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HANSARD

Monday, October 5, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 Fall Sitting

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

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

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, October 5, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Introduction of new Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Speaker: At this time, I am very pleased to be able to introduce Mr. Joe Mewett, our new Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms.

Joe was raised in St. Catharines, Ontario and has served in the Canadian Armed Forces. Joe began his service with the Canadian Armed Forces primary reserves in 1981. In 1983, he transferred to the regular force and, in 1984, was posted to the Third Regiment, royal Canadian forces artillery. Over the years, he has served in various positions in the Canadian Armed Forces, including serving three tours of duty within Canada and overseas.

In August of 2011, after 30 years of active service, Sergeant Mewett retired from the Canadian Armed Forces and moved back to Whitehorse, where he worked for the Department of Environment until his retirement. Joseph has significant volunteer experience with Scouts Canada, the Royal Canadian Army, and air cadets and is currently the branch president of the Whitehorse legion. I would ask members to welcome Joe to the House at this time.

Applause

Speaker: I would also like to take this time to thank Terry Grabowski for his tenure as Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms. Terry has taken a new opportunity at the Department of Justice.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Are there any visitors to be introduced?
Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Women's History Month

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Women's History Month. I would like to acknowledge those who are listening in. I know that we did invite a lot of folks, and given our new reality, they are listening in on the radio. Thank you very much for doing that.

Every October, I am grateful that I have the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the incredible accomplishments of women and girls throughout our history. As always, I want to acknowledge the women in our community who have important roles as indigenous leaders, activists, elders, and matriarchs. From traditional knowledge-keepers to politicians who have broken the glass ceiling to key contributors to Yukon's history, indigenous women and girls have played an important role in shaping this territory.

I would like to acknowledge our most recent woman to make history in our territory. Congratulations to our newly appointed Yukon Chief Justice, Madam Justice Suzanne Duncan. She is the first woman in Yukon history to hold this distinguished position.

I am sure that many of my colleagues here today can think of a woman in their lives who has helped them along the way. I know that I am certainly standing on the shoulders of giants — those women who paved the way for me to be in a leadership role today.

This morning, I was so proud to celebrate the achievements of women in the territory with the launch of six new tourism banners in honour of Women's History Month. From 20 submissions, six artists were selected to have their work featured on banners at visitor information centres and on roadways across this territory. This year, I am delighted to share that all six artists identify as women. I would like to say also that the last competition featured six women artists as well. These artists this year are Emma Barr, Esther Bordet, Amber Church, Maegan Garrett, Violet Gatensby, and Sharon Vittrekwa.

Yukon has a long history of women as leaders in the arts community, both finding success individually as artists and supporting one another in an often very challenging industry. We are very fortunate to come from a territory with a rich history of women overcoming the many challenges they have faced. I'm often inspired by the strength and resilience of women in this territory — particularly indigenous women and girls who have faced even greater adversity.

On Friday, this adversity was acknowledged and honoured with a combined campaign in recognition of the Yukon Sisters in Spirit and Red Dress campaigns. Although we are usually able to join together for a vigil at this time of year, the organizers at Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council adapted to COVID realities. They instead encouraged everyone to hang a red dress in their office or public space in solidarity and support as we remember those lives lost but never forgotten. We did that here in our Cabinet office and the dress is still on display today.

They also hung 42 red dresses along 2nd Avenue and Robert Service Way in Whitehorse to mark the absence of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls of Yukon. The City of Whitehorse has marked this occasion and paid tribute to the campaign by proclaiming October 2, 2020, to be Yukon Sisters in Spirit Vigil and REDress Campaign Day in the City of Whitehorse.

The REDress Project was founded in 2010 by a Métis artist, Jaime Black. The original art installation included collecting 600 red dresses as a visual reminder of the staggering number of indigenous women and girls who are no longer with us.

This year's campaign is not just a powerful symbol of the lives that have been lost and the families who are grieving, but it is also a call for action — a call to stop violence toward indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people in Yukon. As the Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate and the co-chair of the Yukon advisory committee on MMIWG2S+,

I can say that we remain committed to creating a future in Yukon where indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people can live their lives free of violence.

So, during this Women's History Month, I encourage Yukoners not only to celebrate the achievement of women and girls who came before us, but also to remember the adversity we have faced and still face today. It is through recognition of these past and current hardships that we will find a better way forward.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October as Women's History Month. Canada has been home to many strong, resilient women over the years — women who have forged the path for us today.

Life has changed so much for women across the country. Just think back to the stories that our grandparents would tell us about the hardships they faced as children, as young women, as career women, and as mothers. They also persevered through pandemics, economic depressions, and fights for equality. Their experiences — whatever they may have been — and their paths — whichever they may have chosen — have each contributed in some way to the life we enjoy today. We experience similar struggles today but under very different circumstances.

The achievements of those generations of women before us have created a world today where we can enjoy more equality, more opportunity, and the ability to achieve what we want to achieve in our lives and our futures.

This year, Women's History Month is focused around the theme "Make an impact". We focus often on the women who historically have made an impact on society, on women's rights, health care, education, justice, and more. We must remember that every achievement and step forward that we make today, either individually or collectively, we are making an impact for future generations. So let's make sure that we are making positive impacts and ensure that we continue to forge that path for women throughout the Yukon and across the country.

Applause

Ms. Hanson: It is an honour to rise on behalf of the Yukon New Democratic Party to join in paying tribute to Women's History Month. Although we normally think of the past when hear the word "history", this year's theme #BecauseOfYou shifts the focus, celebrating girls and women who have made and continue to make a lasting impact.

It is easy to look back and reflect, as my colleagues have done so ably, on the women who have made history in Yukon and across Canada, often despite incredible opposition. It is sometimes more challenging to recognize the women and girls among us who are in the process of fomenting change, of advocating for and dedicating their time, energy, and skills to making Yukon a better place for us all.

My initial thoughts when I heard the #BecauseOfYou theme were about the young women — girls, really — who have been instrumental over the past year or so leading the

weekly climate change strikes calling upon municipal, territorial, and federal politicians to take climate change seriously — to match words with action.

I think of Sophie Molgat, Kalia Graham, and Emma Marnik, who last fall appeared before city council to a packed, overloaded gallery to state clear, cogent reasons why city council should declare a climate emergency. To their credit, these young women have not relinquished their focus on this all-encompassing crisis and continue to raise climate change as the issue requiring urgent action by us all.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many in Yukon who fit the #BecauseOfYou theme. I also think of Claire Anderson, a Taku River citizen and lawyer who was appointed as BC-Yukon regional commissioner to the CRTC in 2019. She is the first indigenous woman and Yukon resident appointed to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. Her historic appointment provides the CRTC with a much-needed northern lens on connectivity and technology challenges facing Canada's north. She faces the weight of heightened expectation experienced by so many women history-makers.

Once started, Mr. Speaker, it's hard to narrow the list of young women making history. Let me end with a shout-out to Kate Mechan. I first became aware of Kate's intelligent and compassionate approach to working with Yukon's homeless population in 2010 when she was working with the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition on developing a housing strategy. Over the past 10 years, she has persistently advocated through successive governments the importance of working with people, bridging the divides between those who need housing and those who control access. The success of the Safe at Home community plan — a base plan to end and prevent homelessness — is largely due to Kate Mechan's belief in the need to honour partnerships, and it is a vital part of the #BecauseOfYou legacy of Yukon women making history.

Applause

In recognition of World Teachers' Day

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It's my honour to rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Yukon educators in recognition of the 26th annual World Teachers' Day.

This World Teachers' Day, we say thank you. The Canadian Teachers Federation theme this year is "Teaching for a better world: Together in strength and solidarity". This is a theme that recognizes perseverance and dedication. The world has required that teachers and educational assistants and all those who work with students adapt and ensure that learning continues in these challenging times — a time like no other we have known.

Today, I want to recognize the many educators in Yukon schools for their efforts and innovation in finding different ways to work with students while face-to-face classes were suspended at the end of the 2019-20 school year, for working so hard to support the safe return of the students and fellow staff to school this year, and for continuing to provide high-quality,

caring instruction and learning supports to our students in this very unusual school year.

Last spring, Yukon educators were enthusiastic in their adaptation and unique ways to connect with students in continuing to learn while face-to-face classes were suspended. They used online tools and technology like videoconferencing, they prepared and delivered weekly paper learning activity packages, and some did driveway check-ins with students at a safe distance. Thank you for supporting your students.

This fall, students have been able to return safely to face-to-face classes because of the enormous hard-working efforts of administrators and educators in Yukon schools and essential administration staff. They worked to adapt learning spaces to meet the health and safety guidelines for schools; they have gone over new routines with students, such as safe spacing, hand-washing, keeping hands to ourselves, and not sharing food or drinks; and they are working with students and families to ensure that students have the learning supports that they need.

During these unusual and uncertain times, students are looking to the adults in their lives for reassurance, understanding, and compassion. With patience, kindness, and mutual support, Yukon educators continue to set positive examples, be innovative, and demonstrate deep care for the well-being of their students and their school communities.

The jobs and the responsibilities of educators are complex and challenging at the best of times. What is now required of them in the world pandemic is truly unprecedented. Educators have shown that — through resilience and optimism — we can adapt and overcome the challenges that COVID-19 has presented. The energy and smiles on the faces of our students who are back in school remind us of the importance of the role of school and the connections and relationships that students have with their classmates and with their teachers. Our students remind us that Yukon's future, despite current challenges, remains bright.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Yukon Liberal caucus, I thank all of the teachers, educational assistants, support staff, administrators, and school staff for their deep dedication and commitment to their students and their school communities.

Merci, thank you, shǎw níthän.

Applause

Mr. Kent: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party caucus to pay tribute to a group of individuals who are always deserving of our thanks and recognition, but this year in particular. To our Yukon educators on this World Teachers' Day: You have found ways to overcome all the curve balls that this pandemic has thrown at you. We are thankful that here in the Yukon we were able to send many of our kids back to school. While not all schools are back to full-time learning, teachers are making the most of the situation.

Some of you are faced with the additional challenges of only part-time in-class teaching, but the extra time and work that you put in makes a difference to those students who have been affected. You each spend extra time making the school year work, no matter the unusual circumstances that you and

your students find yourselves in, and every bit of that time and dedication is appreciated. You have adapted, learned new skills, and kept a brave face for our children through months of unknowns and challenges. You show resilience and your calm direction helps each student navigate a school year filled with uncertainty.

This year, we would like to give our sincere thanks to all teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and others who work day after day to provide our kids with a learning environment that is wholesome and healthy. You work to create safe spaces where our kids can be kids but still respect the new guidelines we all must follow for the time being. You have had to adjust everything you have learned over the course of your careers and find new ways to make things work. The added stress of a new school year beginning in the middle of a pandemic has not been easy on many parents, but for them to know that their kids are in good hands really helps.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you again to our teachers and educators for their hard work and dedication to education here in the territory.

Applause

Ms. White: Today I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our voices to the chorus of thanks to teachers across the planet but especially here at home.

Teachers are remarkable people. Teachers and educational staff have always been critical but never more so than now. When the pandemic hit, teachers had no more time to pivot than the rest of us. They went from the classroom to spring break to an unknown future. Teachers were fast on their feet as they adjusted from in-person classes to online learning. How they rose to the challenge of telling children and young people that there would be a tomorrow is where this story lies. That story isn't just about education; it is about humanity, kindness, and showing up where and when they were needed. Educators connected with and supported students and families when they were needed. They made banners, videos, Zoom rooms, and phone calls. They reached out in creative ways to let students know that they were seen and not forgotten.

Being a teacher is never an easy job; being a teacher during a pandemic is something else entirely. Teachers aren't just tasked with educating their charges; they help to shape the child of today into the adult of tomorrow. Thanks to educators, despite a pandemic during their school careers, the adults of tomorrow will have hope for the future.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 14: *Act to Amend the Environment Act (2020)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. Frost: I move that Bill No. 14, entitled *Act to Amend the Environment Act (2020)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Environment that Bill No. 14, entitled *Act to Amend the Environment Act (2020)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 14 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills for introduction?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Before we begin notices of motions, I would like to remind all members as we begin this Fall Sitting that the proper form of giving oral notice of a motion is: "I give notice of the following motion..." and then proceed to read the motion. Thank you for your attention on that topic.

Notices of motions.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the income support for essential workers program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT this House acknowledges the urgency of Bill No. 10, *Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act (2020)*, to address paid or unpaid leave for employees who experience domestic or sexualized violence by committing to have regulations in place so that the amended *Employment Standards Act (2020)* can come into force by December 31, 2020.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to increase the proportion of Yukon government jobs based in communities by:

(a) implementing its own policy 1.9, entitled "Decentralization Policy";

(b) supporting current employees who wish to relocate to a Yukon community through remote work arrangements;

(c) relocating community-focused positions including but not limited to regional economic development officers and community advisors when these positions become vacant; and

(d) working with First Nation governments and municipal governments to ensure lot and housing availability to support decentralization efforts.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to use the protected area provisions provided in the *Territorial Lands*

(*Yukon*) Act to protect and manage sensitive areas identified over the last seven years from off-road vehicle use.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide the additional \$400 monthly funding in response to COVID-19 to all disabilities service clients.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Youth Panel on Climate Change

Hon. Mr. Silver: The climate change that we are experiencing is the biggest challenge of this government and of this generation and Yukon youth deserve to have their voices heard.

Two weeks ago, I was very pleased to announce a call for applications to form Yukon's first-ever Youth Panel on Climate Change. Our northern climate continues to warm three times faster than the global average and carbon pollution continues to grow at an alarming rate.

I know that, for many youths, climate change is deeply concerning and there is growing frustration that governments are not doing enough to address the impacts of climate change. This is why Yukon youth are speaking out with concern for their future and demanding change. Our Liberal government believes that it is essential that our youngest citizens have an opportunity to help chart our course forward.

One of the objectives within the *Our Clean Future* strategy is to educate and to empower youth. This youth panel will provide perspectives and advice to our government on how to address climate change. We have launched a call for applications to Yukon youth between the ages of 12 to 25 to serve for a one-year term on the Youth Panel on Climate Change.

The panel is expected to include seven to 10 members. It is important that it reflects the diversity within Yukon and involves youth from across the territory who have a keen interest in addressing climate change. The work of the youth panel will include: participating in activities that build leadership, life skills, and education related to climate change; engaging with young people about energy and the economy; communicating perspectives on climate action; providing advice and perspectives to the Government of Yukon on the *Our Clean Future* strategy; and supporting youth to learn about climate change and empowering youth to get involved and take meaningful action to address it.

Panelists will be asked to attend monthly virtual meetings and, if possible, several in-person meetings. The youth panel will have the autonomy in choosing how to represent their recommendations to the government. We want the youth who form this panel to have the freedom to decide how they engage youth from across the Yukon and how they present their ideas to government.

There will be an honorarium in support of attending meetings and providing advice and participating in other

activities. I'm very excited to learn who will take part in the panel and to greet each of the members after the panel is announced later this fall.

In developing this panel, we worked closely with many committed and concerned non-governmental organizations. These community partners have shared their ideas and unique perspectives and we truly appreciate their help. I want to specifically thank BYTE — Empowering Youth Society for agreeing to support the panel in the coming months. BYTE was asked to help in recognition of its exceptional expertise in empowering youth. They will also be asked to help because of their connection with other non-governmental organizations and with their connections to First Nation governments and organizations active in the field of climate change.

I also want to recognize all younger Yukoners who have already stepped up and are already taking action and showing leadership. You have an important role to play in building a healthy and prosperous Yukon and you are already making a difference. Your generation's passion to addressing issues like climate change will drive many positive and much-needed innovations here in the Yukon.

I'm also very excited about a future where Yukon is resilient and we have a thriving green economy powered by clean energy. We have a lot of work in front of us and we look forward to receiving the panel's perspectives and recommendations. Our government will take those recommendations to heart and make sure that we are taking meaningful actions based upon the work of this panel.

Mr. Istchenko: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this — a ministerial response on a climate change youth panel.

Climate change is an issue that affects all Yukoners, and we know that. We know that Yukoners are affected by climate change more significantly than the rest of the country. We know that it requires real, tangible action from the government to address it. Youth not only in our territory but across the world are leading conversations on what can be done to address climate change effectively and sustainably. This is a good thing, as it will eventually be the youth who inherit this world from us, so having them be part of this discussion is great.

That's why we were concerned when the Liberal government cut the climate change youth ambassador program in 2017. The climate change youth ambassador program allowed young Yukoners to attend United Nations' climate meetings and to see first-hand how these discussions took place. It provided Yukon youth the chance to learn a global perspective of climate change and gain invaluable leadership experience.

It was disappointing that the government chose to cut this successful program, and we were disappointed that they never provided a reason why, but with today's ministerial statement less than a year before the territorial election, I am glad that the government has finally come around to understanding the importance of having youth engaged on this important issue.

I should quickly note that this panel was first announced last year, it was then re-announced last month, and now it is being announced, I believe, for the third time — but as I said,

we are pleased to see more opportunities for youth; we always will be.

This year, when I was responding to the announcement, I asked the government to require that there be representation from rural Yukon on the panel. Unfortunately, it is not a requirement. So I would encourage the government to make a special effort to advertise and encourage youth from our communities to participate.

I would like to also talk about how this initiative is another shining example of the strength and leadership of our youth in this territory. It was a protest by young Yukoners last year that first pushed the government into announcing that they would establish this panel, so I want to give a big shout-out to them. With this initiative and with recent protests by students concerned with the government's decision to relocate MAD and to reduce the amount of in-person classes receiving widespread media coverage, and with the Gender and Sexuality Alliance from Porter Creek successfully pushing the government to bring forward legislation banning conversion therapy, I think we can say that the future is bright for Yukon's young leaders.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I also want to give a shout-out to the NDP leader, who has worked hard to make the government act on their commitment to launch this panel. I just wish the government didn't wait until there was less than a year left in their mandate to take action.

Ms. White: Like many, I was relieved to hear that the government was finally making good on a commitment that they made in their Speech from the Throne last year. After last year's announcement, I was contacted by students eager to apply and by teachers and parents wanting to support that process. Unfortunately, I had no answers, no timelines, and no one to send them toward to ask those questions.

But enough about the year-long wait for the creation of this panel — I would rather focus on the future. My hope is that what is being created is actually given wings to fly and that this is not merely an exercise in lip service. The young people being invited to participate in this process won't accept anything less than meaningful participation. This is an opportunity to hear from those whose futures depend directly on the actions that we take today.

The Premier's acknowledgement that the northern climate is warming three times faster than the global average brings to mind the chants that I hear at climate rallies: "You will die of old age; we will die of climate change" or "The planet is dying; so are we". These words from the mouths of children puts the pace at which things need to change into perspective.

Youth have an outlet that none of us here have. Their optimism at what the future could be is priceless, but their dread at what the future could be is tangible. Through enacting the changes that they recommend, we can make the planet a healthier place. Autumn Peltier has said — and I quote: "Kids all over the world have to pay for the mistakes we didn't even make. This is our future. We're the next leaders. This is our future."

