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HANSARD

Wednesday, November 4, 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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NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Deputy Premier Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Government House Leader Minister of Education; Justice
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate; Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission
Hon. Pauline Frost	Vuntut Gwitchin	Minister of Health and Social Services; Environment; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Highways and Public Works; the Public Service Commission
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Minister of Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board; Women's Directorate

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Yukon Liberal Party

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Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, November 4, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.
Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Wills Month

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government and the Third Party to recognize Wills Month, which takes place each November in an effort to encourage Yukoners to consider creating a legally valid will.

When a person passes away without a will, their loved ones are left to experience the grief of the loss and to act on their behalf to determine final arrangements and the management of their estate. Dying without a will, or dying intestate, adds layers of uncertainty for family and friends in an already difficult time. This becomes especially challenging when no instructions have been left for managing a person's estate and financial affairs or who will assume parental or legal responsibilities for a deceased person's children.

As difficult as it can be to think about, we need to consider what will happen when we die. We need to ask ourselves: What will I leave behind? Who will carry which responsibilities in my absence? What decisions can I make now to ease that burden and convey my wishes to my family for later?

It is a common misconception that making a will is not a concern until you are middle-aged or a senior. However, all adult Yukoners with families, those who might own businesses or properties, or those who lead busy and complex lives should also have wills.

We know that, at first glance, creating a will can seem daunting. Throughout November, we are offering workshops and information sessions for Wills Month to assist Yukoners. You will find that creating a legally valid will is not a difficult process. Workshops will be held via Zoom on November 19 and November 23. In addition, Justice Veale will be giving an in-person presentation on November 25 — with COVID measures in place — at Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre in Whitehorse.

Yukoners can expect to leave the workshops having gained an understanding of why they need a will, the will drafting process and potential costs, common myths about wills, how to prepare a will, and what an enduring power of attorney and an advance directive are. I encourage all Yukoners to consider attending a workshop. For details and to register, please visit the Government of Yukon website and search "learn about wills and estates".

I am especially pleased that this Wills Month, we have brought forward amendments to the *Wills Act* — contained within Bill No. 12 — in this Legislative Assembly to modernize the legislative framework here in the territory. The *Wills Act* has not been amended for 66 years. It needs updating to reflect the modern lives of Yukoners.

Our message today, in recognizing Make a Will Month, is to encourage all Yukoners to plan ahead for their loved ones by creating a will this November.

Visit yukon.ca or yukonpubliclegaleducation@yplea.com for help and information.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize November as Make a Will Month in the Yukon. We began the Make a Will Month initiative in 2015 to raise awareness of the value and importance of a will to provide certainty and assurance after someone passes away.

Particularly important for people to know are the difficulties that family members may face in dealing with the estate and wishes of a person who passed away without a will in place. A will, as most people know, is a written document that sets out how you would like your assets dealt with or distributed and deals with such matters as guardianship of children, preferences for burial or cremation, and service arrangements. Many people do not have a will or have not thought about how they would like their assets dealt with or to whom they would entrust executorship in the event of their death. Often parents have not thought about legally defining their wishes in terms of guardianship for their children. It is important, and there is no time like the present to start planning out how you would like such matters dealt with.

Begin to think about what you would like done with your assets and how someone would deal with your debts and liabilities. There are resources available to help you get started on a will, and you can contact the public guardian and trustee with questions about wills and estates.

Thank you to all for taking the time to assist Yukoners to get organized to create wills and to the former and current staff of the Department of Justice for their work in both suggesting the recognition of Make a Will Month as well as the recent work on amendments to the *Wills Act*.

Applause

In recognition of Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It is also Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week, and I rise today on behalf of the Yukon government and the Official Opposition to talk about the dangers of carbon monoxide and what Yukoners can do to protect themselves and their families from it.

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas produced from the burning of fuels such as gas, kerosene, oil, propane, and wood. It can become a problem in any space heated by a fuel-burning source, not just your house. Your garage, cabin, wall tent, RV, boat, and camper can fill up very quickly with enough carbon monoxide to cause severe, long-term injury or death.

Snowmobiles and vehicles running inside an attached garage or near a home's fresh air intake can significantly increase carbon monoxide levels indoors.

Carbon monoxide is known as "the silent killer" because it's a gas that you can't see, smell, or taste, so people may not realize they're exposed to it until it's too late. Its symptoms can mimic those of a flu — yet another thing to watch for in 2020. At very high levels, a person can collapse and use lose consciousness within minutes, leading to death. We've tragically and needlessly lost Yukoners due to carbon monoxide poisoning. I ask that we all do our part so that, together, we prevent any future loss of life.

In 2013, Yukon was the first jurisdiction in Canada to mandate that all residences with fuel-burning appliances or attached garages are required to have carbon monoxide alarms installed. Carbon monoxide alarms or combination carbon monoxide and smoke alarms must be installed outside all sleeping areas and on every level of the home, including the basement. If you're a tenant, it is your landlord's responsibility to install them.

Never use a fuel-burning appliance that is intended for outdoor use — such as a barbecue, grill, or portable generator — indoors.

On a yearly basis, if you are homeowner or landlord, you should schedule maintenance of appliances such as furnaces, water heaters, fireplaces, wood stoves, barbecues, and gas ranges. This includes cleaning of chimneys, vents, and exhaust pipes or systems to ensure that they aren't blocked by anything that can prevent carbon monoxide from being vented outside.

Installation and maintenance of fuel-burning appliances should be done by a qualified technician who is trained to spot potential issues that could be causing carbon monoxide build up.

Exposure to carbon monoxide can be fatal for people and pets. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include: headache, nausea, dizziness, breathlessness, confusion, hallucinations, and unconsciousness. If you think your home, cabin, trailer, or vehicle has a buildup of carbon monoxide, please go outside immediately and call 911.

Thank you to Yukoners who are protecting their families and communities by making carbon monoxide safety and prevention a priority. I urge you to be aware of the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and to test your alarms at least once a month. It just takes a few seconds and it could save lives.

Applause

Ms. Hanson: I rise on behalf of the Yukon New Democratic Party to speak to the importance of Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week. My colleague from Takhini-Kopper King and I talked about adding our voice to this tribute.

We do so in part to pay tribute to Brad and Valerie Rusk and their children, Rebekah and Gabriel, who, along with their boarder, Donald McNamee, died of carbon monoxide poisoning in their rented Porter Creek home on January 29, 2012. Their deaths were quickly dismissed as accidental. The

question the grieving relatives asked: Was this accident preventable?

Yukoners owe a debt of gratitude to the Rusk family for their persistence in requesting that a coroner's inquest take place, during which some ugly truths were laid bare, including multiple reports from Yukon government departments and agencies detailing the dangerous state of oil-fired appliances in Yukon over the preceding years. A nationally recognized expert had advised Yukon government and industry on the need to modernize legislation and regulations — regulations that may have prevented the hooking up of a new heating appliance to an old chimney due to the risks of clogging and carbon monoxide leaks and may have prevented the deaths of five people.

We also give gratitude to the coroner's jury — six men and women who, after a grueling week of testimony, made nine recommendations. Sadly, many of those recommendations mirrored the recommendations previously made to the Yukon government that were not acted upon.

I join in reiterating the minister's words about the importance of carbon monoxide poisoning awareness. It is not just about being aware, but actually checking and making sure that you and your family are safe, because it's too easy to forget that carbon monoxide is called "the silent killer" for a reason: you can't smell or taste it. Carbon monoxide reduces your ability to think clearly.

In the days before the Rusk family died, Valerie Rusk went to her doctor's office, asking for an appointment to find out why she and her family were so sick. They all had headaches and were feeling weak and nauseous. An appointment was made to see the entire family the next day, but the family was too sick to make that appointment. They died a few days later.

Carbon monoxide deaths are preventable, Mr. Speaker. Ask yourself: Are you one of the 40 percent of Canadians who does not have a carbon monoxide alarm? Do you believe that carbon monoxide alarms last forever? Do you know that you have to replace your carbon monoxide alarm every five to seven years? Do you believe that carbon monoxide alarms are only needed if you have a gas furnace? Do you believe that your heating system does not need to be checked annually?

These questions highlight the importance of education. Appliances that use gas, oil, wood, or any kind of fossil fuel produce carbon monoxide during combustion. Sources of carbon monoxide in your home can include your furnace, your water heater, your wood stove, your fireplace, your oven, and of course, automotive exhaust.

Normally, those appliances are vented outside, but if there's a leak or poor installation, tragedy looms. Your only protection is a CSA-approved carbon monoxide alarm. It's the least you can do to protect yourself and your family.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling a legislative return responding to questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition during Committee of the Whole on October 20, 2020.

Mr. Cathers: I have for tabling a letter dated October 30, 2020, to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources urging the government to provide continued funding for the Fireweed Community Market.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges Members' Services Board to waive any confidentiality provisions as they pertain to recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer regarding safely conducting an election during a pandemic, including any recommendations regarding changes to the *Elections Act*.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to direct the Yukon Housing Corporation to:

(1) ensure that emergency vehicles can access its buildings at all times;

(2) prioritize the safety of seniors by ensuring priority snowplowing of seniors' residences' access ways and parking lots; and

(3) consider tenants' physical abilities when communicating requirements around removal of vehicles and snow clearing.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure equitable, fair, and transparent support to all Yukon daycares applying for and receiving the direct operating grant.

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

THAT this House supports the rental assistance program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motions?

Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Canada-Yukon housing benefit

Hon. Ms. Frost: Every Yukoner deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. Despite the good work of many, our government recognizes that some Yukoners still struggle to find housing that meets their needs and is affordable. As we look forward to National Housing Day on November 22, I want to draw attention to some of the ways in which Yukon Housing Corporation is working to help Yukoners gain and maintain affordable and adequate housing.

New units are being built that will help ease the lack of available affordable housing, like the 47 units of community housing being built at 4th Avenue and Jeckell Street in Whitehorse, the hundreds of affordable housing units that we have supported through the housing initiative fund, as well as other housing being planned and built in communities across the territory. We are working with our partners on solutions to meet the needs of Yukoners, including looking for new and innovative ways to support affordable housing.

Today, I am proud to announce the new Canada housing benefit, a rent subsidy program that is available for low- to moderate-income Yukon households. Developed in partnership with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, this new program will provide additional support to hundreds of low-income households across the territory. This year, there will be \$584,000 available for the program. Funding for the program will increase over the seven years.

The Canada housing benefit prioritizes households in need and the tenants can continue to receive the benefit if they move from one home to another within the territory. Depending on their household income and the size of the family, applicants can receive \$200, \$400, \$600, or \$800 per month, which will be paid directly to the tenant.

Yukoners can find the application form online or at Yukon Housing Corporation's offices starting today. Yukoners approved for the program will start receiving the Canada housing benefit before December 31, 2020, to help pay their rent for November and December. This program is available to Yukon households that make less than the affordable household income limit, which is \$103,070 in gross household income per year.

The amount that an eligible household will receive through this program will be based on the size of the unit required for the family makeup. This new program focuses on Yukoners who are not supported through our existing rent supplement program or Yukon Housing Corporation's housing program. It will be available until 2027. It is an important part of the 10-year national housing strategy announced in 2017.

Our Liberal government recognizes that stable, affordable housing is foundational to the health and well-being of all Yukoners. The Canada-Yukon housing benefit will help us achieve a key goal in the housing action plan for Yukoners by increasing access to adequate and affordable market and non-market rental housing. Working on this together with our partners, we continue to implement the National Housing Strategy, as well as the housing action plan for Yukon, the

Putting People First plan, and the Safe at Home plan to end and prevent homelessness.

We are pleased to collaborate with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation on this new initiative. The Canada-Yukon housing benefit will help Yukoners afford housing that meets their needs.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this important topic today. I appreciate the minister providing us with an update on this file and I hope that it helps Yukoners who are struggling through this pandemic. The minister mentioned that the program will last for seven years, that there is \$584,000 available this year, and that it will increase next year. I am hoping that the minister can tell us how much it will increase to next year.

While making rent and housing more affordable is important for many, it is also important to note that it does very little when there is no housing available. We know that there is a severe housing shortage in the Yukon and it has become increasingly worse over the last four years under this Liberal government.

In July 2016, the social and seniors housing wait-list was at 105. As of October 13, 2020, this wait-list has skyrocketed to 361. That is more than triple — and all under this minister and this Liberal government.

So, while we support assisting folks in affording their rent, the government needs to do a better job in getting more houses and more lots out there so that there is actually more housing available. We have raised this issue with the minister many times and the problem only seems to be getting worse. So, I do hope that this is a signal that she will start to show some urgency with these issues and that the Liberals will start trying to solve the problem.

While I have the Minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation up, I want to bring to the minister's attention an urgent issue that was raised with us and needed some quick attention by this government. Greenwood Manor is a seniors housing complex run by Yukon Housing Corporation and a family has reached out to us to flag that the snow clearing had not been done at this facility, and it was putting seniors at risk. As a result, elderly residents were finding it difficult to get in and out of the building for such things as medical appointments.

We were also told that an ambulance arrived at the building last night to pick up a resident, and the snow was so bad that the ambulance got stuck. As a result, a second ambulance had to be called out, and the resident had to be wheeled out in the street on a stretcher.

Further, we are told that the elderly residents have been informed that they have to dig out their cars on their own to make way for the government plows. There are obviously several concerns here, including having emergency vehicles becoming stuck when they arrive or having elderly individuals go shovel two feet of snow by themselves in cold weather.

I also note that this concern that came to us was also sent to the Premier, the Deputy Premier, and the minister. I am hoping that the minister can assure us that this won't happen

again so that families don't have to go public to get this addressed.

Ms. White: Housing is critical, and it's a human right. Suitable and decent housing contributes to our mental well-being by providing a safe environment to live, work, play, and rest. The truth for many in Yukon is that accessing housing is tough, and access to affordable housing is a dream but not a reality. For more than a decade, Yukon has been in an ever-increasing housing crunch. New construction can't keep up with demand, there is a shortage of building lots in rural communities, and the Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list gets longer every year. With more than 350 people on the Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list, it is clear that housing affordability is an issue across the territory for seniors, individuals, and families. Yukon Housing Corporation's rent supplement program is always fully utilized, with folks who need help being told that there is no room in the program for them.

We are pleased to hear about the additional support coming from the Government of Canada to address housing affordability, funding that we were told about during the spring briefing. Programs like this one are good in that they can provide immediate assistance to people whose housing cost is more than they can afford, but let's be clear: They don't address the cause of the problem, they don't address the out-of-control rent increases on the private market, they don't address the lack of availability or the high demand of affordable housing, and they don't help the young families trying to purchase their first home in an overheated market.

Someone working for minimum wage can barely afford rent in this town — everybody knows this — and this announcement will only ease the sad reality. While subsidizing that person's rent will help in the short term, it is not a long-term solution. In a fair and just society, someone working full-time should not need a rent subsidy to make ends meet. When this government had the ability to increase minimum wage, they chose the path of least resistance, never putting themselves in the shoes of the lowest wage earners. It speaks to their moral compass that they chose to shortchange minimum wage workers 25 cents per hour by not following the recommendations made by the Employment Standards Board. That's over \$500 a year for the lowest paid workers in our economy. These are the same workers whom we all consider to be essential during this pandemic.

We are told that the average cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Whitehorse is just over \$1,200, and this is laughable to anyone in Yukon who has looked for a place to rent recently. People know it to be much higher. But even if we believe these statistics, for a person earning minimum wage, that's nearly two-thirds of the money that they make a year. This is not sustainable.

So, while we welcome this new program because it will help some people with their rent, we're still waiting to see action from this government that will fundamentally address Yukon's housing crisis. Until this happens, the Yukon housing wait-list will keep growing and more Yukoners will need

subsidies to keep a roof over their head. Yukoners need more than temporary solutions. Housing, after all, is a human right and we need our government to treat it as such.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm glad to have the opportunity to highlight some of the work that is being done on housing in the Yukon. With respect to the announcement today or the addressing — the objective of addressing and developing housing solutions across the Yukon and the wide-ranging needs of Yukoners, this is one way to address housing — making housing more affordable in our territory. This is quite a contrast from the previous Yukon government.

