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HANSARD

Wednesday, November 25, 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
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Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Deputy Premier Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Government House Leader Minister of Education; Justice
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate; Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission
Hon. Pauline Frost	Vuntut Gwitchin	Minister of Health and Social Services; Environment; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Highways and Public Works; the Public Service Commission
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Minister of Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board; Women's Directorate

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, November 25, 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: I would ask the members of the Assembly to kindly welcome some individuals who are here today. We are continuing on with our geoscience theme. With us today for our tribute is Mr. Jeff Bond, who is head of surficial geology with the Yukon Geological Survey, and his son Sullivan Bond. Grant Allan, the president of the Yukon Prospectors Association, is also with us today, as well as Lorelee Johnstone, director with the Yukon Chamber of Mines, and Samson Hartland, executive director of the Yukon Chamber of Mines.

Please help me in welcoming them here today.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would like my colleagues to help me welcome Émilie Dory, the executive director for Les EssentiElles, and Camille Lebeau, executive assistant for Les EssentiElles. Thank you for coming today.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

Every year, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence launches on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It ends on December 10, Human Rights Day.

This has certainly been a difficult year. Measures taken in order to limit the spread of COVID-19 have forced people to spend more time in their home, which is unfortunately not a safe place for everyone. When this reality is combined with the rising levels of anxiety and perhaps uncertainty about the future, it has led to a rise of gender-based violence locally, nationally, and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, it is being referred to as a “shadow pandemic”. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence offers us an opportunity to address this shadow pandemic. Today, I would like to call on all Yukoners to think

about what they can do during this year’s campaign that will help end violence.

I have thought of 16 examples:

(1) Today, on November 25, you can join a campfire conversation at Roddy’s Camp at Yukon University, hosted by Les EssentiElles and the Victoria Faulkner Women’s Centre;

(2) Next, take the time to educate yourself about violence and reflect on how your own behaviour might contribute to the problem;

(3) Speak out publicly against violence against indigenous women and girls and LGBTQ2S+ people if you see it around you;

(4) Speak to the youth in your life. It is never too early to start teaching kids about gender equality, respect, and justice;

(5) Speak up against victim blaming. Victim blaming is a major reason that victims do not come forward to talk about their experiences of violence. Victims are not to blame for the violence committed against them;

(6) Challenge the stereotypes of men. Do away with the phrases like “Boys will be boys” or “You run like a girl”, and help kids to recognize the negative impact of stereotypes on their self-esteem;

(7) Ask if there are policies or practices in your workplace to ensure that it is a safe place for everyone. If you are a leader or a supervisor, put them in place;

(8) Teach kids and youth how to use a critical lens when consuming media. Children are exposed to many messages and media, including ones that promote harmful gender norms and enable violence;

(9) Make a donation to a women’s organization. Despite the pandemic, these organizations have worked tirelessly to bridge gaps in support of women and children during these unprecedented times. I would like to thank them from the bottom of my heart for the work that they’ve done on behalf of all Yukoners;

(10) Volunteer at a local women’s or equality-seeking organization. You can join their board;

(11) Hold up the young women and gender-diverse leaders in your life. Support them;

(12) Learn what intersectionality is. Learn how different people experience barriers to equality and justice differently;

(13) On December 6, take a moment to remember the 14 women who lost their lives at École Polytechnique simply because of their gender;

(14) Read the final report or summary report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It’s entitled *Reclaiming Power and Place*;

(15) When the Yukon MMIWG2S+ strategy is released, consider how you can play a role; and

(16) Run for office. Although this job is hard, we do truly have an opportunity to improve supports and address some of those pathways that lead to violence. It’s a responsibility and a very deep honour.

In closing, between November 25 and December 10, I encourage everyone to join the conversation and reflect on the steps that we can take to end gender-based violence.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which begins today.

Today marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Over the next 16 days, we will recognize a number of important dates related to gender-based violence.

This year, due to COVID-19 guidelines, restrictions, and the virus itself, we have seen families challenged and tested in many ways. Financial stress, health worries and impacts, working from home, school from home, social isolation, and increased alcohol and drug use are seen around the globe, and Yukon is not exempt. Unfortunately, along with these types of stressors, we also see a huge increase in domestic and gender-based violence.

On my way to work this morning, I listened to someone speak on the radio about the increase in domestic violence against women. The presenter used the phrase “trapped at home”. This is so scary and sad, as home should be your safe place.

We need to recognize these concerns as we head into another wave of COVID-19 and increased restrictions. We need to keep a close eye on those who may be victims of any type of violence. Check in on your loved ones, your neighbours, and your friends. As we head into what is already ramping up to be a particularly stressful holiday season, you never know who could use some additional conversation. Speak up if you suspect violence in a home. If you are a victim of violence, know that it is not right, it is not normal, and there are ways to make it stop.

Talk to a friend or a family member. Work on a plan to make sure you and your family are safe. A code phrase, if you can't speak or text freely — this could be easy to put into action, but it must be done.

I do believe the key to ending gender-based violence lies within each and every one of us. Family members and friends all have a role to play to ensure that violence stops or that violence never begins.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus in recognition of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. We honour and amplify the voices of survivors and the grassroots organizations that support them. We know that the work done by organizations like the Women's Transition Home, Help and Hope for Families, Dawson Helping Tree, Victoria Faulkner's Women's Centre, Les EssentiElles, and others is always important, but never more so than now.

This year, as the world retreated inside homes due to the lockdown measures introduced to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an alarming increase in the already existing prevalence of violence against women and girls. Quarantine and social isolation have negatively influenced mental health, increasing the risk of problematic coping behaviours, including family violence and conflict.

These factors and others have exacerbated the risk of violence against women and girls here at home, across the country, and around the world. The roots of gender-based violence are all around us — in sexist jokes that degrade women, in the language that is used to isolate, in media messages that objectify women, and in the rigid gender norms imposed on young children.

This campaign has always been a time to bring to the forefront the disproportionate levels of violence faced by women and girls, as well as diverse populations, including indigenous peoples, people of colour, LBGTQS2+ community members, gender non-binary individuals, those living in northern, rural, and remote communities, people with disabilities, newcomers, children, youth, and seniors.

Mr. Speaker, we all have a role to play in ending gender-based violence. So, today on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and kickoff of the White Ribbon campaign, we ask that men and boys be allies to your mothers, your sisters, your daughters, and aunts and take the White Ribbon pledge — a pledge that says: “I pledge never to commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women.”

Applause

In recognition of Yukon Geoscience Forum awards

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government and the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to this year's Yukon geoscience award winners.

The first is Lorelee Johnstone, winner of this year's Yukon Chamber of Mines Yukon geoscience member award. In her role as director of permitting and sustainability for Coeur Silvertip, Lorelee exemplified support for environmentally responsible mining operations through her work on environmental impact mitigation.

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, Lorelee, the Liard First Nation, and volunteers and local businesses provided hundreds of meals to community members through the Watson Lake Hearts and Hands program. Lorelee was also the mining association representative on the Government of Yukon's Business Advisory Council established earlier this year.

Lorelee has remained committed through the years to advancing Yukon's mineral industry, working for government, regulatory bodies, and mineral exploration and mining companies.

Mr. Speaker, in that role on the Yukon Business Advisory Council, Lorelee also was the lead coordinator and communicator with government concerning the YMAC group, which represented all mining groups, and did an exceptional job. Also, she worked from sun-up to sundown — and it was the summertime, so that's a lot of hours — every day on behalf of the mining industry. I don't think that you would have seen some of the positive things happen if it wasn't for that work.

Also, congratulations to her on her new role as vice-president of Whitehorse Gold Corp., which is one of the newest companies to form focused on the Yukon. She will be working with them.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize Jeff Bond, winner of this year's Yukon Chamber of Mines Yukon geoscience community award. Jeff is head of surficial geology with the Yukon Geological Survey where he has worked for 23 years. Geohazards such as landslides and permafrost keep him occupied, as highlighted by Jeff's work with veteran placer miner Greg Hakonson in identifying the Sunnyside slide in Dawson this summer.

Jeff coordinates the placer mining forum at the Geoscience Forum and is renowned for his annual overview of the placer industry. Jeff visits a significant number of active placer operations every year, documenting their work and providing insight and understanding of their deposits. Jeff has assisted the mineral exploration and placer mining sectors, land use planning, our broader understanding of glacial history in the north, and supported public outreach. His scientific, economic, and social contributions are among the many reasons why the Yukon Geological Survey is so highly regarded worldwide.

Jeff is also this year's recipient of the Committee of Provincial and Territorial Geologists medal. The acting Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources in the Yukon gets an opportunity to give that out once every 14 years. It was an honour yesterday to be able to provide Jeff with that award, which is awarded to the geologist working on one of Canada's surveys in recognition of their scientific contributions and the impacts of their work.

In closing, all I can say is: Sullivan, your father is absolutely incredible at what he does.

The third award winner is Dena Nezziddi Development Corporation, this year's Yukon Chamber of Mines and Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce Yukon First Nations in Mining Award. Under CEO Stanley Noel, Ross River Dena Development Corporation created 26 jobs and saw strong growth last year. They have provided training to a further 20 youth and underemployed individuals in the last 12 months, provided over \$100,000 to community events and sponsorship initiatives, and hosted a community summer student employment program that hired nine full-time youth this past summer in environmental training positions.

The corporation is Yukon's largest 100-percent First Nation-owned camp leasing company and Yukon's largest 100-percent First Nation-owned fuel services company and has growing construction and environmental services companies. The corporation creates jobs, provides funding support, hires youth, funds training, provides local services, and much more.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge as well Jodie Gibson, winner of the Yukon Prospectors Association Prospector of the Year Award. Jodie claims that his father was a part-time prospector, but I imagine that he is one of the reasons Jodie was able to play such a large role in identifying and expanding Yukon's mineral wealth on a regional scale.

Jodie was a project manager on the White Gold project for Underworld Resources in 2009 at the time of the discovery hole. This contributed to sparking Yukon's new gold rush. In 2012, Jodie was the project manager for the QV Gold Project held by Comstock Metals, which also led to the delineation of a deposit.

Yukon has benefitted greatly from his diligence and expertise, and I thank Jodie for his tireless dedication and hard work. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all members to join me in congratulating this year's deserving winners.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 48th annual Yukon Chamber of Mines 2020 award winners. This year's Geoscience Forum, held from November 23 to today, November 25, is certainly different from what people are accustomed to attending. Due to COVID-19, an innovative, virtual conference was held with guest speakers and presenters hosting presentations, online sessions, and one-on-one sessions, as well as a trade show. Topics included innovation, infrastructure development, and environment reclamation, to name a few.

The virtual awards gala hosted by the Chamber of Mines president, Ed Peart, was a first, and to repeat his phrase, this was modern and responsible, a new way to do business. The chamber continues to support a dynamic and strong industry and a membership that is not only active, but very involved in the Yukon's mining industry.

Now, on to the winners — geologist Jodie Gibson, who has been awarded Prospector of the Year by the Yukon Prospectors Association. Mr. Gibson is a well-respected geologist who has extensive exploration experience throughout North America and has worked on various projects in the Yukon over the decade; Jeff Bond, a geologist with the Yukon Geological Survey, is the recipient of the Yukon Chamber of Mines Community Award for his work in working with active mines to promote best practices, wetlands management, his Beringia knowledge, and so much more. Thank you, Jeff, for your important contributions.

Loralee Johnstone, who is director of permitting and sustainability for Coeur Mining, has been awarded the Yukon Chamber of Mines geoscience 2020 member award. Active in the industry for many years, we congratulate Loralee. Last but definitely not least, the Dena Nezziddi Development Corporation, Ross River Dena Council, Stanley Noel, CEO, and Stuart VanBibber, vice-president, are the recipients of the Yukon Chamber of Mines First Nations in Mining Award.

The corporation fosters and assists with a wide range of community economic development initiatives and maximizes local participation in resource development for Ross River citizens. Congratulations, and continue the amazing work.

A huge thanks to the chamber's board of directors, staff, and conference team for the outstanding productions. As well, kudos to the always fantastic sponsors, partners, the delegates, speakers, exhibitors, and the many volunteers who made this year's forum awesome.

To the focus of this tribute, all of the recipients of the awards, your roles and influence in the industry are immense and your awards are so well-deserved. Congratulations again, and good luck in the coming years.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Istchenko: I have a letter written to the Hon. Chrystia Freeland, federal Minister of Finance, from Currie Dixon, Leader of the Yukon Party.

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

- Are there any reports of committees?
- Are there any petitions to be presented?
- Are there any bills to be introduced?
- Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports increasing the use of virtual care and developing options for Yukoners to connect with care from their homes and in their communities.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon Liberal government to:

- (1) announce public health measures as soon as possible and through appropriate Government of Yukon channels after decisions are made;
- (2) share information about the government's pandemic response with all MLAs and not just members of the Liberal caucus; and;
- (3) end the practice of politicizing public health announcements by branding them with the Liberal logo.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Housing initiatives fund

Hon. Ms. Frost: Affordable housing is a significant challenge for many Yukoners, and we are working hard to address it. On November 16, 2020, we launched the fourth intake of the housing initiatives fund to support the construction of affordable housing for Yukoners across the territory.

Shovel-ready projects in Whitehorse can receive \$60,000 per unit and up to \$600,000 per project. Shovel-ready projects in rural Yukon communities can receive \$90,000 per unit, up to \$900,000 per project. Project concepts can receive up to \$20,000. First Nation governments, First Nation development corporations, contractors, community organizations, and the general public can apply to this \$3.6-million annual fund to support projects that will increase affordable housing options in their community.

This funding can be used with other Yukon Housing Corporation programs such as the municipal matching construction program, the developer-build loan program, and the federal funding initiative. Over the past three intakes, this

program has successfully supported projects that will lead to over 350 new affordable homes in Yukon communities. These projects are creating new housing for rent and for sale which increase the availability of affordable housing options for Yukoners. These projects will help Yukoners access affordable housing in the private market to First Nation housing providers and community organizations.

Of the 43 projects supported through the fund, 33 of these projects applied through our shovel-ready funding stream and 10 through our project concept stream. To date, 10 shovel-ready projects have been completed and 17 projects are underway. Six are working to start construction.

While most projects have been able to begin work on schedule, others have had to refine or adjust their plans due to the pandemic. The ongoing challenges of building here in the north work to align with other funding sources to ensure that their projects are successful.

One important project that I would like to highlight is Normandy Manor. Once completed, this privately owned and operated seniors supportive housing project in Whitehorse in the Takhini subdivision will provide 84 new housing units. This is one of the positive steps taken by our government to alleviate the ever-growing pressure for reliable housing for our elderly population.

We are pleased to see that many of the shovel-ready projects have started or completed construction. We are committed to work with all of our proponents to help them succeed, and the sooner those units can provide housing to Yukoners in need, the better.

This year's intake is the second year that we have included a project concept stream which supports projects that are in the preliminary phases of planning. Many individuals and organizations across the territory have ideas for housing projects. We are helping bring these ideas to life.

We encourage governments, community organizations, developers, and individuals to apply to this year's fund. Together, we can help to support Yukoners to find a home that meets their needs and that they can afford. Our government is proud to have been part of the effort in bringing over 350 homes to Yukoners. We look forward to supporting the construction of more homes going forward. Thank you.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this ministerial statement. We appreciate the updates from government on this initiative.

As you know, the housing wait-list has skyrocketed under this Liberal government from 105 in July 2016 to 316 as of October this year. Any efforts to reduce the wait-list that has grown significantly under the Liberals are welcome.

