



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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34<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Monday, November 30, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2020 Fall Sitting

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

### CABINET MINISTERS

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

### GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

#### Yukon Liberal Party

<b>Ted Adel</b>	Copperbelt North
<b>Paolo Gallina</b>	Porter Creek Centre
<b>Don Hutton</b>	Mayo-Tatchun

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

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

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
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Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Monday, November 30, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

**Withdrawal of motions**

**Speaker:** The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper as the actions requested in the motions have been taken in whole or in part: Motions No. 242, 243, and 244, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake; and Motion No. 240, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South.

**DAILY ROUTINE**

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

Introduction of visitors.

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS**

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I ask my colleagues to help me welcome Andrew Neufeld and Erin Neufeld here today for the tribute to their parents, and Heather Green, assistant professor in the department of history at St. Mary's University, who is tuning in online, and other family members and friends who are listening.

Welcome here today. Thank you for coming.

**Speaker:** Tributes.

**TRIBUTES**

**In remembrance of Joy Waters and David Neufeld**

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** It is my absolute honour to rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to two Yukoners who left a very positive and permanent mark on our community — former Tourism and Culture deputy minister and Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board president and CEO Joy Waters, and her husband Dave Neufeld, a long-time Parks Canada historian for the Yukon and western Arctic regions.

Over their 30 years in the territory, they wore many hats, both personally and professionally. They made remarkable and lasting contributions to Yukoners' lives, both seen and unseen. As Parks Canada's historian for the Yukon and western region, David was dedicated to bringing voices and perspectives to the north's historical record that had been overlooked and undervalued. He also brought his wisdom to bear for many students whom he mentored and colleagues with whom he collaborated.

In addition to his influential and highly regarded body of published academic work, David also made it a priority to bring peers in his field together. He always seemed to have a perfectly suited "You know who you should talk to?" at the ready. Upon

retiring from Parks Canada, David lent his considerable talents and experience to assisting First Nations and formalizing and enhancing their heritage efforts. As evidenced by their recent dedication ceremony for a memorial bench honouring his memory, David's work with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation in particular leaves an incredible legacy.

Joy, meanwhile, was known for being an exceedingly kind and fair presence throughout her 30-plus years in public service. She was a model of diligence and compassion. Over the course of her Yukon government career, Joy took on leadership roles with the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board, community and correctional services, and the departments of Environment and of Tourism and Culture. People at Tourism and Culture still talk about Joy's arrival in her role of deputy minister. In an effort to understand the operations of the department from the ground up, she worked the front line, greeting travellers at our visitor information centres. These types of stories are a recurring theme in Joy's professional life. Joy was known as much for her aptitude and dignity as for her humility and her kindness.

In much the same fashion as David, Joy's dedication to Yukon and Yukoners went well beyond professional realms. Whether in her role as chair of the Yukon University's Foundation Board, helping organize the 100 Women Who Care fundraising events, through her church, or singing with her choir, Joy sought out opportunities to give back and help to improve her community wherever she could.

Sharing, as they did, their knowledge and their warmth of spirit, Joy Waters and Dave Neufeld touched a great many lives. Mentors, board members, charity organizers, arts patrons, tour guides, neighbours, friends, mother, father, grandparents — their contribution to Yukon and Yukoners is immeasurable. Though their passing represents a tremendous loss, especially given that their deaths were within weeks of each other, their legacy lives on through their family that they raised, the friendships that they forged, the knowledge that they shared, and the many organizations and institutions of which they were a part.

On behalf of Government of Yukon, I extend our heartfelt condolences to their son, Andrew, their daughter, Erin, their grandchildren, and all of the family, friends, and co-workers of Joy Waters and Dave Neufeld. I ask the members of this House to join me today in paying due tribute to these exceptional Yukoners.

*Applause*

**Mr. Cathers:** I will be brief in my tribute here today. I knew Joy and Dave as constituents and I also had the opportunity to work with Joy during her work in some of her capacities with the Yukon government. I also had the opportunity over 20 years ago with Dave, who joined us on a boat trip from Lake Laberge to Dawson City.

I enjoyed spending time with both of them and appreciated their work on behalf of the territory. I would just like to extend my sincere condolences to their family and friends on their passing.

*Applause*

**Ms. Hanson:** On behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus, I also join in paying tribute to the lives and the enduring contributions of Joy Waters and David Neufeld. On Friday, I joined with family and friends of David and Joy from around the world for a virtual celebration of life for a couple who touched so many people in Yukon over the past three decades.

It is a testament to the love and respect that so many felt for Joy and David that almost 1,000 views of the service have occurred since Friday. Bev Brazier, the minister of the Whitehorse United Church, set the tone for the service by describing Joy and David's participation in a planning-your-own funeral workshop a few years ago. At the end, Joy had prepared a neat list of goals, hymns, and readings that would serve as a guide for families and friends.

David's was blank with the exception of one word: "storytelling". So, we were privileged to share in a virtual campfire with beautiful renditions of favourite hymns from the Persephone choir that Joy had been such an integral part of. We heard stories both funny and touching of the many river trips, of Joy's love of cooking and of the sharing of those meals and memories, and of David's deep and abiding love for history, of what is to be learned from the rivers and the land they both loved — Yukon.

Anne Leckie reflected that, when Joy was deputy minister of culture, she visited Mayo, and when Chief Simon Mervyn met her, he immediately renamed her "Joyful Waters", a fitting name. In addition to their many contributions to public service in Yukon over the years — Joy with the Yukon government and the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board, and David through his long career with Parks Canada — Joy also served as chair of the Yukon University Foundation and David as an adjunct professor, a member of the Yukon College board of governors.

There is so much more that could be said about their involvement in so many diverse sections of our community. Mr. Speaker, we thank Joy and David's children, Erin and Andrew, and their extended family for continuing with a family tradition of openness and inclusion at this difficult time. Toward the end of the service, the Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre posted a quote from indigenous author Thomas King's Massey Lectures in which he said: "The truth about stories is that's all we are. It's a known fact that stories can be our greatest teachers — when they're well told, when their lessons remain unstated, when we can ponder their many nuances. Stories can be strong enough to make magic."

We are thankful for the enduring magic created and shared by Joy Waters and David Neufeld.

*Applause*

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

### TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I have for tabling a legislative return responding to a question from the Member for Copperbelt South during Question Period on November 18.

I also have a legislative return responding to a question during Committee of the Whole from the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin on November 23.

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

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

#### **Bill No. 302: Act to Amend the Civil Emergency Measures Act — Introduction and First Reading**

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 302, entitled *Act to Amend the Civil Emergency Measures Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge that Bill No. 302, entitled *Act to Amend the Civil Emergency Measures Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

*Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 302 agreed to*

**Speaker:** Are there any further bills to be introduced? Notices of motions.

### NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports doubling the current medical travel subsidy from \$75 per day to \$150 per day.

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

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

#### **Yukon Resource Gateway project agreement with Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation**

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I am pleased today to update this Assembly on the latest Gateway project agreement. The Government of Yukon and the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation have reached a project agreement to upgrade three bridges along the Freegold Road.

The project agreement provides funding for Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation to effectively participate in the planning, design, regulatory processes, and construction activities of the project. The Government of Yukon and Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation will work collaboratively to develop and implement a training, employment, and business strategy for this project. The strategy will also enable First Nation citizens to qualify for employment.

All of the Yukon Resource Gateway project agreements are subject to Yukon's assessment and regulatory process that includes public input and consultation with affected First Nations.

This is our second Resource Gateway project agreement with the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. The first project agreement was for the Carmacks bypass to enhance community

safety. That project is now underway. This new project will also improve infrastructure to support reasonable resource development while providing local employment and training opportunities. The Yukon Resource Gateway project is enhancing the development of Yukon's resource sectors and providing economic opportunities throughout the territory.

The project agreement includes reconstruction or replacement of the Crossing Creek bridge, Bow Creek bridge, and Seymour Creek bridge on the Freegold Road. Project agreements between the Government of Yukon and affected Yukon First Nations are a funding requirement for the Yukon Resource Gateway program.

As I noted, our government has negotiated several project agreements with First Nation governments. In June 2020, the Government of Yukon and the Liard First Nation reached an agreement to upgrade parts of the Robert Campbell Highway. Improvements are proposed for kilometre 114 to 171 on the Robert Campbell Highway between Ross River and Watson Lake.

In March 2020, the Government of Yukon and the Ross River Dena Council reached an agreement in principle for bridge replacement and safety improvements on the North Canol Road and construction resurfacing of kilometre 354.9 to kilometre 414.4 of the Robert Campbell Highway. That is the stretch between Ross River and Faro.

Finally, in January 2020, the Government of Yukon and the Liard First Nation reached an agreement for the first phase of upgrades to the Nahanni Range Road. Phase 1 upgrades include two bridge replacements, one bridge rehabilitation, and improvement to lines of sight.

Including this project announcement today, more than \$185 million has been identified for capital construction costs for existing Gateway projects.

Our government recognizes the value of working with First Nation governments, and we will continue to do so.

**Mr. Hassard:** I am pleased to respond to this ministerial statement on behalf of the Official Opposition. We note that there was also a news release on this from last week. Of course, the timing of the new news release and this ministerial statement is quite notable. The last time that this government did an announcement about the Resource Gateway project was right in the midst of an affected First Nation's chief and council election. In June of this summer, the Liard First Nation was in the final days of their election, and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources announced the signing of the agreement related to the repair and upgrade work on the Robert Campbell Highway.

Unsurprisingly, several candidates took notice and criticized the minister's decision to make such an announcement during the First Nation's election. In fact, the July 1 headline of the *Yukon News* read — and I quote: “Newly-elected Liard First Nation chief accuses YG of interfering with election”.

At the time, the *Yukon News* asked the Liberal Cabinet if they believed that they had interfered in the election, and according to the article they — and I quote: “... did not respond

to questions about whether the Yukon government believed it had interfered with LFN's election.”

We asked the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources this same question last October, and he dodged it, but we can't help but notice that this announcement was made in the final week of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation election. In fact, their election is today.

Following the previous allegations against the government, we asked the government about their policies and protocols related to making announcements during the election of other levels of government. We would ask the minister today to address this in his response. Could the minister explain why the government keeps making announcements during other governments' elections?

As the minister has said, this is the fifth project announced under the program that the Prime Minister announced back in 2017. We know that the government has struggled to deliver on these projects and timelines. It was way back on September 2, 2017, that the Premier participated in a photo opportunity announcing an investment in the Resource Gateway project, and since that time, the Liberals have missed several key milestones for this project.

According to Infrastructure Canada's website, the Yukon Liberal government originally told Canada that the construction of the project was forecasted to begin on June 1, 2018, and to be completed by March 31, 2024. However, the government has amended and significantly delayed this project. According to Infrastructure Canada's website, construction for the project will only begin this month, more than two years late, and the project will now be completed on March 31, 2031 — a whopping seven years late.

In fact, the Infrastructure Canada website says that construction was set to begin on November 16, so hopefully the minister can let us know if the Liberals missed another timeline or not.

So, several years after the Yukon Liberals announced this project to great fanfare, very few dollars of the \$360 million announced back in 2017 have actually been spent. Members of the Yukon mining and construction industry have been waiting patiently for these projects to move forward, and it's not lost on any of them that the government is scrambling to announce these projects on the eve of an election.

**Ms. White:** So, the Yukon NDP are pleased to hear about the upgrade of bridges along the Freegold Road. When we attended a community meeting in Carmacks much earlier this year, the connection to the land and the importance of participation and accessibility to potential projects were discussed. People want to work. They want to work close to home and in jobs that are meaningful, so it's important that citizens have training opportunities for these jobs, and we look forward to learning more about these initiatives in the future.

We are also pleased to hear that the Village of Carmacks and the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation are getting closer to their subdivision wish near the Carmacks bypass road. As we all know, housing is of critical need in every community across the territory. Land use plans are an important piece of the

puzzle that were missing throughout most of the territory. Land use plans allow First Nation governments, communities, individuals, industry, conservation groups, and others to highlight their values on Yukon's landscape and for uses to be clearly established for the land. Whenever we visit communities and visit with First Nation governments, the issue of land use planning always comes up, and it came up when we last met with the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation in the Village of Carmacks.

I have two questions for the minister: Why does the Yukon government continue to move toward these larger projects in the absence of land use plans, and when might we see a land use planning process start in the Northern Tutchone area?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the members opposite for their responses today. I am very pleased to announce today our fifth project agreement under the Gateway program. Without an agreement with affected First Nations, there is no project. Negotiations with First Nations are essential for projects to proceed. Negotiations take time, Mr. Speaker, and rebuilding trust takes time. In the aftermath of the Peel debacle, rebuilding trust has been job one for this government.

Let's compare this latest agreement to the number of agreements signed by the previous Yukon government. Mr. Speaker, that number was zero. So, five agreements with First Nation governments under our Liberal government and zero agreements under the Yukon Party — nada, donut, goose egg. This should not come as a surprise to anyone who has been paying attention to Yukon politics over the last number of years. One of the defining characteristics of the previous conservative Yukon Party government was its inability — some would say even unwillingness — to work with First Nation governments. We saw that on the Gateway program, on changes to the YESAA contained in Bill S-6, on the Dempster fibre line, and, most significantly, on the Peel land use plan.

It is worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that the two ministers leading the way on the Peel plan were the candidates who placed first, Currie Dixon, and second, the Member for Lake Laberge, in the recent Yukon Party leadership race. That approach landed Yukon in the Supreme Court of Canada.

As I noted earlier, Mr. Speaker, it is also worth noting that the lingering resentment and distrust from that unnecessary legal battle was one of the impediments that needed to be overcome to make Gateway happen.

The Yukon Party hasn't changed its approach to First Nation relations since then. They elected the architect of the Peel plan as their leader — Currie Dixon. Their approach was to meet First Nation governments in front of a judge. Our approach is to meet First Nations at the Yukon Forum and at the negotiating table. The agreement that I am outlining today will lead to upgrades of three bridges along the Freegold Road. It includes the reconstruction and replacement of the Crossing Creek bridge, Bow Creek bridge, and Seymour Creek bridge. The project agreement provides funding for Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation to effectively participate in the planning, design, regulatory processes, and construction activities of the project.

This is our second Resource Gateway project agreement with Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. The first project agreement was for the Carmacks bypass to enhance community safety. That project is now underway, and I will have an update on that project soon.

As I noted, project agreements between the Government of Yukon and affected First Nations are a funding requirement for the Yukon Resource Gateway program. Without these in place, there is no Gateway project. Again, that is why so little happened in the past under previous governments.

As I noted, our government has negotiated several project agreements with First Nation governments, including this project announced today. More than \$185 million has been identified for capital construction costs for existing Gateway projects.

This is important work, Mr. Speaker. It is going to put our citizens — all of our citizens — to work. Gateway is going to improve our road network for our citizens — all of our citizens, including residents of Ross River, who have been at the end of a gravel road for decades. It is going to improve the economy for our citizens — all of our citizens, Mr. Speaker. Our government recognizes the value of working with First Nation governments, and we will continue to do so.

