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HANSARD

Thursday, December 17, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 Fall Sitting

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

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Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Deputy Premier Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Government House Leader Minister of Education; Justice
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate; Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission
Hon. Pauline Frost	Vuntut Gwitchin	Minister of Health and Social Services; Environment; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Highways and Public Works; the Public Service Commission
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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, December 17, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, please help me welcome some avid outdoorsmen and outdoorswomen who are here today for the Yukon Fish and Game Association's 75th tribute: the president, Chuck Shewen; the vice-president, Bryce Bekar; Geoff Wooding, Saxon Ritchie, Stephanie Lyons, and last but not least, Mr. Walter Huberschwerlen, who has been a member since the 1960s sometime. He wasn't sure earlier when I talked to him, and he has been a director for decades.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of winter solstice

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Monday, December 21 is a special day for astronomers as it will be the closest conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn for 400 years.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that you are probably worried that I'm about to break into song — when the moon is in the seventh house and all that dawning of age and Aquarius stuff. Actually, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberals and the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to winter solstice. This coming Monday is winter solstice. Solstice marks the start of the winter as a season, although for north of 60 folk, winter arrived a while ago.

Some people think that winter is when the Earth is farthest from the sun in its slightly elliptical orbit — nope. Actually, the Earth is the closest as it gets to the sun in the next few weeks — this is called "perihelion". We are about five million or so kilometres closer to the sun right now than we are during our summer. The thing that makes winter winter in the northern hemisphere on December 21 is that this is the moment in the Earth's orbit around the sun when our rotational axis is tilted directly away from the sun in the north and toward the sun in the south. This tilt is called the "obliquity of the ecliptic".

Simply put, winter solstice marks our longest night — our deep, dark night. Some folks use the calendar to mark the new year. Roman King Numa Pompilius set January as the first month in 700 BC or so. Celebrating the new year is now pretty universal around the globe — so, go, Romans.

But for me, living in the north, winter solstice marks the turning point, the darkness before the coming return of light,

and it is in this moment of transition that I think back to the year nearly done — 2020 — agonizingly still here — I can't wait for it to be over — 2020. To use the phrase from Queen Elizabeth II, 2020 has been an "annus horribilis" — horrible from all angles, from the front to the backside.

Here are some of the events I remember from 2020. We began 2020 with threats to democracy in Hong Kong; then the shooting down of Ukraine Airlines Flight 752; next, we had the Australian bush fires and the arrival of COVID-19 in Canada, which led to the cancellation of the Arctic Winter Games; the stock market crashed; the gut-wrenching news from Nova Scotia; racism, intolerance, and frustration here in Canada and abroad; I gasped for breath watching the footage of the massive explosion in Beirut and the aftermath; and COVID-19 bubbles, borders, anxiety, and "speaking moistly".

Next came the west coast wildfires. We had the second warmest year on record for the Arctic with sea ice continuing to diminish. What happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic, Mr. Speaker.

Did I mention COVID-19, the global pandemic?

Here, in the south of the territory, we had a crazy dump of snow.

We watched uncertainty, polarization, and threats to democracy around the US election as they set records for coronavirus in the second wave and in voter turnout.

The death of Hockey Night in Canada's legendary announcer Howie Meeker and the death of Jeopardy host Alex Trebek on the same day.

This past weekend, we had the tragic Keno hotel fire and, still, COVID-19.

2020 has been an absolute dumpster fire of a year. Even for those of us who marked a birth, like my new friend Goldie, or a marriage, like my colleague to my right, in 2020, we all know that their celebrations had to be modified or restricted.

I just want to acknowledge how tough a year it has been for everyone, Mr. Speaker, from Watson Lake to Beaver Creek, from Carcross to Old Crow.

I mark winter solstice because it reminds me that we are northern folk. It marks our journey back into the light.

Last week, as we gathered to declare our commitment to the missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus strategy, we listened to Phil Gatensby speak at the lighting of the sacred fire along the Yukon River. Phil reminded us that we all have light within us.

So, my hope for 2021, Mr. Speaker — harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding, and love will steer the stars.

Applause

In recognition of the Yukon Fish and Game Association

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Official Opposition and the Third Party to pay tribute to the Yukon Fish and Game Association as they celebrate 75 years of ensuring sound, long-term management of fish and wildlife and outdoor recreational resources in the best interests of all Yukoners.

A bit of history — on February 7, 1945, 13 residents got together in the Whitehorse parish hall to discuss the fish and game situation in the Yukon and the desirability of starting a movement to protect our wildlife.

The Yukon Fish and Game Association was created for the purpose of propagating and protecting fish and wildlife in the Yukon in response to the potential impacts to come from the construction of the Alaska Highway. The first president was G.R. Bidlake, the first vice-president was F.H.R. Jackson, and the secretary was W.D. MacBride. Membership fees were set at \$1.

Credit for founding the organization goes to Gene Garrow, who had been working for the US Army Corps of Engineers on the Canol Road. Gene was instrumental in getting the organization operational in the early days.

Policy of the day dictated that First Nation people could not be members of a social organization. However, it was decided at the first meeting to open up the membership, as Gene was an indigenous man. A motion was also made to open up the membership to women.

The association was active in the day, lobbying for changes to the fish and game regulations, some of which included: that the sale of game meats and fowl by hunters and the licensing of game dealers be cancelled, at least in the town of Whitehorse; that steps be taken to import mule deer, black-tailed deer, white-tailed deer, elk, and buffalo; that an effort be made to provide additional game guardians to secure adequate enforcement of the game laws; and that resident hunting licences be raised to \$2 and fishing licences begin at \$2.

Long before charcoal and gas BBQs became popular, members of the Yukon Fish and Game Association were treated annually to an outdoor wild-game barbecue, second to none, and the outfitters of the day provided meat from their caches or from early season hunts. Of course, now the annual banquet is sold out way in advance, with an opportunity to try wild game of all sorts. Mr. Speaker, I enjoy the many different recipes and how they are prepared. Outfitters involved in some way over the years were Johnny Johns, Mike Nolan, Alex Van Bibber, Curly and Belle Desrosiers, Joe Jacquot, and Alec Davis — names that many Yukoners will know.

Today, the Yukon Fish and Game Association has grown considerably. The membership is up to around 1,500. The association plays a direct and significant role in the development of Yukon hunting and fishing regulations. They represent a large portion of hunters and anglers in the Yukon, and I would also note that they listen to many anglers and many hunters who do not have membership but who do have concerns, questions, or suggestions.

Today, the association has a very busy agenda, hosting many courses, workshops, and events. I mentioned the popular annual Wild Game Banquet, which includes a silent auction and awards, but there are so many more: Big Bull Night, the Bird and Bat Box Building Day, the Family Fishing Days, the field-dressing course, and the Wolf Creek salmon fry release.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to highlight two programs that are offered through the organization that are particularly well-subscribed to and highly anticipated each year. The Yukon

outdoor women program held toward the end of May or the beginning of June brings women together for a weekend full of workshops, firearm safety and marksmanship, photography, field dressing, archery, fishing, and more. It is a wonderful opportunity for applicants to learn new skills and break into outdoor pursuits.

The other one I wanted to highlight is the youth outdoor education camp held in early June or July. It allows youth between the ages of 13 and 16 to learn outdoor skills, including hunting, fishing, survival, and environmental stewardship. Youth are selected through an application process, and of course, the costs are covered through the organization's annual truck raffle.

So, while these events and others were unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, cancelled in 2020, we sure hope to see them able to go ahead this coming year in addition to all of the other incredible courses, workshops, and events offered throughout the year.

Mr. Speaker, while I was looking through the Yukon Fish and Game Association website photos — and you can scroll through them on the top — I saw one of a friend of mine, Alex Van Bibber. He is sadly missed, but he was a lifetime member of the association. He was tying down a set of moose horns, and it got me to thinking of what an advocate Alex was for the Yukon Fish and Game Association. He loved the youth outdoor education program, and he worked and mentored youth from the time it started — I believe back in the early 1980s. This got me to thinking that Alex probably never knew that he was passing on so much valuable information that would change the lives of so many individuals.

As I scrolled through the rest of the other pictures, I realized that every other member of the association in those pictures — the same goes for you. You are passing on so much valuable information that would change and will change the lives of so many individuals. There are too many people to name throughout the 75 years of the association, but all should know that their efforts are very much appreciated.

I do want to thank President Chuck Shewen, Vice-President Bryce Bekar, all those who serve on the Yukon Fish and Game Association board, and Don Aubin, who is the 75th anniversary event manager.

Mr. Speaker, the future of the Yukon includes healthy lakes and forests, bountiful fish and wildlife, and opportunities for all Yukoners to share our passion for hunting, fishing, and conservation.

So, we thank the Yukon Fish and Game Association for being a big part of that. Congratulations on 75 years and many more years.

Applause

Hon. Ms. Frost: I rise today to pay tribute to the Yukon Fish and Game Association. This voice for licensed hunters was established on February 7, 1945, when 13 Whitehorse residents formed the association for the purpose of protecting fish and wildlife populations in the Yukon.

A great deal has changed since then. With the signing of the final agreements came the establishment of the Yukon Fish

and Wildlife Management Board, the Wildlife Management Advisory Board of the North Slope, the renewable resources councils, and the International Porcupine Caribou Board was also established. These boards and councils play a role in partnership with indigenous governments and Yukon government, working together and holding each other accountable to the legacy that we will leave for our children and grandchildren, much like Alex Van Bibber did.

Today, the Yukon Fish and Game Association continues to operate as a non-profit group with a focus on hunting education and ethics and advocating for the preservation of hunting opportunities for many Yukoners. Department of Environment officials work directly with the association on a regular basis, including contributions to the annual funding of the association. This is a significant contribution, especially considering the number of other environmental groups that we also fund, but we just want to highlight that it affords the opportunity to ensure that Yukon hunters and anglers have access to important education and community outreach activities.

For example, the association provides administrative support for hunter education, ethics development, and outdoor education programming. This includes youth camps and skeet shooting clinics, Yukon outdoor women events, and rifle-sighting clinics — as mentioned by the Member for Kluane, highlighting the initiatives for youth and women. They also participate in and support our angling programming, including the family fishing weekend and events related to the Yukon public fish-stocking program. They partner in lunchtime hunter education and information sessions, like species-specific hunting workshops and bear spray demonstrations. Most recently, we worked together to produce a video education clip related to the effective use of bear spray and bear awareness during winter months.

The association is also one community group that we work with to ensure that Yukon hunters and anglers are engaged on decisions that affect them. This is especially true when considering necessary changes to harvesting opportunities. In the end, our ability to hunt and harvest country food is a privilege. It is a privilege that we enjoy only if we manage species like moose, sheep, caribou, and bison sustainably. The association's input and the engagement of their members have also been key parts of this review as well as the review of adjustments to permit and lottery hunt processes. I would like to take this opportunity to say mahsi' cho to the Yukon Fish and Game Association for the years of partnership.

I look forward to our continued collaboration to ensure sustainable wildlife populations for future generations.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. Frost: Pursuant to section 48.1 of the *Environment Act*, I have for tabling the 2020 state of the environment report. This report provides an update on a suite

of environmental indicators based on information available up to 2019, and it can be found on yukon.ca.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I have for tabling the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board's PricewaterhouseCoopers' report, entitled *Review of duplication in Yukon mining regulation*. I also have for tabling four legislative returns.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have for tabling the legislative return responding to questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition during Committee of the Whole debate on the supplementary budget. I also have for tabling some statistical analysis on 2020 private members' motions.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Mr. Adel: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling the *Twenty-third Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees*.

Speaker: Are there any further reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation to:

(1) apologize to the St. Elias Seniors Society for failing to keep her promise that they would be back in their gathering place in November 2020;

(2) explain the reason for the delay; and

(3) provide a date to the St. Elias Seniors Society for when they can be expected to use this space again.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to cause an inquiry to be made, pursuant to the *Public Inquiries Act*, to:

(1) address circumstances related to the December 11, 2020, fire that destroyed the Keno City Hotel;

(2) address concerns raised by residents of Keno City related to fire protection and community safety; and

(3) address related concerns about fire protection and community safety in unincorporated communities.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to recognize the independence of the Yukon Ombudsman as an Officer of the Yukon Legislative Assembly with the mandate and authority to access records necessary to conduct investigations pursuant to the *Ombudsman Act*.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to ensure that the fence at the research forest is repaired and in good condition.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Education to explain why she told Yukoners that the three new school buses would be put into service on November 24 when they will not be in service until January 4.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Safe Restart Agreement COVID-19 funding

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has worked together with communities to keep the Yukon safe and reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to keeping communities and their residents safe, our priority has been to ensure that communities are informed and supported throughout the pandemic. Our partnerships with municipal and First Nation governments have been integral to keeping the case count low in the territory. I want to thank our partners across the territory for their ongoing supports and collaboration as we enter into the 10th month of this pandemic.

Responding to COVID-19 has put a financial strain on our communities that has not gone unnoticed. Municipalities in the Yukon, like those across Canada, are experiencing higher operational costs as a result of adhering to restrictions due to COVID-19. To assist municipalities struggling due to COVID-19-associated costs, the Government of Canada is providing cost-matched funding as part of the Safe Restart program.