The minister said that shovel-ready projects in Whitehorse can receive \$60,000 per unit, up to \$600,000 per project. She then goes on to reference the Normandy project as part of this statement. This sounds like a promising project.

On November 16, the Premier stated, during debate on the budget, that the project has received approximately \$4.5 million in Yukon government funding, plus \$1 million from Canada. The Premier said that it came out of existing

capital resources in the Yukon Housing Corporation budget. Can the minister tell us what line item those dollars came from?

Of course, we know that the Vimy Heritage Housing Society is a not-for-profit organization that is also looking to build an assisted living facility here in Whitehorse. We know that all three caucuses met with Vimy representatives prior to the start of this current Sitting for an update on this project. Is the government contemplating supports for Vimy out of this program or through the Yukon Housing Corporation budget?

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on the topic of housing today.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her statement today. Affordable housing is indeed critically important in an environment such as ours. Anything that can be done to encourage and support the construction of affordable housing is applauded. As far as the housing initiatives fund as a whole, last week I requested from the minister's office a list of each project and the completion stage that they're at. I look forward to receiving this information soon.

Because so little information is publicly available about one of the projects the minister referenced, I want to start with a few questions about Normandy Manor. As the minister of both the Yukon Housing Corporation and Health and Social Services, I'm hoping that, with the one-government approach, she will provide some clarity on this one particular project.

How much money has Yukon government funded toward the construction of Normandy Manor? Has it been \$60,000 a unit, to the maximum allowable amount of \$600,000, or is it a different amount? Has the Yukon Housing Corporation entered into any other agreement with Normandy Manor, like guaranteeing a number of units to be rented through the corporation? As the Minister of Yukon Housing Corporation who is also the Minister of Health and Social Services noted, this would be a privately owned and operated seniors supportive housing project. My next question is about whether this is Yukon government's first step toward the privatization of senior and elder care in Yukon. What model of care will be provided at Normandy Manor and what scope of assistance will residents of this building have access to?

While the fund is full of promises, the housing situation in Yukon is dire. So, clearly, it has not done enough to alleviate our housing crisis. The minister can make a ministerial statement about housing every single day for the rest of the Legislative Sitting, but it won't change the reality that Yukoners face when looking for a place to live. That reality is that housing in Yukon is harsh. It is harsh for the young family who sees their dream of home ownership slipping away as real estate costs increase much faster than their wages. It is harsh for the retail worker who has to spend 50 percent or more of their revenue to rent an apartment that is too small for their family. It is also harsh for the 360 people who are on the Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list, and it is harsh for the mobile homeowners who were forgotten by most programs announced by this government.

So, the minister can make more announcements and ministerial statements praising the work done on this issue, but

as long as the lived reality that people face every day isn't getting any better, it will ring hollow to Yukoners who continue to struggle to find appropriate and affordable housing.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am very pleased with the collaboration on all projects that we have delivered under the Yukon Housing Corporation — always looking for collaboration. Collaboration is the way of the future, in terms of working together in finding solutions to Yukon's housing challenges.

We know that there have been historical concerns and issues with the catch-up/keep-up requirements — in particular, in rural Yukon communities. We know that Yukoners are in need of new affordable homes. We know that Yukoners across the housing continuum face differing circumstances. We work hard to provide Yukoners with a wide variety of housing solutions to meet their needs.

We acknowledge the need for affordable housing and we will continue to address that as our population increases. Our government supports a multi-faceted approach to bringing safe and affordable housing to Yukoners; our programs reflect this.

Today, I spoke of the fourth intake of the housing initiatives fund which is supporting the addition of 350 homes throughout the Yukon — different from the last three intakes. We have increased the funding threshold to reflect higher costs of construction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rural per-unit grant has increased from \$80,000 to \$90,000 and the Whitehorse per-unit grant increased from \$50,000 to \$60,000. The Normandy Manor project is currently under construction and will provide an additional 84 housing units for Yukoners. We have reached out to many and we'll continue to work with the Vimy Heritage Housing Society to support them as well.

As the Members of the Legislative Assembly are aware, we have supported Vimy in its endeavours and its initiatives as well. We expect one in five Yukoners to be seniors or an elder by 2040 and we recognize that and recognize that we have significant work to do with our partners to provide more options for our elderly.

Some of the solutions we are working hard on bringing to Yukoners are immediate, such as the recently announced Canada-Yukon housing benefit that provides a rental subsidy directly to the tenants. Some of the other housing solutions such as the housing initiatives fund are undertakings that are more complex but will increase funding for housing significantly as the units become available and projects become available. We are always on the lookout for new and creative housing solutions for Yukoners. Whether your housing project is shovel-ready or in a preliminary planning stage, our government consistently demonstrates that, if the goal of affordable housing for Yukoners is shared, we can be a true partner. I am enthusiastic about the fourth intake of the housing initiatives fund. Together with our partners, we can significantly improve housing in all of our communities.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Just before we begin Question Period, I will note to members that I have been advised that there will be a

test of the emergency alert system which is estimated to take place at 1:55 p.m. on cellphones today.

In light of that, I would ask that all members actually physically turn their cellphones completely off during Question Period as we do anticipate that, even if you are on silent mode, it's possible that the emergency signal will interrupt the proceedings.

You can of course reactivate your devices after we complete Question Period.

I hope that members can get by for the next 25 or 30 minutes. I anticipate that members' phones are generally not completely off, but in any event, I have told you.

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic public health measures

Mr. Hassard: Way back in October of 2017, the Minister of Health and Social Services was asked to update Yukoners on a health conference she had attended, and she shockingly responded — and I quote: “That’s above my pay scale.”

Yesterday, the minister was asked about the government’s public health response to the pandemic, and she made an even more outrageous claim. The minister actually said — and I quote: “The government is not responsible; Members of the Legislative Assembly are not responsible; I’m not responsible.”

“I’m not responsible.” So, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Health and Social Services and the government are not responsible for the government’s response to the pandemic, then who is?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I’m quite happy to speak to Yukoners about the great work that we have done to provide significant health improvements for all Yukoners. My role, as a Health minister — it is certainly not my role alone, which I have indicated; it is the role of all partners to work toward better health initiatives and better health outcomes.

With respect to comments that are made by the member opposite — continuously, throughout the session, members of the Official Opposition perhaps like to misquote and put misinformation out there. I indicated that I am not solely responsible, as a Health minister. I have partners that I work with. We have First Nation partners; we have the chief medical officer of health; we have many individuals in our community who work together. I will certainly not make decisions that are going to compromise the health and well-being of Yukoners.

I will do it in good faith with my colleagues on this side of the House. We have significantly improved the lives of Yukoners by delivering essential services that members of the opposition have not done. I can say that in good faith, standing here, to assure Yukoners that, during the pandemic, we will continue to provide all of the supports they require to get us through this terrible pandemic that we are in the midst of.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, it’s interesting that the minister talks about misinformation, when those are actually her comments, not mine — not anyone’s from this side of the Legislature.

The Minister of Health and Social Services yesterday made the outrageous claim that she and her government are not responsible for the government’s response to the pandemic. It’s absolutely baffling that, in the middle of a pandemic, a Health minister would get up in the Legislative Assembly and tell Yukoners, “I am not responsible.” But until this minister is no longer the Health minister, it is her responsibility.

With respect to a vaccine, what preparations has the Department of Health and Social Services done? Have they started work on a plan to roll out a vaccine, and will certain groups be prioritized over others or will it be first come, first served?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the minister spoke very eloquently today about the shared responsibilities. I want to thank her for her leadership on that, making sure that she is one part of a collaborative government on that when it comes to not only the pandemic response, but Health and Social Services reaching out and through her leadership in housing as well, and her many partners in governments across Yukon and nationally. It is an extraordinary job on so many different fronts.

The member opposite talks about planning; we talk about how we will do that together. As a result of the evolving and unprecedented nature of the pandemic, we have adjusted how we work — absolutely. We plan to ensure that we have better alignment across government, maintaining business continuity and facilitating pandemic recovery. Part and parcel of that is the distribution of the vaccine as it occurs in Canada. We have had lots of conversations at the Council of the Federation and the First Ministers’ meetings on that. We have been notified there nationally and also regionally as well that the focus will be on marginalized individuals, on our elderly people, and our health care providers — and that will be no different in the north.

I think that the one thing that would be different here in the north is one of those considerations that we are always pushing on the national level, which is the fact that rural and remote communities need to be prioritized as well. The northern premiers — all three of us — all agree in that chorus.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, as I said, the Minister of Health and Social Services was asked a simple and straightforward question about her decisions and her government’s response to the pandemic. In that response, the minister said, “I’m not responsible”. Well, those are important issues and we would hope that the minister would stop dismissing them.

We have seen concerns recently with one of the vaccine candidates, this one from Pfizer. This potential vaccine needs to be stored at minus 70 degrees Celcius. If this vaccine candidate is chosen, we will need to have adequate equipment to keep it cold. Can the Minister of Health and Social Services tell us if she has done an assessment as to whether we have the appropriate equipment to store this vaccine? If we do not have this equipment, is the Department of Health and Social Services looking at acquiring extreme cold storage options?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, when it comes to the distribution of a vaccine, I have joined the other premiers — all but one premier, I guess — to say that we really want to see a

national strategy. How confusing would it be for 13 different strategies right across the nation?

The member opposite mentions Pfizer — one of the options. There are many different vaccines coming out, as well, that do not have the cold-storage obligations that the Pfizer vaccine has. We'll note as well that this particular vaccine can be stored for up to four or five days without that extreme temperature, but the member opposite does rightly identify that this is a variable of concern, especially for regions that wouldn't necessarily have — very remote communities right across Canada — access to this. Luckily, third trials and advancements have been going on with the Oxford vaccine, with Moderna, and others. There are options. We know that the federal government has bought millions and millions of doses. We will continue to work with the federal government, and we will continue to push for a national strategy when it comes to vaccination.

Question re: COVID-19 exposure notifications in schools

Mr. Kent: Yesterday, the government discussed the notification process for schools in the event that someone who attends or works at a school tests positive for COVID-19. The government has stated that, if there is a case in a school, not everyone who attends that school will be notified. We've heard from a number of school communities that are very concerned with this approach. They feel that this information is needed to make decisions about their health and safety and the health and safety of their kids.

Why does the government not think it is necessary to notify everyone who attends a school if there are positive cases discovered there?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the question. I want to just reassure all members of this Legislative Assembly and, of course, all Yukoners that the health and safety of our students is our number one priority. I would like to take a moment to really thank the teachers and administrators for their incredible hard work and dedication to learning during this stressful and unusual school year.

Despite the challenging circumstances, we have had a successful first semester, and I think that this is something that Yukoners need to hear. We've done well in Yukon, and I want to thank the students for being so flexible and adaptable over the past few months as we work hard to keep them safe.

In terms of the specific question, if there is a confirmed case, the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit will identify and directly notify anyone who has been in close contact with that case. They will provide direction on who should stay home and self-isolate. A confirmed case will not necessarily mean that a school will be closed. Again, YCDC will provide direction on who needs to stay home and isolate, which may include specific classes or groups of students.

I look forward to further questions.

Mr. Kent: So, currently, the possible exposure list on yukon.ca gives information about stores and restaurants where there may have been contact. This allows people to make informed decisions about their health and their safety.

However, under the government's current plan, they will not be sharing similar public health information as it relates to any COVID-19 cases that are found in schools. It was reported that, instead of notifying everyone at a school that a case was discovered there, administrators would only be notified on a confidential basis. This means that parents, students, and, of course, teachers might never find out if there are positive COVID-19 cases discovered in their school. Teachers may have been exposed as they move throughout the school or have supervision responsibilities at recess.

Why has the government decided that it is not necessary to inform all teachers about positive cases in their school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the follow-up question.

Again, we are working with the chief medical officer of health, and we're taking the lead in terms of how we deal with these situations. I have listened for the last couple of days, Mr. Speaker, in terms of how some of the questions have been framed and some of the attacks and types of insinuations about the systems that we have in place in Yukon.

As a Yukoner, I want to speak to Yukoners — that we have strong systems in place and we are following the lead of the chief medical officer of health. He is an expert in this field. He is an expert in epidemiology, and we are absolutely lucky to have such a professional person working with us in Yukon.

As I've stated already in this question, the health and safety of our students is our number one priority, and we have had a successful opening of schools, thanks to the Minister of Education and the team that she works with.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with the chief medical officer of health. I look forward to another question if the member so wishes.

Mr. Kent: For the minister, these are health-related questions. There are no attacks. There are no insinuations.

My first question was about notifications for the student population. My second question was about notifications for teachers who may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus.

In Alberta, they have a school outbreak map that shows the current status of COVID-19 in K to 12 schools across the province. Schools in that province that have two or more confirmed cases will be identified on that map. In Nova Scotia and British Columbia, media stories identify all of the schools where there are positive cases or possible exposures, yet the Yukon government is refusing to share this information with the public.

Why is the government not following the lead of other jurisdictions when it comes to notifying citizens about COVID-19 exposures in schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: If there is a confirmed case in Yukon, the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit will identify and directly notify everyone who has been in close contact with that case. They will provide direction on who should stay home and self-isolate. A confirmed case will not necessarily mean that a school will be closed. Again, the YCDC will provide direction on who needs to stay home and isolate, which may include specific classes or groups of students. YCDC will also determine who needs to be notified within the

school community while still ensuring the privacy and security of personal health information. YCDC will notify parents directly if their child has been exposed, as well as school administrators, on a confidential basis. The school administration does not notify students, staff, or families; YCDC does.

Again, we are working with our Yukon chief medical officer of health, and we will continue to do that. We are not Alberta, as the member opposite has referenced. We do work with our colleagues across the country, but we take our lead from our Yukon chief medical officer of health.

Question re: Air traffic control services

Ms. Hanson: Nav Canada has announced that they are reviewing services and will be cutting air traffic controller jobs at different airport towers across Canada. The Whitehorse airport tower is included in their review and is at risk of losing the air traffic control services. Currently, air traffic controllers are in the tower in Whitehorse from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Flight service specialists are then available at the airport for the remaining hours.

Has the minister spoken to Nav Canada about the possibility that the Whitehorse airport will no longer have air traffic controllers?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: During this time of uncertainty, Yukoners demand consistent leadership and clear information. The member opposite's question this afternoon certainly provides the opportunity for me to provide that to Yukoners. I have been in touch with the president of Nav Canada, Neil Wilson, earlier this year. I was actually in conversation with him, asking him if there's a possibility of him forgiving fees that our aviation industry has to pay to Nav Canada. Of course, we have forgiven our fees at Whitehorse International Airport and airports across the territory, and we are seeking partnership with Nav Canada on that initiative.

During that conversation, I learned the precarious nature of Nav Canada's funding arrangements and how they do receive money, so I am not surprised that Nav Canada is actually examining how it might cut costs during this time of COVID-19.

I have also heard, Mr. Speaker, from Nav Canada employees here working in the tower, and I have heard their concerns about possible changes to the staffing levels at the tower. We know that air traffic is down in the territory right now because of the pandemic — down to levels not seen since 2015. We also know that this is a temporary measure.

We are currently in conversation with Nav Canada, and the Department of Highways and Public Works is assessing the situation.

Ms. Hanson: So, now we've heard that the minister has had lots of talks — great. The fact is that safe air traffic management depends on the air traffic controllers in the tower. The president of Air North has stated that the loss of these jobs would degrade the level of safety at Whitehorse airport. Flight service specialists — perhaps the minister understands what their function is — would cover the full 24 hours but only provide advisory services around weather observation, runway

conditions, and air traffic. They do not direct pilots, leaving it up to the pilots to keep safe distances from other planes.