**Speaker:** This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Yukon Liberal Party support for alcoholic beverage industry

**Mr. Hassard:** During the pandemic, one of the hardest hit sectors of our economy has been bars and restaurants, yet when we proposed a simple tax measure to give this sector a boost in these difficult times, the Liberals voted it down. In explaining why they were voting against our motion, a Liberal representative said — and I'll quote: "Keep in mind the businesses that we are talking about here."

Again — quote: "Alcohol is a psychoactive, mind-altering drug."

Again — quote: "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."

Does the Premier agree with the comments from a member of his Liberal team that bars and restaurants in Yukon should be thought of as drug dealers?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** First of all, I just want to touch on the fact that there have been a number of different tools that we have used to support businesses during this period of time around COVID and that have been shared with and have supported many different parts of the industry — part of that, of course, being restaurants and bars and such.

Again, the Yukon business relief program provided to a number of bars and restaurants — I know that we have Economic Development debate later this afternoon. We will have a really good opportunity to get into some of those sectors. Probably some of the biggest supports and percentage of supports have really gone into the hospitality and restaurant sector.

Also, our paid sick leave rebates were offered as well to bars and restaurants — again, another piece of important support. As well, our Yukon essential workers program, which we just extended, also was offered up.

So, I think that it is important to illustrate that, throughout this pandemic, we have stood by all sectors of our economy, and that being, of course, bars and restaurants, as well as micro breweries and others. I think that we have demonstrated our support there and understand that it is a vibrant and important part of our economy.

**Mr. Hassard:** It is also important to note that this isn't about the government's relief programs. This is about a Yukon Party motion and the Liberals' response to that motion. In speaking further about why the Liberals were voting against this support for bars and restaurants, the Liberal Party representative launched into a tirade against bars and restaurants, implying that they are not socially responsible and are selling drugs and alcohol to children. In fact, when speaking about bars and restaurants in the territory, he said — and I will quote again: "... there is a massive social responsibility on these people who are selling these drugs to our children." Not a single other Liberal member spoke out against these comments.

So, does the Premier agree with the member of his Liberal team that these hard-working businesses in the Yukon hospitality sector are selling drugs to children, and will the Premier disavow these disparaging comments?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** What I can speak to on this, from a standpoint of the role that these entities play within our economy, is that — first of all, the Leader of the Official Opposition is speaking to comments that were made during private members' day.

Private members' day does give an opportunity for all members in the House to speak to — usually on things that they are very passionate about. I think it's important to understand that my colleague spoke from his heart about a number of things that mean a lot to him. He's passionate about it. The communities that he represents have been affected by alcohol. He shared, I believe, his own personal prerogative on it, and I will stand here and say that I support my colleague on his personal comments. I think that's what we should be able to do. We should be able to walk in here and share that during private members' day. I can hear from across the way — I've been in that particular industry. I have many friends who work in that industry. I've owned businesses in that industry. I've paid my rent through that industry, and I support that industry. That doesn't mean that I'm not going to be able to stand here and not still respect my colleague for being able to stand up and say what he means and how he feels.

**Mr. Hassard:** I'll remind the minister that he had every opportunity to stand in this Legislature and speak against this motion and actually show his support for the industry, but he chose not to. Yet in response to our proposal to support bars and restaurants, the Liberal Party representative suggested that brewers and distillers in the Yukon were akin to big drug companies and were profiting from harming Yukon society. He said that brewers and distillers don't take social responsibility

seriously. In fact, when speaking about bars, restaurants, and brewers in the territory, he said that the Yukon Party was — and I quote: "... more concerned with helping the drug dealers make money by killing their fellow Canadians..."

Does the Premier agree with this comment made by the member of the Liberal team that these hard-working businesses are making money by killing Canadians? If not, will he disavow these disparaging comments?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** The member opposite is correct. On that particular day, I did not stand up to speak on that topic. What I did do is speak, on phone call after phone call, to people who work in that industry. When they called me — and these are individuals who own operations — in those particular times, I did explain the context of what was said and explained the context of what had happened.

In most cases, after those conversations, the individuals who are owners and who make their livelihood in this industry had a different prerogative based on that — maybe what they had heard from members from the Yukon Party who might have reached out or those who work with the Yukon Party who were quick to go out — but I can tell you that, when there was an opportunity to speak to those individuals and explain the context, they were much more understanding of the comments that were made. I think that this could be spun for days and days. It can be turned and spun, but the reality is that it is a challenge in the Yukon. We should all be aware of that.

The comments that were made were tough comments. I can say that, in my prerogative as Minister of Economic Development, I respect the people who work in that sector. I also respect the ability for somebody to come in here on private members' day and speak from the heart.

#### **Question re: ATAC Resources tote road project**

**Mr. Kent:** ATAC Resources has spent over \$100 million in the past 13 years on their project north of Keno City. In May 2017, the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board issued a favourable recommendation for the tote road to ATAC Resources' exploration project. On March 5, 2018, almost a year later, the road was conditionally approved based on the completion of a sub-regional land use plan by March of this year. At the time, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources stated — and I quote: "Absolutely, this is a new way of doing business. This is actually how you get business done."

However, on Friday, ATAC Resources received notification that the Liberal government has denied their application. Unfortunately, it seems like this new way of doing business is actually just a new way for the Liberals to shut business down. Can the minister tell us why, after this project received a positive recommendation from YESAB, he strung them along for over three years just to reject them?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** First, to answer the question, I want to congratulate Alexco Resources. We had an opportunity on Friday, I know, to support — so, when we talk about businesses shutting down — they just opened, actually. That would be the third mine in this mandate that has opened. It is a little bit of a

different situation than what we found ourselves in when we arrived here.

Concerning the proposal application from ATAC Resources, there was a decision that was made by the chief mining officer of lands. The company, first of all, did not demonstrate sufficiently in its application that significant adverse environmental and socio-economic effects identified in the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board evaluation would be appropriately mitigated. That is the first item. Secondly, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun identified a number of significant adverse impacts that may occur on its treaty rights, including impacts to hunting, fishing, trapping, and its use of the area for traditional pursuits if the project was to proceed at this time. So, the Government of Yukon agreed with these concerns and determined that the application did not appropriately or sufficiently indicate how these impacts would be mitigated.

**Mr. Kent:** So, in a November 2 letter, ATAC Resources pointed out numerous instances where the Liberal government and this minister have missed every single deadline associated with the project. In that letter, they state that the 42-day timeline set forth under section 9.3 of the Yukon *Quartz Mining Land Use Regulation* formally expired at the end of July. Since missing that deadline, the company has noted — and I will quote: “... every timeline provided to date has passed without resolution.”

It is not lost on the mining industry that this minister is all talk and no action and has been sitting on this decision for months. He waited until after the annual geoscience conference to notify the company.

So, did the minister think that holding off on this decision until after geoscience would shelter him and his government from criticism?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** No, upon signing up for the job, I understood that lots of criticism comes with it — no issue there.

What I will say is that a decision was made inside the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources — a professional group of individuals who work there. The person who is asking me these questions from Copperbelt South was a former minister and understands the professionalism that is there and the ability of the team that is there to analyze applications. That is what they have done.

Concerning consultation, I know that one of the things that has been a challenge throughout the fall of this year and in the spring is ensuring that you meet your consultation obligations within a COVID reality. We have strived in every instance to do that, and I will leave it at that. There essentially have been a lot of pressures for all departments to be able to still meet those obligations when there are concerns and anxieties about people coming to communities and maybe moving that to a virtual format.

**Mr. Kent:** So, the Liberals have told us that their new way of doing business is actually good for the mining industry. The minister even said that this is how you get business done. Well, here is what the CEO of one of Yukon’s leading mining companies said this morning in a news release — and I quote: “We are extremely disappointed with, and surprised by this

decision...” Then he goes on to say — and I will quote again: “If this road can't be permitted following a positive environmental and socio-economic assessment decision and years of governmental encouragement to invest in the project, then you have to wonder if Yukon is in fact open for business.”

So, the Liberals have strung this company along. They have failed to follow their own rules and timelines, and now they are sending the signal to the mining industry that the Yukon is not open for business.

Does the minister think that this new way of doing business has improved certainty for investment in the territory?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I think it’s important to make a note that the proponent that has applied for this application, which has been noted here, does have the ability to improve their application and apply for this. This is not a full stop on this. They do have that opportunity.

But what I will say is that I appreciate the comments that have been reflected by the member opposite, but I also was in a meeting this morning with a CEO of another mining company. What they said to me and the deputy minister was that, out of their complete budget for next year — and they have operations that are throughout the United States, including areas that have a lot of mining investment in the southern US — if they had a place to spend their money between the US, British Columbia, and Yukon, they would spend it in Yukon. In the Yukon, they would spend it in the Mayo area.

You know what — I appreciate the comment, but there are other CEOs who feel differently about this. We encourage them to invest. We also encourage them to sit down with First Nations in the traditional territories where they work, build healthy, good relationships — that is something we’ve said from the start. You have to be ensured that there’s a good balanced approach here.

#### Question re: Yukon Liberal Party donations

**Ms. White:** Last week, after months of pressure, the Liberals released a statement about the \$100,000 in anonymous donations that they received last year. Unfortunately, the statement contained no information about who the donors are, and all that the public has learned is that the Liberals brought in \$47,000 at a hockey game in a suite at Rogers Arena in Vancouver. Under Yukon’s laws, a corporation has to declare publicly when they go so far as meeting or even just calling the Premier, yet that same corporation can donate thousands of dollars to the Liberals completely anonymously. Yukoners understand that this makes no sense, although the Premier will say that he respected the law, because he said it before.

Why is the Premier satisfied with the bare minimum when it comes to transparency, and will he finally disclose who gave his party \$100,000 in anonymous donations?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, again, we’re working within the rules of fundraising. I do know that the treasurer and the party did have a conversation with Elections Yukon and provided information to them as well. At that point, it was determined again — again — that there’s no issue here. We’re well within the rules of fundraising. We did have a very successful year in fundraising. Again, the \$100,000 is not from



one particular person, and it also doesn't include all of the costs to put on these events as well. I wish it was a \$100,000 donation — or donations, plural — but that's just not the case.

At the same time, our treasurer has done the due diligence to double back and to ask those questions and to just make sure that all of the information that was shared was enough for the current rules and found again — even providing more information — that we're well within the current guidelines for fundraising.

**Ms. White:** So, the Premier keeps on saying that he has played within the rules. Well, we better hope so, but it doesn't make it ethical.

Let me be clear: I'm not asking if what the Liberals did is within the rules; I'm asking the Premier if he thinks what was done is moral. I'm asking the Premier if he thinks receiving \$100,000 from anonymous sources is open and transparent. The Liberals found a loophole in the law that allows them to hide who their donors are. They don't have to use that loophole, but they're choosing to, and that's the issue.

Leadership is about doing what's right, not just the bare minimum. So, will the Premier show leadership and disclose who gave \$100,000 in anonymous donations to his party?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** No loopholes — again, we did everything within the current rules. I hear the Yukon Party laughing. They used very similar abilities as well when they were in government to collect money. Again, Mr. Speaker, we're doing everything within the rules. This is not a loophole. This is using the current rules of fundraising. I'm very happy that we had a very successful couple of years in fundraising. The \$100,000 is not from an individual. It's from a few different events — for one — and it also doesn't include all of the costs that go into making those events happen.

The members opposite — the NDP — can call it a loophole. It is not.

**Ms. White:** I know that the Premier doesn't like talking about his anonymous donors, and we understand why. The lack of transparency that this shows doesn't look good on the government. It makes people wonder what they have to hide and who they're really working for.

In the last election, the Liberals received a \$50,000 donation from a single mining company. In this last year, they received a \$12,000 fishing trip. It doesn't look good, but at least these donations are public. Accepting \$100,000 in anonymous donations is even more questionable.

In Yukon, donations over \$250 are supposed to be public. The Liberals found a loophole by inviting their donors to a fundraiser in a suite at Rogers Arena in Vancouver. Will the Premier commit to stop using the loophole that allows him to hide the identity of corporations or people who donate over \$250 to his party?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** What I will do at this point is to thank folks and individuals who have shown their support to all three political parties. It's extremely important that all political parties have the ability to get the message out there and to communicate to voters what their campaigns are, what their platforms are, and what the differences are between those three parties.

The Yukon NDP will have you believe that there is some kind of loophole. No, we're absolutely within the current rules.

I know that, in previous years, the NDP relied on federal union support. That tap has dried out. I do know as well that they've had events outside of Yukon — making support for people to support their party outside of the Yukon.

But again, we all have our methods in which we are going to fundraise. We're all doing it within the rules, and I encourage folks, if you want to support political parties, to get out there and show your support with volunteer work. If you can, make a donation. That would be great as well.

But most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it's extremely important that all political parties have the wherewithal and the ability to get the messages out to make sure that Yukoners have informed decisions when it comes time for elections.

#### **Question re: Alaska Highway corridor upgrades**

**Ms. Hanson:** On the Let's Talk Hillcrest website, there's a handy section with frequently asked questions. One of those questions asked how the road can be safer for pedestrians and bikers when the highway is being widened. The response from the government is to say that two traffic lights will be in place, ensuring that pedestrians and bicyclists can stop traffic to cross safely.

These lights were also mentioned in a May press release and in the ministerial statement from October 14. There has even been activity around the traffic lights, but we have yet to see them in action.

Can the minister explain how the highway can be safe for pedestrians and bikers when the government's sole safety feature isn't working?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I'm happy to address the question on the floor of the Legislature this afternoon. I know that this is an issue of great importance to members of Hillcrest and highway travellers from around the country and around the territory.

Mr. Speaker, we have installed the traffic lights in Hillcrest. Those traffic lights are currently rescheduled to be programmed last week. With the recent second wave of COVID hitting the territory and the restrictions that the chief medical officer of health has recommended that we put in place in the territory, the national company that actually does the programming for those lights — and it is the one company that we use and the City of Whitehorse has used it as well — is unwilling to come to the territory. They have said explicitly that they will not come during this second wave of COVID.

Late last week, I talked to the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works for an update. We are working very closely with that company to alleviate their fears and work — maybe there's remote programming we can do. We're looking at solutions because we want those traffic lights operational, and we're working with the company down south to make that happen.

**Ms. Hanson:** So, the story gets more interesting. This was announced; these lights would be ready in May; they would be ready in October. Then, at the end of November, the minister says, "Oh, they were going to be installed last week." The minister and his Minister responsible for CEMA have also told

this House that there are plans and there are opportunities for alternative isolation plans. So, what we see here, Mr. Speaker, is that the sole safety feature of the highway project wasn't prioritized earlier, and what matters now is ensuring that folks have a safe way to cross the highway as soon as possible. It is dark outside, visibility is decreasing, and signage is being buried under the snow. In wintertime, crossing the highway is dangerous. I drove there last night and it is black at that corner.