There were some questions today with respect to Greenwood Manor and snow removal. The announcement today is about affordable housing. It's about supporting our vulnerable population. Certainly, housing is a human right. Our objective is to ensure that every Yukoner has adequate housing, affordable housing, and that we look at the whole housing transformation and look at supporting the Yukon Housing Corporation tenants, but we also have to look across the Yukon for housing affordability, availability, and vulnerabilities across the Yukon.

The Yukon Party government, previously led by the Housing minister at that time, backed out of a major affordable housing program to the sum of \$13 million. So, explain to Yukoners why they sat on the money and didn't address that and put those housing units on the market — the whole business around catching up and keeping up around the housing needs.

We know that indigenous communities in the Yukon — Yukon First Nation communities — are extremely pressured as well in terms of catching up and keeping up to the housing market. It's not so much about what we're doing in Whitehorse; it's about how we can provide Yukoners with adequate opportunities.

At the time when the concerns were voiced previously around the housing subsidies, we did certainly look at our efforts going forward and looked at providing opportunities. Using this arrangement with the federal government, we provided supports to our households during COVID-19, and the rental assistance program allowed us to give security to our Yukoners. The good news is that our Liberal government is working with our partners to ease housing pressures across the territory. Residential construction is booming; the City of Whitehorse has set a record in 2020 for development permits. The total value of construction so far this year is \$41 million; last year, it was \$24 million at this point in time. New units being built will help to ease the lack of available affordable housing — so will the 47 units of community housing being built at 4th Avenue and Jeckell Street.

Today, I am proud to announce the new Canada-Yukon housing benefit, a rent subsidy program that is available for low- to moderate-income Yukon households. The new program will provide additional supports to hundreds of low-income households across the territory. The benefit prioritizes households in need, and the tenant can continue to receive the benefit if they move from one home to another, regardless of whether it's in Whitehorse or rural Yukon communities.

Yukoners can find the application, as I indicated, on our website, and I certainly look forward to working with Yukoners as we move this project forward. Our Liberal government recognizes that stable, affordable housing is the foundation of the health and well-being of all Yukoners.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Secure medical unit incident

Mr. Hassard: Yesterday, it was revealed that an incident that took place at the hospital has resulted in the end of psychiatric services at the hospital. This comes after over a year of delays from the Liberals on the creation of a secure medical unit at the hospital, which staff who work at the hospital have been pleading for. According to e-mails to staff, the assault was preceded by e-mails from the psychiatrist to the department pleading for heightened security measures.

So, the minister's department was aware of the safety concerns before the assault took place. Can the minister tell us when her department became aware of these security concerns and what they did with that information when they received it?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Our government is committed to ensuring that Yukoners have access to the services and supports that they require, including at Yukon hospitals. We are aware of an incident that occurred at the Whitehorse General Hospital on October 28, and we are working with the Hospital Corporation and a resident psychiatrist to ensure that staff and patients are supported and that staff and physicians have access to a safe workplace.

At the Whitehorse General Hospital — as I understand it — the deputy minister and the CEO are working very closely with the Yukon Medical Association to ensure that we have a safe workplace and that the services the psychiatrist provided at the hospital will continue, and the arrangement is being discussed as we speak.

Mr. Hassard: So, staff at the hospital have been flagging safety concerns to this Liberal government for well over a year. That's why the secure medical unit is so badly needed. On March 7, 2019, the Premier stated this in his budget speech — quote: "This year's Budget also provides \$1 million for a larger secure medical unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital..."

The 2019-20 budget documents go on to state that this is for planning; however, yesterday, it was revealed by the minister in her media scrum that the Liberals have delayed this spending and, as a result, have put staff and patients at risk. The minister's exact quote to media was — quote: "There's a million dollars in the budget in 2020-21 and that's the planning budget."

So, can the Minister of Health tell us why she is putting the safety of patients and staff at risk by delaying this important funding?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As I indicated, our first priority certainly in Health and Social Services — and I know it's a priority of the Hospital Corporation as well — is to ensure that all patients and all staff are safe and that we provide the best

possible service to all who work and enter the Whitehorse General Hospital for services.

The Hospital Corporation has brought in a security officer. We have security officers at the centre there now. They have been there for quite some time. They have looked at providing some immediate interventions. As I know it — I can't speak specifically about the incident but I can talk generally about what has transpired with respect to the Hospital Corporation and its supports to ensure that the staff are safe and the patients who enter the facility are given the services that they need.

With respect to next steps on the secure medical unit, the planning is underway and it has been for quite some time. We have been working very closely with the Yukon Medical Association, Yukon Hospital Corporation, and of course the department on a plan and a plan to fill the secure medical unit — the shell of the facility that was left there by the previous government — to put in the services that were necessary and we continue to put best efforts forward to get that done as quickly as we can.

Mr. Hassard: I am happy to hear that the minister has a good excuse — that it was our fault — one more time.

Even the minister has admitted that the lack of a secure medical unit is putting people at risk. Let me remind the minister of her own words. On April 11, she herself said that the current secure medical unit — quote: "... does not meet current client and patient safety standards."

The minister knows that this space does not meet safety standards, yet she has delayed the funding that the Premier originally announced a year and a half ago. Now there has been an assault on a physician and the hospital has lost psychiatric services.

Will the minister stop her delays that are putting people at risk and finally provide adequate support to the hospital to improve safety?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I certainly want to acknowledge that the incident that happened at the hospital is a priority. It is a priority for this government and it's a priority for the Hospital Corporation, and the staff are doing a really great job in trying to resolve this going forward in collaboration with the psychiatrist, working with the Yukon Medical Association.

I want to put that aside to say that we are working with the corporation to discuss next steps and options as we look at the secure medical unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. The resources are provided and the funding is there for the planning and design of this unit, and the department was provided with a solid business case going forward. Efforts will continue on in terms of the engagement and looking at our partners to move forward quickly on the secure medical unit. We certainly want to acknowledge the efforts there by the Hospital Corporation to have a facility ready for use by 2023 with the support of our partners.

That is the vision. The resources are there and the funding of \$1 million is made available to do the planning, which is in the budget. The Hospital Corporation is working toward finalizing that drafting.

Question re: Hospital staffing

Ms. McLeod: As we have discussed, the minister's delays on the secure medical unit means that we will not have this much-needed unit for years, but I would like the minister to clarify some of her remarks to the media yesterday.

Yesterday, the minister stated — and I quote: "The exciting thing is that we have psychiatrists in the Yukon while we haven't had psychiatrists before." However, a June press release from the minister states: "Prior to this year, adult psychiatric services in Yukon were provided by one visiting psychiatrist and one resident psychiatrist..."

So, here we are again with the minister sharing inaccurate information with Yukoners. This has become a bit of a common thing with this minister. Will the minister now correct the record and retract her incorrect statements from yesterday?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to acknowledge that we have increased our resident psychiatrist supports in Yukon. In fact, we have mental wellness supports in all of our communities now. We have four mental wellness hubs. We link in with the supports to all of our communities. We have increased the supports to improve access to care for patients as part of our work to enhance the continuum of mental wellness supports in the Yukon. We have increased the model of care that provides services to Whitehorse at the private clinic and treatment services for Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services through our Referred Care Clinic. We are taking a holistic approach and a multidisciplinary approach as we look at mental health in the Yukon.

In 2019, three psychiatrists opened a private practice, accepting referrals from physicians for all patients requiring care. So, yes, Mr. Speaker — that is very positive news for Yukoners to know that we are now enhancing the specialized supports and services for Yukoners, taking it from a multidisciplinary, holistic approach and ensuring that all Yukoners, including rural Yukon communities, are provided supports as they need them.

Ms. McLeod: It has become habit for this Health and Social Services minister to share inaccurate or false information with Yukoners. Two weeks ago, the minister told this House that there were no staffing vacancies at community hospitals, only to be corrected a day later by officials who confirmed that, actually, there were staffing vacancies at these hospitals.

Yesterday in her media scrum, the minister was asked about how many Yukoners are impacted by the loss of psychiatry services at the hospital, and the minister's exact response was: "I can't answer your question with respect to how many patients are supported outside the Yukon because I don't ask those questions."

If the Minister of Health and Social Services isn't asking those questions, who is?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Just for the member opposite's records, when we speak about very specific data and information, I don't generally get that information.

If it's an urgent requirement from the member opposite, I would endeavour to get that information. It's a large department, but also, the responsibilities at the hospital rest with the hospital.

I will endeavour to address that. The same holds true for staffing at the hospital. If I get information from the hospital to say that they have used locums and that they have filled all of the positions and there are no shortages across the continuum of care in our community centres, that is what I report.

With respect to knowing how many positions are vacant at the hospital, I will endeavour to respond, but that is the responsibility of the Hospital Corporation as well. What I did clarify was that we are working in collaboration with the Hospital Corporation on a recruitment and retention strategy so that we consistently provide for filling all of the vacancies rather than having two streams going forward to try to fill vacancies across the Yukon.

Ms. McLeod: It's clear that the Minister of Health and Social Services is not paying attention to her files. The minister shares inaccurate information with Yukoners, the minister was nowhere to be seen all summer in response to the pandemic, and yesterday, when asked about the health care of Yukoners, she said that she doesn't know because she doesn't ask those questions.

The minister's lack of attention to these important issues means that the hospital does not have the resources it needs and that our community hospitals are not appropriately staffed. In fact, another department of the minister's is actually contributing to health care staffing issues in our communities, and the minister refuses to fix it.

When will this minister start showing some urgency and start getting properly briefed so she can stop sharing inaccurate information with Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I can understand why the member opposite didn't see the minister all summer, because the member opposite wasn't around. My ministers were here, Mr. Speaker. We were here every day, since the pandemic started, working really hard for Yukoners to put the supports in place.

This particular minister has worked tirelessly, not only working in Health and Social Services and making sure that, during a pandemic, the hospital had the supports that it needed but also, adding to that, a collaborative care model that the opposition didn't even understand when they were in government.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite must clear the record when she says that the minister was not around or not doing her job, because that is absolutely incorrect information. Again, if the member opposite doesn't show up in Whitehorse the whole summer, I can understand why the member opposite wouldn't understand who is working and who isn't working around here.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on Yukon tourism

Ms. Hanson: From Watson Lake to Beaver Creek, from Keno to Old Crow, every Yukon community has a museum or cultural centre. Some are fortunate to have both. These centres that are open to the public share First Nation history and culture, the history of the gold rush, and the building of the Alaska Highway. They all have stories to share. COVID-19 and the loss of tourism this past summer has greatly impacted these

centres. Many struggle to even stay open on a part-time basis. No real revenues from admissions and no large public events such as Indigenous Day, Moosehide Gathering, or Adäka to pull people in has resulted in few tourists.

What actions or support has the minister implemented to assist these important community assets that rely on tourism?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the question. I believe this may be the first question about culture and heritage that we have had on the floor of the Assembly in this Sitting, so I am really grateful to stand and speak about it. This government has taken many steps to support this cultural sector. We know, of course, that there were significant impacts as a result of COVID-19 on this particular area of our Yukon Territory. We absolutely cherish the 19 museums and cultural centres that we have. We were quick to extend all of our funding agreements to all of our facilities and all of our associations that we work with to ensure that they had the funding that they needed — even though we knew that they would not be able to open their doors as they normally would and that they would not be able to provide the types of services that they normally would.

As well, for all of the events that we normally enjoy as Yukoners — we were not able to have those, so we extended all the funding and worked with all of those organizations and associations throughout the pandemic.

Ms. Hanson: These community museums and cultural centres depend on volunteers and community support to be able to offer programs. Students often fill the summer job roster. Yukon's COVID-19 tourism recovery plan makes no mention of community museums or cultural centres. It is unclear whether board members of the Yukon Historical and Museums Association were asked about the impacts on their programs or whether they were invited to participate in any recovery planning for this vital part of Yukon's tourism sector.

Can the minister outline what involvement museums and cultural centres had during consultations and planning for the development of Yukon's COVID-19 tourism recovery plan?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the question. I believe we will be debating a motion later on this afternoon specifically around this exact area of discussion today during Question Period.

During the last several years, we embarked on a new journey with Yukoners in terms of planning for tourism and developed a new *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*. The museums, cultural centres, and the arts community were all involved in that.

One of the outcomes was the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board. We have representation on that board from the cultural, heritage, and First Nation-specific stakeholders and they have absolutely advised us. They worked with us hand in hand through the relief and recovery planning. We also had representation from these very areas on the Business Advisory Council.

We're going to debate this later. I have a lot more information to provide. I will try to provide a little bit more of it after the third question.

Ms. Hanson: A 2003 study entitled *Economic Impacts of Yukon Museums and Heritage Institutions* was commissioned by the government of the day. Even then, this report indicated that the local impact of community museums and cultural centres was substantial. Teslin's George Johnston Museum and the Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre combined accounted for more than 10 percent of that community's employment. Think of how many changes and new centres have been created since then and the even greater impacts these community resources have today.

Despite the statement that honouring our heritage is a core value of Yukon's tourism strategy, it has been ignored when it comes to the draft tourism recovery plan.

What assurances has this minister provided to the museums and cultural centres that, despite ignoring them in the recovery plan, that they will be actively supported in both the relief and recovery phases of Yukon's tourism economy?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board was one of the direct results of the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*. Many of the action items — and there were 24 that were identified in the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* — have been brought and elevated into the tourism relief and recovery plan.

Again, it's current, it's relevant, and it's the envy — again — of the whole country. We actually did the planning during times when we were having extreme success in tourism, and now we have a pandemic to deal with and we have a current, relevant plan. The heritage and culture — and all of our stakeholders — and this is in fact the first time that we've done a tourism plan that took into consideration partners in tourism, culture, and heritage. We absolutely value this sector of our community and know that they're going to be a very big part of the healing as we get through this pandemic. They're going to help us tell the stories. The historical associations are going to be the ones that tell this story, as we will, as Yukoners.

I look forward to debating this further this afternoon.

Question re: Personnel costs

Mr. Cathers: Long before the start of the pandemic, the Liberals were spending outside their means. They ballooned the size of the public service by 568 full-time equivalent positions according to their own numbers. That's the equivalent of a small town larger than Mayo or Carmacks. According to the audited Public Accounts, in just three years between 2017 and 2020, the Liberals added almost \$86 million in personnel costs.

Can the Premier tell us how much more the Liberals are adding in government personnel costs this year?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, we answered this question in Committee of the Whole yesterday and we spoke about how, from our mains, we added 30 FTEs in this fiscal year — 30.

Then of course the pandemic came along and we did have to increase some of our supports — but again, only 13 more full-time equivalents at that time.

Now there have been some more FTEs that are of a temporary nature or a part-time nature as we battle the

pandemic. But again, Mr. Speaker, I'll take our record on FTE growth over the Yukon Party's any day.

Mr. Cathers: I think we have the bizarre situation where the Premier while in opposition — and now — criticizes the previous government for adding too many government employees and his solution to that is to go on a hiring spree to hire 568 more.

Quite simply, the Liberals are burning through cash. Long before pandemic spending, they went on a hiring spree and grew the size of the public service. Their total increase is 568 FTE positions. That's more than five times the size of Burwash Landing. The hiring spree has added almost \$86 million to government personnel costs between 2017 and 2020.

Why won't the Premier actually tell us how much he's adding in personnel costs this year?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, this year, the amount of increases of permanent full-time equivalents — we had 30 for the mains. I would challenge the members opposite to give me a year that was even close to that under the Yukon Party in their previous five years. Then, in *Supplementary Estimates No. 1*, there was an increase of 13 permanent. Now — as I have said — there were 75.5 term positions — or a 1.7-percent increase — from the 2020-21 main estimates.