What is this government doing — actually doing — to ensure that Whitehorse airport maintains its level of safety for all pilots flying in and out of our airport?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I said in my previous answer, Yukoners demand consistent information on matters. I'm happy to answer the members opposite's questions this afternoon.

I know that this is an issue of concern to Yukoners. I also know that currently staffing levels at the tower have not changed. We are currently at the same position we were last week, Mr. Speaker, and the week before that. We do know that air traffic at the airport is down to levels not seen since 2015. We do know that this is a temporary situation. We do know that we have heard concerns raised by the aviation industry in the territory that they do not want to see service levels cut at the tower — that this is a matter of importance to them. I have heard that as well, Mr. Speaker.

So, at first blush, this government does not support such measures being taken by Nav Canada. We will certainly communicate that to Nav Canada.

That said, the Department of Highways and Public Works is working with our partners — one of them being Nav Canada and the other one being the aviation industry in the territory. We're assessing the situation and we will work with our partners to make sure that the safety of Yukoners, when it comes to our aviation industry, is maintained and that we actually maintain a level of service in the territory that is needed in the territory. We know that COVID-19 has reduced flights.

I'm happy to answer the next question from the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

Ms. Hanson: As the member has pointed out, due to the pandemic, the commercial and private flight numbers are significantly down — not just in Yukon, but across Canada.

We pointed out earlier in this session that, by waiving airport fees and commercial aviation fees, there could be unintended consequences for Nav Canada. It is also not lost on those of us who are around that this a direct consequence of the privatization of air traffic controller services that occurred under the Chrétien Liberals.

The federal Transport minister has said that, before Nav Canada moves forward on more cuts to staff and downgrading of airports, they will work with Nav Canada to ensure air safety in Canada. Has this government — has this minister — spoken with the Transport minister in Ottawa to voice the safety concerns heard from commercial and private pilots flying in and out of Whitehorse airport?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I appreciate the history lesson from the Member for Whitehorse Centre this afternoon. The safety of the travelling public is of course of utmost concern to me and to the aviation industry in the territory as it is to Nav Canada and virtually everybody who works in the aviation industry. We are going to make sure that, whatever happens up at Whitehorse International Airport, the safety of the travelling public is paramount.

I have spoken to Nav Canada. I have spoken to Air North and other aviation companies in the territory. I'm aware of the concerns of the employees who work in the tower and their commitment to safety in the territory. I want to make sure that those jobs and that the safety of the aviation industry is maintained in the territory and I will do my utmost to make sure that's the case.

I don't support cuts to Nav Canada's flight staff — and frankly, I don't think it's warranted. Our aviation industry, once this pandemic is dealt with, is going to rebound in a way that will be absolutely glorious. I look forward to those days, and we will need those staff in the tower when that happens.

Question re: Yukon Hospital Corporation funding

Mr. Cathers: Even before the pandemic, the Yukon Hospital Corporation was under a lot of strain, due to chronic underfunding by the Liberal government. Last year, as shown in the Hospital Corporation's 2019-20 annual report, they finished the year with a deficit of almost \$4 million. That's directly from their annual report. The Liberals claim that they gave the hospital an increase in core funding last fiscal year, but in fact — as hospital witnesses told the Legislature last week — some of the core funding for last year wasn't provided until after the fiscal year concluded. For an entire year, the hospital was forced to run in a deficit. The Liberal government withheld millions of dollars in hospital funding until we were in a pandemic.

Does the Minister of Health and Social Services now realize that Liberal neglect left our hospitals without the resources they should have had? What are they doing now to make up for years of neglecting the needs of our hospitals?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The members opposite had the opportunity to ask questions of the board — the witnesses who were here — and spoke specifically to them around their services — the excellent services that they provide for Yukoners. The overarching priority for the Hospital Corporation — and that of Health and Social Services and this government — is collaboration on a large number of initiatives to improve the quality and efficiency of our hospital and health systems.

We have worked together to address the priorities. As I indicated many times in the Legislative Assembly, the increase in the budget for the Hospital Corporation from the time we started is 29 percent — 29 percent. We brought in supports and services; we have expanded the scope of practice; we have brought into the Yukon specialized services, and we did that in collaboration with the Hospital Corporation. We will continue to work in good faith, going forward, to address many of the other significant projects that are coming forward — of course looking at "Wellness Yukon", looking at the directives of the *Putting People First* recommendations, and doing that in collaboration with our partners.

Mr. Cathers: The Liberals can write all the talking points they want, but the facts disprove their spin. They left the Hospital Corporation with a \$4-million hole in its funding last year, and they only provided a band-aid after we were in a pandemic.

When the Hospital Corporation witnesses appeared, the Legislature learned that they have seen increases in pressure for services across the spectrum. The CEO said — and I quote: "... in this past year, almost every ambulatory and inpatient service increased by greater than, say, three percent. Some of them are up to possibly 10 percent. That is something that we will have to work with government on to ensure that our core funding — our base funding — keeps pace with what we see as far as increases."

He also told us: "... chemotherapy has increased by 5.7 percent". In response, the Liberal government is giving our hospitals a paltry 2.5-percent increase to core funding this year and a retroactive increase of 2.5 percent to make up for the hole in their funding last year.

When will this government ensure that the hospital's core funding actually keeps pace with the increase in services and costs?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to just reiterate for the member opposite and for Yukoners that we continue to work with the Hospital Corporation. In the height of the pandemic, we increased their budget over \$6 million to provide necessary supports to the Hospital Corporation during these unprecedented times. We are working continuously to assess the situation as it evolves. We are working very closely with our Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit, we are working with our chief medical officer of health, and we are working with our partners at the Hospital Corporation.

I would venture to say that we have many pressures coming at us through Health and Social Services. We will not politicize it. We will work together with our partners to meet the needs of Yukoners where they reside. That means that we provide services also through our community health centres. We provide services and supports to different venues and with different methods. We certainly want to acknowledge the good work of our Health and Social Services staff and the Hospital Corporation as well, which has been doing an exceptional job. I want to just extend my appreciation to them as well. Without their support and without the support of Yukoners — acknowledging their patience — I would say that we would be in a far more dire situation, but we are not, and that is because of our partners and the good work that they are doing.

Mr. Cathers: The Liberals can try to spin this all they want, but the hospital's own report shows a \$4-million deficit for the last fiscal year. The witnesses confirmed that and that the needed funding wasn't even approved until we were in a state of emergency.

Providing core funding for our hospitals 12 months late is unacceptable. The Liberals neglected our hospitals right up until we were literally in a pandemic. The hospital witnesses told us — and I quote: "... it is a 180-day wait for an MRI..." and that "... our current wait time to see a visiting cardiologist is approximately five months." Yukoners are waiting for health care services while the Liberals have been neglecting hospital funding.

Will the Liberals now admit that their neglect for the hospital has been negatively impacting health services and

ensure that hospital core funding starts to actually keep pace with the increases in services and costs?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The member opposite is not listening to the answers from the minister. She started by saying that, absolutely, increases have happened over the last four years to that core funding for the Hospital Corporation, but yet the member opposite is saying that he only figured out when they appeared as witnesses that there are pressures at the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, what I have seen under the leadership of the current Minister of Health and Social Services was creating strong, respectful partnerships and working together collaboratively with health care and individuals for the well-being of all Yukoners — and that is by working in partnership with the Hospital Corporation, working in partnership with her other lead, with Housing as well. But, more importantly, if we went back to the Office of the Auditor General's scathing report of the Yukon Party's acute care policies and the Peachey report that came out of that asking for collaborative care of government, we had to wait until the leadership of this government to actually start implementing that collaborative care model.

Our government believes that the best way to care for Yukoners is to integrate our health services by offering health care that provides health to the whole person — the situations and their supports, as well as their physical health — and we can make sure that they have access to the services that they need to be healthy. That comes with increased funding to the Hospital Corporation — compared to when the Yukon Party was in — that comes to increased supports and services, and that comes under the current leadership of the current minister.

Question re: Yukon Fish and Game Association funding

Mr. Istchenko: Over the past several years, the relationship between the Liberals and the Yukon hunting community has declined considerably — from sending mixed messages on the law of general application, to the cancelled Finlayson caribou hunt, and now the government's proposal for limiting moose hunting. The hunting community has increasingly felt like an afterthought for this government.

Disagreements can happen, but the Liberal government sent a very clear message in this year's budget. They cut the annual budget for the Yukon Fish and Game Association and let them know that a further cut is coming next year.

So, what message is the Minister of Environment sending to the Yukon hunting community by cutting the annual budget of the Yukon Fish and Game Association?

Hon. Ms. Frost: So, our government has been working to keep Yukoners safe. We have provided many opportunities to work with our partners. The Fish and Wildlife Management Board is a key instrument, of course, for fish and wildlife management in Yukon with respect to the self-government agreements. We work very closely and collaboratively with the renewable resources councils — sufficient resources are in the Yukon to provide the engagements that are required to allow us to look at addressing many of the concerns that are brought to our attention.

I am happy to say that the Yukon Fish and Game Association is receiving funding to continue its business in terms of meeting its membership needs. I can say that there are many opportunities for engagement, and we would be happy to work with Yukoners and give Yukoners an opportunity to participate in a lot of the good work that's happening right now.

We have successfully implemented, let's say, some of the initiatives that were left to lag by the Yukon Party — the Dhaw Ghro management plan; the Peel land use plan; the engagement and initiatives around the Dawson district land use plan; the ATAC road. There are many successful initiatives that require partnerships, and I look forward to further questions.

Mr. Istchenko: I don't believe that I got an answer. I asked what message the minister was sending to Yukon's hunting community by cutting the budget of the Yukon Fish and Game Association. The Yukon Fish and Game Association offers amazing programs, and they encourage Yukoners to get outdoors and promote wildlife conservation and management. Like most non-governmental organizations, the Yukon Fish and Game Association operates on a fairly small, tight budget, so a 25-percent cut to their annual contribution from the Yukon government really hurts. It could mean one less family fishing day or one less Yukon women's outdoors event.

Will the minister just change course and restore the budget of the Yukon Fish and Game Association, please?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the Yukon Fish and Game Association for its efforts to reach into Yukon and provide opportunities for women and children and educational opportunities. We will continue to work with the Yukon Fish and Game Association, as I have indicated. We have given them sufficient resources within the budget.

If, through this exercise, it's deemed insufficient, we will continue to work with them, and we would like to work with the department and work with the association as we go through this fiscal year to determine the efforts that are put forward and whether or not we can increase the resources. If we are able to deliver through other methods, then we will look at collaborative approaches.

I want to just again extend our appreciation to the members of the Yukon Fish and Game Association for their part in educating Yukoners. I want to just say that there are opportunities for us to continue to collaborate, and I look forward to those conversations.

Mr. Istchenko: Cutting the budget of the Yukon Fish and Game Association sends a pretty clear message to Yukoners who like to hunt. Even worse: Prior to signing the contribution agreement, the government insisted on opposing a clause that would require any communication from the association to be approved by the department. This is effectively a gag order imposed on the organization by the Liberals. This gag order was aimed at preventing the Yukon Fish and Game Association from speaking up on behalf of its members — which is their right — and criticizing decisions that it felt weren't in the best interests of its members.

But thankfully, Mr. Speaker, after seeking a legal opinion, the Yukon Fish and Game Association pushed back and got the Liberal gag order removed. But it still raises a question: Why

did the Liberals try to impose a gag order on the Yukon Fish and Game Association?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Certainly, the objective of this government is not to put a gag order on any organization or any individual. We demonstrated that we work in a collaborative approach with all of our partners. We have structures that have been established in terms of how we do engagement across the Yukon. I want to just acknowledge again that there are tools and mechanisms available to us and we use those effectively.

I want to just say thank you again to the many partners that we have in the Yukon for their expertise, their advice, and their guidance as we look at the structures around fish and wildlife management. The approaches that we take have to be in the best interests of conservation management; they have to be in the best interests of fish and wildlife; they have to be in the best interests of the environment and the ecological requirements to support and enhance the way of life of the indigenous peoples of this country and this territory. The parameters that have been established for us allow us to engage through those mechanisms.

I am pleased that the Yukon Fish and Game Association has a huge membership. Members — my friends — are part of the Yukon Fish and Game Association and they also provide advice to this government. I continue to look forward to their input and their collaboration.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 346

Clerk: Motion No. 346, standing in the name of Ms. White.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to support front-line workers through the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- (1) extending the wage top-up program for essential workers beyond 16 weeks; and
- (2) ensuring employees can apply directly to the wage top-up program for essential workers if their employer does not apply on their behalf.

Ms. White: Today, I'm happy to speak to this motion about the wage top-up program for essential workers. Before I get to this motion itself, though, I want to be very clear: Every worker deserves a living wage whether we're in a pandemic or not; it's a question of dignity.

I think about J. S. Woodsworth and a quote that rings near and dear to me, and it says: "What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all." With that, I commit to all Yukon workers that I'll continue to fight for them. I will fight for their right to a decent

wage — and that's a living wage — until that's a reality for everyone.

We know that a living wage is far from the reality of many Yukoners. Our minimum wage currently sits at \$13.71 an hour. The living wage to support a family of four with both parents who are working full time in Whitehorse while accessing all existing support programs, both federally and territorially, is over \$19 per hour.

When the pandemic arrived and it became obvious that many essential workers were not making a salary they deserve, that's when we saw the gap. It's nice to be called a hero or to have your work recognized, but when you bring home a paycheque that doesn't allow you to pay your rent, applause and praise are only worth so much.

When the flaws in our system became so painfully obvious, that's when the government had to act, and that's when the wage top-up program was announced. It's a top-up for all essential workers who make less than \$20 an hour. A worker can access up to \$4 an hour to bring their salary up to a maximum of \$20 an hour.

Let's be clear: This wage subsidy doesn't replace a living wage. It's temporary, and it is government subsidizing employers so that employees can earn a living wage. It's not ideal, but it puts money in the pockets of the lowest paid workers. In the middle of a pandemic, this is an important stop-gap solution.

Initially, the program was capped at four months, or 16 weeks, for these workers. Yesterday, after I asked the minister about it, it was announced that the program was renewed for another four months, so now it's up to a total of 32 weeks. That's a good step, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the minister for that, but it's still not enough.

We're on month 8 of this pandemic, and the maximum that a worker can access this program is for eight months. What happens next? This program is based on the idea that essential workers deserve a living wage because of the critical work that they're doing during a pandemic. This pandemic will last for more than eight months, so why do these workers only deserve a living wage for part of the pandemic? That's the question that we're left with.

Once a worker has used up all eight months of the wage top-up, they will still be doing the exact same work. They will still be in the middle of a pandemic, but they'll be bringing home roughly \$600 less a month. Losing up to \$600 a month is a huge deal. It just doesn't make sense. We would like to see a commitment from this government that this program will be in place throughout the pandemic. It's about a question of fairness.

The second aspect of this motion is administrative, but it is no less important to Yukon workers. One big flaw in the program that we see is that it can only be accessed by employers on behalf of their employees. The government has made it sound like this is just a matter of giving information to employers, but unfortunately, that is not the case. There is no doubt in my mind that most employers would do this for their employees, and we are happy to hear about the 1,300 employees whose employers did access the first four months of

this benefit, but some employees didn't receive this support because their employers didn't fill out the paperwork.

The minister might make it sound like we should just tell them who this is, but we have already done this. When employees in this situation contacted our office, we directed them to reach out to the department, and we know that staff in the department did all they could — so, hats off to them. We know that they reached out to employers, they explained the program and offered assistance in completing the application, yet some still didn't do it. The department knows who these employers are, but currently there is just no way that the money can get to the workers if the employer refused to do their part, and that is not fair because this program is not a benefit for employers; this is support for workers.