Mr. Speaker, initiatives like the Youth Panel on Climate Change are one opportunity at giving youth back their dreams and control over their future. It is a chance to giving the next generations a childhood that isn't plagued by wildfire, smoke, flooding, unnatural disasters, and fear. The task for us here is simple, even though it won't be easy: We have to listen honestly to what youth have to say and enact changes that will lead to the future that they deserve.

We have seen a true crisis response with COVID-19; now let's see the same with the climate crisis.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you to my colleagues for their responses to the ministerial statement today. We do believe, Mr. Speaker, that the Youth Panel on Climate Change will engage Yukon youth and ensure that their perspectives and priorities will inform government action, as we work to address climate change. As I said, the climate crisis that we are experiencing is the biggest challenge of this generation, and Yukon youth deserve to have their voices heard.

We also believe — the Liberal government believes — that it is essential that our youngest citizens have an opportunity to help chart the course forward. It is absolutely important — and I agree — that the panel reflects the diversity within Yukon and has youth involved in it from across the territory. The call for applications is open, and the deadline for application is October 20. I do encourage Yukon youth from all communities to get involved and to share their perspectives on how we can build a clean future for our territory.

Last month, our Liberal government released *Our Clean Future — A Yukon strategy for climate change, energy and a green economy*. We have seen our youth demonstrating in the streets. We have seen them expressing their deep concerns about climate change. We know that they want to see governments take action. The strategy that we have developed together with Yukoners includes 131 actions that our government will take to address the impacts of climate change, while building a green economy and ensuring that Yukoners can access reliable, affordable, and renewable energy over the next decade.

This territory-wide strategy meets the challenges that we face today and sets a clear direction for a strong resilient future. *Our Clean Future* includes a number of targets that we have identified for how we can propose to reduce the impacts to the environment. This includes reducing Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2030.

Over the next decade, Yukon government, in participation with the Government of Canada, will invest more than \$500 million to implement this strategy and to create new jobs in a green economy. Creating a youth panel to provide advice and perspectives to government is one of the action items in this plan, and we are very excited to see it come together.

The plan also supports the leadership objectives of the strategy, which call on us to — and I quote from the plan: “Educate and empower youth as the next generation of leaders.”

We do look forward to hearing from Yukon youth directly and learning from them to identify actions that we can move

forward on with them in the Yukon. We have taken a stake in Yukon's future and we all need to work together to address climate change. Together we can build a future for the territory that is resilient and that has a thriving green economy powered by green energy.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic — support for vulnerable communities

Ms. McLeod: As we sadly highlighted last week, we have seen that the isolation required due to COVID-19 restrictions have negative social consequences, such as an increase in drug and alcohol abuse. We saw the number of deaths this year related to opioids double. This is a crisis, Mr. Speaker.

In response to questions, the minister said that the resources in place already — in her words: “... efficiently meet the needs of Yukoners.” If that is the case, then we wouldn't have seen the drug and addiction issues skyrocket during the shutdown. We wouldn't have seen the amount of people dying from opioids double.

So I will ask the minister a question she did not answer last week: How much has she increased the budget to address mental health and addiction issues since the shutdown?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to supports provided to Yukoners during and before the pandemic, this government has provided significant supports to all Yukoners. We take our role very seriously, which is to ensure that we provide supports. We are committed to Yukoners to ensure that all programs and services accessed during COVID-19 are readily available. If they are not, we have made adjustments, and we will continue to do that.

With respect to the broader Yukon government's commitment to be innovative and adaptive to make sure that Yukoners' needs are met — we have taken those measures. We will continue to look at Health and Social Services' programs to make sure that the COVID-19 requirements are met.

With respect to how much more we put in — we have certainly had to take a different approach. I just want to acknowledge all of our partners in our communities for doing such an excellent job at adapting and pivoting very quickly, moving to make sure all Yukoners are supported where they reside in their Yukon communities by taking necessary measures. That means that services certainly have had to be adapted, and I just want to acknowledge that great work.

Ms. McLeod: The question was on how much the budget was increased during shutdown.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is speaking about supports that were inadequate, as we have seen in the number of opioid deaths that have doubled — and we're only in October. Instead of repeating the old talking points, the minister needs to tell us what she has done to address these issues since the pandemic hit.

How many new mental health and addiction counsellors has the minister added to prevent the increase in drug and

alcohol abuse and deaths in the territory since the pandemic began?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The wellness of Yukon is a high priority for this government, particularly as we deal with the added stress of COVID. Critical mental health and wellness and substance use services in Whitehorse and in our rural Yukon communities continue to be provided with adaptations for the health and safety of all clients and citizens of Yukon.

At the onset of the pandemic, the majority of services moved to providing telephone and virtual counselling. As restrictions lifted, we are now back to ensuring that counselling services are moving forward in person and delivered based on clinical need while respecting COVID-19 guidelines. I would like to assure Yukoners that we will continue to provide collaborative care as needed in our communities.

I'm happy to say that the mental wellness hubs established in the Yukon have been very successful. We have provided counselling supports and services in each one of our communities, successfully working with our municipalities and our First Nations to ensure that we have supports through those agencies as well and the other governments.

With respect to COVID-19 guidelines, we follow the parameters of the chief medical officer of health and followed all the protocols. We will continue to do the good work that Yukoners require of us.

Ms. McLeod: The question was: How many new mental health and addiction counsellors has the minister added?

Will the minister have her department begin studying and monitoring the relationship between the restrictions imposed by her government, the increase in drug and alcohol abuse, and the declining mental health of Yukoners?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to again remind the member opposite and remind Yukoners that this government has taken the necessary measures and the precautions to ensure that all Yukoners are safe and healthy and that we are doing so under the guidance of the chief medical officer of health and we will continue to provide the supports that are needed. We are adapting. As the pandemic has demonstrated, unprecedented times require unprecedented actions.

With respect to the services we provide, historically, I think we have done an exceptional job and I will continue to hold my hands up and acknowledge the good work of the departments for collaborating and working toward the efforts of ensuring that we bring positive measures to Yukon. That's defined under the *Putting People First* report, under the parameters of the weekly meetings that the chief medical officer and my good colleague, the Minister of Community Services, have provided to Yukoners. We are hearing from Yukoners and we are adapting accordingly.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on economy

Mr. Hassard: So, last week, the Liberal government put out a press release that stated "economy remains resilient" in the title. The press release went on to brag about how the GDP of the territory has grown. This messaging and type of thinking

is terribly out of touch and out of line with the lived reality of many Yukoners.

According to the Bureau of Statistics, compared to last year, 1,100 Yukoners are out of work. Also, according to the Bureau of Statistics, compared to last year, 100 businesses have closed. Yet the government is bragging about the GDP growth. Well, GDP numbers are cold comfort for out-of-work Yukoners.

So what is the government's plan to get these Yukoners back to work?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'll ask the Minister of Economic Development to get up as well to respond. Here we have the Yukon Party taking things out of context. Part of that bigger conversation that we're having was that the numbers are the numbers, and we do have a GDP forecast which is great to see compared to other jurisdictions that are really suffering. What else is really good is that we came into the pandemic with a surplus, which is good to have as well.

Now, we continue the conversations. That does not change the fact that many businesses are struggling and suffering right now and it does not change our obligation to these businesses. It doesn't change the obligations that we have to the health and safety of Yukoners, and we must maintain direct conduits to the private sector to make sure that we are giving the relief that we need to give to these businesses.

Now, if the Yukon Party were telling the whole story, they would say that this is the bigger conversation that we are having. However, I will say that we are in an enviable position compared to some other jurisdictions in Canada, and I want to thank the mining sector specifically for that — being a key driver for our economic forecast that we do speak of.

Getting the placer miners out into the field and for getting the quartz mining folks — like Victoria Gold — to be able to continue with guidelines was an extremely important thing that this government did and took seriously from the very beginning. Those numbers are extremely important when we take a look at the forecasts — that we are in an enviable position to other jurisdictions.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker — but 1,000 Yukoners are not in that enviable position that the Premier speaks of. Meanwhile, the government's message last week was that our economy was resilient and our GDP is growing — no plan to get those people back to work. It's just, "Hey, don't worry; our GDP is growing." That message doesn't help the over 1,000 Yukoners out of work.

Has the government done an analysis on how much those numbers will increase if the current restrictions on the economy and the border remain in place throughout the winter?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I think I will start off by saying that it's unfortunate that we are having this question characterized in this way. I think everybody here in the Legislative Assembly knows that small businesses are the backbone of our Canadian economy.

We moved quickly as a government, hand in hand, in taking direction from the private sector to ensure that we have programs in place, like the business relief program or the sick leave program that the federal government used as a template

for their program — which I think says a lot for the public servants who did that work and structured it.

Also, if we are going to talk about the trends, what is key to this is that we have seen some closures in business. In some cases — when they talk about closure and the definition of “closure” — the owner may still be running the business, but yes, some of those individuals may not be employed in that particular business. But also there have been a number of businesses that have opened since April. I think that is something to highlight. In the middle of a pandemic, we have had a number of businesses in the mineral sector as well as in retail that have opened because they trust the foundation of this economy. I think that is also really important to touch on.

We are going to see jobs created between now and December, and I look forward to expanding on that after the third question.

Mr. Hassard: So as I mentioned, 100 businesses have closed compared to June 2019. There are 1,100 Yukoners out of work compared to last year. When can those Yukoners expect to be back to work full time in the private sector?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, we are working with the chief medical officer of health, like every jurisdiction, to have recommendations as far as how we move through a path forward, which is our plan to recovery. We are, right now, in the final plan before we get a vaccine.

There is a bit of a stall based upon the epidemiology, but we are advancing quite quickly. I want to thank Economic Development and Tourism and Culture for the local supports that we do offer here in the Yukon which are not being offered in other jurisdictions in Canada. Fixed business costs of up to \$30,000 a month — that’s something that other jurisdictions did not have the financial wherewithal to be able to support businesses with.

Do we believe that we’re out of the woods? No, we don’t. Are we concerned about the businesses that have gone under and other ones that have had to switch and have their lives upside-down? We absolutely do — absolutely. But in just a few months, COVID-19 has had such a bigger impact on our economy than any other event since the Great Depression. This unique situation requires dramatic increasing in the spending of public health measures, emergency supports and management, coordination and enforcement, and financial and economic relief, and we are up to that challenge.

On a net basis, when all the funding from Canada and other sources are considered, the economic impact of COVID-19 has been large in the Yukon for the Yukon government — close to \$40 million in supports for Yukoners and Yukon businesses. I’m extremely proud of the work that this public service — this government public service — has done to be nimble and helpful to help and support the targets that we need in the right areas.

Question re: Internet connectivity

Ms. White: The COVID-19 pandemic is having different impacts on different people. One area where this was particularly obvious is Internet access. In March, many key parts of the lives of Yukoners were suddenly forced to take place online. Work, school, community activities, and family

gatherings were all one big Zoom meeting. People in Whitehorse fared pretty well with four months of unlimited Internet access. People in the communities, on the other hand, only saw partial increases to their plans and not nearly enough to sustain the increased usage. For many families outside of Whitehorse, this meant hundreds of dollars in fees, and for others who couldn’t afford it, it meant missing out on important parts of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, what concrete steps did this government take to address the affordability gap in Internet access between Whitehorse and Yukon’s communities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this very important issue to Yukoners this afternoon.

This government has been working consistently for the last three years plus to make sure that we get expanded broadband penetration throughout the territory and make sure that the broadband that we do have is resilient and backed up by a fibre optic link to the NWT. That work is underway — it will begin in the next couple of months and will then continue for the next two years which will then provide the redundancy we need.

Now, the member opposite has talked about the cost of Internet up here. This is something that is of extreme concern to Yukoners, and so our government worked very hard to support a plan from Northwestel to bring fibre to every home in the territory that is accessible by road. So Northwestel will be improving the broadband speeds and lowering costs for rural broadband users in the next year and going forward. We appreciate the financial support the CRTC provided to the project to enable rural Yukoners to receive better broadband Internet to communities at rates comparable to those charged in Whitehorse. That was done with the support of this government.

Ms. White: Although I appreciate the work done by Northwestel, that doesn’t answer whether or not this government took any steps to address the affordability gap between Whitehorse and the communities at a time when a huge part of our lives is taking place online and why, at the end of the day, they failed to close that gap.

But here is a chance for this government to be proactive. A few months ago, hundreds of Yukoners living outside of Whitehorse were informed that their provider, Xplornet, would cut their Internet access by the end of this year. This is a massive step back in terms of access to Internet for residents and small businesses. What is worse is that there are no other providers they can turn to.

What steps has this government taken to make sure that these rural Yukoners and Yukon businesses keep Internet access beyond December of this year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This is a very critical file for this government. I, the Premier, and the Minister of Economic Development have been working very closely on this file for the last six weeks since we learned about it. We learned about it at about the same time as all customers in the territory learned about it, which was when Xplornet informed their customer base that they were going to be pulling out by December 31. To this government, that is wholly unacceptable.

We have reached out and worked with our federal counterparts in Ottawa, who have the responsibility for the oversight of satellite communications in this country. I have also had several conversations with the president of Xplornet and his staff about the pending shutdown. Just this morning, Mr. Speaker, I spoke to the president of Telesat and made known to that corporation what our position is here, which is that this service must continue beyond December 31 to make sure that those constituents who we have in Yukon continue to get access to the global communication network that they have built their businesses and their lives around for the last 15 years.

Ms. White: I like to call those constituents “friends” or “neighbours” or, you know, “people in my community”.

So imagine losing access to Internet in the middle of a global pandemic when it is your only way to communicate with the rest of the world. What makes it even worse is that the infrastructure that once provided basic radio phone service before Xplornet offered Internet access has since been taken down by Northwestel. These residents and small business are going back decades in terms of connectivity. It is a safety concern, it is a quality of life concern, and it is an economic development concern.

What assurances can the government give to these rural Yukoners that they will not lose Internet access at the end of this year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to assure the member opposite that our friends, relatives, citizens, and constituents in the territory have an expectation to be connected to the global economy and to the global communication network. We understand that on this side of the House very, very viscerally and we have been fighting and lobbying very hard to make sure that this service, provided by a private company to a Crown corporation, continues after December 31, 2020.

I have every confidence — and I have been told by the company at hand — Xplornet — that they will not leave any customer behind and I am going to hold them to that commitment over the coming weeks and months. It is wholly unacceptable to this government that citizens, constituents, friends, and relatives lose their access to this vital communication network. We will fight tooth and nail to make sure that continues beyond December 31, 2020.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on education system

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, the government tabled the supplementary estimates for the 2020-21 fiscal year. The supplementary budget shows Yukoners that, despite the extra COVID-related funds from Ottawa, the Minister of Education has reduced the money allocated to the Education budget by \$634,000. Everyone understands that running an entire school system during a pandemic costs more than during a normal year. We all know educators who have spent their own money to get their classes ready and adapted to COVID-19.

So, Mr. Speaker, how does this government justify spending less money than budgeted on education when parents

and educators know that the need for support is greater now than in any normal year?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Unfortunately, the assumption in that question is that running a school system in a pandemic costs more. The reality is that a lot of things change during the concept of a pandemic. For instance, there wasn't any busing at the end of last year's school year. There was almost no — or absolutely no — department travel. There was no need at the end of last year's school year for teachers on call. There was no need for extra staff who normally perform a number of duties in the Department of Education. Of course, that resulted in changes in the finances for the Department of Education. Presumably, we'll have lots of time to discuss what those details are.

Ms. Hanson: Despite the minister's litany of things that our money is not being spent on, we know that educators and parents have identified the need to increase the number of educational assistants and provide greater mental health supports for students. We have heard concerns from parents and teachers about a variety of shortcomings with the return-to-school plans. This government chose to shuffle all grade 8 students from F.H. Collins to the Wood Street Centre School. Programs from Wood Street were transferred to other schools, including to a mouldy portable. In-class teacher support for grades 10 to 12 students was reduced by half.

So let's look at one specific area of that education budget: Why has the Minister of Education reduced the schools and student services part of the education budget by \$572,000 rather than increasing the supports that parents, students, and educators are asking for?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The back-to-school plan — I guess that's the part I'll address with respect to some of the number of comments that were in that question. Our government believes in evidence-based decision-making. Our government believes in leadership. We were in a good position to welcome students back to classes, and our government is very proud of the collective work that was done over the summer — and really since March 2020 — to ensure the safe back-to-school plan.

The safety of students is our top priority. The need of Yukon students is our key top priority. It is the measuring stick by which we address every question in Yukon education — what is in the best interests of our students?

The situation with respect to returning to schools — I should just remind Yukoners and those critical of this process that operational plans were done by every individual school. They were worked on diligently by administrators, by teachers, by school communities, by parents, and by First Nation governments in those communities where those schools are and in the school communities here in Whitehorse. Those operational plans were addressed and reviewed by the chief medical officer of health and the hard work that went into that was all for the safe return of Yukon students.

Ms. Hanson: Despite what the minister has said, the reality is that is being made available to schools or student services.

Mr. Speaker, another area — currently students in grades 10 to 12 are attending in-person classes for half a day. For the remainder of the day, they may work from home independently or remain in a study area provided at the school. In a survey of educators earlier this year, one of the greatest concerns was the negative impact on progress and achievement due to lack of direct in-class support — teacher support.

Mr. Speaker, when will the government pay attention to their own information — to their own evidence — and use the new federal dollars to resume full-day in-class instruction for grades 10 to 12 students?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I see that the member opposite thinks perhaps that's something that isn't a top priority for this government or for the Department of Education. I can assure her and all Yukoners that it is.

One of the key criteria in returning to school and to making the decisions about how that could be done came about on the basis that all of the evidence shows that the more connections students have with their teachers, the better. It was critically important for us to have the ability to have all students, including those in grades 10 to 12, with a teacher five days a week. We had many suggestions: Could they come to school two and a half days a week or two days a week? Could we break it up that way? Would they be in full days? Absolutely — the decision was made — based on the criteria of the health and safety of students — to have them connected to a teacher five days per week.

It is a top priority for us to review that as it's going along during this first term. Classes have been in for almost six weeks now, and as a result, that review is happening. The survey that the member opposite refers to is going to be done again in November. I can assure her and all Yukoners in fact that the information that's coming from that survey is included every day in the decisions that are being made by the Department of Education.

Question re: Budget estimates and spending

Mr. Cathers: On Thursday, the Premier tabled a supplementary budget increasing spending for the last fiscal year 2019-20 which ended on March 31 of this year.

The largest portion of this increased spending was in the Department of Health and Social Services amounting to \$5.2 million that occurred in the last fiscal year that was not budgeted for. So far, we have received only a vague one-sentence explanation for the \$5.2 million in increased spending.

Will the Minister of Health and Social Services please provide us with a breakdown of that extra \$5.2 million in spending in the last fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I did hear that there was a briefing this morning with the opposition. We will have an opportunity with both departments to go through the spending in Committee of the Whole, but I will give an update to the general public here in the Legislative Assembly for Question Period.