Today, I'm pleased to announce that, together, our government and Canada are providing \$4.35 million to Yukon municipalities; \$3.85 million in funding is being distributed to our eight municipalities. In addition, \$500,000 in funding is dedicated to public transit in Whitehorse.

This support will help municipalities with budget pressures that they are experiencing, including reduced revenues, costs for safety measures, personal protective equipment, staffing, and operating requirements. This funding will help municipalities weather the pandemic and support them to rebound, hopefully without the need for additional revenue from their tax base.

It will also enable municipalities to return to activities sooner by offsetting some of the costs associated with adapting to COVID-19 safety measures. Ensuring Yukon citizens are able to access the local services and supports they need in their communities remains a priority for municipalities and for us as a territorial government. On top of these financial supports are community outreach teams staffed by the COVID response

unit. Community Affairs and Aboriginal Relations are in place to assist municipalities and First Nations.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken about these supports previously, but they are important, so I would like to highlight them again. The community outreach team provides information about COVID-19, answers questions, and supports citizens in communities throughout Yukon. They are in contact with communities and First Nation leaders weekly. They participate in council meetings and provide constant fact checking, advice, and support. Based on the concerns that we heard from our communities, we sourced hundreds of masks for each of our municipalities. The community outreach team has been organizing presentations in communities about how we will work with them if someone in their community tests positive for COVID-19. We are now working to support them during vaccination.

Mr. Speaker, it is crucial that we work collaboratively with local governments to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am proud to say that we have been working closely with our partners across the territory since the pandemic took hold in March and we will continue to do so.

Ms. Van Bibber: I would like to thank the minister for this statement. We agree that municipalities have faced considerable cost increases as a result of the pandemic and the government-imposed public health measures. Municipal services that depend on revenue from users, like transit or recreation, have obviously caused a considerable impact on the financial situation for municipalities across the country and certainly in Yukon as well. We agree that the federal and territorial governments should provide some financial support to municipalities. We know that, if they did not, municipalities — especially smaller ones — have much fewer tools to address their budget shortfalls. This could mean increasing taxes on citizens and businesses, which no one wants to see.

We do have a few questions that did not seem to be addressed in the minister's statement. In the appendix of the Canada-Yukon Safe Restart Agreement investment details, which were released several months ago, the details were explained. In that document, it stated that the total federal investment was \$2 million for municipalities and \$2.3 million for transit.

To us, that would mean a total federal contribution of \$4.3 million, and the territorial allocation was to be \$2.175 million. That should bring the total to \$6.475 million, yet today's announcement is only for \$4.35 million.

We're hoping that the minister can explain this a bit more. We would ask if the minister could explain how much of the money that the minister has announced for this program came from the federal government and how much came from the Yukon government. Furthermore, the details document indicated that municipalities would receive funding on a per capita basis; however, we have heard that, instead of per capita, the government used the CMG allocation formula.

We would like for the minister to explain how the amount going to each municipality was calculated.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we agree that municipalities should receive this unique funding to meet their unique needs. We appreciate the work done by the municipal governments throughout this pandemic, and we recognize their contribution to keeping our communities safe and healthy.

Ms. White: Every country in the world has had to face the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Canada has been no different, and as we looked at the impact of the pandemic from coast to coast to coast, Canadians have worked together to do the best we could through this strange time. In Yukon, folks have been doing their best to follow the recommendations and restrictions since the spring, but individual action isn't enough, and governments play a key role in public health and safety during this pandemic and as we move toward phasing into a life after COVID.

When the Premier signed the Safe Restart Agreement with Ottawa back in October, one of the agreed-upon priority areas was support for municipal governments. In quoting from that letter: "Funds for municipal and transit investments will be cost-shared 50/50. Contributions for municipal supports will recognize provincial and territorial operational investments flowed from April 1, 2020.

"Our government will provide a direct and verifiable transfer to municipalities for the appropriate amounts and commit that no claw-backs in other forms will occur.

"In Yukon, municipal funding will support operating budget pressures due to COVID-19, such as additional costs for PPE, as well as staffing and operating requirements, particularly for the management of community centres, public spaces and public transit. The Government of Yukon is working directly with municipalities to understand their distinct needs. Once this information is gathered, we intend to allocate funding to municipalities based on an evaluation of their needs."

Municipal governments offer critical services to Yukoners. They are the level of government closest to our everyday lives and, like every other organization, the pandemic has affected them.

Municipalities are responsible for costly infrastructure — infrastructure such as recreational facilities and, in Whitehorse, a transit system that has significant operational costs that must be met regardless of the financial hit from reduced revenues that they have taken as a result of the necessary pandemic restrictions.

As we have discussed previously in this House, we expect that the federal and Yukon governments will work together to focus mid-pandemic on effective relief measures so that, when we eventually come through to the other side, our communities will be poised for a healthy recovery. We recognize that municipalities are limited in the revenue that they can generate, and there are very few avenues other than user fees and property taxes. That's why it's critical that the federal and territorial governments step in now to provide money to cover these gaps.

So, we were pleased when the initial announcement of the Safe Restart program was made in September. The update by the minister today would be enhanced if the minister could clarify how the Yukon government has assessed whether or not

the identified needs of all Yukon communities with respect to the impact of COVID-19 have been assessed and addressed.

Also of interest in terms of assessing the impact of the program is how the \$3.85 million has been distributed. How much money has been drawn down to support municipalities since the Premier first signed the Safe Restart Agreement in October? What support is available to communities without a municipal government? Communities such as Beaver Creek, Destruction Bay, Burwash Landing, Old Crow, Keno, Pelly Crossing, and Ross River come to mind. We agree with the minister that it is indeed crucial that the Yukon work collaboratively with local governments. We believe that they should work with all local governments.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First and foremost, I would just like to thank the members opposite for their acknowledgement of support in principle to the safe restart. I will try to answer some of the questions that were posed.

First of all, with respect to how we work with all communities, many of the things that I listed off in my original preamble about connecting with Community Affairs, with Aboriginal Relations, and with the COVID response unit have been with every community; we do work with them all. We work, for example, with our First Nations through the Yukon Forum. We work with unincorporated municipalities through Community Affairs and Community Services. There is work that is going on with all.

How did we assess what the impact was to municipalities? From early on, we spoke with municipalities. We said to them, "Please try to keep track of this stuff. We know it's going to be challenging, but give us a sense." We've remained open to that.

I have some information. For example, with the Whitehorse tabling of its budget, it noted that it had about a \$500,000 to \$600,000 hit to its budget as a result of COVID. Combined out of this safe restart money, we'll be getting \$1.9 million — just over \$1.9 million — to Whitehorse, and that gives you a sense, Mr. Speaker, that there is, we hope, more than enough to support our communities. There will be no clawbacks. I thank the member for asking me to clarify that.

How we worked to allocate the money — we used the comprehensive municipal grant as a suggestion to municipalities. I have given them the opportunity to tell me if they want some other switch for that. The reason that we used the comprehensive municipality grant is because it is, what I call, "base plus". It doesn't go per capita. It says that our smaller communities should have more per capita than our larger communities. Whitehorse has been pretty generous. I will acknowledge that they have been supportive of that type of arrangement. What it means is that, even though our smaller municipalities might make up 25 percent of the population or somewhere in that neighbourhood, they will get 55 percent of the funding.

This was also how it worked with vaccines. We did go and talk — the Minister of Health and Social Services and the Premier talked with Ottawa and explained that per capita wasn't the right way for the north, and they were successful. I

would like to thank the other provinces for supporting that — and Canada.

So, again, in this instance, what we see is that we will get more of the money to our smaller communities because, on a per capita basis, they will have a harder time navigating through.

The last question that I heard from the member opposite was: What is the split on funding? As the Leader of the Third Party said and as I said, it's cost-matched, meaning that 50 percent of the dollars are coming from the territorial government, and 50 percent of the dollars are coming from Canada.

Thank you very much to Canada for providing these dollars. I spoke with the Association of Yukon Communities a couple of weeks ago or maybe a week and a half ago. I think that it was well-received. I'm starting to get letters back now. I think that our municipalities are pleased, but I will wait to see which way they would like me to go. I am at their service.

Again, we will work throughout the pandemic to support our communities.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Consultation with school communities

Mr. Kent: One of the biggest concerns that we have heard about this fall is the decision to limit grades 10 to 12 students in Whitehorse to half-time in-class learning. Parents, educators, and students are all reaching out to us with questions about such things as mental health support and educational outcomes.

The decision to extend part-time classes to the end of the current school year is getting pushback. In a November 26 letter from the three Whitehorse high school councils to the minister, they say — and I quote: “As council chairs, we are disappointed that the recent announcement to continue with the current half-day in-class model for grades 10-12 during the second semester was made again without consultation.”

Why does this minister continue to make the same mistakes over and over by not consulting with affected school councils on her decisions?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't think it will surprise anyone that I disagree with the characterization made in the preamble to that question. Our department, and this government, clearly acknowledge and appreciate the ongoing work of Yukon school councils and their commitment to their school communities, especially during these unprecedented times. We value and carefully consider the meaningful input and perspectives of school councils and all partners in education.

Our decisions during the ongoing pandemic will continue to be informed by our work with school staff and our education partners. We are in a state of emergency and we take health and safety recommendations from the chief medical officer of health.

School administrators work with their school councils to ensure that they operationalize these health and safety

guidelines at the school level at the individual schools and work with their health and safety committee to ensure the health and safety of the students and staff.

Mr. Kent: So, judging from this letter, the school council chairs also share our concerns.

As the letter goes on to say — and I'll quote again: “At our last meeting on October 28 with both yourself and the deputy minister, our understanding was that a separate meeting would be arranged to discuss the next steps and communications regarding a decision to either maintain half days or return to full-day classes. That did not happen.”

Why did the minister promise the councils that she would meet with them on this issue and then do the exact opposite and charge ahead without any consultation?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, not accurate information being given to Yukoners; I didn't do that.

On matters where we have been determining how school operations can best meet the needs of our students — which is our key goal and priority — we're continuing to work with partners through developing our learning through COVID-19 surveys, two of which have been completed. They have been completed with the assistance on drafting those documents with the benefit of our education partners, including administrators and school councils.

I'm interested that the member opposite has a letter that was written to me and not copied to him, but nonetheless, I have responded to that letter. I'm looking forward to having a meeting with the school councils that are mentioned there and asking them how they would choose to work together with us and how we will repair their concerns and address those as we go forward. There will be many more decisions to make during the course of this pandemic with respect to education, with respect to the benefit of Yukon students, and frankly, with respect to having those students as our top priority.

Mr. Kent: So, when the minister is on her feet again, perhaps she can clarify if she is saying that these councils are making this up, because what we are reading is directly from a letter.

The minister claims that work has been done with school administrators; however, the letter tells a different story. I will quote again: “Learning that none of our administrators or staff was made aware of these decisions before public announcements were made, including the decision to return the MAD program to FH Collins/Wood Street site, only adds to our concern and frustration.”

So, why is the minister so reluctant to seek the advice and assistance of school communities before she makes decisions that affect them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It is clear that the members opposite have not been listening to my responses. I have given many, many responses here in this Legislative Assembly — and certainly publicly and whenever asked in the media and in consultation and conversations with our education partners — acknowledging and appreciating the work of Yukon school councils and all education partners. We carefully consider the meaningful input and the perspectives of school councils and our partners in education. We have been having bi-weekly

meetings with the chairs of all school councils across the territory. We have individual meetings with school councils when invited to do so.

I look forward to meeting with the authors of the letter that the member opposite is referring to in the very near future. We are in a state of emergency and decisions must be made and the responsibility that is granted to the minister through the *Education Act* is a requirement. The *Education Act* indicates that the minister has certain responsibilities and the roles and responsibilities of school councils are greatly respected. Our work with them through the past number of months to delineate those roles and responsibilities has been a positive step forward. We will continue to take the advice of the chief medical officer of health.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic business relief funding

Mr. Hassard: So, in June this year, the Yukon government announced that they were providing an increased wholesale discount for restaurants and licensed establishments as a means to support them through these challenging economic times. The measure was based on a recommendation of the Business Advisory Council and was welcomed by the hospitality industry.

However, recently licensees have been notified that this will end on January 1. Instead, those businesses are being told that they need to apply to Economic Development for support and they will be subject to the criteria of those programs.

This is just more red tape and hoops to jump through for an industry that has already been suffering, so why is the government replacing a successful measure that actually supported Yukon restaurants with a measure that will provide less support and a whole lot more red tape and paperwork?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I did speak over the weekend with some of the folks who are involved in the committee that works to share with us concerns from the food and beverage sector. They did talk to us about what they would like to do over time. We are working toward March 21. We sat down with them in September and came up with a game plan for some deeper changes around April of 2021.

The thing that I have always said to this group is that we are concerned about social responsibility. I expressed to them that the measures that we had in place were meant to be interim measures because we are aware that there are concerns around alcohol. What I said to them was that we were going to look for a way to try to be able to allow this program to go further, but only if we could target it better. What we have done is we have said that, for those businesses that are eligible for the Yukon business relief program — in other words, businesses that are not able to have as much revenue as they had previously — we will work with them to support them through this time. I will be happy to answer further questions.