I also have no doubt that some of the workers in this situation didn't approach me, and I don't pretend to know all of those who missed out on that support. Maybe they don't have a good relationship with their employers and they don't want to risk making it worse, or maybe their company is a large multinational that only has an employee or two in Yukon, and they won't bother with government paperwork.

So, there are many situations that could explain why this administrative approach is preventing workers from getting the benefit that they deserve. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I can understand that administratively, from the government perspective, it might be much easier to administer this benefit through employers. I have no problem if the government wants to continue working with employers in getting this benefit to their employees, but there has to be a backup process. There needs to be some workaround for employees whose employer is not cooperating to get them the money and the support that they deserve. The wage top-up program is for employees; it is for workers. It is not for employers, so it makes no sense for employees or workers to be penalized for whatever reason if their employer doesn't apply on their behalf.

I am absolutely confident that the hard-working folks at the Department of Economic Development can figure out a way for these employees to get what they deserve — to get the support that they deserve. The department could continue reaching out to employers, giving them information and helping with the process, but if the department realizes that a given employer is just not engaging and not filling out the application on behalf of their employees, there should be a separate process for workers to apply on their own, because they still deserve the support and they still deserve this wage top-up.

Mr. Speaker, we are in Yukon, and our population is small. We have the opportunity to right a wrong for some Yukon workers. I hope that the minister will demonstrate that he can work with outside and opposition feedback and act on the suggestions that will help strengthen this government program that has been announced under his portfolio. I have the utmost confidence in the ability of our civil service to develop a workaround for workers who are denied this benefit through no fault of their own. All that is missing is a clear directive to that effect from the minister, so I hope that he will make this commitment today, and I look forward to the conversations that follow.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I want to thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing forward Motion No. 346 today. Essential workers have continued to provide the services that we need every day since the beginning of the pandemic. We are so very thankful for this. Our government was pleased to announce the initial program back in May, which could be applied retroactively to March 15. We were also happy to announce the extension of this program just yesterday, which will run through to February 15, 2021.

The Yukon essential workers income support program provides essential workers with a top-up of either \$4 per hour or an amount that would bring their wages to \$20 per hour, whichever was less, for 16 weeks. For this program, Yukon workers providing essential and critical services listed in annex 1 and 2 of Yukon government's guidelines for the delivery of critical and essential services qualify. The Yukon essential workers income support program provided a wage increase to more than 1,300 essential staff at over 100 businesses between March 15 and October 3.

These businesses and their employees are located all across Yukon, from Old Crow to Watson Lake, and represent a number of sectors — retail, accommodation, food services, health and social assistance, administrative support, real estate, transportation, warehousing, agriculture, and forestry. Workers who have already received the benefit during the original program period are eligible to receive the wage top-up again. We urge employers to take advantage of this.

Just this afternoon, we received a letter from the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce identifying their support that this program would continue and identifying that they would advocate on behalf of the program to work with employers and ensure that employers have the right supports and advocate to ensure that programs such as this are used to their fullest and that workers who have the opportunity to receive this benefit do receive this benefit.

To date, one of the challenges, I'll say, is that — yesterday during Question Period, the Leader of the Third Party identified the fact that there were individuals who had not had the opportunity to receive these funds previously because their employers had issues with the program or didn't want to opt in or, as we just said, maybe didn't want to do the paperwork — whatever it may be. Again, as stated yesterday, I will work with our department to ensure that we reach out to those businesses. There's a bit of a difference today in what we're hearing in the opening statement from the Leader of the Third Party. It was identified that the information concerning those businesses or employees was forwarded to the Department of Economic Development.

This morning, I requested, through the deputy minister, to find out if there were businesses that did not opt in to this for particular reasons that they may have had with the program. Once again, I haven't received anything yet — not to say that we may not get it this afternoon or tomorrow.

Also, it's interesting that, yesterday, the Leader of the Third Party, during the media scrum, said that there was no opportunity to share that information with me, but today the

comment is that actually the information was shared but was shared with the department. I think anybody who knows the tenacious and passionate approach of the Leader of the Third Party would say — I don't think, at any time, as an MLA, that individual wouldn't make the opportunity to share that information if they were passionate about it. I think I have always tried to make myself available to those things.

Again, what we know to date is that there are some businesses — we don't know which ones they are. We don't know how many there are. We think there are three, four, or five.

Again, I'm looking at this, and until I find some information, I feel like we're moving to solve a problem that may not exist. If it does exist, then we'll work through it.

Now, one of the things that may help with employers opting in with these would be the fact that the Government of Yukon did receive some concerns during the first iteration of the program that the \$50 administration fee paid out to applying businesses did not cover the additional cost involved with raising the employee wages — those would include the Canada Pension Plan remittances and employment insurance premiums.

One of the changes that we did make — and our government recognizes the concerns of employers — and so we have raised the administrative fee that employers receive from \$50 to \$100 — so that has doubled — per employee. The program was set out to be employer-driven as the payments are taxable income to employees, making it necessary for the source deductions to be calculated from the wage top-up.

But what I'm struggling to understand is why the Member for Takhini-Kopper King didn't reach out to me directly to relay the concerns that she claims to have heard from employees whose employers were not applying on their behalf — no letters, no e-mails. On top of that, she waited until the initial program wrapped up to raise the issue in the Assembly. That's very interesting.

The team of employees from the Department of Economic Development have been working incredibly hard, and I appreciate the kind words from the Leader of the Third Party to the work that they've been doing to ensure that businesses and their employees are supported through these difficult times.

I know that one of the key opportunities for us was having a chance to meet with organized labour to understand what the challenges were. We talked about that yesterday a bit. Labour reached out and had some discussions about wanting to ensure that their voice was heard. I think that, from working with labour before — whether in the role of a shop steward or negotiating collective agreements on behalf of union members — I think that it's very important to be able to sit and hear their perspective. That then led to the opportunity to have senior people within those union groups as well reach out and to talk about what was happening in different jurisdictions.

I appreciate the fact that they touched on — we also brought in the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission to those meetings. It was echoed that this was not something that was happening in other jurisdictions. I know that having that opportunity to talk about what was happening

on the ground and then for us to take that information on behalf of the employees — in the same way that I'm offering up now — back to some of those organizations and companies — whether they be large retailers — and to be able to voice what we're hearing from government and request that those employers maybe tweak what they're doing or improve what they're doing to ensure the health and safety of those employees.

Again, I have heard the Leader of the Third Party saying that she'll fight for employees, but that's what was happening throughout the summer — to ensure that we were listening to those employees and understanding the interface between — in some cases, where there was a collective agreement in place, to ensure that was followed and that those individuals were safe and that the proper mitigation was put in place. I think that was something that was very helpful — to be guided by those individuals on things that we could help business do better and for us to understand their situation.

Again, concerning the Department of Economic Development — their commitment and dedication to developing and executing programs is deserving of recognition. I'm thankful to the team that I have an opportunity to work with. The department has regularly promoted all programs available, including this one.

There have been social media posts, proactive outreach to employers, and the chamber of commerce advertisements, in addition to the information available on yukon.ca.

This promotion will continue with the announcement of the extension, Mr. Speaker, with the goal of maximizing the number of participants. When the funding became available through the Government of Canada, the Department of Economic Development spoke with a number of businesses to get input on how to best deliver funds to essential workers. The feedback received helped establish the initial program.

Ahead of the program extension, research was completed by the department through a survey to participants. So, again, we went through the program, looked at the balance of funding that we had, and looked at ways to best impact analysis. My hope would be that, if there is information that's still forthcoming from the department and the Leader of the Third Party had directed or had reached out to the department, we will endeavour to get the details of that. If that has occurred, then information that was provided would have been part of the data that was analyzed to ensure that the program was improved on in the next iteration.

I think that interaction between the Leader of the Third Party with the department — as was stated — would have been helpful — or was helpful in the creation of this. Again, I'm speaking in a form where I don't have — I'm going on what I've heard and I'm still endeavouring to get the details of that communication flow.

The survey that we provided asked the following questions: As the current program concludes, would you consider applying again if a similar program is implemented in the near future — if each employer was provided with \$50 for each registered employee? Was your participation in the program impacted in any way by the current employer

compensation? We asked: Is there any other feedback as well in regard to the program?

Here are some of things that we heard in that analysis: “I thought that the program was great and extremely helpful.” “Employees were very grateful and otherwise would have left to find employment elsewhere.” “Easy to follow application process, and Shirley was very easy to work with” — a shout-out to Shirley as well, in the department. “Good program. Cost of living was high, so it has helped the employees.” “I applaud Yukon government for implementing this program.” “Very appreciative of the program to be able to provide that for their staff.” Another quote: “Well run, easy to apply for, and happy that it was administered through Ec. Dev.” Another comment: “Great program, helpful staff. Initially seemed complicated; however, once staff began the application, they realized it was very straightforward.”

So, as I indicated earlier, there was also feedback with regard to the cost to administer the program, with many expressing the need to increase the administrative fee. This feedback was incorporated into the extension that we spoke about earlier.

We will continue to advertise the program to inform the employers and workers of the extension and we will continue to urge employers to apply for the program to support essential workers here in Yukon. I would be happy, again, to work with my colleagues from all parties represented in the Yukon Legislative Assembly to ensure that the programs we deliver have the greatest impact possible in this very difficult time. However, employers — we believe — are best suited to deliver the Yukon essential workers income program, and that is how we plan to deliver the extension of the program through February 15, 2021.

Also, what was identified or spoken to in the initial comments today was that the individuals who had maybe previously not received that — again, we are going to try to search to get which businesses may have not used it. A good point is that those businesses can now use it; those employees can still feel the full impact of this program. Again, we just need to figure out which businesses have not.

If this is the case again where there is a business and the partial reason was that they felt that the incurred costs in the remittances was a barrier for them to do it, I think that the adjustment that has been made here with the doubling from \$50 to \$100 to offset the MERCs should be something that makes this easier to use and does not put a greater burden on those individuals.

Just for the Assembly — as members are here representing many different corners — I touched on this yesterday, but just for the record and for Hansard — by the numbers, paid out as of November 18: Whitehorse has seen the largest amount, at almost 95 percent, at \$1,603,613; Haines Junction is the next largest area that has used this at \$30,322; Dawson City has seen an expenditure by businesses there of about \$22,041; Teslin is at \$11,162; Carcross is at \$8,217; Carmacks is at \$4,129; Watson Lake is at \$2,311; Keno is at \$2,174; and Old Crow is at \$1,846. For the communities that you might have noticed were missed, I have reached out to business owners. In some

cases, those businesses are owned by development corporations or First Nation governments. We have reached out to their leadership to let them know that the program exists. In some cases, the rate that individuals are paid surpasses what we have used here as a benchmark.

As well, as we move forward, if we are all dealing with one or two cases, I think the best approach — it will probably be a different perspective from the Leader of the Third Party — and course of action for us with one or two businesses is to communicate with them. We can have the department communicate.

I want to be respectful of the employees. I don't want them to feel uncomfortable. They can share that information with a third party anonymously and then just let us know which business — or we can reach out, or we can have the chamber — there are lots of different ways to do it, but I think we can reach out to those businesses and let them know this program exists, but if we have one or two businesses — hopefully, as well, that the increase and the administrative grant that we're providing per participant also alleviates any of the pressure on this — I think that the majority of employers are happy to be able to support their front-line workers with something like this.

But if there are one or two cases — or three or four, half a dozen cases — I don't know; we haven't seen them yet — but if there is, I think our first option is to reach out and speak to them. Restructuring a program — of course, the individuals who are in our policy teams and delivering these services have the talent to work these, but I believe that the best use of time, energy, and work — now that we have tweaked this, let's use a program that's in place before going back through a process to fix it, when we haven't seen if it's actually going to meet the total needs.

My sense is — let's see if there's a problem, before we start changing our program to make other solutions. We don't have the concrete evidence of that, and if we do, we have some ways to remedy that beforehand.

As you can tell, we think that the program that is in place is a good program; we think it's effective; we think we have other tools that we can use to ensure maximum participation. Again, I don't think that there's a reason here for us to be supporting this motion, because I think what happened is that this was a motion the Third Party wanted to bring forward. The timing was unfortunate in that we have been working on this and it was rolling out. I approved of our notes and it went out, and then there's a bit of redundancy now in this motion that we are debating today.

I look forward to comments from other members of the Assembly.

Mr. Kent: I'm going to be very brief in my comments today. I will be the only one speaking on behalf of the Official Opposition to this motion. We thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing it forward. It certainly identified some potential deficiencies within the existing program. We do support the program, and, of course, we do support essential workers.

One of the issues that I wanted to just put on the record here is something that we've heard from some of the smaller retailers here in Whitehorse. I'm sure it affects others throughout the Yukon as well. I'm hoping that the minister can take note of this as the ongoing evaluation of the program continues. Perhaps they're able to pivot just to address certain situations, but again, I think that one of the unintended consequences for some of the small retailers is that they ended up competing for their staff with some of the subsidized employers. Some of the smaller mom-and-pop shops on Main Street here in Whitehorse ended up losing staff to some of the companies that had the wage top-up. I just flag that for the minister and hope that he and his officials can work that through, because that's certainly something that I had heard and other members in our caucus had heard right off the top, as I mentioned, as an unintended consequence for what this program was intended to do, recognizing that these programs, of course, were rolled out very quickly and were designed to achieve a specific goal. Again, that's just one of the consequences that was identified to me.

With that, I will close my remarks and thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing this forward, and we will be supporting this motion here today.

Ms. Hanson: I just wanted to say that I'm perplexed by the Minister of Economic Development's comments this afternoon. I'm perplexed for a couple of reasons, and he may not be interested in hearing them, but I will say why I'm perplexed.

What the Leader of the New Democratic Party put forward today wasn't something that she fabricated. The comments that I heard from the Minister of Economic Development remind me of a word that we're not supposed to use in this Legislative Assembly, but it is a form of manipulation in which a person sows seeds of doubt, making people question whether or not they actually meant what they said or if their perception of the issue is accurate. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the Leader of the New Democratic Party's perception of the issue is accurate because it does reflect the lived experience of people who have reached out to her.

I heard the Leader of the New Democratic Party make repeated acknowledgements of the efforts of the Department of Economic Development staff to work with recalcitrant employers, to work with them to try to get them to recognize the importance of their employees being able to access this bridge financing and give them something toward a living wage. What she was suggesting was not a holus-bolus change to a program that those same officials developed at great speed. It was simply looking to find out whether or not there was, in my words, a compassionate administrative approach.

Despite what the Minister of Economic Development said, as he repeatedly tried to sow doubt as to whether or not there is any veracity to what the Leader of the NDP has put forward on this floor today — is the lived experience. Despite that, if there are one, two, or five, does that dismiss that lived experience of those families and of those individuals? Should we not be concerned about them? I think that we should be.

I am disappointed that the Minister of Economic Development has demonstrated again the rigidity of this government. They talk about working with the opposition. When the Leader of the New Democratic Party puts forward an idea that embraces the work that was done and the response yesterday to extend the program, but points out a small but significant omission that impacts the daily lives of Yukon citizens — whether it is a handful or more, they are Yukon citizens. Why should they be denied that because the minister isn't really sure about the veracity of the comments, the statements, and the motion put forward by the Leader of the New Democratic Party?

