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HANSARD

Tuesday, November 24, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 Fall Sitting

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

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

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Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, November 24, 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.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would like the Assembly to help me welcome individuals who are here today for a tribute that we will touch on in a second. The president of Alexco Resources, Mr. Brad Thrall, is here with us, as well as Amanda Leslie, who works with the Yukon Producers' Group. She was also organizing an event this week that was fitting for such an accomplishment that we are going to talk about. Due to what is happening with COVID-19, it has been delayed for now.

Also, here with us today are Mr. Ed Peart, who we spoke about earlier this week and who is now in his second term as president of Yukon Chamber of Mines, and esteemed and celebrated geologist Mr. Maurice Colpron, from the Yukon Geological Survey.

Please help me in welcoming them here today.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Addictions Awareness Week

Hon. Ms. Frost: I rise in the House today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to acknowledge this week as National Addictions Awareness Week.

Every day, approximately 11 Canadians die from apparent opioid-related incidents. As Yukoners, many of us know someone who has been affected by substance abuse — whether it be a family member, a friend, a neighbour, or a local community member.

National Addictions Awareness Week helps us raise awareness of reducing the stigma of substance use and supporting those suffering from it to seek help. This year, the theme is “Change Begins with Me,” putting the focus on the efforts and actions of individuals. It is about making a choice to play a part in reducing the stigma surrounding substance use and people who use substances and committing to change.

I cannot say it enough: It is people who use drugs occasionally who are at higher risk of overdosing. The conversations around addiction need to change. How can we do that? By learning more about substance use disorders, it can help you assist others to improve your encounters with people

with this condition. I believe in learning at a young age that addiction is a complex medical condition. It can change perceptions for a lifetime. I encourage all Yukoners to take the time to have that important talk with youth in your life. Each of us has a part to play; taking the initiative, you will be an ambassador for change.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents additional challenges for us, but even more for people living with substance use disorders. Small gestures can make a big difference. I encourage Yukoners to check in on people in our communities during these uncertain times. A society that supports harm reduction strategies embodies compassion. Small actions, such as offering some of the necessities of life, can help people who use substances to keep themselves safe.

This government is working year-round with our community partners, including First Nation governments, municipalities, and a variety of NGOs, to ensure ease of access and reduce barriers to the provisions of harm reduction training and supplies in the community.

For National Addictions Awareness Week, Watson Lake has increased their outreach hours for the week. Haines Junction, Carmacks, and Carcross are offering workshops on addictions awareness and harm reduction, and there are other initiatives happening this week across the Yukon.

This week, I ask that Yukoners listen to the stories of those who have been impacted by addictions and mental disorders and learn how they can be helped and how we can help in reducing the stigma associated with mental illnesses and those associated with addictions.

I would like to acknowledge individuals who are working with Yukoners struggling with addictions to help them in their journey to recovery. We need to show compassion and understanding and offer our support.

In closing, I invite Yukoners and my colleagues to take part in changing the conversation by participating in the National Addictions Awareness Week events. You will find all of the information on Health and Social Services' Facebook page.

Mahsi' cho, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize November 22 to 28 as National Addictions Awareness Week in Canada. The theme this year is “Change Begins with Me”. The focus is on the efforts and actions of individuals to help reduce the stigma surrounding substance abuse.

Addictions can affect anyone, whatever your social status, your age, your gender, your ethnicity, or your profession. We are all too well aware of the harmful effects of addictions. The ripple effect goes on to other individuals and families and, in turn, to our communities. The recent spike in deaths across Canada due to overdoses is a clear message to everyone that the problem is growing. Top those stats with the stress with the spread of COVID-19, and we are, in fact, in crisis.

Most of us know someone facing an addiction. Sometimes we know that there is a problem, or we don't know that there is a problem but only suspect that there is one. Sometimes the one

facing addiction does not even realize it themselves or they are in denial.

We most commonly think that addiction is the use of legal or illegal drugs of substance, such as alcohol, opioids, cannabis, or methamphetamines. However, it could also be food, shopping, gambling, and so many other compulsive habits. It is so important to keep an eye on loved ones who may be affected in some way by an addiction. Keep communication lines open, ask questions, offer suggestions and care. It could be your mother, uncle, brother, daughter, best friend, or neighbour. Should it be so close, we usually reassess our ways of thinking about the problem.

Acknowledgment of an issue and timely support is a key step to recovery. There is help to be found in the Yukon. If an individual is ready, we offer detox and treatment programs to help face addictions head on. There are alcohol, drug, and mental health workers and counsellors.

We live in a time when we have access to so much information and support, so encourage others to reach out. Let's end the stigma around those with addictive habits. It is a difficult societal issue, but we must continue to support people through the health care, social, and educational systems as best we can.

We would like to thank the staff, volunteers, and organizations who worked to help and support those living with addictions. The work you do continues to make a difference to our communities and those who call them home. It takes special people to be part of the solution.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the NDP caucus in recognition of National Addictions Awareness Week. As we've heard, this year's theme, "Change Begins with Me", focuses on what we as individuals can do to support people who are experiencing addiction.

As a result of the pandemic, with the increases of stress, fear, and uncertainty, more people than ever are turning to substances to cope. We know that shaming, blaming, and stigmatizing people who use substances doesn't help. It actually harms. Practising lateral kindness and meeting folks where they're at within the context of substance use is really important. Choosing our words, being mindful of how we think or act toward people who use substances is essential. Being kind can literally change and save lives.

Right now, especially within the context of something we've never had to face before, being supportive of those who are experiencing addiction is more important than ever before. Over half of Canadians suffering from substance use disorders say that stigma is a major barrier to their well-being. It's important to note that substance use disorders aren't a choice; they are a health condition. We can choose to take steps to ending stigma by eliminating biased words and ideas from our day-to-day life. It's about putting the person first, not the addiction.

I've talked a lot about biases in this House. Every human being has biases. It's part of what being human is. These biases will show up in different ways for each of us. When confronting

our own biases about addiction and substance use disorders, we need to take a step back and remember the human before us.

What someone once suggested was to imagine a child in front of me who had done their very best. Then ask myself what problems they must have encountered as they grew up and be dealing with today to be suffering so much. So, once I started doing that, it struck me that this person must be leading a life that they never imagined. So, with this new understanding, we're able to ask ourselves: Is there something that we can do to help?

At the very least, we can offer our respect for their humanity and use person-first language so that they are more than the disorder that we see. The words we use help shape other people's experiences, so let's create the reality we want by choosing words related to substance use that are compassionate and respect an individual's human dignity.

Applause

In recognition of Alexco Resource Corporation's geological mapping project

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Alexco Resource Corporation and their new geological map for the mineral district in Yukon.

Alexco owns the majority of the most prospective part of the Keno Hill silver district. Alexco acquired the Keno Hill district in 2005 and with it came extensive archives from United Keno Hill Mines Ltd.

During the past 10 years, Alexco retained the services of Peter Read to produce a new detailed geological map of the area. Peter visited every outcrop over the entire property, compiled previous maps and examined logs for more than 10,000 drill holes. He captured both the historic logs of United Keno Hill Mines and more recent drilling by Alexco. This dedication resulted in a map that is undoubtedly the most detailed geological map in Yukon. I believe, from speaking with the CEO and chairman of Alexco, I think Mr. Read has spent almost 55 years of time in that area and learning about that area.

Mr. Speaker, this map marks a major milestone. It represents the most comprehensive update to understanding the geology of the Keno Hill district since the Geological Survey of Canada's 1965 report. The Yukon Geological Survey indicated its willingness to help publish this updated information after the visiting the Keno Hill district and discussing Alexco's new detailed work. Maurice Colpron, the Yukon Geological Survey's head of bedrock geology, worked collaboratively with Peter Read and Al McOnie during the past year to prepare this open file map.

This map is exceptionally detailed with the most accurate representation of quartz veins and fault geometry ever shown for the district. The open file releases include a 1:25,000 scale map of the district and a detailed 1:5,000 scale map and a cross-section of the Birmingham deposit.

The creators of this map are also developing a report that will detail the geology and present an understanding of how silver-bearing veins formed in the Keno Hill district.

Information on this map will help refine the Yukon Geological Survey's compilation of Yukon bedrock geology. It also provides a much-improved geological context for the mineral occurrence in the survey's MINFILE database.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very detailed and technical project. This exceptional work is a significant contribution to better understand our geology. This in turn informs where Yukon's mineral industry can direct their resources and contribute to the economic well-being of the territory. As we honour geoscience this week during the annual forum, it is important to highlight all the work behind locating the minerals that are part of our everyday lives.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank those involved in this exceptional mapping project.

Applause

Mr. Kent: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Alexco Resource Corp. and the company's comprehensive and dedicated work with the Yukon Geological Survey to publish an updated geological map of the historic Keno Hill silver district — work and a commitment to the territory that draws on the past to the benefit of Yukon geology in central Yukon today and for decades to come.

This important body of work builds on previous Yukon Geological Survey publications of the district and incorporates an extensive compilation of historical mining records, past and present exploration map sheets, and drill program results. My colleagues and I greatly appreciate the efforts of Alexco, which has owned the majority of the Keno Hill silver district since 2005, and the significant contribution this new map makes to the Yukon and to all of Canada.

I would like to acknowledge the Alexco chairman and CEO Clynt Nauman, President Brad Thrall, who is here with us in the gallery today, VP of Exploration Al McOnie, District Exploration Manager Seymore Isles, and Geotex President Peter Read — who was also Mr. Nauman's professor at New Zealand's University of Otago — and, of course, the entire team at the Yukon Geological Survey, past and present, for their vision and commitment to making this achievement a reality.

This updated map is based on a 1:5,000 scale and reveals several significant outcomes concerning the geology of the district, outcomes that benefit Canada's geological community. As we know, the Keno Hill silver district has contributed significantly to the territory's economy and its culture since the early 1900s. Elsa, built in 1935, was a vibrant Yukon community of 600 residents at its peak in the 1960s.

In a 2006 paper authored by Bob Cathro, entitled "*Great Mining Camps of Canada 1. The History and Geology of the Keno Hill Silver Camp, Yukon Territory*", he offers a great history of mining in the area. In it, he writes — and I will quote: "The Keno Hill Camp was one of The Great Mining Camps of Canada; it was not only Canada's second largest primary silver producer and one of the richest... — silver-lead-zinc — "... vein deposits ever mined in the world, it was also one of the mainstays of the Yukon economy from the 1920s, after the

rapid decline of the Klondike Goldfields, until the early 1960s. At its peak in the 1950s and early 1960s, it supported about 15% of the territorial population. It also produced more wealth than the Klondike, one of the richest placer gold districts in the world. Following a small amount of hand mining between 1913 and 1917, larger scale production was almost continuous from 1919 to 1989, except during the war from 1942 to 1945. Two companies produced most of the ore, Treadwell Yukon Corporation. Ltd. From 1925 to 1941, and United Keno Hill Mines Ltd. Between 1947 and 1989."

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Cathro also offers a glimpse into the old transportation methods of getting ore out of the district. I will quote again from his paper: "Soon after the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush, there were over 200 boats of all sizes on the Yukon River system; in fact, it had more riverboats than any North American river except the Mississippi... Each boat burned about 8,000 cords per season. Slightly smaller sternwheelers were used on the 270 km voyage that connected Mayo to the Yukon River. The river distance from Mayo to Whitehorse is about 860 km. Without this established river transportation system, development of the Keno Hill Camp would have been delayed for decades."

Many Yukon families still here today and contributing to our social and economic fabric worked in the mines in Elsa and Keno. In addition to Mr. Cathro's paper, other books — like *Gold and Galena* by the Mayo Historical Society or the *Mad Miners Muckup* video that profiles life in Elsa back in the day through the eyes of Elsa-born-and-raised and long-time Whitehorse teacher Peter Grundmanis — are all worth checking out.

My colleagues and I are extremely pleased that Alexco was granted its water use licence this past summer in order to renew high-grade silver production once again in the district. As Alexco moves toward production from both historic and newly discovered deposits, we also appreciate the company's reclamation work to mitigate historical environmental legacies, some dating back well over a century.

We commend Alexco's commitment to the responsible and sustainable development of the Keno Hill silver district and the company's work with Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, within whose traditional territory the district is located.

Alexco is a testament to how responsible mineral exploration and development can be conducted to the benefit of Yukon residents, businesses, governments, and communities today and well into the future.

We look forward to watching the teams progress as they resume production in the coming months to reclaim their place as Canada's only primary silver producer.

Thank you to everyone involved and congratulations.

Applause

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

THAT this House supports creating a holistic expanded primary care system built on relationships between providers and their clients.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Kwanlin Dün First Nation community hub

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, we have all seen how the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre in downtown Whitehorse has changed the fabric of our community. Since being built, this centre has provided space for countless cultural events and meetings, both for the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the community at large. It has been an important site for reconciliation and for the wider community to learn about Kwanlin Dün culture.

Now the Kwanlin Dün First Nation is building a community hub in the McIntyre subdivision. The new community hub will provide a space for programs and services directly for the Kwanlin Dün First Nation community. I'm very proud that our government is providing \$6.45 million toward this \$29-million project which is currently under construction and is expected to be completed by the middle of next year. The building's superstructure is complete, and the insulation, cladding, and roofing are well underway. I want to thank everyone involved for their hard work on this project.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, the community hub will provide a place for Kwanlin Dün First Nation citizens to gather in the McIntyre subdivision, where many citizens live. Like the cultural centre, this new hub will be an inclusive space for community meetings, gatherings, and ceremonies in the spirit of reconciliation. It will also provide necessary space for cultural education activities and language classes which will enhance the vitalization of Kwanlin Dün First Nation culture.