The supplementary estimates for 2019-20 — we are calling them *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* — requested \$7.6 million in additional operation and maintenance. Specific to what the

member opposite is speaking to, Health and Social Services did require an extra \$5.2 million as a result of greater demand, primarily related to hospital stays outside of the Yukon for extended family care agreements, increased demand for mental health services, and social and community supports throughout Yukon. It also includes additional costs to respond to unexpected challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have seen in the past, as well, that when claims come in from other jurisdictions that are the responsibility of the Yukon, these might not be coming in as timely as we want them to, but I believe that the department did their best to stay within their budgets. What we have here is a result of a couple of different things that we explained both in the briefing today and also here in the Legislative Assembly, and we will have an opportunity for the minister responsible to go into detail in Committee of the Whole for whatever questions the members opposite have on that \$5.2 million.

Mr. Cathers: Just some context for the average person listening: What we have received to date is less information on the \$5.2 million than the average person would have to provide if they were applying for a new credit card.

Mr. Speaker, we know that increased spending associated with the pandemic is needed. That doesn't eliminate the need for the government to be accountable for its spending and to provide us with a breakdown. Will the Minister of Health and Social Services please tell us how much of that \$5.2-million increase in last year's budget is related to the purchase of personal protective equipment and other pandemic supplies?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, the minister will get up and answer the final question here, but the member opposite makes it seem that there is no opportunity for that conversation. As members in the Legislative Assembly know, Committee of the Whole will debate *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* for the whole \$7.6 million, and at that time, what we will do is go through all of the questions that the members opposite have for all of those budget items. We can spend as much time as they want answering questions. The department will be here as well — so again, giving that transparency as well.

We have an opportunity here to highlight — in the short time frame — that there were two different departments — the other department being Highways and Public Works — that will require \$2.4 million more due to maintenance activities related to a higher snowfall than normal and higher utilities costs than normal, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

Again, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to personal protective equipment or overtime or demand for technology support that was increasing, we will have opportunities for both departments to talk about that.

I will say that when it comes to Highways and Public Works and the ability for the public servants to have the virtual clients that they needed to continue the good work after we passed the 2020-21 main estimates — it is extremely important work and we are really glad that we got that work done for the department.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, we are just asking for transparency. Again, as I pointed out earlier, so far, we have

received less information justifying this \$5.2 million than the average person would have to provide if they were applying for an ordinary credit card.

Mr. Speaker, on March 5, the Liberal government tabled its spending plans for the remainder of the 2019-20 fiscal year, which ended on March 31 of this year. They have now increased spending in Health and Social Services for the 2019-20 fiscal year by \$5.2 million more than they predicted in early March — the last month of that fiscal year.

Will the Minister of Health and Social Services please tell us how much of that \$5.2-million increase is related to pandemic costs, including actually providing us with a breakdown of how much of this was spent on the Health Emergency Operations Centre and other increases and operational costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the public's money. All we are asking is that the government be transparent about how they spent it, where, and how much.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to assure Yukoners that we are accountable. We are a public government that has accountability to Yukoners —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am not sure about the other rumblings — I am trying to concentrate, Mr. Speaker.

Where we are exactly is that we have committed to support Yukoners. The members opposite — the Yukon Party in particular — built a 350-bed facility with no O&M, no costings or supports. We opened up the Wind River Hospice House recently. We provided supports for extended life care for families. We provided and opened up the reablement unit at the Thomson Centre. We have the emergency shelter that was built — a shell — and it excluded vulnerable populations. We have made increases to supporting vulnerable Yukoners. We have provided collaborative care supports to all Yukoners with an emphasis on rural Yukon care. We have not sat on \$20 million of housing funding for the most vulnerable of our communities. We have spent the resources that were made in an accountable and true fashion through collaboration and input from Yukoners who are aging in place using collaborative models. We have *Putting People First*; we have the Financial Advisory Panel — I can go on, Mr. Speaker, but we deliver accountability to Yukoners.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 205: *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 205, standing in the name of the Hon. Premier.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to rise this afternoon to outline spending requests as part of the first supplementary estimates for 2020-21. Supplementary estimates provide the government with an opportunity to update the main estimates or budget that this House approved in the spring. It should come as no surprise that there have been some updates in spending expectations since early March. There has been a lot of change since early March. The economy has changed and the needs of Yukoners have changed; our priorities have not, Mr. Speaker.

This Liberal government remains committed to fiscal responsibility, to providing Yukoners with the services that they need and that they expect, and to helping those who need extra support. These supplementary estimates show that we need a wider safety net as Yukoners deal with a global pandemic.

The pandemic certainly came on quickly and we also acted quickly. Credit is due to so many staff across government. We were able to get health resources, economic supports, border controls, and other programs off the ground quickly and decisively — things like the respiratory assessment centre, the Health Emergency Operations Centre, testing and contact tracing, the Yukon business relief program, and supports for event cancellations and also for reopening schools. This fast action ensured that Yukon families, businesses, and industries could access the help that they needed and remain safe, open, and viable.

Working in collaboration with the federal government, many of these programs and services will have costs recovered, but we know that we are in this for the long haul as well. The new normal that the chief medical officer of health has mentioned so many times means that we will have to continue to ensure that our families, businesses, and industries are supported through all of these uncertain times.

So, while many of the challenges presented here today are COVID-related, they will not reflect the total cost of dealing with the pandemic. The first supplementary estimates provide an up-to-the-minute picture of where we are today. Many departments absorb costs as staff work to ensure continuity of our core services, while also having the extra responsibility of launching new programs.

It is important to remember core services. Regardless of a pandemic, services to Yukoners need to continue and some of them need to change. You will see in the supplementary estimates that there are some non-COVID-related changes and updates as well — that is normal to see, even in an abnormal year like this one — but none have been made without scrutiny and an eye to responsible spending.

So let me explain a little as to where we are. I'm going to start with just an overview. Mr. Speaker, I would like to outline the budget changes that we are making between the main estimates and the supplementary estimates. In total, the 2020-21 first supplementary estimates contain \$92.2 million in additional spending. It can be broken down into \$95.9 million for operation and maintenance and a decrease of \$3.7 million in capital spending. The result is a forecasted deficit in 2020-21 of \$31.6 million.

As mentioned, O&M recoveries are significant. They are \$58 million higher than in the main estimates. However, there is also a decrease of \$5.9 million in recoveries on the capital side. While transfers from Canada remain the same, we are projecting a \$10-million decrease in own-source revenues from taxes and fees. These changes, of course, were not expected. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected almost all areas of society and government.

Preparation and response take time, effort, and money. What this pandemic has shown so far is that, even if there is no community spread and the number of cases is low, you still have to prepare for the pandemic. You need to have the masks, the testing, the centre, the staffing, and the enforcement. It comes at a cost, but it is necessary to prevent the loss of life. We recognize that the financial cost is significant.

As mentioned, there is an increase of \$95.9 million in O&M. \$88.7 million of this increase is related to the response to COVID-19. This includes \$33.7 million in new spending on health care and the public health response to the pandemic.

It is important to note that health care during a pandemic is not just treating those who have the virus. So, even though only 15 Yukoners have tested positive, more than 3,000 have been tested. Funds have been used to set up the respiratory assessment centre, now called the COVID testing centre. It helps with emergency operations and personal protective equipment. There has been support for vulnerable populations and daycares. But where the health funding helps to prepare and protect for what might happen, economic supports have helped with real-time impacts. This supplementary estimate has \$44.8 million in economic and financial supports for businesses, families, and Yukoners hardest hit by the pandemic.

For lower wage essential workers, it was giving them a boost to make sure that they could pay their rent and buy groceries. For those without sick-pay leave, it provided a way to stay at home and stay safe. For businesses trying to keep their doors open, it covered fixed costs that were beyond their ability to pay with fewer customers coming in. For cancelled events, it helped ensure that they could happen another year or provide supports as a result of their cancellation. This included events like the Arctic Winter Games. For our northern aviation industry, it kept flights going to take people where they needed to go, delivered COVID-19 tests to Vancouver, and kept vital community ties alive. For our mining industry, it incentivized continued activity in this crucial sector. For our schools, it helped to make sure that students and staff had extra spending measures when they returned to the classroom. There is \$11 million in this budget allotted to COVID spending that remains unallocated so that we can continue to respond to the needs of the territory as they arise.

Beyond spending related to COVID-19, there are changes that will make a difference in the lives of Yukoners long after the pandemic impacts fade.

Putting People First — The final report of the comprehensive review of Yukon's health and social programs and services was released this summer because, pandemic or not, we know that Yukoners want improvements to our health care system. Through our supplementary estimates, we are

committing \$1.7 million for our government's initial actions in the implementation of this report. Those actions include but are not limited to: providing increased medical travel supports; a new nurse practitioner in Carmacks; enhancements to Yukon's pharmaceutical programs; and expanding the implementation of the IHealth information network. Modernizing and integrating our health care system is essential now more than ever.

We are also seeing new and increased funding agreements for things like early learning and childcare because we recognize that, to kickstart our economy, we need to support Yukon parents who want and need to get back to work. We also know that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women. Affordable childcare is one way to offset this reality.

The supplementary estimates also show added funding for many other projects, from school council elections to emergency road-washout repairs.

For programs and services that help some of our most vulnerable populations — like the Victim Services family information liaison unit, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, and the Yukon strategy on MMIWG2S+, or funding for disability services to increase the volume of flu vaccines — we are maintaining the services that Yukoners expect, expanding our programs to deal with the growing population, and ensuring safety and economic stability during the pandemic. We recognize the importance of balancing our economy with the health and safety of our residents, and we are implementing programs to put Yukoners and Yukon businesses on a sure track to recovery.

I would like to now turn to the supplementary estimates in terms of capital spending decreases. The overall \$3.7-million decrease is due to delays in the Dempster fibre project. Permitting delays meant that most of the work that was expected on this project in 2020-21 will be deferred to the next fiscal year; however, this is offset by moving forward with the Mayo-to-McQuesten transmission project and the battery storage project — two significant and critical Yukon Energy projects to give Yukon added reliability and sustainability. Together, there is \$9.3 million allocated for these projects.

These projects are indicative of a growing territory that has growing needs. These needs are being responded to with actions such as expanding the IHealth information network and finishing additional work at the Whistle Bend continuing care facility.

Mr. Speaker, there are also changes to recoveries included in the first supplementary estimates; particularly, there is an increase of \$59 million for operation and maintenance recoveries. Over 90 percent of this is related to funding from COVID-19 programs and services. That includes funding measures in schools to protect students and staff, financial support for lower income workers for the delivery of essential services, funding for sports organizations affected by COVID, funding to keep flights coming in and out of the territory, and of course much of the funding for health care services.

On the capital side, there is a decrease in recoveries. As I mentioned, the Dempster fibre project permitting delays mean that recoverable funds expected to come back this year will also

be pushed to next year; however, new areas of capital spending will take advantage of federal funding opportunities. New energy investments are 100-percent recoverable and nearly two-thirds of the investments in the IHealth information network are recoverable. We will continue to invest in this territory and take advantage of opportunities that can build capacity for a growing Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, it will be no surprise that there are also forecasted changes to revenue in the first supplementary estimates for 2020-21. The COVID-19 pandemic did not just have an impact on how much it cost for supports but also in how much we took in. We are forecasting a \$10-million decrease in own-source revenue from taxes and from fees. That's from collecting less personal, corporate, and fuel oil taxes. As well, there will be fewer revenues from the fees associated with outdoor pursuits as fewer tourists were able to visit. This includes camping, hunting, fishing, and wilderness tourism fees. Some industry fees — including aviation and mining — have been waived, decreasing those potential revenues as well. We recognized early that one way we could support local businesses and industry was not just by providing funding but rather by eliminating some of the costs in the form of fees.

Another example of creative ideas to help Yukoners in these uncertain times: the interim outlook. Sorry, I'm going to pivot to the interim outlook.

Mr. Speaker, this week, we also released the *2020-21 Interim Fiscal and Economic Update*. It reveals that, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yukon has seen significantly higher levels of spending to support public health measures and help to mitigate economic disruptions.

Despite increasing funds from the federal government, impacts of the pandemic — including spending on public health measures — are the primary driver of a downward revision in the surplus projections. The result is a forecasted deficit in 2020-21 of \$31.6 million.

There was a lot of talk this summer from the opposition about the spending that was taking place this summer — talk of a huge supplementary to come, with no oversight. I find it interesting to note that this supplementary — during a pandemic no less — is still smaller than some that were tabled by the previous government.

A key priority of this Liberal government has been to implement strong financial management after years of uncontrolled spending. The strong pillars this government has implemented in the last four years remain in place.

As with most jurisdictions across Canada and around the world, Yukon has seen a decline in economic activity in recent months. While still positive, Yukon's real GDP is now forecasted to grow by 0.8 percent, below the March forecast of 6.2 percent. We are one of only two jurisdictions forecasting positive GDP growth for this year. That economic growth remains positive due to the underlying momentum in the economy that predates the pandemic — particularly, increased production from Eagle Gold, Minto, and later this year, we hope, from Keno Hill mines.

In order to keep Yukoners safe, mandatory self-isolation requirements have restricted Canadians and international visitors. This public health measure has resulted in a significant reduction of the 2020 tourism season, which also translated to a reduction in Yukon's real GDP forecasts.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic is adding a greater uncertainty to the outlook. Factors like the duration of the outbreak, the potential for a second wave, and the timing of vaccine development are all key factors and they continue to impact Yukon's economy.

I would like to conclude my remarks by reflecting on the last six months. I know that it has not been easy for Yukoners. Yukoners have been isolated from friends and family, unable to easily leave the territory or welcome guests. The concern over the virus has been real, even as measures have prevented any significant community spread locally, but these measures that kept our territory healthy and safe have a lasting impact on many local businesses, especially the tourism sector.

I want to acknowledge that much of the credit for a successful response to the global crisis begins with the people of this territory. To citizens who have been following the "safe six", to businesses that have adapted to new ways to serve customers, and to our essential front-line workers who keep us safe and provided for us all throughout this, I want to say my most sincere thank you.

Mr. Speaker, changes to our supplementary estimates have helped those hit the hardest and we will continue to look for ways to help those who are struggling. We have had to evolve our efforts and measures over the last six months and we will continue to evolve.

So while the first supplementary estimate for 2020-21 is large, it speaks to an even larger and uncertain issue: a worldwide pandemic. It will not go on forever, but we need to make responsible financial decisions in order to come out of it on the other end strong. This is not the time to be tentative in our approach to spending. It is the time for the government to support its people.

We are on a good path forward, even if it is not the path we expected to be on just six months ago. Today, our Liberal government presents a responsible first supplementary estimate, and I invite members to treat Committee of the Whole as an opportunity to request further details on any of the areas included in any of the line items and any of the supplementary estimates — and I thank them all. I thank everybody for the time today. I look forward to other members' comments as we go through second reading here today.

Mr. Cathers: In rising to this as Official Opposition Finance critic, first of all — since it is my first opportunity of the fall to get up and discuss the budget — I would like to thank my constituents in Lake Laberge for their continued confidence and support in my job as MLA for Lake Laberge and to thank my colleagues for their support in my role as Finance critic and in my other roles I perform on behalf of the Official Opposition caucus.

I would like to note that 2020 has been, for many people, a tough year. I recognize, and my colleagues recognize, that

while the year has been challenging for everyone, these tough times have been much harder for some people than for others. It's probably fair to say that almost everyone has adjusted their life to some degree because of the pandemic and its restrictions. For some, it has meant much more.

For some, it has meant a loss of income and the possible loss of the future that they had planned. For many business owners who had approached the 2020 season with optimism, they are now facing an uncertain future, and some don't know whether or not their businesses will be able to survive this pandemic.

In these unprecedented times, while we recognize that there is a need for government action, including public health restrictions and increased spending, it is also a time that, along with that unprecedented spending and unprecedented restrictions, there should come increased public input and public consultation and increased democratic oversight and debate. At the start of this pandemic, if we take it back briefly to when the Premier tabled the budget — he gave the budget speech in March of this year — the Premier and his colleagues had been very slow to recognize that there was a global health crisis emerging. The budget speech contains some remarks that were outdated when they were delivered, claiming that the Yukon's economy is strong — for example, on page 4 — and talking about record tourism numbers and predicting that these would only grow in 2020, which, again, it did on page 5 of that budget speech.

Now, recognizing what was happening, my colleagues and I asked the government a number of questions during the very short Spring Sitting, before it was wrapped up due to the pandemic restrictions. At that time, we saw in the first week the Premier and his colleagues largely batten down the hatches, claiming that it would be business as usual and defending their projections rather than realizing what was going on all around us.

In saying that, I am quite aware that the government was caught off guard and it was simply slow to recognize what was occurring. I recognize that, in fact, for many people — whether elected or unelected — the events this year have caught people by surprise and it has taken time to wrap their heads around them, but a pandemic is not an excuse to avoid accountability. It is not an excuse to physically distance yourself from democracy or to refuse to call the Legislative Assembly for half a year. With unprecedented spending should come increased public consultation, democratic oversight, debate, and accountability — not less. With unprecedented restrictions on people's lives should come increased public consultation, democratic oversight, debate, and accountability — not less.

When business owners were seeing their income hit hard by the impacts of the pandemic and seeing the very future of their businesses and in some cases their families who depend on them for their livelihoods in doubt, there should be increased public consultation, democratic oversight, debate, and accountability — not less.

When parents are worried that changes to the education system related to the pandemic may cause serious harm to the education of their children and are worried about their kids and

their future, there should come increased public consultation, democratic oversight, debate, and accountability — not less.

When substance abuse issues are growing and more people are experiencing negative impacts to their mental health related to the pandemic, there should be increased public consultation, democratic oversight, debate, and accountability — not less.

In talking about the supplementary this year, again, we do recognize that some increased spending related to the pandemic is of course required. We agree as well that some public health restrictions were needed. But because — as I noted in beginning my remarks — this is affecting people differently, it's important to recognize that government doesn't have all the answers and certainly the Liberal caucus does not have all the answers, nor do they even understand fully the impacts this is having on some Yukon citizens. As members will know, at the outset of the pandemic, the Official Opposition proposed an all-party committee to deal with the pandemic and the response to it and that suggestion was rebuffed by the government.

Again, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I continue to listen to Yukoners who are affected by this. As I mentioned, the effects are different. The rules that are working well for some businesses are not working well for others. We've heard from Yukoners who think that the rules should be more open, allowing more activity, and those who are concerned about the public health risks under the current rule and would rather see other measures taken. What's important in a democracy is that everyone's view and everyone's livelihood — everyone's life — matters. So the government did not need to be fearful of public consultation or democratic debate, nor did they need to fear Question Period during the summer. These are opportunities to debate what is a substantial health crisis but also a substantial economic one.

In the supplementary estimates, the Premier downplayed the increased spending and minimized it, hoping that people would not read the total amount and do the calculations on it. If we look at the two budget bills that were presented on Thursday of this Fall Sitting, the total increased spending when you tally up the additional \$7.6 million that was spent in the 2019-20 fiscal year and the increased spending in this budget here now, with an increase of \$114.8 million, that in total is a \$122.4-million increase since the spring of this year. \$122.4 million is a large number, and for some people, it may not immediately relate to their lives, but if you compare that to the Yukon population of 40,000, that is over \$3,000 in increased spending per person in the territory. That is over \$3,000 that, if it's not coming from the federal government, it is coming from deficit spending. Those matters are very relevant to the public.