To sow doubt like that, Mr. Speaker, really calls into question the integrity of the process in this Legislative Assembly. I thought we came here to speak truth, so when a member puts forward a motion like this, I trust that it is not a game. I trust that they're putting it forward because it's a valid social policy issue — in this case, a socio-economic policy issue. The scope of it may be narrow in terms of its application, but it affects some Yukon citizens.

So, the Leader of the New Democratic Party is simply asking for some flexibility — some nimbleness in response — by the Yukon Liberal government. Clearly, that's not on.

Again, I just express my regret and my disappointment, and I anticipate that we'll hear all sorts of bowing down to the leadership about this being the way we do it. I'm sorry — that's not the way it should be done. I'm disappointed.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I want to thank the Leader of the Third Party for bringing this motion forward today. I think that it's a very important topic, and I'm happy to speak to it. I want to thank all the speakers who have had an opportunity to speak so far. I want to just address one of the points that was just made by the member opposite. I don't believe that my colleague, the Minister of Economic Development, was dismissing the experience of workers. I heard the Minister of Economic Development say that he wants to work with the opposition — and if they would please share the information in order to help. That's what I heard. I wanted to just address that off the top.

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the essential workers who have done a tremendous job during this pandemic. Without them, our essential needs would not have been met. They are truly our everyday heroes, and we recognize the significance of these workers in our Yukon Territory and throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a couple of minutes to really acknowledge them. They are our caregivers, our medical workers, our first responders, and technicians. They are workers supporting groceries, pharmacies, and hospitality. They are all people providing communication, Internet, and information, and all people providing transportation and transporting goods to Yukon — our truck drivers, our bus drivers, our school bus drivers, and the workers in the upstream supply chain for essential services needed to support critical infrastructure.

They are all so vital, and there are many more, of course, Mr. Speaker. They are our friends and our families. They have

played a critical role in our lives, providing us with a lifeline during this very hard time — these hard times.

Again, as my colleague, the Minister responsible for Economic Development, stated earlier, our Liberal government took action to ensure that low-income essential workers were financially supported.

I would also like to reflect a little bit on some of the other supports that we've put in place throughout the pandemic. We were quick and had an early response to ensure that our business community was supported through a number of really key programs. One of them is this essential workers program — but the Yukon business relief program, the sick leave benefits. Most recently, we have expanded some of those programs to include specific business supports for the accommodation sector. We're working toward the non-accommodation tourism sectors as well and not-for-profits.

The reason that I mention this is because our government responded quickly and put in place the programs that were needed to support our business community and to support and ensure that businesses could remain open and that folks were able to continue working. We're seeing sectors close throughout the country again. I just want to express my gratitude to all Yukoners who have adjusted and who have done everything that they possibly can to ensure the safety of Yukoners and to also ensure that we have the goods and services that we need. I think that we all can agree how blessed we are to live in this territory and to have what we do.

As the Minister of Tourism and Culture, it goes without saying that essential workers are key to our industry. Essential workers have allowed our restaurants to stay open, our hotels to remain clean and welcoming and safe, our gas stations and supermarkets to function properly — all of those are great supports for Yukoners and travellers as well. When we were receiving visitors from BC, we would not have been able to sustain travel without these essential workers.

As the Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate, my heart goes out to our most vulnerable population. Women are the hardest hit — as I referred to today in our tribute to the 16 days to end gender-based violence — impacted by increased levels of gender-based violence but also in the economy.

I want to just reflect a little bit on that from that perspective. We are well aware of those issues, and we're working to address them. One of the areas, in terms of the — as we talk about the shadow pandemic — this is from the United Nations Foundation. They stated that: "The COVID-19 pandemic is clearly aggravating economic inequalities faced by women. A new study suggests that '... the COVID-19 pandemic will have a disproportionate negative effect on women and their employment opportunities. The effects of this shock are likely to outlast the actual epidemic.'"

Studies show that "... the sectors that have been most affected by the COVID-19 crisis so far are those with high levels of women workers, including the restaurant and hospitality business, as well as the..." — entire — "... travel sector." Daycare workers and childcare workers are essential to help women get back into the labour force.

On the other side of the reality — I want to just, before I get to this next point, say that we know that women are particularly hard hit by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We're working with our partners to minimize the impacts and to ensure that women in the community are supported now more than ever.

We put in place — as I said, sick leave programs, access to funding, funded childcare for essential workers, and eviction protection are all ways our government has been supporting women through the pandemic. I think that there are a lot of different angles and today we're just talking specifically about this fund. But I do think that you have to look at it in a broad sense to appreciate the hard work and thoughtfulness that has gone into responding to this global pandemic that we find ourselves in.

In terms of violence against women throughout the pandemic — but in general, violence against women is three times higher in the north and three times higher yet for indigenous women. Another United Nations report outlines: "Crowded homes, substance abuse, limited access to services and reduced peer support are exacerbating these conditions. Before the pandemic, it was estimated that one in three women will experience violence during their lifetimes. Many of these women are now trapped in their homes with their abusers."

For those reasons — and for many more — it's crucial to support our essential workers. This is what our government has been doing all the way and will continue to do. I want to reflect — again, the Minister of Economic Development clearly outlined the program, the work that has gone into it — the announcement yesterday — and has really offered the Leader of the Third Party an opportunity to work together to ensure that we provide the information that is needed to address the issues. As the minister has stated, this is — we've extended the program. I know that we're debating it now, but there really is no need to support this motion today in the way that it has been presented. I will leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, she will close debate on Motion No. 346.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. White: Eye-opening, I guess, is part of it. It is interesting to me — you know, when I communicate with ministers and if it is about a specific thing, I have to have casework letters and that means that someone needs to give me consent to be able to speak about them or their issue. So, when people would stop me and say that they hadn't been able to get the top-up because of their employers, there was no casework letter. What I did say was — I suggested that people contact the department to ask. I guess one of the questions that I would put back to the minister is: Did the department collect that information if an employee contacted them?

You know, when the minister was listing out the amounts and the communities — and I really appreciate that, and I will go back through Hansard to see it — but the idea that a community like Watson Lake — less than \$3,000 went in for wage top-up — makes me question if everyone there makes

more than \$20 an hour. I mean, there are a fair amount of businesses and a fair amount of workers in Watson Lake, so if they all earn more than \$20, I think that is fantastic. Hearing about other communities and the amount of money that had gone into those communities to support workers — I question if all the workers who were able to access or should have been supported by that program were able to access that program. That was all. I wasn't asking that the program get re-written; I was asking that there be a workaround so that employees could access it.

I guess the decision could be made that it is about me and my lack of action or what I should have done. I think that is an unfortunate way to look at it. As the Third Party, we have six questions a week — and if it makes the minister feel any better, I have had that question for a while and other things kept popping up. Finally, yesterday, after hearing again from someone who wasn't able to access it and knowing that the program closed, it was like, okay, now I just have to get it forward.

It's unfortunate to hear some parts of the debate. I am hopeful that the folks who weren't able to access it the first time around — maybe their employers will change their mind and then they will be able to collect that initial 16 weeks and from this point forward, because up to \$600 a month is a substantial amount.

I guess, with that, I will wait for the vote.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Mr. Adel: Disagree.

Mr. Hutton: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Mr. Gallina: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are seven yea, nine nay.

Speaker: The nays have it. I declare the motion defeated.

Motion No. 346 negatived

Motion No. 345

Clerk: Motion No. 345, standing in the name of Mr. Istchenko.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Klwane:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to support the recovery of the restaurant and bar industry by eliminating the automatic annual federal excise tax increase on beer, wine, and spirits.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to this motion today. As we all know, the tourism industry in the Yukon is facing a catastrophe. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions have created an incredibly dire situation for the entire industry. In September, the executive director of the Tourism Industry Association put it bluntly by saying — and I quote: “We are looking at potentially a complete collapse of the industry.”

One of the sectors in this industry that has been particularly hard hit has been the restaurant and bar industry. When the pandemic first hit, they were one of the first sectors to face limits and even complete closures. Since then, they have struggled to reopen and recover. The recent second wave of the pandemic and further public health measures now threaten to limit even the slight recovery that some of the restaurants and bars had begun to see.

While everyone recognizes the importance of taking these measures to protect public health, there are economic and social consequences to the businesses and the workers. This is obviously concerning not just for the owners of these businesses, but for hundreds of Yukoners who are employed by them. It is well understood that the restaurant and bar industries are major employers across the Yukon, so we have been looking for ways to support these businesses. I know that both the federal and territorial governments have offered a lot in terms of supports for the businesses; there is no doubt about that. We support many of the economic and business relief programs and supports that have been put in place by the various levels of government. I think we have spoken about those in this House many times, but we think we can and should do more.

When some of our Yukon Party team learned about the Canadian Chamber of Commerce “Our Restaurants” initiative, we took notice of some of the policy suggestions that were being presented. In particular, we noted that the campaign to repeal the automatic annual federal excise tax increase on beer, wine, and spirits was an important policy recommendation they had identified. In fact, there is an active campaign underway. I don't know if you know this, but it's led by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce to encourage the federal government to take this action.

The letter has been signed by hundreds of businesses across the country. This morning, the last time I checked, there was only one business from the Yukon that had signed the letter, which was Yukon Brewing, but I understand that the Canadian Chamber of Commerce is hosting information sessions for Yukon businesses in the upcoming week, so we hope there will be more.

Before I say much about this campaign, I should note some of the background on the tax itself. The new tax structure was introduced in 2017 by the federal Liberal government. In short, the 2017 budget imposed a two-percent hike in beer tax, which at the time added five cents to a case of 24 bottles. This caught a lot of attention at the time, but what was less noticeable was the increase on beer, wine, and spirits every year at the rate of inflation. The escalator provision means the tax increases every year automatically.

This means that these tax increases never need to be tabled in Parliament, never discussed, as it is the standard course of action of a Liberal tax increase. At that time, this measure was criticized by several industry organizations, academics, political journalists, and notably, the Senate. In fact, in their review of the budget bill, the Senate tried to delete the escalator tax, but unfortunately, the Liberal majority in Parliament at the time forced these automatic tax increases back in.

There are plenty of excellent explanations out there about why the new tax structure introduced by the federal Liberals was a bad policy, but I think the submission to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance by Beer Canada on May 26, 2017, is worth citing. I won't go on at length, but I will encourage listeners to review the document.

Beer Canada made six arguments at the time for repealing the excise tax escalator, and those were: The escalator is too rigid and insensitive to regional economic circumstances; this unnecessarily adds to a challenging and uncertain business outlook; it conceals future tax increases from democratic oversight; it contradicts the Liberal government's commitment to evidence-based decisions; it is inconsistent with Canada's national alcohol strategy; and the final one, it was opposite from the direction recommended by the Prime Minister's economic advisory panel. Despite the many arguments against moving forward with this new escalator tax, the federal Liberal government did so anyway. Since then, a new tax structure has been in place and has been rising annually ever since.

Let me return to the recent campaign by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. On November 4, the chamber made public a letter sent to the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance minister Chrystia Freeland on October 30. The letter from the Hon. Perrin Beatty, President and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, was at the time co-signed by 261 other businesses and associations. Since that time, the number of signatures has increased, and the number of those signatures is continuing to increase.

The letter urges the federal government to repeal or freeze its planned excise tax on beverage alcohol currently scheduled for April 1, 2021. Let me quote from the letter — and I quote: “We are writing on behalf of Canadian restaurants and the hospitality industry, agricultural and other supply chain members, alcohol producers and consumers to ask that Finance Canada repeal the alcohol escalator tax in the government's upcoming update to Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. The escalator tax is an automatic increase to excise duties that has gone up four times in the last three years and is scheduled to increase again on April 1, 2021 further driving up

the price of beverage alcohol for consumers and businesses that are struggling.”

It went on to say: “Canada has some of the highest alcohol taxes in the world. On average, 47 per cent of the price of beer in Canada is from federal or provincial taxes. Approximately 65 per cent of the price of wine is due to taxes and on average 80 per cent of the price of spirits is taxes. The escalator tax increases that tax burden every single year on April 1.

“The pandemic has resulted in a collapse in bar and restaurant sales for all beverage alcohol. Another increase to the escalator tax will increase hospitality industry costs, affecting their ability to attract customers and retain employees while they try to survive and recover from government-imposed shutdowns. As new indoor dining restrictions are implemented in various parts of the country and patio season ends, tens of thousands of restaurants and bars are in danger of closing their doors permanently. An increase in excise duties will also hurt Canadian brewers, wineries and distillers who will lose access to much needed capital that they would otherwise invest in their operations, employees and products as they try to navigate the huge loss of sales to restaurants and bars.

“When the escalator tax was first introduced, we expressed concern that a permanent automatic increase in duties every year was not warranted given Canada's exceedingly high alcohol tax rates. We also believe that the escalator shields tax increases from necessary parliamentary scrutiny and approval and that the rigid and automatic nature of the escalator does not allow the government to account for economic circumstances such as those we are experiencing right now.

“Now is not the time to increase alcohol taxes on middle-class Canadians, our struggling restaurants and bars and domestic alcohol producers. Our request is that you repeal the escalator tax through the fall update to Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan or the next federal budget. At a minimum to support Canada's economic recovery, the escalator tax increase should be frozen so it does not increase excise duty rates on April 1, 2021.”

That was the letter. So, as members will note — and I read it in the House today — the Canadian chamber makes some excellent, excellent points. I also wanted to note that the Leader of the Yukon Party had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce last week to discuss the initiative. Following that meeting, we decided to add our support to the Canadian chamber's campaign. Earlier today in this House, I tabled a letter from the Yukon Party leader to the federal Minister of Finance. In fact, he noted that — and I quote: “... this excise tax ... will add to the costs on the hospitality industry and will affect the ability of those businesses to attract customers, retain employees and try to survive and recover from government-imposed shutdowns or restrictions.”

Another quote out of that letter that was written by the Leader of the Yukon Party: “This is especially true in the Yukon, where our businesses rely considerably on revenue from visitors and tourists.”

This motion that I have put forward supports this campaign led by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Its passage today would send a signal — and I say this for all members in here. Its passage today would send a signal to the federal government that there is broad support to repeal this misguided tax plan that was put forward by the federal Liberals back in 2017. Of the utmost importance, it will also send a signal to our hospitality sector — whether that hospitality sector is in Haines Junction, Dawson City, downtown Whitehorse, Watson Lake, or our communities that we have in the Yukon — that we are trying to find new ways to help them survive and recover from this health and economic crisis that we all face.

From what the Yukon government has said to date, I believe that we are in agreement about the challenges faced by this important sector of our economy. We said it on both sides of this House.

So, I am hopeful — very hopeful, actually — that they will agree with this motion, join us in supporting it, and demonstrate to Yukon businesses that, while we disagree about some things, we are indeed capable of coming together to find new ways to support our business community.

I will end with that for now, and I will look forward to hearing from others about this motion.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, thanks for the opportunity to rise today to speak to this motion. I want to begin by saying that we are supportive of restaurants, bars, and our hospitality sector, but I do want to note that, at all times — whenever I have worked with the hospitality sector and licensees, the other thing that we have always talked about — and what is also critically important — is social responsibility.

So, let me just start with what we have been doing for businesses broadly and for the hospitality sector. We put in place the business relief program here in the territory right away. It was an initiative brought forward by Economic Development and worked on by the Minister of Tourism and Culture and her team because they recognized the pressures that were coming on to the tourism sector — and how to make sure that we could get supports to our businesses as they navigated this pandemic.

We have just recently extended that to the end of March 2021. As we continue to move through the pandemic, we will continue to watch all of these programs, including the wage top-up that we were speaking about in the last motion. All of these programs that we're talking about continue to be responsive to the state of the emergency that we have here, how to support Yukoners, Yukon businesses, and Yukon workers, and how to keep people safe.