Can the minister say when and how he is going to make that highway safe for pedestrians and bikers as a contingency while he is waiting for this other alternative that he has suddenly announced today?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I have answered the question this afternoon, and I don't think that the member opposite — the traffic lights exist. We have them in place. They have been installed. The problem is the fact that the electronics need to be programmed, and the company that both the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon government rely on to get that programming done is not willing to come to the territory after the bubble burst with BC.

Now, I understand that there are ways that you can work in the territory that are safe. The company itself has taken the decision not come to the territory. We are working with that company to alleviate their fears and come up with alternatives. They have not yet made an alternative isolation submission to my colleague, the Minister for Community Services. We are currently working with that company to find out what the impediments are and what the fears of that company are. Once we have dealt with those fears, I am sure that they will come north and actually program the lights.

I am well aware of the commitments that we made, and we had every intention of fulfilling them last week, but the collapse of the bubble with BC has impeded our ability to get those lights programmed. We are working very hard with that company, at my direction, to make sure that happens.

**Ms. Hanson:** I thank the minister for that explanation with respect to traffic lights. We have all seen those traffic lights wrapped in black plastic over the last number of weeks.

The other issue, as I mentioned in my question, is signage. Without proper signage, the highway near Hillcrest isn't only dangerous for pedestrians and bikers, it is also dangerous for vehicles. Signs are buried in snow, one pedestrian crossing sign has gone missing, and snow is piling up at the crossroads near the airport, creating blind corners.

Despite a wider highway, when the lines are being covered by ice and snow, folks will stick to what they know. If vehicles continue to speed through this intersection of the highway, it's only a matter of time before someone gets seriously hurt. The highway at Hillcrest is dangerous, and it looks like nothing has been done.

Will the minister commit to increasing signage — at least commit to increase signage while we're waiting for those lights to be put up?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I'm a bit puzzled at the member opposite's assertion that it looks as if nothing has been done. I have driven that highway several times and continue to, and I can see the profound difference in the road that runs along the

Alaska Highway in front of Hillcrest and Valleyview and whatnot. There's a profound change there, Mr. Speaker.

The problem is that we have installed lights — the light standards are up there — and they are dark because they have not yet been programmed. I have told the member opposite this afternoon that I am well aware of the concerns of the residents of Hillcrest. I know that my colleague, the Member for Mountainview, has also been in touch with her constituents on this matter. I take this seriously. I am working with the company to make sure that those lights are programmed properly. There's fear there. I don't know what's driving that fear, and we're working with the company to alleviate it to make sure that those lights get programmed so that the vast safety improvements that we've made on that highway in front of Hillcrest and Valleyview — or this next level of safety is put in place.

I do not take the members opposite's assertion that this is unsafe. The road through Hillcrest and Valleyview has been made vastly more safe by the work of Highways and Public Works this last summer.

#### Question re: COVID-19 vaccine

**Ms. McLeod:** Last week, national media reported that the federal government announced that they are expecting enough of the COVID-19 vaccine for three million Canadians to be vaccinated in the first three months of 2021. On a per capita basis, this means that only 3,300 Yukoners will be able to get vaccinated before April.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services tell us what assurances the government has that the federal government will give Yukon access to more than that?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I'll start — and I'm sure my colleagues would like to join as well in second and third answers. But last week, we had a very frank discussion with our fellow premiers and the Prime Minister about the national approach to the vaccine delivery. We discussed the importance of waiting for regulatory approval to be given out for the vaccines, as well as providing additional information to Canadians as it becomes available.

Many details still need to be finalized, including the number of doses that will be available and the timelines for rolling out the vaccine across Canada once that vaccine — or vaccines — are approved.

Our team is definitely working very closely with all jurisdictions — federal, provincial, and territorial colleagues — to ensure a coordinated approach as we work toward the approved candidate vaccines. In my conversations on the federal level when talking at the First Ministers' meetings or the Council of the Federation, we are reiterating on a very regular basis the importance of equitable distribution but also recognizing the importance of rural and urban considerations for the vaccine as well.

We have all the assurances that an equitable distribution will be made right across Canada.

**Ms. McLeod:** According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people aged 50 to 64 are 30 times more likely to die from COVID-19. This risk increases

to 220 times more likely for ages 75 to 84. According to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, there are 14,578 Yukoners above the age of 50. If the vaccine is distributed on a per capita basis, that means that only 3,300 Yukoners will get access to it in the first quarter of 2021, which only accounts for 23 percent of that risk age group. Vaccine distribution and rollout is the responsibility of the territorial government.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services tell us how the Government of Yukon will prioritize and roll out the vaccine?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, to elaborate a little bit further on what the member opposite talks about as far as distribution, the six million vaccines that were announced by federal Minister LeBlanc and his team was six million doses for three million people; however, that was just the very first. The conversation that the federal government has been saying on the national news is that this will start in January and will increase from there, so it's not the be-all and end-all when it comes to vaccines; there will be more after that.

Again, I spoke about, on our side, the conversations that we have been having in several forums. We have also been speaking at, as I said, First Ministers' meetings and public health and emergency measures tables. We have been forming new relationships to make sure that we have the supply chains needed and the supply lines being built. Fair and equitable access to the vaccine is a key priority for this government in all of these conversations. This includes getting vaccines out to key populations that are high risk.

The member opposite spoke about elder populations — absolutely. Add into that, as well, long-term care residents, immunocompromised individuals, health care workers, indigenous, remote, and northern communities — that is the voice that Yukon brings to the national stage at all of these tables. We are working very closely with all of our partners in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, as well, to ensure that northern circumstances are considered, and we are extremely vocal at these tables.

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister told premiers that they are expecting two-thirds of the initial vaccine that Canada has access to, to be the Pfizer vaccine. This vaccine must be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius. Last week, we asked the Minister of Health and Social Services several questions about preparation for this vaccine that she has refused to answer.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services tell us if her department has done an assessment of whether we have the appropriate equipment to store this vaccine? Is the Department of Health and Social Services looking at acquiring extreme cold storage options?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** What I can say is that I know that we are coordinating this conversation with Joint Task Force North. I know that, last week, one of my assistant deputy ministers and the head of emergency response were on calls with General Carpentier to discuss the logistics around this rollout, including such things as making sure that the vaccine is kept at a safe temperature, how to get it into our physical communities, and how to work to deal with the prioritization

— to deal with the most vulnerable first. So, there is a coordinated effort being put in place. I don't have an answer today specifically on whether all of those logistics are dealt with, but I do know that they are being addressed as we speak. Of course, it is dependent on the type of vaccine and the logistics will be based from that.

What I can say for all the members of this House and to you, Mr. Speaker, is that this work is being developed now — how to make sure that we keep Yukoners safe through the pandemic and as we roll out the vaccine.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BILLS

#### **Bill No. 17: *Enduring Powers of Attorney and Related Amendments Act (2020)* — Third Reading**

**Clerk:** Third reading, Bill No. 17, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 17, entitled *Enduring Powers of Attorney and Related Amendments Act (2020)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 17, entitled *Enduring Powers of Attorney and Related Amendments Act (2020)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members of this Assembly for their contributions to the debate on this bill. I'll now just take a few moments to revisit the amendments we are proposing in Bill No. 17, *Enduring Powers of Attorney and Related Amendments Act (2020)*.

As mentioned in my earlier remarks and during the debate, the *Enduring Power of Attorney Act* has not been amended since it was first passed 25 years ago. The Government of Yukon is committed to ensuring that our legislation keeps up with the changing realities of Yukon, and these provisions will ensure that safeguards are in place to protect Yukoners with enduring powers of attorney.

Enduring power of attorney documents are a vital option for Yukoners faced with the prospect that they may become incapacitated and unable to manage their own affairs. We know that enduring powers of attorney can be a useful alternative to a court-ordered guardianship, but they can also make a person vulnerable to financial abuse, misuse, or fraud.

The proposed amendments include strong, protective measures to prevent and stop financial abuse. Mr. Speaker, in addition, the proposed amendments are designed to improve accessibility by providing a means for Yukoners to make a valid enduring power of attorney without having to obtain the services of a lawyer.

During engagement which was completed in the spring of 2020, feedback was received on what we should include in the amendments. The proposed amendments take into consideration what we heard from those respondents. In

addition, the proposed amendments are based on recommendations from the Uniform Law Conference of Canada and align our legislation with other jurisdictions in Canada.

The proposed amendments are designed to follow three general themes: There are changes to formal requirements and processes for making an EPA, or enduring power of attorney; there are increased protections against financial abuse or improper use by attorneys or those named to take care of someone else's affairs; and there is clarification of the attorney's roles, responsibilities, duties, and liabilities. Again, by "attorney", I mean the person who is indicated to make decisions on behalf of another.

The Government of Yukon is pleased to bring forward these amendments which will modernize enduring power of attorney legislation in the territory and mirrors legislation in other jurisdictions across the country.

We know that passing this legislation is a progressive step forward — one that is necessary to provide safeguards for Yukoners who have enduring powers of attorney and which fulfills our obligation to ensure that Yukon legislation is inclusive and accessible.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments will enable us to ensure that enduring power of attorney legislation here in the territory meets the needs of today's Yukoners and protects their interests.

In conclusion, I recommend and urge Members of this Legislative Assembly to support the passing of Bill No. 17 or the *Enduring Powers of Attorney and Related Amendments Act (2020)*. I will take this opportunity to thank all those, particularly at the Department of Justice, who worked on this matter to bring it forward and draft the documents so that we might have this modernization move forward and debate it here in the Legislative Assembly.

I would also like to thank all those Yukoners who participated in the engagement when that was occurring previous to this bill coming forward. Their opinions and interest certainly made Bill No. 17 responsive to the needs expressed by Yukoners.

**Mr. Cathers:** The amendments in this legislation are largely in the nature of housekeeping. We have discussed them previously in the Assembly. At this point in time, we will be supporting the bill proceeding forward.

**Ms. Hanson:** I thank the minister for her remarks this afternoon with respect to Bill No. 17, the *Enduring Powers of Attorney and Related Amendments Act (2020)*.

I think that, as we saw during the October 29 second reading debate of this Bill No. 17, these amendments provide clarity and that the EPA deals with property and legal matters only and finances and property. I say that because oftentimes — and it certainly was evinced in debate during questioning that there can be, or has been, in the public sometimes a confusion about what's covered under an EPA and what's covered under an advance directive. I thank the minister for setting on the record clarity with respect to that.

One of the things that I think is really important about the amendments to the *Enduring Power of Attorney Act* and the amendments that are proposed in Bill No. 17 is that there is going to be a revised standardized form that, as the minister had indicated during that second reading debate, will be developed as regulations are developed. This is important because this is the form that will make it clear how an EPA — an enduring power of attorney — can be done without a lawyer. If I or anyone in this House wants to complete an EPA — an enduring power of attorney — without a lawyer, I or we will be required to use that standardized form that will be developed for this purpose. That really reinforces, as I have said numerous times in this House before, the importance of getting those regulations done as soon as possible. A person is granting significant power and authority when they sign an enduring power of attorney.

In her closing comments, I hope that the minister can give this House a sense of when we might anticipate seeing the regulations that will give effect to Bill No. 17.

Mr. Speaker, we will, of course, be supporting Bill No. 17.

**Speaker:** If the member now speaks, she will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard on third reading of Bill No. 17?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I appreciate the comments from my colleagues across the way in relation to Bill No. 17. I am afraid I don't agree with the Member for Lake Laberge that these are largely housekeeping amendments. In fact, they are not technical or housekeeping amendments. Bill No. 17 contains significant and important progress for Yukoners, including — as mentioned by the Member for Whitehorse Centre — the ability for individuals to make enduring powers of attorney or sign documents for enduring powers of attorney that don't require legal advice or sanction. That is an important opportunity going forward.

There are also significant changes that include protections for individuals from potential fraud and other opportunities in Bill No. 17 that will modernize the *Enduring Power of Attorney Act* to the benefit of Yukoners. I thank them for their comments. I appreciate that the regulations — I'm afraid I don't have my note with respect to when that might be the case. I know we discussed that in Committee of the Whole, but I take the Member for Whitehorse Centre's point that the regulations are critically important. I don't remember them being terribly complex, although they will include the form, as noted, and that will be an important piece for Yukoners. Again, regulations — as soon as possible so that this might proceed to the benefit of Yukon citizens.

**Speaker:** Are you prepared for the question?

**Some Hon. Members:** Division.

**Division**

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

*Bells*

**Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. Frost:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Agree.

**Mr. Adel:** Agree.

**Mr. Hutton:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Agree.

**Mr. Gallina:** Agree.

**Mr. Hassard:** Agree.

**Mr. Kent:** Agree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Agree.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Agree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Agree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Agree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**Ms. Hanson:** Agree.

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

**Speaker:** The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.  
*Motion for third reading of Bill No. 17 agreed to*

**Speaker:** I declare that Bill No. 17 has passed this House.

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

**Chair (Mr. Hutton):** The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

**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 general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

**Department of Economic Development**

**Chair:** Is there any general debate?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Chair, I would first like to welcome the officials to the Legislative Assembly today. The deputy minister is here — Mr. Justin Ferbey — as well as the acting director of Finance, Beth Fricke, who is with us as well. Both individuals, as the Assembly would know, played critical roles over the spring and summer, and have continued to do so, dealing with what has become a very active time for the Department of Economic Development. They have done a job that all Yukoners should be proud of on the work they have done to date, and I know they will continue to deliver with that passion and understanding of the responsibility that they have in these very important roles.

Mr. Chair and Hon. Members, as the Minister of Economic Development, I rise today to introduce the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

Mr. Chair, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Yukon has undertaken unprecedented steps and implemented rapid responses to support Yukon's economy. As we step cautiously through recovery, we are committed to supporting our residents, businesses, and communities through this global crisis. The path to recovery is not one size fits all. It looks different from household to household, business to business, and sector to sector. I think that it is important to speak frankly about this reality and the complexity of it.

For some businesses, their operations were not impacted at all by the pandemic. For other businesses, the pandemic resulted in an unexpected windfall with unprecedented increases in activity, sales, and revenue. Other businesses have suffered a complete and utter loss of business activity, and there is the whole spectrum in between.

Our tourism sector, as the Minister of Tourism and Culture has spoken to, is one of the hardest hit with the global responses and movement of the pandemic absolutely impacting us here on a local level. It is through the supplementary budget that we will see the economic response to COVID-19 and the supports that have been put in place through the Department of Economic Development, and, of course, all increases are a direct result of the COVID-19 response supports.

The Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program, which we've touched on here — to date, we're looking at about \$4.3 million that has been allocated to that. The Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program was introduced this past spring to provide lower income essential workers with a wage subsidy of up to \$4 an hour to a maximum of \$20 an hour for up to 16 weeks. This program is delivered in partnership with the Government of Canada, which allows the program design to be done at the territorial level in order to best meet our specific needs here in Yukon. The program is focused on services identified as critical or essential in the guidelines for the delivery of critical, essential, and other services. Our essential workers have continued to offer the services and goods that Yukoners need on a day-to-day basis.

The Assembly and all Yukoners have recognized the work that those folks have done under a tremendous amount of stress. There was a point when people were not moving. They were there, continuing to make sure that we were supporting and that folks had what they needed.