The new building will also have archival storage and facilities for preserving the Kwanlin Dün First Nation's cultural materials, artifacts, and artwork. The Kwanlin Dün First Nation citizens have been engaged in the design of this exciting new project and have shared what they would like to see in their community hub.

As a result of their input, the new hub will reflect the land, culture, and people of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. While the building will be located in the McIntyre subdivision, the nation's enduring ties with the Yukon River are reflected in the building's design. The building has been architecturally designed to look like a leaping salmon, and the indoor flooring will look like flowing water. The dry riverbed will be a prominent feature in the outdoor landscaping. In addition, there will be 14 basalt columns around the firepit in the centre courtyard area to represent the 14 First Nations in Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, community projects such as this are an important part of our government's commitment to build healthy, thriving communities. The Government of Canada, the

Government of Yukon, and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation have all made important contributions to this new facility. Thanks to the partnership, I am confident that this new community hub for Kwanlin Dün First Nation citizens will enhance our community in the spirit of reconciliation.

Ms. Van Bibber: I would like to thank the minister for the update on this project, which was announced in July 2019. This is an important project for the reasons that the minister identified, such as providing a new, inclusive space for community meetings and gatherings.

Congratulations to the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and all of their citizens for their advocacy on this project. I truly look forward to seeing it when it is open and complete. It sounds like some wonderful architectural and cultural significance will be featured.

The only question that I have for the minister is that, when the project was announced last year, it was originally forecast to be completed by June 30, 2021. Is the minister able to tell us if that is still the target date?

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to this important community project, and congratulations to Kwanlin Dün.

Ms. Hanson: The Yukon NDP joins in congratulating the Kwanlin Dün First Nation as they work toward finalizing the building of their community hub in the McIntyre subdivision. The tripartite funding arrangement involving Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the federal and Yukon governments is a good example of intergovernmental cooperation.

However, we do question the use of a ministerial statement by the minister responsible for Tourism and Culture and the Women's Directorate to co-opt a First Nation story for what is essentially a Liberal government pre-campaign re-announcement by a Liberal MLA for a riding represented by that MLA. If the Liberal government and this minister had sincerely wanted to celebrate the initiative by the Kwanlin Dün First Nation government to create the community hub, one would reasonably expect that they would suggest to all members that a legislative tribute would be a good idea. Tributes, Mr. Speaker, offer an opportunity for a non-partisan celebration of achievements by individuals, community groups, or other orders of government. Instead, the MLA for Mountainview, using the cover of ministerial title, uses this time to announce a funding contribution. In any other jurisdiction, this would be a member's statement open to Liberal backbenchers as well as opposition members to make brief statements about important events in their riding, but that's not the Liberal way. The key for the Yukon Liberal government is control of the message. To that end, so far in this Fall Sitting, the Liberal government members' appropriation of this time has amounted to about six hours of this Assembly's daily one-hour televised time to do just that.

That being said, just as the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre re-established an important reclaiming of the traditional presence of the Tagish Kwan as the original people who live

and occupy the lands alongside the headwaters of the Yukon River, the Kwanlin Dün community hub has the potential to create, by design, a link to the area called “Kwanlin”, which means “running water through a canyon” in Southern Tutchone. The 21st century Kwanlin Dün First Nation, comprised as it is of peoples of Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Tlingit descent, is creating a tangible representation of their evolution as a people and as a government. They are to be congratulated, and we look forward to the opening of their community hub.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you very much for the comments and for the recognition of this very important project. It’s important to all Yukoners. I hear the criticism from the Third Party around using this time to talk about this important project. I think that folks on the other side of the House were given equal opportunity to speak to the importance of it, and I think that’s an important aspect of a ministerial statement.

I’m inspired by Kwanlin Dün citizens. They reclaimed their community. They looked at their infrastructure and issues in truthfulness. No matter how immense the task and how hard the path, they had a vision and undertook something very important by conducting — and I want to reflect on some of the work that led up to the revitalization and the significant work that Kwanlin Dün has undertaken. They embarked on crime prevention through environmental design analysis where community safety and well-being became central to how they went forward as a community. Slowly, the number of infrastructure improvements in McIntyre increased, and the sense of pride flourished. The vision was always to feel the community spirit — its vibrancy. It is like watching a dream unfold and come to life.

The Government of Yukon’s priorities are clear — for Yukoners to live happier, healthier lives and for them to live in a sustainable environment. I invite everyone to go for a stroll or a drive through the McIntyre subdivision if you haven’t done that. It is incredible to see how the community has, as I have said, flourished, and it is exciting. The changes over the years and the feel of the community are beyond what can be said with words. It has to be seen — the renovations of the Nakwataku Potlatch House, the new community playground, and the addition of a multipurpose building.

The work toward reconciliation with First Nations is underway all across the territory. Our Liberal government has made reconciliation a priority, as well as helping the communities to be happier and healthier, and this is exactly what those infrastructure projects help to support.

I want to thank the Minister of Community Services and all of the government officials for the hard work that they have done. The Infrastructure Development branch is working on more than \$76 million — investing in Canada-approved projects — in partnership with First Nations. Some of them include: a new community centre in Old Crow, an early childhood development centre in Pelly Crossing, a youth centre for Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in youth, and many, many more.

I do think that it is every member of this Legislative Assembly’s responsibility to work toward reconciliation and to support thriving, happy communities. I am happy to stand today to speak from my perspective around this project. I am really proud of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation for all of their achievements and of all of our First Nations that are undertaking important work throughout our entire territory.

Applause

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: COVID-19 testing

Mr. Hassard: So, last Thursday, we asked the Minister of Health and Social Services to update us on the government’s response to the pandemic. The minister avoided giving the Legislature or Yukoners any new updates on what the government was doing to respond to COVID-19.

Then on Sunday, the government started drive-through COVID testing; however, they started it without announcing it publicly until the next day. This meant that, for an entire day, people were not aware that this option was available to them.

So, why did the government not announce the drive-through COVID testing in advance so that Yukoners who may need to get tested were aware that this was available to them?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I certainly am pleased to speak to Yukoners about the efforts that are being put forward through the Health Emergency Operations Centre in cooperation with our chief medical officer of health.

In regard to the direction that we are taking, the collaboration across the government is to ensure a coordinated public health response with COVID-19. The centre plays a pivotal role in ensuring that public health guidance and support is there.

The efforts with the drive-through assessment centre were done on a trial basis, given that we are in the midst of an influenza season as well. As the member opposite may very well be aware, we are on the rise with COVID. The assessment centre certainly needed to put enough effort into supporting Yukoners to ensure that they remain healthy and safe. This site is there on a trial basis. It’s there to provide essential support.

Mr. Speaker, on the opening, we had 32 tests in one day, which is an indication that Yukoners are fully aware. We have alternative options as well that I can speak to in the next question.

Mr. Hassard: The minister obviously didn’t hear the question, because I was asking why they didn’t announce it in advance. Instead, she chose to talk about collaborating with government — well, how about collaborating with Yukoners, Mr. Speaker?

You know, as we discussed, the government held off on announcing the drive-through COVID testing option that was available to them for an entire day. This means that Yukoners were not aware of this option. When they did announce it, they stated that it would only be open for six days.

Can the minister tell us why drive-through testing is only for six days?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Given the recent exposure and the increased pressures on COVID testing through the assessment centre — and, of course, with the case numbers, the COVID response unit, in cooperation with the chief medical officer of health, decided to put in place a testing facility on an interim basis to alleviate some of the pressures. I am sure that the member opposite could appreciate that this government, along with the staff, are working above and beyond to address the needs of Yukoners under this current crisis that we are in. We started up the drive-through very quickly to ensure that we enhanced our testing capacity and that every Yukoner who needs to be tested has the opportunity at this centre or at one of our health centres. We have made every possible effort, given the current numbers that we have.

I want to thank the staff for their diligence in coming together very quickly to establish a site that is there to address the current pressures. The soft launch is really to alleviate the pressures. That will be assessed in one week's time with the staff who are the experts in the field.

Mr. Hassard: It still would have been nice for the government to actually tell Yukoners what they are doing.

The current testing threshold for the government does not include asymptomatic individuals. Has the government considered working with any private medical service providers to assist in expanding testing capacity in the territory as well as allow for asymptomatic people to get tested?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The interim site that is established right now is there to alleviate some of the pressures for the city of Whitehorse. I would like to remind the member opposite that we have facilities in every one of our communities. If there are individuals in Yukon communities who have symptoms, the recommendations, as clearly laid out by our chief medical officer of health, indicate that individuals should self-monitor. Given the current climate, the testing can be done at the health centres, and we have this opportunity in the city to provide the services.

If there is ever an opportunity to work with the private sector, I am sure that the recommendations will come from the experts through the Health Emergency Operations Centre under the guidance of the chief medical officer of health. I want to assure the member opposite and all Yukoners that we are doing everything possible to keep Yukoners safe.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic public health measures announcements

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, this morning at 9:30 a.m., the government held a press conference to announce a mandatory mask policy that would start on December 1. Within minutes, and while the Premier was still making the announcement, the Yukon Liberals tweeted a graphic announcing the measures, which included their party logo that they had clearly produced in advance. This means that the Liberals held off on announcing the mandatory mask policy before they told Yukoners so that they could create partisan graphics with their party logo to promote their political party.

So, instead of announcing the decision to Yukoners when it was made, why did the Liberals hold off on making the

announcement so their party could be briefed to make partisan graphics?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Ridiculous, Mr. Speaker — absolutely ridiculous — the insinuation from the members opposite. If the members opposite cared to listen to the public updates that Dr. Hanley and I have been giving for weeks now, it has been coming; masks have been coming. We have talked about how other governments have been doing this work. Dr. Hanley has talked about the public acceptance of masks, and that is the work that we have done.

To be quite honest with the member opposite: This is the first that I have heard of our party's activities on social media when it comes to masks. I didn't know until right now. So, I can assure Yukoners that, on this side of the House, we keep politics out of our decisions when we want to keep Yukoners safe, and we will follow the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health. I can't believe that the members opposite would make anybody think that we would delay any type of announcement when it came to the safety of Yukoners for political wrangling. That might be something that they would do; it is not something that we would even consider.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, clearly, we have struck a nerve with the Premier as he is quite agitated with this line of questioning. He appears to be very uncomfortable with it.

It's a risky precedent to set for the Liberal Party to begin partisan branding, which includes their logo on public health measures. This is especially so when it is clear that Liberal Party officials had advance notice before the announcement was made to the public in order to allow them to create partisan images with their party logo. We have seen them hold off on and slowly trickle out tourism funding so they can maximize these announcements, and now they did it with the new mandatory mask policy. The result is that information is not being shared with Yukoners immediately.

Can the Premier answer this question: When was the decision made for a mandatory mask policy, and why were the Liberal Party's graphic designers notified before the public?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not the case. Again, we make decisions based on recommendations of the chief medical officer of health. Dr. Hanley and I have been discussing masks and policies of masks for a while now. The recommendations came in, and very quickly after the recommendations, we had a public conference for everybody to know that, as of December 1, masks in public spaces will be mandatory.

I will take this opportunity to answer questions that Yukoners need the real answers to, which are: What type of businesses? What are public spaces? Hopefully, folks who were listening in this morning to the press conference — we have said that more information will be available. We wanted to give businesses time, from now until December 1, to know that this policy is coming. We spoke about how public acceptability for masks has changed quite drastically over the last weeks and months in Yukon, and we want to give Yukoners enough time to understand what the new rules are. That information will be available on yukon.ca. Again, for the most up-to-date, relevant, non-misleading information on COVID-19, please — for

Yukoners — go to yukon.ca to get the most up-to-date information that they need to keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe.

Mr. Kent: Again, this line of questioning clearly makes the Premier uncomfortable. No one is disputing the need to communicate public health measures to the public, but holding off on public health announcements so that you can throw the Liberal Party logo on them sends the wrong message to Yukoners.

We even saw the Liberal Party announce this morning's government press conference before any official communication from government channels. Public health measures should not be looked at through the lens of partisan or political communications.

Will the government — will this Premier — agree that, going forward, they will de-politicize and stop using partisan branding for the announcement of public health measures?

Hon. Mr. Silver: What I can tell Yukoners is that we will continue, on this side of the House, to use science and communication with our colleagues right across this nation when it comes to COVID-19 and when it comes to keeping Yukoners safe. We will continue to not use politics when it comes to COVID. We will continue to make sure that the safety and welfare of Yukoners is at the heart of every decision that we make.

Now, the opposition can waste people's time by making insinuating comments like they are doing today. Again, that is what we have come to know and understand from the Yukon Party, but over here on the government side of this Legislative Assembly, we would never do what they are insinuating.

Again, it's the first that I have heard of any of the social media that is coming out from the Yukon Liberal Party. My job and my concentration over the last few months, weeks, and days has been the safety of Yukoners, and we will absolutely continue to make sure that we follow the recommendations of public health. We will make sure that we get the information out as soon as possible. Whether it is mobile clinics and getting that out as quickly as we possibly can to mobilize that or whether it is making sure that Yukoners are aware of new policies coming down the pipe, we want to make sure that we get that information out as quickly as possible, and we will continue to do that for the safety of Yukoners.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic essential workers program

Ms. White: This pandemic continues to be hard on many people. Front-line workers — whether they keep shelves stocked, clean public spaces, or deliver the goods that we need — have always been essential, but it has never been more obvious than now.

For four months, the government paid up to \$4 per hour to those who earned less than \$20 per hour. The program has expired, and these workers are back to earning less than a living wage. While the pandemic is still very real, and while these jobs of these workers are still just as essential as they were this past spring, they no longer have the same support from this

government. They are still essential, and we're still in a pandemic.