I will make this statement, even though it is somewhat obvious: The business relief program is open to the hospitality sector, and there are some businesses that are taking advantage of it because they are in trouble. There are actually some businesses in the hospitality sector that are doing okay, and they don't actually need that support right now. It really does depend, but I agree with the Member for Kluane that there is a deep concern in the hospitality sector right now.

I will also note that the business relief program works in partnership with CanNor and their northern business relief fund. I think that we came out first, and then, I think, CanNor developed their program to complement the work that we were doing, and we have been working closely together at all times.

Beyond this, I will also acknowledge that the Minister of Tourism and Culture announced, through a ministerial statement about a month and a half ago — early in October — about \$15 million identified over the next three years for tourism recovery and relief. I know that, since that time, the minister has announced several sectors that are supported — the accommodation sector and events was supported almost right away as the pandemic hit the territory and the country. I know that the minister has been meeting regularly — and her team has been meeting regularly — with the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, TIAY, to talk through how to develop the plan for other sectors, including hospitality. I'm sure we will hear something soon. I know that work has been ongoing.

At the same time, when the pandemic first hit and we saw the pressures on restaurants and bars, I started meeting with members of the Business Advisory Council, with reps from the chambers of commerce, and with licensees to talk about their concerns around their ability to survive as businesses during this pandemic and also to be able to continue to make it through.

I heard the member opposite — the Member for Kluane — talk about a “government-imposed shutdown”. I guess that we did choose, out of an abundance of safety for Yukoners, to close restaurants and bars. Again, that sort of suggested that we weren't considerate to bars and restaurants. I think that the way I would frame it is that we were considerate of Yukoners' health.

I have heard questions from the member opposite asking about why we don't open up to Alberta to allow tourism to come from Alberta. The response has always been that it is dependent on the epidemiology. That is what we are looking at — how to protect the health of Yukoners — and the health of Albertans, for that matter — and the health of Canadians. It is not that we are opposed to tourism from Alberta, but what we are looking at is how to protect the health of Yukoners. I am thankful that, after the five weeks of the Member for Copperbelt North bringing back the motion to this Legislature about whether or not the members of this Legislature support a state of emergency, we now know that all members of this Legislature do agree that we are in a state of emergency.

Similarly, with bars and restaurants — early in the pandemic, they were closed in order to protect the safety of Yukoners. They were allowed to open up in a phased manner as we worked through the phases of our recovery here in the territory. Currently, bars and restaurants can be open to up to 100 percent of capacity, but they also have to consider social distancing within. That is still making it difficult for them to operate fully and thus to be able to have a strong income.

What the member opposite did not mention when he talked about the national initiative — that, by the way, it is an inflationary rider on the excise of liquor, which I think is in a range of between one and three percent. If inflation is low —

as it is now — then it will be at the low end, so we're talking about a one-percent increase — so it's an inflationary rider.

What he didn't mention was that we have, since May of this year, decreased the cost to local licensees by an additional 13 percent. We've already given 13 percent, and what is being argued today is whether or not we should express our concern to the federal government about one percent.

The challenge that I have is that there was no mention of social responsibility by the member opposite. What I'll say is that when I've met with the industry here, with licensees, to talk to them about how to support them — at every turn, we as a corporation have said: "We do want to support you, but we need to address social responsibility as well." Because right now, during this pandemic, we also know that some people — certainly vulnerable folks — are turning to alcohol too much and the harms of alcohol — which we have every year — have now increased. Those harms are significant. It's not to say that everybody who consumes alcohol is suffering from harm, but it is to say that we have to be very careful that we are working to promote social responsibility and to foster responsible consumption — because as soon as it is not responsible consumption, the harms are significant.

In fact, today we had a tribute to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. I heard from members of this Legislature about concerns around wellness and substance use and how people stay safe during this time. We can't on the one hand look to support licensees and on the other hand ignore that problem; no — they need to be considered together. That's why I was concerned when I didn't hear any reference to social responsibility or the harms of alcohol from the member opposite when he stood to speak. Maybe his colleagues will speak about them when they get up.

When I talked with the licensees, we discussed what we could do over the very short term to get them some immediate relief, but we talked about how we needed to move that in a way which would address the issues of social responsibility more.

Just, I think, two months ago — sort of later in September — I sat down — we had a one-day Zoom workshop with licensees to talk to them about how the Liquor Corporation could be supportive of restaurants and bars over time. In my opening remarks, I talked about social responsibility. I have met several times since then, over the phone, with some of the members of that panel and I know that they have asked us if we can extend our discount for a short time. We have agreed, but we have also said that we need to move on to other programs. I know that we do want to look at how to improve their profit margins and we do want to look at special-order processes for logistics for them, and we also want to look at online ordering. These are all things that we can work on to assist them, but at the same time, we need to always keep social responsibility as one of our prime objectives. You will know this, Mr. Acting Chair, as we brought in the new *Liquor Act* last fall.

I thank the Member for Kluane for tabling the letter today. I did have a look at it. Again, I didn't notice any reference to social responsibility in the letter from the Leader of the Official

Opposition. I will continue to say that, in my role as Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation, I will never divorce those two things. We need to address the challenges of alcohol if we are there to also support alcohol with our tourism sector and our hospitality sector — restaurants and bars.

I noted — as the member opposite was talking about some of the references from across the country, as people are working to look at this issue from the provinces — the provinces are in a different place from us, thankfully.

Where the Yukon has been — I don't want to say that we haven't had challenges; we absolutely have, in particular, thinking about our restaurants and bars. I know they have faced challenges. I understand that, but I do think that it is different in the provinces. They have had more restrictions. They have had more lockdowns. They have had more challenges with their second wave. At all times, we need to be a little bit humble about that, because if we don't make good decisions here, we could be facing similar challenges.

When the member talks about shutdowns — what we are doing, as a government, at all times, is looking to protect the health and safety of Yukoners, because the pandemic represents a lot of uncertainty, and I think Yukoners need consistent leadership and accurate information. It's critical during the pandemic.

The basic thing being asked for here — we have already provided supports for Yukoners and Yukon businesses, right now. We're working to find a more sustainable solution that will address the issue of social responsibility, because we recognize and acknowledge the harms of alcohol. I have previously tabled in this Legislature the analysis of the costs and harms of substances. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that the number one issue is alcohol. When you look at it and measure the impact that it has on our territory — it's significant. We need to be careful that we are not, in any way, increasing that or exacerbating that — in particular, during the pandemic.

While the first part of the motion — which talks about helping restaurants and bars and that industry to recover, that we will continue to support them — we don't support the motion, as it's worded here. We just continue to encourage that, as we talk about these issues as a territory or as representatives in this Legislature, we acknowledge the challenge of social responsibility at the same time.

Again, thank you to the member opposite for bringing forward this motion as part of their private members' motions. I guess that this was their priority. I am not saying that this is not an important issue; however, I was surprised to see that this was the priority, given all of the issues that we are facing as a territory. It is their prerogative which motion to prioritize and bring forward today and I look forward to further debate on the motion.

Mr. Cathers: I wasn't originally planning to speak to this, but I do have to rise in rebuttal to the Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and Community Services. It is unfortunate that this really seems again to be reflective of the Liberal government's attitude toward business, which can sometimes be characterized as "If it moves, tax it; if it stops

moving, subsidize it.” Unfortunately, in this particular situation, what I don’t think the member and his colleagues have understood is that the heart of the motion brought forward by my colleague, the Member for Kluane, is urging the Government of Canada, as one step in supporting the recovery of the restaurant and bar industry, to eliminate their new automatic annual federal excise tax increase on beer, wine, and spirits.

This is not a proposal for government to remove all current taxes, but simply to stop automatically increasing it — because it is one thing that will make it progressively harder for an industry that is already very much struggling as a result of the pandemic. It has seen significant effects here as well as across the country that have affected not just the owners of these bars and restaurants, but also their employees.

While the minister can use talking points about social responsibility all he wants, again, we are not proposing something that would increase the availability of alcohol or eliminate all taxes on it. We are simply asking the Government of Canada to recognize that, at a time when this sector of the economy is down, it’s not the time to keep adding new taxes and more burden on small business owners who are struggling right now to keep going and are looking at the future with concern about whether they can stand back up again and get back to where they were as prosperous businesses that contribute to the local economy as well as help their employees put food on the table.

So, we will, of course, close by encouraging the minister to reconsider the Liberals’ anti-business position on this motion. This is a great motion brought forward by my colleague, the Member for Kluane, and we have an excellent letter as well, written by Leader of the Yukon Party Currie Dixon to the federal minister regarding their current plan to keep raising the taxes on this sector of the economy. We would encourage the Liberals to rethink their pro-tax approach and instead adopt a pro-business approach, a pro-employee approach, and a pro-economy approach.

Ms. Hanson: You know, I had, honest to god, not intended to speak to this motion. I do find — I mean, to me, it is symbolic again, though, of what we have seen every Wednesday in this Legislative Assembly, where this could be easily resolved. If the Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation felt that it was important that this motion had the caveat of social responsibility added to it, they could have — like they do so many times — introduced a motion to amend the motion as put forward by the Member for Kluane.

As I understand it, the Member for Kluane was seeking to have this House basically say that this Liberal government joined with the opposition members to join and say to the federal Liberal government: “We think that there is an overstep here. We would like you to step back a bit during this period of time.”

The Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation knows — probably better than anyone else in this Legislative Assembly — how strongly I feel about his role — our role — with respect to the social responsibility aspect of the

Liquor Corporation. He also knows how strongly I feel about how that social responsibility aspect has been so woefully underplayed, both in the day-to-day activities and in the recent amendments to the legislation.

So, it is one thing to say — I mean, I have stood in this Legislative Assembly time and time again and pointed to the various reports — whether it is the chief medical officer of health’s reports or the *Putting People First* report or the aging-in-place report — time and time again. But at the same time, this minister, this government, has continued to divorce — basically, to effectively support privatization of our liquor sales, to allow the advertising and establishment of private liquor stores throughout the city, to say, on one hand, that we know the social impacts and we know the health impacts and the economic impacts of unfettered alcohol sales, but at the same time, profiting from those.

I’m finding it a little hard — it’s incongruous. There’s a lack of congruence between what’s being proposed — what’s being said as an objection to the motion put forward by the Member for Kluane — and the reality on the ground. I find that really difficult to accept. I’m ambivalent, quite frankly, on the merits of this motion, but the argument put forward by the Minister of Community Services — also responsible for the Liquor Corporation — is not ringing true in terms of the actions of the government when they had the opportunity to be very clear when they brought forward the new *Liquor Act* — as the minister knows, from the very first encounters with him as MLA around issues in my riding. I watch every Friday, and I watch the number of off-sales venues that have been approved by this government, with extended hours, and I wonder — really? Is that social responsibility?

I think we are charged, as Members of the Legislative Assembly — and particularly those who are given the privilege of serving as ministers in this capacity in this Legislative Assembly — to ensure that the rhetoric we use is matched by the actions we take.

I absolutely support the minister in his comments with respect to the vital importance of social responsibility, but it’s a stretch to see how that is applied in the context of — other than chastising the Member for Kluane for not including that in his motion — oversight perhaps. The opportunity was there for the minister, if he felt so strongly about it, to amend the Member for Kluane’s motion and make it reflect what he thinks is necessary — what his government thinks is necessary.

I guess I just see it as a classic example of this Liberal government dismissing any attempts by members opposite to raise issues that they are hearing from, perhaps, parts or segments of the Yukon economy, Yukon private sector, that they don’t. That’s unfortunate, but that’s a reflection that we’re seeing time and time again every Wednesday when private members have an opportunity to raise — as the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, the Leader of the New Democrats, did this afternoon. It’s disappointing to see a government that says, “We want to work with you, but you know what? We don’t really. We want to listen to you, but no, we’re not listening because we already made our minds up, and we came into the room prepared with the statements that we’re going to make.”

So be it — that's unfortunate. I kind of hoped that the democratic process was a bit more robust than that. After 10 years here, I'm beginning to think that it's less and less so, because it's speaking points only and it is the party line. I didn't think that this was what I was elected for, Mr. Speaker. I thought I was elected to reflect the concerns of Yukon citizens, whether I agree with them all or not.

I think we've made it very clear — both my colleague for Takhini-Kopper King and I. I don't agree on many things that perhaps the Member for Kluane, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, or even the Member for Porter Creek North might put forward, but I'm willing to listen to them and maybe try to find a way of accommodating the concerns that they have, but I find that's not the way that anything is received across the way. That's unfortunate.

I'm optimistic that someday we may actually have an exchange of ideas in this Legislative Assembly. We may be able to engage without having prepaid announcements coming at us — paid by us and paid at the cost of democracy. I'm disappointed, Mr. Speaker, but that's not, unfortunately, unusual over the last four years.

I will rest on the hope that there might be a day when we actually have a conversation that isn't either questioning my integrity or that of my colleagues on this side of the floor for bringing forth issues, questioning whether or not we have a valid understanding of issues based on what citizens tell us. I hope that there will be a day when there is that kind of exchange that demonstrates what I have heard as the mantra, but not the actions, of being open and accountable and transparent, because those words have become beyond risible in the context of this Legislative Assembly.

I'm disappointed. That's not new. It's Wednesday.

Mr. Hassard: I didn't intend to speak initially today either, but I think there are a couple of things that should be addressed. It's interesting that the minister has essentially said that he feels that there are more important things that we could be discussing here today than this motion brought forward by my colleague, the Member for Kluane. That's concerning.

The government can take time doing ministerial statements, talking about — a good example would be the other day when we talked about a housing project that had been completed and open for 11 months rather than getting an update on a drive-through testing clinic for COVID.

I think that a motion that encourages the government to work with the federal government to not have tax increases in these troubling times — to me, that is an important motion. I spent my entire life in business, and businesses, I think, are integral to our society. If we don't do everything we can to encourage and try to help people out in their businesses, then we're failing as legislators.

The other thing that's concerning is that we heard from this government, on numerous occasions, how they want to work with everybody and that good ideas come from all sides of the Legislature, yet as we heard from the Member for Whitehorse Centre, instead of bringing forward an amendment to this motion with regard to social responsibility — because that

seems to be the sticking point for the minister — the government will instead choose to just vote it down — use their majority and vote it down.

The minister talked about the motion brought forward by the Member for Copperbelt North a few weeks ago. We spent, essentially, two and a half Wednesdays talking about it. The opposition continually brought forward amendments to that motion to try to make it stronger and put more meat on the bone. The government had the prerogative and they used their majority to vote those amendments down. As I said, that was their prerogative and their choice, but at least we brought forward amendments that we felt would strengthen the motion. It really is unfortunate that the Liberals, rather than trying to work with opposition members, choose to just dig in their heels and use their majority to vote things down rather than really look at the big picture and work together.

Mr. Hutton: The members opposite have made this look like it is a very simple issue; you either support business or you don't. It is not that simple. Keep in mind the businesses that we are talking about here.

Alcohol is a psychoactive, mind-altering drug. My definition of a drug dealer is somebody who sells a psychoactive, mind-altering drug, knowing that it can cause harm to people, for profit. Let's make it cheaper. Let's make it more accessible. Every time you make it cheaper, more people get in —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Hutton: Excuse me — I have the floor, I believe, Mr. Hassard.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: The Member for Watson Lake, on a point of order.

Ms. McLeod: If the Speaker would remind members to refrain from using proper names.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: The members will refer to each other by the ridings that they represent or the portfolio that they have. That is an oversight from time to time, I'm sure, but nevertheless, I would remind members to please keep vigilant in that regard. Also, let's avoid having conversations back and forth. That includes the Member for Mayo-Tatchun — you should stick to the contributions that you are making, and I will listen closely to everyone to ensure that I can hear what you are saying. If I have any issue hearing what you are saying, I will intervene as required.