Mr. Hassard: The layers of bureaucracy and red tape that the Liberals have put on the economic recovery program are ridiculous. In order to be eligible for one fund, they are forcing bars and restaurants to prove that 60 percent of their revenue came from tourists last year. Even though they know

that this will be difficult to prove, they will subject them to audits. Then they are saying that, for other funds, you aren't eligible unless you have already applied to different funds. Now they are cancelling a popular, easy-to-use wholesale discount for restaurants and making things more complicated. The result is a complicated labyrinth of bureaucracy and confusing programs that are making it difficult for businesses to get relief. The government has even had to fund a position to help businesses navigate this labyrinth.

Why won't the Liberals just get rid of all of this red tape and just make it easier to get this recovery funding out the door?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I guess I will add a couple of points. The first one is that, even during the pandemic — even though right away we put out the Yukon business relief program and we worked to get it moving very quickly — we still have a responsibility to Yukoners. We still have a responsibility to make sure that the funds are going where they're needed. We have a responsibility in a tourism relief program to put that relief toward tourism businesses.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, you can criticize that, Mr. Speaker.

I think the point here is that we're working with those businesses to help them where they are in trouble.

I had a conversation with one of the members of the advisory group, and he did talk to me about having to go through extra steps. I said to him, "Look, let's work with you. If you have businesses that are having challenges with this, let me know and let's see what we can do."

I'm not trying to say, Mr. Speaker, that there isn't additional work, but we're trying to target that funding so that it supports those businesses that are in trouble. That's what we're trying to do. We're working to support our businesses from day one.

Mr. Hassard: So, we know that the programs have turned into a labyrinth of red tape. Take, for example, the \$2.88 million for the accommodation supplement. The Liberals announced this to great fanfare on October 19. That was two months ago. Yet the minister admitted earlier this week that the program is so poorly designed that zero dollars have actually been sent out the door. So, maybe instead of creating new hoops for businesses to jump through, the Liberals should just make the support available and get rid of all of the red tape, which brings me back to this wholesale discount for bars and restaurants that the Liberals are getting rid of. This program was working. The program was helping, and the Liberals are scrapping it and making these businesses go through new hoops.

So, will they abandon this short-sighted plan and extend the wholesale discount for all licensed establishments beyond January 1?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Since the member opposite has opened the door around the tourism accommodation fund, I will go there, because I think it's important for Yukoners to know the facts around this and that we are continuing to work with this very important sector of our tourism economy. We did announce a \$2.88-million program as a supplementary program

to the Yukon business relief program. What we found is — yes, you're right — that no funding has been disbursed from that supplement.

We have received inquiries from 27 accommodation providers who would like to explore this program. Our first step is to work with CanNor and Economic Development to ensure that each applicant has maximized the funding available to them under the northern business relief fund and the Yukon business relief program.

Again, these are Yukon taxpayer dollars. We are in a supplementary budget with these relief programs and recovery programs. We are using them in the best way to support our businesses. We continue to uphold our hospitality industry, and we will continue to work with them through these unprecedented times.

Question re: Housing support programs

Ms. White: Renters in Yukon now have access to the Canada-Yukon housing benefit program, which provides eligible Yukon renters with financial support to help pay for their housing. This is an income-based program, and applicants must submit their most recent tax assessment.

There's a problem with this, though, Mr. Speaker. An individual working in tourism or in the food and beverage service will likely find themselves earning a lot less than they did a year ago. We have heard from individuals who have been denied the rental supplement because their earnings in 2019 were too high.

Can the minister tell us what options there are for these individuals who have had their applications denied based on their 2019 tax assessment?

Hon. Ms. Frost: As we look at transforming the community housing programming and start to look at the Canada housing benefit program, we looked at ensuring that we provided essential supports and benefits to Yukoners. In doing that, the Housing Corporation recently announced — and I'm very excited about the launching — the new Canada housing benefit in partnership with CMHC. As of December, we have approved 101 Yukoners in Whitehorse and communities for housing benefit support, and we continue to support applicants and approve clients for this programming to help Yukoners with rental housing affordability.

The program is intended to contribute to the COVID-19 recovery process by supporting Yukoners and providing necessary subsidies. We will continue to do that, and that is intended to support low-income people, those who have lost income, and those who have housing challenges. Of course, there's a requirement through the Housing Corporation to do the assessments, and we are working with all of the clients to get that information as quickly as we can so as not to jeopardize the access to the programming.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I think that I highlighted the problem with that so far.

Yukon Housing also has a rent supplement program to help Yukoners who are struggling to meet their housing costs. The rent supplement program supports Yukoners who are eligible for social housing but live in private housing. This would be a

great alternative for Yukoners, but unfortunately, this program is already fully subscribed to. There is no room for new applicants, and this is not a one-time thing. This program is fully subscribed to each and every year. So, we have a federal rent supplement program that individuals and families are being denied based on their 2019 income level, and we have a Yukon rent supplement program that is fully subscribed to.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell this House what Yukoners struggling to pay their rent are to do next?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Existing clients of the Yukon Housing Corporation who were receiving the COVID-19 rent assistance funding will now access the Canada-Yukon housing benefit. If there are individuals having challenges, I encourage them to contact the Yukon Housing Corporation. The federal funding program received was to enhance the affordability of housing for Yukoners, to support our housing action plan, as well as the Safe at Home plan. The Canada-Yukon housing benefit is a key part of how we are transforming housing and social housing program needs here in the Yukon.

I am looking forward to the next question, Mr. Speaker, because the Yukon Housing Corporation responded. We targeted and provided the necessary supports. The Canada-Yukon housing benefit replaces the Yukon Housing Corporation initiative funding. The current program status is to ensure that we have the funding necessary to support vulnerable Yukoners and support Yukoners who are having challenges. We have just ensured that we have supports and a continuation of a program that will continue into the future. As long as we need it, Mr. Speaker, we will support Yukoners.

Ms. White: I guess that my question was: What about new clients who don't currently qualify for the programs that the minister described? Every day, we talk to Yukoners looking for answers and looking for help. We help with Yukon Housing applications and then we help with the appeals. We encourage them to go through the appeal processes available to them and we help them with the paperwork. We encourage them to talk to their landlords and, if need be, to go to the residential tenancies office, but even there, unless a landlord has not followed the regulations, there is little that the office can offer.

The federal rent supplement is based on 2019 income levels and the territorial program has no more spots available.

Does the minister acknowledge that this leaves many Yukon tenants behind, and what will she do about it?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I acknowledge that there is certainly a demand. We are in the middle of a crisis; we are in the middle of a pandemic. We know that we have had some challenges with housing and we certainly want to ensure affordability; we want to ensure access. Canada has committed to providing Yukon with \$9.1 million over the next eight years under the Canada-Yukon housing benefit. We have made significant allocations. We have subscribed to all of the funds that are available to us, and by doing so, we have used that to support Yukoners.

On November 5, 2020, we issued — under this particular program — support to 55 Yukoners who were supported in November and December — in fact, a total of \$62,000 for the first run of that support initiative. We continue to support

Yukoners and we will continue to look for additional resources, if resources are required. This government is all about supporting Yukoners through the pandemic and we want to assure Yukoners that, if you are having challenges, please — as the member opposite noted: housing navigators, Yukon Housing Corporation. We have opportunities to work together. The program for supports is available, so I am just encouraging Yukoners to please come forward, if you have a concern. We will be happy to work with you. Thank you.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic impact on education system

Ms. White: So, it has been a long fall semester for students and teachers alike. Teachers and students have struggled to have their voices heard by this government. Despite these efforts, many gaps remain. This morning on CBC, the president of the Yukon Teachers' Association spoke of occupational health and safety committees. In the context of a pandemic, the role of teachers who are on these committees is even more critical than in a regular school year. Yet the YTA was recently informed that the 90-day window for these employees to get training is expiring this week, just as this semester is wrapping up.

Will the minister ensure that occupational health and safety training is available beyond this week and that teachers will have priority access to this training?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Top priority for the department and for the administrators and educators in our Education department here in the territory is the health and safety of themselves and our students in schools. Our central administration staff have worked to support schools to access training and the support that they need.

I would like to thank all the educators and the school staff for the tremendous work that they have been doing over the course of this term. I can indicate that the training began in earnest in August 2020 and that all individuals who are spending time in school — educators and others — should receive the proper training and the proper opportunities to know and be fully apprised of the health and safety requirements. They have done so — tremendous work, in addition to their regular duties, in order to avail themselves of that information throughout the pandemic and throughout this school year. These are certainly not normal times. Our school system has really risen with an extraordinary response. Training will continue. All those working in our schools need to be properly trained and apprised of the information they need.

Ms. White: I was really looking to know that those training opportunities would be extended and that teachers would have priority access.

Another issue that was raised in this morning's interview was the lack of teachers on call, or TOCs. The YTA president reported that several schools are still not getting sufficient TOC coverage on a regular basis. This puts an extra burden on all teachers, and it forces teachers who are not feeling well to make a difficult decision: Do they stay home knowing that their colleagues will have to fill their spot, or do they go to school?

Despite this shortage, we have heard of long delays for new teachers on call, even after they've completed their background check. In one case, after three weeks of delay, this potential TOC had taken on another job and was no longer available for substitute teaching.

Can the minister report on how many schools have operated short-staffed this fall because of a lack of teachers on call and AOCs? How many days have schools been short staffed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm happy to address this issue — slightly different from the last, but I'm happy to be talking about schools and I'm happy to be talking about teachers, educators, and our students here in the territory.

As of December 11, registered teachers on call numbers continue to rise, with a total of 253 available in the Yukon Territory, 195 in Whitehorse, and some 58 in communities, with an additional 25 applications pending. Twenty-three of those are for teachers on call who want to work in Whitehorse and three in the communities.

Teachers on call are recruited on an ongoing basis to ensure that continued supports are available to schools. On an occasion when a teacher on call is not available, the school is able to adjust operational requirements to ensure that student learning needs are met — the top priority for schools.

Ms. White: Although I appreciate the minister's take on the issue, we heard differently from the president of the YTA today. Teachers on call are a critical part of our school system, and even more so in a pandemic. The shortage of teachers on call is putting an extra burden on everyone working in our schools. It shouldn't come as a surprise that, during a pandemic, the need for teachers on call would be greater than in a normal year. So, it would be reasonable to think that this government would take extra measures to increase the number of teachers on call and the speed at which these people can be brought in.

Can the minister tell Yukoners if the government has taken measures beyond what they do in any normal year to recruit more teachers on call and to accelerate the administrative process required to bring them on board?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I, too, heard the Yukon Teachers' Association president in the media this morning, and I actually was a bit — well, I was quite shocked and surprised to hear him say that some teachers may be — or, I think he actually said "are" going to school when they're not well. This simply cannot happen.

I assume that the advice from the Yukon Teachers' Association is that teachers must follow the health and safety guidelines, as put out by the chief medical officer of health and the health and safety standards for schools. The department 100 percent supports anyone who is not well staying home. They are supported by the department, they are supported by the administrators, and they are supported to stay home by their fellow educators.

The potential of the consequences otherwise is just too great. Teachers who are not well should stay home; administrators are keen to make sure that those health and safety protocols are dealt with and adhered to properly. Teachers and educators and administrators are supporting one

another through this very difficult time, and I would like to thank all of them for doing so.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic public health measures for hospitality industry

Mr. Istchenko: Last week, we asked the minister why the Liberals did not consult with the Privacy Commissioner before forcing bars and restaurants to start collecting private information from customers. The government dismissed these privacy questions as not their problem; however, this information is being collected because of them. This government is not putting enough of a priority on protecting privacy.

Has the government since consulted with the Privacy Commissioner, and if not, will they agree to? Just a yes or a no.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: While we continue to work under the ATIPP act developed by the members opposite — that ATIPP act hasn't changed since we came into office.

We have a new act that has been drafted and is about to take effect, but currently, we're operating under the same act, so they shouldn't be confused by this, Mr. Speaker. The ATIPP legislation governs government; it does not govern private businesses. So, the member opposite is absolutely wrong. The ATIPP act does not apply to private businesses. Private businesses are gathering their customers' records — Yukoners need to know this — and those businesses will look after that information for their customers. Government will not access those records unless there's a problem, Mr. Speaker. This is being done through provinces across the country. We are no different from them. We are doing it in a public health crisis, and it is a prudent thing for these businesses to do. I applaud them for looking after the safety of their customers.

Mr. Istchenko: The question that I asked — this is for the member opposite — was: Has the government since consulted with the Privacy Commissioner?

Last week, we pointed out that the government has been creating a policy. This policy was created on the fly and not providing guidance to businesses on how to collect and protect this information. This is a government telling them that they have to do it — forcing them to do this. It's the government's responsibility. If they go into any bar or restaurant right now, they are all collecting this information differently, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear from bars and restaurants that have not received guidance from the government on protecting this information, nor have they received information on their liabilities with respect to this information. So, again, they have been instructed to collect this information by the government.

Can the minister tell us — what are the liabilities of these businesses with respect to people's private information?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to first start by acknowledging the businesses — the bars and restaurants — for participating with the objective of keeping Yukoners safe and, of course, wanting to maintain safety for all of their clients and their staff. That's the first step, and I want to just acknowledge them for that in stepping up and responding to the COVID rules as they apply. We are identifying new ways to

keep our communities safe and the bars and restaurants are very much a part of that — so just an acknowledgement to them.