Can the Premier tell Yukoners why essential front-line workers deserved a living wage at the start of the pandemic but not now?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Essential workers, of course, have provided the services that we need every day through the pandemic. I want to take a moment to thank them. We've had a lot of opportunity to speak with them. I know that one of the key things that we undertook this summer was to make sure that we reached out to union leaders across the Yukon. We had multiple meetings that were organized where some of the leads of those organizations that are based in Vancouver but that represent the members here came to the table to help us understand what they were going through and to help us understand where we could work — even with ownership groups — to improve those working conditions. I think that was really important to work with organized labour. I always felt that sitting down and collaborating is key.

We do agree that this essential workers program has been effective. I think that looking to extend this is something that we've been working on — doing the work to figure out how to tweak it to make sure it continues. I think there will be more on this topic — but again, agreement with the Leader of the Third Party. I'm glad that there's a validation from the Third Party that this has been an effective program, and certainly this is something that we are keen to lean into and to continue to respect those individuals who are doing the hard work on behalf of Yukoners.

Ms. White: The essential front-line workers whom we depend on deserve a living wage before, during, and after a pandemic; it's that simple.

Now we find ourselves in an absurd situation where these workers are doing the same work that they did three months ago but are earning up to \$600 less every month. A problem with the wage top-up program was that only employers could apply on behalf of employees. Some workers had to pressure their employers for months before they completed the paperwork. Others were not so lucky and never received the top-up because their employer didn't apply to the program. How is this fair to them? These workers deserve support, whether or not their bosses wanted to fill out government paperwork.

Will the minister make sure that workers whose employers did not apply for the wage subsidy can still access the help that they deserve but that they have missed out on?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that I can work with the Leader of the Third Party to identify anybody who was missed by this program and who should have had access to it. That would give us an opportunity for the Department of Economic Development to work directly with that employer to educate them on the opportunities. I know that this summer, being in the Yukon, stopping at businesses, especially in remote areas — whether it be between here and Dawson or up on the Dempster — there were businesses that weren't aware of our program — so really taking the opportunity to go and speak with those business owners and let

them know the suite of tools that were available to them again, in this case, that would be advantageous to their staff.

Again, I make a commitment to work with the Leader of the Third Party and identify if there has been anybody missed. As we lean into continuing to do this good work — just making sure that we have a good sense of what this program should look like as we continue to support those workers.

Just quickly, by the numbers across the board — retail trade was about 49 percent of the employers that we have supported; accommodation and food services was about 39 percent; and then health and social assistance was about five percent. In those numbers, you were looking at just under \$1 million that went to the retail trade with this program. In accommodation and food services, about \$650,000 was laid out to support these workers.

Ms. White: Full credit to the members of the minister's department, because we know that the department had tried to assist employers in applying to the wage top-up for front-line workers, but we also know that some employers had not done it and their employees were penalized because of it. There must be a way for employees to access the program whether or not their bosses choose to apply. This program shows how unfair it is to expect workers to make a living on less than a living wage. I can't say it enough — we're still in a pandemic, and these front-line workers are still doing essential work, and they still deserve a living wage.

So, Mr. Speaker, will the government immediately extend the wage top-up for essential workers and ensure that employees can directly access the program even if their employer does not apply?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I have garnered from the question today is: (1) a validation that this program is effective; (2) it seems as though there is some information that the Leader of the Third Party has garnered or has access to — that there are some employers that have not used this program, so I want to share that. It seems, too, that there were employees who tried to move this program forward in Economic Development and with whom, I guess, the Leader of the Third Party has spoken. I'll reach out to the deputy minister and see if we can get that information moving up through the department so that we can address this. In such cases, I'm always willing to step in and directly call an employer and let them know how important this is, which we have done day in and day out since March.

There hasn't been a day go by when we are not reaching out and trying to work to make the situation better for workers, for the business owners, and for the private sector. I think that this approach has resonated within the sector.

Again, we have done a tremendous amount of work. We are cued up to continue to put the supports out that we want. I think that there will be more to come on this. Again, I offer the invitation to the Leader of the Third Party for specifics. If she wants me to work on some things where some people are missed, please send me an e-mail or call me. I will come down to her office and help where I can.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic contact tracing

Ms. Van Bibber: On November 12, there was a flight from Vancouver to Whitehorse that was flagged as having a potential COVID-19 exposure. On November 15, there was another flight, this time from Whitehorse to Vancouver, that was flagged as having a potential COVID-19 exposure; however, the Government of Yukon did not send out any official notice that this flight had been identified. Yukoners had to find out from the government of BC and the airline. According to the BC Centre for Disease Control, Yukoners who were on those flights may have been exposed; however, the Government of Yukon did not issue a similar notice until this morning, several days after those others issued a notice. Why was this?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to acknowledge the staff at the Health Emergency Operations Centre who are working day and night to do contact tracing. There are many, many files to follow through on. As a note, over the weekend, we have conducted over 250 assessments and contact tracings. So, with respect to the member opposite's question, it is important to note and acknowledge all the efforts and the great work that has been put in.

When we speak about contact tracing, an important component of Yukon's pandemic management is contact tracing, which involves investigation, investigating recent cases and contacts, and informing individuals of possible COVID-19 exposures. Contact tracing is overseen by the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit, which is closely connected to the chief medical officer of health. I want to highlight that because the response time and the responsiveness of the department is stellar in its operations.

The efforts that they put out there in notifying clients and patients of Health and Social Services or those individuals who have come in contact through positive results — and the process of contract tracing is evolution, and it will continue to evolve.

Ms. Van Bibber: The government frequently states that you can get the most up-to-date information on yukon.ca. However, we know that there are two possible COVID exposures for Yukoners on November 12 and November 15, on two flights coming in and out of the territory. If you go to yukon.ca and click on the possible exposure notice, there is no mention of any of these flights until late this morning. Even now, the November 12 flight is not listed on yukon.ca.

Why does the government not think it is necessary to notify Yukoners of all possible exposures as soon as possible?

Hon. Ms. Frost: To verify: The government is not responsible; Members of the Legislative Assembly are not responsible; I'm not responsible. I have authorities to manage a structure. We have staff in place. We take the advice of the chief medical officer of health. We are responsive and responding appropriately to the pressures — absolutely, I am responsible. We have many experts in the field. We follow epidemiology; we follow evidence. The staff of the Department of Health and Social Services have worked hard over the weekend. They have worked hard over the course of the last few days to keep Yukoners safe. I'm very proud of that effort.

I want to say that individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19 have been contacted by Yukon Communicable Disease Control. That's what I'm referring to.

I would like to advise and inform Yukoners that they must self-monitor for symptoms and get a COVID test if they begin to show symptoms. Dr. Hanley has come out and spoken very clearly to Yukoners. I would like to direct Yukoners to go to the yukon.ca website and follow the procedures.

I would also like to say that Yukon Communicable Disease Control has done an excellent job and excellent work in contact tracing throughout the pandemic. We remain in a strong position —

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Van Bibber: As was just mentioned, the government states that you get the most up-to-date information at yukon.ca. Can the minister update its notification procedures to ensure that Yukoners are notified the next time a flight inbound or outbound from the territory has a COVID-19 exposure on board?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Again, thanks to the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit for their contact tracing. Look: Everybody is slotted into categories. There is low risk, high risk, and then there is direct contact. So, when there are flights, there are flight manifests. The YCDC takes those flight manifests. They directly contact all the people who would have been nearby. That is why they don't necessarily go out there and publish "if you were on this flight" — because they contact everybody directly. Where we don't know — where we think there is a low risk, but we don't know, then we put out "Okay, if you were in and around this business at this time..." or "... in this location at this time..." So, it is a range of risks, but when it comes to the flights, the YCDC is contacting directly. So, that is the reason why.

I think that what we ought to be saying to all Yukoners right now is that the contact tracing is going — they are working very hard; they are doing a great job — as far as I understand — in reaching out. When I have talked to individual nurses in our communities, they talk about the strength of this contact tracing and the levels to which they go to make sure that Yukoners are informed. So, it is a range of differences. If it is just not specific to individuals and it is low risk, that is when it is put out on the website.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic testing

Mr. Kent: The Christmas season is around the corner and we know that there will be a significant number of Yukoners returning to the territory for the holidays. So, has the government considered any additional measures related to this influx of people coming into the territory? Also, will they consider expanding testing criteria to allow returning Yukoners travelling home for the holidays to get tested, even if they aren't exhibiting symptoms?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I can think of three ways that we are working on this. I will leave the testing question to the Minister of Health and Social Services. With respect to borders and border enforcement, there is work that we are doing. I have

already said in this House that we are sending more resources down to Watson Lake.

We will meet every flight. So, if there are additional flights, we will work to staff up to make sure that those are staffed — but also, with respect to communication. This is around how we talk to Yukoners, around the situation with travel, self-isolation, and just how we deal with our families over Christmastime and how everybody stays safe.

We have seen, just over the past several days, that the Premier and Dr. Hanley have had additional livestreams to talk about some of the new initiatives.

We will continue to message — whether that's directly through, for example, meetings with municipalities and First Nations or whether that is through more public channels through the media or through livestreams or through the website — but we will try to use them all to keep Yukoners safe over the holiday season.

Mr. Kent: There are many young Yukoners who are out of the territory attending high school or university or who are in the military or advanced sport programs. Almost all of these young people will be coming home for the holidays — in many cases, for just about two weeks. The holidays are a welcome reprieve from the stress and mental toll that many of these teenagers face while pursuing their academics or sport development or military service away from their families.

So, last week, we asked about this and the answer seemed to be a no, but we would like to bring it forward again.

What is the government's plan for the holidays and will it include expanded and rapid testing for young Yukoners who find themselves in this situation — returning for the holidays?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As noted by the previous question, of course this is evolving. The question that the member poses right now around the influx and the return of students and others who come back for the holidays — the department is working very closely with the chief medical officer of health and his staff. We are taking advice and not testing asymptomatic people at this time. What we are doing is we are ramping up additional isolation sites. The minister responsible for the CEMA orders will make decisions with respect to alternatives.

At this moment in time, there are limited opportunities, but we do want to assure all Yukoners who are returning that we will make every effort to ensure that we provide the support that's required. We want to look at ensuring that we provide an opportunity for Yukoners to have an enjoyable Christmas — one that's free of COVID, one that's safe for the families to gather and of course for the students to come back to the Yukon and enjoy their families. We will work with our staff and work with the chief medical officer of health as we design the model around care for these individuals.

Mr. Kent: So, back on April 17 of this year in a press release, the government said that they would be getting the rapid GeneXpert testing device to provide results quickly on-site.

Can the minister confirm that we have this device in the territory? Will the government be purchasing more? Will those students and other young people get access to rapid testing as

they return for the holidays so that we can reduce the burden on students and other young military members while also ensuring the safety of the territory?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Throughout our response to COVID-19, we have taken an evidence-based approach to testing. We are working very closely with the BC Centre for Disease Control to provide a gold standard of testing. We have GeneXpert testing capabilities at the hospitals. Now, is that going to be used for testing? That would certainly be under the advice and direction of our health experts on determining which test options are best suited for Yukon's context, including the two newly approved lab tests that have been recently identified.

Rapid-testing devices do not replace the importance of having a robust, centralized testing strategy. We continue to work with our partners in BC and continue to work with our facilities through our health centres, through our hospitals, and through the experts who provide the direction to this government and to Yukoners. As they present with symptoms, they are assessed and provided with the necessary guidance and direction from the experts in our professional staff.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members' business

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, November 25, 2020. It is Motion No. 346, standing in the name of the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, November 25, 2020. It is Motion No. 345, standing in the name of the Member for Kluane.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, 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 Acting Government House Leader that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Hutton): Order, please.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in 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

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

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

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Environment

Hon. Ms. Frost: Mr. Chair, I have with me today Chris Mahar, Director of Finance, and Deputy Minister John Bailey. I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the department for preparing the briefings and preparing the budget. I will start by speaking a bit about the supplementary submission before us today.

The Department of Environment contributes to a healthy, sustainable, and prosperous future through environmental stewardship and effective management of Yukon's natural resources. The responsibility for safeguarding our land and water and fish and wildlife is not taken lightly and is done in partnership with Yukon First Nations, Inuvialuit, and other governments, as well as many other agencies and organizations and citizens.

Much of the department's work is focused on maintaining our biological diversity and upholding principles of conservation so that all Yukoners can continue to use the land for harvesting, for culture, for recreation, and for economic purposes.

The supplementary budget before us today that I am presenting will see an increase of \$1.5 million to the Department of Environment's budget.

Our COVID-19 response resulted in the largest increase to our operation and maintenance budget at \$1.2 million. This includes but is not limited to: additional front-line counter personnel so that we can continue to serve our clients; contracts for increased cleaning to keep workplaces safe for employees; and overtime and travel costs for enforcement officers who have provided border control services throughout the pandemic.

The remainder of this increase includes: \$67,000 to support continuing projects under the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* that were not completed in 2019-20; \$264,000 in carry-over funding from the Climate Change Secretariat for funds not spent in the last fiscal year; and \$10,000 to hire an intern under the clean leadership professional development program. All of the above items are fully recoverable from the Government of Canada.

Under this capital budget, we are requesting an increase of \$1,000 for the cost of equipment purchased under the *Inuvialuit*

Final Agreement. This cost is also fully recoverable from the federal government.

Before I wrap up, I would like to highlight some of the good work that the Department of Environment has completed this year and the initiatives that our budget will continue to support. In September, we were pleased to release two milestone documents. This includes *Our Clean Future — A Yukon strategy for climate change, energy and a green economy*, which is our response to the climate change emergency which will help us build sustainable, resilient Yukon communities by 2030, as well as the *Yukon Parks Strategy*, which sets direction for Yukon's parks and campgrounds over the next 10 years and which will see significant investments in our communities.