While I want to note that we do not disagree that some of this spending was absolutely necessary, when we see numbers touted about such as \$33 million in increased spending in health related to the pandemic for which we do not yet have a reasonable breakdown, we are left, on behalf of Yukoners, having to remind the government that this is the public's money. It is not just the business of MLAs but in fact of every citizen in the territory as to where the money is being spent and how it is being spent. People deserve to see a breakdown.

Also, at a time like this, the fact that it is a pandemic does not excuse the government from the tough questions about whether it is making the right decisions or whether in some cases it is unnecessarily spending money or spending it inefficiently or wastefully. For example, in the spring, the Liberals yet again increased the size of government by hiring more full-time equivalent positions. This is from the same government that, according to their own statistics, in the first two years of office alone, increased the number of government employees by 10.4 percent. We have seen that as a consistent pattern with every budget.

Every year, there is a significant increase in the number of government positions, while the government bizarrely presents itself on the other hand as getting out of the business of doing business and while taking on areas such as when they unnecessarily entered into cannabis retail — before they eventually backed out in embarrassment — and when they have taken over from NGOs that were offering services and ballooned the Department of Health and Social Services through their inability or unwillingness to work with Many Rivers and the Salvation Army — just to name two examples of the many NGOs this government has had a broken relationship with.

Those increases matter. So again, we see an increase on top of the increase they included in the main estimates this spring; the new plan presented to us now has 88 full-time equivalent positions for government. That is on top of the spring increase and the previous 10.4-percent increase. This is at a time when — while we do recognize that there are new duties that have been created — we have also seen situations where some government employees have seen their duties change substantially. So we have the obligation to ask, on behalf of Yukoners, why those increases are necessary and could they not have been accomplished within existing resources, including through people who could potentially be doing slightly different duties related to the pandemic.

I want to note that, in addition to the private sector, I do recognize that this has been hard on government employees in some areas as well. It has caused, for people across the territory, great adjustments to their life and to their daily routine, and especially for parents and those caring for other family members, it has required dramatic adjustments to their routines that have made it tough for many people. I don't dismiss the challenges that anyone is facing, but I would point out in this that government — again, we have seen the pattern of the Liberal government to increase spending every time it turns around. While some of that spending, in every budget bill we have seen, has always had a purpose to it, we have always been able to see areas where that spending was unnecessary. In this case — though we don't yet fully have the breakdown — increased spending of \$3,000 per every man, woman, and child in the territory is significant. When we see the number of those positions that are increased in areas that have nothing to do with the pandemic, again, we're left questioning why this Premier's and this Liberal government's reflexive response to every situation seems to be to grow government and to increase spending.

Ultimately, someone has to pay the bill for the deficit spending. If the federal government is not increasing spending related to the pandemic, it is coming from Yukoners in the future. You cannot simply spend that money without having to pay that money back at some point in time. Someone has to take responsibility for that.

So, Mr. Speaker, in this area — while we're concerned about the increased deficit spending, we're concerned as well that again — though the government has modified their talking points since the spring and they have recognized that the tourism sector and some sectors of the economy have taken a major hit — actually, a massive hit — we still see them bragging about the GDP forecast while businesses are closing.

If a certain sector — if operating mines are leading to an increase in the GDP, of course that has positive impacts. But for businesses that are not benefitting from it — for businesses — especially those in the tourism sector — that are dependent on a tourism season that basically never happened and are wondering whether they can keep the lights on until next year — if there is even a tourism season next summer and next winter — these people are concerned.

The government's rhetoric, quite frankly, is out of touch — to go on about how rosy the picture is here in the territory and how well our GDP compares to other jurisdictions and to fail to recognize that's pretty cold comfort if you're operating a business or used to be employed by a business that is in a sector of the economy that took a massive hit this year and you're seriously questioning what you are going to be able to do to feed your family and to pay your mortgage, and if you're a business owner, to keep that business running.

So we're looking for more than platitudes from this government. We're looking for the government to actually live up to the rhetoric about cooperation and actually walk the walk instead of just talking the talk. As we noted in March, at the outset of when this was officially declared a pandemic, we were prepared to work with the government collaboratively — and we are now — to try to work together in the best interest of Yukoners, recognizing that collectively our territory — and the world — is facing a health and economic crisis that has not existed in our lifetimes — and indeed, we have to go back to events like the flu pandemic in 1918, the Great Depression, or wartime situations to find examples that are even comparable in terms of the turmoil that they create.

So again, there is an opportunity to work together. The government has talked the talk at every turn but has failed to follow that up with real action and a real willingness to work with us.

We have seen other areas related to the government's misuse of the emergency powers under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, ministerial orders that could have been subject to public consultation, either prior to being issued or after the fact — again, noting that we do recognize that there have been times throughout this pandemic, especially at the beginning, when quick action was necessary — but as we are into month 7 of the pandemic, there is no excuse for the lack of public consultation. There is no excuse for the lack of consultation

directly with businesses that are affected by these provisions and with citizens who are affected by these provisions.

Government could be asking people, “What is working and what we can do better?” While it would not be possible, of course, to keep everyone happy, government could be listening. For a party — a government — that campaigned on a promise of “Be Heard”, the lack of willingness to follow through on that, the lack of willingness to work with other parties has been disappointing — not surprising, but disappointing.

We saw as well this summer the government quietly issuing a press release announcing that the Yukon’s debt limit had doubled from \$400 million to \$800 million. This is despite the fact that the Yukon had used only about half of the previous debt limit. We know that the request was made in secret by the territorial Liberal government and it would allow them to saddle future generations of Yukoners with this debt — a massive amount of debt — without prior public debate or democratic accountability. The fact that the Premier asked the federal government to double the debt limit despite repeatedly denying in this House prior to that that he had any interest in doing that is, in my view, neither accountable, democratic, or transparent.

If the government wishes to borrow an unprecedented amount of money — whether related to the pandemic or some other priorities — it really does require debate, because future generations of Yukoners should not have to pay the bill for this government’s spending, especially if that spending is not subject to the prior scrutiny of Yukon citizens and the Yukon Legislative Assembly. A decision to burden future generations with massive debt should never be made behind closed doors by just the seven members of the Liberal Cabinet. Yukoners deserve better from their government.

I would point out that the number of times — we have come up with a list — no less than three times — of when the Premier assured this House that he had no interest in increasing the debt cap. Then, of course, they didn’t follow through. He did exactly the opposite of what he promised.

Again, I want to touch on the fact related to not just the spending contained in this budget, but also the decisions made by the government during their holiday this summer when they were not being accountable to the public in the Legislative Assembly. Yukoners were gravely concerned about the impact that these measures were having on their lives, including Yukoners who have taken the government to court, believing that the actions were unconstitutional. Ultimately, we continue to argue that people have a right to see the information, that there is a right to informed public debate, and that there should be democratic oversight and debate of the decisions government makes rather than seeing the seven members of the Liberal Cabinet make the decisions about what spending is required and what public health measures are required and fail to involve the Yukon public during a time when we are facing a crisis that we have not faced in our lifetimes.

As I stated before, while there is a need for increased spending and while there is a need for public health restrictions, with unprecedented spending and with unprecedented public

health restrictions should come increased debate and increased accountability, not less debate and less accountability.

Mr. Speaker, there are some positive things contained within this budget. Again, we do recognize that there are some areas where the government’s response to the pandemic has been good, but in the areas where it could be improved, that public debate and dialogue are important parts of improving it. Unfortunately, the government has not been listening.

I will give a few examples where I am pleased to see increases here or continued spending in this budget. There is the 1Health project — the Meditech replacement project. It is positive to see it moving forward. I do have to remind the Premier and the Health minister that this is an area that they were slow to act on. I have been raising it on behalf of our caucus and Yukoners since the spring of 2017.

We are pleased to see that the government is finally moving to increase the medical travel rates after over two years of delaying in response to requests from the Yukon Party Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I would note that we will get into some of the details of this budget in Committee, but I would like to just briefly touch on a matter that is both a constituency matter and is related to the success of the agriculture sector. Government, despite being very quick to shut businesses down during the pandemic, has been slow to respond and recognize when businesses are in need of the government working with another level of government to help them, and that is in the area of the impact particularly to the agriculture sector, but also to other businesses in my riding as well as south and west of town outside of city limits that have been impacted by the sudden lack of availability of commercial garbage service. That is related to an area where, if the Yukon government were working as they should be with the City of Whitehorse, this problem wouldn’t exist.

As the ministers know, over 70 percent of the Yukon’s farms, including a number of our largest producers, are in my riding of Lake Laberge, and many are directly affected by this change that is preventing them from having commercial waste-hauling service. Again, for anyone who is not aware, that was at their own cost. They paid for that service, but despite the fact that it was a month ago that I wrote to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Minister of Community Services about this problem — I know it has been raised with them directly as well by people prior to that. While I have received a response from the city about this issue, I have yet to receive a response to my letters from either the Minister of Community Services or the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, despite the fact that this is a problem directly impacting farmers and other businesses, including tourism businesses that had already taken a hard hit this year — and retailers — and it’s impacting services to residential customers, including creating a risk of increased wildlife attraction due to the lack of waste-disposal options. We see again a government that has been quick to shut businesses down but slow to act when businesses need help.

Mr. Speaker, I would just encourage them to recognize the issue. As I asked earlier in my initial letter — which was much

more collaborative in tone because I was hoping they would listen, recognize the urgency of it, and act — all I am suggesting is that the government work with the city to come up with an agreement that allows this service to continue. During the time that they have failed to act, that waste has to go somewhere. Seeing it burned or dumped in ditches is not a very environmentally responsible solution.

Again, Mr. Speaker, government needs to work with these businesses and work with others who have been affected by the pandemic to respond to their needs and to balance public health restrictions and other situations with the needs of the private sector rather than simply sticking to their talking points in Question Period, reading from budget speeches and supplementary budget speeches that tell us all how rosy the situation is in the territory because of comparing GDP numbers to GDP from other situations. It is time for the government to get out of their ivory tower and listen to Yukoners.

I will leave most of my comments on the budget until later. I look forward to hearing more in Committee. A significant amount of the information that we rely on to scrutinize the budget was just provided to us late this morning, so in some cases, we are still analyzing the information that we have received. We are concerned, of course, that the government has made a downward revision to the forecast deficit of \$31.6 million.

We are pleased that there is a more realistic assessment than there was in the spring about the potential for problems related to surges in infection rates throughout the autumn and winter, which could require extended public health restrictions and additional need for economic and financial relief. Just for the reference of Hansard, I am quoting from page 2 of the *Interim Fiscal and Economic Outlook*.

Another area that I am concerned about is the assumption in the government's projection for future years about increased GDP growth, including the recovery of the tourism sector. We have yet to see information presented that really backs up that optimism with information.

I recognize that, for every government, this is a time of change. It is difficult to fully understand the impacts of something as unpredictable as this pandemic. That being said, when government is providing predictions and projections — including when they're spending into the red today and assuming that, in future years, they'll be able to pay it back — the public does have a right to detailed information about how government is coming to those assumptions. While hope is important, hope is not a solid enough basis for future projections.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask, in wrapping up my remarks, that we see more detailed information coming from the government related to the increased spending, including where they have seen reductions in certain areas that have offset some of the increases and where reallocation between departments has occurred. I would again note that we've seen a significant increase in this budget unrelated to the pandemic and that of course is concerning.

Another area that I would like to highlight is the fact that there has been an impact on people in that increased Internet

usage has become a very common thing across the territory. As was debated earlier in the House and as has been the subject of a letter sent by the Leader of the Yukon Party to the federal minister regarding the coming cessation of Xplornet services, this is affecting hundreds of Yukoners, including people in my riding, placer miners throughout the territory, people with outfitting and tourism camps, and many others. I have constituents who are just out on the Mayo Road area or in Ibex Valley who are dependent on Xplornet right now — to see these people without an option, in some cases — because many of the people who will be losing the service do not have cell service and do not have the option of accessing Northwestel's direct services.

It also relates to the long-standing request and proposal coming from the Yukon Party Official Opposition to the Liberal government that government invest in working with the private sector to expand cell service to areas throughout the territory that are not currently served. Unfortunately, we've heard a lot of platitudes and have seen absolutely no response on that area.

Within my riding, the unserved areas where people have asked us to bring forward a request for cell service to the government repeatedly include Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake, and areas in the Ibex Valley that don't have proper service. There are areas within the Member for Klwane's riding — that includes Mendenhall and Champagne — and in the Member for Watson Lake's riding — that includes Junction 37. Again, these are areas where hundreds of people throughout the territory are needing communication opportunities and are forced, in some cases, to rely on satellite service that may be ending at the end of the year without having the opportunity for cell service or the availability of service through Northwestel.

Unfortunately, we see a Liberal government that has been long on platitudes and very light on action in this area. People who are asking for cell service in their areas and in their communities would like to see action, not words. People who are losing Xplornet service — it is good to hear that the government is attempting to lobby the company to come up with a solution, but whether that succeeds or not, there are still people who are without cell service and have been asking for it repeatedly, while we see the government spending money needlessly in areas that have nothing to do with the priorities of Yukon citizens.

We see other areas, such as — again, touching on an issue that is important to my constituents and to people in the riding of Watson Lake — the Minister of Highways and Public Works at the moment is bizarrely proceeding with installing more street lights than my constituents want to see on the corner of the Alaska Highway at the Mayo Road intersection by the Cousins Airfield Road while meanwhile turning down the request by 370-some residents of the Watson Lake area who would like to see street lights on the Robert Campbell Highway.

Listening to the public is an important part of making good government decisions. I would hope that the minister would reconsider that matter and recognize that there is an easy and obvious solution to replace the lighting in my riding at a level comparable to what it was before, which would make people

there happier, and an opportunity to respond to requests that have been made for two years — it might even be three years — by the people of Watson Lake for increased lighting for safety in their area.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to just talk as well about another area in terms of the government's projections for future GDP growth and the economy. They appear to be making assumptions about the timing of when a COVID-19 vaccine will be available as well as its viability. We don't have a lot of detail yet on what they're basing those assumptions on. Again, we recognize that government — that every government is to some extent struggling with predicting exactly what the impacts of this pandemic will be; however, we believe that the public has a right to the best available information the government has about what assumptions they're basing their projections on — whether it relates to vaccine viability and availability or to whether the tourism sector will recover due to the potential impacts to the cruise ship market, to name one, as well as international travel, to name another.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will wrap up my remarks for the moment. I look forward to hearing other remarks from my colleagues, and there are a number of other issues — including related to individual departments — that I will look forward to touching on either in general debate on the budget or on those individual line items.

In conclusion, I would say what we're looking to see from this government is more information, more accountability, and more transparency.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today to share my thoughts on the supplementary estimates in this House for all Yukoners.

In particular, I am deeply honoured to have the opportunity to represent my community of Vuntut Gwitchin to speak to the members of my riding, my home, about this supplementary budget and what it means to them, this territory, and their government.

In all the work that I do, I will always bring an indigenous perspective, indigenous values, and indigenous commitments. The time that I give to Yukon and to Yukoners will always be with the focus on reconciliation and on appropriate supports and programs.

The time away from family, the time away from my community, and the time away from the land that I love to do the work in shaping the fundamental changes of Yukon is necessary. It is necessary for a better tomorrow and for a better future for the people of my community and for all Yukoners.

I want to just start by acknowledging the public servants for coming in day in and day out, for working virtually and showing up every day because they care. They care about services for Yukoners. They care about essential supports for Yukoners.

I want to acknowledge the Minister of Community Services and his efforts. Every week, he has reached out to the communities. He has worked with Yukon First Nation chiefs. He has worked with executive directors. He has worked with the municipalities.

With respect to some of the comments — slow to respond to a recognized crisis — I would say that we acted very appropriately and in a very timely fashion. We did not play down the budget. We did not play down our responsibilities. In fact, 25 percent of the budget from last year went toward COVID expenses. We had to act quickly.

We just came off of a Yukon Forum three days ago. It was the 14th one that we have had in our term in office, compared to the previous government. That shows that we are committed to listening. We are committed to partnerships. We are not downplaying anything. We are working in collaboration with our communities.

As the Minister of Health and Social Services, Environment, and Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, I recognize the privilege that I have been afforded to do this work. My work will continue to be guided by the realities of my constituents, and I thank them deeply for their voice and their support.

These past seven months have been unprecedented, and even in the midst of responding to the COVID-19 health pandemic, work has continued on the issues that matter most to Yukoners, and that work will not stop — it can't, because we have come so far.

In four years, we are now in a place when prevention, preventive care, and people-centred health care are possible, where housing solutions are collaborative and ideas become results and where, for the first time, Yukon has an environmental road map for a clean future.

Finding the good is always possible in times of deep change, and the pandemic has required us to adapt and innovate new ways to deliver programs and services across all departments. Much of the work already underway was quickly accelerated by the COVID-19 health crisis, which overnight demanded the need for more virtual health care options, greater supports for preventive health care, and improved access to daycare for parents.

At the same time, we saw an increased demand on our health and social systems. We saw a dramatic increase in the use of Yukon's parks and campgrounds. So our government responded to the COVID-19 crisis. We have also picked up the pace on our charted course, and that is to ensure that we have better supports for Yukoners. The work is reflected in these supplementary estimates, which shows how our support nets got wider quickly as we launched a whole-of-government response to the pandemic.

It is also important to acknowledge what this budget doesn't reflect, and that is public servants who adapted and took on more — such as environmental enforcement and inspection officers who contributed heavily to the front-line work with border checkpoints or the health care workers who took on new positions and duties to help our territory respond to COVID-19.

I am so humbled and grateful for the work of Yukon government public servants. As members of the Liberal caucus, we have all worked tirelessly to collaborate on the right response. Deputy ministers and their staff were right there with us. Significant challenges were faced by all departments this

year as, globally and locally, we attempted to respond to COVID-19.

Our government continues to strive toward citizen-centred, person-centred values, while ensuring that our budget is spent in a way that supports Yukoners to lead healthy, happy lives. It was money well spent, and it is worth acknowledging that Yukon government staff have done what they have done and continue to do an incredible job of protecting Yukoners from the threat of COVID-19.

More than ever, we will continue to work as a team to support Yukoners and respond as one government. Our government — and the Department of Health and Social Services — considers the health and well-being of Yukoners to be of paramount importance. Our financial commitments acknowledge this. The pandemic response required new spending for items like the COVID-19 response unit and isolation centre, PPEs for our critical care workers, COVID-19 testing, and a respiratory centre. These supplementary estimates provided for a comprehensive and coordinated program and services to meet people's needs at all stages of their lives. Reports and actions such as *Putting People First*, aging in place, and *Embracing the Children of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* and our response to the recommendations of the Blackjack inquest all show that reinvesting in and revolutionizing our health system is a priority for this government.

Meanwhile, though, we forged ahead with the *Putting People First* action plan, which sees us working to increase medical travel subsidies, the implementation of the IHealth information network, the development of options for universal childcare, and much more.

Already we have a nurse practitioner accessible in Mayo and Pelly, with more to come. There have been enhancements to the vaccine program, increased accessibility to them through expansion of the pharmacists' scope of practice, and we now lead the country in supports for type 1 diabetes as the first jurisdiction in Canada to fully fund constant glucose monitors.