Again, an increase of \$4,336,000 is identified for the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program within the supplementary budget.

Paid sick leave program — the Department of Economic Development quickly identified the need for paid sick leave to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The paid sick leave program allows workers or self-employed Yukoners who are without sick leave to stay at home if they are sick and required to self-isolate for 14 days and still meet their basic financial needs. The program was part of the stimulus package that was announced on March 16. The dollars identified for this are \$1.2 million. The program has been extended to March 31, 2021, as well, in response to the ongoing needs for Yukoners to self-isolate. We have seen over the last couple of weeks that a program like this is so important. So, again, there is \$1.2 million to continue support for this program.

In the spring, we announced that Yukon businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic would be supported with assistance to cover fixed business costs. The business relief program has been the backbone of our economic supports, giving businesses grants to cover their fixed costs. These costs include rent, utilities, and business insurance — just to name a few. This program was a lifeline and gave Yukon businesses the support needed to manage through this difficult time. While some businesses have been able to rebound and no longer require support, others are still experiencing hardship.

The Department of Economic Development worked with industry organizations and local businesses to help Yukon businesses and workers impacted by the pandemic, and this important work continues through the extension of this program. Through this supplementary budget, we are allocating \$12,024,000 to support this program.

As well, our adaptive pandemic response — we are looking at \$2 million there. One of the fundamental realities of the pandemic is the necessity to plan for the unexpected. This is particularly true with elements of our economy and our risk and result. Again, dollars have been put aside to ensure that we can deal — as we see these pressures mount, it gives us an opportunity to be able to pivot if necessary — of course, all the while, analyzing our programs to ensure that the programs that we have in place are — we're not seeing gaps — working hand in hand with Tourism and Culture.

As well, there is another item in this budget; it is for \$100,000. This is the last item. It is just a quick one, and it falls more into the realm of a housekeeping piece. There was \$100,000 in the 2020-21 main estimates in flow-through funding for the Canada-Yukon business service centre. These funds are now being paid directly by CanNor to Yukonstruct. Again, there was a change to our books.

To summarize, we are putting forward an increase of a total of \$19,460,000 in operation and maintenance for the Department of Economic Development. This is a very

significant increase and it probably has not been seen before, based on where we usually are for the mains. These funds are singularly dedicated to directly support our economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The work that the department undertakes using these funds will continue to pave our path to recovery during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we will continue to adapt and respond as the impact on Yukon evolves. I would also like to thank the department for their efforts as well as the Yukon Business Advisory Council, which really helped and advised us to structure many of these programs, again, working directly with business and the local chambers in their commitment to supporting Yukon's economy.

I encourage Yukoners again to take every opportunity that they can to shop locally. It's so important as we go into the month of December. Please — if there was ever a time, this is it. Again, it will take a concerted effort on all our parts to support our local economy and see this through.

With that, I will leave it to my colleagues for questions, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Chair, I want to begin by thanking the minister for his opening remarks and thanking the officials from the department for being here today. I also want to thank the officials from the department who have been working throughout this year implementing many of the business relief programs on behalf of the Yukon government.

I know that many of them have had a lot of new material, programs, and responsibilities thrust right onto their desks. We have been in touch with a lot of the local businesses about their interactions with the department. I want to note that the majority of the businesses we hear from all note that the officials genuinely seem like they are trying to help and are doing the best they can to ensure that local companies can access all of these supports. I want to note for those officials in the department that we understand that it has been a challenging year and we really do want to thank them. If the department heads can pass that on — that they have made considerable effort and we thank them and commend them for that.

When we have debated budgets of the department, I typically like to begin by asking about the adjustments that the departments have had to make with regard to COVID-19. Just at a very high level, can the minister begin by telling us a bit about how the staff in the department have adjusted to the pandemic? How many Economic Development staff are working from home? Has that changed throughout the year, and how many staff are currently in the building on Alexander Street?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I think it should be noted that one of the things that I know the deputy minister — upon taking on this role and is in full agreement with — is trying to ensure that individuals in particular roles — mostly in the advisors' roles — do have the opportunity to be out of the office before COVID started — getting out there and interacting with the business community, understanding the needs of the business community. I think that's key.

Along those lines, as well — I know, in all staff meetings that I've had an opportunity to attend, I have always — through

the work of the deputy minister — just a challenge to see if individuals within the department could work in different ways. I think that what many people have found is that the resistance to that concept — I'm not saying the department, but just generally I think within society — the resistance to feeling that people could work in an effective way or that you were getting sort of the most out of your colleagues. That was something still to be questioned, I think. What we've seen since March is a government continuing to operate, a government that has risen to the occasion week after week, and in many cases, individuals were doing that from home. That adds to the whole conversation about what future work looks like. We're seeing that right from the financial industry across the country through to, you name it — and there is going to be an industry that has really pivoted quickly in understanding what the needs of their employees are.

Within the department, most folks are there every day. We have about 10 people right now who are rotating between being in the office and being at home. I think, as the year has gone by or as we have moved through 2020, people have come back. I don't have exact stats of what the incremental changes were, but that's where we are today. I think folks have been very effective in the work they have done.

**Mr. Istchenko:** In my question, I also just asked about how the staff in the department have adjusted to the pandemic, and it sounds like 10 of the staff are rotating from home. I was just hoping that maybe the minister would just elaborate a little bit more on the safety protocols at the office and stuff like that.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Chair, there has been orientation with individuals on staff concerning the appropriate protocols, the "safe six", ensuring that people are following the most appropriate protocols to keep people safe.

It was just shared with me — one-way hallways, proper spacing, the wearing of masks. All of those different items are being done.

Also, each branch has taken on other responsibilities. Of course, there is cleaning that's done on a regular basis, but also, over and above that, the department has been very prudent in making sure that areas that are used a lot — they take turns making sure that those areas are clean and are safe to use. Overall, concerning what the feeling is from staff, what has been shared is that, going into this second wave, appropriately, there is some anxiety around that. I know that the folks within the senior team as well as human resources are just monitoring to make sure that people are feeling comfortable, and if they need accommodations put in place, they can have that work done.

Overall, I think that's generally in every industry right now. In our community, we've seen that over the last couple of weeks. As there have been more COVID cases, there's a greater anxiety around this — whereas other jurisdictions have been experiencing things in a different way than we have here.

I hope that answers the question and gives a sense of what is happening in the department.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Yes, thank you for the answer from the minister.

I want to turn to the specifics of the budget before us relative to the amount voted today — basically the biggest increase in this appropriation. This is related to the expenditure of the Yukon COVID response.

In the briefing, officials provided a bit of a breakdown. The first component of the \$19.56 million was related to the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program, which is approximately \$4.3 million. This is a program that was recently extended. Then there is the paid sick leave program, the business relief program, and a final line of what the government called "COVID-19 impacts".

Before I dig into each program, I would just like the minister to discuss a bit about the speed at which these programs came in. I'm just wondering what sort of policy development and due diligence was done to develop these programs. Were the department officials offered new training to deliver these programs? Of course, in many cases, the staff who are delivering these programs are trained on the delivery of different programs. Was any additional support put in place to the existing staff?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I'm going to speak sort of broadly around the creation of programs. To answer quickly off the top, the deputy minister was sharing that there were multiple staff trainings on the delivery of programs. That there was work that was done was just shared with me.

We have a group of individuals who are working in the department — and again, what an exceptional job they did. They had a very short period of time to either tweak existing programs or build out programs and then deliver them. They're professionals in the world that they work in. I do agree that it's important to understand from one program to another, but at the same time, there are core competencies that individuals have that can then be applied to the delivery of multiple programs.

The sick leave program, which would have been the first program — that was March 19. To give you a sense, the Arctic Winters Games was cancelled on March 7. That's a good anchor to try to remember back to. Then, 12 days later, they were — sorry, March 22, I apologize. So, on March 22, the paid sick leave — so we were looking at it 15 days later, so in just over two weeks, that program was put together.

There were a lot of long hours. The norm was to reach out to the deputy minister and check in to see how things were going. There were a lot of late evenings where pizza was being ordered, and people were continuing to do the work that they needed to do. They knew how absolutely important that it was. Again, it was a very short period of time, but a group of fantastic policy folks — number one — and strong leadership — we have a really talented economist there who did a lot of work for us and continues to do a lot of work. The finance team came in as well — and being able to look at the resources that we had to identify the program and to cash-flow it out to understand what the optimal program was to maximize the impact of those financial resources. All of that work was happening so quickly. That is what we saw within the sick leave.

The next program that went out was on April 9, which was the Yukon business relief program. I think the department —

and huge kudos to the deputy minister. There was a lot of conversation. We watched what was happening around the country. There were conversations happening between ministers of economic development, some formal and some more casual in nature. Everyone was scrambling to try to figure out how they were going to shore up their different sectors. That was about a month from the Arctic Winter Games.

But the other piece that I think was really important was that we struck the business advisory group. Actually, the first meeting that we had was on the Monday, I believe, after the Arctic Winter Games — I believe it was a Saturday — and then, two days later, we pulled in a group of people who were primarily affected by the cancellation of those games. That group — there were chambers involved, retailers, and all of the folks who had the biggest impact from the Arctic Winter Games. We were just entering into this new reality. Within that, it became very clear that it was important to strike a group very quickly, so that's what we did.

We tried to do our best in a way that brought a very diverse group of folks together and at the same time. Certainly, as we went along, there were times when I worked with the Member for Whitehorse Centre and there were maybe industries — or there were industries — that were missed, and so folks reached out to me and said, "Look, you could really add more people." It is a tough thing to do. You start to grow this group of folks and you don't want to leave people out who represent a sector, but at the same time, you are trying to figure out how — for every one of us in here, I know that all of us have taken on roles — whether as elected officials, non-profits, NGOs, or community groups — but we have all chaired meetings, and you can imagine when you get to a point where you are doing it virtually, and now you have 30 people. Those are difficult processes to undertake. You still want to get value from it.

So, anyway, that group came in. We identified a group of individuals. Folks kindly lent their time and expertise, and then we started to have a discussion with them. At the same time, the department had some good sense about programs that we needed to do. It landed perfectly where the Business Advisory Council came and said, "Look, you need to shore us up." We were in a position where, upon the analysis of what we thought that would look like, which is tough to do — but really, to do the due diligence from a financial perspective, the teams dug in, they projected what we thought the uptake would be on a program, and then, again, cash-flowed it out. Of course, we had to come up with our proper budget number to be able to go to Management Board and request the funds for this particular program — and make sure that you have enough to support the folks in it.

It's a policy conversation, and I appreciate the question from the Member for Kluane, but the folks in that department — when I think about everything that they have worked on over the last number of years that I have had a chance to work with them on, it was extraordinary. The sick leave program — the federal government has come in and essentially used this as a template, or a blueprint, for the Canadian program. That is what we have been made aware of.

But the business relief program is something that has been so important because, even over the last couple of weeks as we have gone into this period where we have seen more cases and when we no longer had the BC bubble, the first thing you start to think about is — in my role, the announcement is made and then you start to think about: What are the implications to the business sector, and what are the implications to the greater community? Having the business relief program built out by the department gave some comfort in the sense that there was a program ready. We knew that initially there were just under 500 businesses that used that program. Then, when we went into post summer and into September, then we know that the number dropped down — in that 125 to 150 mark, I believe. I'll go back and pick the exact numbers, but it is in that range. We knew that they were primarily tourism operations because that part of the economy was still in a really tough spot. Knowing that you can wake up on Monday or Tuesday and ask companies if they are affected by these decisions — in many cases, they might have been clients already. You have their pertinent information, you have a relationship with them, and you're in a position for them to come back to you very quickly if they need to request that help and support.

I think that this is something that — again, talking to ministers from other jurisdictions, they just — I will say that, even though we're in the House and we have the ability to have the supports of the House when we speak, I would say that, without identifying the provinces or territories — in dialogue with ministers of all political backgrounds — some of them, when we were on the phone, just said, "We're in a position where we're just going to have to let businesses close. There's nothing we can do."

In some cases, ministers were saying, "We are going to look toward different parts of our economy right now. That's what we have to do. We're going to be looking into completely different sectors." Understanding the magnitude of what was happening here, but then trying to understand what that would be in a bigger centre — we were very lucky that we had the ability to come together and have this program in place and that it shored up businesses. When you look at the statistical information, it was good to see, in that period of time and under the definitions that we used, that there might have been a business closed for a month or two, but then we saw the reopening piece.

The officials just corrected me. March 22 — and this is for Hansard — was the date when I believe our program was communicated for the sick leave. March 26 was when it went live, so it was a bit longer — 19 days versus 15 days. The business relief started in April and ends, of course, March 31.

The essential workers program start date was March 15. That is a great one, too. I want to make sure that is the right date, because it might have been a bit earlier, so I will get back with that. This program was one where we had to identify the money that was provided to us by the federal government. I know that there has been some talk in the House about how we could have maximized that particular program. I think that what we tried to do was take a look at money that has been allocated to us and understand what — I guess you would call it the



“sweet spot” in getting that money out to make as much of an impact as we possibly could. It was effective on March 15, and it goes to February 15 with this extension. Right now, that is what we are looking at.

There was just one other piece of information that I wanted to share with the Member for Kluane. On the Yukon business relief program, there were 522 applications, so it is over 500 now. It was just under \$6 million — \$5.91 million. That was as of November 25, so this is where we were last week on that particular program.

For the paid sick leave rebate — from March to November, there were 84 employers who have been approved to date. We had some last week and we are in a good position to continue to inform folks about that in the hopes that all the employees who are seeking that and who meet the criteria through their current remuneration will have employers who support that — and again, ready to reach out if need be.

I think that’s the time period. Again, focusing on — there was the in-house training, the core competency that exists within the folks who are there — a multitude of skillsets from finance right through to policy to having economists who can do the work — a group of people who, again, have risen to the occasion, have put programs in place that are really keeping us moving — and not just something that rolled out in the springtime but programs that are timeless within the construct of COVID-19 — I’ll put it that way — really strong work on their part.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I’m going to have questions on each one of the programs, so I will stick with one program at a time.

The Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program — let’s begin with a little bit of an overview. Can the minister tell me who is eligible for this program and who is not? Where did the decision — where did the minister decide to structure this program from?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** The structuring of these programs — the question asked: How did the minister decide to structure the program? For Yukoners — what happens is that we have a group of talented individuals who help structure options for these programs and then present them, build a case, and, most times, will give a series of options around some key points.

That’s what has happened. I’m lucky that I get to sit down and look at what’s essentially pretty much a finished product, and then the department will look for me to endorse it, and then it moves on to another process within the governance structure. Then it will go to Cabinet and, if need be, Management Board.

Let me just talk a little bit about the programs. The essential workers provide the services that we need every day throughout the pandemic. To support these efforts, the government launched the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program to provide temporary financial support for lower income workers who deliver these essential services. Businesses, non-governmental organizations, and governments that are delivering essential services can receive a wage subsidy of up to \$4 per hour for each eligible employee, increasing their wage to a maximum of \$20 per hour for up to 16 weeks.