Again, the majority of this increase is attributed to our response to the pandemic. Is the member opposite saying that we shouldn't have hired those part-time individuals to battle the pandemic? Is that what he's saying? What programs and services would he want us to cut? Because we have done an enviable job of not only balancing our budget a year ahead of schedule — before the pandemic — but also curbed a trend in the increasing of FTEs to the tune of 30 FTEs in the mains.

The member opposite can have fun with his statistics, but in this year, 30 plus 13 is the number of full-time equivalents this year, and there was another addition of term positions as we dealt with border controls, as we dealt with making sure that we have personal protection equipment, and making sure that our communities were safe.

Mr. Speaker, I think we have done an enviable job to make sure we did that within our means.

Mr. Cathers: In opposition, the Premier criticized the previous government for adding too many staff. His solution to this was to hire more than a small-town's-worth of staff and add them to government. The Liberals spent the entire summer hiding from transparency and accountability by shutting down the Legislative Assembly. Now that the House is finally sitting, they continue to refuse to answer questions.

Here is what we know: The Liberals have grown the size of government by 568 FTE positions by their own numbers. The Public Accounts show that when you compare 2020 to 2017 — in just three years — their hiring spree increased personnel costs to taxpayers by almost \$86 million, before the pandemic.

We're trying to find out how much these personnel costs are increasing by this year. Does the Premier even know? If he does know, why does he believe that the public doesn't have a right to know?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is true that the members opposite planned a 150-bed facility without taking into consideration putting anybody in that building. Yes, it is true that we had to increase the mental health supports in Yukon, because there were only two for rural Yukon, and we did add some FTEs for that extremely important work.

Yes, it is extremely important for people to remember the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — and the lack of planning for that, as well — and also the hiring spree that the members opposite went on in the election year for teachers who were in the classrooms before we even got into power, but yet they said that those were our hires.

The real fact is, Mr. Speaker, that, yes, it is a very, very small town — 30 up front and another 13 after that. According to my calculations, that is 43. That is a very, very small town.

Question re: Alaska Highway corridor upgrades

Mr. Hassard: So, there is no debate that improvements along the Alaska Highway corridor in Whitehorse are needed. With the upgrades to the highway, Hillcrest residents have asked for a number of safety improvements to assist those crossing the highway. The government said no to those requests, citing costs. The plan to expand the intersection to seven or more lanes has received significant criticism from residents due to safety reasons. The residents said that they were not confident that the government would listen to their concerns in drawing up the final design; however, that design went ahead.

What is the Yukon government doing to ensure the safety of motorists on the Alaska Highway in the Hillcrest area now that the first phase of construction is completed and we are now into winter?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am very happy to address the improvements that we are making along our highway system, including in front of the subdivision of Hillcrest. As I am sure all of us are aware, workplace and community safety are very important to me, and, in fact, improved safety to pedestrians, bikers, and drivers is why I see these long-sought improvements — lights, controlled crosswalks, turn lanes, and bike paths in front of Hillcrest — as such a great addition to our community. It is very exciting, and the traffic disruption and confusion that the community has endured so stoically this summer, through this \$10-million job, is now over and the traffic flows, from everything I have heard from the community and from people who have reached out to me — they are saying that they are very happy with the final result.

I have spoken to the construction company, Cobalt, and they said that it was one of the best projects they have ever worked on, despite all the challenges of working through COVID in a very restricted area, on one of the busiest highways in the territory. They said that working in tandem with the community and with the Department of Highways and Public Works was an excellent job for them. I know that the community residents are now seeing the benefits of the highway improvements that we put in place there. I am happy to talk about this again in question 2.

Mr. Hassard: So, Hillcrest residents spent the summer dodging construction equipment as work commenced, but the residents thought: “Hey, some short-term pain for long-term gain.” However, the pain continues. Residents are telling us, especially with the recent snowfall, that it is very hard to tell where they are on the road due to issues with the road and line painting.

With both northbound and southbound vehicles hugging the centre line in efforts to stay on the road, it’s creating a safety hazard. Can the minister tell us if they are working with the contractor to identify and alleviate these residents’ safety concerns?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I can tell the member opposite that we are working very closely with the contractor and with the community. We invited the community to our weekly safety meetings up in Hillcrest when the job was going on, and we will continue that practice in the future. It is a refinement to the whole process to make sure that the community has involvement in the construction jobs that are happening in front of their community. That was something that was suggested, and I took it on. I thought that it was a great addition. Mr. Speaker, as well, the department is meeting with the contractor and the community every week at these safety meetings. They are part of this whole thing.

Yes, last week, as a matter of fact, the Department of Highways and Public Works met with the contractor and had a debrief on the projects throughout the territory — how they were going. They had a frank exchange that lasted for hours. By happenstance, I happened to phone the contractor that afternoon and had a very good discussion with them myself about the work that is happening throughout the territory. I was told that they had never had meetings like this with the department before. They valued them intensely, and the frank exchange will help both parties come to much better agreements on what is needed in the future and to refine contracting and project execution. The individual whom I was talking to said that it was an absolutely great exchange of ideas and he looked forward to that type of collaboration into the future.

Mr. Hassard: Hillcrest residents have also raised other safety concerns along this stretch of road. There are still not many street lights in the area and it’s tough to see where the road is when it’s dark. Residents say that key traffic signs are missing, speeding has increased, and there are no safe crossings for bikes and pedestrians.

With summer behind us, can the minister tell us how much work still needs to be completed and when these safety concerns will be addressed?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As everyone in this House knows, this was a \$10-million project. It was a multi-year project. We are going to continue with the work next year. I have biked, walked, and driven through that construction site all summer to keep an eye on it myself. I have worked with the community of Hillcrest with my colleague, the MLA for Mountainview. I have spoken with the contractor. I have had the department working very closely with contractors throughout the territory going forward.

I know that the job in this particular stretch of Alaska Highway was one of the most chaotic and busiest stretches of highway in the territory. Certainly, through the construction, there was — when you pull out all the controls that were there and actually worked with it with a couple of construction sites — it was very hard for the community. I know that they put up with that and endured that.

What we have now, Mr. Speaker, is a road that is working far, far better than it has in many, many years and it will serve the community very, very well going forward. We have bike trails — we have bike paths along the highway. We have lights that were never there before, Mr. Speaker. The speed limit is actually decreasing. We have proper turn lanes. It's going to be a great improvement to the City of Whitehorse and the safety of the highway going forward.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 268

Clerk: Motion No. 268, standing in the name of Ms. McLeod.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Watson Lake: THAT this House urges the Minister of Health and Social Services to provide a detailed breakdown of spending associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you just stated, this motion states:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Health and Social Services to provide a detailed breakdown of spending associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

I believe that this is a relatively straightforward motion. Having this information, of course, will help to provide some much-needed transparency and accountability of a Liberal government that seems to have gone to great lengths to avoid democratic accountability.

We would like to see where the money was spent, how it was spent, what it was spent on, who received the contracts, and how many full-time equivalents were created. We would like to see these details in writing so that Yukoners can review how taxpayers' money was spent.

This information will assist us as legislators in doing our job of providing scrutiny of government decisions.

With that, I'm going to end my remarks and hope that the Liberals will support democratic accountability.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm happy to speak to Motion No. 268 today. The motion requests a breakdown of COVID spending and I'm happy to provide it. I will note for the record that members of the opposition were provided a briefing on the

Department of Health and Social Services spending and they were free to ask the questions they wished at that briefing.

I will further note that we have not yet begun debate on the supplementary budget for the Department of Health and Social Services. Members, of course, are free to ask about spending at that time.

I hope that today Yukoners will hear whether or not the Official Opposition supports being in a state of emergency or not. They have refused to answer the questions on two Wednesdays in a row. The ongoing COVID response from this government is very important to all Yukoners, and I'm glad to have this opportunity to further speak to the work done by so many to keep our territory safe.

Our government worked quickly and efficiently to respond to the COVID-19 health pandemic last spring. On March 23, the Health Emergency Operations Centre opened. The centre collaborated with other departments to ensure a coordinated public health response to COVID-19 and was established to address the immediate COVID-19 risks.

Staff at the centre did an incredible job bringing together resources from across the government. At its height, more than 80 employees were working together on operations, planning, logistics, and finance. The Health Emergency Operations Centre also played a key role in supporting the chief medical officer of health as he developed his public health guidance and supported businesses and organizations as part of the restart plan. The centre has now transitioned into the COVID response unit to continue its work addressing ongoing and emerging COVID risks.

This unit remains a temporary branch of Health and Social Services to provide ongoing operation support to the chief medical officer of health. This unit is focused on ensuring that the government continues to have a coordinated public health response until a vaccine is in place.

Also, on March 23, our government opened the Respiratory Assessment Centre to provide rapid access to COVID-19 testing to Yukoners. The centre also provided acute care to patients with influenza-like illnesses as physicians in Yukon moved primarily to virtual care. This centre continues to reduce the testing burden on Yukon Communicable Disease Control, allowing this incredible team of individuals to focus on its vital work of contact tracing and testing high-risk clients and contacts of confirmed cases.

The Respiratory Assessment Centre also eased the burden to the Emergency department of our hospitals and physician clinics, allowing them to focus on other aspects of maintaining public health and acute care needs during the pandemic. The centre has now transitioned into COVID testing and assessment centre. Total spending on the Health Emergency Operations Centre and our anticipated costs for the now COVID response unit, supplementary services for the office of the chief medical officer of health and the Respiratory Assessment Centre — now the COVID testing and assessment centre — is \$8,467,202. Support for these operations is ongoing, as we continue to ensure that we do all that we can to keep Yukoners safe and healthy.

Thank you to the many health professionals in our territory who have responded so quickly and professionally to support our work in setting up these vital operations for Yukoners.

As we responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic, one of our priorities was to ensure that Yukoners did not experience financial hardship. We entered the crisis with strong economic momentum and a solid financial footing. Starting from this good place, we drastically improved the support that we were able to offer businesses and families in the Yukon. In fact, our government was one of the first in the country to roll out business supports through the Yukon business relief program.

Additionally, on April 27, we announced that the Canadian emergency response benefit payment would not be considered income when determining eligibility for social assistance for the months of April, May, June, July, August, and September.

We further exempted two federal benefits — the Canadian emergency student benefit and the one-time \$600 disability payment. The cost of these social supports and the anticipated increased demand for social assistance related to the pandemic is \$2,826,000.

Another early consideration last spring was childcare. The Yukon was one of very few provinces and territories to keep licensed childcare programs open through the COVID-19 pandemic and one of the first Canadian jurisdictions to implement a robust funding model during the COVID-19 response. To ensure continued access to childcare for critical and essential workers and to provide critical funding to maintain operations, we provided 100 percent of the direct operating grant for building costs from March to the end of June, as well as 100 percent of wages for all working staff at daycare centres that stayed open.

We increased the direct operating grant to day homes by 50 percent for those that remained open from March to the end of June. For the centres that closed, we provided 100 percent of the direct operating grant, including costs for March to the end of June.

We also provided supports to parents and caregivers by providing all childcare fees to keep children's spaces and by limiting childcare spaces to only children of critical and essential workers. We continue to provide funds to ensure additional infection prevention and control measures for childcare operators, such as enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, to ensure a safe environment for both children and staff, as well as training related to COVID protocols.

The total amount of COVID-related supports for childcare providers is \$3,347,263. We have supported the Yukon Hospital Corporation throughout the pandemic to ensure that it remains equipped and well-positioned to respond to the health and safety needs of Yukoners, including staff.

We have provided additional COVID funding in recognition of additional costs to prepare for COVID and ongoing operational costs, such as salaries, supplies, and medical equipment. The funding also addressed lost revenue and out-of-territory patients. The total amount of COVID-related additional funds provided to the Hospital Corporation is \$6,012,424. Additionally, we provided \$250,000 in funding to Yukon physicians whose practices were affected by the

pandemic to ensure that Yukoners did not lose access to critical in-territory physician services.

Health supports to mitigate COVID transmission is another key area of spending in our response to the pandemic. This includes support to the Yukon centre for communicable diseases and increased funding for Yukon 811 services.

Please allow me to pause to reflect on the incredible service that the team at the Yukon centre for communicable diseases provided — it was absolutely amazing over the course of the last few months. I had the pleasure of meeting with members of the communicable disease centre team last Friday and I am impressed with the competent and thorough approach to contact tracing and slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our territory. I would like to say thank you to all the staff at the Yukon communicable disease centre. Your work has been instrumental to our efforts.

We also provided funding for additional medical personnel, such as infection control nurses and care providers in long-term care homes. I am pleased to say that, to date, we have had zero cases of COVID-19 in our long-term care homes. It is a reality, and we are working diligently to maintain that statistic.

We started work early in the pandemic to plan and implement additional measures to keep staff and residents in long-term care homes safe, such as limiting staff movement between different homes and changing visitation. We are very fortunate for the high quality of care in our long-term care homes. I am grateful to all the staff for their ongoing dedication and hard work. Health supports to mitigate COVID transmission in long-term care homes and support for the Yukon Communicable Disease Control totals \$1,107,757. This is another key mitigation area in our response to the continued work to ensure the safety of front-line health and long-term care workers.

Yukon remains equipped and prepared to effectively respond to COVID-19 with a reliable supply of personal protective equipment. Keeping our health care professionals safe is of high priority for our government. We have worked closely with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners on the coordinated bulk purchasing of PPE. We maintain a 12-week supply of reserve PPE in addition to our regular stockpile of PPE, which is used on a day-to-day basis and continues to be replenished.

Yukon has not experienced the shortage of PPE felt in other jurisdictions. We will continue our work to ensure that front-line health workers have the resources they need. Some of our PPE supply has been transferred from the government at no charge — some included in the number that I already shared — which has been provided to the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

Additional costs for masks, sanitizers, and plexiglass screens for all Yukon government facilities across the territory and First Nation governments amount to \$802,300.

Our government is committed to supporting all Yukoners through the pandemic, especially our most vulnerable. This has included additional professional staff to ensure that we can respond to increased demand, including community nurses and mental health support workers.

We have increased funding to non-governmental service providers, such as the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, All Genders Yukon, and mental health Yukon. We have provided some alternate accommodations so that clients at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter are able to socially distance themselves and others and remain safe. Expenditures to protect the health and safety of Yukon's most vulnerable people totals \$2,491,087.

Additional expenditures of \$983,511 are allocated for new screening staff in places such as at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and long-term care homes. This amount also includes enhanced cleaning at these locations; ensuring that Yukoners have a safe place to self-isolate is a continued response of our government.

For individuals unable to self-isolate at home, it is vital that they have another option. The total amount budgeted for the self-isolation centre in response to the COVID-19 health pandemic in Whitehorse and communities, as needed, is \$1,533,407.

Open, available, and transparent communication between our government, the chief medical officer of health, and all Yukoners has been — and remains — of the utmost importance to our territory's collective work to slow the spread of COVID-19. Our government has worked hard to keep open and transparent lines of communication through the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included a weekly meeting with the minister or the Premier and the Yukon chief medical officer of health.

Just last week, the Minister of Community Services and I met with the Mayor and Council of Watson Lake. We met with the chief and council. I know the chief medical officer has also met with them; he was on the call with us. We continue to take priority and precedence on ensuring that all Yukoners are safe and that the resources are on the ground to meet the needs of Yukoners as we go through this pandemic.

Additionally, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Government of Yukon have embarked on a whole-of-territory communications plan to educate Yukoners on what they can do to slow the spread of COVID-19 by following the "safe six". The response to this campaign has been incredible. I offer my personal thanks to all Yukoners for their continued effort to physically distance, wash their hands, stay home if unwell, follow gathering guidelines, avoid unnecessary travel to our rural communities, and self-isolate if they have been outside of our territory bubble or have been in contact with someone with COVID-19.

Our communities know how to take care of each other and never has this been shown more than in the past eight months as we have all worked together to stay safe and reduce the spread of the virus.

We will continue to work closely with the chief medical officer of health and Yukon Communicable Disease Control to ensure that we base our efforts on the newest information and the best practices.