Our departments have worked extremely hard to ensure that First Nation children are cared for by family and community whenever possible, rather than being brought into care. This step forward should be celebrated even while we strive to do better through our partnerships in amending the *Child and Family Services Act*.

We have been expanding mental health services, improving access in the communities, and are in the midst of hiring staff to implement a territory-wide midwifery program.

Mental health services are one of many examples of where our previous work has served us well through the pandemic. When I took office, there were two rural mental health support workers; now we have four mental wellness and substance use hubs serving rural Yukon. We have worked hard to ensure that those who are struggling in our communities do not face additional hurdles in accessing services.

While we all acknowledge that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter faces many challenges, we have brought together a number of social supports under one roof. Mental wellness and substance use services, Emergency Medical Services

paramedic supports, the psychiatric outreach team, and others are working toward Housing First strategies for those in need. The issue facing the shelter are historic, community-wide, and systemic. It will take our community to acknowledge and address this situation. We consider it a priority, and we are doing our part. This summer, we released our community safety plan, and developments continue with our partners on this and other fronts. Yukoners have sent a clear message that housing is a priority, and we are listening.

I want to just say, Mr. Speaker, that as I'm speaking, there are members in this Legislative Assembly using profanities, and I can hear it very clearly. I would please acknowledge that this language be refrained from as I'm speaking about our most vulnerable citizens in our community and the importance of the health and well-being of Yukoners. I would please ask that the language be refrained from being used in this House.

Yukoners sent a clear message. In keeping with my promise to find collaborative solutions, we now have 350 affordable units at various stages of completion and construction throughout the territory, resulting from our housing initiative fund. We have over 600 units that we put in the market in the last three and a half years.

In keeping with the housing action plan, aging in place, and *Putting People First*, we are happy to be partnering with local businesses and governments on the construction of Normandy Manor, which fills an important gap in the housing continuum, meeting the needs of seniors who want housing with support services such as meals and activities.

We also continue to partner with the Challenge Cornerstone mixed-use project, which will soon provide 53 units in downtown Whitehorse, 46 of which will be affordable rental units.

Underway as we speak, and helping us to achieve the goals of our clean future, is our 47-unit community housing development. This development is being built to the highest energy standards possible and follows the leadership in energy and environmental design, or LEED, energy ratings. Ten of these units will be barrier-free, and all of them will support clients across the housing continuum, from homelessness to affordable rental.

Again, this was all work that continued despite our required response to COVID demands, which prompted actions such as the rent-assist program that provides supports to over 150 households to ensure that no one lost their housing due to lost income during the pandemic.

The pandemic has also required us to adapt and innovate new ways to deliver programs and services across all departments. Yukoners were ready to take advantage of this summer's staycation, and once campgrounds opened, they quickly packed up and headed outdoors. The Department of Environment adapted by delivering online education and events rather than in-person gatherings and encouraged clients to use the online system for hunting and camping permits. The demand for clean, safe, and quiet campgrounds continues to grow, and it is clear that this is an important topic for Yukoners.

Guided by the Yukon Parks Strategy, we will continue to invest in our campgrounds and parks to support local economic

recovery and a positive camping experience. Within the next five years, a campground near Whitehorse will be built with 150 new campsites. The strategy sets the long-term direction for Yukon's territorial parks system over the next 10 years and it outlines the values of how we manage our system of parks along with First Nations and Inuvialuit partners.

Our health and well-being is holistic. It has been particularly important for Yukoners to have space to get outside during COVID. Yukoners want healthy outdoor spaces and thriving, vibrant landscapes for our future generations to enjoy.

As northerners, we can see and feel that the climate is changing. It is a priority for this government to take part in the global shift to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, build a greener economy, and fuel our lives with clean and reliable energy. Last month, we proudly released *Our Clean Future*, an ambitious territory-wide plan that sets out a road map for our long-term response to the climate change emergency and puts us on a course to reduce Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2030. These ambitious targets include increasing renewable electricity on Yukon's main grid to 97 percent and increasing renewable heating in Yukon buildings to 50 percent.

Through 131 specific actions, we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance energy security, prepare for the impacts of our changing climate, and employ Yukoners in the green economy. The strategy outlines clear targets, timelines, and evaluation criteria. We also added a new target to reach net zero emissions for Yukon's entire economy by 2050. We look forward to continuing to work with our partner governments and our communities that are championing initiatives and that have also contributed their own actions to our clean future.

Over the next decade, the Government of Yukon, in partnership with the Government of Canada, will invest over \$500 million to implement this strategy and create new jobs in our green economy. I am proud of the work undertaken by the Liberal caucus to lead the government-wide efforts to respond to COVID-19 while still providing services despite the uncertainty that the pandemic has caused. Our government continues to strive toward citizen-centred — person-centred — values while ensuring that our budget is spent in a way that supports Yukoners to lead healthy and happy lives.

Mahsi' cho.

Mr. Istchenko: It is my pleasure to rise, as the MLA for the great riding of Kluane, to speak to Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

I first want to thank my family and friends for their support and often their guidance and trust. I would also like to thank the constituents of Kluane for their support. In my over nine years representing this riding, I have learned a lot and seen a lot of people do a lot of great things.

This is a riding made up of resilient, hard-working Yukoners. Never has that been more evident than this year, when we saw our tourism industry and highway traffic industry devastated. The Kluane riding relies heavily on the Alaska Highway to support its economy. We are particularly heavily hit by the ongoing negative impacts caused by the restrictions placed on the economy.

Since the very short Spring Sitting of the Legislature, I have been busy in the riding in a different way than I usually am: meeting with constituents, listening to concerns, and trying to help find solutions. In a regular year, this is the bread and butter of being an MLA. But in 2020, when nothing is normal anymore, this job takes on a very different look. With limitations on gatherings, limitations on meetings, and limitations on everything, it really changes the dynamic of engaging with constituents. This means that our old friend — we all love it — the phone became one of the most important tools of democracy. E-mail use skyrocketed. In fact, I don't think my inbox has ever seen so much activity. Facebook became an even more important tool for reaching out and listening to constituents.

Finally, the word "zoom" — something previously associated with a car commercial — entered everyday use as the number one way to conduct business. In fact, Zoom stopped being the thing you simply downloaded and started being something you did to stay in touch. People just started saying, "Oh, let's Zoom each other." The pandemic sure has changed how we do business as MLAs in rural ridings. In fact, to say that things have changed and that it has been a challenge is an understatement.

Every day, I know that this has been the case for all my Yukon Party colleagues. We have received questions, concerns, and issues from constituents. Many of these issues would have been best addressed if the Legislature had been sitting, of course, so that we could ask the government direct questions for answers and help improve the government's response to this pandemic. As you know, the Liberal government refused to let the Legislature sit. Every other jurisdiction in the country sat or had committees meet to allow for democratic oversight. The Yukon's Liberal government instead shut it down. They wouldn't even let committees meet to discuss the pandemic.

The Chair of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments flat out refused to convene that committee despite several requests from both opposition parties to do so. This unfortunately reduced the opposition to only be able to send letters to ministers.

As any Yukoner who has tried to get a hold of a minister through e-mail or letter can attest, they're not exactly speedy in their replies. In fact, I think I had one letter this summer that took the government nearly two months to respond to. I have many letters that haven't been responded to yet. That's just one of a few examples.

These are all issues related to spending actions — and in the case of some, inactions — of government. With the Liberals shutting down the Legislature, with the Liberals shutting down committee work, and with the Liberals delaying and refusing to respond to requests — not just from MLAs but from the general public — in a timely manner, they unfortunately undermine democracy.

If legislatures across Canada, including the Northwest Territories, can find a way to safely meet to allow for democracy to continue, the Yukon can do the same. Democracy is not just something you ignore because the government doesn't perform well in Question Period. We need to be able to

hold the government to account — so that is why I am glad we're back to do this and talk about Bill No. 205 today. Before I get into Bill No. 205, I need to acknowledge all those essential service workers, private sector service workers, and constituents who had to adapt in a hurry to the effects of COVID-19.

I'm so proud of how everyone handled this pandemic in the Kluane area. I'm very confident that we will continue to adapt and carry on with our lives in these changing times. Our RCMP, doctors, nurses, EMS staff, and all our front-line Yukon government, First Nations, municipal staff — I want to thank them for what they do. They adapted and found ways to still provide the service — sometimes having to be creative and innovative, but you got the job done.

To our seniors and those most vulnerable, these times are tough, but we will get through this together. Those who work with our seniors are the best. They sure are. Thank you for taking care of our most important residents.

To the teachers, students, parents — an understatement would be “What a stressful time”. I heard from so many parents and students and teachers. It was a massive job if classes were cancelled, but having access to technology in our homes, you were all getting through it. There were probably a few hiccups along the way — I know — but you did it. Of course, you have to say something to the graduating class of 2020. It was a lot different from anyone else's, but we found a way out there to celebrate and it was awesome. Thanks to everyone for making that happen.

To all the community leaders, thank you for helping to stickhandle through these trying times. We are starting to see the economic impacts of this pandemic. Many of us are very fortunate to have jobs, but many others unfortunately lost their jobs, their businesses, and their savings. That's where this gets real. There are people suffering due to the pandemic. But the riding of Kluane is so dependent on the tourism market. Even today, I just noticed a post on Facebook — one great event in our community that happens in the spring, the bluegrass festival, has been cancelled. That is an economic driver for us.

Unfortunately, through the pandemic, this is where there was a major lack of leadership from the Liberal government. Talk to anyone in the tourism sector in my riding, and they'll tell you that the Minister of Tourism and Culture, in the beginning, was nowhere to be seen. That is what's really disappointing. At the time when the minister was needed the most, she was not there. The advertising campaign to British Columbia was delayed until the industry came out and criticized the Liberal government for being slow to act. This is a bit of a theme with this government: They don't take action until it's a bad news story.

But the tourism industry is innovative. The hard-working people in that industry knew that they couldn't wait for the minister to start taking action, so they started to act on their own. They began to innovate, promote, reinvent, advertise, and support themselves and our other local businesses. It will be awhile before things get back to normal, so we need to adapt to the times. We need to do a better job of building resiliency

within the industry and we need better promotion by the government of local tourism.

My riding, in particular, needs more Yukoners to go there and spend money. Our business community has adapted and done very well, but we need to buy local and we need to support them because they support our communities. As the MLA for Kluane, I will continue to fight for them and hold this government to account. I will continue to pass on ideas and constructive criticism. I've been hearing loud and clear from my constituents that they are not being heard or listened to by the government. Constituents have concerns with how the Liberal government's spending, without legislative scrutiny, will affect them. They also wonder who benefited and who will have to pay for this spending.

A few examples are how much more things will cost within all the increased taxes and fees the Liberals are bringing in during the pandemic. These will make things tougher for businesses in my riding to make a go of it. Things are tough enough, so we should be looking at reducing overall costs for businesses. In fact, some businesses in my riding have reported that they have seen more than a 90 percent — I'll say that again — a 90 percent or more loss of business compared to last year.

Seeing the Liberals mess up for the second time on contracting and delaying phase 3 of municipal infrastructure upgrades disappointed so many in Haines Junction — especially the business community. This would have been the year to make sure that the project went forward. Businesses in town sure could have used that business to help pay the bills. It's also too bad that the Liberals once again have refused to put money into the budget for the north Alaska Highway. The conditions of that road — it is the worst it has been in years. Unfortunately, this lack of attention and priority to this highway is due to the Liberals saying that the north Alaska Highway does not benefit Yukoners — incredible, Mr. Speaker.

Another thing that is frustrating — there are so many in this — is the inability of this Liberal government to build a school in Burwash Landing, even though they have put money in the budget every year. This government is just a government that can't get things done, I guess.

In Bill No. 205, we see an increase of \$19.4 million in economic development. We are going to have a lot of questions in Committee on where the money went and how it helped during an unprecedented time in this world. Health and Social Services has increases of \$43 million. On what and how did the funds get spent when we know that the pandemic is taking a toll on our mental health and almost doubling the deaths due to opioid addiction? An increase in the Department of Tourism and Culture of over \$7 million — how does that help the non-existent tourism industry in the riding of Kluane?

Then again, we have to question the lapse of funds not spent in Education. You know, I think this would have gone up as well. You know how important our education is to our youth.

We will be digging into these questions and many more when we get to Committee of the Whole, but unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we should have been able to dig into these issues throughout the summer. Maybe we could have helped to solve

a lot of the problems that this Liberal government is having, but the Liberals shut down our democracy and our institutions.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I do strongly believe in our small rural towns and the lifestyle. I owe my family, my community, and my constituents thanks for their guidance, as always. Unfortunately, I see a rough ride ahead for my riding in the economic recovery from COVID-19. In more than one way, I see a rough road — I can say that.

I see a government that does not take action and does not make decisions. This is creating uncertainty for the residents of Kluane, so I am going to keep pushing this government to make things better for the riding of Kluane. I want to thank everybody for their time today in this House. God bless.

Mr. Adel: To the constituents of Copperbelt North and the rest of Yukon citizens, I want to start by assuring them that their health and safety is the number one priority of this government. It is on that note that I rise today to speak to Bill No. 205.

2020 has been an exceptionally challenging year for many Yukoners, to say the least. COVID-19 has presented many new challenges, and this government has been working tirelessly to navigate the uncertain path forward. I would like to start off by saying thank you to my fellow MLAs on both sides of the House for their dedication to the well-being and safety of each and every Yukoner. From the hard-working departments to the front-line workers and, of course, the first responders, everyone has a part to play in these troubling times.

In the spring of 2020, this government tabled a surplus budget. The unforeseen circumstances of COVID-19 have impacted the previously tabled budget in a number of ways, and I would like to take some time to touch on how and why. As any responsible government should, this government follows the advice and recommendations of the chief medical officer of health when it comes to addressing this pandemic.

Throughout Yukon's spring and summer, this government took many steps to ensure the safety of Yukoners. The Yukon remained equipped and prepared to respond to COVID-19 by working closely with federal, provincial, and territorial partners to coordinate bulk purchasing of personal protective equipment. The health and safety of our front-line care workers is important to us. We want to ensure that they are provided with the resources they require to ensure the health and safety of the public. This did not come cheap. We have ensured that our health care workers are following protocols for the proper use of PPE to contain the spread of the virus as much as possible. I would like to think that we have been very successful in our efforts. While PPE shortages have been a cause for concern nationally and internationally, Yukon's level of preparedness has been raised.

A concern that I share with many of my constituents is the treatment and care of Yukoners living in long-term care. Our government has remained committed to ensuring that Yukon residents and staff in long-term care homes remain safe and well taken care of. Today, the active numbers of cases in our long-term care homes remains at zero. The success of this achievement cannot be overstated.

Ultimately, the success of this was predicated on the steps we took to protect residents and staff in the early stages of the pandemic, which included restricting visitors and regularly screening staff for COVID-related symptoms. Of course, it would be entirely unreasonable to expect any families from physically visiting their loved ones in long-term care, which is why we took the steps to provide alternative visits such as window visits, video calls, and outdoor visits.

Mr. Speaker, many Yukoners raised concerns over medical travel during this pandemic. Yukoners want to know that our government is committed to ensuring access to treatment and care when medical services are not available in their home community. Our government made sure that the medical travel program remained operational and available to Yukoners through our response to the pandemic. We continue to work closely with provincial partners so that Yukoners can continue to access out-of-territory care as required.

Our commitment doesn't stop there. The Department of Health and Social Services recently introduced Kelowna and Victoria as gateway cities that provide additional options for Yukoners to access care as required. Mr. Speaker, these added options provide flexibility for seeking medical services in areas closer to potential family and friends for additional support if needed.

The *Putting People First* report put forward many recommendations including the importance of improved coordination of medical travel. The government has delivered. The medical travel subsidy will increase. It will also begin on the first day of travel. Of course, this came with a cost. The supplementary is showing a general increase across Health and Social Services of over \$50 million for the delivery of these programs along with the measures taken to preserve Yukoners from the impact of COVID-19. This kind of action speaks volumes.

The pandemic has impacted our economy in many ways. One of the hardest hit sectors, unfortunately, was tourism. We recognize the importance and value of tourism for Yukoners and are committed to supporting the industry through the global pandemic. Canada's tourism GDP is projected to drop by two times more than the national economy. This drop, as would be expected, leaves many of our Yukon tourism-based businesses in jeopardy. This government's response efforts to this blow to our tourism industry was comprised of efforts to stabilize the tourism business by developing relief programs to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 while we made progress toward our recovery phases. The Department of Tourism and Culture works to fund businesses and support initiatives such as the tourism cooperative marketing fund and marketing campaigns targeting BC residents and Yukoners, which encouraged them to explore the Yukon Territory over the summer.

I had several conversations with people who came to the Yukon because of the TV ads that we ran and who spent five to eight weeks here, and they had a marvellous time. It was a great time to show off our territory. This marketing fund was increased by \$1 million to a total of \$1.7 million for 2020-21, and the requirement for a 50-percent equity contribution from applicants was waived.

Sustaining Yukon's tourism industry during a global pandemic is challenging, to say the least, but Yukoners are resilient, and I am sure that they will rise to the challenge. This government took responsible actions, considering the health and wellness of the community in its decision-making process.

I would like now to turn my attention to the housing issues that Yukoners currently face. Recognizing that job losses and financial difficulties were inevitable during a pandemic, this government took the necessary steps to ensure that Yukoners were not left out on the streets. Under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, Yukon government issued a ministerial order for the suspension of evictions of residential tenants. Along with securing tenancy for Yukoners, our government is constantly working toward land development to help with the fast-growing housing market in the Yukon. Most of this government's land and development budget is used to engage private sector contractors for development, with our role being focused on getting land ready for residential or commercial building projects.

As part of this government's housing action plan, we want to provide a variety of different sized lots to encourage the construction of more affordable housing for Yukoners. We recognize that, for younger Yukoners looking to enter the housing market, the current costs for development and purchasing present financial challenges for young families. We want to strike a balance between maintaining a healthy supply of lot inventory across the Yukon without adversely affecting the current markets.

Supporting the Yukon First Nation governments is another key priority in land development and availability. First Nations have shown an interest in using the Yukon Land Titles Office to register settlement lands. This provides unprecedented opportunities for future development for both commercial and residential properties.

This government maintains its commitment to working more closely with Yukon's indigenous people and has approved recommendations to support the amendments of several Yukon First Nation self-government agreements. These agreements allow for the registration of category A and B settlement land in the Yukon Land Titles Office without compromising aboriginal rights and title, which I heard was a primary concern for Yukon's First Nations.

Lastly, I would like to talk a bit out our Youth Directorate, which supports youth programs and services to promote wellness and assist youth in reaching their potential. It stands to reason that, one day, each of us in this House will be replaced by a younger member of society — some sooner than others. It's important that we provide the youth of today with the tools that they need to succeed in the world of tomorrow.