Mr. Hutton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The motion is a little confusing. Last week, we heard the members opposite talk about support for the cannabis stores here — criticizing the members on this side of the House because we were competing with private cannabis. I didn't hear any request about cutting the taxes for the cannabis retailers. They are business people here too. So, if you want to pick

winner and loser among the business community here, that is not something that I can support. This is a really simple issue for me. When there is more availability to alcohol and people have more access to it, more people die in my communities. I go to more funerals.

I am happy that the legalization of cannabis provided us with the opportunity to finally talk about alcohol as the drug that it is. You know, it is not a beverage. I didn't teach my kids that alcohol was a beverage; I taught them that it is a drug. I think that is something that we should all be teaching our children. It is the most dangerous drug — not just in Canada but in the entire world. It kills more people than every other drug put together.

We have an opioid crisis in this country. In 2017, Canada lost 4,000 people to opioids. It is a crisis and it is sad. In 2015, we lost 5,082 Canadians to alcohol-attributable-only death. That's another crisis and it's one that we've ignored for far too long in this country. Social responsibility — there is a massive social responsibility on these people who are selling these drugs to our children. I'm struggling to see any value in this motion at all.

Do the members opposite not see the correlation between alcohol availability and increased hospitalizations? I heard members in Question Period this afternoon talking about the hospital being underfunded. Last year in Canada, 77,000 hospitalizations occurred from alcohol-attributable-only causes. Each one of those resulted in an \$8,100 average cost, compared to a \$5,800 cost for anybody going in there for any other reason. We're putting a tremendous burden on our health care system every time we increase alcohol sales in this country.

The profit that the Government of Canada — that any provincial government — makes off it doesn't come close to paying for the harms that alcohol does in our society. We all get to pay for that. The big drug companies — Seagram — they don't pay for it; we do. Social responsibility is not just on us; it's on these people who are producing, manufacturing, and distributing these drugs.

From 2009 to 2018, we've seen a 37-percent increase in alcohol-related traffic violations in the Yukon. Impaired driving went up drastically last year and the year before. More Yukoners are having accidents, injuring people, and killing people on our roads. "Let's make booze cheaper so that businesses can survive. That's a great idea." It shouldn't shock anybody over there why I'm not going to support this motion. I've carried enough people who have died from alcohol-related illnesses to their graves in all three of my communities. Enough is enough. It's time to have an honest conversation about the cost of alcohol in this country.

Canada-wide — because they changed the impaired driving laws in 2018 — we saw the largest increase in impaired driving in over 30 years — a 20-percent increase in impaired driving across Canada last year — because legislation got rid of two really weak defences that people had used to get around impaired driving for years. Now they are gone — and now our roads are getting safer?

The RCMP are doing a better job of keeping our streets safe, but more Yukoners are operating their vehicles while impaired. It is not just impaired driving. In 2018-19, Yukon saw the largest increase in police-reported crime across the country, with a 21-percent increase. We talked earlier in this House today and people spoke about gender-based violence and spousal violence. You can speak to any RCMP officer and they will tell you that 75 to 80 percent of all these incidents involve alcohol.

According to the World Health Organization, Canadians consume more alcohol per capita than the worldwide average. That's something to be proud of. Better yet: Here in the Yukon, we are the champions. We are the smallest province or territory, but we consume 13.2 litres of pure alcohol per person every year. That's great. Let's support businesses that sell this. What is more disturbing is that Yukon is leading Canada in sales and lagging the country in social responsibility.

In this pandemic — when people are already suffering — people are turning to drugs and alcohol and they already have drug and alcohol problems. This is just making it worse. The only possible outcome we can have from making alcohol cheaper is to exacerbate all of those problems. How can any member opposite think that this is a good idea?

A few weeks ago, the members opposite wanted to have a select committee on mental health. Talk about mental health — let's lower the price of alcohol; that will do wonders for the mental health of Yukoners. That is just crazy. Every single one of us, Mr. Speaker, have friends and family who have been negatively impacted by alcohol in some way. Many of us have lost friends and family. I am no exception to this, Mr. Speaker.

This motion does an excellent job of displaying the lack of understanding from the members opposite of how serious this drug is — and that's exactly what it is: a drug. It's killing our youth at a rate that exceeds fentanyl, cocaine, heroin, and every other dangerous class 1 narcotic circulating in our communities. It is the absolute champion when it comes to killing our young people. In 2019, Canada averaged 10 deaths every day related to substance abuse. Seven and a half of those 10 were attributed to alcohol.

Maybe you start to get a sense of why I'm not a big fan of alcohol. Every day, we lose an average of seven Canadians — seven friends, seven family members — because of a drug that we have the nerve to call a beverage. Let's call it what it really is: a silent killer; a burden on our medical facilities, staff, and infrastructure; an agitator that leads to domestic violence and assault; a mind-altering substance responsible for the deaths of countless innocent people; a suicide drink.

As a society, as a government, we dedicate an enormous amount of time, energy, and money just trying to keep the issues of alcohol in check, and the members opposite want us to cut this industry more slack, while Canadians and Yukoners are literally dying daily from the very substance that the Yukon conservative party is advocating for.

I grow tired of this, Mr. Speaker. I'm tired of having to educate people on an issue that quite literally rests under their noses, because they're more concerned with helping the drug dealers make money by killing their fellow Canadians than they

are concerned with helping those who struggle with its addictive and destructive qualities.

I guess I shouldn't be too surprised, though, given that the Yukon conservative party has a history of putting profits and money ahead of human quality of life and basic decency. They're so concerned with how quickly the Liberal caucus can produce graphic images — using a stock image, a placeholder logo, and a box of text — all to fire up constituents about mandated masks that they couldn't be bothered to fact-check the issues on alcohol before tabling this out-of-touch motion in this House.

For the record, producing a graphic like that takes about three minutes — which ironically is about as much time as the members opposite spent contemplating this motion. They talked about the devil being in the details and about unintended consequences of the words that are in motions. Go home and think about that tonight, members opposite — about the unintended consequences of the words in your motion.

If they spent half the time researching and understanding these topics as they do criticizing this government, perhaps their arguments and criticism would be more succinct. Perhaps their credibility wouldn't be crumbling beneath them. If this isn't a sad indication of how outdated and out of touch the Yukon conservative party really is with the reality that we face, I don't know what would be — and they have the nerve to call themselves “progressive”.

Alcohol doesn't need our support, Mr. Speaker — the alcoholics do; our communities do. Those who grieve lost loved ones, friends, and family because of drunk drivers — those are the people who need our support. We need to stop investing and cutting costs for socially irresponsible industries and start putting that money into rehabilitation so that we can create a world where our children and our grandchildren have the support they need to thrive, not just survive. Living by the bottle is not thriving — for many Yukoners, it is barely surviving.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, he will close debate on Motion No. 345.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Mr. Istchenko: I do want to thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre from the Third Party for her comments. I had thought, also, along those same lines as her — that this would be a great opportunity to send a message that we support our business community.

It was very unfortunate to hear some of the comments from the Minister of Community Services. I am not certain that the Liberals realize that this is not a campaign being led by the Yukon Party; this is a campaign being led by Canada's business community — the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. It is a letter signed by hundreds of Canadian businesses, asking specifically for how this motion was worded. At least one major Yukon business signed this letter. As I pointed out, the very well-written letter from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce lays out why this change will help the business community across Canada.

It would have been awesome if the members across the way would have listened when I was speaking. It was very disappointing to hear the negative comments that the Minister of Community Services and other members across the way made about the hospitality sector earlier, which suggested that this motion — which, as I pointed out, is specifically a request from the business community. For the minister to suggest that they do not care about social responsibility, that was very disappointing — to hear the Liberal Minister of Community Services say that about the business community. It was also very disappointing to hear the Liberals suggest that the business community is irresponsible and does not care about social responsibility.

We even heard one Liberal member of the Legislature refer to bar and restaurant owners as “drug dealers” today. My god, Mr. Speaker — what an outrageous and disappointing statement for the Liberals to make about small business owners in our community. You know what, we will forward the Liberals' comments to the dozens of business owners who are following this debate today and are hoping to see this federal tax repealed. I should mention again that the wording of this motion was written in collaboration with the business community. By the way, nowhere in the motion is it advocating for more access to alcohol — nowhere in the motion.

Sometimes, I think that the Liberals see political conspiracies everywhere. This is not a trick motion, Mr. Speaker. This was a very simple, straightforward motion about a specific policy request from the business community to help them through a pandemic. This was literally just a request from the business community. It was just a nice way for us to voice our support for the business community here in the Yukon and across the country to show that we support them. Unfortunately, what the businesses will see is that the Yukon Liberal government made negative comments about them and voted against this important measure that we could then take to support the industry. That is their record and we will make sure that, on the doorsteps during the next election, every business owner and employee of restaurants and bars knows that the Liberals made these negative comments about their industry.

Mr. Speaker, after listening to the comments from the Minister of Community Services, I had a quick conversation with the Member for Whitehorse Centre. We talked about the previous Legislative Assembly, when the Liberals only had one member in here. When we used to debate motions on Wednesday, we would all vote in support of these motions — and I think it was a race to see who could get the press release out first — but we were supporting things in general for all Yukoners. During a pandemic, not wanting to support the business community is so disappointing from these Liberals. That the Liberals are going to vote against this idea that came directly from business is just disappointing. Let's get the vote over and done with.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Mr. Adel: Disagree.

Mr. Hutton: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Mr. Gallina: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are seven yea, nine nay.

Speaker: The nays have it. I declare the motion negatived.

Motion No. 345 negatived

Hon. Mr. Streicker: 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 continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agree.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public

Works, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Highways and Public Works — continued

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome to round two. My officials, Mr. Gorczyca and Mr. McConnell, are just taking their seats. I welcome them to the House this afternoon. Thank you for joining us, gentlemen.

I look forward to hearing questions. On the floor today is our supplementary budget number 1 for the season. We have a total of \$11.5 million in O&M to talk about this afternoon and about \$22 million in capital. I look forward to the members opposites' questions on those items. I will leave it to you.

Mr. Kent: I welcome the officials back to the Assembly here today to provide advice and support to the minister. Of course, everybody knows that we had a very short and abbreviated Spring Sitting — nine days — due to the global pandemic, so I don't think that it will surprise the minister that we have some policy questions that perhaps aren't related to the supplementary budget because we didn't get a chance to ask those questions in the spring.

So, the first one that I wanted to ask about is with respect to the *Airport Act* and the timing of the regulations. Can the minister tell us if those regulations are being developed or if they have been finished? I know that the Aviation Advisory Group was playing a very big role in that work, so I am curious when the last meeting of that committee was and if there are minutes available for those meetings.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The last meeting of the Aviation Advisory Group, which is now in full swing, was last week. I addressed that committee. As the member opposite knows, the committee is there to help us and advise us on matters relating to aviation and provide advice to me. I have had a lot of discussions with the aviation community over the last several months. The last time was at this committee meeting last week. It was cordial, I fielded some questions, and then they conducted the substantive part of their own meeting.

I look forward to hearing what they have to say to me about the results of that meeting.

The *Public Airports Act* regulations are on the cusp of coming to Cabinet. I told the committee last week that I expect to have those regulations before the committee as I pledged to do sometime in the early new year. That's my update as far as the aviation act, the regulations and the aviation advisory committee.

Mr. Kent: If the minister can direct me to them — if they are available on the website — are the minutes available from those Aviation Advisory Committee meetings? I know that the last time Highways and Public Works was up for debate, we asked about the Procurement Advisory Committee and if the minutes were available for those or if they would be made available.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. To remind him, the last time we met and I was questioned by the member opposite, he did ask about the

minutes. I did tell him at that time that the minutes of the meeting of the Procurement Advisory Panel are not public. They're shared with members inside there. It's the same with the Aviation Advisory Committee. As I said, that committee has been struck to provide me with advice — advice to the minister — and the minutes of those meetings are shared with the members of the committee, but they are not public.

The member opposite also, I think in his opening remarks this afternoon, referenced the short Sitting this spring. I do appreciate that. I will remind the members opposite there though that we did actually debate the entire budget. The budget was passed by this Legislative Assembly after debate. We let go — a lot of our legislative agenda last spring was shelved to provide the opposition members time to debate the budget, and at the end of the budget debate and after the end of that last night — which we extended and we actually made offers to sit as long as the members opposite would like to sit — at the end of that session, we unanimously agreed to meet again on October 1, which we did.

We met all of our commitments and we're happy to answer questions in this extended Sitting this time. We're into day 29. We have another 16 days to go and we're certainly looking forward to a fulsome, wholesome, and really incisive debate with the members opposite.

Mr. Kent: I guess we will agree to disagree on whether or not the entire budget was debated in the nine short days that we had in the spring before adjourning because of the pandemic.

That said, I do want to move on to a couple of other topics before I turn the floor over to the Member for Whitehorse Centre. There are a number of studies that have been conducted with respect to aviation. Let's go through them one at a time. The first one that I have in front of me is a Stantec report dated May 23, 2017. It is entitled *Government of Yukon: Yukon Aviation System Review*. It is an aviation system review and investment recommendations. As I mentioned, Stantec was the contractor. The minister may not have this information, but I am hoping that, if he doesn't, he can commit to get back to us. What was the cost of conducting this system review and what information was used as part of the plan of action that is on page 74 of that document?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The member opposite, I am sure — I mean, we're straying. We're not only not debating the \$30 million that is in the supplementary budget today, but we're not even debating stuff that was in 2019-20, 2018-19, or 2017-18; we are back to stuff from 2016-17.

Actually, that report that was, I believe, commissioned by the former government — this system review. It did land in May 2017, shortly after the election. I will have to review the document because we don't have it here; it is going back a long way.

I will note, though, for the member opposite that, after the election, I went to research aviation in the territory — after I was assigned this portfolio — and came across the website “The War on Aviation” in the territory. It was pages upon pages of problems with aviation in the territory and some of them were very specific. They had to do with sewage systems up at

the airport. Some of them were a lot more general and had to do with policy problems. So, I knew right away that there were problems with this system of aviation in the territory, and I met with the pilots, shortly after being elected, at a general meeting up at the airport site. I have had several meetings, of course, with pilots and aviation companies since then — many, many, many — and really got a sense for the industry.

One of the things that I was told early in my time in this portfolio — by a former member of the members opposite's government — was that the 2040 document setting guidelines — setting planning — for the coming years was not adequate. It wasn't good, and so we actually re-tooled that. That is what Yukon's Flight Path — and the significant document that we are now just on the cusp of releasing in the next few weeks is the re-do of the work of the previous government, which we were told at the time was inadequate.

Having seen “The War on Aviation” in the territory and the grousing — and the serious issues that were raised by the aviation sector online and in other areas — we set to work. We are still in the process of straightening out and planning for the future. The Flight Path document, the re-do of the 2040 document, is about to land, and that will lay out the investments that we plan in the Yukon's aviation system over the next 10 years.

We're in the grips of COVID-19, of course, and having that problem, but we have seen a heavy investment in the aviation industry. Since we came into office, we have paved the Dawson runway, we certified the Mayo airport, and we have worked very hard to get Whitehorse International Airport out of the doldrums and to get it the proper equipment so that it can maintain the runways in a way that befits an international airport. We have made sure that it had the baggage-handling equipment so we didn't lose our certification and the proper safety/security systems up at the airport so that we retain the certification of that airport. That was work that should have been done many years ago, but we're catching up, and we're going to continue to invest in this absolutely vital industry for the territory.

