenance budgets for the Yukon Housing Corporation.

I would like to introduce the officials with me today. I have Pamela Hine, Yukon Housing Corporation, over here and Gurmaan Rai, manager of finance, Yukon Housing Corporation. I just want to acknowledge the staff at Yukon Housing Corporation for doing such an exceptional job and really great work. I will just acknowledge Pamela for her many years of service to the public service in the Yukon government

and also wish her well in her future endeavours. I know that she has done so much for the Yukon. I want to also take this opportunity to show my appreciation and thank both the staff and the board at the Yukon Housing Corporation for their hard work and dedication to making more affordable housing options available to Yukoners.

This government understands that, to have healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities, Yukoners need to have homes that fit their needs and that they can afford. Yukon Housing Corporation works hard at being a trusted housing partner. This budget includes increases to our programs, opportunities to leverage partnerships, investments, and a range of housing solutions to meet the needs of communities.

I will just stop there and go into the questions on the main estimates for the Yukon Housing Corporation.

Ms. Van Bibber: I, too, would like to thank the officials for coming and also extend our thanks to Pam Hine and wish her well in her ongoing endeavours — and also to thank you for coming and assisting us at this lovely hour of the evening.

As we know, housing issues in the Yukon continue and there don't seem to be any easy answers to get this wait-list down. So, we have 274 on the wait-list, and, of course, having the large population in Yukon, Whitehorse has the biggest wait-list. What does concern me is that we have 96 seniors on this wait-list.

Can the minister give us an understanding of why this list stays stagnant and the numbers are not coming down?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I appreciate the question with respect to the housing units and the wait-list.

The Yukon Housing Corporation has worked really hard over the course of the last three years to bring more affordable housing units to the Yukon. Working with our communities, we have increased the housing complements through, for example, the Da Daghay Development Corporation. We have social housing units here in the city. We have some units identified for the communities and are really working hard to reduce the wait times.

We have specific areas that we're working on. One is to ensure that we have more resources and supports available to victims of violence, which we identified most recently in an announcement. We are looking at ensuring that we provide units to the homeless population, those who are precariously hard to house — housing affordability. I would suggest that the wait-lists really are based upon priority needs. We have a growing population, but we certainly want to focus on changing that trend. With the new Housing First complex just opening up, we have a number of units there that will eliminate some of the pressures here in the city. We have some initiatives in this year's budget that we're working on. One of those units is looking at supports and a Housing First project in Watson Lake, for an example.

We're seeing some high pressures in the larger centres — Watson Lake being one, and in Dawson City. We've worked really hard with the Klondike Development Organization to reduce the pressures there. We will continue to work with our partners in acknowledging that sometimes it's hard, as we look at the wait-lists and the time frames and making sure that we

have the right amount of budget allocation and the complement of funding in each one of our communities to address the pressures.

Of course, Whitehorse being the centre, we want to really try not to focus on the urban-centric model but try to look at ensuring that we bring supports to all of our communities. That was really clear in the mandate letter from the Premier to look at aging in place in our communities, which was a significant piece of the aging in place work that was collaborated on by Yukon Housing Corporation and Health and Social Services.

I would venture to say that, of course, we always have a wait-list, but we are working really hard to ensure that we reduce the wait-list with the new funding initiatives that we have.

Ms. Van Bibber: Under capital, under the heading “Social Housing”, the amount in the current budget is more than double what was allotted last year. Can the minister explain what is happening to cause such an increase in social housing? Where is this money being spent?

Hon. Ms. Frost: For the capital expenditures for social housing, it is broken down into specific categories. We have renovation and rehabilitation of existing stocks. We have \$1,200,000 in that particular budget. We talked about a lot of that previously and about modernizing our housing units, but we also talked about moving away from single-family dwellings and trying to look at multi-unit facilities. That will provide for some of that as we look at renovations and rehabilitation of our units.