We will continue to communicate as much as possible with Yukoners. The total amount to support communications, administration, and technology supports, which includes

technology for virtual medical and government meetings, is \$1,183,149.

COVID has placed additional pressures on other health services like the flu vaccine. This year, we have taken a different approach to ensure safe distancing practices and respond to the increased demand. Costs to support the 2020 influenza vaccine recognized this increased demand — and a total of \$291,000. As we continue to respond to the pandemic, we have built in capacity to meet future needs. This provides additional funding to support our ongoing response, such as potential clusters of new cases, potential vaccine program, and the ability to manage the surge in cases. The total future capacity funding is \$4 million.

This brings us to the total line item in the 2020-21 Supplementary No. 1 budget of \$33,695,000. This includes money spent to date as well as projected to the end of the fiscal year. This unique situation requires a dramatic increase in spending on public health measures, emergency management, coordination, enforcement, and financial and economic relief.

I can say that I am proud of the work done by the team to keep Yukoners safe during this time. We are grateful during this time for the federal supports that we have received to date. These funds are critical to the territory's COVID-19 response to ensure that all Yukoners are supported to stay safe.

Yukon received the first northern supports package early on in the pandemic. This includes funding that was for aviation and health and social services. The allocation was \$22 million, with \$18.4 million directed to Health and Social Services.

In July, Canada announced \$19 billion in funding for the Safe Restart Agreement, which will be directed toward testing, contact tracing, data management, health care system capacity, support for vulnerable peoples, personal protection equipment, childcare, and support for municipalities and paid sick leave over the next six to eight months. Funding was primarily allocated to provinces and territories on a per capita basis, excluding the childcare which has a base allocation, which saw us receive \$13.2 million. Health and Social Services will receive \$11.2 million of that total.

A second northern supports package has been negotiated to acknowledge northern realities with the higher cost of delivering programs and services. Yukon received a total of \$12.4 million — \$7.7 million to support health system capacity and \$4.7 million to support vulnerable populations.

While I am pleased to speak of these specific response measures, we must also acknowledge the additional services and work provided by government departments during this time.

As we navigate the COVID-19 health pandemic, I am grateful for the work of this government and the Department of Health and Social Services and the work that they have done over the past four years, creating strong, respectful, partnerships. We are on a journey to improve the health and well-being of Yukoners in all aspects of society.

Through the implementation of the recommendations and the *Putting People First* report, our government has a road map to preventive and people-centred care for all. We know that all communities matter and that mental health is important. This

has led our government to improve mental health supports prior to the pandemic, and this work served Yukoners well when the pandemic hit.

Mental health supports have been expanded across the territory, with rural positions increased from two when I took office to currently having 22. At the onset of the pandemic, service providers quickly adapted to continue to provide critical services while working within the pandemic guidelines.

Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services has continued to provide supports across the Yukon. The Canadian Mental Health Association, Yukon division, and All Genders Yukon Society also continue to provide counselling supports. By properly supporting mental health in our territory, we were prepared to manage the unexpected, and that is exactly what happened when our territory was hit with COVID-19.

Additionally, through work with the home first program, bed pressures have been reduced at the Yukon hospitals. Due to the reablement unit program at the Thomson Centre, 80 percent of participants have returned home.

We have introduced a social pediatric model with three resident pediatricians, introducing medical travel for children seeing a pediatrician out of the territory that was reduced by 74 percent. We have child and youth counsellors with master's level training who work with children in every Yukon community. Wait times for ophthalmology have been reduced from 37 months to nine months. Ultrasounds have been expanded to Yukon community hospitals.

This work, combined with the work of my colleagues to build a strong economy and to diversify, to grow a sustainable and thriving tourism sector, to work with community and First Nation partners on their infrastructure priorities, to modernize our school curriculums, to strength school communities — all of this work has come together to allow us to work as a team to provide the strong response that was needed and continues to be needed to support Yukoners through the global health pandemic.

The additional funds needed to respond to COVID-19 tell a bigger story. While opposition members may want to focus on just the funding, it is important to understand the incredible amount of hard work and collaboration by public servants, health care providers, and municipal and First Nation governments in our territory to keep Yukon in a good position. Behind these numbers is a story about everything done to keep Yukoners safe, to keep people in their jobs and in their homes, and to adapt services to ensure that Yukoners have the access they need to mental health supports, doctors, surgeries, and medical travel.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the federal Conservative candidate in the last election made a comment in the *Whitehorse Star* on May 1, 2020, stating — and I quote: "... humanity has not faced a challenge like this pandemic in generations, so politicians are taking direction from medical experts — ordinary professionals in extraordinary circumstances doing the best they can — but public confidence wavers when their advice changes daily.

"And while doctors may be experts in health, they are not experts in financial or cultural health..."

I like to point out that this individual was a paid employee of the Yukon Party caucus this spring. The first reaction from local Conservatives to this COVID-19 pandemic was to discredit the chief medical officers of health across our nation.

Today, I was informed that we are not doing enough. Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, what I have just explained and highlighted in my submission clearly highlights all of the work that the public servants of this government have been doing over the course of the last eight months in responding to a global pandemic to address the needs of Yukoners — certainly a priority for all of us. We believe the science and we believe the doctors, and we will work very closely with the chief medical officer of health and take his direction under advisement as we look at moving forward. We will continue to innovate and adapt to ensure that we are meeting the needs of Yukoners — now and into the future.

I will say, again, just as our government has indicated — and as my colleagues have indicated over the course of this Sitting — that Yukoners are strong, resilient people, and they will adapt. They will adapt and they will come together to collaborate. The public servants have put in extra effort and have gone above and beyond to ensure that we provide the right services for Yukoners during this pandemic.

I want to just complete my submission by saying hai' choo, the greatest thank you, to the staff at Health and Social Services for your work delivering these essential services. You are vital to the health and well-being of our territory, and this government will continue to do everything necessary to support all Yukoners.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that list. It is interesting because, during the opposition briefing, we did ask, actually, for a breakdown of the \$33,695,000 line item that says "pandemic management", so I appreciate that the minister has just done that.

I will just highlight in stark contrast that the breakdown in the budget briefing goes as low as \$20,000 where it is explained that it is for community health programs. It was a bit surprising to know that there was a \$33,695,000 line item that just said "pandemic management", so I thank the minister for listing that, and that will be really helpful when we are able to talk about it in the budget debate.

Mr. Gallina: I want to thank the Member for Watson Lake for bringing forward this important motion for us to debate today.

This government takes the roles and responsibilities that Yukoners have placed with us very seriously. This includes being open and transparent on how taxpayers' dollars are spent and explaining why we take the positions that we do.

For Yukoners listening today, I will make note that a number of opportunities were offered to opposition members during the summer to question ministers and department staff on the main estimates and how the government was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those offers to meet were either declined or ignored.

As a government, we are committed to having open, transparent, and accountable discussions with questions on all departments' spending, not just Health and Social Services. A clear example of openness and transparency displayed by this government is the fact that, for the first time that I can recall ever in the territory, the Public Accounts of this government have been scrutinized through public hearings.

Traditionally, the House spends a lot of time debating budgets and what is forecast to be spent. By having these public hearings with officials from the Department of Finance and various departments, the conversation shifts to where and how territorial funds were spent.

I acknowledge that the Leader of the Official Opposition is the chair of the Public Accounts Committee and that this is an all-party committee. I'll also note for Yukoners that there were no Public Accounts hearings in the previous 14 years of Conservative Yukon Party governance. In the four years of this Liberal government, hearings on Public Accounts have begun to happen, and I expect this level of public scrutiny to continue. It's important that Yukoners know where their money is being spent, how it is being spent, and how they are benefiting from it.

I'll take this time to share with my constituents and Yukoners how Health and Social Services has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to keep Yukoners safe. For example, almost \$2.5 million was spent on direct client services to vulnerable populations. Contained within this were measures to protect the health and safety of our vulnerable population. This Liberal government provided alternative accommodation for clients at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter to allow for proper physical and social distancing to promote a safe environment for those already struggling.

This government supported NGOs and service providers with a focus on our vulnerable peoples, including the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, All Genders Yukon, and mental health Yukon. This \$2.5 million was also used for additional professional staff in order to respond to the anticipated increased demand for community nurses and mental health support workers.

Recognizing that childcare services for essential workers is paramount through this pandemic, the department spent over \$3.7 million to support licensed childcare providers.

Essential workers provide critical services necessary to the function of our society. These include: health sector workers; emergency services; critical infrastructure workers, including energy and utility workers; information technology workers; government workers; and legal service providers. Having these supports in place was necessary to ensure that parents had the appropriate support for the gradual return to work and phased reopening of our economy.

Included in this \$3.7 million are the additional infection prevention control measures for childcare operators, which include enhanced cleaning and disinfecting as well as enhanced training for staff related to COVID-19 protocols. Mr. Speaker, this government has spent \$1.5 million on self-isolation facilities in Whitehorse and in the communities — a small price to pay to ensure that Yukoners who were not able to self-isolate

in their homes had a safe place where they received the necessary services to weather the storm. Mr. Speaker, the purpose of each of these expenses is to ensure Yukoners' health and safety as we press forward through this pandemic.

As well, an additional \$6 million was provided to the Yukon Hospital Corporation to support necessary COVID responses. It's important to me and to Yukoners who rely on our hospital facilities and staff that they have the necessary support and preparedness and that they are able to respond adequately to an outbreak, should it happen. Despite our low infection rate in Yukon, we have seen first-hand that we are not immune, as one Yukoner has unfortunately passed away. My condolences do go out to their family, their friends, and their loved ones.

This government has been working tirelessly to help protect everyone who calls Yukon home and those who work here providing essential services. We are forever grateful for those who have participated in maintaining the "safe six", those who have respected our COVID-19 guidelines, and those who have recognized the importance of following the recommendations passed down by our chief medical officer of health. It's all too easy to get caught up in the rhetoric and misinformation being passed around through social media. The decisions made by this government to keep people safe are substantiated by science, the medical professionals, people who have dedicated their lives to work in the medical field and understand how viruses operate, evolve, spread, and impact our everyday life. The advice from these medical professionals has consistently remained the same: practise social distancing, wash your hands, self-isolate when you have symptoms, and wear a mask when you can't keep your distance from others.

Mr. Speaker, we don't have to look far to Outside jurisdictions to know that the precautions and measures that we are taking are working. Fairbanks, Alaska shares a similar population size to Whitehorse. It is a mere 10-hour drive from here and, to date, has experienced almost 2,400 cases of COVID-19. Couple that with daily COVID-19 rates reaching the thousands in a number of provinces across the country, our infection rate remains low. Our transmission rate remains low, and I'm hopeful that we can maintain this trajectory as we enter the winter season.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, this government remains committed to transparency and accountability to Yukoners. I have provided clear examples of how the territory's Public Accounts are now being publicly scrutinized for the first time in the territory's history that I can recall, and I expect these hearings to continue in the future.

If I made note previously that the Public Accounts Committee had not met in the previous administration, I will correct the record. The Public Accounts Committee did meet in the previous administration; however, there were no public hearings that were held during the 14 years of the Yukon Party government.

As well, my Liberal colleagues made several offers to opposition members to question government spending in the government's response to COVID-19. These offers were not taken up. This is an important motion in providing the Member

for Watson Lake the information that she's looking for, on her terms.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just wanted to try to add a couple of thoughts. First of all, I'm going to try to talk about two things that I heard today that I'm not sure were correct. The first one is whether or not there were public hearings for the Public Accounts. I think there were in previous years, so what I will do is try to look that up and talk with my colleague. The other one that I wanted to talk about was a comment from the Member for Watson Lake during Question Period — that the Minister of Health and Social Services wasn't working, suggesting that she wasn't active.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am speaking to the motion, Mr. Speaker. This motion is about being accountable to the public, and part of that is being active in the role. Let me just talk about that for a moment, Mr. Speaker.

Health and Social Services normally has a big portfolio. We all know that; we all know that there is a big budget and lots to do. I mean, we have seen here, through this Legislature, *Putting People First*, aging in place, work on the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and on vulnerable persons, and work on mental wellness. That's all ongoing all the time.

When the pandemic — not even before the pandemic was here, but when we first started to be concerned about the pandemic, around the time when we were cancelling the Arctic Winter Games, we started having meetings. I had meetings personally with the Minister of Health and Social Services, the chief medical officer of health, and our director of emergency response here in the territory. We sat down to have discussions and planning meetings to prepare in case there would be a pandemic coming.

Before we ever declared a public health emergency, the minister and her team put in place the Health Emergency Operations Centre — in case — to be prepared. That's why there were costs against last year's budget early on.

Other things that I know she was working on — once we were aware that the pandemic was coming to Canada and posed a risk to us, she worked with her team to put in place personal protective equipment across not only all our health care centres but across our communities. She worked to get the Respiratory Assessment Centre up and running. She worked on how to develop the isolation centre by discussing it with the business community, because we had been meeting with them almost right away to talk about concerns around the Arctic Winter Games. She worked with the hospitals to support them so that they were dealing with the most acute care patients, because there was a concern that, if patients needed to start to come to our hospitals, there would be space for them and also that we not put those patients at risk who had less acuity.

All of us, as ministers, were on federal, provincial, and territorial calls. In the first few weeks, I was on three calls a week. I know that the Minister of Health and Social Services was on those calls with her colleagues discussing the issues across the country and how to coordinate. She was working on how to do testing, how to do contract tracing, and how to do an

online self-assessment tool. She was part of the group that was dealing with the COVID information centre to make sure it was up and running so that we were getting information out to the public. She was part of conversations with all of our communities in those meetings. At first, they were three times a week. Later on, they went down to twice a week and then once a week, but I recall her being on many of those calls.

There was all sorts of work around guidelines to help our businesses and the public. There was all sorts of work around public education, about working to support the chief medical officer of health, the Premier or other ministers and herself to get up in front of the public to talk about what was happening and to answer questions so that the public would know what was going on. She worked to make sure that our long-term care facilities were protected because we knew — as we watched the pandemic unfold across the country — that seniors were more at risk.

What I am trying to say is that the reason I am concerned with the comments that came from the Member for Watson Lake is because they suggested that the minister wasn't active. In fact, it was the opposite. The minister was incredibly active during this time.

As far as the motion goes that we have here today, I am happy to support the notion that we will get detailed numbers around the spending on COVID-19. I think that is great.

I just want to make sure, for the Yukon public, that they are aware of how much work this minister put in to help protect Yukoners during the pandemic.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, she will close debate on Motion No. 268.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. McLeod: I want to thank the members for their contributions this afternoon to this discussion on getting a detailed breakdown of spending that has been associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, we are referring to the \$33 million-plus that was identified in the supplementary budget. We had quite a struggle to get the information for the \$5 million that was in Bill No. 204, so obviously there was some concern about how much — I guess, discussion — it would take to get that information.

I appreciate that the minister gave us a breakdown today of some broad strokes in spending, which we would be only too happy to drill into in debate on Health and Social Services. It has been suggested here that — I mean, I know the Member for Takhini-Kopper King also made a request for this information and it was not provided, to my knowledge. It certainly wasn't provided to this opposition party. So, I felt that it was necessary to have this discussion today.

Anyway, I guess I'm just going to leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

I want to again thank the minister for the information she provided for us today. While I would have asked for a written compilation of those costs, they will be in the Blues, so I don't believe we'll need that.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 268 agreed to

Motion No. 297

Clerk: Motion No. 297, standing in the name of Ms. Hanson.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Whitehorse Centre:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to include the Yukon Historical and Museums Association in the discussions and planning for the COVID-19 tourism recovery plan.

Ms. Hanson: I am happy to have an opportunity to rise today to talk about this motion. I want to say at the outset that when we're talking about including — so, it's an inclusion approach that I'm trying to suggest here. I raise this motion today, not in a negative way, but in the hopes that the minister will acknowledge that it is reasonable to seek clarification — and in this case, perhaps remedy for situations that arise — perhaps by oversight, who knows — but, in this case, what appears to be the omission of any reference to the museum and heritage sector in the Yukon COVID-19 tourism recovery plan.