They are required to submit their operational plans prior to reopening and ensuring that the health and safety of staff and customers are at the forefront of everything they do. These plans have been approved by the Health Emergency Operations Centre and follow the guidelines of the chief medical officer of health. All bars and restaurants are following the protocol. That is to ensure that we follow the principles of keeping Yukoners safe. I just want to extend to them our appreciation.

We have consulted with the Privacy Commissioner in this process. We have consulted with the chief medical officer of health and with our staff to ensure the safety of all clients — and again, just a shout-out to the businesses for participating and keeping Yukoners safe.

Mr. Istchenko: Section 2 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* states: "This Act applies to all records in the custody, or under the control of a public body..." These requirements on bars and restaurants force them to collect private information on customers and to make these lists available to the government upon request. These lists are being created at the request of the government. In many respects, this appears to leave a grey area about whether or not the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* would apply to this information.

The Minister of Health and Social Services has confirmed that they met with the Privacy Commissioner. Are we going to see any changes to this program since they spoke to the Privacy Commissioner? Has the government received any legal advice on whether the act applies to these lists?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: At a time of a global pandemic, Yukoners need consistent leadership and accurate information. That is what we are continually providing. What we are seeing from the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, is an absolutely shocking lack of understanding of a piece of legislation that they oversaw for 15 years. Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely astounded to see the level — the lack of understanding of the members opposite on information and privacy, so here we are.

I will say that the information being collected by restaurants, as they are across the continent, is being held by those businesses. Those businesses are not governed by the access to information and protection of privacy laws. They are doing it on their own at the recommendation of the chief medical officer of health. Why? It's to protect the interest of their customers — to actually make sure that their customers have a level of safety when they go out to eat or go into their premises. I applaud that responsibility on the part of our businesses. I think it's great. To have the members opposite — they are practising rhetoric in search of a problem, and I absolutely think that they are putting disinformation into the public domain. I think that it's shocking. In the face of a public pandemic, we have to be pulling together to protect the interests of our community and protect the health of our citizens.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

Motion re appearance of witness

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 8

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 17, 2020, Dr. Brendan Hanley, Yukon's chief medical officer of health, appear as a witness before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. McPhee:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 17, 2020, Dr. Brendan Hanley, Yukon's chief medical officer of health, appear as a witness before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 8 agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, 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 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any general debate?

Yukon Development Corporation

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would just like to begin by thanking the officials for coming in today — our president of the Yukon Development Corporation, Mr. Justin Ferbey, who was with us earlier this week as a witness with the president of the Yukon Energy Corporation, and Mr. Blaine Anderson, who is our chief financial officer and has been with the organization for a while.

Thank you for coming in from your daily activities in the private sector.

I'm just going to share a few comments about the supplementary budget, and then I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to potentially broaden that discussion.

I would like to thank the Members of the Legislative Assembly for the opportunity to speak to the Yukon Development Corporation *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the 2020-21 fiscal year. The Yukon Development Corporation's mandate to develop and promote the development of innovative energy systems and sustainable generation, production, transmission, and distribution of energy in Yukon is an important one. As Yukon's population grows and the demand for energy infrastructure increases, we must invest in transmission and electrical storage infrastructure. These investments will support economic growth in the territory while supporting renewable electrical projects being developed by the utilities and independent power producers.

The battery storage project — there was lots of discussion about it earlier this week, and we had an opportunity to share some information on an important milestone earlier this week with a ministerial statement — will provide 40 megawatt hours of backup capacity to provide grid stability by maintaining generating capacity. The battery will assist with mitigating short-term outages and assist with peak demand and the integration of renewable energy, like wind and solar, that are not available all the time.

The replacement of the Mayo-McQuesten transmission line and upgrading of the Stewart Crossing substation will modernize aging infrastructure, thereby improving reliability for local area residents and enabling industrial customers to use grid electricity rather than on-site thermal sources of energy.

These projects are being completed with the support of Government of Canada through a 10-year bilateral agreement signed by the Minister of Community Services.

The green infrastructure stream off the Investing in Canada infrastructure program is providing funding for Yukon Energy Corporation's battery storage project and the Mayo-McQuesten transmission line. As the holders of significant subject matter experience, the Yukon Development Corporation is the Government of Yukon's signatory for payment agreements with fund recipients for electricity projects. The Yukon Development Corporation pays out eligible funds as per the agreement and then recovers 100 percent of those costs from Canada.

To that end, the Yukon Development Corporation supplementary budget includes \$9.275 million for eligible costs being incurred by Yukon Energy Corporation for the battery and transmission line between now and the end of 2020. I would like to reiterate that these funds are fully recoverable from Canada and will be paid back to the Government of Yukon by the Yukon Development Corporation.

We are pleased that these projects are advancing in spite of the challenging circumstances brought on by COVID-19 and applaud the Yukon Energy Corporation for their dedication in this regard. I think that we will hold it there and hand over the floor to the opposition for questions, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kent: I would like to join the minister in thanking the officials for being here today to provide support to him. I would also like to thank the officials who provided the briefing to us in October with respect to the supplementary budget.

As everyone knows, witnesses were here from the Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon Energy Corporation earlier this week. At that point, we were able to ask a number of questions. I was able to get most of the questions that I had put on the record — and a response to them. I will be submitting the remaining ones in writing.

Just before turning it over to my colleague from the New Democratic Party, I would just wish everyone at the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation very happy holidays and a safe and healthy 2021.

Ms. Hanson: I would echo the comments from my colleague to the right in that the Yukon NDP, based on the hearings that were held the other day, is quite prepared to move on so that we can get other departments through as quickly as possible.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I want to be respectful to the parties across the way, but the only thing that I think is important to clarify, while we have the opportunity and the officials here today, is — one of the comments that was made and one of the questions that was posed, not specific to the supplementary budget, but definitely, it has to do with current proceedings around the general rate application.

There was a question that was posed by the Member for Copperbelt South to the president of Yukon Energy Corporation. It was really around statements that I had made publicly on what we were looking at as a rate increase — between the relationship, of course — Yukon Energy Corporation works with Yukon Development Corporation and provides that information.

I think that it's really important for the record and for those who are listening today, as well as, I'm sure, folks within government — I'm going to walk through the last 48 hours. I just want to set the record straight — I think it's really important — and give the appropriate information.

A little less than 48 hours ago, we had the Yukon Energy Corporation here. There was a document that was in the hands of the Official Opposition. It was a public document, I believe. It was a document that was from the general rate application. The question that was posed at that point was — there were two numbers that were reflected on. The Official Opposition reflected on the fact that I had publicly stated that the increase that we were looking at for rates was 11.5 percent. The members opposite reflected on a number of 17.1 percent from the general rate application. At that time, there was a commitment from the president of the Yukon Energy Corporation — because he didn't have the documents on him that were being referred to — that he would go back and ensure that there was no discrepancy. I think that it was a very professional and prudent way to handle it.

Less than 24 hours later, I was asked the exact same question here during proceedings, and I responded that I would endeavour to get that answer. I made a commitment to the House. I said that, from our perspective, there is nothing that

we're holding back. We believe that we have provided accurate information to Yukoners and we would then get that back. Here we are, again, less than 48 hours later.

The challenge is that now what's happening is that the Yukon Energy Corporation is going through a number of steps because a press release was put out for immediate release from the Yukon Party. So, instead of waiting just until we could get the appropriate information back, a press release was released: "Utilities Board Indicates Government is seeking a 17.1% Increase to Energy Bills". It goes on to say: "At a time when Yukoners and Yukon businesses are struggling, a 11.5% increase to energy bills is going to make life more difficult ... So that's why the government needs to clarify if they are seeking ..." — so, again, what has now happened, for folks here, is the Energy Corporation — because, of course, the press release was absolutely misleading. There was not an opportunity for folks to come back and just give an answer, which I think is probably appropriate. We made a commitment; we made a commitment that we would come back and give the right information. Here we are — no questions today.

What that leads to, at a time when people are extremely busy in the public service and the Energy Corporation — now what has happened is that we spoke to media today. We have ensured that they have the right information, which is that 11.5 percent is what the increase is. What has also happened today is that now the Energy Corporation — and I will just put this on the record — has now clarified any misunderstanding that the Official Opposition had.

I was also questioned yesterday — there was a statement made yesterday by the Member for Lake Laberge, who is also a former Minister responsible for the Yukon Energy Corporation and Yukon Development Corporation on this topic.

They have clarified that on their social media. They are now going to have a meeting for the public, and it can be virtually attended in early January. For anybody listening, it will be on January 8, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. Again, they put the same information out that we had previously listed — that they are seeking an 11.5-percent increase — increments made between 2019 and 2021 equate to 3.8 percent.

It is fine to have the challenging conversations and play the political games, but instead of just waiting for us to come back when we had made a commitment — if there was a mistake, I would have clarified that and I would have taken responsibility.

But, anyway, the big spin — and the reality is that a number of people at Yukon Energy Corporation are now fielding calls from media, they are putting together a public session, and they are posting on social media. All that they are doing is putting the same information out, and they are dispelling the misinformation that was put out by the Yukon Party in a press release. All that they really had to do was just wait until today. I was prepared to speak to this. I made a commitment on a legislative return. That has basically been completed.

Again, that is unfortunate — pretty standard for this fall and the last 40-some days.

As well, I just would like to share — there were some visitors here earlier in the week from Yukoners Concerned. There has been some public information. They've been challenging us on what we've done at the Yukon Development Corporation concerning renewable energy. What was great to see was that they had the opportunity to sit in; there were questions from the Leader of the Third Party concerning the projects that Yukon Development Corporation has been involved in. I'm happy to say that — the one question was tabled, and that question really focused on what we're doing with communities. What ended up — there was an extensive list of renewable energy projects, not just the 10-year plan but projects that are in place right from Beaver Creek to Burwash to Haines Junction — again, Old Crow, Dawson City, Mayo, Pelly — an extremely extensive list. I hope what we've been able to illustrate and provide information on is that the government, with direct support and intervention, has renewable energy projects that are feeding into the overall strategy for the Energy Corporation across the Yukon and, as well, a very robust plan.

For folks, if they haven't had an opportunity with some other questions, we have signed on to the working groups here. I think that there is some information coming out on work around hydrogen. We have spoken at the table of energy ministers. We've had an opportunity concerning some of that work. What we're essentially going to be doing is that we're going to have a chance to put our researchers and scientists forward — that's the commitment that I made at the table with energy ministers — to ensure that any work that is being done around hydrogen really — some of our western provinces are looking to this as a key and unique solution. What we have committed to is ensuring that the university and our researchers have an opportunity to support that work — if there is specific research that has to be done in a northern climate, that we would be able to provide that.

So, that's one, and I think there are one or two other working groups that are about to announce on other types of energy. Again, we have supported those working groups. I think we're going to look at different technologies than what we've seen in Yukon previously.

In some cases, what we've said is that we don't have — we're not bringing a lot to the table because, in that particular sector or technology, there are provinces that have extensive work in them, but what we've said is at least we have great researchers. So, when it comes to hydrogen or other new technologies, we are at the table. We have committed to that and we have signed on to that work across the Yukon.

With that, I think it is important to add a few items. I don't know if there are any other questions. I think that the opposition have made the point that they are just going to submit some written questions, so thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Hanson: Interesting — I just have to make one final comment. It is fascinating to hear the minister. We have been told repeatedly over the last 40-some days that we are here to talk to the supplementary budget. When we have attempted to — because we didn't debate the budget in the spring, we saw great theatrics and forestalling or even, well, basically bombast

by various ministers. They were refusing to answer questions or going circuitously around them. So, it is fascinating to hear the minister use his allotted time to go after my colleagues down the way, but I do think that what we were attempting to do was to try to make best use of our time here this afternoon, given the fact that we have a major piece of legislation — the *Condominium Act, 2015* amendment — that has not been debated.

There are a number of pieces of legislation and remaining budget areas — significant aspects of Education and Health and Social Services — that have not been canvassed and are key to the supplementary budget. Then the ministers opposite wonder why we have difficulty supporting what they put forward. I mean no offense to the officials who are here. They are professionals, they do their job, and they are here to support the minister. But it's unfortunate when it becomes a theatre piece for the minister. That is what I understand — that is how they describe it to each other — as theatre. I don't think this is theatre, Mr. Chair.

We understand that there is significant work. We would love to have a discussion someday about the delimiting of the mandate of the Yukon Development Corporation and how it could be revived and operate to the full extent of its original concept, but that's not what we're here for today. I will stand down. We were intending to get the support of members to move and clear the \$9.725 million that the minister has identified as supplementary and that had been discussed previously.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: In response to that — the comments — we were in a position where, throughout this Fall Sitting, I think that the exchange and my exchange around the questions for the budget for Energy, Mines and Resources — I think we had a good exchange. It was very broad; it wasn't just specifically to the supplementary budget.

I know that the member opposite didn't have any questions for me. The Member for Whitehorse Centre didn't have any questions for me concerning anything to do with Energy, Mines and Resources. There were no questions on mining; there were no questions on agriculture; there were no questions on forestry; there were no questions on biomass; there were no questions on land planning — absolutely no questions.

I provided the opportunity to the Official Opposition to go through those questions, and the member opposite — the Member for Copperbelt South — had identified if there were any pieces that were missed. There were some things we didn't get to and was going to just submit those. I think that's an appropriate way to move forward.