We have housing stocks that are over 30 years old in some of our communities, so the resources are put into providing funding for that. We have energy retrofits — identified as an estimated 12 social housing units, and 75 percent of that is recoverable under the low economy fund. We have allocated \$1,402,000 in that line item.

Unit conversions — single-family units, as I indicated previously, are covered in this one particular line item — conversions to reduce wait-lists as well as looking at older housing. Priorities are given to projects that support aging in place within our communities.

The Carcross mixed-use sixplex is budgeted for in this particular line item. That allocation is \$200,000. We have Watson Lake Housing First, which is \$200,000. A lot of this is for planning, drafting, and supporting the communities.

The \$750,000 is going into the design of the mixed-use complex in Old Crow. Whitehorse has a mixed-use housing project as well. We have \$9 million in that budget. In the northern housing fund, there is \$1,900,000.

Ms. Van Bibber: There is \$3.2 million in the rural home ownership program to help Yukoners buy or build and to get people into home ownership in our rural areas. How is this money divided between the communities? Is it first come, first served? How is the money decided per community?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The item that the member is inquiring about is through an individual application process, not by community.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you very much for that answer. You had mentioned \$200,000 being allocated to a Watson Lake

Housing First project. As we know, we’ve just opened our first in Whitehorse. How big will this project be in Watson Lake, and how many residents is it being planned to hold?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The project in Watson Lake kind of evolved from discussions with the community. We’ve had some really great discussions with the Liard First Nation to look at a design project in the community. The \$200,000 is allocated for design and planning.

I just want to acknowledge the Yukon Housing Corporation staff under the leadership of Pamela to look at a partnership initiative there and start those initial discussions. I’m really pleased with where we are there, given that Watson Lake has come forward as a key priority.

We have another initiative with housing and ensuring that we have resources in the future available for a shelter place as well, so it is important for us to work with our partners to gather information to identify client-type program — type and proponent to best deliver the program.

The information would include the homelessness count that is currently underway. We have a scheduled meeting coming up in April. It will be the municipality, the First Nations and the NGO community, and the Housing Corporation to complete the project to have construction commence in 2021-22.

So, that’s the vision and we will continue to access federal resources. How much and how many units right now — that’s to be determined by the community.

Ms. Van Bibber: The home repair loan program assists homeowners in the ability to address upgrades and repairs to existing homes. Under the heading, there were three grants and loans: the accessibility enhancement grant, the emergency repair grant, and a home repair loan.

Can the minister break down the figures for each of these programs? To follow up: Under the emergency repair grant, how quick is the turnaround should an emergency repair be needed?

Hon. Ms. Frost: There is \$1.6 million for home repair loans to assist homeowners to address upgrades and repairs to existing homes, broken down into three distinct areas: the accessibility enhancement grant for \$600,000; we have the emergency repair grant, which is \$350,000 — and that is assessed as quickly as we can to review and turn that funding around, given that it is an emergency repair grant — home repair loan — adequacy and suitability — \$700,000 in that line item.

Ms. Van Bibber: The new policy that was introduced last year for staff housing and government employees where there is now a three-year maximum to stay in staff housing in the communities — and I do understand that this is way too early to assess the policy — however, can the minister tell us what feedback she has received from employees who rent in rural communities?

Hon. Ms. Frost: How it works — the Public Service Commission administers the units and Yukon Housing Corporation actually manages the facilities. That is done in collaboration. Keep in mind, when this came to be, it was really a major concern that was brought to the attention of the

government at that time — about equity and transparency. We had a social housing client on one side, who was paying a significant amount — 25 percent of their income, as it was governed that way — and then individuals who would go to work in the spring and would still get charged back that same amount. The consistency — the tenants who were in the staff housing on the opposite side of the duplex, for an example, would be paying a consistent rate across the board. That, in itself, posed a lot of challenges for the community.

So, the objective was really to provide some transparency, so we have heard some concerns about limiting the three years. There is the possibility of extending that under extenuating circumstances. I want to just encourage staff to consider other housing options in the community and, if there is availability — recognizing that it isn't always available in our communities.