I would also like to thank all of the Environment staff who took on a role as a CEMA enforcement officer, helping keep our borders secure against COVID-19.

Mr. Chair, I thank you for your time. As well, I just want to acknowledge the staff again for doing great work getting us through the pandemic and keeping Yukoners safe to this point. We will continue to see a rise, I guess, in terms of the border security as we go forward. The conservation officers will be back supporting the CEMA orders. Thank you.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to begin by thanking the officials who have joined us from the department for their time and for their support in providing us with important information about the activities of the government and the Department of Environment.

I do want to take a moment to also thank those employees — the minister spoke of them, the COs and some of the Yukon Parks' staff — who were enforcement officers for CEMA. They left their communities and sometimes went right across the Yukon to go and step up to the plate during a pandemic. I know that sometimes they have very short notice and they had to run and do that, so they should be commended for their work — especially our conservation officers because there are a lot of activities that they do anyway throughout the summer besides having to do that on top of it. So, I do want to thank them.

I also want to thank the minister for her opening remarks. I have a number of questions about the department's budget, but I also have some ongoing activities of the department that this budget will support. I guess I'm going to begin with some general questions, Mr. Chair, and then I will transition to some specific ones later.

I guess some of my first thoughts and questions here are — we have heard from a number of staff that there has been a lot of changeover in the senior management of the department. The department has been facing some general staffing morale issues.

Can the minister give us an overview of some of the broader strokes of any recent changes in senior management? Can she provide some comment on what she is doing herself as the minister to support employees and foster a positive workplace for the employees?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As I indicated in my opening statements, the supplementary request before us is for \$1.2 million specific to — mostly related to COVID expenses.

I would be happy to respond to the questions around management and of course the additional supports within the department during the COVID pandemic. As experienced throughout government, we have seen significant pressures. We have seen mobile — the department is working out of office and working from home. We have seen staff working remotely. We have also seen staff working out in the field and utilizing alternative methods of communicating. So, significant efforts and work have been put into the Department of Environment, given that we are generally a people department where we interact with the clients when we deal with enforcement, enforcement officers, environmental monitors and such.

We also look at working toward protecting Yukoners as we go through the pandemic. So, there are lots of great efforts and work in the department. We have a diverse and talented group of individuals who have certainly gone above and beyond during the pandemic.

Through innovation and creative use of full-time, term, part-time, seasonal, and on-call positions, the department offers 282 positions and currently employs a total of 266 employees. There are always — through attrition and other pressures, we do have vacancies which usually average around 15 to 16. I just want to say that the department is at full capacity right now. We have a dedicated team of seasonal employees as well. We have a permanent senior management team. I am very pleased to acknowledge that.

DM Bailey clearly has a wealth of knowledge and experience. He comes from the private sector and has worked in First Nation governments, has worked in industry, and has worked across the north. He has now been with us for two years. We have an ADM who has been with us for two and a half years and who has worked in government in various departments. Our other ADM has moved up in the department and has been there now for one year.

They are doing an excellent job, I would say, and are working now on a response to ensure that we have continued support in the program delivery during these unprecedented times so as not to disrupt service, but to maintain staff morale and maintain the service model we have of putting out the necessary supports to ensure that Yukoners are comfortable and feeling supported as we look at enhancing the programs that we have currently, maintaining the programs we have going forward, and not jeopardizing any of the measures that we have in place right now.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. I thank her for talking about the DMs and the ADMs, but I was just wondering — one of the big things is leadership from the minister. I am just wondering what the minister is doing to support the employees and foster a positive workplace, separate from what the initiatives are within the department. Are there other things or something that the minister is doing to foster a positive workplace for those employees?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Well, I can certainly speak for my leadership and my involvement with Yukon and Yukon First Nations, spending many years working as the chair of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee, many years working with Yukon First Nations implementing and negotiating elements of

chapter 16, and working with renewable resources councils. I would venture to say that I have a wealth of experience based on my many years working in that field. I am a hunter and a trapper. I work with the department, and I understand the dynamics of government. I also have met with staff over the course of the year. Since I started, in fact, I have had many, many sessions with the staff, and I continue to foster leadership in that regard by keeping an open door and by allowing briefings that involve the staff.

I certainly am not bold enough to say that I have — like with any of my files, I rely on the department and on the experts within the department to give me guidance on best management approaches as we move forward while still fostering development and fostering leadership within the department. The many briefings that we have with the department involve the DM and the ADMs. By virtue of that, we have connections throughout the Yukon and continue to have, of course, dialogue with our partners, and we collaborate with our stakeholder groups as well.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. Can she comment on all or any recent changes that have occurred with regard to adapting to the pandemic? I am pretty sure that every minister who gets up will get asked the same question. What measures has the department taken in response to COVID-19? More at the workplace — we understand the CEMA officers and some of the other stuff — but more at the workplace.

Hon. Ms. Frost: As I highlighted earlier, the Department of Environment has 282 positions. With those 282 positions, we have a very diverse department. We have some field staff; we have some office staff; we have managers; we have policy folks; and, of course, we have biologists and experts in environment and environmental sustainability.

So, ensuring that we provide opportunities for the staff to work safely as they continue to deliver the services that they're employed to do, we certainly have to put measures in place to allow that to happen during the pandemic. Moving through the pandemic, we have made some changes within the department — changes for remote work sites. The department has maintained almost all of its services to Yukoners while minimizing the potential risk and impact on staff, clients, and our partners. The front counter remains open every day — throughout the spring and summer.

The pandemic has required us to adapt and innovate new ways to deliver programs and services, such as encouraging clients to use the online system for hunting and camping permits and delivering online education and events rather than in-person gatherings. Staff work hard to offer virtual versions of our regular annual programming, such as the Celebration of Swans, the Bear Fair, bear safety information sessions, Wild Discoveries, and the Bioblitz.

There has been very limited impact on our capacity to fulfill essential roles and services that are our responsibility. We were successful in supporting all hunting licences and fishing activities, selling over 10,000 fishing licences and over 4,000 hunting licences.

The environmental enforcement inspection staff have also contributed heavily to the front line of enforcement orders

under the CEMA — the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* — while working at the border checkpoints.

We delayed the start of the camping season in order to develop a reopening plan to reduce COVID transmission risks and to allow staff and visitors to enjoy the campground safely. Parks staff adapted their operations to ensure that necessary travel, sanitation, and hygiene practices were in place to allow for the safe reopening of campgrounds. Several staff were temporarily deployed to assist the Emergency Coordination Centre and the Health Emergency Operations Centre.

I'm really proud of the work of the Department of Environment staff to support the government-wide response efforts to COVID-19. They continue to provide services despite the uncertainty of the pandemic.

The department staff have — of course, as I just highlighted — been deployed in different areas, but we have also provided many opportunities for the staff to work from home and provided them with the technical support that they needed so they could stay at home and work from home.

We work with our field staff to adjust protocols so that they remain safe while they're in the field.

I want to just indicate in here as well that we worked very closely with the Public Service Commissioner and the Public Service Commission as they look at a government-wide approach to the pandemic and work through the protocols that have been established for all of government.

Mr. Istchenko: The minister mentioned something that I do want to highlight — the front desk and how important that is. I've heard from many of my constituents who are having trouble during the pandemic with certain departments on getting an answer or being able to have a face-to-face conversation. I was glad that the Department of Environment safely, through Plexiglas and everything else — but I heard so many positive things — whether they called the local conservation office in one of the communities or went to 10 Burns Road, they could actually ask a question, get an answer, and not have to wait for an e-mail or leave a message on a phone. That is key to public service. Thank you — and please pass that on to them and thank them for that.

When it comes to COVID-19, the last thing that I have directly on this is a broader question. Some of the initiatives across the department that the government has underway — like whether the government is out consulting, or with the department's budget — I'm sort of wondering how COVID-19 has affected the day-to-day operations within the department. I'll be a little bit more direct: Has it affected the way in which the department does consulting? I would imagine that it has affected the department's budget. Maybe the minister could speak a little bit to that.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I want to just acknowledge that COVID-19 has had a pretty drastic impact on how we conduct our business in the Department of Environment. The staff work very hard to offer virtual versions of our regular, annual face-to-face meetings. As the member opposite indicated, we have set up measures within the office to allow face-to-face interaction with Plexiglass to protect our staff and the public.

In the measures that relate to our consultation and consulting interactions, it would be the same. There have been adjustments to protect citizens, protect our interaction, and limit interaction — so less face-to-face and more virtual engagements. During COVID, we had started providing more opportunities as we were seeing things improving, but now we have sort of ramped back up to ensure that we have very limited contact on a full capacity, but still fulfilling our essential roles and services that are our responsibility.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. These are tough times, and I am glad to see that everyone is adapting safely.

Let me turn now to the Yukon Parks branch. Of course, there will be some discussion about the new strategy, but I want to start the conversation with campground-related questions. The minister highlighted this a little bit in her opening remarks, but the campgrounds opened later than usual this year in the spring. At the time, the minister said that it was because of COVID-19, but at the press conference, the chief medical officer of health denied that he made any recommendations about campgrounds. Can the minister explain why it was okay to delay the spring campground opening in light of how popular the campgrounds are with Yukoners?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The 2020 campground season looked a little bit different from previous years due to health and safety measures that had to be put in place in response to COVID-19. The delayed start to the beginning of the camping season was put in place in order to develop a reopening plan to reduce transmission risks to staff and visitors. As we know, our campgrounds are used as playgrounds as families interact with one another, and we have many campsites that are shared among friends. We did this in coordination with the chief medical officer of health when we could not meet the mandated orders and guidance given for travel in the Yukon — the issue with hygiene and sanitation that was required for our visitors and staff under the COVID-19 parameters.

So, people required to self-isolate and non-residents who were travelling through the Yukon within a 24-hour period were not allowed to camp at the campgrounds, but we wanted an opportunity to open up the campgrounds for Yukoners. So, the measures that were taken in the early season were really to allow that to happen. It was to allow us to work on measures to ensure that we protected our Yukoners as they were out and about, enjoying our many campgrounds that we have across the Yukon.

I have just acknowledged that the occupancy rates for the season were very, very high. Many of our campgrounds were at or near capacity, and that was attributed to the protocols that were established and set in place by the staff at the Department of Environment. Of course, that was done under the guidance of the chief medical officer of health's recommendations.

Mr. Istchenko: So, the minister just started to talk a little about the 2020 camping season — how busy it was. Can the minister discuss that with us actually from the perspective of the department? Of course, campgrounds are very popular — extremely popular — with Yukoners this year and have offered a bit of a reprieve — like she said — from COVID-19

lockdowns. So, can she provide a little bit more metrics about campground usage? Did some of the farther-away campgrounds get used more? Does she have some statistics — things like that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As I am understanding, the department hasn't yet compiled all of the data from the season. Once the data is available to us, then I would be happy to share the numbers of the campground usage.

I just want to say that what I understand from the department is that they've seen significant usage in the campgrounds over the summer given that Yukoners were limited to travelling within the Yukon. They were seeing, on a daily basis, full campgrounds and lots of usage. All of the campgrounds were occupied with very succinct numbers. I don't have that in front of me, but I would be happy to provide that. Under normal — the member opposite would know this as a previous minister — the numbers — we don't usually compile the numbers until January or February, so we wouldn't have that generally until then anyway. I might take a little bit of time to get those numbers together.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. I do look forward to seeing those numbers when they're compiled and I understand that they are compiled. I guess, sticking with that question, I'll ask a couple more related to it.

A couple things happened. Of course, we were all locked down, so we couldn't go anywhere. I'm just wondering, at a very high level, were some of our farther-away campgrounds used a little more? I know there was a bit of a program that the department started last year on exploring the farther-away campgrounds.

The other thing is the BC bubble. When we were in the BC bubble, I did notice more traffic from British Columbia. So, just at the high level too, did we see campground use from BC residents?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As I understand it, most of the campground use was by Yukoners. The data for BC residents — I don't have that in front of me, but that will certainly come out in the data in January or February.

The campgrounds farther away — a lot of effort was put into trying to promote usage of campgrounds across the Yukon. We were seeing a higher uptake of the campgrounds in Faro, Congdon Creek, and the Tombstone — it is pretty popular, and it is always, always full. Quiet Lake saw a significant increase as well. So, that is some of the information that we have right now, and that's from the Parks' officers as they were out and about throughout the summer months.

Mr. Istchenko: So, let's turn to the parks strategy. This is pretty much a political question: Can the minister explain why the Liberals have decided to increase camping fees during a pandemic?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The parks strategy outlines a number of new initiatives — improved services and expanding service in campgrounds further — opening now for five months. We are looking currently at building new campgrounds and of course modernizing the existing campgrounds and putting the efforts into that. There are a number of pieces of equipment in the campgrounds that did not meet code requirements. In order to

sustain service levels in our parks, that was the intent of increasing the fees. That will be starting in 2022.

The draft strategy proposed an increase for 2021. Considering the impact of COVID, we pushed that out significantly. We worked very closely with our tourism sector and of course the department in looking at the fee increases. I want to just say that the fee is consistent with the desire to improve services in all of our parks.

Mr. Istchenko: It's ironic that 2022 is the year after the election. So, can the minister elaborate on the decision to increase camping fees for Yukon seniors?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Increasing camping fees has nothing to do with the election. It certainly has everything to do with the service delivery and the expanded park infrastructure and adding additional campsites. It's about enhancing services. As well, the strategy proposed an increase in 2021. We are in the middle of a pandemic and we certainly don't want to penalize individuals for using campgrounds during this time, so that is why it was extended to 2022.