But I do want to set the record straight. The last day we were here, we did unanimously pass a budget, but also, folks will know — I was in a precarious position in that I had to go through some of the early testing for COVID, and I came in, and my budgets that I was responsible for were the last budgets that were tabled that day. I was ready to speak to those budgets. It was Energy, Mines and Resources and Economic Development.

I think that folks, at that point — concerns, anxiety about what was happening — folks wanted to — I think that there

were some conversations happening between all three parties. I wasn't involved in that discussion. I was really just coming back to make sure that I was in a position to speak to those particular budget items.

Just for the record, I was ready — both opposition parties on that particular afternoon — I thought it was going to be quite a unique experience, like other folks have had the opportunity to do in the past — I thought we were going late into the evening and was ready to speak to those.

We collectively and unanimously decided — so, not casting any shadows here — we all made a decision, but that was the good thing about being able to come back and have questions from the Official Opposition on those items that we didn't get a chance — and to be fair, I felt I had that responsibility to answer those questions that might have been outside of the supplementary.

That's the only reason today that I have touched on a few things — and you know, there's a bit of buzz. We have folks over at Yukon Energy who are trying to correct some information that's out there. We have media calling on a number of things. So, I thought, you know, we're here, and part of my responsibility is to provide that correct information to Yukoners so they understand, when they're sitting down and they're contemplating what 2021 will bring and they're trying to figure out consistently what those bills at the kitchen table will look like — that they have a chance to understand that. What we're really looking at is 11.5 percent. Hopefully, that — and we're not looking at that number that was misunderstood by the 17 exactly, which was not correct — what we're looking at for a rate increase. So, with that, I will take my seat.

Mr. Gallina: I do appreciate the officials from Yukon Development Corporation being here today. I think that it is important to have a conversation with them while they're here before we move on to other business.

I did have a couple of questions for officials and the minister while they're here. The first area that I just wanted to touch on was the innovative renewable energy initiative. We know that the government has made a four-year commitment of \$1.5 million annually to the innovative renewable energy initiative, which is now in its final year. We know that this is managed by the Development Corporation. The innovative renewable energy initiative funds Yukon First Nation governments, municipalities, and community-based organizations to identify and develop projects that sustainably generate electricity and heat for homes and businesses.

I was wondering if the minister could speak to some of the projects that this initiative has supported and provide some details to Yukoners to update them on the progress of these initiatives.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I appreciate the opportunity to provide this information to Members of the Legislative Assembly — and yes, gathering our officials here today. I'm glad that we have the opportunity to just share a couple of things at least concerning the work that's undergoing. Energy is always something that is near and dear to folks' hearts. It can be a very personal thing. We've heard lots of discussion about that — a

great opportunity to share a few things about the renewable energy program.

So, the Government of Yukon, again, is proud to invest in Yukon communities and Yukon First Nations to develop renewable energy projects that help reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. Our government has made a four-year commitment of \$1.5 million annually to the innovative renewable energy initiative, which is now in its final year.

Managed by the Yukon Development Corporation — as stated — this innovative renewable energy initiative funds Yukon First Nation governments, municipalities, and community-based organizations to identify and develop projects that sustainably generate electricity and heat for our homes and businesses.

This year, we are supporting a number of exciting projects across the territory, including: construction of a one-megawatt solar project on the north Klondike Highway; construction of a small-scale solar project here in Whitehorse; feasibility work for a solar project in Watson Lake; and design work for the Beaver Creek solar project — and I would like to take an opportunity to thank the folks at Highways and Public Works for helping us there; they partnered up with Yukon Development Corporation so that we could get access to some material that was needed to keep that project moving in a particular location — feasibility work for a combined solar and wind project in Pelly Crossing — and I know that folks there are excited in our discussions with the Selkirk First Nation about that particular project; and feasibility work at the North Fork hydro site near Dawson City — it seems that, in our latest correspondence, there have been some good conversations between, I believe, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the proponent. That is quite important; they seemed to be supportive of this project moving forward. Of course, that is an exciting one, when you think back to the history of the Yukon Ditch and how innovative and groundbreaking that was back in the day that it was built and the ability — just an exceptional engineering project — and what it did at that particular time — so innovative to provide that electricity to Dawson. For anybody who is not aware of that, it is such a great, amazing accomplishment in Dawson, and now we are seeing North Fork hydro come back to light.

Interest in innovative renewable energy has grown year over year since its inception in 2018, and the fund is fully subscribed for this fiscal year. This fall, our government will be reviewing the success of the innovative renewable energy initiative and considering recommendations for further funding. Just to give you an opportunity to — so this year, \$1.5 million is committed to renewable energy projects. To date, over \$3.6 million in project support has been spent. Our major projects in 2020-21 include, again, our project with Solvest — a great local company. What has been great to see there, Mr. Chair, is their ability to increase job opportunities in the clean energy sector, where you see young Yukoners coming home and having an opportunity to work in a sector that they may be very passionate about.

Just this week, I saw a student from the University of Victoria who was commenting on the workplace experience in

some of her graduate studies and having the opportunity — how nice that is to see on a business social media page, where a young grad student is coming to the north to have an opportunity to learn about this specifically, and those folks at Solvest have done just an exceptional job of continuing to grow their business.

This funding goes to make sure that we have the feasibility and design work done, and on that North Fork — that's a two-megawatt project. Working with First Kaska — just to clarify — in Watson Lake and with the First Nation development corporation in Beaver Creek, we're also going to be providing about \$172,000 to Yukon Energy for their peak smart program — a great program. I know that the Leader of the Third Party commented on it. It was pretty seamless to get engaged in that particular program. I have also reached out — great subcontractors from Arcrite electrical came into my home to make sure that we're leading by example. It has been quite seamless. They changed out all the infrastructure on my hot water heater and throughout the house — making sure that we're heating our water tanks at not a peak time, and we have that opportunity to properly ensure that demand is as helpful, I'll say, as possible.

As well, we're going to continue to work on other projects with the Klondike Development Organization on a solar project in Dawson City. You might have heard, Mr. Chair, from some of the constituents whom you represent around the geothermal work that has been done in Carmacks, and the First Nation is very committed to that. Some of the early work — some of our top-notch companies here that do work globally and that have expertise in drilling are now going to be working with them. They're going to do some exploratory drilling, and that's using some technology that has been used in certain industries and then seeing if there isn't an opportunity to make that work for their project with their development corporation. Again, supporting work around the Atlin expansion project — there was also a great discussion about that earlier this week — something that we're pretty excited about.

Some of the other things that we're still keeping an eye on, that we funded before — a wind project on Montana Mountain. We're again engaged with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the development corporation around some of their key priorities. I know that, once we see — there has been a bit of delay in Old Crow, and that has really been just around COVID and having those particular experts come into that community to work on some of the final touches on their project.

But I know that — and I'm sure we've heard from the great proponent, Chief Tramm, on ideas that they have. I think it is kind of a stage gate. This is the first one, but now they are pretty excited about some other work that they're looking to do.

So, I hope that gives Yukoners who have an opportunity to hear today a sense of really the robust — you have to remember, in 2016-17, we were walking in. There was a resource plan that was put in place. We didn't have the IPP regulation completed at that point. We asked folks to lean in on that. Since then, we have now a mechanism that's appropriate and accountable and that all folks came together to work on. That's what we use to be able to purchase this energy — this power.

I think that when you go through it and you go — probably getting close to almost 20 projects, between probably a dozen to 20 projects — all of that over a period of 36 months. Really, the only project that was in place was the Kluane wind project and I think the challenge for that was the company that they sourced the hardware from originally had become insolvent and so now they're sourcing out and they have some new champions to get that project done in the community.

But really, folks have worked really, really hard. The Yukon Development Corporation — whether it's policy work on the IPP or it's some of the work that we've committed to doing around demand-side management — both of those pieces. Then all of the work by the advisors we have there has been really substantial and I think that it has been quite transformative.

I do appreciate the time to share that today with folks so that they know all the work that's being done.

Mr. Gallina: I appreciate the response from the minister and an update on renewable projects here in the territory. It sounds like, for this year, the \$1.5 million that was committed to renewable energy projects has been fully subscribed. That's wonderful to hear — that over the life of the project to date, at over \$3.6 million, there are 20 projects over a 36-month period.

I do appreciate the work that the department and the Yukon Development Corporation has undergone — the policy work around the independent power producers and demand-side management piece. I thank the officials for being here today. I don't have any further questions and I appreciate their time.

Mr. Kent: I just have one quick question. I know that the battery storage project was announced the other day. I think it was earlier this week, actually. I was just wondering if the minister can confirm the location of that now, as we have seen some OICs here today.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: They are still in the midst — I believe, and as I have been told — of concluding that agreement. At this particular time, I can't touch on that, but I think that we should have that information pretty soon. It's back to — again, this question was tabled — appropriately, and a good question — with the Yukon Energy Corporation CEO and president, but at this time, I believe, they are still in negotiations and cleaning that up. Some of the work that the member opposite is reflecting on really has to do with the fact of new technology. We are just going through some particular administrative work to ensure that this project can be properly assessed.

Mr. Kent: I have the OIC that was just released publicly a few minutes ago, which is why I stood up. It is OIC 2020/180, *Public Utilities Act*, and states that: "The following energy project is designated as a regulated project for the purposes of Part 3 of the Act." It goes on to say, under 1(b), that it is: "to be located near the intersection of Robert Service Way and the Alaska Highway".

As I mentioned, this document just arrived in my inbox as a public document, so I am just hoping once again that the minister can confirm that the location is indeed right at the intersection of Robert Service Way and the Alaska Highway.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: My understanding is that there are two blocks of land within that particular area. I am not sure which

one is the final spot that has been chosen. I think that what was shared by the president was that we are working with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, which has settlement blocks in both of those areas. One of the things that we had to do to ensure that the OIC was in place — we had an obligation to have the government reach out to Chief Bill and ensure that there was a comfort level and that this was going to proceed in that way. Again, we will make sure that we get back. As I have done all week, I want to make sure that I have the exact and appropriate information.

I do understand this area. Another First Nation has a block there as well. I want to go back and take a look, but I know that, in earlier proceedings on some other projects, there were multiple blocks that were looked at in that particular area. I just wanted to make sure which one it is that they are using.

Mr. Kent: As I mentioned, this is an order-in-council that was just made public. It was my understanding that the potential location on the north Klondike Highway was abandoned and that there were two left. I thought that there was the one mentioned in the OIC at the top of Robert Service Way or on the corner of the Alaska Highway, and I thought that there was one down closer to Yukon Energy. I understand, I guess, that the minister needs to go back and confirm this OIC. If it is confirmed to be and the site has been chosen — if he is able to provide us with the terms of the lease as well, because I think that this was another outstanding issue that was identified earlier this week when the announcement was made.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Absolutely — again, we will reach out and make sure. I don't know if the description that we put in the OIC would be covering that particular area that is really what I guess Yukoners would think of as the snow dump and the motocross track in that particular area. Then, of course, it reaches up to the corner. I know that there is land available as well right across the way.

Again, what I will commit to is that I'm going to go and find out the terms of the agreement. I know that members in the opposition would be aware of — I know there are agreements that were done previously with Kwanlin Dün First Nation. I don't know the nature of what can be shared. I know that we've come back here and reported on a number of those things, but I just want to make sure that I understand exactly if there is any confidentiality around it. I'm not stating that there is, but I will endeavour to ensure that we give the exact location, if that's available to share, and that we are in a position to speak about the terms of the agreement with the First Nation as well.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line debate.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

On Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan

Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan in the amount of \$9,275,000 agreed to

On Total of Other Capital

Total of Other Capital in the amount of nil cleared

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$9,275,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$9,275,000 agreed to

Yukon Development Corporation agreed to

Chair: This concludes Committee of the Whole's consideration of Vote 22 in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Seeing the time and knowing that there's a motion passed unanimously that a witness appear at 3:30 p.m., I suggest that the House recess until 3:30 p.m. when the witness will be in attendance.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Chair, I move that you report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

Chair: Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 8 adopted earlier today, at 3:30 p.m., Committee of the Whole will receive a witness, Dr. Brendan Hanley, Yukon's chief medical officer of health.

In order to allow the witness to take his place in the Chamber, the Committee will now recess and reconvene at 3:30 p.m.

Recess

Appearance of witness

Chair: Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 8 adopted on this day, Committee of the Whole will now receive a witness, Dr. Brendan Hanley, Yukon's chief medical officer of health. I would ask all members to remember to refer their remarks through the Chair when addressing the witness. I would also ask the witness to refer answers through the Chair when he is responding to members of the Committee.

Witness introduced

Hon. Ms. Frost: The witness appearing before Committee of the Whole today is Dr. Brendan Hanley, Yukon's chief medical officer of health. Dr. Hanley assumed the role of chief medical officer of health for the territory in 2008.

Since then, we have seen the growth of this role as he has steered us through the H1N1 pandemic of 2009 and raised awareness around the state of the opioids in Yukon, around motorized vehicle safety and injury prevention, environmental health, and countless other issues.

Those in this House will recognize him more recently for his calm and steady presence in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic over the past 10 months.

Dr. Hanley has first-hand experience with health issues surrounding northern and marginalized populations. Prior to working as Yukon's chief medical officer of health, Dr. Hanley worked as an emergency physician and family practitioner in the Yukon. Before then, he practised medicine in a number of rural and inner-city locations throughout Canada, as well as

internationally. He spent many years in various parts of the Canadian Arctic and frequently worked with Doctors Without Borders and other relief organizations.