We have heard some concerns, for certain. Like everything else that changes, we want to ensure that we align to be more reflective of market rates in the community and also ensure that we aren't further marginalizing our clients who are not in staff housing in the same unit.

Ms. Van Bibber: We can't go through a session without mentioning the Vimy housing project. We are wondering why there was no mention of it in this project. Are there ongoing talks with the society or any future plans to assist this project?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The Vimy Heritage Housing Society is still continuing to work with the federal government. We are continuing to meet with them to provide them with the supports that they need to access resources. That is kind of where it is at currently.

Ms. Van Bibber: Under the five-year capital concept, there is a line saying that there are deployable mobile home units, but it isn't starting until 2021-22. Can the minister explain this item?

Hon. Ms. Frost: So, the deployable mobile homes are intended to provide supports in the communities where we are seeing imminent pressure and it's intended to be mobile so we can move it around. I think we kind of came up with this — or the department came up with this concept when we ran into some major issues in one of our communities and we needed to find housing imminently and we weren't able to do that within the housing complement in the communities. The objective of that in next year's budget is to consider this as an option or a means in which to provide some ability to support the community should that arise there — in any one of our communities.

Ms. Van Bibber: As we all know, the reason we're sitting here tonight is because of COVID-19, which is a world pandemic that we're going through. I'm afraid the situation we find ourselves in — the positive economic climate of our recent years is certainly gone. As I turn the floor over to the Third Party, I would like to add my sincere thanks to all the legislative staff and the Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms and of course Hansard — who captures all of our words — for making our work go as smoothly as it can, especially under these hard circumstances. Thank you.

Ms. White: Of course, I thank the officials here from Yukon Housing Corporation, especially Pamela Hine. It has been a pleasure learning all things housing from you in the last many moons — quite a long time — and I'm sure your next endeavours will be exciting and you'll bring a lot to that. We're lucky to have had you.

Mr. Chair, my questions right now are not very numerous. We had a great conversation in the briefing about COVID-19 and how it would affect renters right now in the Yukon Housing Corporation. What I'm looking for is just for the minister to tell me how — so, for example, not everyone who is a Yukon Housing Corporation tenant is on social assistance. A lot of folks have jobs and their jobs could be affected right now. I wanted to know what assurances Yukon Housing Corporation tenants had from the minister of Housing as to how they could pay their rent or not pay their rent or what assurances her department has.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I understand that people are worried and concerned about paying their rent, paying their mortgage or their loans. As always, Yukon Housing Corporation continues to work with the tenants and the clients who we have to really try to understand their individual circumstances and come up with a reasonable solution — one that is appropriate and that meets their needs. We will continue to monitor our policies and continue to work with our clients to ensure that they align with the changing circumstances. So, I want to just assure our clients that they will not get an eviction notice should they not be able to pay their mortgage or their rent this month, given the circumstances that we are in. I think we have to be as flexible as we can to work with the tenants who are in our facilities.

Ms. White: Maybe if we could break that down into plain language. If a tenant has concerns, should they contact the Yukon Housing Corporation or the Whitehorse Housing office?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Given that the units are managed by Yukon Housing Corporation, I would suggest that, if individuals have concerns or questions, that they would present themselves at the Yukon Housing Corporation office and work through that avenue.

Ms. White: In this time of social distancing, are they able to call? Can a client call the client relations phone number and have an initial conversation with someone before they present themselves physically in the office?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Of course, it is set up so that, if clients need to call in, they can call in. In the Housing office, we have a screen set up as well so that, if someone feels it necessary to come in person, we have measures set up also. Certainly, call first and speak with the Housing staff and we will certainly make sure that we have sufficient staff on hand to answer all the questions that are presented.