The program has been extended until February 15, 2021, to remain responsive as the COVID-19 situation evolves.

Essential workers who received the benefit during the initial program that we had are once again eligible. The Government of Canada has agreed to provide funding for this program. We talked a little bit last week just about the extension, but also the \$100 — we moved it from \$50 to \$100 on that.

I’m going to go through a bit of background about the program, but let’s go into the question of eligibility. The basic program design eligibility requirements are — part-time or full-time and seasonal workers earning a pre-program wage rate of less than \$20 per hour before taxes and deductions and providing essential services will be eligible. Workers will receive a top-up — so it is part of the design — of either \$4 an hour or an amount that brings their wage to \$20 per hour, whichever is less. The top-up is available for each hour worked by an eligible worker — so, generally a 40-hour workweek — to a maximum of 640 hours over that 16-week period. Now, of course, we’ve extended that. Overtime hours are not eligible under the program.

To assess the eligibility of salaried workers, the hourly wage will be calculated as the annual salary divided by 2,000 working hours — equivalent to working 40 hours per week for 50 weeks. All Yukon businesses, community organizations, or government operations can apply for their eligible workers. This program applies to all Yukon workers engaged in providing essential services identified in annex 2 of the Yukon government’s guidelines for the delivery of critical and essential services that we have.

Employers accessing the temporary wage subsidy are eligible applicants. Employers accessing the Yukon government’s staffing up labour market funding program will be automatically enrolled in the program through the Department of Education where they receive the top-up. Both the employer and essential worker must be Yukon-based. A Yukon-based business must meet three of the following criteria: (1) has a resident, agent, warehouse, office, or place of business in the Yukon; (2) is subject to the Yukon *Income Tax Act*; (3) has a valid registration with Corporate Affairs *Business Corporations Act, Partnership and Business Names Act, or Societies Act*; and (4) has a valid municipal business licence where applicable.

Community societies or associations are defined as being organizations that are registered societies under the Yukon *Societies Act* and are in good standing and that are based in a community.

Employers, again — we talked a bit about that, which was the \$100 per registered essential worker to defray payroll expenses — such as Canada Pension Plan contributions, employment insurance, and Yukon Workers’ Compensation Health and Safety Board premiums — and reflect the administrative burden that is associated with applications and encourage participation in the program. The amount will be paid at the time the employee is registered.

I think that it is a pretty good understanding of the eligibility and a bit about the design and structure. Again, we had that opportunity to do the early work on it.

I just want to make sure, before I sit down, that I have answered all the questions. Maybe I will just touch quickly on

what parts of the sectors have used the essential workers the most.

The Yukon essential workers — we have seen the biggest uptake in accommodation and food services — about \$435,000. We have seen, in the administrative and support waste management and remuneration services, about \$16,000. I am going to go through these exact numbers for Hansard. On our top line, we have accommodation and food services — \$435,614. In our administrative and support waste management and remuneration services — \$16,605. Under agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting — \$20,030.

Under educational services, there is \$60,383; information and cultural industries is \$3,354; other services — I can endeavour to get that, but it's \$2,615. Professional, scientific, and technical services — \$28,972. Retail trade, our biggest user of the program to date, was \$636,740 allocated to that sector of the economy. Transportation warehousing — \$9,209. Wholesale trade — \$1,456. This gives you a bit of a sense. As of Friday, Mr. Chair, the program has paid a top-up to 1,292 employees, so just around 1,300 employees who have used the program.

I think it's important to show that there is a lot of hard work done by the department on this.

I will get into subsectors. In the subsectors for the program, there are the accommodation services. Accommodation services have used \$36,751 so far of this program. Administrative and support services is \$16,605. Air transportation has used \$9,209. Animal production and aquaculture — \$3,812; building materials, garden equipment, and supplies dealers — \$85,034. For crop production, we have seen \$16,219. Again, educational services — we touched on it before — is \$60,383. Electronics and appliance stores — \$1,335; food and beverage stores — \$320,291; food services and drinking places — \$398,864; gasoline stations — \$31,646; general merchandise stores — \$134,171; health and personal care stores — \$29,427.

I'm not going to address some of the subsectors because there was nothing allocated. I will just name the ones that we did fund: motor vehicle and parts dealers — \$21,107; non-store retailers — \$7,696; personal and laundry services — \$2,615; petroleum and petroleum products merchant warehouses — \$1,456; professional, scientific, and technical services — \$20,972; publishing industries, not counting digital online except Internet — \$3,354; and sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores — \$6,031. So, there is really good detail there, I think, on what we've spent.

Then, not as much uptake in the communities on this for some — we've seen, to date, when we look at allocation — in Carmacks, we've seen \$3,430; Haines Junction — \$17,698; Teslin — \$8,904; and the bulk in Whitehorse at one point — \$1,184,946. Again, the bulk of it in Whitehorse but some communities using — and again, making sure that we share this information with the chambers — Whitehorse chamber, Yukon chamber, and others out there. They have, of course, in the communities — most of the organizations that represent the private sector have a relationship with the Yukon Chamber of Commerce.

I think that we have hit the questions that were asked by the Member for Kluane. If I have missed anything, please let me know and I will add it as we answer questions for the next couple of programs.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Given the speed here that we are at, I do have many more questions about the essential workers program, the paid sick leave program, and the business relief program, but I am going to switch gears a little bit here. I am looking at how things are going here, so maybe I will read them all in later or maybe I will do it in a legislative return.

Let's turn to the Economic Development programs and some of them now. Let's start with red tape. The Liberals had a fairly significant platform commitment in 2016 related to reducing red tape and increasing access to e-services. To our knowledge, this work has been led by the Minister of Economic Development.

Can the minister give us an update on the work that his government is doing to reduce red tape?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Sure, I think that we can have a discussion about red tape. Red tape reduction is in both mandate letters. In the first mandate letter, it speaks about my work and the work to focus on with the Minister of Community Services. The second mandate letter talks about the work that I am to undertake with the Minister of Community Services and, I believe, with the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I caught a little bit of a nuance in there saying that we believe that the Minister of Economic Development is leading this. I think that really what happens is that the departments come together and identify the points in the mandate letters. They take that into their work planning and then they undertake the work. It is our job to communicate and interface back and forth with the deputy ministers and senior leaders to understand how that work is proceeding. I think that, just for clarity, this is important to address.

Yes, we are, of course, absolutely committed to a user-friendly environment for all stakeholders and working to reduce red tape and manage regulatory processes for Yukon businesses and individuals. We know that this is key to make Yukon a competitive place to work and do business. During the pandemic, COVID-19 program applications were available for download and submission online. A single application process was developed for the Yukon business relief program and the Canada Northern Economic Development Agency's northern relief fund — again, folks working across government departments to streamline regulations and reduce barriers to accessing government services and, with our provincial and territorial counterparts, to reduce regulatory challenges through implementation of the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*, which falls directly into the Department of Economic Development.

Departments have implemented a number of service enhancements online. As the member opposite had asked what were some of the things that were there, I will give a few examples of further enhancements. The Yukon corporate online registry and improved Bids and Tenders website, which you have heard about over the last bit in the House, is really through Highways and Public Works, but we support that work in the sense that it is important to be able to streamline that. We

continue to seek ongoing feedback from the business community and individual Yukoners to ensure that we are on the right path. We know that efficient and fair procurement processes are important to Yukon businesses and we are also putting resources, policies, and processes in place to improve government procurement.

When I look back at some of the actions taken, I would say that, although it may not seem like a red tape reduction, I think that the absolute elimination of the small business tax is probably the one, when I look back over the last four years — it is — how do we reduce red tape? Well, there is no small business tax in the Yukon anymore. I think that is probably — when you talk to businesses — eliminating the Yukon small business tax was a really important undertaking. I think that probably helps our private sector as much as any of the work that we have done. It is important for them to have access to those dollars to reinvest in their businesses and hire more Yukoners or to invest in new equipment — all of the things that you can do with some of those tax strategies.

I touched on a few things there. Again, work that has to continue on — I think that we could go into different departments that I have responsibility for. There is other work that has been done to help streamline some of the processes. So, I will leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Sticking with red tape — as the minister probably knows, the leading organization in Canada that looks at government measures related to red tape is the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, CFIB. According to CFIB, the Liberal government hasn't been doing much. Every year, CFIB issues a report card on how the provinces and territories are doing on reducing red tape. This year, the report card didn't even include the Yukon. I'm not sure what happened there.

But the 2019 red tape report card was quite scathing for the government and it gave the Liberal government an F — a grade of an F — for this work in that report. They said — and I quote: "It is unclear any progress has been made on the following election commitments to: collaborate with businesses to identify barriers to competitiveness and modernize the existing regulatory environment; reduce red tape and regulatory burdens for small business while maintaining standards for business operations; reduce red tape for Yukoners accessing service..."

It seems that CFIB certainly didn't think the Liberals have done much to achieve their platform commitment. The minister spoke a little bit earlier, but what other plans does the minister have? I have spoken to lots of businesses and regular old Yukoners and it seems like, for them, everything costs more and there is more paperwork. What are the plans to address this failing grade that the Yukon Liberal government has received?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I've never heard it called "CFIB", but the next time I talk to them — it's the Canadian Federation of Independent Business — CFIB. Out of the last mandate — year after year, the Yukon had been given very poor grades. It was kind of a standard thing, whether it was under the Yukon Party or under us. My challenge would be — and I think we would have to go and have that dialogue with them — is that we didn't even hear comments from the Canadian Federation of

Independent Business when we eliminated the small business tax.

I've listened to the lead on COVID and what they have asked jurisdictions to do. The Yukon business relief program essentially knocks it out of the park on what that organization has looked for jurisdictions to do.

I know the Member for Lake Laberge might even send a text. He has a lot of good pictures with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business folks when they're in town or even when they're in Vancouver. Please — if anybody is in constant dialogue with them — reach out to them and let them know the programs that they are looking for in this country around COVID — we have put them in place and they can look for great examples.

Now, I can tell you that there are other organizations that also work on behalf of the private sector in this country and globally. In many cases, they have reached out to us and have asked us about the good work that's happening. Again, I think there is more to this story, and I will do my best. What I remember — not that they didn't grade us this year, and as the member opposite said, I don't know what that's all about. I think when they said they didn't grade the jurisdictions in the north, they also had put out a statement that, because of the uniqueness, I believe, of the northern territories, they were going to try to recalibrate how they do their grading. Now, I could be wrong — and I know my officials have shared with me a little bit of information here. I can check anyway to see, but I believe that's really what happened.

When I look back at the work that the department has undertaken and the work that I've been able to do, I think — when it comes to red tape, I think trying to ensure that we are really client-centric is part of it. Within the department — trying to make sure that we have a one-window approach when you meet with advisors, for example, to help businesses navigate through COVID regardless of whatever funding stream is there to reduce our administrative burdens during that and also looking at trying to get rid of systems that are in place that are well past their due date and trying to upgrade those and take more of a digital approach and again looking at our application processes.

I respect the work that all these organizations do, including the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, but I also remember being requested to go to a debate in the election process during the writ and all of sudden there was a moderator from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business who showed up in town that was organized. In our discussions with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, we have made overtures to say, "Hey, let's work together. How can we share some of the work that we're doing?"

I think that there have been some comments from there on things that we haven't done. The things we have done — which, to me, would seem absolutely in line with their mandate and their ideology — we've heard crickets. Maybe we have to do a better job. Maybe what I'll do is thank you for this. I'll work with the department; we'll write a letter to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We will focus on our COVID programs. What we'll also do is talk about the fact that

we've eliminated the small business tax and taken that corporate rate down from 15 to 12 percent. We will see if they will reflect on that work with positive comments, which seems well in line with what they try to cheer jurisdictions and policy makers on to do.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I want to switch to the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*. In January of this year, the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* parties, including the Yukon, announced that they were conducting a review of their party-specific exemptions. Can the minister provide us with an update on this review? Who is leading the review from the Yukon government? When can we expect to see a report, and has the minister given any direction in this regard? Are they considering dropping any of our party-specific exemptions?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** A little bit of background, Mr. Chair. By being part of the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*, we ensure that Yukon businesses have access to markets and investment opportunities beyond our territory. The Member for Pelly-Nisutlin — it's a while ago since we talked about this — in his role in the department, was there through a lot of the early policy development work. It was shortly into the start of this mandate that things had come together. The Minister of Economic Development for Ontario hosted the signing and the final pieces were put together.

I believe that we have the most exemptions of any region. We're utilizing these exceptions and special provisions that Yukon negotiated to increase local employment, support small firms, and enhance regional economic development.

Yukon supports other jurisdictions as they reduce their exceptions to the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*, and we are currently negotiating our exceptions on non-medical use of cannabis and electricity transmission.

I'm not going to delve too much into the specifics. It's essentially mandate negotiation. There have been times where the department has come and sat with me and talked a bit about a series of options — what position we're going to take at the negotiating table. I know that we had some concern around the discussion around transmission. Part of that led to — as I understand it, and I'll look to my officials — but it was really about ensuring that — if you were signed into that package, you would have to ensure that, as you link in — so, not now, if you were just thinking about a forward-thinking position. If you linked into a North American grid, there would be a standard of infrastructure that you would then have to ensure was in place. In the future — it is not something that is going to happen while I'm in this role, but we wanted to think ahead and understand what that would mean — the implications.

As you can imagine, in the Yukon, we have a real range of quality of transmission — or capacity, I should say. We wanted to ensure that we thought through that piece. The direction, of course, was for us to look for an exemption on that piece as well.

We're working with our partners in other jurisdictions through the Regulatory Reconciliation and Cooperation Table, the RCT, to improve the regulatory environment in Canada. We're also continuing to negotiate rules on financial services through the financial services working group in providing

inputs to the other CFTA bodies, including the working groups on government procurement and alcoholic beverages.

The national economic impact for our exemptions is very small in the larger scheme of things, but removing any of these — and the question was: Are we looking to remove? We're not. At no point have I looked to remove exemptions because they could, even though they are small in a national sense, they would have potentially very negative effects locally — again, while really not making an impact on the national scene.

Under the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* with Yukon, the government has an option, as well, to bypass the procurement rules for contracts up to \$1 million, and you have heard the Minister of Highways and Public Works talk about this. So, we can use that 10 times on a fiscal year basis, and we maximize these procurements and suppliers to create economic opportunities across the Yukon. So, that is something that has been in place. I think that this government is probably, I believe, the first government to use that. It is an exemption that we think is a great tool.

Again, as a result of our negotiations, Yukon University, hospitals, and municipalities are exempt from the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* procurement rules — so more good work by the department there. The agreement will not impact territorial legislation or protections related to indigenous people, language, the environment, culture, or health care. These are all exempt from this.

The *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* has also created a number of working groups that our teams play a role in to advance certain aspects of the agreement or to potentially expand the agreement into new sectors. Yukon government is actively participating in all of these working groups to ensure that Yukon's interests are considered and protected. The working groups include alcoholic beverages, financial services, cannabis for non-medical purposes, the development in the food sector in the territories, and trade in fish and fish products that we're involved in.