The Youth Directorate provides an annual contribution of over \$1.5 million to organizations and community groups through several funding programs specifically for Yukon's youth. These organizations include: Association franco-yukonnaise, which provides programming for francophone youth; BYTE — Empowering Youth Society, which focuses on empowering youth throughout Yukon and Canada's north; Boys and Girls Club of Yukon, which provides a safe and

supportive drop-in centre for youth; the Heart of Riverdale Community Centre, which focuses on youth programming, citizenship, leadership, and arts development and engages community members across generations; Youth of Today Society, which delivers a safe, nurturing environment for high-risk youth; the youth development asset program, which focuses on activities, training, and employment for youth across 16 Yukon communities, including the Kwanlin Dün First Nation; and the youth investment fund that is dedicated to fund for projects which recognizes the value of community-driven initiatives aimed at marginalized youth 18 and under. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, this government has continued to take a number of important steps for preserving the integrity of Yukoners.

I have taken some time over the summer to interact with my constituents from social distances while riding through the constituency on my bike. It's kind of fun — people are out on the lawn and you get to have a chat and you're not inside the six feet. As always, I'm available at any time for my constituents to listen to their concerns and assist them in any way I can.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to seeing what other members of the House have to say. I will be supporting this supplementary budget.

Ms. Van Bibber: I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family and friends and the constituents of Porter Creek North for their continued support and for the honour I have of representing them in this Legislative Assembly.

It continues to be a trying time for the world, the country, and our Yukon due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is at times confusing, at times scary, and at times comforting to know that we have a small infection rate in our corner of Canada, but without due caution, we could be turned very quickly and those stats could change. I encourage all to get their winter flu shots as well as continue to take the necessary precautions already stated over and over on COVID-19 protocol. This is not a time to relax, as we see in other parts of Canada the rising numbers of infections continue. Although we want to relax and forget this danger, we cannot yet.

The budget adjustments for the current period ending March 31, 2021 — Bill No. 205 — have adjustments to operation and the maintenance budgets for most departments. The Premier stated that most adjustments are due to COVID-19 stresses and therefore there is a need to get money moving quickly, without legislative oversight and scrutiny. Such costs include the COVID-19 assessment centre, the response unit, PPE, contract tracing, daycare supports, financial support and relief programs, and many, many orders under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, or CEMA.

We have not been in this Chamber since late March and now see, for the first time, figures that have been spent and money that has been used however the ruling party has decided. This should be a concern for all Yukoners who believe in the democratic system. To rule out autocratic decisions — or “Premier knows best for us” — we must have the ability to see this as it happens in real time, not months later. To put the onus

on working groups or third-party decision-makers is just not cutting it. The Liberals have made final decisions and must now answer the questions.

Somehow, government still found a way in the middle of a pandemic to grow government. For instance, there is a total of nine additional full-time employees hired as border control for the COVID-19 response. Considering that we understood that employees would be moved from different areas across government to work at the Yukon borders during closures, it is a surprise to see that government had to hire a number of full-time employees to fill these positions. Due to these times of uncertainty, governments of all levels are expected to step forward to assist where possible and I commend those employees who have done that. I commend the NGOs and other non-profit groups who help whenever and wherever possible and are needed more for families that are struggling to make ends meet.

As social functions stopped and fundraising events were cancelled, working or professional musicians and artists are out of work. The list goes on. All need some help. There are so many concerns that arise when we are in this transition period — what is safe and what is worrisome? However, I hope that anyone with concerns will please come forward and let us know. If we don't know what is on your mind, we can't ask the appropriate questions on your behalf.

So I look forward to going through line-by-line debate and asking more pointed questions on this bill and hopefully we will get more concrete answers for all Yukoners.

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill No. 205, which of course I will be supporting.

I would like to begin by saying a truly sincere and heartfelt thank you and mahsi' cho to all the good folks out there in the Mayo-Tatchun riding for all their support and encouragement over the past four years and a special thank you to family and friends for their continued support. It means absolutely everything to me. Without them, I wouldn't be here today pushing forward solutions to the many unique problems that my communities face.

I would like to acknowledge that the Mayo-Tatchun riding is encompassed by the traditional territory of the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Selkirk, and Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations. Their land comprises the largest and most beautiful riding, among many beautiful areas, in our Yukon, and I am privileged to be welcomed there and living on it. Every day is truly a blessing, and in these times of COVID, we kind of tend to forget that, but we live in the best part of the greatest country in the world. We are extremely fortunate to have so much land and so few people. It has allowed us to weather this pandemic much more comfortably than hundreds of millions of people around the world — so, thank you, Creator, for this land.

I would also like to thank this government for its continued hard work and dedication to Yukoners in our communities. I want to give a huge shout-out to NND and all their staff for ensuring that all the traffic that came into Mayo was monitored at their COVID-19 checkstop. This was done to keep everybody in the community safe. It is all about contact tracing;

it wasn't about keeping anybody in or out. It has been very successful, and I just really want to say thank you and how much I appreciate all those people. They all have jobs. They are all suffering from COVID-19. They are all in the same pandemic we are, and they still took on this additional responsibility to ensure that they kept our communities safe.

The kindness that I have witnessed in the communities — all the communities. There is a network — a Yukon helpers network. I don't know if it was established by Ashley Fewer, but she seemed to be the driving force behind it. All you have to do is read some of the ways that Yukoners have reached out and helped each other. It is absolutely heartwarming.

What saddens me is that it took a pandemic to get that level of kindness out there. I know that it exists out there, so it shouldn't take a time of crisis — a war or a pandemic — to make people treat each other this way. I hope that one of the lessons we take home after this — if it ever ends — is that the kindness we show to our fellow human beings throughout situations like this will get us through the absolute darkest and worst of times.

To every Yukoner out there who shared a kindness, thank you so much. You really made me proud to live in this territory — just to see the way that people look after each other.

I want to thank our government for putting a full-time nurse practitioner in Mayo. A huge thank you to Lee Holliday for her service to our community. It was greatly appreciated. I never heard a bad word from anyone in the community. I would also like to welcome our new nurse practitioner, Erinne, and her family. She has been very successful filling some very big shoes that Lee Holliday left behind. I also understand that a nurse practitioner will be added very soon to the Carmacks Health Centre. Thank you to Minister Frost and her team for making that happen.

I do owe a big thank you —

Speaker: Order, please.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: The Member for Mayo-Tatchun will have to be careful. You should name the minister by their portfolio. Thank you.

Mr. Hutton: I would like to thank the Minister of Health and Social Services and her team for the great work that they did in keeping our communities safe.

To front-line workers in every community, thank you so much for providing essential services while putting at risk not only your own health and well-being but that of your loved ones as well. This is a huge sacrifice and one that no one should take lightly. I want you all to know — every one of you, including the truck drivers, custodial workers, and the people I get my groceries from at the store — thank you, absolutely from the bottom of my heart, for doing that work. It just means so much to all of us. We appreciate you and we thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

I am truly grateful for the continued focus on improving the well-being of our citizens in our rural communities, especially during these trying times. The impacts have been

severe in our small communities. The lockdown was hard on a lot of people. People with alcohol and substance abuse problems were already isolated and marginalized. Now some of them are dead. It is just getting worse and worse out there. I really do appreciate the mental health supports that have gone out to those hubs so that they are available in the communities. At least people out there, in this time of darkness and despair, have a place to go and someone to talk to.

2020 has been an exceptionally challenging year for many of us living in the communities. Our world continues to face unprecedented pressures year after year, and this year has been no exception; in fact, it has been a dandy. On March 27, the Yukon government declared a state of emergency under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* in order to respond to the onset of the pandemic — an extremely difficult but absolutely necessary decision when considering the health and safety of our people and our communities with limited infrastructure and support staff.

Keeping communities engaged, informed, and supported through the COVID-19 pandemic is no small feat. I would like to give a big shout-out to the Minister of Community Services for the fantastic work that he has done in making sure that Yukoners have been kept informed. Since March, a community outreach team has been working directly with municipalities and First Nations by providing support and information to our community members throughout the Yukon. Working hand in hand with industry and government departments, they work to ensure that the essential and critical services work required in our communities is closely managed. The state of emergency provides Yukon government with the tools and capacity to ensure the safety and security of Yukoners, by and large.

As a member living in one of the many beautiful communities that our territory provides, I've heard many constituents express their fears and concerns this year. The health protection order was put in place, which mandated individuals entering Yukon from certain jurisdictions to self-isolate for a 14-day period. This provides adequate time for the virus to pass through its life cycle but also to ensure that those who were asymptomatic were not putting others at unnecessary risk. While not all travellers were required to self-isolate, the results of the measures and orders put in place speak volumes to Yukon's success in mitigating the potential impact of COVID-19. With an estimated 20,000 US citizens passing through the Yukon under these restrictions, the results speak for themselves: a marginal number of cases and no deaths.

Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, protecting Yukoners from the virus is only half the battle. Measures for job protection leave were also established to ensure that Yukoners could self-isolate without concern of losing employment. The paid sick leave rebates have provided businesses with an opportunity to recoup losses from wages for employees collecting paid sick leave while being required to self-isolate.

The government has taken, and continues to take, many steps to ensure the security of Yukoners and businesses. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a research group was established with the goal of assessing how the pandemic has affected businesses and non-profit organizations and their

operations, as well as identifying the best adaptations possible. With assistance through an inter-agency leadership, the Government of Yukon is currently working to develop a research program with the hope that this program will identify high-quality research to better assist us to understand how the pandemic has affected our environment, health, communities, business, and culture.

Evidence-based decision-making is the best form of decision-making, Mr. Speaker, and these initiatives advance the Government of Yukon science strategy. I hope that Yukoners are proud of the work we've done and continue to do to ensure that the impacts of this pandemic are as minimal as possible.

During the early onset of the pandemic, Yukon received the first northern support funding for our aviation industry and Health and Social Services. \$18 million was directed to Health and Social Services and \$4 million to Highways and Public Works.

In July, Canada announced the Safe Restart Agreement with \$19 billion in funding. These funds were directed toward a number of support systems designed to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians, including testing, contact tracing, and data management, health care system capacity, support for our vulnerable peoples, personal protective equipment, childcare, support for municipalities, and paid sick leave. As the funding was allocated on a per capita basis, Yukon received \$13.2 million, with Health and Social Services receiving \$11.2 million of those funds. Additionally, this government is negotiating a second northern supports package in acknowledgement of the higher costs for delivery of these programs and services up here in the north.

COVID-19 is only one of the many emergencies that we must consider and manage. Wildland Fire Management faces new challenges each year, with extended and more severe fire seasons. This very wet season provided a brief respite as fire season went well into October last year and severely taxed the resources of our Wildland Fire Management program.

Protecting our communities from disaster and working on preventive measures is becoming a clear priority with this government. I'm very pleased to see that wildfire protection plans will be developed with the communities in an effort to mitigate forest fire risk while creating jobs in the communities and among the First Nations. For generations, First Nations have played a key role in wildland fire management in the territory. I am very happy to see the ever-increasing role played by our First Nation firefighters, many of whom I've had the pleasure of working with during my somewhat lengthy career in the Yukon.

I would also like to congratulate the community of Mayo on their new airport status. The government has committed \$2.5 million in upgrades for runway lighting which will allow for scheduled and non-scheduled night operations. Infrastructure upgrades such as these help to connect our remote communities to the territory's capital city. I'm excited to see further infrastructure upgrades like these in the near future.

Over this remarkably wet summer, I've been involved with my constituents in a number of areas. I met with my colleague, the Minister of Community Services, and the mayor and council from Mayo with regard to the solid waste facility. I've been working with all my colleagues on a one-government approach to address the costs for home heating fuel, groceries, and electric utilities as well as the lack of housing and development which are impacting residents in unprecedented ways in our rural communities.

The Minister of Highways and Public Works and the Minister of Economic Development are working with federal regulators and Xplornet to ensure subscribers still have service after December 31 of this year. Many of my constituents, especially those along the Silver Trail, rely on Xplornet, so it's going to be a huge blow to them if they lose that service, so I really hope our ministers are successful.

I've had regular and ongoing discussions with the Minister of Health and Social Services on the opioid crisis and mental health that's negatively affecting the communities of our territory, especially in my riding. We've also discussed working toward housing solutions for our rural communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to say congratulations to the NND and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society youth for their sponsorship and educational youth partnership. The lessons and knowledge shared with the youth on their traditional territories is invaluable, and I hope that other nations will work to do something similar for their youth. I had the opportunity to congratulate them when the youth returned from their trip from the Beaver River all the way down the Stewart into Mayo. They got to see some fantastic country.

I would like to thank the Minister of Highways and Public Works for the ongoing work at the Ethel Lake Road. I certainly kept the ministers informed, and I advocated for and received support to ensure that the road was kept open this year.

Thank you and mahsi' cho to the Highways and Public Works staff, especially those at Stewart Crossing. Thank you to the Minister of Highways and Public Works for doing this necessary work for the community.

Thank you, everyone, for taking the time to hear me today. I look forward to hearing the responses to the budget from other members and look forward to future opportunities to speak and expand on some of the topics I discussed today. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in response to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1 for 2020-21* for the current fiscal year. First, I would just like to express a heartfelt thank you to my family and my friends for their unwavering support as I worked alongside my colleagues to respond to this global pandemic that we find ourselves in as Yukoners, Canadians, and ultimately the world.

I would like to also thank my constituents. It is an honour to represent the Mountainview riding and to work through different issues with constituents. We did a lot of casework during the last six months and I thank my constituents for entrusting some of their most personal issues to me and allowing us to assist where we could.

I thank my staff for sure for going the extra mile all the time. I really want to take a moment to acknowledge this team on this side of the House. I am so grateful to each and every one of these members for the work that they did on behalf of Yukoners and on behalf of future generations. As we went through the last six months, we knew that we were in a historic moment all the way through and that life as we knew it would never be the same. When we put our names on those ballots, not one of us thought that we would be governing through a pandemic, yet we did. I am so grateful for this team and for all of their hard work — the family that we have. I still believe 100 percent that Yukoners got it right when they chose this team to govern at this time in our history, so I thank them — each and every one of them — for the remarkable work that they have done to keep our territory safe and to hold it for the next seven generations to come, because that's how we need to govern in this territory.

I will now get to my reply around some of the specifics. I will start with Tourism and Culture. I will begin by thanking our team there as well. Tourism and Culture staff have been remarkable. There were several months and consecutive days where people did not take any time off. People were working from home and did it with a full heart to help this industry survive and respond in the best possible way.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Yukon has acted swiftly and decisively in response to the drastic impact COVID-19 has had on the territory's arts, culture, and tourism sectors. With the 2020-21 *Supplementary Estimates No. 1*, the Department of Tourism and Culture is putting forward a net increase of \$7,847,000 in operation and maintenance expenditures, which I would like to now explain in greater detail.

On the arts and culture side, we have successfully reallocated funds within our department's existing budget to provide nearly \$500,000 in support to these crucial Yukon creative communities. I would like to formally recognize the ingenuity of my Cultural Services branch in these reallocations. The funding has been a welcome relief for Yukon's cultural sector and has sparked imaginative new ways to engage with their chosen crafts and mediums as well as their audiences.

The temporary support for events funding, which was \$1.8 million — as part of our mitigation efforts, the government provided urgently needed financial support to organizations of Yukon events that were cancelled because of the pandemic. Though absolutely necessary to protect the health and safety of Yukoners, the cancellation of events has left many Yukon organizations facing unique financial losses related to perishable goods and the cancellation of accommodations and services. This is everything from large-scale events — such as the 2020 Arctic Winter Games, the Yukon First Nation hockey tournament, the Dawson City Music Festival, and Adäka Cultural Festival — all the way down to conferences and other events in Yukon with more than 50 participants.

As a transfer to Tourism and Culture from the Department of Economic Development, this funding program allowed for mitigation of up to 100 percent of unique financial losses due to COVID-19-related cancellation of specific events. The Yukon government was pleased to be able to provide support

to local workers, businesses, and non-profit organizations negatively impacted by cancellations of these events due to COVID-19.

In terms of tourism — on the tourism side, the recent release of our second-quarter stats confirmed what most of us already knew all too well: Travel restrictions to and within the territory have decimated Yukon's tourism industry. The goal of the department's response efforts to date has been to stabilize Yukon's tourism businesses by developing relief programs to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and prepare for recovery. To this end, the department reprofiled portions of its budget to fund business support initiatives such as the tourism cooperative marketing fund and marketing campaigns targeting British Columbia residents and Yukoners, encouraging them to explore the territory this summer.

In terms of marketing to help address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Yukon's tourism sector, the Government of Yukon announced a \$1-million increase to its tourism cooperative marketing fund, bringing the total available funding to \$1.7 million for the 2020-21 fiscal year. The scope of the eligible applicants and eligible activities was also broadened so that more Yukon tourism experience and service providers can promote themselves locally within Canada and internationally when the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and wider scale travel resumes.

To make it easier for Yukon businesses to receive support for their tourism marketing efforts, the funding enhancement will see the Government of Yukon contribute 100 percent of the costs of eligible marketing activities for 2020-21. This increased funding and expanded eligibility will allow for greater promotional opportunities for a wider cross-section of our tourism sector and help facilitate a strong resurgence. As of last week, the department has processed 161 of the 223 applicants for a total of \$1.2 million in funding.

Moving to the border information kiosk staffing — there is an increase of \$547,000. With their experience as welcoming and knowledgeable ambassadors for the territory, we recognize that staff in our visitor information centres as well as in the Beringia Centre could play a role in providing travellers — particularly those transiting through Yukon to Alaska — with COVID-19 information and resources. Visitor information centre staff and Beringia Centre staff were reassigned to our borders and airport as information officers to augment and support the enforcement officers. I would like to thank them for the excellent service that they provided. They were very eager to do this work on behalf of Yukoners. This decision was made with a mind to best application of staffing resources and to support the Government of Yukon's overall COVID-19 response and enforcement efforts. Additionally, nine full-time employees were hired to meet the demand for information officers. This supplementary budget item covers the additional personnel costs associated with providing the service.

Enhanced domestic marketing of \$500,000 — this \$500,000 increase to the domestic marketing budget is in support of coordinated marketing and communication efforts to promote tourism within Canada. The resulting campaigns are part of a nation-wide effort led by Destination Canada to restart

Canada's visitor economy following the impact of COVID-19. Because of this partnership, this funding will be fully recoverable.

For dedicated COVID-19 recovery and support, there is \$4 million. The largest item in our supplementary budget is \$4 million for dedicated COVID-19 support and response to Yukon's tourism sector. This funding will be guided by the tourism recovery strategy, which is currently under development in coordination with the overall economic recovery plan for Yukon. The initial goal of Yukon government's response effort was to stabilize Yukon's tourism businesses and organizations by developing relief programs to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. With the support of the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board, we continue to be focused on relief and are partnering with the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon to assess industry needs and identify any gaps in relief funding so that we can properly support the sector.

In addition to business relief, we have also turned our attention to recovery in coordination with the economic recovery plan for Yukon. We are developing Yukon's COVID-19 tourism recovery plan. Elements have been reviewed and endorsed by the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board and include four key themes: instilling tourism leadership; rebuilding confidence and capacity for tourism; preparing operators for recovery and refining the brand; and inspiring travellers to visit. A final step will be to engage industry on a draft recovery plan and to collect their input to ensure that we have it right. The Yukon COVID-19 tourism recovery plan will aim to bolster and reshape the sector into a more resilient and sustainable tourism industry and strengthen it in the long term. I look forward to sharing the details of this plan in the very near future.