I'm referring, of course, to a plan that is dated October 13, 2020, that all members of this House, I'm sure, have had a chance to review.

There are a number of reasons that I'll get into about why I think this is important. I know that the minister shares my concern and my respect for our historical sites and our

museums — our heritage resources; she said so this afternoon, in fact. But the reality that we're dealing with in this territory is that — as the recovery plan indicates on page 11 in echoing the scenarios that Destination Canada developed in terms of the potential impact of the pandemic, depending on the duration of the pandemic — there is every indication at the federal level and certainly here in the Yukon that it may take as long as five years to recover to the 2019 visitation rates that all Yukoners enjoyed — all Yukoners enjoyed the visitation levels that were at an all-time high.

The federal body, Destination Canada, further estimated that the tourism sector would be hit three times harder than any other sector of our economy. We have heard from TIA over the course of the — I think 33 — calls to date that they have had, on a weekly basis, among their memberships — the Tourism Industry Association — that 50 percent to 60 percent of tourism businesses will not survive without Yukon government leadership. The demise, the lack of vitality, or the inability of this sector to endure — as we have talked about in this Legislative Assembly — through relief measures as we plan toward recovery — really what I'm talking about here is the fact that we have a recovery plan, but one of the emphases of that is, in part, addressed through the relief measures that we put in until we are on the path to recovery.

The key element of this — particularly when we talk about sectors like the cultural sector and heritage and museums — is the real potential for the loss to the territory and the communities — in many cases, these centres that we are talking about and the resources that we're talking about are based in small communities throughout the territory — so the critical loss of skilled human capital is a challenge that we need to be very cognizant of and to take into our thinking as we deal with the long-term vitality of our tourism sector — the whole of our tourism sector.

So, the tourism recovery plan — and I'm quoting here: "... specifically targets the rebuilding and strengthening of the Yukon tourism economy and sector through target investments that support the safe recovery and rebuilding of our tourism industry."

I had looked then, Mr. Speaker, to this recovery plan, looking at it in the context of what we talk about or what I see on the government websites and what's publicly available. As a Member of the Legislative Assembly, that's what I have access to. When the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* was tabled in the Legislative Assembly — and we've discussed it a number of times — and as I said earlier today, one of the key, core values that Yukoners contributed to — and then through the bodies that worked with the minister and through the advisory bodies that were established — thankfully, was the core value of honouring our heritage. That's why I was hopeful that I would see in the recovery plan an explicit mention of this — of heritage, museums — and see where the role of the association that represents them is reflected in that or reflected in any other documents. I couldn't find it. That's why I'm raising it today, because I want to ensure — as I know the minister has said and this government has said that they want to hear from the voices of all who are affected. I know that if

those stories are going to be told — as the minister said, into the future — then we need to have the resources to be able to do that, and we need to find a way to sustain them through the next very difficult period.

I guess my concern emanates largely from my observation over the last number of years that, despite the fact that the tourism sector and many of the private and community entities work so hard in this sector, our investment as government doesn't match what our words are about how important this sector is to the economy — putting our money where our mouth is, quite frankly — because when I look at the areas in our budget, for example, we say that heritage is important and that it's a core value of our strategy, but we flatlined the amount of money that we provide to those resources.

So, the Yukon Historical and Museums Association — the same amount year after year. I can go through just about every one of them, but I am not going to waste the time. I would reference people to look at 17-13 in the budget and 18. Even essential items that could be worked on right now — and maybe the minister will announce today that there have been some additional investments in this area, but it seems to me that, during a pandemic at a time when many of the museums and heritage sites are not able to be open to the public, here is an opportunity for general operation and maintenance and training support. But again, not only has that flatlined, it has decreased — and we referenced that on page 17-14, if the minister is looking to see where I am pulling the figures or where my reference is from. Whether that is First Nation cultural centres — flatlined — or museums assistance — flatlined. Partly that may be because it's a broad swath when we look at what is encompassed in the tourism strategy, but if we take as a core value the importance of — as we say in the report that heritage is a core value and respect for it and then how that is communicated to people is generally through our museums and our cultural centres and heritage sites.

So, then I thought that one of the things that we hear over the course of many of the tourism association's meetings and the discussions as the strategy was unfolding was definitions of the kinds of tourists that tourism operators might be wanting to and gearing themselves to attract and how Yukon cultural or heritage sites or others might want to be positioning themselves to — in terms of attracting more tourists whether it is to Teslin, Mayo, Old Crow, Dawson, or Beaver Creek.

You go on the website — so, with Destination Canada, the Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture has put together these dashboard demographics identifying them in terms of the kinds of tourists that we may or may not want to work toward pulling into the territory and how most effectively to work with those tourists to get a deeper appreciation of the territory.

We have 18 percent of the Canadian visitors to Yukon, according to the territorial government's dashboard demographics, as cultural explorers. That is great. These are people who are seeking local foods, attractions like museums and historical sites, and a preference for small towns. They are not materialistic, they are not intimidated by change, and they enjoy spontaneity. They look at local arts and crafts exhibitions.

The heritage and culture connection is in visiting museums and historical attractions and experiencing local foods.

There are lots of little factoids in these dashboard demographics, Mr. Speaker. They talk about everything that is covered off. I am sure the minister was there as well, but I can remember attending several of the tourism conferences where they describe these various characteristics of travellers and tourists. Sometimes they sounded more like a horoscope or some kind of Myers-Briggs assessment of tourists — for example, a cultural explorer tip saying that a CE, a cultural explorer, is more indulgent and carefree when travelling. They like to share their experience with others and use social media to do so during the trip, and 63 percent find activities in the category of heritage and culture appealing. The CE tip says that they are taking full advantage of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, when marketing and engaging with the cultural explorer. I was thinking that this is something that we would be seeing in terms of working with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association, dealing with historic sites and heritage and cultural sites.

That might be something that could be worked on, and we would be seeing some sort of additional resources provided while people are unable to do the work that they want to be doing, engaging directly, as all tourism-engaged people want to be doing.

Another group is the historians. These are a combination of personal history buffs and cultural history buffs. Goodness knows that Yukon has a wealth of history opportunities for visitors.

There are all sorts of little dashboard demographics with respect to the historian-type Canadian visitor to the Yukon in the dashboard demographics that Destination Canada developed for application in the Yukon. They seek an experience appeal — and each one of these areas has considerations for product development — so that includes experience appeal. They seek well-known historic sites and buildings. They seek taking time at historic sites and museums.

In this sector, historians, experience drivers, the average percentage of this type who find activities in this category appealing was heritage and culture — 53 percent.

I raise this partly because I think this is an interesting exercise that Destination Canada has assisted the Yukon government in working on, but also to point out that the data that was surprising to me — when they looked at the snapshot in terms of the numbers — so, when they profiled these profiles that I have just shared with you, Mr. Speaker, they were a snapshot of Canadian visitors to Yukon, based on the Yukon visitor tracking program.

Now, I would have thought that we would have had visitor data — visitor tracking information — based on the years 2018-19 when we were gearing up so that we would have data that reflects the current trend and the current travellers to the Yukon. Unfortunately, the data that the Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture input into this system was from 2012-14. That is unfortunate — this is directly from the website. Here is an opportunity, perhaps — here is an opportunity to work on building a more robust picture of these two — and there are

others; there are other descriptors or dashboard demographics for the other EQ identifiers — descriptors of us as tourists or people as tourists — but having accurate information would help the minister to build her case to her colleagues about why there needs to be additional investment in this particular sector.

That is also, again, as I said earlier, my concern about the fact that, as I look at the apparent exclusion — or apparent non-inclusion — of the Yukon's museums and heritage institutions in any express plan — or any express action — with respect to a three-year plan to drive the recovery of Yukon's tourism sector, which is the Yukon's tourism recovery plan — there are a couple of things that struck me. Nowhere on the websites of yukon.ca or Yukon Tourism and Culture or Yukon Economic Development can I find anything more recent with respect to the economic impact of Yukon's historical and museums, circle sites and museums — our heritage institutions — any more recent data or analysis with respect to the economic impacts of the sector than 2003.

The world has changed a lot in 17 years. Thankfully, we saw, up until the impact of COVID-19 — we were all hopeful about an increase in each year, with very robust targets 10 years out in terms of the broad tourism sector. I would hope that this would be a real opportunity for the minister to perhaps invite, as part of the recovery plan, the Yukon Historical and Museums Association and other heritage and culture representatives to be part of assessing the real economic impact. We all know that in every little community, including in Whitehorse, there is a significant economic impact. Having that information allows us then to build on it to grow this sector.

The last puzzling piece to this was that — when I had said that I hadn't seen any reference in the Yukon COVID-19 tourism recovery plan to museums or historical sites, I will correct myself. I stand corrected because the word is there, but there is no information and there is no way to find it. I will read you the paragraph that struck me as important and reinforces the need to have an inclusive approach to developing and making sure that the COVID-19 tourism recovery plan envelops all possible players. It says — for Hansard, it is on page 17 of the tourism recovery plan: "All this is to say that while many sectors of Yukon's economy have been able to adapt and begin to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, the sectors that rely on visitation and gatherings continue to need ongoing relief and support. 'Recovery: Yukon's economic strategy in 2020' outlines how Government of Yukon will continue to provide relief with supplemental programs for accommodations and tourism business as well as for tourism and culture non-profit organizations such as museums and cultural centres."

Before I put this motion forward, Mr. Speaker, I thought that this was it and that I would find something there.

Despite the best efforts of several people in my office, including myself, in yukon.ca, and Yukon tourism, there is no document that's publicly available called "Recovery: Yukon's economic strategy in 2020". I can't rely upon that document, nor can anybody in this House, unless and until the minister — and perhaps she will table today, as part of helping inform the discussion here today, that document so that we can see what

relief with supplemental programs are contained in that strategy for recovery for cultural non-profit organizations such as museums and cultural centres.

I look forward to that, and then I would say that it would be going a long way to addressing the concerns that I raised here. I am raising them in a positive sense. I'm not trying to criticize this minister; this is not a personal thing. This is about how we make sure that all parts of our tourism sector are in a healthy place to recover and that we're doing it in an informed way with the best data possible.

I have identified a couple of areas where there are gaps in data. I know that people have been busy. I have watched over the course of the last months, but this is not just because of the pandemic that this sector has lagged behind in terms of investments by this government or the previous government. We need to make sure that we continue to match what we state is our commitment in this Legislative Assembly with the ongoing support and inclusion in the development of appropriate supports — of supports that correspond to the identified needs.

I don't have anything else to add. I look forward to a positive response. This motion is offered in a positive vein and would allow us to move forward and get on with other business of the day.

I hope that we can enjoy the support of the minister and other members of this Legislative Assembly with respect to the inclusion of all sectors — in particular, the Yukon Historical and Museums Association — in the essential planning for recovery toward a healthy tourism sector that is representative of all of our very deserving individuals and organizations that comprise tourism and make our tourism sector — have made it in the past and hopefully will make it in the future — really such a vital part of our economy and the fabric of our community.

As the minister said — and we look at the museums and the cultural centres. As the core value said — and we talk about our heritage value — that's where the stories are. We can't lose those stories, nor can we lose the storytellers and the keepers of the stories. So, simply by inclusion, we can address some of this and we can move forward.

I look forward to positive discussion this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I was really trying to give the members opposite an opportunity to speak as I will be the only speaker as planned today on this motion. I thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre for bringing forward this motion. As I said today in Question Period, I'm happy to rise to speak about culture, heritage, and our museum community.

For many years, we have welcomed visitors from around the world to experience this really special place that we call home — our Yukon home. We had three consecutive years of record visitation from 2017, 2018, and 2019. Together, we created the new *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy: Sustainable Tourism. Our Path. Our Future. 2018-2028* to take tourism to the next level in a responsible, respectful, and sustainable way for the benefit of Yukoners.

We were on track to exceed our joint goals — business revenue attributable to tourism, resident support for tourism, and the development of a sustainable framework to move the industry forward in a constructive and responsible way — but then COVID-19 happened.

As we all know, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been especially challenging for the tourism industry. Travel and gathering restrictions have been essential to keep Yukoners safe, but at the same time, they have had ongoing profoundly negative impacts for the Yukon visitor economy.

The situation facing the tourism industry has been continually shifting throughout the spring, summer, and fall. It is a very fluid situation, and it has been challenging to develop a recovery plan based on that fact alone. One very encouraging realization has been the continued currency and the relevance of our *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*. As I said today in Question Period, we are the envy of the country, having gone through a planning process when we did to have a plan in place for such difficult times.

The strategy is based upon the heartfelt values of Yukoners, as expressed to us through public engagement sessions. As a result, the goals of the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* include ensuring tourism has broad public support and legitimacy and that tourism is operating in a sustainable way that meets the needs of present and future generations of Yukoners and takes into consideration the needs of present and future generations of Yukoners.

These values and goals provide an excellent framework for a tourism recovery plan. We are confident that we can return tourism to the strength that we once enjoyed. The industry can regain its title as Yukon's largest private sector employer and return to contributing five percent of our GDP and \$368 million in revenue to Yukon businesses, but not until it is safe to do so.

With this confidence and patience instilled in us by the long-term view of the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*, we know that we can deal with COVID-19 and return to tourism when the time is right. That is why I am so grateful to the 15 Yukon organizations and the partners that made up the Yukon Tourism Development Strategy Steering Committee. The *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* was written by the committee, and the Yukon Historical and Museums Association was one of the members and signatories involved in developing the strategy. They did a great job.

The document — which included, again, participation from the Yukon Historical and Museums Association and other stakeholders from that sector of our community submitted and recommended to government — this was adopted by our government immediately and we began implementing the priority actions as identified by the committee.

One of the recommendations of the strategy was to conduct a review of tourism governance. This led to the establishment of the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board. The role of the advisory board is to provide me, as the Minister of Tourism and Culture, with strategic advice on implementing the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* and to work to align the efforts of government and industry in a manner that maximizes the

efficiency of destination management and supports tourism industry growth.

Those who were involved in designing the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board looked at the success of the Yukon Tourism Development Strategy Steering Committee and wanted to capture its essence in seeking key sectoral representation. This resulted in the requirement that the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board be made up of three members representing tourism perspectives, but also two representing First Nations' perspectives, one representing the perspective of the Yukon communities, and the last one representing cultural perspectives. The existence of a cultural representative is a direct legacy of the Yukon Historical and Museums Association's importance in providing a cultural voice in the work of the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* steering committee, and thus, the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board played a key role and central role in developing and advising the contents of the tourism relief and recovery plan, with a cultural perspective baked into it.

Other key factors have influenced the tourism relief and recovery plan. We conducted a survey of tourism businesses in partnership with the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon and the Yukon Bureau of Statistics. To round out our information gathering, we also conducted a survey of Yukon non-profit societies and gained a better understanding of the economic and operational pressures related to the pandemic. This survey was conducted by Volunteer Yukon, the Yukon Nonprofit Advisory Council, and the Yukon Bureau of Statistics.

We expect to be able to release the official "what we heard" report from this survey soon; however, the initial results are reassuring, with no respondents indicating that the pandemic has placed them in immediate financial peril — however, the sector has concerns about the future, as we're talking about today.

These initial results have influenced a tourism relief and recovery plan and will continue to do so as we move into more detailed implementation. Yukon non-profit organizations such as the Yukon Historical and Museums Association are critical to the health and vitality of our communities and economic fabric of Yukon. Therefore, we have made best efforts to be supportive of the non-profit organizations in the face of the pandemic.

For those non-profits reliant on Yukon government funding, my department elected to honour the 2019-20 transfer payment agreements, even in cases where COVID-19 got in the way of meeting agreement deliverables. Also, we ensured agreements for 2020-21 were put in place early to get money flowing. As I mentioned, we recently formed the Yukon non-profit advisory council. This has been a very positive development. It is encouraging to see non-profit organizations taking the initiative to work together on common issues and challenges facing this very diverse sector.