I am just going to check with the officials. I think that I have a good sense of who is leading it, but I am just going to confer. Shay Kokiw continues to lead the negotiation team with help from the policy group, and as well, the department continues to reach out to outside legal. We are aware of the protocol. I know that the Member for Kluane is kind to me on this. He probably would have let me get up to finish answering his question, but I will leave it at that.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I thank the minister for that. The minister was alluding to the three areas that they were focusing on when he was on his teleconference this year — financial services, cannabis, and alcohol. Can the minister provide us with an update on some of this negotiation stuff that is related to it?

My questions are: What is Yukon's position with regard to reducing regulatory barriers to the trade in cannabis, and what is the latest with regard to trade in alcohol? Also, can the minister tell us about efforts to reduce barriers in trading alcohol? I know that there was previously a move to limit or unlimit, but some jurisdictions, such as Yukon, were reluctant.

That was with the importation of alcohol. Can the minister update us on that and answer those questions, please?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** In these particular instances where we have had some questions from the member opposite, I just want to say that, when these undertakings are happening, we try to ensure that we sit down and speak with the individuals in the private sector. We have done this around the conversation about alcohol — sitting down with companies like Yukon Brewing, understanding their position, and making sure that our negotiators can take that forward.

I do appreciate the questions. I think it's best — I'm going to work with the department to get the Member for Kluane a written response, because we have to be very careful about the confidentiality around the negotiating position and where we are at within it. I just want to make sure that we are prudent in that endeavour. We will go back to the written record in Hansard and work with our team to provide a written answer to this that I can bring back to the Legislative Assembly.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I thank the minister for that and I look forward to that return.

Let's switch gears here and head to the business incentive program. It's pretty well understood by this House and by the business community, but I had a few questions about this year in particular. We have heard from a number of businesses that the department has consulted regarding possible changes to the business incentive program. My questions, I guess, are: Has the minister considered making changes to BIP, and if so, what changes were considered? If the minister does consider these changes to BIP, will he commit to thoroughly consult with the business community before he makes them?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** So, the business incentive program, for folks who may be tuning in and are not aware of it — or BIP, as it's also called — supports businesses bidding on Yukon government tenders, enabling government investments to support local economic activity and diversification. The program encourages employment and training opportunities for Yukoners as well as the use of our locally manufactured products.

In 2019-20, it supported 360 Yukon employees, including 65 apprentices. I know that the Leader of the Third Party has asked that question quite a bit — if we are using that element of the program.

In 2019-20, we had a significant uptake in the program. We continue to see Yukon contractors secure government contracts with Yukon tradespeople, apprentices, and goods manufacturing benefiting from the program. The Department of Economic Development has had discussions with the Yukon Contractors Association regarding options to update the program. We continue to explore options to modernize the goods and services component of the program. Any changes to the business program would have to be compatible with Yukon's domestic and international trade commitments.

I'm going to be respectful. I'm not going to, in a sense, go through all the detail of the payables that went out. What I can say is that it has really been hard in conversations to identify a clear direction that we believe is going to make the most positive impact.

Mr. Chair, if you don't mind, I'm going to say hello to Mr. Steve Rose who is here today and is a former Assistant Deputy Minister of Economic Development. Mr. Rose and I worked together to figure out how this program — and with the officials and the deputy minister — could be optimized. There are reports going back years and years and years where, for the business incentive program, there had been a program analysis. What impact is it making? Is it working? Then it would kind of sit for a while. Coming into this role, a lot of individuals were looking at other jurisdictions. They had a business incentive program. The name was the same, but there was a bit of difference within it. I think that had a lot to do with the value that could be identified within procurement scoring versus paying a rebate out, which is what we are doing here.

We went to the Contractors Association and we sat with them, and it was probably 50:50 in those meetings where some people really wanted us to try to restructure the program and others who are some of the biggest employers and most successful contractors also said, "We use this program, and the way that it's structured right now is helping."

One of the situations that we saw — it was really an advantage — was where we worked with the City of Whitehorse. We extended the program to the building of the municipal services building, and what we heard afterward was that the local contractor that built it made their bid work because they knew they could use this program. We ended up seeing Ketza Construction build that building and hire a bunch of Yukoners.

I want to be open to the Member for Kluane. Have we contemplated trying to change it to optimize it? Yes, we have. I would have to say, though, that we don't have a concrete direction for that. At this point, we're not touching it; we're leaving it as it is. That's what we've heard from more individuals — to leave it as it is and to use it. There seems to be a lot of uptake in it.

I want the member opposite to be able to ask some more of those questions. I'm not going to go through which companies used it and how much they used it, but I can say that there is a big uptake on it. It has been used a lot. There are other sectors that are now thinking about it. I think we have to see if it can be extended to ensure — maybe it's something that we're just starting to have the discussion about, but can the agricultural industry use this? Does it make sense that a product is grown here? Can that help with institutional procurement? How do we work to ensure that there is the maximum amount of Yukon-grown food inside our bigger institutions here? How can we deal with that delta of what they need to charge to produce something here versus it being produced somewhere else? Those are all the things that we are still contemplating.

Again, there are no changes being contemplated. If there were changes at this time, we absolutely would be going out to have a broader conversation. Through those broad conversations, we have had pretty clear direction to date.

**Mr. Istchenko:** The minister did speak about allowing the City of Whitehorse to be eligible for BIP, so I guess I do have a few questions that might have to come back in a legislative return. I am pretty sure that, now that this has almost

been completed, there was an announcement that the applications were rolling in for that project. How much money is in the budget for BIP in light of the massive new project? Does the minister have any idea how much money will be spent on BIP rebates just for this project alone? Before he made the decision, did he ever ask how much it would cost to allow the city operations building to be BIP-eligible? I am just wondering if the department had planned for this at all.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** The anticipated ask for the BIP program in 2020-21 is estimated at \$919,932. BIP payment averages in the last five years have seen a high degree of variation between a low of \$865,749 to a high of \$2,463,139.

I am just going to see if I can identify the amount for the city building.

I apologize, Mr. Chair. I will get back to the member opposite with a written return concerning the total projected cost associated with the city building. I know that, as the member opposite has just touched on, a lot of those filings would still be coming in as the work is being concluded on that, but we will come back with best estimates on that particular cost.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Are there going to be other non-YG projects that will be considered for eligibility moving forward? I know that the minister has spoken a little bit about agriculture, but maybe First Nation-owned projects — things like that?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** One point of clarification — speaking about agriculture, I was referring to agriculture products more — not as the sector using the program for the procurement purposes in the sense to build something — and the member opposite probably has what I was getting at. If you grow a product and you're selling it in Yukon — the same way that you are building something — can you use the BIP? That is where the agriculture industry has reached out and said, "Is this something that we can use?" We have had the president of the Yukon Agricultural Association match them up with the BIP coordinator so they can have a discussion to see if that is something that fits.

Other than that, to be very open, other than answering these questions today and having a conversation around the agricultural piece, not much has come up. I haven't had any discussions with First Nation governments about extending — or other municipalities. It is something that has been used, I think, twice in the history of Yukon: once for the Canada Games Centre building and then another time for the building of the newest city building that has been put together.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I thank the minister for that.

I want to go back to CFIB a little bit. We discussed earlier that Liberals got — for their lack of action to reduce red tape — but it was something that the minister had said, so I had somebody look into this for me. The minister mentioned that CFIB hadn't commented on the Yukon's COVID-19 relief. So, just to correct the record for the minister, there's an entire section of their website about it.

Something that also popped up to me: Can the minister provide an example of some red tape that he has reduced? For the minister's reference, red tape is things like — I know the minister probably knows this — forms, paperwork that needs

to be filled out, and regulations. Can the minister just give me one example?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Can I just get a clarification on the comment there — the preamble before the question? What is it that exists on the Canadian Federation of Independent Business website? I just didn't hear it correctly. Is it comments about COVID programs, or is it comments about the Yukon's COVID programs?

**Mr. Istchenko:** It's the Yukon's COVID-19 relief.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Okay, that's good. I hope that the comments by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, as stated on their website about our programs, are positive. I'll have a look at that, and then we'll make sure — if they have said positive things, we'll send a letter that says, "Thank you". Then we'll also identify some of the tax measures that we had and share that with them as well. I apologize; I haven't been on the Canadian Federation of Independent Business website in awhile.

So, give an example — during the pandemic, if you were dealing with a situation within your business around COVID-19 and you were at home and needed to go through a process to access one of our programs, one of the things that we did was that you could get a digital copy of that. You could download that and then provide that submission back to us. It was a single application process.

We also coordinated it with the federal government and the territorial government. Again, I think it needs to be said that Sierra Van der Meer — what a great leader in that organization — did a fantastic job on behalf of CanNor and all Yukoners. She was a strong voice within the federal public service to make sure that we had great programs here. I know she worked very closely with our team — just to give one example.

I think that's something — if you look back over the last — I don't know, probably a couple of decades — I could be wrong here; probably the Member for Whitehorse Centre knows better than all of us — but when was the last time that we could identify, digitally download, get an application, and apply for a program that was co-delivered by the federal government? That was the work of the great public servants on this. I know that filling out applications previously when I was in the private sector — how many trips would I be making into offices trying to drop stuff off and make sure they got in? I think there are some real pieces that are changing.

Another one that is just simple, but is very important is that, under the stress that people were in, businesses had to work up their spreadsheets and numbers about where they were. Again, the department provided a tool where folks could input essentially their costs and the reductions in some of their revenues, and then they could calculate their rebates through that sheet. If their bookkeeper or accountant is not readily available, some of those things can be really daunting. Having something that is really user-friendly, again, is something.

Now that we have that tool, we can use it and augment it into different work that we do within our department. Many would say that it is a very powerful tool when they are taking into consideration their time. It might not seem exactly within the definition of "red tape reduction" as identified by my

colleague from Kluane, but just going out and making sure that we are interfacing with businesses, meeting them where they are, and working with them in that form I think is important.

I am going to leave it to the Minister of Community Services at some point in the near future when he comes in — a great opportunity as well to talk about some of the red tape reduction. Again, I will identify that this is an area of interest.

With all of us working together in the mandate and having folks really work on it, I am going to say that, after having investment in business and having private businesses, being told that the small business tax has been eliminated — as a business person, this is something you like to hear. It's the first time we've seen that happen in the Yukon. I think it was a big undertaking. Maybe it's not within the criteria of what folks think is a red tape reduction, but I think most would look very fondly on that one.

For the business incentive program — I'm going to answer that question while I have the data. For the City of Whitehorse, as of March 31 — with stuff still coming in — it was \$303,926.

**Chair:** Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

#### *Recess*

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

**Mr. Istchenko:** Welcome back everyone. One thing you will always get from the Yukon Party is how we unequivocally support the mining industry — one of our oldest sectors in the Yukon.

Earlier in Question Period, we were a little bit interested when the minister announced that he had met with the CEO of a company this morning and said they were ready to invest millions of dollars in the Yukon. Can the minister tell us which company this was?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Today, what we were doing was following up on our conversations from the Geoscience Forum. These are times where we reach out to folks and usually have an opportunity — some of the companies — we didn't have a chance to meet with all of them. I think it is best right now — we are now going back into Question Period to talk about Energy, Mines and Resources' questions. Energy, Mines and Resources will be called, and there will be, I'm sure, ample opportunity to talk about all of the things that are of concern and priorities for the Yukon Party.

What I would say, if we're really talking about — as the member opposite said, that the Yukon Party — one thing that they always do is support mining. I think that was sort of like the opening preamble.

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** So, this year, I think that we are pretty happy with the ability to again increase the YMEP grant to an

all-time high. So, I think that's something with an economic program and it's good that the Member for Copperbelt South has shown up with some vigor as well and is talking off-mic, fired up; that's good.

I think the Member for Kluane is asking questions, so I think — unless it's the Member for Copperbelt South — I would be happy to take questions from him as well.

Maybe just to clarify, Mr. Chair: Can you let me know who was asking me questions from the opposition today? Is it the Member for Kluane? Then we will continue on.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I beg to differ with the minister. I believe a comment about investing millions of dollars into the Yukon — I would actually say that's economic development in the Yukon. That's why the question was asked here today, but if the minister wants to wait for my fellow colleague during debate on Energy, Mines and Resources, that's fine by me.

What I want to get into now is — I'm going to run through quite a few questions about the programs we were speaking to earlier. I hope to get a legislative return on some of these. If the minister does want to tackle a few of them and then I'll turn the floor over to the Third Party.

The first program that we did have quite a few questions on — and the questions we have are questions that come from working with our constituents and our businesses and all those, just like the members opposite do. I'm sure every MLA has had a call on something asking why this was done or why that was done.

When it comes to the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program, how did the minister select the rate of \$20 an hour? I'm understanding, in the minister's earlier comments, that it's the Department of Education that administers the program. Can he clarify that? Who in the department is authorized to approve applications and distribute money? At what thresholds?

A key one that has been asked by lots: Is any of this funding recoverable from Canada? If so, how much?

We would also like to find out a little bit about the uptake of the program. What has it been like?

I'm going to switch now to the paid sick leave program which, to my account, is \$1.2 million of this expenditure. We found out from the minister earlier when the program went into effect. We note that, in May, the Premier issued a joint statement with the premiers of Manitoba and British Columbia welcoming the federal government's paid sick leave program.

So, in his return, can the minister tell us how the federal announcement changed the Yukon's program? Is this now funded by the federal program? Is there a written policy in place for the program? If there is a written policy, can he share that with the Legislative Assembly?

There has been some discourse at the national level about making this program permanent. Can the minister, in his return, discuss this and explain what the government's position is — this is important — with regard to making this program permanent? What was the uptake in the program — how many businesses and how many days off? Can the minister provide some metrics about this program? With all the programs, I am

just wondering which branch of Economic Development is administering this program.

The biggest one here, of course, is the business relief program. That line accounts for approximately \$12 million. It's also one of the most complex programs for Yukon businesses because of the interaction and connection between the Yukon government and Canada. Let's start by getting an explanation about how the program works. I was looking for the minister — but with time restraints, I just see that we probably don't have enough time.

One question that I wanted to ask about this program is a little bit about the limits. Are we correct in stating that a business that is accessing the program to the maximum extent of \$30,000 a month will run out of eligibility after three months? The government has announced an extension of this program, but it did not lift the total maximum limit of \$100,000. Can the minister explain that decision? Some businesses have asked why the total limit didn't also increase. Who in the department is authorized to approve applications and distribute money? Is there a written policy also in place for this program? Have businesses been denied funding? Were they permitted to appeal the process, and what is that process like? What sort of metrics is the government collecting? Can the minister give us an overview of the uptake of the program — how many businesses have accessed it and at what levels have they accessed it?

From what we have heard, many businesses that accessed this program also frequently access a federal program through CanNor. This is one of the questions we get quite a bit. Can the minister tell us about the information sharing between Economic Development and CanNor to help develop this program?

We also note that the CanNor program has a different eligibility than the Economic Development program. I'm a little bit concerned about why the programs have conflicting eligibility.