The investments that we have made have been strategic. They have been critically important, and I'm very proud of the work that my colleagues in the Highways and Public Works department have done over the years to right the aviation industry and bring it closer to true. I don't know if we're there yet. I don't think we are, but we have made huge strides, and we're going to continue to make those investments and improve this very vital infrastructure for an industry that is absolutely critical to the territory's people and for its industry.

Mr. Kent: I thank the minister for his revisionist history lesson he just gave us with respect to the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport 2040 document.

I'm on the website — yukonflying.com — and I'm going to read to the minister an e-mail from the former ADM of Transportation at Highways and Public Works, dated Monday, February 20, 2017, months after the minister was sworn in as the Minister of Highways and Public Works. It's to the Yukon Aviation Advisory Group — yes, a group that already existed

prior to the introduction of the *Public Airports Act* by the minister.

It says — and I quote: “YAAG Members,

“As discussed at our January 18th meeting...” — again, a time when the member opposite was the Minister of Highways and Public Works — “... attached for your review is the Scope of Work from the Terms of Reference for the update of the Vision 2020 planning document for the Whitehorse Airport. I haven’t included all the administrative pieces that will form the tender package as I didn’t think that would be of much interest to the group. If anyone would like to see them I am happy to share them with you.

“We would like to tender this package fairly soon so that we can get the work underway as soon as possible. As such we likely won’t have another YAAG meeting before we tender so I would ask if you have any comments or suggestions you send them to me no later than March 2nd.”

Again, that is signed by the former Assistant Deputy Minister of Transportation in the minister’s Department of Highways and Public Works. When the minister says that a former colleague with the Yukon Party government said that the ENWIA 2040 document had flaws, it is his document; he was the minister. It was not tendered under the previous government. He can’t point fingers and he can’t blame the other government like this minister and his colleagues like to do all the time. This is a tender issued by this minister and this government when it comes to ENWIA 2040.

As I mentioned, there were three separate reviews when it comes to aviation. The first was the system review — yes, it was started under the previous government, but as I mentioned, it was signed off and completed by this minister. There was the ENWIA 2040 document that the minister doesn’t seem to remember initiating when he was the minister — again, I have this e-mail in front of me from yukonflying.com. Then we have the third review that this minister has undertaken, which is *Yukon’s Flight Path: Aviation System Investment Strategy for 2020-2030*.

As I mentioned, we know who the contractor was on that initial system review — it was Stantec, as I mentioned. So, I am hoping that the minister can provide us with a cost. I am curious as to if the minister can provide us with who the contractor was and what the costs were on his ENWIA 2040 document that he said is flawed. I am also curious as to if the minister can provide us with the information on the costs and who the contractor was for his third review of aviation since he has been the minister — *Yukon’s Flight Path: Aviation System Investment Strategy for 2020-2030*.

This minister, as I have mentioned, has undertaken three separate reviews. We haven’t seen the results of any of them. The system review has overlaps with the Yukon’s Flight Path document, so again, we are looking for some answers from the minister with respect to money spent on these three separate reviews and some accountability from the minister that he actually understands which of these are his responsibility — because he was the minister in 2017.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I did hear a lot of indignation from the member opposite, but not really a question. But he was

talking about the process and I will endeavour to get him an answer because of course I currently hold the position of Minister of Highways and Public Works. Contrary to the assertions of the member opposite, I take that very seriously and it is a responsible position.

The member opposite was talking — I was talking earlier about the state of the aviation industry when I was appointed to this role. Early in the mandate, I heard from aviation industry representatives that there had not been enough consultation on the master planning documents. We undertook a more robust engagement consultation process after getting the aviation act passed. We now have Stantec again about to present us with the Flight Path document, which is the result of a really deep dive into consultation and into the industry to make sure that the planning document that we have to guide our investments over the next 10 years represents the community, including the aviation industry.

We also have — the member opposite mentioned — the Yukon Aviation Advisory Committee, the volunteer group. What we’ve done and what we heard from industry is that they wanted a direct and a more formal mechanism to advise me — the Minister of Highways and Public Works, whoever that may be — on aviation industry matters going forward — again, because they did not feel that they had been heard in the past. So, we actually endeavoured to get the Aviation Advisory Committee put in place. That entity is now in place. It is meeting, it is discussing matters related to aviation, and it is advising the Minister of Highways and Public Works on matters relating to aviation in a more formal way than had been done previously.

Again, the goal of this whole process is to make sure that the aviation industry is heard and that its concerns and ideas are reflected and transmitted to the government for consideration. I’m happy to have gotten that committee in place to advise us going forward. I think it’s an important body, and I look forward to working with it into the future.

Ms. Hanson: I just want to say, at the outset, that sometimes I think the failure to communicate is that we use the same words and we hear them differently. At the outset of this afternoon’s debate on the Highways and Public Works supplementary estimates, the minister talked about having a fulsome discussion. I’m sure he thinks that he meant an abundant, copious — lots of words — debate, thinking that “fulsome” is solely a positive word, but the modern and the more common reference to “fulsome” — and I react, because I would like to have a full conversation — but “fulsome”, to many, is “offensive to good taste, tactless, overzealous, and excessive”. That’s not the kind of conversation that I want to have with the minister or with a minister.

I heard the minister the other day — in response to my colleague from the Yukon Party who was asking questions with respect to this budget area — making some allusion earlier, even in this short time, that he was not interested in talking about matters other than that covered in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for 2020-21. Unfortunately, I think it’s imperative that we actually have an opportunity to raise questions, and that is our job, so I will raise questions, some of

which will be focused exclusively on matters that are identified in the supplementary estimates, but from those, there are some questions that arise that are linked to the whole of the budget, and it's impossible to sequester them, and so I don't intend to.

On November 23, just two days ago, in his opening comments, the minister identified, as is represented in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1*, that \$2.5 million was transferred to the Department of Health and Social Services for the 1Health information project.

My question is — I have a couple of questions in this area, just so that the minister understands where I am going. The budget indicates that the budget for 2020-21 for 1Health is \$5 million to \$10 million — so, a range. I don't know what it is; he can tell me that. So, \$2.5 million is transferred to the Department of Health and Social Services. Is the balance — whatever it is, and the minister can fill in the blank — retained by Highways and Public Works? Has the Highways and Public Works department been managing the various iterations of e-health systems since the first federal money started to flow in 2004 for the various e-health initiatives that Canada has funded to provinces and territories? How much has been spent on this?

How many different systems — and what is the cumulative total over the last 16 years expended by the Yukon government and the federal government on developing an as yet undeveloped electronic information system for our health care system? This is something that was identified when the provinces and the federal government identified that there was a need to modernize our communications — just as we have heard from this minister and from various ministers about the importance of sharing information and all the various factors that are contained in that in terms of privacy — the modernization of that HIPMA legislation and all that goes with it.

My curiosity is both about the first part of this fiscal year — the \$5 million to \$10 million range that is contained in the five-year capital plan of March 2020. Is all of it planned to be spent this fiscal year by Highways and Public Works with the exclusion of \$2.5 million? So, I need to know that, and then I am looking for some background information so that, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and through me, Yukon citizens, through the official record of Hansard, will know what we are looking at in terms of expenditures in this important area.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I welcome the Member for Whitehorse Centre to the debate this afternoon. I thank her for her question.

When it comes to “fulsome” — I was using it as far as “generous” or “abundant” debate, but I take her point. She is a wordsmith and a lover of language, and I respect that.

The question this afternoon has to do with 1Health. We did transfer \$2.5 million out of our IRMC envelope — that's our tech envelope.

Health had an opportunity to proceed with their 1Health system. This year, we had money that we could divert to that tech project in the Health department and so we did so.

The details of the 1Health project and where it's at — it's actually a project that's being managed by the Health

department. This was a financial transaction on our part. At the moment, the Health department is the one managing the 1Health system for its department and so I would recommend that the member opposite, when we get to the Health debate, that the Member for Whitehorse Centre direct her questions to the Minister of Health and Social Services in that debate.

She also talked about 16 years' worth of tech funding. Going back to 2004 — the time of the very first iPod — the one with the scroll wheel, and the Razr phone I had at the time. It was a Motorola Razr that was wafer thin — the first phone I had. So, it goes back a very, very long period of time. Tech has evolved dramatically in that period of time.

The problem, Mr. Chair, as I have spoken about quite often, is that spending on our IT systems within government over that period of time has not really been very robust. We are working very hard to increase spending to our online systems. We have recently upgraded the servers in Highways and Public Works to allow for remote desktops which came in very handy during the COVID-19 pandemic when we asked about half our employees to work from home at the onset of this pandemic. We also have an open data repository now, which we didn't have before. We are greatly increasing our online services. We have the U-drive system that is increasing the services to the traveling public and people who own cars.

We have made huge investments in our tech, taking systems that the Government of Yukon depended on that were really pioneered in the Pong era and we had huge swaths of data and the government was at risk because of these archaic and very, very old systems. We've updated a lot of those and we're going to continue that work going forward.

I know that 1Health is another vital project to the Yukon government and for the Health and Social Services department. In my former career, I spoke often about the need to make sure that our health systems were updated to allow the data transfer between the citizens of the territory, the pharmacists, the doctors and surgeons — because there is so much data there, and it was so antique. The systems were basically paper-based systems — huge filing folders — and did not allow for the quick transfer of very essential personal information between doctors and patients, or patients and surgeons, or doctors and surgeons. 1Health is one of the ways that we're going to make sure that system is more robust for the citizens of the territory.

We had an opportunity this year to invest \$2.5 million from the IRMC envelope into health to facilitate that work, and we were happy to do that.

The member opposite references our five-year capital plan. I'm glad to find another member of the opposition who is using the plan and has found some utility in it. I know that it does provide a range of price for the project in that capital plan. The reason for that is because we don't want to give a very precise number because it is used for bidding for contracts and that type of thing, so we have to give a range, and that's why that's there.

I'm sure when my colleague, the Minister of Health and Social Services, gets up to discuss her budget, she will be happy to provide a lot more detail on this very important project.

Ms. Hanson: If the minister could provide a legislative return with respect to the question I asked — which was to do

with the money the federal government has contributed to the Yukon government since 2004, when provincial and territorial governments began to look at, began to develop systems to improve — as he said, in his fulsome way — in this case, I am not using it in the positive way, Mr. Chair — excessive, repetitive — the information I am seeking is to try to get a sense of how much we have invested to date on systems that are not in place. It's not about normal operational IT systems within the Government of Yukon, but on IHealth.

I don't want to go through that again. I am limited in my time, as the minister knows. We used to have ministers opposite who would do just as this minister does — stand up and speak without answering the question for the allotted 20 minutes. Luckily, he hasn't got into the 20-minute gambit.

Earlier this afternoon — and this is not a matter that is directly related to the supplementary budget, so I will put that caveat out there — I had raised a question or two with respect to some of the proposed changes that may come about as a result of Nav Canada studying the possibility of closing air traffic control tower functions across Canada. What we understand from the website and from looking at the Nav Canada site is that Nav Canada is looking at transitioning the other six towers — those being Whitehorse, Regina, Fort McMurray, Prince George, Sault Ste. Marie, and Windsor — to flight service stations, which would involve cutting the air traffic controller jobs.

Mr. Chair, I would hope the minister — in his conversations with the officials that he mentioned earlier today from Nav Canada — would have ascertained what the implications are. If he could provide this House with an estimate of what it would cost for it — we currently have flight service specialists and air traffic controllers at the Whitehorse airport, but it is cheaper for Nav Canada to change it to a flight service advisory as opposed to the full gamut, as we have now. So, there are a couple of options — as I understand it — that are available for Nav Canada — both of which will cost the Yukon government money. So, if the air traffic controllers stay and the flight service specialists go, there would be a need to install automatic weather-observing sites. If that happens, Whitehorse would not meet the standards necessary to be an alternate airport for international flights, as they might get weathered in — so that's a possibility. What costs are associated with that? What conversations has he had to determine what the implications for Yukon would be?

If we get rid of the flight service specialists because of cost cutting, there would be no one on midnights. As you will recall, Mr. Chair, I said to the minister earlier today that it is our understanding that the air traffic controllers are there from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., and after that, it is flight service specialists. Has the Yukon government an estimate of what it would cost to install automatic runway lights that could be activated by pilots? Question.

These are serious issues that have implications for not just our aviation industry in the territory, but it also has implications for Yukon government budgets and for tourism. I am hopeful that the minister can either — he may not have these figures at hand, and his officials may not have done that liaison yet with

Nav Canada, but I would be appreciative if he can simply say that he doesn't have it at hand and that he will provide that by legislative return; that would suffice for this afternoon's question on that matter.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We were having such a nice discussion, I thought — and fulsome. I'm not trying to waste the time of the member opposite. I know her time is short. I was endeavouring to get her a response to a very broad question that she asked earlier, dating back to decades of spending.

I understand her curiosity, as she put it, in seeking that information. She has been a member of this Legislative Assembly for a long time. I don't know whether this *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* — the \$10 million in O&M and \$20 million in capital — spurred the question, or whether she just didn't get an answer in the other years in which she was sitting in the Legislative Assembly, but I understand her curiosity and her wanting to have answers to 16 years of federal spending that wasn't spent, or perhaps was spent, and where it went. I totally get that, and I'm puzzled as to why she hasn't had an answer to this question from previous governments or whatever, but that's speculation on my part. I certainly don't want to waste the remaining minutes of the member opposite's time today.

I hope we have an opportunity to meet again on the Highways and Public Works budget. I hope we can get through some of the other departments. I can come back here and discuss further with the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

The question that she was asking about today — on this next question — was a Nav Canada question that we fielded earlier today in Question Period.

The problem that I have, Mr. Chair, with the member opposite's tone is that it's like a *fait accompli* — that we actually have a decision out of Nav Canada to do this action, which is to gut the air traffic controllers and gut the flight service specialists from the Whitehorse International Airport and that this is what Nav Canada is going to do. I am much more optimistic. I guess my glass is half full, Mr. Chair. I see this as a discussion that we're currently having with a federal government agency. I know that the Premier has had his conversations with Transport Minister Garneau. I know that I have had my conversations with Minister Garneau and with Neil Wilson, the president of Nav Canada. We're having discussions to work out — this is an investigation that Nav Canada is doing to see how it can save money during a global pandemic in which its revenues are falling precipitously, as most of the airline industry is doing right now — and which we are struggling and working very hard with our federal partners in the aviation industry to keep afloat. The very nature of that support that we're providing to carriers such as Air North and Alkan Air and to the rotary and fixed-wing companies is keeping them flying, and it is actually providing some revenue to Nav Canada because Nav Canada did not cut its fees that it's charging aviation companies to use its services.

We are in the very, very preliminary stages of a discussion with a federal agency responsible for flight services and safety. I have heard from the local aviation industries their concerns about safety. I have said several times — more than once on the

floor — that safety is a focus of mine; it's a focus of this government. During the pandemic, we put the safety of people first. When I'm working with airports, I've been working very hard to make sure that the safety and certificates that we rely on to operate these facilities are kept up to date, and we take the necessary investments to make sure that they are looked after. I'm going to continue to make that a focus of mine, going forward.

Mr. Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Mostyn 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 of the Chair of Committee of the Whole. Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

Speaker: It has been moved by the Acting Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:29 p.m.

The following document was filed November 25, 2020:

34-3-38

Excise tax on alcohol, letter re (dated November 24, 2020) from Currie Dixon, Leader of the Yukon Party, to Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finance, Government of Canada (Istchenko)