In conclusion, on the tourism aspect, Mr. Speaker, I summarize that we are putting forward an increase of \$7,847,000 to the Tourism and Culture operation and maintenance budget. These funds represent ongoing support to Yukon's tourism and culture sectors in the wake of COVID-19. The Government of Yukon recognizes the value of tourism and our arts and culture sectors. It is committed to supporting them through this crisis.

I would like to thank our department officials again for their efforts in getting these funds out the door in a strategic and expedient manner, as well as the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board, the Business Advisory Council, and TIA membership for invaluable guidance in making sure that the tourism sector's needs and challenges are known and understood.

Moving to the Women's Directorate, I would like to thank the team at the Women's Directorate for their excellent work in, again, adapting so very well to what our new reality was, especially in the early days. We have a lot of parents who work in the Women's Directorate, and this was a challenging time for all, so I really thank them for their hard work and for adapting in such a great way to serve Yukoners.

The supplementary budget for 2020-21 reflects the many initiatives that the Women's Directorate undertakes with our partners in order to advance gender equality. This year, in addition to our key priorities and mandate items, we had the

gender impacts of COVID-19 to consider. The UN Women organization described it as a “shadow pandemic”. One clear implication is that physical distancing and self-isolation measures mean that individuals may be required to stay in close quarters with someone who is violent.

Many support services and public spaces were required to reduce or alter services. As part of our response, the Women’s Directorate accessed \$25,000 in funding from the Government of Canada to improve availability of safe taxi transportation in Whitehorse and support other COVID-related emergency needs at the time.

Another initiative that supports the increased needs due to COVID-19 is the sexualized assault response team. The Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health and Social Services, and I, along with several non-governmental agencies, have been working to improve services for victims of violence and sexual assault in Yukon. The sexualized assault response team, known as SART, has now been implemented in Whitehorse and provides coordinated victim-centred, low-barrier services to victims of sexualized assault. Services within SART include a 24/7 support line for victims to call, a website, weekend support workers on call, specifically trained medical care providers, specifically trained RCMP officers, and priority access to mental wellness care.

SART also builds collaboration between existing services, including Crown witness coordinators, Victim Services, and many other supports within the territory. As a result of the SART initiative, victims of sexualized violence in Whitehorse and rural communities now have priority access to mental wellness care through our new mental wellness and substance use hubs. Better coordination of existing medical and victim services is being supported by two specialized staff, a victim support coordinator, and a clinical counsel coordinator. They are working in partnership to ensure that there is continuity of care and wraparound service for victims of sexualized assault.

As SART is implemented and strengthened in Whitehorse, we will begin to work with communities to create a model that works for them, starting with Dawson City and Watson Lake where medical supports are currently available. As we move to the next phase, we will start our conversations with First Nation governments in each community and build on their expertise.

Another key priority in increasing government’s effort to reduce violence against women has been ensuring that Yukon plays a leadership role in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Our government has been working on this issue for several years through a variety of collaborative efforts with First Nation governments, indigenous women’s organizations, RCMP, and communities. As we all know, the national inquiry final report was released on June 3, 2019, leaving our country with 231 ambitious and impactful calls for justice.

In Yukon, the Women’s Directorate serves as the secretariat support for the Yukon Advisory Committee. I serve as one of the three co-chairs, alongside Chief Doris Bill and Ann Maje Raider. We are now in the final stages of responding to the national inquiry final report with clear actions for Yukon. The Yukon strategy on MMIWG2S+ will be a long-term,

whole-of-Yukon approach. It will outline the main paths where action is needed, which are: strengthening connections and supports, education and economic empowerment, community safety and justice, and community dialogue and action.

In terms of the budget, to support this approach, we have an increase in the Women’s Directorate budget for \$90,000 in support of two family gatherings that happened during the summer. Those were some of the changes reflected in the supplementary budget.

We’re also working closely with a number of NGOs. When I get into Committee of the Whole, I’ll make sure that I outline the supports that are going to the non-governmental organizations and, of course, some of the work that we’re doing around the LGBTQ2S+ communities and the action plan that’s coming forward.

I really thank Members of the Legislative Assembly for your time and for listening to my reply to this supplementary budget. I really look forward to Committee of the Whole and talking about all of the initiatives that we’re undertaking in more detail.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I truly appreciate the opportunity to address the House today and speak to all Yukoners.

This is an unusual and challenging year for everyone. Mr. Speaker, we are living through a moment in history when every day there is uncertainty, anxiety, courage, and opportunity. Every day, we are learning and adjusting to new routines.

It is with patience, kindness, and mutual support that Yukon communities are working to keep us all safe and resilient. Before I begin speaking about the 2020-21 supplementary budget, I would like to speak for a moment about what we have all dealt with in the last several months — and it is ongoing. At this point, I think it’s fair for us to talk about experiences that have come to date, but we are all clearly and keenly aware that this pandemic is nowhere near over and our struggles and challenges with it are nowhere near over.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn’t feel like that long ago that my colleagues and I met with the chief medical officer of health and made the very difficult decision to cancel the 2020 Arctic Winter Games. Our hearts broke for the organizers and for the endless hours that they had spent to make sure that every detail was attended to. Our hearts broke for the athletes who had earned their spots, who had practised, and who were excited for the opportunities ahead to meet new friends and be with one another in what is truly a unique opportunity for our youth.

The organizers’ herculean efforts cannot be, and must not be, diminished by the fact that the world had intervened and our games at that time would not be all that they had dreamed. We know now that this was only the beginning of the difficult decisions that we would have to make.

During this world pandemic, Mr. Speaker, people need their government to be strong, to make difficult decisions, and to make adjustments as needed so that everyone can be supported. We need to meet people where they are. That is what our government has been doing. We have been working hard

every day to adjust, to respond, and to do what is supportive of all Yukoners.

Turning to the 2020-21 supplementary budget, I think it is important that Yukoners know how we worked to develop the most important document produced by government — the main budgets, of course, and the supplementary budgets going forward. We worked as a team for months and months, not from a distance but in a very real way. We asked ourselves, “What are the priorities of Yukoners?” — what they told us on the doorsteps, through public engagement, through our partnerships, and working with First Nation governments, municipalities, community groups, and individual Yukoners. Governments must understand their responsibility to the people of this territory — and this one does.

The 2020-21 supplementary budget is required when there are changes to the main budget for one reason or another — and have we got changes and reasons this year. The supplementary budget includes spending due to the COVID-19 pandemic and what our government spent to assist Yukoners in multiple necessary areas. When members opposite accuse us of making decisions based on our own political interests, this is truly shocking to me, Mr. Speaker, because I know this team of people. As my colleague has said, I have spent nearly every day with them, and I know that in every situation we ask ourselves, “What is in the best interests of Yukoners?”

Mr. Speaker, this has been at the forefront of our decisions during the last several months, even more than usual: What is in the best interests of Yukoners? The supplementary spending reflects that attitude and that approach. What is the help that Yukoners need and are asking for? What can we do to keep Yukoners safe during this world pandemic? That approach ensures that priorities that exist in every corner of this great territory are addressed. All Yukoners and all communities matter, and I am so proud that our government has not only adjusted our spending at this time, but has worked extensively with each and every community to meet with them, to listen to their priorities, and to respond.

This supplementary budget shows many of those responses, Mr. Speaker — investments in arenas, medical professionals, schools, mining roads, bridges, housing, residential lots, new legislation, tourism infrastructure, small business, climate change, procurement, fire halls, community centres, health centres, biomass, and land use planning, just to name a few. Government is not just about buying things; it is about growing vibrant, sustainable communities and supporting Yukoners everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, Yukoners are extremely intelligent, innovative, and forward-looking people. They have built the most amazing communities. Back in 2016, when we asked Yukoners to put their trust in our team to make their lives better, they agreed. They sent us here to work for them. This has been a very unusual time, and I am proud that our government has been here to provide the support that Yukoners need now more than ever. I know that part of their trust in us resulted from our commitment to work collaboratively with Yukon First Nation governments and communities, to respect the spirit and intent of modern treaties, and to build prosperity and certainty for our

futures by building meaningful partnerships with Yukon First Nations for the benefit of us all.

Despite talking about doing so, these relationships with Yukon First Nations were just not working. It was not a priority for too many years under the previous government. We have worked hard at these relationships to build trust and to build the foundation of our work going forward. Mr. Speaker, it is not always perfect. Like all complex relationships, there are bumps in the road, but we are on the road together and committed to going forward together.

That was extremely evident during the 15th Yukon Forum that was held last Friday in Carcross — an opportunity to have meaningful and important dialogue between Yukon First Nations, the Council of Yukon First Nations, and the Yukon government ministers and officials. These meetings take place now four times per year. Agendas are drafted together. Opportunities to have meaningful dialogue are presented and relationships and trust are being built. They are the foundation of us moving forward in this territory for greater prosperity for all Yukoners.

I’ll move now to make some comments about the Department of Justice. I am so proud of the work that the Department of Justice has done. It is an honour for me to be the minister responsible for that work and to lead and respond to the people who work in that department.

The Department of Justice has recently developed priorities to guide its work on behalf of Yukoners. They could not even be contemplated — those priorities — without the foundational work done by our government with Yukon First Nations. Throughout this fiscal year, the Department of Justice has continued to work diligently toward a justice system that is responsive to the needs of all Yukoners in a fiscally responsible manner, all while responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One increase in the Department of Justice for the operation and maintenance expenditures pertains to the Government of Yukon’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Justice is working with all government departments to protect the health and safety of our staff, clients, and all Yukoners. A number of our workers were deployed to other work units to assist with emergency planning, response activities, and enforcement measures. While the majority of workers have continued with their regular assignments, it is through their efforts and with the cooperation of Yukoners that we have been able to limit the spread of COVID-19 within the Yukon.

While we recognize that there have been service disruptions due to COVID-19, the department has remained committed to ensuring the delivery of essential services throughout the territory. Therefore, the Department of Justice has allocated spending as required for enforcement measures under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* and to accommodate the increased workload of the Legal Services branch to assist with our security services to enforce occupancy and physical distancing guidelines and drafting the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* orders and court operations.

Of course, during this time, the other important work of the Department of Justice continued.

The Department of Education has one focus and one focus only: What is in the best interests of our students? Yukoners expect us to plan, to think ahead, and to do our jobs, even when that work is really hard. They don't expect us to throw up our hands and refuse to plan schools just because it is difficult, just because people will disagree on next steps. Planning schools is tough work, because you cannot please all Yukoners all the time. Parents, teachers, administrators, students, and Yukon citizens who are no longer involved in the school system all have different ideas about what is best, but just because it is tough doesn't mean that it can be avoided. It doesn't mean that there is no opportunity to work together.

I want to thank every Yukoner who took the time out of their day to write to me or to the department. There are parents, students, community members, and others. We answer every letter carefully and, even when we might disagree on the approach forward, the ideas that come from those Yukoners — their comments and their insight — are truly so valuable.

Our government and the Department of Education has taken up the challenge of addressing our future school needs. Thanks to these conscious efforts, we have been able to adapt and resume classes in schools for students following the advice and the guidelines from the Yukon chief medical officer of health. This supplementary budget reflects how the department is adapting and responding this year, based on the priorities for education during this ongoing pandemic, which include: ensuring the health and safety of students and staff; ensuring that learning continues for all students, including supports for students with diverse learning needs and those in need of additional supports; and supports for students, teachers, and support staff for flexible learning, including access to technological tools and training.

Of course, obligations and the work of the Department of Education also continue. We are building Whistle Bend elementary school, the first elementary school planned and built in almost 30 years in Whitehorse. We have finally ended an 11-year court battle through negotiation in the building of a French first language secondary school. We are working with the community of Ross River to address the long-overdue stress of a new school.

I have to take just a moment to correct the Member for Kluane regarding a school being built in Burwash Landing. Mr. Speaker, I have never been asked by the Member for Kluane about what the situation is there or what is happening on that file. If he had, I would have told him that the Department of Education officials are meeting almost weekly with representatives of the Kluane First Nation to plan a new school for their community. We are doing this because building a school in Kluane is a priority. Back in June 2020, an MOU was signed between the Government of Yukon and the Kluane First Nation regarding setting out a plan and a timeline for the construction and implementation of a new school. That MOU is a commitment for our work together. With Kluane, land has been identified and geotechnical work is about to begin and will be underway shortly.

Mr. Speaker, building a new school in Kluane is a priority for our government for many reasons. The first one is simply that it is the right thing to do. On October 20, 1917, the then-Chief T.A. Dickson wrote to the then-bishop of the Yukon asking for a school in that community. On my very first visit to Burwash Landing, quite coincidentally, as the Minister of Education, I met with the chief and council and brought them a copy of that letter. The day we visited there — my colleague and I — was October 20, 2017 — 100 years to the day. I am not suggesting that the member opposite even knew about that request, but I do know that the former government, for some 14 years, made no moves whatsoever to build a new school in Kluane, and there were no meetings about that either.

I would like to take a moment, as many of the members here have, to thank my family and friends for their endless support and understanding. It has been tested this year for sure. As everyone who has done this job — even for a short period of time — knows, being a member of the government and of this House takes a toll on relationships. It is wrong, but the demands of your time mean that your family and friends regularly take a backseat, and they don't have you in the everyday moments of their lives as much as they might like or as much as you might like. This commitment is one that they make as well when we decide to go down this road.

This time since March and the world pandemic coming to our Yukon doorstep has been even more challenging. Our caucus has been working every day. There have been no family vacations, no lazy Saturdays, no quiet summer days. The work has been ongoing, and I take note that some comments have regularly been coming from the other side of this House about being on holiday. I can assure you that nobody on this side of the House has been on any holiday in 2020.

I would like to take a moment to thank the people of Riverdale South. The honour is mine to have been sent here by them to represent them, to bring forward their concerns, and to help resolve issues that are of interest to them and of interest to all Yukoners. I appreciate that we come from our own ridings and that we have come with a political stripe, but, in fact, representing all of the individuals in our neighbourhoods, in our ridings, or in our communities — those who cast their vote for us and, maybe more importantly, those who didn't cast their vote for us — is the true honour and privilege and commitment of this job. The individuals from Riverdale South who took the time to express their votes and to participate in our democratic process for the purposes of having a representative here in the Legislative Assembly and choosing me to do that fills me with honour every day.

There is an incredible opportunity here to work on behalf of Yukoners. I would like to thank all Yukoners and how diligently and vigilantly they have worked to protect us all over these last number of months. I think we need to remember that it is not over and that we do need to continue that vigilance and I appreciate Yukoners. We have such a safe and amazing community because they have worked so hard.

Ms. White: There are lots of thoughts on the supplementary budget — and some definitely on what has

happened since, you know, we left this House in March. I can assure everyone here that members on both sides of the House have worked steadily throughout. Vacations weren't had, and time with family wasn't what we looked for. In my case, family dinners don't look the same because there are more than 10 of us who could be in a room. I haven't hugged my nephews in — I don't know — six months. I haven't had dinner with them in that long. I haven't spent time in the seniors complex with the 48 surrogate grandparents. We haven't had Whitehorse Connects. There are lots of changes that have happened and they have affected everybody. I don't think it's anyone's — we're all in this. We have talked about this — we're all in this together.

So, Mr. Speaker, much has changed since that budget was tabled in the spring. In fact, that budget made absolutely no mention of COVID-19. I mean, I think that gives everybody an idea of how many adjustments needed to be made in the supplementary. Budgets are our priorities. We have talked about this before. So at times, I'm listening to the members speak and I'm like, "Oh, maybe there is an election coming this fall" because it sounds kind of similar to speeches that were given in 2016 after the election. Maybe what we are going to see here is the highlighting of the priorities that will come forward in that next election.

But budgets are about priorities, and the way we prioritize in budgets is we put money toward things and we respond to the needs of people in the community where we live. We recognize the shortcomings and where support needs to go. With that in mind, the first thing that jumps out, when we looked at the supplementary budget, was the fact that we actually see a decrease in Education spending, despite over \$5 million being planned for the COVID response.

You know, today in Question Period, we heard justifications from the minister — but remember that budgets are about priorities. So this was in stark contrast with other departments like Tourism and Culture, Economic Development, and Health and Social Services which all saw a significant increase in spending. I think it is important to be clear: It is not that needs don't exist in Education. I mean, we all say that education is critical. We talk about how important it is. We talk about early childhood education. We talk about K through 12. We talk about post-secondary education. There are obvious needs right now in Education — the adaptation of classrooms, sanitation protocols, and increased cleaning.

When there was a program announced — that there was going to be \$250 for every K to 12 student in the public system to support students through COVID-19 — I sent some letters. Initially, it was supposed to be within Yukon public schools. We have K4 students who are in public schools and then Aurora virtual students who are affected by COVID-19. There were unanticipated consequences of the pandemic. It was interesting. We got that expanded — the \$250 — to most K to 12 students, except those in the Montessori program — which is fascinating, because I think it would have been about \$3,000 and then those students too would have been supported because of the pandemic. But that is an example of obvious need.

So when we look to schools, we know that they need more educational assistance. We know that there needs to be more mental health supports. I am not the only one who said that we were lucky that the pandemic hit in the spring when the light was coming back. I know that I am seasonally affected; November sucks. Thank goodness it happened in March, but what happens in November? What happens in November when grades 10 through 12 students are only going to half-day in-person classes? What happens in November? What happens in November when the grade 8 students at Wood Street Centre School can't change classrooms because that's the way it is — when they aren't able to go the parks to play soccer for PE class? What happens to school systems when winter hits and it gets colder?

I spend a fair amount of time around teenagers to find out how things are going, and I can tell you that it is bleak for students in grades 10 through 12 in Whitehorse; it is tough. Even students who are academically gifted are struggling with half-day classes. Of course, we are going to see this reflected — for some, it's going to go really well, it's going to be great, and it's what they needed, but for those who are struggling, do we want to make it harder — especially for those in grade 12 whose next step, if they choose, is post-secondary education? Do we want to give them one more burden before they apply against kids across the country for those spots?

We think about classrooms, we think about educational assistants, and we think about additional teachers — knowing that there are teachers on call and that there are a number right now — 30 more going through the process — but understanding that, with the system as it is that is in place, teachers themselves are not able to attend classes. So at this point in time, even now — just a couple weeks in — schools have been short of teachers. We have administrators and principals going into classrooms and we have counsellors in classrooms, which takes away from the support for other students.

When we talk about the budget and we talk about priorities, some of the questions are: If we saved all that money in the spring because we didn't need school buses, then why, at that point in time, didn't we make the decision that we would need more school buses in the fall? Why didn't we start looking at it then? Why was it until August that we started talking about that?

If we knew that there wasn't enough room at F.H. Collins — and this is full credit — F.H. Collins — and I've said this before; the Liberal government inherited F.H. Collins — I like to call it the "new" new F.H. Collins, because the new F.H. Collins that was planned was going to be awesome and it was going to be much bigger, but the "new" new F.H. Collins that we got isn't quite big enough, which leads to problems. But there are solutions out of that. I read this comment — from a teacher, it turns out — a teacher, no less — who suggested that grades 8 and 9 students could go to F.H. Collins, grades 10 through 12 could go to Porter Creek, and then Wood Street would stay where Wood Street was — great suggestion. We have lots of space right now. We have some space in the community — the Guild Hall, the Arts Centre — we have

meeting rooms at the Kwanlin Dün. Maybe we could have looked at renting space so that students in grades 10 through 12 could have stayed for full face-to-face classes.