Since coming into his role as the chief medical officer of health in February 2008, he has focused on strengthening public health capacity and developing partnerships within the community.

Dr. Hanley received his MD from the University of Alberta and has a master's in public health from John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Over the past nine to 10 months and more, Dr. Hanley has worked tirelessly and almost every day to keep Yukoners safe during the pandemic.

Dr. Hanley, on behalf of our government and Yukon, we can't thank you enough for the work that you have done. Welcome to the House today. We look forward to a fruitful exchange of information. Hai choo.

Chair: Would the witness like to make opening remarks?

Dr. Hanley: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you minister. Mahsi' cho. Yes, I would like to thank Members of the Legislative Assembly and all Yukoners for the opportunity to speak today about my work as the chief medical officer of health and the work of my team from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic until now. I look forward to answering your questions regarding the public health approach to COVID, the nature and behaviour of the virus, the workings of my office, and what we might expect in the coming months.

Mr. Chair, I'll trust that you'll understand that I may not be able to answer some of the questions immediately because I may not have the information at my fingertips. If so, I'll endeavour to follow up with a response as soon as possible. I also hope that you'll understand that I must keep my responses focused on my duties and professional responsibilities as a chief medical officer of health. I will not be able to answer questions about the advice I provided to ministers. This information is protected by confidentiality conventions. Also, I will not be able to answer questions about legal, political, or financial matters, as these are outside of my area of responsibility. I therefore just wanted to make clear beforehand the reasons if I must decline to answer questions or parts of questions that are put to me.

Under the *Public Health and Safety Act*, my duties are to promote health and prevent disease, including by preventing the transmission of communicable diseases. I am also responsible for monitoring, investigating, and responding to communicable disease. I also have certain authorities under this act, including the power to designate and revoke the designation of a disease as a communicable disease and the power to declare a public health emergency.

If a public health emergency is declared, I have additional authorities under the law. This includes: the power to compel a person to provide me with the information I need to exercise my duties; the power to order a person to suspend the sale, distribution, or relocation of medication, supplies, and equipment; to enter a place or vehicle to determine the health of a person or peoples, including by examining a person; to direct a person to undergo testing; to direct the disinfection of

a place or vehicle; and to detain, appropriately isolate, and hospitalize a person if necessary until the communicable disease threat is no longer of concern.

In the course of my duties, I am asked to provide my professional views and opinions to the ministers on matters regarding prevention of disease and the promotion of public health. In doing so, I take an evidence-informed, science-based approach, and I am supported by professionals and experts in my office. I also rely on a network of professionals, academic journals, and my medical officer of health colleagues and their staff around the country.

This pandemic is an unprecedented event in our lifetimes. There are few guideposts and there certainly is — as of yet — no textbook for dealing with this novel disease. As you know, when the first wave of COVID arrived in Yukon last winter, I declared a public health emergency. Yukon acted quickly and decisively. Thanks to our precautionary approach, we were able to gain control of the emerging situation. What followed was a period of relative stability in Yukon over the summer months, where some restrictions were relaxed and businesses and our communities were reopened while preparations were made for subsequent increased risks that would be faced in the fall.

As we know, health restrictions can have unintended societal impacts, including impacts on people's livelihoods, which can, in turn, affect the health of Yukoners. Balancing measures that protect Yukoners from this disease while keeping an eye on the overall health and well-being of Yukoners is one of the challenges of responding to the pandemic and one of the themes that I have always made an effort to promote.

My efforts have been aimed at promoting the health of Yukoners throughout the pandemic by providing additional supports for mental health, promoting physical activity, and ensuring that people could safely attend camps and schools. Our knowledge of the virus is evolving and growing, and we have been fortunate to have close and effective working relationships with medical officers of health in other jurisdictions.

With the simultaneous onset of winter, which can present increased risk of transmission, and arrival of a vaccine, the upcoming months will certainly be a time of increased vigilance, but also a time of increased hope and optimism. I am confident that, acting together as Yukoners, we will be successful in meeting the coming challenges, and we'll be able to defeat this virus.

I look forward to your questions.

Mr. Hassard: I would like to thank Dr. Hanley for being here. We certainly appreciate him taking the time to be here today and answer questions from us in opposition. I understand that he's a rather busy guy, so I won't spend a lot of time talking. I'll just get straight to questions.

The first questions I have are in regard to testing. Since the beginning of the pandemic, it has been widely acknowledged that the pathway to effectively managing this would be through testing and tracing. It seems that our tracing is strong, but we do have some questions about the testing.

We know that Dr. Hanley recently indicated that we have now expanded testing criteria to include asymptomatic people,

so I'm wondering if he could tell us why the criteria was expanded and whether it will revert back at some point to where it was.

Dr. Hanley: Thank you for the member's question. I think this is a really important area to be clear on how we do asymptomatic testing and what our criteria are.

We have actually always had what I might say is a contained policy of carrying out asymptomatic testing among whom we designate, and this is through the efforts of our contact tracing and our communicable disease team at YCDC, whom we designate as "higher-risk" contacts, recognizing — especially through the early months of the pandemic — the increasing role of asymptomatic transmission, which was not well recognized at the beginning of the pandemic in the early months, but by the time we came through the summer months, it was increasingly recognized that there was a contribution — even if unclear how substantial — but nevertheless, there was a contribution to COVID spread by asymptomatic transmission, and therefore, the role of strategic identification of asymptomatic COVID became a part of our contact tracing approach.

So, what does that mean in reality? What it means is that when we identify someone who is what we call a "high-risk" contact — so, let's say that there is a case, and let's say that there is someone living in confined circumstances who may be more susceptible to complications of COVID and for whom it may be harder to detect symptoms for whatever reason, or there are other circumstances that make it that much more important — perhaps it is a person who may be more difficult to follow up because of life circumstances — there are these circumstances where, under direction from YCDC, we actually do testing to determine if there is asymptomatic or even what may turn out to be pre-symptomatic detection of COVID disease. So, this is what I call "strategic and contained asymptomatic testing" as a part of contact tracing and follow-up of cases.

This is different from public asymptomatic testing, where we might, say, open the doors — anyone who wants a test gets a test. We have seen that there have been limitations and potential problems with that approach. We have seen that happen in other jurisdictions, where I would say that the zeal to expand testing without clear goals of testing has led to kind of the loss of that goal of testing. I think that it is really important to always maintain a strategic approach to testing and to everything that's within that testing envelope.

What we have always said about public asymptomatic testing is that, in our low-prevalence, low-incidence environment, the chance of finding — no matter how good the test is — a false positive test is relatively high, and in our context, that could be as high as a 50-percent chance of finding, in a random public case, as much as 50-percent false positive tests. That means, if a test came back positive, there would be a high chance of that being a false positive if there were no other risk circumstances to suggest that person may have been exposed to COVID.

So, it becomes not a very reliable test. If we were to go, for instance, to test the whole of Yukon in one day or something

like that, we would then be encountering false positives, which would then lead us down misleading paths. So, the role of asymptomatic testing has become integrated into our communicable disease approach. It is focused, and it's really part of our case-finding approach. That's very different from a policy of encouraging all comers for asymptomatic testing.

I hope that clarifies the distinction.

Mr. Hassard: I had some questions in regard to rapid testing as well. I'm wondering if Dr. Hanley could tell us: What is the status of rapid testing here in the Yukon? How many tests are available? What are the parameters for a rapid test to be conducted?

Dr. Hanley: There are actually a number of rapid tests either currently in place in Yukon or anticipated in Yukon. So, maybe I'll take a chance to go through what we have or what's in the works. I think there's one thing I want to have everyone keep in mind, first of all: That is that our present gold-standard approach is still our best test, and that is our current test — the one that is a nasopharyngeal swab that is sent out to BC and processed at BC CDC labs. It comes back with an average turnaround time — from arrival at the lab — from shipment to arrival back — of 48 to 72 hours. We continue to maintain a very good turnaround time with what I would call our "gold-standard" test — a test that is likely to be our go-to test for the bulk of our needs here and henceforth. I think that it becomes our benchmark test.

Then it's looking at, well, what is the role of additional testing capacity and where can that help us? The first example of that is our GeneXpert machine — the GeneXpert analyzer — which is also — like the BC CDC test — a molecular PCA test that is housed within Whitehorse General Hospital. It's throughput — it is a smaller machine and a smaller analyzer than what we have at BC CDC, but it's also very reliable. It is still in a relatively early stage of implementation. I think that we have about 171 rapid tests that have been carried out between mid-September when it was launched up until the other day.

In general, this test, we reserve for when it's really critical that we have that result with a quick turnaround — a turnaround of between, say, two to six hours, depending on the circumstances. We use this sometimes for hospitalized patients. We use it for scenarios where there may be staff illness and it is critical to know whether that person might have COVID or not, particularly when it is a critical hospital staff member with a mild illness who otherwise could work.

We also have used it in outbreak scenarios. With certain high-risk contacts, it has made a critical difference to know within a few hours versus two or three days what that test result is, because it influences how we expand or potentially expand our investigation.

Vulnerable persons are another category where we use this test where it may be a matter of having a person in a self-isolation facility where that person may need many supports while in self-isolation. So, it's having the advantage of that rapid turnaround also there.

The GeneXpert is still in the verification process where, if we have a positive test, that is considered a preliminary positive

test until it's confirmed by the referral lab, which is St. Paul's Hospital in BC.

Of course, we consider a positive a positive and there is just a quality-assurance process that requires a certain number of positive tests before it is completely validated as an independent testing device. Fortunately, we are not quite there yet. The negative tests, though, are considered confirmed as negative.

There is a backup GeneXpert, a device which is not online, but if we did run into problems with the first analyzer, we could bring a second one online. The device also does require supporting technology, so that really is only suitable for the Whitehorse General Hospital laboratory. It needs to be in that kind of an advanced hospital environment and could not have the supports, even in the Watson Lake hospital or Dawson City hospital, because of the lab technology that is required and person time that is required to support that test.

We also have a machine called the "Biofire", which is actually similar — it is also a molecular-based test, and it is similar to the GeneXpert. There are a few technical differences, which I could explain, if required. So, we have one device at the Whitehorse General Hospital. It is not yet kind of online and ready. It is going through some validation — I would say that we are preparing for a validation process. Really, the idea of this machine is that if there was a problem with the GeneXpert cartridges — for instance, the supply of cartridges — we could use the Biofire, because it has a completely different supply inventory, as a backup device for, more or less, in-house testing capacity.

There are a few more, and I am sure that everyone is familiar with other technologies. There is the Abbott ID NOW. We have 10 devices in-territory and we are expecting 10 more devices. These have yet to be deployed. This type of technology is also a molecular test, but a rapid and simplified molecular test which gives you a qualitative yes/no answer. It doesn't have quite the precision of the larger analyzers — the GeneXpert or the ones used at BC CDC.

So, what we are doing right now is working closely with our colleagues and counterparts in BC, as they are going through a rollout of Abbott ID NOW to really determine the best use for these machines.

The advantage that these will offer would be either for more remote settings to have that kind of rapid turnaround in a more remote setting or to be able to deploy — potentially three or four at a time — to where an outbreak is occurring to give us that kind of on-site capacity to do some rapid testing.

It's more than just a matter of putting a machine in a place. It requires — what is the additional benefit that we're going to get and really being clear about it; it's training providers; it's establishing standard operating procedures; it's knowing what to do with the result, whether it's positive or negative, and what the backup plan is — for instance, the verification process.

We're actually going through that process almost as we speak in validating and preparing for — what I would call — a "strategic deployment" of these devices.

Two more to go through, if you don't mind a longer answer — the next one is called the "Abbott Panbio", and this is where

we really go into a different category of test. The Abbott Panbio is not a molecular but an antigen test. So, really, now what you're looking for are little bits of viral protein instead of the molecular material of the virus. What you're talking about is literally a handheld card, not dissimilar to a pregnancy test, where you actually have a kind of a piece of filter paper, and the material — whether it's saliva or swab material — is placed and then gives a positive or a negative.

This is really designed for more of a mass testing approach where we might be using it in a surveillance setting — if, for instance, we were looking at its potential applicability in a remote work site where we are testing workers or in long-term care — certain areas where we're really looking for lots of tests, recognizing that it's going to be inaccurate but, if you do lots, it makes up for the inherent inaccuracy of the test. We might be just looking for signals rather than using it individually as a diagnostic test. So, it has a different place. It is also new — also fairly recently validated by Health Canada. These things came after a long wait. These came one after another, so it's really lining up which technology works for which area and where we might strategically deploy it to add to our internal testing capacity.

Again, this is in the line up, and we're very interested in the potential complementary role that this Abbott Panbio or the antigen testing might play.

Lastly, I'm going to just mention what we now call the "mouth rinse and gargle test". This is what BC had pioneered a couple of months ago and we are now piloting. It is really the same test, but it really replaces the swab with just taking saliva from a child. For children, the potential advantage is just replacing having a swab in the nose but using a kind of a rinse process with salt water, gargling, and then spitting into a tube and using that as your sample. It otherwise goes through the same process as our BC CDC testing.