Also, one of the components of the COVID-19 response is what the department calls the "COVID-19 impacts", and that is slated for \$2 million. We would like a bit of a breakdown on where that money will go — basically what it's slated for.

In my closing, it's not lost on all Yukoners, it's not lost on us on this side, and I'm sure it's not lost on the hard work from the department — it's clear that these programs were thrown together quickly; they had to be. We were in a pandemic. We totally understand that. We understand how it was imperative of time. With every program and with anything, there are always hiccups with a brand new program that's fast.

When the minister does get back or if he has time to answer it today, I'm just wondering if the minister and the government will agree — and I think this is important. There will probably be other jurisdictions that will be asked the same thing — an internal audit of funding that is provided to local businesses under all of these programs that they have.

Just in my closing remarks, I do again just want to reiterate our thanks on this side to the officials who are here today, but really to everybody in Economic Development and throughout the government. I mentioned it in the last department that I was

debating, which was Environment. Their window and door were open for people who went up there to ask about hunting-related issues, trapping licences, and anything to do with Environment, and there were people there. During the pandemic, the work that the employees in Economic Development did was above average, and it was awesome, to tell the truth, so just a big thank you to them.

I'll cede the floor, after the minister gets up, to the Third Party.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I'll go one step further: I would say more than above average — we went back through and rolled programs out. These folks went back to tweak those programs, and from program to program, I don't think there were big amendments made; there were tweaks made. Yes, programs were put together in a short period of time.

I think that part of our takeaway is to understand: What is the time to build programs? What was reflected to me was that we had individuals in the Department of Economic Development who love policy and love working on policy, and to be able to build something, to do an analysis, to be able to put your budgets together around that and, at the same time, to understand how important your work is and then to be able to deploy that in such a short period of time — it doesn't happen a lot in the public service. So, yes, I think that the program has had some tweaks, but, really, when we go back and think about how many tweaks there were — pretty minimal, really.

I want to be respectful to the Member for Whitehorse Centre. I know that there are a lot of questions there. We do have most of that information right here. It would be an hour of me going back through statistical information, application interests — I know that members love that, but I will hold off, and we can put it in a submission.

I think, overall, it is the data that the Member for Kluane wanted to see on those different programs — uptakes and analysis. As we talk about identifying or analyzing our programs, we are still in a position where we are using these programs. How much they are used will really depend on what happens around restrictions and COVID and all of those different impacts.

Quickly, I think, just to be respectful to folks who are here with me — we will go back and we will look at how we chose the dollar amounts for essential workers, who has approval levels within the departments — all of those things.

Just in finishing, the only comment that I will make is that what I have garnered today — there were some very specific questions around trade, which are important ones; there were some very specific questions around our programs. There was a lot of reflection around the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I have had a quick chance to go through the Canadian Federation of Independent Business' website where they do reflect upon the programs by the Yukon. In some cases, what they are asking, I think, as I quickly looked at it, was for us to extend the programs. They support those programs; they just want to see them extended for a longer period of time. So, it seems like there is a little bit of validation from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business on the programs if they are asking them to be extended.



There was a comment about support for the mineral sector. I appreciate that, and we will stick it back into Energy, Mines and Resources, but there are companies that are service sector providers and that have been supported through the Yukon business relief program, so we did have that program helping so many that are critical to that sector — the mineral sector and the resource sector.

In closing, I would just say to the member opposite that there is good validation and support for programs — identified it. So, why did you vote against them? That's my question. If you are celebrating them, you know they were critical, you know they are supported, and you're looking for guidance and advice from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business — and they are coming in and saying that we should extend the programs, again validating — why would you vote against them? Why wouldn't you support these programs when we were at second reading? If these are what is holding up our economy — and every day there are questions in Question Period about the tourism sector. This Yukon business relief program has been the greatest tool that we've been able to use to sustain us as we go forward. Again, if you are really, legitimately there to support them, I hope at third reading you support the programs that have kept the economy going — which a bunch of hard-working public servants have done — and programs that were built through advice from the private sector.

I will leave it at that and look for questions from the Third Party.

**Ms. Hanson:** I was a bit thrown off by that rousing ending from the minister opposite. I will try to gather my thoughts and reflect.

We didn't debate Economic Development at all during the Spring Sitting, so we haven't had an opportunity to actually engage on the Economic Development portfolio for some time.

I just wanted to start with the big number, and then we can go from there. Of the \$19.5 million in the supplementary — there's a change when you take everything off when you take the \$100,000 off to make it \$19.4 million — is 100 percent of that recoverable from Canada? What percentage is recoverable from Canada?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I just want to clarify: Was the question the total amount of the supplementary budget, or was it just pertaining to the larger line item, which is the Yukon business relief? Which amount was the member opposite seeking to see if it was offset by federal funds?

**Ms. Hanson:** I'm referring to the line which says "COVID-19 Response" for Economic Development.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Chair, out of the \$19,560,000, the dollars that are supporting the Yukon essential workers program — which is \$4,336,000 — are the monies that are offset through federal funding agreements at this time.

**Ms. Hanson:** I'll go on to the next question, but if I am incorrect in my assumption that the balance then is — so 100 percent of the \$4,336,000 that is listed in the documents that we received — it is 100-percent recoverable and the balance is being borne by the Yukon consolidated revenue.

The minister provided some background information with respect to the paid sick leave rebate. He indicated that there were 84 employers who had availed themselves of this program. Can the minister tell us how many employees that covers? That's really what we're talking about. I understand that was what was budgeted for the paid sick leave program, which has, as he said, been extended to March 21 — so it's \$1.2 million, but what has actually been paid out of this program to date?

Has there been consideration that some employees will need a second 14 days' paid leave with the increasing numbers? We're seeing a surge. We just saw today — just as I came in here today — that 46 people died in BC yesterday. It's easy to imagine that someone could have had to isolate during the summer or this fall, and they will need the same ability to self-isolate over the next couple of months given what we're seeing as a surge.

The minister can correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Chair, but it's my understanding that this sick leave rebate doesn't mean that all workers have access to paid sick leave; it has to be used all at once. It sounds great with 14 days, but as I understand it — for example, if a retail worker wakes up one morning — a retail worker who does not have access to paid sick leave from their employer — and has a sore throat and a runny nose, a headache — all symptoms listed on the COVID website — again, these are essential front-line workers — if that employee decides to do the responsible thing and not go in to work and does get a COVID test, they would qualify for the rebate program. Now, let's say that the test comes back negative, and they could get back to work two or three days later — three to four days, more likely. If their employer uses the rebate for those two or three days, it won't be available again for this employee, as I understand it; I'm asking the minister to clarify that.

I don't know about you, Mr. Chair, but I think most people have a headache, runny nose, sore throat more than once a year. In these COVID times when people are being asked to be hyper-diligent and hyper-aware, then we need to be cognizant that there's going to be a different impact, particularly for front-line workers who have no access to paid sick leave.

I would like the minister to tell us how this program will help this retail worker the next time they wake up with these COVID-like symptoms. That worker could be faced with a pretty terrible choice. They can do the right thing by not going in to work, but this might mean they can't afford their rent or to put food on the table.

So, my question is really: Why is the program structured so that the rebate can only be used in one go — like, one time?

From a public health perspective, it doesn't make sense. I would say that it's not just the vulnerability of, say, the retail worker, but we have auxiliary-on-call workers who are working in similar situations who don't have access to sick leave.

Can the minister provide that clarity with respect to the paid sick leave — the number of employees, and then what consideration has been given to the fact that some employees may have had to access this — are they one time only and that's it?

How are we going to accommodate this to deal with the real issues — the real lived reality of people on the front lines with no benefits?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** There have been 150 employees who have used the program to date, for folks who have been tested, and have used the program that was rolled out by the Yukon government and now are finding themselves in a situation where they may have to go back and get tested again. The federal program that has rolled out is stackable with the Yukon program, so there would be another program that they would have an opportunity to use to go out and get tested again.

**Ms. Hanson:** I thank the minister for that. That, I'm sure, will provide some sense of relief. It is good to get that on the record.

When the minister was talking about the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program — we have talked about a lot of things here this afternoon — the discussion this afternoon was about the number of people who had applied. The minister said that the \$4.3 million, which we just talked about, is 100-percent recoverable. No, that is not the business — sorry; that is the essential worker program, and I will come back to that in a minute.

This budget that was put out there — \$12 million for the Yukon business relief program — the forecast was done based on expectations as of April 9 this year. So, we are forecasting to the end of March of this year. Has there been a recent review of that to determine if that \$12 million that was forecast in April, in terms of any indicators from businesses across Yukon, as to whether or not that is adequate? We heard today the rollout of new federal money for tourism relief, and as I understand it from sitting in on the tourism calls, this is largely managed through the Department of Economic Development. Is that \$12 million — does the minister forecast that as his outer limit?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Concerning the business relief program and the dollars that have been allocated — we monitor, adapt, and respond. That has been basically the work and the process that has been undertaken by the department, and we continue to monitor our expenditures to make sure that we have a strong understanding.

At this time, we are in a position where we have budgeted it. This is the amount we have budgeted. Of course, we are hoping to see our supplementary budget pass here, but at the same time, we are looking to ensure that we stay within our spend.

The original forecast of \$6.5 million was when we started the work; then later, when we looked at the extension of the program, we increased that to \$12 million. At this time, our feeling is that we budgeted correctly. Now, between here and Q1 and Q2 of next year — I guess the end of this fiscal year, which is Q1 and the rest this year — there have been lots of different pressures that businesses have faced. I would say that, right now, our upper limit as it has been forecasted is \$12 million, but in all cases, what we have tried to do is continue to monitor, adapt the programs, and respond accordingly to make sure that we optimize the policy decisions that are being made. I will leave it at that. Based on the current circumstances, that is where we are.

I think everyone is aware that those decisions can change from time to time. I also believe that, as we move forward — the question from the member opposite was: Is this the outer limit? Are we willing to spend more? That's a decision that is made collectively with my Management Board colleagues. I don't have the ability to do that. Would we seek other measures as we monitor? Potentially. But right now, we feel that this program, with the circumstances we are in, is properly funded at this time.

**Ms. Hanson:** I appreciate the minister's answer right up to the last part there, because when I asked the question about whether this is the outer limit, I wasn't really asking him whether they are willing to — because I think that we would have to respond. He just chastised the Member for Kluane for not blindly voting in support of the supplementary estimates, but when he says that then they collectively make a decision about how they move forward or how they collectively will respond to this, that collective does not include members of this Legislative Assembly. It doesn't even include backbenchers of their own governing party.

My concern here is that I'm just trying to get this information because the only time we have is this very limited time here. We haven't had the conversation as members of this Legislative Assembly about any of the decision-making process on any of these issues since March 19.

The minister had outlined, with respect to the essential workers program — and I thank him for the figures that he did provide this afternoon. We were told in the briefing that we would — because I had asked for actually a breakdown of both the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program — and I was told that I would get it by legislative return — and another area as well. I had asked for the demographics with respect to the various programs, and I was told that I would get those as well.

However, as the minister said today, Whitehorse makes up almost 95 percent of the amounts of money that were paid out to top up essential workers' salaries. He outlined how much money had been provided to employers in Carmacks, Haines Junction, and Teslin. We had also heard — I think last week in the Legislative Assembly in response to a question — that Watson Lake, Keno, and Old Crow were about \$2,000. The others were \$11,000, \$8,000, \$4,000 — well, roughly, because today I was told that Carmacks was \$3,430, so last week was a bit higher.

There are a couple things that come to mind. When we heard that there is only \$2,300 provided to employers in the community of Watson Lake, that might cover the top-up of one person for four months. I guess my question is: Does the minister really believe that every other essential worker in Watson Lake does not require or deserve a top-up? Is he really confident that every essential worker in Watson Lake who qualifies for this program has received or will receive the support that they need?

The minister had also said in this House that employees who have not received this kind of a top-up that they're eligible for should approach the department and that the department will send information to the businesses to encourage them to

apply. We know for a fact that some of these businesses have been in touch with the department, but despite the hard work of the department, these businesses have not applied, so their employees have ended up being penalized — not the employer.

I'm going to emphasize again, Mr. Chair, that the department is aware of who these employers are, and they were unsuccessful in convincing the employers to apply. There's only so much that a public servant can do. But even if it's only a few cases — which seems doubtful, given the numbers that we heard today and last week in terms of the uptake in places like Watson Lake or Dawson — it seems doubtful — well, it's not doubtful. It seems to me that these essential workers are the ones who are suffering. They are the ones who are being prevented from accessing hundreds of dollars that they should be eligible for because of the way this program is set up. Does the minister think that this is fair? Does he have any plans to do anything that might help these essential workers get the support that they deserve? If we're looking at an equity-based approach across this territory — that if you're working as an essential worker in Whitehorse — just because you happen to be in Whitehorse, you shouldn't have access or have it denied because you have an essential-worker position in Watson Lake.

We're not asking the minister to change the whole program. We're looking for creativity to find a way for employees whose employer is not cooperating to get the support that they both deserve and need. I think that one of the rationales that we heard very eloquently from the minister and from others in this House is that, during COVID, the stress of the COVID pandemic that we're all facing — the stress that's on everybody but particularly on those who are low-wage earners — is extreme.

So, we're looking for some sense of a recognition of the need to find more creative ways to respond to those few situations where employees can't — haven't been able to — and I guess the other part of that question is — the other part of the “maybe” is: What outreach has been done with respect to ensuring that employers in all parts of the territory are well-informed?

This does link to questions that I've asked this minister and previous ministers of Economic Development with respect to the notion of having, on the ground, Economic Development staff in regions of this territory. We heard earlier this Sitting from the minister that he was in support of having Regional Economic Development people in the communities. He told us that there was a pilot project in Watson Lake. We heard later that the pilot project was cancelled. Perhaps if that pilot project was still in place, there might be a better uptake because there would be a better understanding by employers in Watson Lake about the benefits of the essential workers program. It would be interesting if the minister could tell us why that project was cancelled and what analysis was done to determine which aspects of the pilot project were successful and which weren't.

It would be interesting to know if, in Dawson, the Yukon government has a Regional Economic Development officer. Is the uptake there reflected in the figures that the minister has?

Further, does the minister anticipate expanding the approach of having Regional Economic Development officers

based in communities, as opposed to having them based in Whitehorse? We all know that the restrictions for travel during this pandemic have made it difficult to be present in communities, other than virtually.

It's a broad range of things, but they all relate to ensuring — and I'm focusing on the front line. I am looking to know what the department and what the minister — with his responsibility for everything that occurs in that department — has directed in terms of creative approaches to addressing these very real issues on the ground.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** There is a lot there. I will go back to where we started on that question to make sure that I don't miss the front end.

On the essential workers program, I think that there are very valid points made by the Member for Whitehorse Centre about uptake in the communities. We have sent mailouts to every house in Yukon. We have worked with the chambers. I think that there are valid points made by the member opposite and I think that we, just in discussion — is to ensure that we reach out to chambers again.

I don't believe that the numbers — if we cross-reference the uptake or lack of uptake in certain communities — are reflective that all individuals — that there are other individuals who can use this program.