We have the lowest camping fee rates in the country. The increase in fees is consistent with improving cost recovery, but it also aligns with other jurisdictions. Camping fees cover about 10 percent of the services. With the new fee, it will cover 22 percent. The government is currently covering 90 percent of the fees associated with parks, parks management, and services in each of our parks. This is significant support to all of our campgrounds — and, of course, enhanced services at the same time. In comparison, if we look at jurisdictions like Alberta, they charge 39 percent against cost recovery. We are currently at 10 percent. This is just as a note. We want to just suggest also that the objective is not to penalize but to enhance services. The campground fees for seniors is part of this process as well. It is part of the increase in the service fee across the board.

Mr. Istchenko: Again, I just want to note that it is pretty interesting that the Liberals will be implementing all of these new fees in the year after the election. When it comes to seniors, seniors built this territory. They put their time and effort into making the Yukon a better place. I firmly believe that the seniors should camp for free.

Let's talk about the new parks strategy, which includes the development of a new campground in the general Whitehorse area. Can the minister tell us what locations they are considering? Can she also discuss the size of the new campground?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Moving toward camping fees, as I indicated, is to provide enhanced services. Currently, the seniors will be obligated to pay 50 percent of the camping fees, which is not seen anywhere else in the country, so I want to just highlight that.

It is not about penalizing. It is about giving enhanced supports and services. We have taken efforts in our parks system to increase mobility access, and as we know, seniors oftentimes require additional supports when they would like to go camping. So, we are taking efforts across all of our parks system to ensure that we have mobility access for seniors and others who have mobility issues. I want to just make note of that.

As we look at enhanced campgrounds across Yukon — particularly as we indicated in the strategy — part of the feedback that we received from Yukoners during the engagement was looking at a campground in the proximity of the city for easy access. That will be done in consultation and collaboration with our indigenous partners. We are, of course, in the midst of a pandemic, so it is not possible for us to do that now, but that is in the plan and in the strategy — to start the discussions with First Nations to look at a potential campground within 200 kilometres of the city — looking at upwards of 150 sites, as a possibility.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to thank the minister for confirming again, for the record here today, that the Liberals will be increasing fees for seniors who like to camp.

I am just wondering, with the new strategy — and I asked about the new campground. I am not sure if the minister said, but I didn't hear this — can she tell us which locations they are considering?

Hon. Ms. Frost: So, the location hasn't been identified. As I indicated, we are currently in discussions. We will continue to have our collaboration with the Yukon First Nations, look at options, and have some continued engagement around possible sites within approximately 200 kilometres of the city.

Mr. Istchenko: I'm wondering — is there any money in the budget for this yet?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The question that is being asked by the member opposite refers to the mains and is not referring specifically to the supplementary budget. It takes a bit of time to find the detailed information in the mains. I want to just acknowledge that we have finalized the parks strategy. The parks strategy was done in consultation. We've had lots of engagement and feedback from multiple partners. We will continue to work with our partners as we look at finalizing the parks strategy, implementing it, and going forward. The parks strategy and planning — we do have resources within the mains to look at the planning element of the strategy.

Mr. Istchenko: If the minister can commit to a legislative return or something letting me know where that is in the budget please. The strategy also contemplates new boat-in or hike-in campsites. Can the minister tell us where those will be if there are locations picked for those yet?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Basically, it's the same answer to the question that the member keeps asking. We have our engagement process that we will have with the Yukon First Nations around the future of a new site within 200 kilometres of the city. We have some specific parameters around what that might look like. We're looking at possibly a 150-site facility. As that evolves, I would be happy to share that information as we continue to have the dialogue.

Mr. Istchenko: So, the strategy also contemplates adding sites to existing campgrounds. Have they made a decision on which existing campgrounds would be expected to see new sites added?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The response to the question is: The department hasn't yet identified the campgrounds that will be expanded. I think as we look at campground improvements —

there are significant resources already being put in place for campgrounds. As I indicated earlier, we are spending resources on mobility access in some of the campgrounds near Whitehorse. We did that at Wolf Creek campground just last year. We will continue to do that enhanced support in our campgrounds as well as identifying future expanded sites. We have some opportunities that we're exploring and that will be done in collaboration with our partners.

Mr. Istchenko: It sounds like there's a bunch of work being done. If the minister could just — maybe through a legislative return at some point in time, she could get back to this side of the House on which campgrounds — like I had asked — are going to be getting upgrades. Most of them are in rural ridings that we're in. It would be nice to know so we can do our due diligence and pass that on to our constituents.

I want to stick with campgrounds. My last question is: What is the plan for campground access this winter? We're stuck here again. I don't think there are many of us with flights to beaches this year — unless the beaches have snow on them.

I'm just wondering about winter access — will some campgrounds be opened for unserviced use? Which ones? Are there dates or times or is this something that the department is still working on?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would be happy to advise Yukoners as the strategy evolves and the department does its work with the communities with regard to the campgrounds that are being upgraded in the next fiscal year and of those we just completed. I know it's continuous upgrading. I will be happy to provide that information.

With winter access to which campgrounds — I guess the question was: Which campgrounds have winter access? There are non-gated campgrounds that are accessible to members of the public. The Tombstone Park is one. I can — of course, I don't have that in front of me, but as I understand it, those campsites are identified on the yukon.ca website. I would go to that site and get the information. I just don't have it at my fingertips.

Mr. Istchenko: I guess we'll leave campgrounds. There is a lot of information there that I still need to gather. I guess I'll go to yukon.ca.

I would like to turn now to wildlife management. We're of the view that the relationship between the department and the Yukon hunting community has declined considerably in recent years. The result of this has been that there is increased scepticism from the hunting community about proposals put forward by the government, especially with regard to new approaches to limit hunting.

Let's start with the 2020 suite of proposals that are currently being considered by the minister. We have seen a letter to the minister from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board with those recommendations. We know that the minister has responded to each of them, but I have a few questions.

The letter from the board corrected the minister's language with regard to the term "reject" as opposed to "set aside". Can the minister explain what the issue was there, for us in the House today?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Can I ask the member opposite just to state the question again? I didn't catch the last part. Thank you.

Mr. Istchenko: So, the letter from the board corrected the minister's language with regard to the term "rejected" as opposed to "set aside". Can the minister explain what the issue was there for us?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The language that was used — "set aside" versus "rejected" — the language in the letter was an administrative oversight and that has since subsequently been corrected, for the record.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that.

Let's turn to the adaptive management measures for moose that the department has proposed. So, can the minister give us her understanding of those proposals and explain whether or not she supports them, and why?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Procedurally, as the member opposite would know, under the recommended changes as required under the *Wildlife Act*, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board and members of the public would come forward with their perspectives and respective approaches on potential amendments that come forward, and the Fish and Wildlife Management Board then proceeds to do consultation and engagement across the Yukon. Some of the measures that are coming forward with respect to moose management and adaptive measures are currently under discussion and consideration. No decision has yet been made. Certainly, that recommendation would go before the Cabinet Committee on Legislation. When that happens and the discussion evolves, we will be happy to talk about that, but it is important that our management approach respects First Nation final agreements and is effective in managing harvest within sustainable limits.

This past spring, Yukoners were provided with additional time to review and comment on three moose management proposals through the Fish and Wildlife Management Board's *Wildlife Act* regulations public review process. We have asked for a bit of an extension, given that we were in the height of a pandemic. The board advised that this was acceptable, so the recommendations are currently under consideration with a response expected back to the board this fall.

Mr. Istchenko: When it comes to the adaptive management measures, I wanted the minister to explain a little bit about them, which she sort of did, but she didn't really say whether she supports them or not, and why.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would just again highlight that, when we have these discussions about measures that are being considered under the *Wildlife Act* and when we look at co-management efforts around the sustainability of pressure areas, the discussion happens with the Fish and Wildlife Management Board. The member opposite is well versed in that, as a former minister responsible for this area. A process evolves, consultation happens, the recommendations are brought to the board, the board brings the recommendations to the minister, collaboration happens, and technical discussions evolve. As those things evolve, the information is absolutely confidential until it is made public.

My opinion, when it comes into the discussion, is really irrelevant at this point. The technical process and the public

process have been defined for us. It is very clearly defined under the chapters of the *Umbrella Final Agreement* that speak to co-management and to conservation. Of course, the *Wildlife Act* sets the parameters in how we proceed with wildlife management measures.

Mr. Istchenko: There have been many public presentations about these proposals. I was simply looking for the minister's thoughts on them because it was she who put the proposals forward. Can the minister comment on the current timelines? We understand that she may be beyond the prescribed amount of time set out in the UFA. I think she spoke a little bit earlier on this — on these proposals. Can the minister confirm this?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm absolutely familiar with the *Umbrella Final Agreement* as it sets out parameters on co-management. Chapter 16 lays out some parameters for us. Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board is set in place to govern and to provide recommendations to the minister around management measures. The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board is working very closely with the Department of Environment as we look at the recommendations brought forward. They have been informed and are in agreement, given that we are, right now, in the middle of a pandemic. They are absolutely in support of the extension and granted that, in fact.

Mr. Istchenko: I better watch my time. I think it's elapsing quickly.

I would like to bounce around on a few other wildlife management issues. How much in this year's budget is there for surveying animal populations? How does this compare to, say, the last four years?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I will just highlight that, in the supplementary budget as presented, it does not speak specifically to anything with respect to wildlife surveys. It speaks a lot to COVID and COVID-related expenses. The member opposite wants to speak about the mains and specifics to the mains. The objective of today's debate is to look at the supplementary budget, and I have highlighted that in my opening statements. I would certainly be happy to entertain the questions that are presented which are in the mains and are not specific to the supplementary budget.

The member has Environment's budget, I am assuming. It was distributed a while ago. The allocated amount for Fish and Wildlife is \$8,128,000.

Mr. Istchenko: Before I continue on with that, I just want to go back to something that I had missed. I had written it down, and I think this is important.

Can the minister tell us when she last met with the Fish and Wildlife Management Board?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can confirm that I have met with the chair and the vice-chair this past summer. I know that the department is in frequent contact with the board. I am certainly happy to have conversations with the board, and, of course, I have extended that invitation to the chair. I have met with the chair on different occasions, and I will continue to do so.

Mr. Istchenko: I think that it is important that, when you meet with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board,

you meet with the complete board. So, the last time she met with the complete board — can she answer that, please?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can confirm that I have met with the complete board. Given that we are in the middle of a pandemic, it is not advisable to meet in those settings. I would be happy to meet with the board. I have extended the invitation to the chair. We continue to collaborate on a regular basis. I would certainly be happy to meet with the board again.

The last board meeting was in October and we did have staff at the meeting. When receiving an invitation myself, I do attend those board meetings, as requested by the chair.

Mr. Istchenko: There are things like Zoom meetings or virtual meetings, so the minister could meet. I don't think I got the answer. Was the last time that she — the minister — met with the board in October 2019?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can confirm that I have met with the board. I have met with the chair. I know that the staff have had continuous engagement with the board. As I indicated to the member opposite, I have met with the chair and the vice-chair in the last couple of months. I will continue to have those conversations and dialogue.

As we know, we are in the middle of a pandemic. I am most certainly aware of Zoom and the virtual opportunities. The invitation is there. We will continue to work with the board as we look at the changes to the moose management obligations and the *Wildlife Act* obligations. We want to look at developing and enhancing our engagement. We also want to acknowledge that the department meets regularly with the board. We have a member who sits on the board, so we are always connected to the board. We will continue to ensure that the board is well versed on the efforts of this government and also that the connection is there now and into the future.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to switch to the Hart River caribou. I have a couple of questions: What year did the Alaskans come to the Yukon government with the management plan? When did TH sign the agreement to put the plan in place?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm not certain that I understand what the member opposite is asking. The Alaskans and harvest management plan in relation to the Fortymile caribou or in relation to moose — I'm not certain — Porcupine caribou maybe? If he can elaborate, that would be very helpful for me to better understand and respond.

Mr. Istchenko: Sorry for not being specific — the Fortymile caribou.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to the Fortymile, we're just pleased to say that Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has now signed off on the harvest management agreement with the government. This effort took over 25 years — really focusing on the recovery efforts among Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Wildlife Management Board, the Dawson District Renewable Resources Council, and of course the Government of Yukon and the State of Alaska. I'm assuming that's the question.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in supported the management plan. We most recently opened up the hunting with that herd. The State of Alaska, in terms of its structure on allocation, has been predefined through this management plan.

As I understand things, the — I have to just stop for a moment. I do have a hearing impediment; I do wear hearing aids. I want to just acknowledge and admit that here now. I cannot hear when there are multiple conversations happening and I just want to ask my colleagues respectfully if I can just — it interrupts what I'm hearing coming here and what I'm hearing over here — if I can just ask for that respect. It may be funny for some folks, but that is the reality that I live with every day, and I am not going to apologize for that.

We have been working very collaboratively with Alaska since recovery began in 1995. We, of course, have seen some significant challenges there, but we have established a harvest management quota with each jurisdiction, with 65 percent of the sustainable harvest going to Alaska and 35 percent to Yukon. The Government of Yukon has participated in recovery planning with Alaska. Of course, that plan was approved by the Alaska Board of Game.

Alaska has shared with Yukon its concerns about the herd reaching its carrying capacity and we have seen historically the population crash, and we certainly want to look at the sustainability of that herd as we go forward. It is important for us to work with our partners as we look at enhancing now that we have opened up harvesting and we have signed off on the harvest management agreement. That is a Canadian agreement, but we do have measures in place that have been historically agreed to with the State of Alaska. Alaska's harvest management plan for the Fortymile indicates that they would harvest their allocation, and we are trying to work out some alternative formal arrangements. As the member opposite would be aware, that formal arrangement was done not — I correct myself — it is not a formal arrangement; it is a mutual commitment that was done, not through a formal process, but a mutual commitment to work together on the sustainability of that herd.

The State of Alaska — in terms of its collaboration and its efforts — Yukon First Nations, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Dawson Renewable Resources Council, and, of course, the Government of Yukon meet on a regular basis. I know they meet every year — perhaps twice a year, technically — to talk about the sustainability of the herd and the harvest management.