It's not so much a rapid test as an additional method to take a sample that can then go through our normal testing. It's really a convenience measure, particularly for children, and hopefully to lower the barrier and make it easier for kids to be tested. This is currently being piloted through YCDC, doing a few to get the procedure right. It sounds simple, but it actually has to be done rigorously in order to get a good sample. There's a video that BC has produced, for example, to really instruct how you prepare your child for it and how you prepare for the taste of salt water, the rinse, and then the taking of the specimen to ensure that you get the best quality specimen possible.

That's a bit of an overview of our testing technologies.

Mr. Hassard: I certainly appreciate the in-depth answers because it actually takes care of several questions at once. It helps us move along in the long run.

Just to follow up on the rapid tests, some people have pointed to them as potentially offering an alternative to self-isolation or possibly shortening up that isolation time. I'm just curious if Dr. Hanley could give us some insight into his thoughts around this idea.

Dr. Hanley: Yes, it is again an area of growing interest. That interest is shared with us — with me as well. What I would say is that we are all focusing attention on the experience

globally but, more particularly, the Alberta pilot test, which is a collaboration between the federal government and the Alberta government. This is focusing on two international ports of entry, one land-based and one airport — at Calgary Airport — for testing asymptomatic travellers and determining what the results are from testing at entry and then at, I believe, day eight, and then looking at the actual results. As I understand it, we will be seeing more results from that research soon. I think that this will help inform our approach to the possibility of looking at the potential role of testing as it might influence isolation times.

I think that it is important — there are a couple of things that I would say about that. It's not just a matter of looking at that result and then, sort of, going with it. We would be very interested in how this might apply, for instance, to Canada's approach as a country for its use in international quarantine.

We are always looking for precedents where we can because, of course, when we can see the ability to evaluate in larger jurisdictions with larger populations and look at results, it gives us that much more comfort, rather than being the first ones out of the gate, I would say. It is definitely something that is part of our national conversations at the CCMOH — the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health — level to follow these results and to see the potential wider applicability to international travel and then potentially to places where we have these domestic requirements.

I will say that we are following this with interest and looking at the potential role that this could play in how that might influence the current requirement for a 14-day isolation period.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the witness for that response. I had questions on gargle testing, so I will just stay on that now since you brought it up earlier.

In late September, Dr. Hanley announced that these tests were coming to the Yukon in a matter of weeks. Then, on December 7, we asked about them here in the Legislature during Question Period. At that time, the minister said — and I quote: “We have also looked at the swab tests and are reviewing the policies of implementing the saline swish-and-spit test currently in use in British Columbia, and we anticipate an update being made available by the...” chief medical officer of health.

Then, on December 9, the minister told us — and again, I quote: “We are waiting at the moment for the chief medical officer's advice on when and if this test will be implemented here...”

It would seem that, at that point, the minister was suggesting that the government was waiting for Dr. Hanley. Then, later that day in a press scrum, the Premier told the media that the gargle test wasn't as effective and that we were simply waiting for a recommendation from the chief medical officer of health.

Based on those comments, both from the minister and the Premier, the *Whitehorse Star* then published an article that told Yukoners that these tests weren't coming to the Yukon. Of course, this prompted several parents throughout the territory to contact us, obviously disappointed, but then the next day,

which came as a surprise, on December 10, the Acting Minister of Health and Social Services told us that there actually was a trial of these tests moving forward immediately.

I'm just wondering if Dr. Hanley can clear the air, so to speak, on this, because it sounds like, from what he's saying now, the gargle tests are being used in a few instances. I guess the other question along that line would be if Dr. Hanley would be able to explain why there was such a delay from September until just recently.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to questions that were asked specifically here in the Legislative Assembly around testing and testing methodologies, I have noted numerous times, as did the acting Health and Social Services minister, that the tests were being trialed in British Columbia, and Yukon hasn't yet pursued that, given that the trial was still in effect. So, of course, as we move and progress, I want to just say that the evidence around implementing this methodology in the Yukon really falls under the advice and guidance of the experts, and it's not in any way putting Dr. Hanley in any kind of political realm of conversation. It's really about the structure and the process of how and what happened in British Columbia that resulted in us following through here.

Just as a note, I happened not to be in the House that day as I was on another federal call and wasn't able to answer the question. So, my good colleague on that very day, once we received notification, presented to the House. As a preamble to the question, that's where we landed here last week.

Chair: Would the witness like to add to that?

Dr. Hanley: Certainly, yes. I would be happy to give my point of view.

I'll talk about, basically, the role that I play in medical direction provided to the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit. My answer will probably be a little bit more on the operational side because we regularly really have that kind of clinical communicable disease level — regularly work. My deputy CMOH — Dr. Elliott, in particular — works very closely on a day-to-day basis with the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit providing that kind of day-to-day medical direction with me participating regularly at a slightly arm's-length level, but often involved in key decision areas, such as new additions to our testing capacity, changes in our delivery, or changes in our approach and contact tracing according to emerging guidelines — things like this.

As soon as we heard of the — it's hard to get the official name right — “mouth rinse and gargle test”, as it is now called, certainly that was something that captured our interest immediately as we learned that BC, which we also worked very closely with, of course, was implementing — first trialing and then implementing and working out the kinks. We were following along with them and were excited about this possibility and definitely had it on our radar.

I think that there were delays in our anticipated timeline operationally just simply because of the work that was required when we had the surge in cases. So, it was just at that level where we really needed that kind of intimate involvement of our staff and personnel at YCDC to carry out the piloting of this method.

It's a matter of working out the processes and the operating procedure, the instructions, and going through any potential limitations of how this actually works in practice. Again, when you read it about it, it looks simple, but it does need to be worked out exactly how it is going to happen, and therefore, our goal was to have it within the premises, under the supervision of the nursing staff at YCDC before expanding it.

We have had an opportunity to use it recently with some of our recent testing as that very contained pilot measure, and we do anticipate having it more generally available early in the new year.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate the answer, but just to follow up on that a little bit further, I'm curious as to if, in the mind of Dr. Hanley, when the Premier said we were waiting for a recommendation, would that be a correct assumption in his mind?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would suggest that the member is here to provide his expert advice, not to engage in political decision-making processes. Clearly, he provides advice to this side of the House, and we take that under advisement. Suggesting and perhaps leading the chief medical officer to respond to a political question, I think, is inappropriate. So, I would advise that, if there are any specific questions on implementing the program, as I understand it, based on the BC model and leveraging the expertise and experience on this type of testing — that is what we relied on in making the decision to proceed with that methodology here in the Yukon.

Chair: Dr. Hanley, would you care to add to the response?

Dr. Hanley: I think I've said enough on that particular topic, thank you.

Mr. Hassard: I think, when the government says that Dr. Hanley or Dr. Hanley's office was the holdup, I think that it's fair for us to ask, just to try to decipher this for Yukoners because obviously we are very fortunate to have this time and our briefing time to talk to Dr. Hanley, but unfortunately, the general public doesn't. This is our opportunity to try to ask these questions on behalf of the general public, so I certainly was hoping that we could get some clarification on that. But understanding that we don't have a lot of time, Mr. Chair, and that we do have a lot of questions, I will move on. I certainly wasn't trying to make the doctor speak to something political.

I have some questions regarding critical workers and questions coming from employers. They have brought these questions forward and asked us to raise them. The guidelines on yukon.ca indicate that critical workers must self-isolate when they are not working but don't need to isolate if they are working. I guess a good example would be a truck driver. They are a critical worker. He or she can attend their workplace without isolating, but when they go home, they must isolate from their family. I am wondering if Dr. Hanley could clarify if that is, in fact, the case or how that works.

Dr. Hanley: I will try to answer. I know that there are many complexities that can arise out of life circumstances vis-à-vis how the orders are actually written. First of all, the essential and critical services were defined by the Yukon government and aligned to be consistent with the federal

guidelines that were issued early on in the early months of the pandemic. Of course, the role of that in defining "essential" and "critical" workers was in order to maintain essential services, minimizing the risk of introducing COVID-19 to Yukon. Defining what is "essential" and what is "critical" was essential for that business continuity part.

"Critical" really is around what is essential for preserving life, health, and basic societal functions within Yukon. Within these categories, travel into Yukon was allowed as part of delivering the essential or critical service. Now, there are two ways the order is written. Of course, the order is written around critical service, where there is actually an exemption from the requirements inasmuch as it is in order to provide the service that is part of that critical work.

The "essential" part is not an exemption — essential workers are required to self-isolate but are also able to submit alternate self-isolation plans to enable the process of working with self-isolation. How that plays out in real life really depends on the work sector.

An example might be health care workers who are critical workers and who may have been required to travel out or who may be coming into the territory to provide services. When they're in that critical category, they have requirements for how they provide that service in the workplace while protecting the potential for the introduction of risk. That might involve how they use PPE, for example, and how they follow infection control precautions within the workplace.

Really, the basic expectation is that critical workers are expected to abide by self-isolation measures to the extent possible while carrying out the service that they're required to provide. So, the expectation is that they are to abide by the principles of self-isolation even while providing that service. I don't know if there are perhaps circumstances that the member wishes to bring up that might provide more clarity, but I think it's important to, first of all, understand that there are these two categories, and the much bigger category is essential, where that expectation and the order is actually for self-isolation, but there is an allowance for approval of alternate self-isolation plans.

Mr. Hassard: This particular question was specific to the trucking industry. We know that some companies haul fuel out of Alaska, for example; we have companies here based in Whitehorse that travel to Alberta for groceries on a weekly basis; we have companies that travel to British Columbia every other day for such things as groceries. So, my question was really based around that — if I am a truck driver and I make five trips to Skagway or if I make a trip a day to Skagway — so, essentially five or six trips a week to Skagway — as my job, what do I do on Sunday or what do I do when I get home at night? Am I supposed to self-isolate from my family or how is that supposed to work?

Dr. Hanley: The principle is abiding, to the extent possible, with the principles of self-isolation. I will probably have to get back to the member with exactly how the order is written, because we are really now talking about what the law is and how it is written out. The principle is that there is always an expectation to carry out the general principles of self-

isolation to the extent that it is possible — recognizing that there are these frequent travellers who are going in and out and have been doing so and applying the utmost care in what they do. From what I have heard — whether it is health care workers or truck drivers or other people in the transportation industry — they have been very aware of what the expectation is, and I have not heard of instances where that principle of adhering was not carried out with the utmost faith. But perhaps there are some elements that I will have to bring back, in terms of how the order specifically applies.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the member opposite for the question and Dr. Hanley for the response. I am just going to add a small thing here. Rather than have Dr. Hanley go up and look at those orders, I think that I will ask my department to do that and bring that back. We are happy to get the language around the orders and supply them here, as it is our responsibility to enforce those orders. I will get that information — the clarity around how critical workers isolate during off-hours, how they do that, and what the orders require.

Mr. Hassard: I certainly look forward to seeing that information.

I have another workplace question for Dr. Hanley. We were asked about an employee who called in sick for work one day saying that they had COVID-like symptoms and were worried that they could have COVID. They stayed home that day and the next day and then went to work the following day without getting any test. I am curious if this is the obligation of the employer to instruct that the employee get tested, or is it the obligation of the employee to get tested as soon as they feel that they have symptoms?

Dr. Hanley: Again, I will answer to the best of my ability from the public health point of view, but clearly this again goes into some of the nuances of orders and interpretation, so I will be a little bit careful here. You have heard much of my messaging particularly in the last few weeks, which emphasizes the importance of people who are sick and have symptoms staying away from the workplace — and pointing out a number of the resources and supports that are available, whether as an employee or as an employer, to avail upon should an employee be staying home, as appropriately they should be when they have symptoms. Again, the directive to the public and the plea to the public is that, if you are an employee and you are sick, you stay home and away from others and arrange to get testing when symptoms occur.

We do have some specific guidance around that and what we affectionately call the “traffic light” guidance, which really gives a bit more specific direction on when to worry more and when to worry less. Since we have had the surge in cases, we have really tried to push the basic concept that, if you’re sick, don’t go to work. Stay home, stay away from others, and arrange to get tested. Call 811 if you are uncertain, or do the online self-assessment. That is really the basic message.

I am hoping that employers have mechanisms in place so that they are able to support that in the workplace, whether that is notification, meetings with the employees, or other ways to notify employees that this is the expectation of the workplace.

To me, it’s up to the individual to arrange what to do with their own life, but I think that there is a responsibility for the employee to follow that direction to stay away from the workplace when sick, and it’s the responsibility for the employer to make it known that this is the expectation within the workplace and to make it known what the supports are for that person to enable that process to occur.

Mr. Hassard: I certainly appreciate that information from Dr. Hanley because I think that it’s interesting that this is the situation that we experienced here this week with an MLA in the Legislature.

I have some questions around schools for Dr. Hanley. Now, there has been considerable debate about whether and how to reopen schools. Probably the most controversial aspect of that decision was the decision to only reopen to half days for students in grades 10 to 12 here in Whitehorse, while students in grades 10 to 12 in the communities, as well as the French school here in Whitehorse, are back full time. I’m curious what advice Dr. Hanley provided to Education about the reopening of schools and if it was in his recommendation that grades 10 to 12 only attend half-time in-person classes.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I certainly will turn it over to Dr. Hanley. I think that it’s important to correct the information in the question in that grades 10 to 12 students here in Whitehorse are attending in-person classes half of a day but they are learning full time with additional supports for them when they are not in class in the three large high schools here in Whitehorse.