So, Mr. Speaker, if a budget is a reflection of government priorities, then unfortunately, with the supplementary budget, it doesn't look like Education is a priority to this government, because if it was, maybe things would look different. Maybe the families that had students who had been on buses since they started school would still be getting bused, but they're not, in some cases. The letters that come back to me say they're out of their catchment areas but the schools within their catchment areas don't have space, which is why they were going to these other schools to start off with, so now parents are trying to figure out how to make that work.

Let me be clear: We understand that, at the end of last school year, there were fewer expenses; we understand that. We just got told that was the difference in the budget. But then why didn't that extra money get reinvested into Education? Going into the opening of school, we heard from administrators that they were trying to figure out how — within their budgets — they were going to pay for the hand sanitizer that they need. Knowing that we saved that money, then why haven't we made extra mental health supports — beyond what's regularly available — available? Why didn't we put more counsellors in school? There are a lot of questions. I appreciate that the Premier has ideas. I can't wait to hear them again.

I am going to move on from Education to other departments. It is interesting because the Liberal government likes to talk about how much better they are than the Yukon Party government. It pains me. It pains me to have to say that I disagree at times, because it was terrible between 2011 and 2016. I am being perfectly honest about that.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. White: I appreciate that the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin is asking if it was that bad. It was terrible.

But do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker, in briefings? There was more information available. There was information available. It is shocking to say that I preferred it sometimes before — but the information.

I am going to use this as an example. This wasn't the general briefing this morning. This was like the departmental briefing. I went to the Health and Social Services department briefing this morning — the very specific one. There is a \$43-million increase in operation and maintenance for Health and Social Services. I was given the sheet — and I really appreciate the sheets given me by the department; I really do. On the top of that sheet, there is a line for \$33,695,000, and the note for it says, "pandemic management".

So, to give you an idea on this breakdown, I think the smallest breakdown where there is more of a line item — yes, it is here under health services, which is a total expenditure of \$2 million. It explains that \$20,000 has gone to community health programs — the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer — and it is 100-percent recoverable — \$20,000. It breaks it down to \$20,000 for me, but there is a \$33-million line item — almost a \$34-million line item — and it says "pandemic management". That is incredible. So, then I ask what

"pandemic management" means, and you can imagine that we're taking notes and trying to get through it. Some of it has numbers and some of it doesn't, and I do look forward because the official says that they will get us more information. It is fascinating that we should break it down so much that I could know that almost \$34 million was for pandemic management, but I can tell you where \$20,000 went.

It's fascinating, because we are often told that this government is the most transparent and that they share the most information and all those things, but I don't see it. I don't see it in all ways.

Understanding that there is a pandemic — I get that. I have heard the word "unprecedented" quite a few times. I understand that and everybody understands that, but it doesn't negate the responsibility of government to be transparent about where and how they spend the money. Pandemic management — \$34 million. Mr. Speaker, one of the complaints that you hear from opposition is that we believe that oversight can lead to better programs. We really believe that. I just used the example of the \$250 for children in school. That got better with a bit of oversight.

Initially, when CERB was announced, the Department of Health and Social Services was clawing that back, and people were worse off during the pandemic than they were before the pandemic. That got resolved. That was great, and I am glad that got resolved. Then there were announcements about \$400 for disability clients, but then it turned out it only meant per family and not per client, which meant that some kids got more supports than other kids. I still can't figure out how that works. There was the rent subsidy program that got announced on May 11. The first payment went out at the end of June — fascinating. People panicked the entire time. They were panicking because they were desperate for help. There have been lots of programs announced. There has been a lot of help. It has been good, but we believe that oversight makes for stronger programs.

Some of the questions that we have are: How much does each program cost? How many people or businesses access them? How many students or families applied for the \$250? How many families applied for the disability support service money? How many individuals had to access the rent subsidy? All that information is essential because that's how you evaluate the success of programs. That is how governments determine if they need to be continued or modified to better respond to people's needs.

We have heard government talk about evidence-based decision-making. We appreciate that. We would like to see the evidence; that would be great. We have heard often the words "extraordinary", "unprecedented", "challenging" times, and I don't disagree. Now, when we talk about the budget and we look at information — here is an example. I only know the two briefings for tomorrow, for Tuesday, but I don't know what is happening on Wednesday or Thursday. I am not sure. I really appreciated it when government initially would give us the full listing of briefings so we could plot it in and figure out where it was going, but that has changed. I know what tomorrow's 10:00 a.m. briefing is and what tomorrow's 11:00 a.m. briefing

is, but I don't know what is going to happen on Wednesday or Thursday.

I appreciate that, when there are more people, maybe that's less challenging, but when there are fewer people, it's quite challenging. The Premier would know about that because before we didn't get told what the briefings were either, and that wasn't great.

We talk about the sharing of information and we talk about transparency because everybody has been affected by this. There's not a single person in the territory who is not affected. We talk about people's experiences. For some people, this has been a break that they needed. Their life had to slow down because it had to, but for so many people, it has up-ended routine, it has made things challenging, and it has been hard. It's with all of that that we look toward a supplementary budget to see where people are going to get support and how people will be supported. I'm grateful for the programs that have been announced because they have taken some people from the brink, brought them back, and told them that it's not easy right now but don't go over that edge, but you know, you talk to the tourism industry, and they're at that edge. They're trying to figure out how to get through a winter tourism season or what happens next year. What does next year look like?

Mr. Speaker, we're just looking for more information. We're just looking for the transparency that we were promised and how things would be different. It's challenging. It's challenging to be on this side and looking for that information. I look forward to additional speeches and how people have gotten through this, but what I really look forward to is more information during briefings. I'll even put a pitch in that it would be great to know when those briefings are going to happen.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I'm happy to speak to the supplementary budget for 2020-21 today. I'll do my best to try to add information.

Since the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* falls under Community Services, we are very involved in the Government of Yukon's overall COVID-19 response efforts, although it really has been an issue that includes all of government. It's an all-of-government effort, and it doesn't just include our level of government. It includes every community, every person, and every aspect of the territory.

The supplementary estimates before us consist of \$275,000 in increases to capital and \$9.5 million in increases to operation and maintenance for Community Services.

Let me break that down a bit. Of the \$9.5 million for operation and maintenance, \$9.2 million is for the COVID-19 pandemic support and response. Approximately \$6 million is tied directly to provide support and economic recovery for municipalities and sport and recreation organizations. Approximately \$3 million is related to our ongoing response efforts including border measures and emergency coordination efforts broadly.

On March 27, we declared a state of emergency under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, or CEMA, as I'll refer to it. Even before that time, departments activated Yukon

government's pandemic plan, and under the guidance of the civil emergency planning officer, we activated the Emergency Coordination Centre to coordinate government's response to COVID-19. The Emergency Coordination Centre operates under an incident command structure and relies on employees from across government who are trained in those roles to support operations and the continuity of services in an emergency.

In this case, the Emergency Coordination Centre also supported the health emergency operation centre and the chief medical officer of health, or CMOH, to set up and operate and has made the various CEMA ministerial orders, including border measures, a reality.

I look forward to discussing ministerial orders with all members of this Legislature. In the spring, we wrote to the opposition twice — on May 21 and June 5 — to offer to come into the Legislature to answer questions about those orders. I was surprised that the opposition declined. I hope to hear from the opposition about which orders they disagree with because all of them were put in place to support Yukoners and Yukon businesses.

I would like to give a shout-out to the team at the Emergency Coordination Centre. Through the pandemic, these folks have worked tirelessly to keep Yukoners safe and to reduce the impact of this pandemic on our communities. They have worked to keep people informed and communities connected, and they have liaised with the Canada Border Services Agency, RCMP, and more.

Engaging with municipalities, First Nations, unincorporated communities, and local advisory councils remains a priority for our government throughout the pandemic. Conference calls and Zoom calls have helped us to understand their needs and concerns, to provide updates on the government's COVID-19 response, and to support communities in their emergency preparedness capacity and response. The Emergency Coordination Centre does come with additional costs that were not otherwise planned for in this budget year originally.

Hindsight may be 20/20, but the year 2020 has been tough to predict. Border control and enforcement of the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* has resulted in additional costs. Through the supplementary budget, we are requesting an additional \$2.8 million related to the Emergency Coordination Centre and border enforcement. These costs include such things as enforcement personnel in Watson Lake for both the Alaska Highway and Stewart Cassiar Highway at Junction 37 — and by the way, I should just mention for the Member for Porter Creek North, who talked about full-time, permanent employees — no, these employees are term employees. They are here during the pandemic and, in fact, we have been working with the Liard First Nation and the Town of Watson Lake to discuss whether they would like to be staffing up there.

We have also been paying for equipment rentals including light towers and trailers. We have paid for automated texting for travellers who are transiting the Yukon. We have put in place a security contract for the information kiosk that was up at the top of Robert Service Way. We have contracted flagging

services and we have also paid for decals to provide for out-of-territory residents to signify their adherence to the self-isolation rules.

Other areas within Community Services of course also adjusted to the pandemic. I want to acknowledge the staff in the department for their efforts to maintain essential service continuity amidst the reality of remote work and service-level adjustments to safeguard Yukoners. For the most part, these adjustments have been incorporated into all aspects of operations and the department is pivoting without the need for significant additional supplementary funding. There are some exceptions and for good reasons.

We are seeking additional funds to support some of the required changes within the Yukon Emergency Medical Services — EMS — an essential partner in the territory's health care system. EMS is supporting the COVID assessment centre and works hand in hand with Health and Social Services, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and other allied emergency response agencies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in extra costs for EMS to deal with increased personnel expenses. The supplementary budget includes \$206,000 to pay for increased EMS costs, including the backfilling of primary responders as required due to self-isolation and related requirements.

We have related capital requests, including \$105,000 for EMS equipment costs. This includes the purchase of four high-speed disinfecting units, UV or ultraviolet disinfecting lights, and respiratory testing equipment. The EMS staff showed me the disinfecting unit. It allows us to disinfect an ambulance against COVID-19 in minutes, which of course means that the ambulance and staff will be back in circulation quickly and safely.

Other costs included in this supplementary budget support operations of recycling depots and public libraries. The supplementary budget includes \$78,000 to provide relief funding to recycling facilities for adaptations they have had to make to maintain public health and safety. COVID-19 has touched every aspect of our day-to-day routines, and recycling is no exception. Reducing the volume of waste that goes to landfills remains an ongoing effort, made more challenging by the pandemic.

At the outset of the pandemic, we closed the public libraries on the advice of the chief medical officer of health and took advantage of this time to make some needed upgrades to comply with the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health and his office to safely reopen on July 21. There was \$85,000 toward unbudgeted equipment, including replacing the existing aging furniture with cleanable chairs and sofas in the Whitehorse Public Library and upgrading the boardroom floor to a more cleanable surface.

In terms of additional costs related to COVID-19 supports and recovery, the supplementary budget includes funds for sport and recreation organizations and Yukon's municipal governments. In May, the Government of Canada announced many millions of dollars — \$500 million — in COVID-19 relief funding for cultural, heritage, and sport organizations across the country. Yukon's allotment was approximately

\$1.7 million to distribute to local non-profit and sport and recreation organizations. This funding is included in the supplementary budget and is fully recoverable from Canada.

The team at Sport and Recreation has been in contact with community sport and recreation groups over the past months to provide support to these organizations so that these sport organizations can access this funding.

Funds are going to sport governing bodies, special recreation groups, and local authorities for recreation. As well, a portion of these funds will be available to other groups through Sport Yukon. Forty-nine groups have received funding already, and it is anticipated that another 20 to 30 organizations may access funding through the fund established through Sport Yukon.

We also recognize the importance of supporting our municipal governments with funding related to the COVID-19 response. Together with Canada, the Yukon government is investing in municipal governments to assist with the additional expenses that they are realizing due to the pandemic. This will be essential in helping municipalities in their recovery from the pandemic. I will talk in a moment about my latest round of community visits where we discussed their costs due to COVID-19. We will work with Yukon municipalities to identify eligible costs, and we will be working to set up a process to make these funds available this fiscal year.

The supplementary budget is focused on additional pressures due to the pandemic, but there are some changes not related to COVID-19. One that I will mention pertains to wildland fire. In this budget, there is a transfer of \$425,000 from the Infrastructure Development branch to Wildland Fire Management for the Whitehorse south hazard-reduction project. This project was announced in September and will result in a 400-hectare fireguard 14 kilometres south of downtown Whitehorse. The project will reduce the city's wildfire risk while providing firefighters with a control line from which any fire coming from the south could potentially be fought. This is part of our overall move to increase wildfire prevention around all of our communities. Of course, I might have been one of the few Yukoners who was happy that we had a wet, rainy summer. Overall, our spending to respond to wildfires went down. More importantly, of course, we didn't face the increased risk of wildfire in our communities, so it was a good opportunity for us to advance our work on prevention.

Since the 2016 territorial election, we as a Cabinet have made over 450 visits to our communities. One of the toughest things about COVID for me personally was that we had to stop community travel. Teleconference calls are fine and video calls are good for those who are tech savvy, but it is so important to be able to meet face to face when it is safe. I was happy to begin community visits again this fall where the community was ready for an in-person visit. Where they were not, we turned to Zoom or conference calls.

Here's a sample of that community tour. In Watson Lake, the Premier and I discussed staffing possibilities for border control, and we agreed to work with the Liard First Nation and the Town of Watson Lake on these opportunities. By the way, Watson Lake is having a mayor by-election on October 8, later

this week, and I'm sure that the Member for Watson Lake and I encourage all Watson Lake residents to get out and vote.

I made it to Old Crow for the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation General Assembly. There, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin and I talked with the chief and council and citizens about how hard their staff are working during the pandemic.

For the Village of Haines Junction and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, we met via Zoom. We discussed property assessments and municipal boundary expansions.

In Dawson, our meetings went very late into the evening, discussing land, recycling, mining and municipalities, and you name it. Dawson always enjoys talking long.

In Burwash, Chief Dickson gave us a great tour of the new water treatment plant, and by the way, we also talked about work in developing and plans toward the new school.

With Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, the Minister for Economic Development and for Energy, Mines and Resources and I had an in-person meeting where some of the staff Zoomed in. We discussed service agreements and secondary exits for their subdivision up on the bench. We also had a meeting with the Village of Mayo that the Member for Mayo-Tatchun referenced in his remarks, and we discussed spill liability and negotiating a landfill agreement. Just a shout-out to the mayor — he's a force to be reckoned with on that front. I just want to acknowledge his advocacy.

The Minister of Highways and Public Works joined me for a Zoom call with Ross River. We discussed long-term solutions for their school, permafrost degradation, and the chipsealing of the Robert Campbell Highway from Ross River to Faro.

Teslin was another Zoom call. Congratulations, by the way, to Mayor Gord Curran. He is the new President of the Association of Yukon Communities, which had to cancel their annual general meeting or make it an online meeting. By the way, this was enabled by a ministerial order. Mayor Curran and I try to speak weekly to discuss issues concerning municipalities. During our Teslin call, we discussed creating a road map for solid waste in our communities.

For Carmacks, we had both an in-person visit, talking about land development, and a Zoom call, where we discussed the Blackjack inquest and adjustments to EMS. When we spoke with the Selkirk First Nation, we spoke about support and improvements to the Pelly farm. In Faro, I had a late-night conversation with one of the local businesses to assist with accessing the business relief program.

As Minister of Community Services, I have quarterly meetings with the Whitehorse City Council and administration. Right after our last meeting, I had the honour to speak at the opening of the new operations building. I didn't speak as eloquently or as long as Mayor Curtis, but we both gave our remarks to leaders, media, and staff at podiums that were situated under this giant overhead crane that can lift a city bus inside the building. It was a stark contrast to when I was on city council. With the old transit building, it was so tight that some buses had to be parked outside. On cold nights, the city would need to keep the buses running.

The Premier and I also did a Zoom call and an in-person visit to Beaver Creek. One story that I will share from those

meetings was checking in with the folks at the Canada Border Services Agency. As I said earlier, we are working closely with Canada on the Alaska-Yukon border crossings. When we got our tour, the staff were proudly wearing beaded fireweed pins donated to them from the White River First Nation. Normally, agency staff are not allowed to add anything to their uniforms, but in this case, they got special dispensation to do so.

With respect to my own communities of Mount Lorne, Carcross, Tagish, and Marsh Lake, I started weekly calls with each community to let them know how things were progressing with respect to COVID-19, to answer questions, and to share updates back in April. We talked about free stores, firesmartering, travel, border patrols, and all things COVID-19 related. There are so many people that I would like to thank, but today I would like to give a shout-out to Katee Obediah, our mental wellness community counsellor in Carcross. This pandemic has been such a deep concern for Yukoners, and the stress on families and Yukoners has been a real challenge.

Katee first worked via telephone, then Zoom, and then later in person to counsel those folks who were not coping well. On top of that, she chaired our inter-agency meetings this year.

I'm glad to be back in this Legislature. I'm glad we are able to be here in this Legislature. As a government, we have been at work since we were last here every day to keep Yukoners safe during this pandemic — all of us. I just wanted to let Yukoners know that we also wrote to the opposition parties on May 6 and 14 and on July 24 offering to sit in this Legislature with departments to answer questions on the budget. Again, the opposition declined. Thankfully, we did meet with our communities. They asked questions and talked about their concerns. We met with First Nations, municipalities, the public, businesses, the Business Advisory Council, tourism, and NGOs. On March 7, we — the territorial government, the City of Whitehorse, and the Arctic Winter Games Host Society —

Speaker: Ten seconds.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Well, I will just stop it there. I will say that, since that day, our focus has been to help keep Yukoners safe during a pandemic. I would like to acknowledge all those Yukoners —

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm happy to rise today to speak to the spending as part of the first supplementary estimates of 2020-21, but first, as my colleagues have so effectively done, I think it's important to thank family members. A unique situation at my house — in March, although it seems a long time ago but was just a few months ago, I had the unique opportunity to be one of the first individuals to have to go through COVID testing here in the Yukon.

In the work that we do — all of us in the Assembly — we have pressures that sometimes get put on our friends, children, and family members because of the work we do or the policy decisions that we decide to take on. In this particular case, my wife and both of my children were thrown into — because of the work I do — a process of having to be under a tremendous amount of stress as they were waiting for tests to come back.

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on second reading of Bill No. 205 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following documents were filed October 5, 2020:

34-3-29

Whistle Bend Place care, letter re (dated October 1, 2020) from Patti McLeod, Member for Watson Lake, to Hon. Pauline Frost, Minister of Health and Social Services (McLeod)

34-3-30

Streetlights on the Alaska Highway, letter re (dated September 29, 2020) from Patti McLeod, Member for Watson Lake, and Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge, to Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Highways and Public Works (McLeod)

Written notice was given of the following motions October 5, 2020:

Motion No. 229

Re: ensuring that Yukon families have access to adequate and safe child care spaces (McLeod)

Motion No. 230

Re: Special Committee on Mental Health and Education Supports during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hassard)

Motion No. 231

Re: amending orders of reference for the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments to include ministerial orders (Cathers)