This is an excellent forum for any non-profit organization to become active in engaging government. COVID-19 is, of course, a key issue that impacts all non-profits in one way or another. As I said, the tourism relief and recovery plan is a work

in progress. We will release the overarching framework of the plan soon. We will continue to engage partners and stakeholders on how details of this plan will be implemented. In this regard, we will be directly involved with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association in discussions about the plan and the annual Yukon museums roundtable, which is taking place this year on December 1.

As one of the Yukon's most respected and long-standing non-profit organizations, we strongly support the Yukon Historical and Museums Association through the Department of Tourism and Culture's museum assistance program. We are providing them with the annual operational funding — again, knowing that they are unable to do some of the normal activities they would do. The \$74,000 has gone to them — and I'm not sure how much time I have, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: You have unlimited time.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Unlimited, okay.

I wanted to also just identify some of the other funds that we have within the Department of Tourism and Culture and funds that we've expanded as we have dealt with the pandemic and different provisions that we've put in place for this specific area of our community.

I'll just go over the regular funding that was given to all of our organizations, in terms of museums and cultural centres: the Yukon Historical and Museums Association received \$74,000; the Dawson City Museum, \$130,000; the Binet House in Mayo, \$40,000; Campbell Region Interpretive Centre in Faro, \$40,000; Carcross/Tagish First Nation Learning Centre, \$130,000; Da Kų Cultural Centre, \$130,000; MacBride Copperbelt Mining Museum, \$50,000; George Johnston Museum, \$50,000; Keno Mining Museum, \$50,000; Kluane Museum of Natural History, \$50,000; the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, \$130,000; the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation cultural centre, \$50,000; the MacBride Museum, \$182,000; Northern Lights Centre in the Town of Watson Lake, \$40,000; the Old Log Church Museum, \$80,000; Big Jonathan House, \$50,000; Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre, \$130,000; the Yukon Transportation Museum, \$130,000; Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation cultural centre, \$130,000; and the John Tizya Centre in Old Crow, \$50,000.

We extended our agreements as well to all of those other really important stakeholders: the Junction Arts and Music Society received \$32,600; the Longest Night Society, \$18,000; the Nakai Theatre ensemble, \$62,000; the Northern Fibres Guild, \$5,600; Northern Lights School of Dance, \$28,000; Rotary Club of Whitehorse, \$10,000; the Village of Mayo, \$8,000; the Whitehorse Concerts, \$39,300; Yukon Film Society, \$89,000; and the Yukon Bluegrass Music Society, \$28,000.

Getting into some of our key stakeholders, we funded the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon with \$219,000, and we've extended further funds in relation to the pandemic, so there is an increase to that amount that is in our supplementary budget as well. There is: the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon, \$264,000; Yukon Convention Bureau, \$200,000; Sport Yukon, \$43,000; Yukon Quest, \$150,000; Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous, \$75,000; Selkirk First Nation for First

Nation historic sites, \$106,000; Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation for the Forty Mile site, \$95,000; Carcross/Tagish First Nation for Conrad, \$7,500; Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation for Rampart House, \$60,000; and Yukon Council of Archives, \$70,000.

There is the arts sector: Friends of the Yukon Permanent Art Collection, \$30,000; Dawson City Arts Society, \$425,000; Northern Cultural Expressions Society, \$345,000; the Yukon Art Society, \$82,000; Yukon Art Society for the artist in the school program, \$100,000; Yukon Arts Centre, \$891,657; Yukon Arts Centre Old Fire Hall, \$175,000; Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association, \$160,000; All-City Band Society, \$25,000; the Association franco-yukonnaise, \$20,000; Blue Feather Music Festival, \$27,500; Whitehorse Community Choir, \$30,900; Dawson City Music Festival Association, \$59,400; Guild Society, \$108,000; Gwaandak Theatre Society, \$64,800; Heart of Riverdale, \$50,000; and Jazz Yukon, \$33,700.

We increased some of our arts funding so that we could ensure that, because we weren't able to have the types of events that we normally would, artists and folks working in the heritage sector were able to access additional dollars as we were in this incredibly difficult time during COVID-19. I would like to just talk about a couple of them.

Going back, though, I would like to also say that all of the funding that I just described, in terms of what went to all of the various organizations — we also provide funding to the Yukon Heritage Resources Board, which is a mandated board through the UFA to look at the oversight of heritage in Yukon. We also provide funding for operation and maintenance and other work that's done on all of our heritage sites throughout the Yukon.

There is always more that we can do, and we want to do more. I think this is a really important aspect of our territory, and I'm proud of the funding that is distributed to all of these organizations and all who contribute to this important aspect of our territory. We provided an additional \$490,000 in various funds for artists, and that was a direct result of COVID-19. I won't directly go into those details, but I do want to speak to a couple of the questions before I wrap up — in terms of the member feeling that, somehow, there is something that needs to be remedied.

I believe that we have taken extra steps to ensure that the culture, heritage, and arts communities were absolutely included in the development of the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*, and that strategy is what has informed our recovery plan.

The surveys and the work that we are doing with the Yukon Bureau of Statistics and other entities are informing the relief programs going forward. I have worked really closely with our federal partners as well. We are still anticipating further programs that will relate specifically to arts, culture, and the performing arts that will come from the federal government as well. So, we are continuing to have those types of meetings on a regular basis. I had several meetings with the federal Minister of Heritage and Culture throughout the pandemic — many in-depth discussions and one-on-one — relaying exactly the issues that we have in Yukon. This is a vitally important part of our

territory and in order to ensure that we have the quality of arts community that we have come to enjoy and appreciate — it really makes up the fabric of who we are as Yukoners but it also supports our tourism industry. I know that my colleagues — I worked alongside my colleagues from the Northwest Territories and Nunavut wanted to ensure that the Minister of Heritage and Culture heard specifically what some of the uniqueness is in the north and that our response would need to be modified in terms of — as you look at the rest of the country and take into consideration the uniqueness of our north.

I know that it was well-received and it has helped to inform steps going forward in terms of long-term support.

The Member for Whitehorse Centre talked about the data that is available — and I will have to get back to her in terms of this data that she is referring to, because we have new data that is available. We did a visitor exit survey from 2017-18, and we did it for a whole year. That exit survey hadn't been done since 2012, but it was only done for half a year; this is how the visitor exit surveys were done previously. This exit survey that we did was done for an entire year, so it included all of our seasons — which was not typical, in terms of the type of data that was previously gathered.

So, I will ensure that she can find the data that she is looking for, because this is exactly — we in Tourism and Culture make all of our decisions based on evidence and data, and we work very closely with our partners at Destination Canada to inform them. They have access, actually, to the new data that we have available to us through the visitor exit survey, and we will continue to do that work. It's built into the tourism development strategy to continue to do good research and ensure that we have the correct data going forward so that we can make well-informed decisions.

In terms of this motion specifically, I thank the member for bringing it forward. We haven't had a lot of opportunity to speak about culture and heritage during this Sitting. I believe that this is such a vitally important part of our territory and that this sector is going to need as much support as all other related tourism- and travel-related entities will need. They're built into the relief and recovery plan.

On that note, I hope I have answered a lot of the questions. I think there is a lot of room for more discussion around this, and as the minister responsible, I take my job very seriously and I have been very committed to ensuring that we are hearing from Yukoners, that we're taking into consideration the issues that they have, and that we're doing everything possible to make sure that we are responding in an appropriate way.

I want to thank the member for bringing it forward today. As I've said, we do have the roundtable planned for December 1 and we'll have these direct discussions there.

On that note, we will be supporting the motion today. Thank you very much.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity on speaking to Motion No. 297 to thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre for bringing this forward. We, on this side, agree with this motion 100 percent. Including the Yukon Historical Museums Association in the discussion and

planning for the COVID-19 tourism recovery plan is a good idea.

I wish it didn't have to be brought forward in a motion to make the government actually think about working with this organization. It's something that the minister should have been doing from the beginning.

I don't have a lot to say today, but the minister has not announced the entire tourism recovery plan. We think that this is unfortunate and it is unfair to industry. Every day, we on this side are contacted by key players in the tourism industry wondering what's in the package for them. We believe that the Liberals should really prioritize getting support out to the tourism industry immediately.

We've offered to help. We've said this on many occasions — we've offered to help to work with the government since the beginning of the pandemic, and I know that the Third Party has also. Unfortunately, the Liberals have refused all offers to work together collaboratively. You know what — this doesn't serve the industry well. I do hope that the Liberals figure out that we should be working together. Until that time, the offer, of course, still stands. We are willing to work with the government, but the government needs to start being open and transparent. They need to share information with us and they need to start trying to answer questions.

I would be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity, because we're talking about — with this motion — recovery of the tourism sector. I want to talk about some of the industry just in my riding. I could go on about the rest of the Yukon and be here for days and days because I'm a historian and I really enjoy the history of the Yukon — the thousands of years of history, the hundreds of years of history, the 50 years of history.

In my riding alone, we have the Da Kų Cultural Centre and it's a beautiful building and it's a good example of First Nation government and all types of government working together. In there, there are thousands of years of First Nation cultural history.

Parks Canada has been here since 1969-70, and their history is there, and then the Yukon government has tourism, and they talk about the "trail of 42" and everything else Yukon. That's promoting, supporting, and educating our tourists. They love that stuff when they come to the Yukon.

One just needs to go to the Kluane Lake museum in Burwash and have a look at what I think is some of the best taxidermy in the world. I was so happy — I think I brought this up before — that there is also cultural stuff in there, too, and some beautiful beadwork.

Kwāday Dān Kenji — I don't know if anybody has been there, but that's Long Ago Peoples' Place, and that is an incredible place that needs seeing and needs to be part of this conversation. Shakat Tun Adventures — "Shakat Tun" means "summer hunting trails" in Christmas Bay, and that's something, and it's definitely worth seeing, too. We have other museums, unofficial museums. There's one in Beaver Creek — I'm sure we've all been to the one in Beaver Creek — and there are a couple in my community. If you ever get an invitation there or an opportunity to stop by, you should, because there is a lot of history in there.

I think the Member for Whitehorse Centre brought up — and I just want to talk a little bit about — just on the Internet alone — and if you go to Facebook, there's the Destruction Bay Days. That's a fresh site where people are posting old photos and history. There are the People of Beaver Creek Yukon or People of Haines Junction pages — two sites where there is so much history. Probably the most popular one throughout the Yukon is Yukon History & Abandoned Places.

On many occasions, I have seen someone comment or share a picture and ask if anybody knows anything about it, and it just runs rampant. There's great history, but those people need to be part of the tourism recovery plan. They need to be engaged, and they need to be talked to.

I just wanted to add that. As I said, with my closing remarks, I want to thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre for bringing this motion forward. It's very timely, and we will be supporting this motion.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that it's just important to correct the record. It's always important to do that. Maybe I'll just start with the comments that we just heard from the Member for Kluane. Even though we are speaking to the motion brought forward by the Member for Whitehorse Centre, there was kind of a —

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Order. I'm not picking on the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, but just for the benefit of the House because everyone says this — but I have been advised by the Clerks-at-the-Table that the members cannot "correct the record" of anybody else. You cannot do that.

You can correct yourself. You can stand on a matter of personal privilege and you can correct the record by saying, "I misspoke myself" or that a certain statistic was incorrect.

I suppose you would say, "These are the facts as I see them, and the member opposite is incorrect." I've been told by the keepers of the procedural narrative for our Assembly that you cannot "correct the record" of another member.

I know that this is very interesting for all members at this juncture in the afternoon, but like I said, I'm not picking on the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources specifically because I likely have heard this from every member over the course of the last four years — except perhaps the Leader of the Third Party.

On that minor note, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources can continue.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On that point, Mr. Speaker, I think that my experience has been, over the last couple of years, that there have been new interpretations and changes — I think maybe instead of on the fly, with the great wisdom of the Clerks-at-the-Table who continue to educate us from their previous experience, if there's something that — collectively, as members, we could talk about some of these particular points and ways to do our job better and more appropriately.

But maybe we can collectively put a session aside to understand what those things are.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Sorry, just briefly. I think I have conveyed the message with respect to the element of correcting the record. I could provide specific reasons, but like I said, I learn as well, and I learn from the Clerks.

When I heard you say that, it tweaked to me that it was something that I should probably clarify with all members.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Maybe I should share some facts that may differ from the facts that were previously spoken to. I also want to be respectful to the fact that we're really talking about support for the heritage sector and the infrastructure in the museums that exists across the Yukon and the great community work as it interfaces with our tourism strategy, even though we are talking about recovery.

I think the minister has done a good job of connecting the fact that — because there was a fairly new strategy put together — this strategy also becomes an impetus for some of the work that is going to be done for recovery — really, with that same notion that this gives an opportunity, as members across had said, at this particular time not just to improve your infrastructure, your programming, your delivery of the content, but also there is an opportunity here to put your strategy in place and to look at how this overall strategy is a great, refreshing approach to what will happen with tourism.

I will just again go back to some of the comments made by the Member for Kluane. There has been a reoccurring theme and it has been integrated into the response here on this motion. It really talks about: "Why aren't you doing work for the tourism sector during these particular pressures that we have seen from COVID-19?" Also, it segued into understanding that there are supports to be put in place for these particular museums and heritage hot spots.

Again, as the minister spoke to, we were in a position where the minister very quickly, at the beginning of this pandemic with her department, provided the funding for the upcoming fiscal year to each of those organizations — understanding that they probably would not be providing the same programming that they normally would. They would, of course, have different costs if they were open. They would be delivering programming — some of those organizations for half a year, some for a longer period of time — but the department knew that it was essential to provide them with that funding. That is the first key piece. That counters some of the information that has been provided here today. Those are the facts, and the money flowed very quickly.

The business relief program, which also has been highly used by the tourism sector, was something that was put into place very quickly. The first meeting that occurred with the Business Advisory Council was, I believe, on April 9. Previous to that, there was work done around ensuring that we were listening to the business community and the policy work was being done. That was rolled out as well.

What is interesting is that the Member for Kluane continues, each time he gets up on this questioning, to state that we didn't do the work and that the work didn't get done — and what is interesting about that is that, during the briefing for

Economic Development, the last comments that were made by the Member for Klwane were to thank the officials on their quick and swift work that they did to put this program out. So, that is completely counter to the questioning that we hear every single day when he touches on this. I will have a discussion — maybe during Question Period — with him on that the next time he brings it up, if we have that opportunity. I wonder why he would thank the officials and the government for their quick and swift work, yet come in each day and share a bit of a different narrative.

Of course, our program for business is extended. The number of organizations that are looking to leverage that has gone down dramatically. We were over almost 500 organizations and now that's at about, I think, 150 organizations or businesses that are using it. Of course, we have lifted the ceiling of how much these organizations can access. Again, being respectful to the content of the motion, I will go back to some of the comments that were made by the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

When we think of support for the heritage sector, it's not just about how we provide money to museums and these organizations. I think that we have shown and shared through the conversations with the minister that there has been input that has been provided through the process of the strategy — and also in the case where there are ongoing conversations that are happening with the Tourism Advisory Board. Again, that organization has representation.

I also think that there were a lot of comments made by the member that were also broader than just the motion. It really touched on what we are doing for heritage. Again, the focus of this motion was to speak to input into a recovery plan, but we heard conversations about the budget and we heard the conversations about trends and annual funding.

So, I think it's fair to say that it was a broader conversation. Being consistent with that, or speaking to that, I think it's also important to understand what the government has done for heritage. You would leave listening to that and you would think there had been a lack of commitment to heritage.

You don't have to go any further than to look at some of our communities — as in Mayo, where you've seen the community come together in some of their most important heritage assets — the Anglican Church that's there or the resource centre — and to look at the funding — that funding that had not been received for many, many years — really important pieces of infrastructure in those communities that were badly in need of repair. I know that the community development fund was accessed by the proponents and the individuals who support that important work, and that's just one example.