Alaska has, of course, the habitat and the herd tends to migrate more frequently in the State of Alaska. That allocation, in terms of the herd range, is much larger. We have indicated some challenges there and want to continue to work with Alaska as we look at the sustainability of that herd long term.

Mr. Istchenko: I just want to note the comments from the minister before she started answering. It is hard to hear in here. There was no laughter on this side. I'm trying to listen to her, Mr. Chair, and I'm trying to listen to what she says — vice versa — but there was no laughter on this side of the House. Stuff gets recorded in Hansard, so that needed to be put in there, Mr. Chair.

So, maybe I'll speak a little closer to the mic. Actually, the sound system is bad in here, anyway.

So, can the minister discuss the contribution agreement with the Yukon Fish and Game Association? Why was the funding cut to this organization?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The Government of Yukon has a working relationship with the Yukon Fish and Game Association. The department officials have met with the association during their public engagement period. Again, they have looked at the conclusion of the recommendations. They have been working very closely with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board around public processes and the decision on the annual funding to support the association by providing them with \$70,000 in the mains. This was to ensure that they provide input on management measures — and, of course, participating in their public engagement with their membership. We do have other organizations that are being considered as well as we look at our budget requirements in supporting our various working groups that we have out there. This also includes the Elk/Agriculture Conflict Working Group, the grizzly bear/bison management plans, and looking at engagement sessions and providing opportunities in different venues. Given that the association is a non-profit group and that we have many other organizations that we fund, my understanding is that this amount was reduced from \$80,000 to \$70,000, which still meets the obligations of the Yukon Fish and Game Association.

Mr. Istchenko: When was the last time that the minister — not the staff of the department, but the minister — met with the Yukon Fish and Game Association?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can say that I have met with them on two occasions. Given that they are a non-profit organization that provides recommendations to the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, I tend to spend my efforts — given that my portfolio requires my engagement under structured processes —

I want to just acknowledge that they have had opportunities to engage, and I'm very happy about that process. I certainly want to support the association's operation and engagement with the Department of Environment. The collaboration continues with the Department of Environment. I have met with them in the past. I certainly would be open to meeting with them again.

Mr. Istchenko: She mentioned that she had met with them two times, but she did not give me a date. Can she please give me a date?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would be happy to talk about the process. At this moment in time, I'm not able to specifically give a date of when I met with the Yukon Fish and Game Association, but I would be happy to talk about the funding that we provide to the association to allow them to conduct their work and to support this non-profit organization and their meaningful input into fish and wildlife management and — by collaboration of that — provide recommendations to the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board.

As I indicated, there are many boards and committees across the Yukon. I make efforts to meet with the boards as they request. I would be happy to meet with any board that requests

a meeting. I have met with them in the past, and I would be happy to do that again in the future.

Mr. Istchenko: It sounds like it has been a while.

I want to switch over to the Finlayson caribou herd. Is there a recovery plan in the works?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We are committed to addressing, with the Ross River Dena Council, concerns around hunting, wildlife management and conservation in the First Nation's respective area. The observations and, of course, the input from the department indicates a decline in the Finlayson caribou herd since 1990, and respecting our shared concerns for the herd, the decision was to issue no licence hunting permits in 2018-19, and that continued on.

The outfitters' quota was set at zero, and that is an indication that we certainly need to put our efforts together and work together to look at addressing the herd levels.

So, the department is working with the Ross River Dena Council around the herd management and stabilizing the herd so that we can see increased harvest levels — a very similar situation with what we have seen historically with the Fortymile. We'll continue that work with our partners and we'll eventually see the numbers rise back up so that we can open up the herd to a public process in the future. That may take some time, so we — as I indicated many times to Yukoners — are looking at our concerted effort to protect the herd from further decline, and that means that we must put in place a management measure to sustain that herd for longevity.

Mr. Istchenko: I will just leave that alone. What is the status of the court case with regard to the emergency closure of the Finlayson caribou herd?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I was just trying to seek some clarification around the court case, so I'm just trying to determine what the member opposite is referring to with respect to which court case it is. I'm not sure, but I would be happy to respond once I get a little bit more clarity.

Mr. Istchenko: I will just move on. Has the minister met with the affected outfitter in that area?

Hon. Ms. Frost: No, I have not met with the outfitter for that area.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Chair, would the minister happen to have the special guide licences — I'm just wondering how many were issued last fall and what the success rate was, seeing as we were in a pandemic.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I was just seeking a little more clarification around the outfitter in that particular area who was referred to. I can acknowledge that the department has met with the outfitter and continues to do so.

With regard to special guide licences from last fall, we still clearly don't have those numbers and they won't be available for a bit.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Chair, what I was actually talking about — the government had replied to the outfitter's legal challenge — so when I asked about the court case, that's what I was talking about — if the minister can comment on that, please.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Given that it is a judicial process, it's not something that I can speak to at this point, but once that is resolved, I would be happy to speak about it.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to go back to the question that I asked about the special guide licences because it was special circumstances in there with special guide licences. Can the minister tell me how many were issued last fall? What was the success rate? How many were able to go out — because we were in a pandemic and travel and things like that were a bit of an issue?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have that information. The department is still compiling the data, and once we get that, I would be happy to share that, but at the moment, it's not — certainly, we're still having folks out there, so I don't have those numbers yet.

Mr. Istchenko: I look forward to seeing the stats on that.

Speaking of outfitting, I would like to get a few questions in on that. What work is being done with the outfitting industry with their losses due to COVID-19? Of course, you know that wildlife is key and with the way travel was this year — you know that the industry took a huge hit. I'm just wondering what work is being done with that industry with their losses due to COVID-19.

Hon. Ms. Frost: We've had many, many discussions in the Legislative Assembly about the business relief fund through Economic Development. We know that the outfitters have been supported as businesses. I encourage them to, those who are identified as not receiving support, to please proceed to connect. We would be happy to provide some support and guidance there as well.

We acknowledge the impact that COVID-19 has had on the outfitting industry as most outfitting clients are not able to travel to Yukon this year. Yukon outfitters and Canadian clients can self-isolate for 14 days on outfitting concessions. We've worked through the operational plan with colleagues at the civil emergency measures — connections through Community Services and of course through the chief medical officer in terms of operational planning that has been approved.

To date, there were 18 out of 20 outfitting concessions that had approved plans — so significant effort and support around options, including supports for clients within Canada and the isolation requirements and making some accommodations in terms of supporting the outfitters.

Mr. Istchenko: I understand the business relief fund and the programs that are set out to help all businesses in the Yukon. I do know that 18 of the 20 outfitters put plans together and they did get some customers, but it was devastating, like it was for the tourism industry. I am just wondering what direction the minister, during this tough time on the outfitters, has given to the department or what work is the department doing other than the business relief program that the minister spoke about or the outfitters working on plans and going through that process through CEMA to try to get the odd customer to make a go of it? What is the department doing to work with outfitters?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can confirm that we have worked very closely with the outfitting concessions and the outfitters in putting together their plans. We have worked very closely with

the chief medical officer of health staff, and we have worked with Community Services. I can say that the outfitters harvested 35 to 55 percent of their normal harvest this year, recognizing that they, of course, were restricted to Canadian clients. The international clients obviously were limited. The business relief program and the northern business relief program provided significant supports, and we continue to provide supports there.

This year, the outfitters harvested 83 sheep, 87 moose, and 52 caribou, which is an indication that they have met 55 percent of their quota. I would say that, in addition to that, they have taken 23 grizzly bears as well. The alternative self-isolation plan for the outfitters helped them immensely to meet 55 percent of their harvest numbers.

I am happy to work with the industry at any given time. As I just highlighted, the department has done a really great job in looking at alternatives for the industry, appreciating that we have seen a decline — the hit that COVID has had on the industry, which is not to be taken lightly.

I can just safely say that the department has done a really great job in just looking at alternatives with them and quickly mobilizing and putting in place the supports so that they can accept clients and do so in a safe manner so that we can continue to protect Yukoners. The safe transition from another jurisdiction into the Yukon and then out to the concession was done in a very diligent and quick fashion to allow for that to happen. I am very pleased with that, and I want to just acknowledge that we are still not out of the woods, but the season has concluded. Hopefully, we will have a better year next year.

Mr. Istchenko: I don't know if you noticed, Mr. Chair, but the minister had a lot of information there about harvest data with outfitters — percentages and stuff like that — but when I asked about the special guide licences, which was also during the same time, the minister didn't have that information.

So, are there going to be any changes going forward to the outfitters' quotas as a result of the reduced season?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would venture to say that perhaps it is a little too early for us to make that determination.

Mr. Istchenko: As I have earlier today in this House, I will ask the minister again: When was the last time that the minister met with the Yukon Outfitters Association? I am looking for a date and a time.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can say that I have met with the Yukon Outfitters Association in the past, and given that we have outfitters throughout the Yukon, I haven't met with the association of late, but I would be happy to have engagements in the future, should the Yukon Outfitters Association request the said meeting.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to talk just a little bit about trapping, which is near and dear to my heart, among many other things, but I like getting out there.

The fur industry markets have crashed. We have lost one of our major fur buyers in Canada. I am just kind of wondering, in light of that, how many new trapping licences were issued last year. At a very high level, are we seeing an increase in the number of people going and doing the trappers course, or is it just kind of status quo?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Given that we are in the middle of a pandemic, I wanted to just know from the department — trying to get some more information about the process established for trapping courses and the uptake on that, given the limitations in terms of how many folks you can have in close proximity. We're working on getting those numbers, but I understand that the courses are fully subscribed under the COVID protocols. As I understand it, the licences are pretty consistent from last year to this year.

As the member opposite knows, trapping is not at its prime, but we want to continue to certainly ensure that our young trappers are educated, informed, and provided the training that they need. The courses will continue throughout the Yukon. Given that we have limitations with COVID, we may have to do more courses to still capture the same number of individuals interested in taking trapping courses.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. I'm wondering if the minister or the department is contemplating any trapper support programs in light of the crash of, basically, the fur industry.

Hon. Ms. Frost: It's not something that the department has discussed.

Mr. Istchenko: I'm just wondering when the last time was that the minister had met with the Yukon Trappers Association.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The member opposite wants to know when I met with these organizations. I will say to the member opposite and to the associations, if they require and request a meeting with me, I would be happy to attend a meeting with them. I have never received a request from the Yukon Trappers Association to meet with them, but I do meet with trappers on a regular basis — individual trappers. I would be happy to extend the invitation — of course, my door is always open. I'm certainly happy to meet with any organization that wishes to meet with me. Thank you.

Mr. Istchenko: What was the number of bears destroyed due to human-bear conflict this year? Is it higher or lower than last year? Do you have the numbers?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The number of bears identified this year in human-wildlife conflict was 55, which is down from last year.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that.

I want to switch over to the big furry animals in my riding and partly in the member's riding too — between Carmacks and that whole area. How many bison were harvested last year compared to the last five years?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I certainly don't have those numbers in front of me. I would be happy to get those numbers from the department, but it's not something that I would have at my fingertips. As we look at the supplementary budget and we look at the debate today before us, they are certainly not numbers that the department would provide me as we have the budget debate.

Mr. Istchenko: Has the department or the minister — through some of the recommendations that might come out of the bison technical team — considered any changes to hunting opportunities?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We are reviewing and updating the Aishihik bison management plan to ensure that it reflects current priorities and issues. There is a Yukon bison technical team that is leading the updated plan. The team includes representatives from territorial, federal, and four Yukon First Nations, as well as four renewable resources councils and the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. The bison technical team is expected to provide the plan to the Fish and Wildlife Management Board for public review sometime this winter. I would not pre-suppose the outcome on that in light of the fact that we have a technical team. They are mandated to review the process and provide recommendations.

As I understand it, they are expected to have their recommendations back sometime within the next four to six weeks.

Chair: 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. The matter before the Committee is Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to welcome everybody back to the House here.

When we left, we were having a discussion about the bison harvested last year compared to the last five years, and I want to ask a couple more questions about bison.

How many bison does the department harvest at the end of the season for data collection and samples?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can confirm that there have been zero bison harvested this year. The program has ended. I do want to correct the record. I certainly misspoke earlier and I had some incorrect information. I do want to say, as of — and it's not 55 bears — I had indicated that it was down from last year. As I know now, it is actually — as of November 18, we had 29 bears destroyed and five have been translocated; 29 were black bears and eight were grizzly bears.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for correcting the record.

We'll stick with bison. How many bison does the department harvest at the end of the season for data collection and samples?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Zero.

Mr. Istchenko: I'm under the understanding that, every year at the end of bison season — when it closes — the department actually goes out, collects data, gets samples, and harvests some bison. I just wanted to know the number.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I just note that the program has ended, so there were zero bison harvested for that purpose.

Mr. Istchenko: I wanted to talk a little bit about conservation officers. I want to talk a little bit about the minister's decision to use the budget to purchase AR-10s. Can the minister give us a more detailed response than we received

in Question Period about the rationale for the purchase of these guns?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to remind the member opposite that the supplementary budget presented today consists of \$1.5 million for the Department of Environment specifically for responding to COVID pressures. A significant portion was related to COVID and the operation and maintenance of the department, which came to \$1.2 million. The questions that are being asked at the moment and that we have fielded for the last two hours do not speak to the supplementary budget that we are here to talk about. The member opposite is asking a multitude of questions about meeting times when, in fact, the objective here is for us to refer to the supplementary budget.

With respect to the questions around assault rifles, the member opposite would know that there are exemptions made in the federal legislation that speaks to assault rifles, or alternative rifles, for conservation officers and enforcement officers. The Conservation Officer Services branch has issued a public tender for new patrol rifles. The patrol rifles are intended as a public safety tool. They are required to provide the necessary protection required for the safety of conservation officers and the public when responding to high-risk situations, including dangerous wildlife.