Ms. White: Just so we cover all the bases — so, anyone who has borrowed money from the Yukon Housing Corporation for home renovation programs, anyone who has borrowed money through the down payment assistance program, anyone who has borrowed money through the first time homebuyer at one point in time, any lending program —

just to get it on the record — they can all contact the corporation and have that conversation?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes, that is correct. Please call the Yukon Housing Corporation and work with the Housing tenant relation officers, and they will assess the situation, look for an appropriate solution with each individual who calls.

It is certainly important that we keep in the forefront of everyone's mind making reasonable decisions that meet the needs of Yukoners under such extenuating circumstances.

Ms. White: Normally, I would have a lot more questions for the Yukon Housing Corporation, but understanding the hour of the day — especially for our friends in Hansard — I want to thank the minister and her department for the leadership in this very specific thing — making sure that people know who they can contact if they have questions or concerns and that assurance that they don't have to be afraid on April 5. But they should call ahead of time. Don't wait too long, folks — call if you know that there are going to be problems.

With that, Mr. Chair, I have no further questions.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation?

Seeing none, we will proceed with line-by-line debate on Vote 18.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent to deem all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried

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 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$19,431,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures
Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$35,532,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$54,963,000 agreed to

Yukon Housing Corporation agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all remaining Votes in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, carried.

Unanimous consent re deeming all remaining Votes in Bill No. 203, First Appropriation Act 2020-21, carried

Chair: Ms. McPhee has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the

Whole to deem all remaining Votes in Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, carried.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$1,254,786,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures
Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$369,719,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$1,624,505,000 agreed to

On Schedules A and B

Schedules A and B agreed to

On Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. McPhee that the Chair report Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

Chair: As the bill identified in the Order to sit past the normal hour of adjournment has now been decided upon by Committee of the Whole, it is my duty to rise and report to the House.

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, and directed to me to report the bill without amendment.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Bill No. 203: First Appropriation Act 2020-21 — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading of Bill No. 203, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Speaker: The support staff can come into the gallery if you distance yourself.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 203, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2020-21*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I have a really long speech here, but seeing as how everybody is extremely tired and we have worked an extremely long day together, I just want to say thank you to every MLA in the House for their diligence in getting us past the main budget in this extraordinary amount of time in extraordinary circumstances.

I want to thank the support staff from all of the different political parties who are joining us here today in the gallery with social distancing in mind. Thank you for all of your hard work, your diligence, and your service to Yukon. These will be the moments that you remember for the rest of your life. You have all done extremely good work, and I really am proud of everybody in the political offices.

To Hansard, above and beyond, we all — I know that I speak on behalf of all MLAs, and I am sure that the other leaders are going to want to have their say as well, but I tell you — we know that this has been a trying time for you, and we really appreciate your efforts not only for us as MLAs but for all Yukoners.

To the Clerk's office, and to yours as well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for your patience in getting us to where we are, and to all my colleagues, ministers, backbenchers, and MLAs on both sides, thank you.

We are definitely in interesting times, Mr. Speaker. I urge everyone now to go back to their ridings and work with their elders, work with their community, make sure the people are safe, and provide the leadership that I know you all will.

Mr. Cathers: In rising to speak to this at third reading, I would note that the world and the Yukon are facing a serious issue with the declared pandemic. In times like this, it is not business as usual. Extraordinary times do require action. While we do disagree with a number of the choices that the government has made in their budget, we have also agreed to focus on the big picture, because times like this require setting aside partisanship and working together to support the response to the pandemic. That is why we reached an all-party agreement to expedite debate on the budget. This will also allow departments to focus on pandemic response and not be distracted by supporting ministers in the Legislative Assembly.

I just want to thank everyone who is working in pandemic response, including: officials and staff in every government department; hospitals and staff; physicians, nurses, and health professionals across the territory; Emergency Medical Services staff and volunteers; other first responders, including fire and police; municipal and First Nation leaders; staff in the federal government, as well as people in the private sector and non-governmental organizations; and, last but not least, individual Yukoners who are doing their part, taking action and making sacrifices to ensure that, as a territory, we are responding in the

best way that we can to the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is a time to remain calm but also to take action. Please follow the advice of public health officials and avoid unnecessarily buying goods that other people may need. By working together, the Yukon can minimize both the health and economic impacts.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to thank everyone who is part of this effort for the Yukon and, of course, thank those who have supported us in sitting later this evening so that the budget could be passed and so that department staff, hospitals, and others can focus on responding to this pandemic.