Also, I think it's important to think about how government looks at heritage and how they work in that area. It's not just about those museums — although very important — it's about how government looks at heritage. What I think I would commend the minister on is the heritage assessment work that gets done. There was a commitment, I know, that the minister made in her work with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. It is something that is used in many aspects when we are going into our

communities. It's really important for those who have a real passion for heritage and who understand the importance of heritage to understand that work is so key. We've seen over the last number of years that work really being highlighted by this minister — and such a strong voice.

We have lots of challenging conversations around this from time to time because it is a new step that those in the resource sector have to take, but I have to commend the minister for always ensuring that her colleagues know just how important this is. What I've learned from the minister about this is that it's not just the importance of this heritage and our history as Yukoners, but how important elements of that story are to the Yukon brand and what draws so many visitors to the Yukon. It's such an integral part of when people are making decisions about the Yukon.

Just this morning, I had an opportunity to speak to a panel around the resource sector, but the first question that was asked was "Please, share with us the history of the Yukon — especially when it comes to some of these sectors — and tell us the stories of Skookum Jim or Kate Carmack". Those are always things that are brought up, even when we're talking about economic issues or investment.

I think that's one thing that's important to touch on — the fact that heritage assessment work has been something that has been driven by the minister and is such an important piece of what we're doing.

Another thing that's important to touch on — when we talk about recovery and we talk about how heritage will be key to recovery — and if the voice was there — just this week, the minister attended a meeting with me with the Chiefs Committee on Economic Development. The minister spoke to the chiefs about the fact that, in January, she attended a meeting with me during Roundup, but it was a meeting that was put together by the Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce. The minister attended, and at that point, the minister made an offer to Yukon First Nation development corporations that there was a new heritage resource centre that the minister wanted to invest in, and within that, we felt that in using the clauses of chapter 22 and the language of chapter 22 of existing self-government agreements, there was a real opportunity to work directly with First Nation governments or development corporations to help build the new heritage resource centre.

One thing that the minister has done is to make sure that all people in Cabinet — she has invited us — we have spent time going out to the Archives that the government inherited — and there are so many special things there, but we believe that it's time for a new centre.

I think that bringing First Nation governments to the table to look at developing and building a new heritage resource centre, where the very important items that the Yukon has can be looked after in an appropriate manner in a facility that can be world-class — that really provides the respect that's needed.

When I think about the building of that new infrastructure and that support to all of these different museums that exist — and heritage infrastructure — it just seems to me that this, again, is such a strong commitment, and it's so timely that

we're debating this motion, because we just had this discussion this week — actually, within the last 48 hours.

Again, we went back to First Nation leaders and said, "Look, please contemplate this because it's such an important thing."

I also want to say that I appreciate the opportunity that the minister has provided us to go out into the field and have a chance to go out into the Member for Kluane's home area — going up and understanding what needs to be put in place around the work around the ice patch and for us with other portfolios and responsibilities to be educated on that and to understand what we need to — just the respect that we have to have for all of these community pieces of infrastructure. I think the member opposite talked about Da Ku — a great place, a state-of-the-art, classy facility where there are items that come out of places such as the ice patch. It's really important that the minister ensured that the funding, very quickly in March, was provided to those organizations so they could provide some stability in their overhead.

So, once again, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the chance to touch on a few things today. Again, I appreciate the education on that. I will make sure that I choose my words appropriately as we go forward.

But again, thanks for the opportunity to share a bit more about the passion of the department and the minister and also the fact that you have a minister who is coming into this role who has always brought people together — a track record of bringing people together when it's time to make decisions. Again, that's the work that has been done here. Voices, of course, that have been chosen to speak on behalf of those organizations have been heard. That's why we're committed to making sure that all of those stakeholders are part of a recovery as they have been part of the strategic plan.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on Motion No. 297? If the member now speaks, she will close debate. Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank all members for their support for this motion today. As I said at the outset, this was intended as a motion to reinforce inclusion in the territory and also, as I said in my comments, to underscore the imperative and importance of making sure that all sectors of our tourism economy are reflected.

I thank the Minister of Economic Development for his comments about information that has been shared but that the members of this Legislative Assembly are not privy to. So, what I have been looking for, Mr. Speaker, and will continue to endeavour to have access to, is information that is and should be made available to all members of this Legislative Assembly, not just those who attend private meetings.

I look forward to having the minister either for Tourism and Culture or for Economic Development tabling in this Legislative Assembly the document that I referred to earlier, as I said when I stood, to self-correct myself.

I had to acknowledge that perhaps there is someplace within the Yukon system a document that makes reference to a

strategy that is going to outline how the Government of Yukon will provide relief with supplemental programs for tourism and culture non-profit organizations, such as museums and cultural centres — that document being entitled or referenced in the October 13 Yukon COVID-19 tourism recovery plan. It was referenced as "Recovery: Yukon's economic strategy in 2020". If the government would make that document available, perhaps this whole discussion this afternoon would have been rendered moot, Mr. Speaker, but it wasn't. Therefore, it has been interesting — in some ways a bit repetitive, but edifying nonetheless. I thank the members for their support.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 297 agreed to

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

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

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Hutton): The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Chair, I do have some more updates for the member opposite. We endeavoured to get back to him with some more information about some Water Board licences. Currently, we have 10 applications that remain before the board for Indian River licences, which overlap with wetlands. Those all require a wetlands reclamation plan per the decision document. Four also require an additional plan to meet the full interim approach criteria for placer mining in wetlands, which includes details like no mining in bogs or preserving 40 percent of fen as well. With some applications, the delay falls to the operator, as I have expressed in the past, to respond to information requests from the Water Board.

I have just a confirmation and reiteration of information based on a question on November 3 discussing the government's fiscal position. The member opposite was asking about the Yukon Development Corporation. I am happy to respond to the question. I do need to point out that we talked about changes in long-term debt and that the change in long-term debt is reported on a consolidated basis for the Yukon Development Corporation. It does not relate to the government's fiscal position on a non-consolidated basis.

The question from the member opposite related specifically to the change in long-term debt of \$10 million. \$3.959 million is long-term debt between Yukon Development Corporation and KDFN related to investments in their third LNG unit. The remainder, \$6.765 million, is Yukon Energy Corporation's long-term debt from TD bank for its 2018 capital structure true-up. The Yukon Energy Corporation's capital structure true-up is the process where construction funds accessed through the line of credit are swapped to lower interest long-term debt at the completion of a project.

The member opposite also asked a follow-up question related to their motion — Motion No. 235 for the production of papers — outlining the residency and classification of Government of Yukon employees by department.

Mr. Chair, Yukon government employees are expected to live and work within Yukon as a condition of their employment. In rare cases, the Yukon government may hire an out-of-territory resident to work remotely long term. These remote work arrangements have generally been used to staff specialized positions that are difficult to fill from within the Yukon, allowing us to meet operational requirements in situations where local recruitment efforts have been

unsuccessful. These arrangements have been appropriate for the position or the employee and the remote work site and are approved on a case-by-case basis. This is at the discretion of individual departments. It must be approved by the deputy minister and the Public Service Commissioner. There are currently a handful of long-term, out-of-territory working arrangements across the government.

Aside from these few exceptions, the Government of Yukon employees are expected to reside in the Yukon, as I said, and must report to their official workplace according to their regularly scheduled hours of work. While I am happy to provide this high-level summary, I will allow the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission to speak more specifically about this item in greater detail at a later time.

I will cede the floor to the member opposite.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate that the Premier has acknowledged that there are some staff out of the territory who are working; however, it does not appear to be a full description. We have heard this as a repeated concern from within departments — and a growing concern — and that includes staff who had positions in the Yukon who have been allowed to move elsewhere, we have been informed, as well as senior staff in departments who play a very major role in the pandemic response. The reports that we have heard regarding the amount of time that they are not residing in the territory are concerning.

We are trying to be respectful of privacy, on the one hand, but also recognize that, as it relates operationally to how the government is dealing with things — especially including the pandemic response — it does become a matter of public interest, notwithstanding the fact that there are some privacy considerations associated with it. Again, we would like a more fulsome breakdown. We would rather not have to get into ATIPP or call a motion for the production of papers. It is information that we would like to see a breakdown on — what the total number is and how many departments are affected, as well as understanding the positions that are affected.

In the case of, for example, another department related to COVID response, we appreciate that officials have already advised us that one person hired for work related to the COVID response is not a resident of the Yukon. I do want to note that there is always the possibility that, for certain skillsets, contract work or a temporary position might need to be addressed in an unusual way. What we are hearing is that this is becoming a trend, and it is not just disturbing to the public, which it is, but it is disturbing to employees and recently retired employees who are concerned about the impact that it is having.

I will move on to another area related to the pandemic. Again, this is an area that crosses multiple portfolios, so it is one that we felt was appropriate to raise in general debate with the Premier. In this part of the pandemic response, it relates to the responsibilities of Health and Social Services and of Community Services for pandemic response and involves Department of Education facilities that are maintained by Highways and Public Works.

One question that I have heard from a constituent — and I know that some of my colleagues have heard it from others —

relates to the issue of sports groups and other user groups — and by that, I mean both kids and adults — being able to use school gyms during the pandemic. On the one hand, it has been strongly encouraged and recommended by Dr. Hanley as well as other physicians that people, including youth, need exercise as part of keeping healthy during the pandemic, and I, of course, agree with that. But on the flip side — and again, we recognize where this concern arises from — there has been an issue with gyms not being open and a number of user groups having to pay out-of-pocket fees to lease the Canada Games Centre to run sports programs, but that has created a challenge because of the increasing number of user groups and sports groups that are competing, and they run into issues such as getting rescheduled, losing gym times, et cetera — not through the fault of the Canada Games Centre, of course, but simply due to the fact that there are a lot of people competing to use it.

Most recently, from what we've heard, there was an announcement that the gym closure had been extended until November 23. I also understand that there have been some discussions underway involving sports groups, as well as departments, aimed at potentially trying to open those up sooner. Could the Premier please advise me what the status of those discussions is and if the government is going to be able to open up access to its own school gymnasiums to sports groups and other user groups prior to November 23? If so, when do they envision being able to do so?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As I understand it, user groups in schools have been addressed. We are in a pandemic, and we have to take a look to make sure that the user groups are safe, that the custodial staff are safe as well as the students returning the next day. With that, there has been quick work done with the chief medical officer of health's department. At first, obviously, the priority was getting the students back to school, and then we could focus our attention on user groups.

As I understand it, it is one user group per night. School facilities will be available for after-use on week nights only at this point. Each user group will be provided with an extended block of time per booking to maximize the number of cohorts — cohorts being different age groups or women's teams versus men's teams, co-ed teams — different type of cohorts like that — who can use the facility. Priority will be made there, and the priority is being given to user groups delivering activities to children and youth, first and foremost.

I do know that there are ongoing conversations with the municipality as well, but there's a general sense of what's happening, and we'll leave the rest to the ministers who are responsible, when they have their time here in Committee of the Whole, to fill in the gaps of the general information I gave.

While I am on my feet — I did miss a question here — a back-and-forth — something that I did kind of ponder about a bit here the other day when the member opposite was speaking about the debt levels and talking about how, somehow, we were misleading — that it wasn't just \$20-some million. The member opposite said it was up to \$30 million of debt that we gave. To be clear, I'll give the timeline here of exactly what happened from the borrowing of the Yukon Party and then the numbers, and how they moved per year after that.

When we took office here, we inherited a debt from the Yukon Party. As of March 31, 2016, that outstanding balance was reported as \$201.558 million — not the number that the member opposite gave the other day. This is directly attributed to the time that the Yukon Party was in power. That was the number. That was the hangover of debt that we inherited from the Yukon Party — just over \$200 million.

Our government has paid \$30.591 million to reduce that debt over the past four years. This was not included in my previous discussion. I just wanted to provide a little bit more information. After paying that \$30.591 million on the inherited debt, that still left us with the number that the member opposite talked about — which he claimed title to — which was the \$170.967 million outstanding from the original \$201.559 million in debt that the Yukon Party left us.

Now, if we're looking at the total government debt as of March 31 of this year, we see the total of \$228.435 million — so \$228,435,000 — in outstanding debt. Of this, we know that this is where we are right now, but it's good to give the context of where we were.

For the past four years, we have not only paid down some of the debt that we inherited, but we're also paying the interest charges on that debt that the Yukon Party left us, which has to be absorbed within our annual budgets as well. We take a pertinent approach to borrowing, which enables us to deliver on our promises to Yukoners with the strategic investments that we've met by prioritizing this government with the community as far as priorities go. We are leveraging funds to lay a foundation for a much stronger and a much more sustainable future with that sound fiscal prudence.

I just wanted to put things into context for the member opposite as far as the current status of the debt.

Mr. Cathers: That was a very clever way that the Premier put it — albeit one that does not present an accurate picture of the facts. As the Premier very well knows, on page 51 of the Public Accounts from March 31, 2017 — which is the end of the overlap year, most of which was the Yukon Party's time in office and part of which was the Liberal Party's — the total debt at the end of March 31, 2017, was \$193.5 million.

The Liberal government has increased that by \$34.9 million up to the end of the last fiscal year that we have Public Accounts for. These are not my numbers; these are the numbers from the Public Accounts, audited by the Auditor General and tabled by the Premier himself.

So, that is \$34.9 million — and I would remind the Premier that the debt balance at the start of the 2016-17 fiscal year was higher than it was at the end of the year, and loans that existed — relating to both the Yukon Development Corporation and the Hospital Corporation, as well as housing — were paid down in accordance with the terms of those loans, which include annual payments. These were specified in the previous Public Accounts, as the Premier knows very well. I would hope that he scrutinized those during his time as the Leader of the Third Party — though perhaps he didn't read those, which may be why he professes a lack of knowledge about the financial situation upon taking office, when in fact it was fully disclosed.

Moving on to other matters, I am pleased to hear the Premier indicating that he believes that the issue around gyms is resolved. I know that I have heard from some people who have not heard that word yet — if that is indeed the case, I am sure that they will be glad to hear it. It is a matter of importance to people who are being affected by it. Sports and active living, of course, are an important part, for many people, of enjoying their lives and also for keeping healthy. As the Premier and his colleagues should be aware, active living, including exercise, is an important part of being healthier and, consequently, does have a proven beneficial impact on reducing people developing problems such as chronic obesity, which add to costs to the health care system, as well as affecting their quality of life. So, I am pleased to hear that this is occurring.

I would ask the Premier about one matter that we don't see mentioned in the supplementary budget, but we've never heard it mentioned by the government in any budget until we bring up the question — that is one that relates to the importance of communications for people in rural Yukon. As the Premier will be aware, this is something that — during the Yukon Party's time in office, we invested in initiatives, including the creation of the 811 HealthLine and the expansion of the 911 service.

We also partnered with the private sector to expand cellphone service beyond the Whitehorse area. That investment, incurred largely in two installments during Yukon Party's time in office, resulted in expanding that service to most communities in the territory, as well as the Whitehorse periphery. However, there has been a growth in population through that time in a number of areas that are unserved, as well as issues relating to some of how the moves to newer technology of cell service has, in some cases, resulted in gaps in service that weren't there when the towers were initially put in. That's a problem that's happening, for example, in the Ibex Valley area — and I know it's not the only area in the territory where people are reporting that they used to have better cell service than they do, and there has been a decline in that service since that time.

As the Premier will be well aware, we have repeatedly urged the government to support the expansion of communications infrastructure into rural Yukon, including working with the private sector to expand cellphone coverage to people without service in areas including Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake, Ibex Valley, Junction 37, Champagne, Mendenhall, and the north Alaska Highway, as well as improving service in areas with coverage gaps.

Unfortunately, while we are pleased that, when we have raised the issue, the Premier and his colleagues have not rejected the concept, the answer every time has been various versions of a response that basically boils down to "We'll think about it". Unfortunately, as we get to this part in the Liberal government's mandate, four years in, of a situation where people are concerned about it — and this issue has reared its head for some, including in my riding, during the recent windstorm that we experienced, where a number of people lost landline service. That has again raised the issue to one that is very top-of-mind for Yukoners. As well, the snow that we saw on Monday of this week created situations where we were

fortunate that there were not a large number of accidents. The RCMP had reported that, I believe, there were a total of eight accidents that they identified at that time.