The current issue bolt-action rifles are not meeting current service requirements for a variety of reasons, including the lack of available weapon-life quality control concerns and a lack of manufacturer support.

So, the current bolt-action rifles are, of course, very difficult to modify, so the alternative had to be put into place. That means that existing rifles first need to be modernized, and the exemption is given by the federal regulations that allows peace officers to use an alternative. In this case, the regulation complies with the federal regulations, allowing conservation officers to have this rifle as the regulations allow that federally.

Mr. Istchenko: So, when the minister approved that going out for tender, was she aware that these guns were on the list of the guns that were being targeted by the federal government — the federal Liberal government — when she made the decision to approve their purchase?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We weren't aware, but the department certainly is following the protocols as established and set for them as they look at the tools that they need to successfully protect themselves and the public. Of course, that means that we will abide by the rules as they have been established for us. The federal laws exempt law enforcement officers, and that is, I guess, the section of the act that applies in this instance. They are certainly prohibited by public use. However, there are exemptions, and we are aware of the federal processes, but as the tender went out by the department, we are looking at the clause that provides for an exemption.

Mr. Istchenko: There seems to be quite the contradiction between our MP and this Liberal government when it comes to this issue.

I want to switch now to elk. We have heard a lot of questions from constituents and concerned stakeholders about the management of elk in the territory. Can the minister update

us on the current management of elk from the perspective of the Department of Environment? We understand that they introduced a predation permit for elk with a limited number of PHAs per year. So, we are looking for the minister to tell us how many have been issued this year and how this program has been going.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I don't have that number in front of me, but I will certainly endeavour to get back with the numbers. As I noted earlier, the objective today is to speak about the supplementary. That specific information is not at my fingertips, but I would be happy to endeavour to get back.

Mr. Istchenko: I will look forward to getting that information also.

At a very high level, does the minister believe that the agricultural industry is currently satisfied with the government's response regarding elk management?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The elk management plan, as it was renewed in 2016, prioritizes and addresses conflicts between elk and agriculture as a goal. Now, there is a working group that meets with the farmers, and they met with them this past fall. They continue to work on the conflict.

Throughout the summer, there were continued conversations with stakeholders as we rolled out the new approaches as a result of the discussions. We will continue to move forward with a multi-pronged approach to maintain but more closely manage elk in the Yukon. This includes reducing the population in the Takhini valley by up to 40 percent and providing financial supports.

Now, with regard to the working group, we have the agriculture industry, we have the Laberge Renewable Resources Council, we have the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and we have a number of participants on that working group who will provide direction in terms of how we deal with the elk and the agriculture industry. As I understand it, the departments are working very closely on an approach in terms of ensuring equal representation and voice on that working group.

Mr. Istchenko: We understand that a farmer has taken legal action against the Yukon government. I understand that the minister can't actually comment on the case, but can the minister tell us what the action was that was taken against the government and the current status of it?

Hon. Ms. Frost: There are continued conversations between the stakeholders as we roll out new approaches to co-management. Of course, the agricultural industry is as important as elk conservation and elk management.

Specifically regarding legal actions — I am not privy to speak to that on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, but I will speak about the processes that have been established with regard to the co-management efforts that have taken place over the course of time and as we move forward with a multi-pronged approach to maintain and more closely manage elk in the Yukon while still maintaining our agricultural industry in that particular area, which seems to be posing a bit of a conflict. We have issued a conflict hunt for elk to try to cull the herd and deter them from entering into these conflict zones. That was

done very closely in collaboration with our working group. As I understand it, we have had 25 elk taken this year in total.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to talk a little bit about the area of wildlife management related to adaptive management. The department introduced new measures for sheep in the hunting zone of game zone 7 this year. Can the minister tell us about the government's approach to this change? Why was it done, and has it worked?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The new sheep permit system in game management zones helps to ensure a sustainable harvest by allowing us to adapt permit numbers to changes in sheep harvest patterns and success rates, as well as sheep population information. These changes are based on recommendations from the sheep working group with members of the Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Government of Yukon. The sheep permit holders have greater flexibility in where they hunt within the sheep management zone. That includes multiple subzones.

Mr. Istchenko: So, does the minister feel that the changes that the department has implemented are consistent with the advice and the recommendations from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes, they are.

Mr. Istchenko: Has the minister — because I know on this side of the House here — heard concerns from Yukoners and the Yukon hunters about the changes in this approach?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The government, as I indicated, had some significant concerns that have been brought forward — recognized that and made some management adjustments in the game management zone. Looking at resident hunters, including the Trails Only Yukon Association members who have expressed concerns about increased hunting pressures — we have looked at the individual management zones. We have looked at the input from the Fish and Wildlife Management Board on a series of recommendations, and the board supported the recommendations. We have heard, of course, very positive views. There will always be responses that we hear back that are not in agreement, but we try to balance that in terms of the best interests of conservation and conservation management. Always, that will prevail in terms of the approach that we take.

The sheep working group was created under the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and they've made the recommendations. That's where we are.

Mr. Istchenko: I'm wondering if the government would actually reconsider this approach and go back to the way it used to be.

Hon. Ms. Frost: That is not something that we are considering at the moment.

Mr. Istchenko: This concludes my questioning for today. I am going to turn it over to the Third Party.

I have a couple of comments at the end. I do want to thank the staff for being here today, and I really want to especially thank the staff who aren't here but are on their phones providing advice and information to the minister.

I believe that the Premier has put in almost a full day of work here answering questions in the House. It was highlighted by my fellow colleague that this is part of the job. When it came

to the Spring Sitting to debate actual budgets, it was very short. We were in a pandemic; we understand that. So, when we get up in the House on this side and have questions, they are questions from our constituents, and we like to bring them forward. This is our opportunity to bring them forward where they are recorded in Hansard so we can show our constituents and those people who have concerns or who are happy with some of the government policies what is going on, and that we are doing our job. I want to thank everybody for being here today.

Ms. White: Welcome to the officials here, of course, as always, and I thank them for the work that they do throughout the year.

Before I get started into questions, Mr. Chair, I would really like to take a minute to hold my hands up and to thank the folks within the Department of Environment who were redeployed toward the Watson Lake border. When you are supposed to be doing the backcountry supervising of the Tombstones, Watson Lake is not exactly where you thought you would be working. I know that folks made sacrifices to do that and that we appreciate the work that they did, and I acknowledge that it wasn't fun and it wasn't easy — but just how important it was. I know that the minister feels the same way, as do her officials, so I just wanted to make sure that, when I had that opportunity, I just said, "Thank you". We know, as we hear every day, how this is an unusual time and I agree. It's not easy, so I just wanted to start off with that.

I do appreciate that we are here during the supplementary budget, but I have lots of questions — or a few questions, for sure. The first thing that I wanted to ask about is the status of the species at risk legislation. Where are we? There was a commitment that we would be on it, and here I am. I haven't asked about it in Question Period, but depending on today, I won't need to. So, where are we with species at risk legislation?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The Yukon *Species at Risk Act* addresses the long-term health and conservation of our species in the Yukon that are at risk. It is a Government of Yukon priority as we continue to research and do the analyses on establishing species at risk legislation for Yukon.

We will be engaging with our Yukon First Nation partners regarding the management of species at risk on settlement lands. The timeline to complete this work depends on several factors, including determining how new legislation would interact with existing legislation and whether there is support from management partners and Yukoners. Despite not having specific species at risk legislation for Yukon, we actively manage species at risk currently. There are a number of species that have healthy populations, but they are imperilled in other areas of North America, such as caribou, bison, grizzly bears, and wolverines. We know that new legislation is of interest to many groups and individuals. Based on that interest, we recognize that sufficient time and resources should be allocated to create an effective act that addresses the unique circumstances of Yukon.

We currently steward species at risk using a variety of existing tools, including the boreal caribou under the section 11 agreement that was signed in 2019 with Canada and the First

Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and the Gwich'in Tribal Council. We have looked at the efforts under the Peel land use plan as well in protecting specific areas for boreal caribou. We are currently working with a variety of partners on the federal priority places initiative to improve knowledge and deeper conservation actions for species at risk within south Yukon and Beringia.

We are looking at all our efforts, making sure that we continue on. We have a mandate letter that identifies the priority to develop legislation to protect species at risk while taking action aimed at protecting vulnerable species as well. This is a key priority and we are working toward it.

Ms. White: As I'm sure you're familiar with at this point in time, this is a pet question of mine that I ask quite often.

On March 6, 2019, in a statement that the minister made to the *Yukon News* via e-mail, it said that — and I quote: "... the Yukon Government is currently working to develop a Yukon Species at Risk Act." What I was looking for was a timeline. If the minister could be a bit clearer on the timeline of consultation, for example, or when it might go out on to engageyukon.ca. Ultimately, my goal is to have created-in-Yukon species at risk legislation like Yukon government committed to a fair number of years ago. So, I was just looking for timelines.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I appreciate the question as it relates to a priority for this government. The member opposite highlights that a species at risk act is a priority. We cannot move without our partners at the table. At the moment, we make this a priority and we are doing our due diligence. At the same time, the First Nations have indicated that they are not ready to proceed with a species at risk act because it's a joint requirement and approximately 25 percent of the Yukon is made up of settlement areas. We certainly need to take that into consideration. We cannot advance without our First Nation partners.

The species assessment and the analysis that is being done by the department will continue. It will continue as we look at legislation going forward. The opposition raises a very great point. We want to make sure that we continue on in the dialogue and do it as quickly or as slowly as our partners are with us — but we also certainly need to keep in mind that we have other tools that are readily available to us as we look at the species that have been identified as at risk and use the tools that are available to us so that we continue to protect the species that have been identified — like boreal caribou, for example.

Ms. White: Just for clarification, then — so the reason we are not moving forward with this right now is because our First Nation partners don't want us to develop species at risk legislation?

Hon. Ms. Frost: So, the First Nations have other priorities at this moment. I am not suggesting in any way that they are not supportive of a species at risk act. At the moment, they have other priorities and we need to work with them on the priorities that they have. Certainly, it is a priority for them. It just doesn't find itself, I guess, in the same priority line as we do. We want to make sure that we work with them in their efforts.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that clarification. So, a number of years ago — when I was also the critic for the Environment, but there was a different minister — there was lots of conversation around the water strategy that was being developed at the time. It is something that we speak about less, but it is no less important. So, if the minister can give me, you know, kind of — well, she can give me whatever update she would like about it — but where are we in terms of the Yukon water strategy and action plan?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The water strategy wrapped up last year — but as I am conversing with the department, that conversation continues on, in terms of priorities with our partners.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

So, where could someone like me find an update on the water strategy?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The highlights of the water strategy are online, but I will endeavour to get that information to the member opposite.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I would just point out that, while searching on yukon.ca for the water strategy, it linked me to the 2014 report. It's nice to know that things are changing, and it would be great to be able to find it as well.

One of the things that I think is very important when we talk about, for example, water and the importance of it — a lot has changed, obviously, since 2014, which I am grateful for. I was having conversations about the importance of groundwater in 2014. Now we recognize the importance of groundwater, which I appreciate.

One thing that came up when I knocked on doors for the first time in 2006 — and then multiple times in 2011 and it has never stopped since — is the importance of having a wetlands strategy in Yukon. As we know, every year when we do tributes to biodiversity, we often talk about the importance of wetlands. We talk about how critical wetlands are in protecting our own biodiversity in Yukon, so I want to know what kind of involvement the minister and her department have in the development of a wetlands strategy.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Delivering a wetlands policy remains a Government of Yukon priority. We are committed to completing a policy that reflects Yukon's perspectives and ensures the benefit of Yukon's wetlands — that wetlands are sustained for all. The wetlands policy is targeted to be finalized in 2021. Given that we are currently in the COVID pandemic, that may be delayed by a few months, but I don't have that specific information in front of me at the moment. I would be happy to get back to her with that. We find ourselves in a very complex situation, especially with the uncertainty around the opportunities for engagement. I just want to say that, throughout August and September 2020, the department reviewed the policies with our partners to receive valuable feedback. We are continuing to work on the strategies.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. One thing that I struggle with — and I don't disagree that we're in a pandemic at all; I don't. I also acknowledge that climate is an issue. That is something that I'll also acknowledge, but when questions are

asked and we get told that there's a hangup because there's a pandemic, at this point in time, we're eight months in. We've adapted quite well, I think, at times — maybe less well at other times. There are plenty of opportunities to have large-scale public meetings via online forums. Engage Yukon still continues on. There are options. I appreciate that I heard from the minister when she said "in 2021".

One of the challenges, I guess — and I stand to be corrected and I welcome the minister to do those corrections. I was in this House and also in the capacity as critic of the Environment when, a few years ago, the Yukon Party decided to do a single inspection regime for mining. What that meant is that they were both the regulator and the promoter, but they also took away water monitoring from the Department of Environment. It moved from the Department of Environment to the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

What we saw was both a promoter and then a regulator all in one thing. It was challenging, because there were lots of questions, and questions still remain. For example, who ensures that the environmental legislation and regulations are respected? Because now we have the environment that is being affected, but it's being looked at by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. What I wanted to know is: Does the minister recognize, and maybe even acknowledge, the inherent conflict with this dual role? Water monitoring and enforcement used to be under the Department of Environment, and then it was moved out to Energy, Mines and Resources. I wanted to know if the minister had some thoughts on that.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Just for clarification, mining promotions moved to Economic Development and water remains with Environment. We continue to work in collaboration within government as we look at the agreements between the departments to coordinate expertise, including the role for water supports, water experts, and inspectors to enforce various activities. The agreement has been in place, and I look forward to further questions.