I agree completely — to be creative and get out and communicate more. That is something that we are committed to doing. We still have funds in place that individuals can use, and I think that is a great point.

We went into a bit of a different topic at the very end of the question, and I do think that there is real value in having representation of folks. We have discussed this a little bit back and forth during Question Period.

We may have a difference of opinion to some extent. I know that some organizations that are in communities have reached out to us and specifically asked for funding that supports an individual, a coordinator, or somebody in that community. We don't have to debate. I know the member opposite's prerogative, as it was shared with me at that time, was: “But that's limited time, and so how do you really get somebody in there who has deep roots?” I agree with all of those points. Having previously worked around different communities, it made sense. Do I support that concept going forward? Absolutely. Am I going to going into human resources issues? No, I am not, but I fully support the concept. When you look at the different sub-regions of Yukon, yes, it makes sense, and when we have supported organizations to have capacity and travel within those economic corridors, it has been good.

I do support the program. If there was an individual who was in that community and who was full-time through that program, do I think that there would be more uptake? Potentially, yes; that is a great point. I don't know, because we don't, but if I broke that down, I think that the line of thinking makes sense to me. Do we think that the member opposite's comments about more efforts to see about this program's uptakes are valid? Absolutely. Are we willing to do that? Yes, we are.

**Ms. Hanson:** I appreciate the comments and the response from the minister. I will point out that I am not talking about HR; I'm talking about the broad issue of pilot projects that the minister — so, I'm very careful when I make the reference to a pilot project, because then I assume, when a government initiates a pilot project, they have some criteria for establishing a pilot project and they have objective criteria against which they can assess the effectiveness of that pilot project to determine whether it should be expanded for use in other regions of the territory. That's the gist of my question there and I would hope that the minister will touch back on that when he stands again.

The Government of Yukon had multi-page sponsored content inserted into the *Yukon, North of Ordinary* magazine recently that provided more details than members of this Legislature have been provided with respect to how Yukon businesses are charting a future during the global epidemic, which is really about the Government of Yukon's contribution. It does provide slightly different data infographics than the minister has provided us in this Legislative Assembly, but I will assume that's just because it's dated. My question is: Can the minister tell this House what the cost was for inserting this infographic and information to this publication?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I was looking for the proper French translation and I'm not going to do a very good job on that one. I was seeking it from my colleague. I just wanted to give a full breadth of the publications that we have done work in since the COVID piece.

Yes, I have to go back and look at the actual charts and data that's in the *Yukon, North of Ordinary* piece to see — I think that's what it would be — dated.

I also want to go back to the last question just quickly and say that I want to make sure that we reconcile the numbers appropriately for the member opposite because I want to make sure that our numbers are pretty current — the 30<sup>th</sup> is where I think we were on most of our charts today, but I want to make sure that I provide the newest numbers. I know from last week that I had gone through some briefing notes that I had, and then this week, there were some updated spreadsheets. We'll make sure — and that's around the essential workers program.

The piece for *Yukon, North of Ordinary* cost \$26,000. The *What's Up Yukon* — which we did earlier on, I think, in April; I'll check the date — was \$20,000. The francophone publication, *l'auroreboréale*, was \$20,000 as well. So, there has been about \$66,000 spent over three publications. *Yukon, North of Ordinary* focused on more of the relief programs and some of the stories that were reflected on how different Yukon businesses have adapted and moved.

The publications that were supported early on were more about information sharing around programs. I can get some more information, but yeah, there was a total of three different expenditures from the department on communication pieces.

**Ms. Hanson:** I thank the minister for that response.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure I'm not alone that, every day when I open up my Facebook or the Internet in any way, I'm inundated — and in particular, this week — with cyber sales, and free shipping is basically the big selling point for people across the

country. We've heard, Mr. Chair, from local retailers that one of the challenges for them is to compete with the web giants when it comes to holiday shopping. We know that Yukoners love to share a bit of Yukon wherever they can. With holidays approaching and with the sales already ramping up and many people not travelling to visit family, there is an opportunity for Yukoners to support local business — like buying local, as we see all over town — by shopping local and sending a piece of Yukon to their family Outside. One of the barriers is shipping costs for retailers.

My question is: Has the government considered assistance to local retailers with shipping expenses? The minister correctly outlined at the beginning of this afternoon how nimble the response has been from Economic Development, from his policy and operational folks, and I'm wondering if he has directed them to give him some options with respect to dealing and responding to this very real challenge. If so, when might we see it rolling out? What form would it take?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** First of all, I think we've watched there be a real move locally to have an organized conversation about “buy local”. We've seen the Whitehorse chamber roll out their work and now, I believe — and I will check to make sure I'm correct — that there was federal funding that was provided. There has been a group of local business people who have really focused on the “buy local” piece. I think there was some support there to have some consistent capacity working on this. I'm going to be open — I think it's a very intriguing concept to offset shipping costs. To the member opposite, I have to say I have not — to be very open — what a creative idea. It's not something that I've contemplated. We've really just tried to get folks to go down to their local stores and to buy local and to support them in that way and to continue to talk with some of the small and medium sized businesses. There are still meetings that are happening, and if there are concepts or ideas that come out of those meetings, they're usually shared with us either through Economic Development or directly through e-mail from the members who are attending.

I guess, the question kind of said, “Hey, if you were looking at this concept, have you directed?” No, I haven't. If this was something, when could it go live and when would we know about it? What I am going to do is take that advice. The officials are here and I think we should reach out to the chambers and see if that's something where there is interest in the business community for that. If there is, what does that look like? How do we do that? We are late in the season. I think that it is a great idea and, any time, I am open to those conversations. We probably have 21 days leading up to when people are still shipping items out and we have that opportunity. We are probably going to see across the rest of the country a lot of people buying local in all of their home communities.

The “buy local” work is a partnership with the chamber. Some of that “brand: Yukon” is some of the early work that is being worked on. I know that a couple of individuals who sit on the Canadian chamber — we are lucky enough to have two people sitting on the chamber. One is Craig Hougen and the other is Stanley Noel. They both are at that table with others continuing to work on a real local focus. Part of what we are

looking at is supporting product development in partnership with YuKconstruct and Yukon University, and we support the web presence for small businesses.

I am not going to belabour it and go into other work that we are doing. I will leave the questions for the member opposite, take that intriguing idea and bring it over. I will make a commitment to report back to the member opposite, probably not in the House with a written return, unless that is what is requested, but definitely reach out directly and let her know what the response is from the private sector if there is interest and uptake on that concept.

**Ms. Hanson:** I thank the minister for his receptivity to the idea. I think that there is only so much that we can consume in this territory. Many Yukoners, as we all know, have family and friends across this country and around the world where they traditionally would be sending things, but at some point, when you are facing some financial constraints yourself, the shipping costs become another issue. When the businesses are competing with the giants that are shipping for free, it makes it challenging.

I would appreciate it if the minister would reach out, as he said, to — and it is not just the chambers. We are talking about the artisanal sector here — the number of small microbusinesses that rely upon being able to have sales this season is pretty amazing, but it is also pretty scary to look at the impact on them.

The minister made a comment earlier about the \$100,000, which he said is flow-through funding through the Canada-Yukon Business Service Centre, which is now going to YuKconstruct. I understand that arrangement. Could the minister, though, provide an update for this Legislative Assembly on the total contribution to YuKconstruct by Yukon government?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** This year, in the 2020-21 budget, the funding from the Department of Economic Development to YuKconstruct Makerspace Society is \$350,000.

**Ms. Hanson:** I thank the minister for that response. Mr. Chair, the government has been advertising — although it is very difficult to read the advertising because it is in magenta with microscopic print and about two inches big in the newspapers — a new immigration strategy for Yukon. We think that's an important initiative. It's 2020 to 2030.

I have a number of questions — and we probably won't get to them all today, Mr. Chair — with respect to some of the matters that are contained in both the backgrounder and the discussion document for a new immigration strategy. Can the minister provide this House with an update as to the timeline for the completion of this immigration strategy for Yukon?

The implication is, as it says in the document, that: "The Yukon Immigration Strategy is limited in scope because of the parameters of the agreement with Canada and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and Regulations. Yukon and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) are preparing to negotiate a new five-year joint agreement. A date has not yet been set to begin negotiations."

Can the minister update the House as to whether or not a date has now been set to begin negotiations on this agreement?

Failing that, how does he see proceeding with developing a strategy if it's missed by means of the fact that there is no agreement? Whatever strategy you're going to develop is limited in scope, so how is he addressing those limitations?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** If the member opposite will just give me a little bit of space, I'm going to give a little bit of background on it. Economic immigration is something that we focused on over the last bit. It's an essential tool for attracting skilled workers and developing a labour force that supports investment, economic growth, and diversification. Even going into 2021, having gone through the last week of meetings around the geoscience conference and the projected expenditures identified, we're hearing from a number of companies that feel that they are going to be in a position where they are not going to have enough staff, potentially, to meet the demands that are being requested of them, based on the quotes that they're doing.

So, since the Yukon *Immigration Strategy* was drafted 10 years ago, the territory's economy has grown and changed, and we're updating the strategy this year to ensure that it meets the evolving needs of Yukon's employers and communities.

This fall, 2020 — I am going to find out exactly what our date is on it. I believe that it is in the month of December when the consultation on this will conclude. The engagement will seek feedback on existing Yukon immigration programs, including Yukon business nominee programs, the recent introduction of the Yukon community pilot, and how the new strategy can help address issues faced by Yukon employers. I know that the member opposite would be happy to hear also that people who have been in those programs or entered the Yukon through those programs have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences. I think that is an important one, and it is just giving a chance for those clients to talk about how they believe things could be improved or what their experiences were — and, if their experiences weren't that favourable, being able to share that with us in a safe way so that we can ensure that programs change.

The engagement period for the immigration strategy has shifted, as a result. We wanted to have some of this work done in the springtime, and now it has been pushed to this fall. Again, because of COVID-19, there are health and spacing requirements. An updated engagement approach has been proposed to ensure the safety of our partners and stakeholders. The revised engagement strategy will include online surveys as well as phone interviews and virtual meetings. The inputs from the public engagement will feed into the revised immigration strategy, which is expected to be finalized later in 2020-21.

The team is very experienced. Part of what it is going to do is to be able to get us some feedback around how the programs have worked and a sense of where we need to go. I think that this is pertinent information when you are at the table. It is very up-to-date information. We have had a lot of back-and-forth with the federal government around this file. I have worked with two different ministers — Minister Hussen and then Minister Mendicino. In both cases, I started work with Minister Hussen on the Yukon pilot program, and that was really just trying to respond to our Yukon communities about it.

What I just want to illustrate is that my experience with the ministers and the immigration officials whom our officials work with — they have been very supportive. For a small jurisdiction, when you take into consideration how many nominees that we have allocated to the Yukon compared to other big jurisdictions, it has been good — having that information going into December, having a good sense of what we are hearing about where people want to go, being able to reflect that at the negotiating table, and then being able to get a bilateral agreement in place that is updated and still gives us the foundational policy pieces that we need to roll out a larger strategy.

In the current circumstances, we have focused on economic immigration. We will see if that is what we are hearing from our communities. There are definitely other streams and types of immigration programs, but in this particular case, coming into 2021, our hope is that we are going to see our economy back to where it was previous to that. There is going to be a need for folks. We understand the pressures as well that come with that, but at the same time, we think that we are on the right path for the programs.

That pilot program gives a lot of flexibility. It gave employers flexibility. A lot of individuals have stopped me and talked to me — that it was conducive to what individuals want. Some individuals want to be in a small community, but they can't find a full-time job. They know that they can get it between two or three businesses. They want to be in those places, and it's exciting to see individuals from across the world make decisions to move to some of our small communities, bolster the fabric of those communities, and increase the population in them.

I hope that gives the member a little bit of a sense about what we're thinking, and I will leave it at that.

**Ms. Hanson:** The question that I was asking — the minister sort of answered one of them, but the key question was — the statement in the minister's own document is: "The Yukon immigration strategy is limited in scope because of the parameters of the agreement with Canada and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and Regulations ... A date has not yet been set to begin negotiations." Without that agreement, the strategy that we're working to develop is limited in scope. My question is: Has a date been set to begin those negotiations?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** We are in the midst of gathering pertinent, current information about what Yukoners want to see in a strategy. A good thing to know is where you want to start your negotiations. What is your negotiation mandate going to look like? You can set a date, but you should know what you are looking to negotiate, so we are gathering that information on our strategy.

Then we reach out to the Minister of Immigration for Canada and say, "We now have a really good sense because we just finished this particular process — can we come to the table? We would like to maybe amend our current bilateral agreement that we have in place."

As I alluded to previously in my statements, we rolled out a community program that was the first in the country, so we seem to be — actually, the department and officials seem to be

very successful in ensuring that the goals of the department, as reflected and illustrated through the ideas and values of Yukoners, get to go to the table. I think what we're saying is that we're going to get this information. When we get it, we can compile it. We want to make sure we don't set a date that actually puts us in a position where we don't have our position and we haven't analyzed all the data yet. So, we will do that first, and then we'll set a date. We'll have an opportunity to see if we have to tweak our bilateral relationship. Maybe we don't; maybe what we'll hear from Yukoners is exactly where we are right now within the programs.

So, we'll get that work done, and then we will move to negotiating or to changing the bilateral agreement. I think that looks to me to be a good order of operations. It doesn't seem like we're doing anything wrong. It's important work that we're undertaking. I think that the department has a really good handle on this — and the officials who are actually looking to roll it out and then negotiate those agreements.

**Ms. Hanson:** That's an interesting approach.

The government announced in August 2019 — at the end of August and then again in September — and signed a letter of intent with the Republic of the Philippines. When we were preparing for what we hoped was going to be budget debate last spring, I went on the websites. I wanted to see what the update was, because the letter of intent had been signed by the Minister of Economic Development and the Philippines' Secretary of Labour according to the Yukon government's website on August 28, 2019.

But in February 2020, the Philippine government website said that the agreement had not been signed. So, a letter of intent may have been signed, but the agreement had not been signed. Could the minister update this House as to whether or not that agreement with the Government of the Philippines has been signed?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I think this will be — seeing the time, I'm going to answer this question, and then I will move that we report progress.

We haven't signed a final agreement. There was back and forth work between the department and the Philippine government. I know it was reported to me that they would like to have that agreement signed. We anticipated that it would be something that could be done in the early part of 2021.

I know that there have been some overtures from officials that they want us to — it's very significant to them, and they wanted to have the agreement signed off. A lot of jurisdictions have reached out on some of that.

I can get an update on that as well from the department and make sure. There are a number of things that we'll follow up on — good ideas and concepts from the Member for Whitehorse Centre — and, of course, some other items that we will get more thorough information for.

Seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

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

*Motion agreed to*

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.

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

### **Chair's report**

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

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

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** I declare the report carried.

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

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the 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 legislative returns were tabled November 30, 2020:**

34-3-46

Response to oral question from Mr. Kent re: School capacity — Porter Creek Secondary School portable mould remediation (Mostyn)

34-3-47

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 205, *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21* — overhead signs (Mostyn)