I could stand to be corrected on that number, but they did issue a press release noting that the number was relatively low, but in an accident situation — whether during a snowstorm or some other event or simply if a vehicle is stuck on the side of the highway — being able to call home or call for help is something that is a matter of interest to people but, under certain situations, could also be a matter of great importance and potentially even a matter of life and death in extreme situations. So, the value in having that communication there for emergency purposes — and I would just ask the Premier — we have really heard very little from the government around this. We haven't heard a rejection of the concept, but we haven't heard support for it either — what the government's position is and what their plan is, if they have one, on addressing the request from Yukoners on expanded cellphone coverage.

Again, just to refresh the Premier's memory in case I wasn't talking clearly — or he didn't hear me clearly — the areas that we have identified, based on what we hear from Yukoners, include Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fox Lake and the south Fox Lake area, Ibex Valley, Junction 37, Champagne, Mendenhall, and the north Alaska Highway.

Could the Premier let us know what the government's position is on that? Do they intend to take action on that list of priorities or any portion of that list?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, as the member opposite referenced, this has been a question in the debate already, and I believe that the ministers have responded.

As far as updates, I do know that, in the last few years, as far as my travel back and forth — and I am sure, Mr. Chair, that you can concur with this — the amount of cell service coverage along the road from Whitehorse to Dawson has expanded. I am finding connectivity in places — even in between Stewart Crossing and Dawson — that definitely wasn't there in the past. I know that there is work ongoing with our providers here — Northwestel — and the departments, but I will leave the credit and the expansion news to the departments that are responsible for those to comment on.

Again, we are here in general debate with a supplementary budget. I can report — I don't believe, and I will check in with my DM here — that I don't believe that there is money in this supplementary budget for work in expanding of the Internet services per se, and if there is, I will correct the record later or get the minister that is responsible for that to report, but I don't believe that there is. Again, we'll get the proper place to respond to that with the proper minister at the proper time.

It is interesting, though, that the member opposite is continuing to refuse that \$201.558 million of debt was — now, I guess, in his mind — not accumulated by the previous government. I guess now he's trying to say, as well, that, in their last year, they might have done some kind of reduction to that debt. I don't remember debating that in the Legislature in their last year, so I will let the member opposite correct the record if that's true, but the Yukon Party did accumulate \$201.558 million of debt, and the current debt, right now, is not

that much higher — our current debt level right now being \$228 million — yet the member opposite would make it seem that we are the ones who borrowed the money.

I'm going to move on from that point because it's just — and with all the assaults that he hurled at me personally, I will just cast those to the side as well. That's not something that, on this side of the House, we are going to play with.

I've been accused of a lot of things from the members opposite. They used to call me a “Timbit hockey player” at times when they got frustrated with me. The personal attacks continue again here today on the floor of the Legislative Assembly from the Yukon Party — nothing new to see here, Mr. Chair.

I will say that, when it comes to debt and how we have circumnavigated through these extraordinary times, I think we have done a fair job — a fair job comparatively to others in Canada. Our economy has been in a situation where, when you take a look at the global pandemic, there are positive stats from economic reports — not just from us, but from economic reports. Unemployment rates fell more than 1.8 percentage points in September, and this is the lowest in the country. We are very thankful for that. We're very thankful that Yukoners, where we can, are going back to work. We know that we have a long way to go, but it's always important to get to our feet and counter what we're hearing from the Yukon Party.

As of August, the number of people on employer payrolls had received half of those pandemic job losses. Sales receipts from restaurants and bars have recovered more than half of their pandemic losses, while the retail sales have fully recovered, reaching an all-time high in August.

That's a really important point there, because the credit for the fact that retail sales have fully recovered to an all-time high in August belongs to no political party in the Legislative Assembly. That credit belongs to Yukoners who buy local, and I want to thank people for doing so. There was criticism of our government employees, whether they were at work or not at work. We have proven they were at work during the pandemic for the whole time. People working from home in August still went downtown, still bought local, whether they were from the private sector or the public sector. To see that in August we had an all-time high in retail sales, that credit goes directly to every Yukoner who made a conscious decision to buy local, and I thank them for that.

Heading into the pandemic, our economic fundamentals were generally strong, regardless of what the member opposite would have you believe. Yukon's positive labour market led the way — again, a credit to Yukon's ingenuity and the private sector — boasting the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. Yukoners are earning more pay on average, with average weekly earnings up in August by almost 10 percent from 12 months prior — good for third place in Canada jurisdictions, but only behind the two other territories. These are hallmarks of a strong economy — a strong fiscal situation that we're in due to the money that we earn through a good labour market.

Our housing market continues to perform well in light of current disruptions. Existing home sales were up this year by 7.8 percent in the first half of 2019. We have a long way to go

still with housing and making sure that we have housing available, but when you're in a booming economy, housing is something that goes along with that. The work that we have done in the last two years — compared to the previous four as we have talked about many times in the Legislative Assembly — talks about the importance of us spending, getting lots out the door, and getting housing available, whether it be affordable housing or social housing, to complement the housing market.

Yukon's construction sector has continued to be active in 2020. I know that in Dawson, when I was trying to do some renovations at my house, it was hard to get Mike and his crew to get to my house to work because everyone in town wanted a carpenter this summer. There were a lot of people working. It was really hard to find construction folks because they were working this summer, which was good to see.

The value of building permits is on par with the 2019 performance, which is also a testament to a healthy economy, given very unprecedented economic disruptions. Again, we are not out of the woods and there are still people and businesses that are suffering, but it is important to share the statistics about where we are when we put into context our government and our communities as compared to other jurisdictions.

We have said before as well that Yukon and Nunavut are the only two jurisdictions in Canada that are expected to see real GDP growth in 2020. We saw an announcement about spending from the Nunavut government. They are in a unique situation. My heart goes out to Premier Savikataaq and his team. They are going to be in a really unique situation there. They are, of course, in a different situation from us with no roads to a lot of their communities — mobility is a real concern when it comes to how they get equipment and health care into their communities. It is a huge expense compared to us.

But in the Yukon, we have seen strong mining production — the ramping up of the Eagle Gold project, which is expected to lead to very modest economic growth in 2020 of .8 percent, ramping up to 6.9 percent in 2021. Mr. Speaker, that is incredible.

The ability for us as a government to work with the chief medical officer of health and the proponent to get people safely to the mine and moving back and forth safely was a herculean effort. Again, it shows the importance of making sure that, in these trying times, we have a strong economy as much as we possibly can and to work hand in glove with the private sector in order to ensure that, whether it's through the business relief fund or through assisting the mining sector — either the placer miners or the quartz mining folks — to get to camps safely so that our communities are safe and our economy can survive.

The department's forecast is significantly more conservative than — the Conference Board of Canada is forecasting nine percent growth this year and 7.7 percent growth next year. Our own statisticians — the bean counters and the good folks in Finance — are definitely a little bit more conservative than that, but these are numbers from the Conference Board of Canada.

Speaking of the Conference Board of Canada, I am going to read some quotes from their reports — and I quote: “Despite

the global pandemic, Yukon will post strong economic growth in 2020 thanks to increased production in its mining sector.”

Another quote from the Conference Board of Canada: “Yukon has a lower unemployment rate than any other province or territory. In 2018, the unemployment rate fell to a historic low of 2.7 per cent. And, although it rose to 3.6 per cent last year, that was still well below the level of any other province or territory.”

Another quote from the Conference Board of Canada: “Yukon’s unemployment rate will fall to 2.4 per cent in 2021, its lowest level on record. Continued gains in the territory’s mining industry and a recovering tourism sector are the main reasons for the historically low unemployment rate.”

We have Standard and Poor’s as well, which also shows a positive fiscal situation here in Yukon — and I quote: “Changes in Yukon’s GDP are often fueled by activity within the mining sector, and we believe that the start of production at Victoria Gold’s Eagle mine and ongoing development of the Coffee Gold mine will help to maintain modestly positive GDP growth in 2020...” They did go on to say — and I quote: “Yukon will continue to benefit from a very manageable debt burden and ample liquidity over the next few years... We believe that the territory’s debt policy is prudent: debt limits are legislated and outstanding balances are well below the limits.”

Just to remind people again of the \$201.558 million of borrowing from the Yukon Party that we did inherit.

One more quote — and I will leave it at that for the Standard and Poor’s — is: “... the direct fiscal impacts stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic will be less severe for Yukon than for Canadian provinces, given the relatively small proportion of its revenues that have direct exposure to economic activity. We expect that continued activity in the mining sector and Yukon’s reliance on federal transfer payments, while limiting its fiscal flexibility, will help the territory recover positive budgetary momentum in the next two years.”

I do recall, in the past, the Yukon Party government ministers getting up and, when it came to a booming economy, taking all the credit as opposed to giving the credit to the mining industry. We have worked hand in glove with the mining industry, and we’re giving credit to the mining industry. We’re very thankful to be in the situation that we’re in right now and that we got Victoria Gold through the regulatory process to be able to be in production. We’ll give credit to the placer miners for getting out to the field and for helping other families. We’ll also give credit to the fact that we do have a federal transfer payment. We’re very lucky for that, compared with other jurisdictions.

We talk all the time with the other provinces about their situations. Sometimes at those tables, the three territories — we don’t have much to say when folks are talking about proportionate money going to each of the provinces. We know that we’re very lucky here to have a federal transfer payment, and we’ll give credit to that.

But we are also seeing huge improvements and increases in a lot of different fields that we’re very proud of when it comes to how we are going to diversify our own economy.

What’s really important to this government is being able to work on the economy and the environment together as issues.

I want to spend a little bit of time, if I may, talking about initiatives to make sure that controlling our debt limits and controlling the amount of debt that we have but, at the same time, looking to invest in a clean future — extremely important to this government. Also, what’s really interesting work — and I’m really proud of it — we haven’t talked too much about it this year in the Legislative Assembly — is the concept of economic and environmental sustainability put together. We’re extremely committed to working in partnership with all of the stakeholders in the Yukon, collaborating to find solutions to complex challenges that face the territory.

This is interesting stuff — codesign labs. Codesign labs are one way in which we can achieve this. During the pandemic response, we have applied a refined version and vision of this model. For example, we conveyed economic and tourism industry stakeholders to identify priorities and core issues for moving toward recovery and also the reopening of the economy. We’ve also leveraged co-lab principles in some of our previous engagement work, including modernizing the *Liquor Act* in 2019 when we conveyed interest groups, licensees, First Nation governments, and local governments in a series of workshops that further developed new legislation.

In the coming year — and this is where the exciting piece is when it comes to economic and environmental sustainability — we will be piloting a Yukon co-lab, which is a very innovative approach — an open and creative process where groups from across sectors are working together to generate solutions on very complicated problems — very complex and very Yukon-centric problems. A Yukon co-lab will be promoting a multi-stakeholder, multi-agency collaboration so that end users most impacted by solutions can participate in the design of those solutions at the outset. The co-lab is going to focus in on solving practical problems that support sustainable development in the Yukon.

I want to give credit to the Minister of Economic Development for the work that he has done to get YuKConstruct moving forward. There are lots of brilliant people doing lots of brilliant work down there at that building. Kudos to the Department of Economic Development for all the work that they did to see that vision — modernizing our approach to the tech community and to folks working together.

All of this work is about developing solutions with users, not for them, as together, the teams will discover, design, define, and deliver new ways to work forward in partnerships so that we can stand up here and take a look at the lasting results to complicated problems. It would be my pleasure in future legislative sessions to be able to sit up here and give credit again to the stakeholders who will be involved in the co-labs for economic and environmental sustainability. Active participation from all across all sectors is extremely fundamental when coming to the guiding principles around our public engagement approach, and these co-labs are going to take that step further together, and we will stand up here in the Legislative Assembly and give credit to those communities at

that time as we look to work with partnerships to expand our own-source revenues here in the Yukon.

Mr. Cathers: First of all, I have to remind the Premier that I have never compared him to a hockey player of any size. The Premier needs to recognize that, when we are criticizing the government for their performance or their lack of transparency, it is not a personal insult. We are reflecting on their performance or their refusal to answer questions, and we are doing our job as the Official Opposition in holding the government to account for that refusal to provide information or that failure to take action.

For example, the Premier, in spending 20 minutes or close to it, dodging my question — a very simple question — about cellphone service — something that is very important to Yukoners, especially for those who are in areas that don't have it. This is something that we have raised repeatedly. I have raised it. The Member for Kluane has raised it. In fact, I believe that all of my colleagues — the Member for Porter Creek North, the Member for Watson Lake, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, and the Member for Copperbelt South — have all spoken in favour of this repeatedly on behalf of our constituents and other Yukoners who raised it with us. Four years into this government, we cannot get a straight answer on whether they will support it or not.

The Premier gave one of his “ask someone else later” answers, but unfortunately, four years into this Liberal government, we just don't have an answer on it and people are looking for action. If the Liberal government doesn't support the expansion of cellphone service, then tell us. If they do support it, what Yukoners want to see is action, not words.

Mr. Chair, I do want to point out as well that I appreciate that the Premier provided a little more information on the topic of wetlands. It is one that is of great concern to Yukoners who are affected by it. There was an indication from the Premier that he was pleased to see the progress of the mining sector moving forward, but unfortunately, we have heard repeatedly from multiple affected people about long delays — not just involving the water licence process, but increasing problems on the government side through increasing delays in the process run by Energy, Mines and Resources, as well as other departments, including Environment.

We're hearing that the problems are getting worse. Unfortunately, this government is good at talking points, but they seem to think that the work ends when the photo op is done. We have seen that the regulatory and permitting process has gotten worse under their watch.

Another area I want to touch on — and I'll ask the Premier to respond to it when he rises next — the Premier made reference to the housing market, talking about taking action in that area. One of the things that we've heard repeatedly from landlords is that changes that the federal government made to taxing rental properties have created a real disincentive to people actually making investments in rental property. As the Premier likely knows — or as he should know — a substantial portion of the rental housing market here in the Yukon — as well as throughout the country — includes people who are making personal investments on a small scale by buying

another house that they rent out or buying a duplex that they rent out, as well as people purchasing shares in apartment buildings and choosing that as an investment, because real estate has traditionally been a solid investment — it is often fairly safe to predict that it will go up in most housing markets.

However, changes that were brought in by the Trudeau Liberals have increased the tax on rental properties by classifying them as so-called “passive income”, and the taxation rate that they increased is now rather punitive. In some cases, I believe it's up to 50 percent. The effect of that has been a real disincentive to investors, including Yukon residents, to make an investment in rental properties.

We have heard this repeatedly from Yukon businesses, Yukon realtors, Yukon landlords, and others who would have potentially considered becoming an investor in a rental property but are choosing not to, because of the tax changes. The question is — it has been brought to our attention — I'm sure it has been brought to the attention of the Premier and his colleagues — has the Premier raised this issue with either Prime Minister Trudeau, Minister Freeland, or the previous Minister of Finance — Minister Morneau — and expressed concern about this taxation change?

As Minister of Finance, he is the Yukon government's lead on taxation-related matters. If this government is at all listening to what they're hearing from Yukon business owners, they should be aware that this is a topic of significant concern. So, can the Premier tell this House what position his government has taken on the tax changes made by the federal Liberals that have increased the taxes on rental properties and made them punitive in some cases? Has he expressed concern to the federal government and asked them to change it to, in fact, create more of an incentive for businesses to invest in rental properties and invest in creating a housing supply? If not, will he commit to do so?

With that, Mr. Chair, seeing the time — and also seeing that the Premier is getting advice on that and he obviously needs information — I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Cathers that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Streicker that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the House do now adjourn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled November 4, 2020:

34-3-43

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 204, *Fourth Appropriation Act 2019-20* — Jersey barriers (Mostyn)

The following document was filed November 4, 2020:

34-3-37

Continued funding for the Fireweed Community Market, letter re (dated October 30, 2020) from Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge, to Hon. Mr. Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Cathers)