Ms. White: I appreciate the answer about water. So, what about the environmental inspections that would happen, for example, to a mine site? Is that done by the Department of Environment, or is that done by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As I understand it, the inspections are done through EMR and the Department of Environment provides technical support.

Ms. White: I thank the minister. What plans does the minister have for restoring the autonomy and integrity of environmental protection if it is currently kind of separated between two departments?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can acknowledge that the Department of Environment works very closely with Energy, Mines and Resources and our partners in supporting the inspections and the work that is done. We certainly take a one-government approach and work very collaboratively in terms of enhancing supports for both departments. There is expertise and there are professionals who work in both departments. I would suggest that they are working well together. I am not sure what the member opposite is implying with the question, but I do know

that the departments are working very well together. They are taking a one-government approach as they look at the supports that are required.

Ms. White: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. What am I alluding to? Well, the closer the relationship, the greater the potential conflict when we talk about development.

Again, if the Minister of Environment is responsible for advocating for and defending the environment, how is the Minister responsible for Environment ensuring that there is an independent and objective assessment at all times when we are talking about mine development? There is a potential conflict. The reason I am asking these questions is that, when it was explained to me about how we could look at governmental or ministerial roles around the table, the person who champions for the environment is the Minister of Environment.

I hear about a one-government approach all the time. I can say that, from different aspects, it hasn't worked. We can use the words, but it doesn't mean that this is how it's actually working. The champion around that table for the environment is the Minister of Environment, so how do we make sure that there is that ability to make sure that the environmental needs — for example, the ecological needs of the environment — are first and foremost in mind when those decisions are being made?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Let's talk about the comments with respect to compliance and integrity. My priority has always been, and it will always be, environmental protection and looking at conservation as a priority and looking at sustainability of the environment.

I can certainly say that I've championed many efforts, including: the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; protecting boreal caribou; implementing ethics legislation; pushing forward regulations with respect to the Peel plan; and sitting at the negotiating table and pushing forward through litigation, representing my First Nation and that of the northern First Nations. In terms of integrity, I would suggest that I will always bring that into consideration when I look at advocating for protecting the environment and assessing the independent considerations that are the prerogative of this government as we look at our responsibilities.

We have tools that are readily available to us. YESAA, for example — the YESAA processes that have been established to allow a neutral process to take effect and always take into consideration best interests around fish and wildlife, the environment, and environmental protection. The department and this government act as intervenors on the Water Board and the YESAA processes that have been established for us under the self-government agreements.

As we go ahead into the future, we look at ecological sustainability, we look at *Our Clean Future*, and we look at climate change strategies. Everything that we're doing in this government is about protecting our environment and keeping the integrity and sustainability always in the forefront of our minds as we look at equal representation and equal voices at the table. We're going through this exercise right now as we look at our Yukon-wide water strategies. We do this as we look at co-management efforts in various fronts and various issues that

are brought to our attention around hunting concerns, for example, or hunting pressures as we look at development.

Well, certainly, we want to take into consideration everything that comes before us to always ensure that we have environmental protection and sustainability of the resources that are there and that are the obligation of Environment. At the same time, we have an opportunity to look at providing guidance to various departments when it comes to environmental integrity and supports, and that is done with the experts in the Department of Environment.

Ms. White: I will apologize to the minister first for the misunderstanding. I wasn't questioning her integrity. I was talking about the integrity of the environment — the physical integrity. For example, a natural space without a road — that would maintain its integrity. It would be intact.

I wasn't speaking about that. I do not question the minister's integrity. She has a very extensive resumé with lots of very cool things, and that was not my intention. I apologize, but I was still talking about the relationship between the Department of Environment and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, partially because one is about protection and one is about promotion in a different way.

The minister did reference YESAA, which is a great kind of foray into my next questions. How does the Department of Environment participate in things like, for example, land use planning? The example that I will use right now is that we have the Beaver River watershed as a small land use plan that is going in. How does the Department of Environment participate in that process?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Just reflecting on the establishment of land use plans and such in the Yukon, the chapters of the agreement certainly lay out very clearly the parameters around how we engage on land use planning and the various considerations that are taken into discussion, I guess — brought into the deliberations. There is always a senior liaison committee established on various land use plans as we progress.

The senior liaison committee is made up of representation of the parties and the interest groups as we look at the specific zone and the specific area. So, the collaboration is that liaison committee and the technical working group, with the departments of Environment and Energy, Mines and Resources co-leading and participating equally at the table, representing our respective interests.

Ms. White: The reason I am asking this question is — I went to the public meetings for the Beaver River land use plan. There was a conflict. We could see the conflict. The conflict was around environmental protection and mining development. The conflict is there.

The reason why I keep on coming back to that is: How does the minister, as the Minister of Environment, reconcile having the mineral promotion and development department doing the on-the-ground work of providing the Minister of Environment with independent advice about decisions that are being made? I am just trying to figure out how that conflict is resolved. I say "conflict" because, having gone to those meetings, there was visible conflict. I am not talking about people swinging at each other, but you could see that there were differences and that

they were going to be hard to reconcile. How does the minister reconcile that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: On the specific question of the Beaver River land use planning process, the Government of Yukon continues to work with the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun to develop a land use plan — of course, with the priority around fish and wildlife monitoring, adaptive management plans, and the road access management plan. The agreement is between the Government of Yukon — which is the departments of Environment and Energy, Mines and Resources, co-leading the discussions — with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun. In this case, the renewable resources council would participate when it deals with specific regional recommendations on co-management. I would venture to say that this process is evolving and gathering feedback as the work is being discussed between all parties and stakeholders.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

I guess one of the things I'm having a hard time reconciling then is how we can see chapter 11 of the final agreements with respect to a regional land use plan for Na-Cho Nyäk Dun when we're talking about having a sub-regional plan in there. I guess one of the challenges at these public meetings is that there was no discussion about what happened outside of those boundaries. The boundaries of the sub-regional land use plan was very — there was no discussion on the outside of that. So, how does the minister see this plan fulfilling the requirements of chapter 11 if it's outside of the regional land use planning with the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Just to provide a little more clarity, as we look at the confines and the direction or the procedures as it's established for us under chapter 11 — as we look at land use plans — we know that there are two established plans. One is the North Yukon plan; the other is the Peel plan. We're in the middle of a land use plan with the Dawson Regional Land Use Plan process right now.

So, chapter 11 doesn't apply in this instance with the Beaver River plan. We took the concepts as it's defined and worked with the First Nations as we looked at an adaptive management plan. So, just for the record: The Beaver River land use planning committee includes representation from the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and the Government of Yukon in advancing the work.

I can say that we have worked outside of the agreements to work with other First Nations — like the Selkirk First Nation, for example, or the collaboration of the Northern Tutchone nations as we look at the Ddhaw Ghro plan. It took a lot of effort and a lot of years to get there. We are working through the same process through the Kusawa park plan.

We are trying to look at opportunities to advance and collaborate on measures that would allow us to address the concerns that have been brought forward from the department but still look at our approaches as we define the working group and develop land use plans.

Of course, perhaps the next set of land use plans will be identified formally once we conclude the Dawson regional plan — but the work of this working group is not clearly identified under chapter 11.

Ms. White: I guess one of the reasons why I'm bringing this up right now is — I'll just ask this for clarification and education on my side. Land use plans — when they're being developed, does it go through the Yukon Land Use Planning Council?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The land use planning commission identifies a planning region. In this instance — with the Beaver River plan — they would not have done that because it's not in the parameters of chapter 11.

Ms. White: I appreciate that clarification. It was fascinating initially when there was a discussion about doing this sub-regional land use plan, because I contacted the council when I was trying to look for clarification and understanding. They 100 percent said, "We have nothing to do with it." So, that was kind of part of it.

Again, I'm trying to figure out the relationship between — where the Department of Environment and land use planning goes. One thing that has — well, something that has been recently — there was just the YESAB meeting in Dawson City about the Indian River wetlands. What kind of feedback or information was submitted by the Department of Environment for the YESAA process with the Indian River wetlands?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The Department of Environment is currently working on a Yukon-wide wetlands strategy and isn't specifically focusing on the Indian River. As Energy, Mines and Resources looks at mineral development in the area, they of course have to consider water management, and that is the Department of Environment's responsibility. We do feed into that process as the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources makes their decisions and recommendations going forward. We do provide water monitoring in that area in the Indian River and lead-in technically to decisions that are made.

Ms. White: Does the minister share the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun chiefs' concerns that continued placer mining in the Indian River wetlands, prior to completion of the wetlands policy, is a contradiction in how that planning should go if the decision is made prior to the ultimate decision being made?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can confirm that we are working — it is an internal process — and we do continue to collaborate and work with EMR. We have had joint sessions with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and, in this case, with Vuntut Gwitchin as well to speak about collaboration in the north, and we will continue to do that in a respectful way.

Ms. White: I guess what I am trying to get to — and the point of the chiefs — is: Can you restore a wetland to pre-disruption? Does the minister acknowledge that this is the concern of the chiefs? They have said it in letters. Their concern is: How do you restore a wetland to pre-disruption? That is why it is a question of land use planning and development.

Hon. Ms. Frost: The question around working with the chiefs — I will certainly always take into consideration what we are hearing and work with our partners as we look at strategies. The technical question that the member opposite is asking — about whether or not the wetlands can be restored — is a technical question that I will leave to the experts to respond to. We do work with our partners in Energy, Mines and

Resources. We will continue to do our collaboration and our due diligence with our partners as well, and that is working very closely with the northern chiefs.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

In developing a wetlands strategy, just based on what we're seeing right now around the Indian River, does that mean that, if there is any kind of staking near a wetland, that wetland will not be included in a protection strategy?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Delivering a wetlands policy remains our priority. As we look at the targets, I want to say that we certainly will work with our partners. The questions that are being asked are technical questions that I will leave to the department to respond to as they work on their wetlands strategy. What I can say is that we have worked very successfully with some of our northern partners on some of the approaches to wetlands. We just signed off on the Ch'ihili Chik wetlands strategy for north Yukon.

That took a lot of years to get there and that was done in collaboration with the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. That is, I think, an indication that we always look at collaboration and working with our partners as we identify key priority areas and special management areas where wetlands are identified and try to collaborate under the parameters of the land use planning process.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that, but when the minister talks about delivering a policy or the wetland — the strategy will come; the policy will come — I guess that one of the questions I have is: Are we waiting until after the Indian River, for example, wetland has been mined out?

I appreciate the example of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, but the north Yukon has had a land use plan since 2009. So, I mean, there has been protection there. The reason why I am asking about the wetlands policy, or the strategy, is because I have been told multiple times that they have been brought forward to Cabinet — different Cabinets, of course — but, you know, similar to land use planning, had we done it when Yukon government had committed to, we wouldn't be in this position because we would have already done the planning process for these areas and we wouldn't be in the spot where the conflict was arising between development and protection. That is the reason why I continue to ask about that, but I will move on — I think, probably, to the relief of everyone.

There was an application process for youth to apply for the Youth Panel of Climate Change. I imagine that we should be getting close to that. I was wondering when we would know about those successful applicants.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Going back to the wetlands policy — in 2014, the Yukon water strategy action plan directed the Government of Yukon to develop a policy for managing Yukon wetlands. Not a lot had happened since that time. We came on as a government and pushed it forward to look at developing a Yukon-wide policy and developing and using a partnerships approach and looking at public engagement. So, we have been developing the draft Yukon policy with Yukon First Nations, transboundary indigenous groups, federal and municipal governments, industry, and other organizations in order to

develop a strong and consistent stewardship approach that reflects the values and interests of all Yukoners.

We recognize that wetlands are essential for biodiversity, water filtration, climate change mitigation, and adaptation, as well as for cultural and social connections.

As the member opposite noted, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has raised some significant cultural interest in the area. Obviously, we take those things into consideration as we look at designing models that have co-interests.

We look at the next question that the member opposite asked about the climate change strategy and the youth fellowship and youth approach. We are currently looking at reviewing the applicants. The process closed. We're really excited to announce that we've had a lot of interest — which is a good indication. Of course, youth are passionate about the environment, passionate about climate, and they are educated and have a lot of input to offer. We are happy to say that we are going to go through that exercise and to the selection and make the announcement in December.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that — highlighting of course that the announcement was made in 2019 in the fall. I asked the Premier at the time how people could apply because I was getting contacted by teachers and students who were doing the Climate Rise. So, I'm excited to hear that they will soon be announced. I think that they would look forward to getting on with the work that they would like to do.

I know that this is a topic that's near and dear to the minister's heart, and we don't have much time, so I think I'll end on a high note. I'm sure that the world has recognized that there has been a presidential election in the United States and I wish that we were less affected, and sometimes we are. But can the minister tell me what the next steps are for the Yukon government as far protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

Hon. Ms. Frost: A very great question. We have, in the past year, met on three different occasions with our partners. I facilitated and shared in those meetings — including our partner, Canada, at the table and GNWT — to look at supporting our Gwich'in partners and the Gwich'in nations in moving forward on protecting the Arctic refuge.

Right now, with the presidential election as it has evolved — we are optimistic, but of course we always have the hard work to do. It has taken us 30 years to get here. We've gone many times to the table to develop — and then of course the decision on the reversal through the Obama administration. The recommendations to protect the Arctic refuge and create a wilderness designation with President-elect Biden as co-president — indicating protection. We're certainly looking at reflecting on the decision that was made by the United States Secretary of the Department of the Interior to open up the Arctic refuge for significant development. We want to consistently work with our partners. So, we are now having those conversations and re-establishing our connections. It's more imminent now than before, and we're waiting for the transition to happen and considering and reflecting on where we are with the responses that we have received through the environmental assessment process.

Ms. White: We're so close to the end, so seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. White 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.

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

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.