Ms. White: It is hard to imagine when we got called back in on March 5 that this is where we would be on March 19. It is hard to imagine between this week and last week the changes that have happened.

You know, this is not business as usual. Right now, our grocery store clerks are heroes. Our janitorial staff are heroes. We have people who never would have been viewed as front line who are now being viewed as front line.

We thank all of those on the front lines from the hospitals to the nursing staff to those in Community Services working on the pandemic response to EMO. We want to especially thank those who may not view themselves in the positions right now that they are in — like I said, those at the grocery stores and those stocking the shelves. We thank the Hansard staff, because if it's 600 degrees in this room, it's probably 1,200 degrees in that room.

Mr. Speaker, take care. We look forward to better days.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard on third reading of Bill No. 203?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you to the members opposite for their comments. Thanks to everybody in the Legislative Assembly. Go home to your loved ones. You've all done great work today. Thank you very much.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Disagree.

Ms. Hanson: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.
Motion for third reading of Bill No. 203 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 203 has passed this House.

We are now prepared to receive the Commissioner of Yukon, in her capacity as Lieutenant Governor, to grant assent to the bill which has passed this House.

Commissioner Bernard enters the Chamber announced by Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

ASSENT TO BILLS

Commissioner: Please be seated.

Speaker: Madam Commissioner, the Assembly has, at its present session, passed a bill to which, in the name and on behalf of the Assembly, I respectfully request your assent.

Clerk: *First Appropriation Act 2020-21.*

Commissioner: I hereby assent to the bill as enumerated by the Clerk — so, twice in a week.

I would like to thank you again for your work over the last two weeks.

Take care of yourselves and each other.

Commissioner leaves the Chamber

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

Before we adjourn this Sitting, I have a few brief comments. I would like to extend my thanks on behalf of the Speaker — myself — the Deputy Speaker, the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole, and on behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly to the Clerk Dan Cable, Deputy Clerk Linda Kolody, Clerk of Committees Allison Lloyd, Director of Administration, Finance and Systems Helen Fitzsimmons, Operations Manager Brenda McCain-Armour, Finance and Operations Clerk Lyndsey Amundson, as well as Sergeant-at-Arms Karina Watson and Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms Terry Grabowski, who all provided invaluable support to all MLAs and their staff in order for all of us to continue to do the important work that we are sent here to do on behalf of all Yukoners.

As well, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the skilled team at Hansard, the pages, and all the other background staff and contractors who keep this operation going.

I would also commend the hard-working civil servants who deliver services to Yukoners, particularly at this time, and support to all of us, as members in our work.

This is an especially trying time for Yukoners, and I want to assure all of our constituents in our beautiful territory, from Old Crow to Carcross and from Beaver Creek to Watson Lake, that all members of this House have you in our thoughts, and we are all prepared to do whatever it takes to get through these challenging times.

Yukoners are resilient folk, and I know that we will continue to help and support each other in the next weeks and months. Indeed, I have immense confidence that we will emerge from this period of uncertainty and concern as an even stronger tight-knit community of relatives, friends, work colleagues, teammates, and neighbours. I encourage all Yukoners to continue to be kind and generous and to assist those less fortunate wherever and whenever possible.

Thank you very much.

Adjournment of Sitting per special adjournment Order

Speaker: Pursuant to the special adjournment Order adopted earlier today, this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m., Thursday, October 1, 2020.

The House adjourned at 9:29 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled March 19, 2020:

34-3-17

Response to oral question from Mr. Kent re: French immersion enrolment (McPhee)