Just to correct that — I’m certainly happy for Dr. Hanley to answer with what advice he provided or what recommendations he provided in relation to the school health and safety guidelines.

Dr. Hanley: Maybe I’ll back up a little bit and provide a little bit of an overview. What we saw early on in the pandemic was jurisdictions, in that first phase of response, migrating in-person learning to online learning. That was really due to many of the early uncertainties of the pandemic, the mixing of students and staff in close proximity to each other, and limited measures at the time to reduce the possible transmission of COVID-19 in school settings. So, Yukon likewise adopted a similar structure for the last couple of months of the last school year along with other jurisdictions — so, closing in-person classes and going to online learning as of April 15, 2020.

Then there was the resumption of classes with all of those intensive preparations that occurred during the rest of the spring and over the summer period to put in place all of the protective measures — with that focus on student and staff safety, but also to support student learning and to support the ability of learning to continue as best as possible in an altered environment.

Within what was the Health Emergency Operations Centre — basically, my team — we developed guidelines for K to 12 — public health and safety guidelines — based on federal guidance and, at the time, emerging guidance as it was coming out in various jurisdictions and what we could review and interpret of the literature around COVID introduction into schools, COVID transmission among children, and that global literature as it was coming into play. As you know, we have

revised that guideline — I believe twice — and the most recent updates are around the use of masks, making it a requirement rather than a recommendation within common areas within schools for ages 10 and up, the requirement for staff to wear non-medical masks outside of the classroom, and the one-metre spacing as a new bar for students within a classroom, as well as staff requirements for two-metre spacing.

Then, of course, most recently, there is the updated guidance around school buses. Students aged five and over will be required, as of January 4, to wear a mask on a bus, as must the drivers, with students under five, or the four-year-olds, having more of an encouragement but not a requirement.

I think that my role, and our team's role, was to provide the basic public health guidance that acted as a kind of a template for the Department of Education to then put in place the requirements for operational plans. Each school, as we saw, developed operational plans, really coming back to the public health guidance and how that would adhere to the basic principles that we laid out in the public health and safety guidance for schools. So, that comes back to screening of staff and screening of students for illness before going to school, recommended sanitation measures for schools, physical distancing requirements and, as I said, that evolving recommendation and then requirement for mask use and others of those public health measures. Decisions by the department were made accordingly.

Mr. Hassard: I'm wondering if Dr. Hanley could tell us what the additional risk would be if we allowed full-day classes for all students. We know that a lot of parents have asked us about this, and they have said that they would definitely support stronger measures in other areas if it meant allowing children or students to fully access the education system. A follow-up to that would be: If Dr. Hanley felt that adequate spacing could be achieved, would he be in support of full-day classes for all Yukon students?

Dr. Hanley: Again, this goes to a place where public health guidance is the foundation and operational requirements are out of my scope. I mean, one could imagine all kinds of possible scenarios where you might have adherence in a number of ways to guidance to the public health requirements. Then it really comes down to what works best for the operational capacity of the department. That's where it gets out of my scope.

I think that my role in this case was really to provide the best public health guidance that we could in a Yukonized context and then to work with the department, of course, for the department to be able to translate those recommendations into practice, but the department has many other considerations to take into account as the operationalizing of those guidelines are carried out.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate that. Just to kind of expand on that a little bit, we know that the guidelines that led the government to the decision to limit in-person classes for grades 10 to 12 here in Whitehorse were all developed in the summer. Obviously, at that time, the situation was quite different from what it is now — you know, there were no mandatory mask requirements and we had the BC bubble open. Now that the

bubble is closed and we have mandatory masks throughout the territory — or in any public spaces, sorry; not to change the wording — I would think that the risk assessment has obviously changed. I am curious as to if Dr. Hanley has considered changing the guidelines for schools based on new risk levels. I guess I would like to see what he has to say about that, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Hanley: Yes, I think that is a really interesting question. I think it comes back to: How do we assess overall risk and what is the actual risk? I think that, for me, it is a reminder of how close we are to an actual risk of introduction and transmission, given the surge that we have apparently come to the other side of recently. As little as probably a week and a half ago, I was saying that I'm not actually sure if we are starting to see community transmission and we may actually be seeing the beginnings of community transmission in Yukon. That would very much change our approach in potentially a number of areas.

Now, as I say, technically, we have not ruled that out yet until we are perhaps a week or two further in to really know if there are some undetected cases in our territory, but the fact that we have come down to only one active case — and that most recent case being a known contact — puts us in a much more comfortable position than we were in a week and a half ago. But I think it speaks to the vulnerability and that vulnerability is around the surge of activity in Canada. So, even though we did come to a point where the BC bubble seemed to no longer be a sensible approach based on the increasing risk and that it made more sense for us as a jurisdiction to consider reverting to a quarantine requirement for any importation — any person travelling in — we were still at the same time facing an actual increased risk of any single person coming in — no matter what the reason for travel — to be infected with COVID based on the increasing surge in most of the rest of the country. So, there were many factors in play.

In other words, the decline in travel has been, to some degree, countered by the risk per traveller coming in, so the introductory risk is relatively high even though there are now these new requirements.

I think that we have to see the self-quarantine measure as one layer of a multiplicity of layers that help to protect us and that we can't — even with the closure of the BC bubble, I think we would be mistaken to view that as an impenetrable barrier because we have seen that barrier pierced many times, actually, since the beginning of the pandemic, which is why I always try to bring the messaging back to — not so much the risk solely of introduction, but how do we mitigate and reduce the risk of transmission?

I think that really is perhaps a larger picture view of how we think about risk of both introduction and then transmission of COVID and how that influences the way we develop guidelines.

To make it short, I don't see that the actual risk has changed that much that it would influence the rewriting of guidelines that would then, in turn, influence changes in the schools. I think, holistically, we're probably dealing with a similar level of risk, and we have just seen how close we are to

the ability for COVID to be not only be introduced but transmitted — potentially in a very short amount of time.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate that from Dr. Hanley. We've heard that vaccines are coming in early January. That's great news. Everybody's happy to hear that. I'm wondering if, once people are getting vaccinated, that would change the dynamics around the school being able to go to back to full capacity and allowing those grades 10 to 12 students to go back to full-time classes.

If the vaccine does have a positive impact on that, is there a magic number that Dr. Hanley and his office would be looking at for the percentage of people to be vaccinated here in the Yukon to allow that to happen?

Dr. Hanley: This is a very interesting question. I'm going to probably again take it up another level of more general thinking. Maybe the short answer is that we don't know yet. It's clearly the question that everyone has and that I hope we'll be happily able to answer in the months to come, but it literally might take months before we know the answer to that.

There are estimates of what might constitute herd immunity — the magic phrase “herd immunity” meaning what level of uptake in a population do we need to ensure that COVID transmission is either nil or minimal or negligible so that it no longer poses a significant risk to the public. It actually is not quite clear what that number is. There are formulas to determine that. Of course, it relates to the transmissibility of the virus, and then it also relates to the effectiveness of the vaccine.

The early vaccines — the messenger RNA vaccines — have very promising results from the clinical trials in the area of 95-percent efficacy, which are amazing results based on the robust results so far from the phase 3 clinical trials. As we know, some of this more specific information and data will come as the approval processes carry on, but also — as the phase 3 trials are not over, they are continuing for a further two years — we will get more data as time goes, particularly on durability of vaccines. The durability question is, as yet, the unknown.

All we know is that there are initial estimates that seem to put the durability at three months at least, but that's really based on the short time that we've had of the vaccine being put into arms as part of the trial data. The more months that go by, the better we will know what the expected durability of the vaccine is and therefore what the practical herd immunity is.

An example might be — if we were estimating, for instance, 70-percent herd immunity, but the durability of the vaccine was only three to six months, it would not necessarily be enough assurance that we could start to undo public health measures unless we had all of those contingencies about revaccination and boosters and that sort of thing in place.

There's a lot of work to do to know what the target is, how durable the vaccine will be, and how the vaccine effectiveness plays out in real life. There often is a difference between the clinical efficacy based on clinical trials and then the real-world effectiveness based on population uptake and the whole variety of recipients of vaccine. That is something that is followed, researched, and surveyed, so we will get information as we go.

This is all to say that it's too early to say what the impact of vaccine will be on our ability to start to unroll public health measures. Of course, it is our expectation that we will be, at some point; we just don't have enough information anywhere in the world, as yet, to know what the expected timing would be.

I would be thinking that we're months away from that, so if you think about how that would play out into the practicalities of a school term, I would be surprised if we could reach a point where it would be enough to influence the continuity of a school term given, again, all of the other considerations, but I think that we would probably have a better idea, even by February and March, what the expectations would be.

I could probably go on for quite a bit, and maybe that would answer some of the other questions around vaccine, but, of course, coverage is one of those big unknowns. We all hope — and I am certainly encouraging the population to, and will continue to encourage people to, step forth when the time comes. We have a unique chance in our territory, as well as in the other territories, to have enough vaccine for all of our adult population. We have an opportunity that few Canadians have at this point to, within the first quarter of 2021, potentially achieve population immunity. If we can get to that 70- to 75-percent population uptake, we would likely be in a very good position to expect population immunity. I think that is our goal for now, and when we start getting into that implementation phase, we will have, hopefully, more data, more evidence, and more information to be able to then project what the implications of that will be for many of our public health measures, including some of the ones around school and education.

Mr. Hassard: I thank Dr. Hanley for that. I think that he has pretty much answered the next question, but in light of the time, I will ask my one last question. In doing so, I will thank Dr. Hanley again. I appreciate him taking the time to be here and certainly look forward to future opportunities to ask questions on behalf of Yukoners. We have many questions today, but I understand that we only have a limited amount of time.

Dr. Hanley talked about the vaccine and how the rollout would change the picture here in the Yukon. We know that the vaccine, I think, has been to many people the thing that they have been waiting for, and it will be the be-all and the end-all, and COVID will be gone and history.

But then Dr. Hanley indicated today that we could be looking at another 12 to 18 months. I believe that he indicated many of the reasons why in his last answer — and if there is something else that he would like to add, I would appreciate it. Also, the question of other jurisdictions — will vaccination rates in other jurisdictions affect it, or does he feel that it would have any effect on how our borders would open up to other territories and provinces? I guess an example would be if we need BC or Alberta to reach a certain — again, I will go back to the magic number, for simple terms — the magic number that those provinces would have to reach for vaccinations before the bubble could be reopened to the Yukon?

Again, I appreciate Dr. Hanley for his time today.

Dr. Hanley: Thank you for your comments and thanks for that question.

I think that there are so many remaining questions that we all have. I am trying to be authentic with my responses and these are great questions. We really fundamentally don't know yet. I can give a few thoughts, though.

I think that we are certainly in that fortunate position to be able to have the chance to reach population uptake and potentially population immunity before most of the rest of the country. Again, I think that this is important for us because we are remote. It is something that we asked for through the three territories in consideration of our small, widely dispersed populations, our relatively low capacity in health care, and the need to transport for tertiary health care — all of those considerations — which made it more feasible for us to go with a population-based approach rather than that kind of staggered, phased, priority approach that the larger jurisdictions are beginning right now.

But added to that equation is the importance of vaccine uptake in Canada, and added to that is the importance of vaccine uptake globally. This is a global pandemic and the pandemic won't be over until we have global control — not just Yukon and not just Canada, but globally — which speaks to the importance, for instance, of Canada's participation in the COVAX initiative, which ensures — or at least attempts to provide — assistance to countries that have less ability to purchase vaccine because we are literally all in this together. So, until we kind of have that global control so that COVID becomes, at best, perhaps a disease that still exists, but without that epidemic potential, then we will be at risk. I think even if we had, say, a widely protected Yukon population but not the same level in Canada, then we would continually be facing importation risks, the potential for declining immunity in Yukon as time goes on and the potential for our changes in population, with newcomers coming in. So, there are so many things that weave into that dynamic of how we could consider ourselves protected as a community.

But we also know that it's only a matter of time before the rest of Canada catches up, as it were, to Yukon. It just stretches that timeline. Certainly, there are tremendous advantages to us having as our goal the ability to have the bulk of our population — three-quarters of our adult population and potentially more than that by the end of the first quarter — that puts us into a very good position. But it would behoove us to maintain some degree of public health measures in addition to that until, I think as a country, we were all probably at an equivalent measure of immunity. But these things really, again, need to be worked out as we gain more information about durability, as we see what the actual uptake is like, as we learn more about the role of other vaccines as they're coming in — the need for boosters, et cetera — so I do think it's getting into speculative territory.

All we know is that we have a great opportunity and that the more that we can do this — achieve rapid uptake — the more rapidly we can achieve population uptake, the more robust position we will be in and the more protected our vulnerable people will be. We also have a chance to demonstrate to the rest of the country the operational realities

and the benefits and potential pitfalls of achieving a population uptake. We do have a really important role to play not just for ourselves, but for the country in the next few months as we aim for a population approach to vaccination.

Ms. White: Just before we start, it feels like months ago, the first time we met in what became the operational space in the old library. It definitely feels like a lifetime ago where everything was happening very quickly and we just didn't know what it was going to look like.

I have since decided that I feel like you are like an iceberg. You're the person we can see and you have entire — we talked about this back in March — that it was important that people understood that you weren't alone and that you were doing this with a team. I thought I would give you an opportunity to tell us a bit about the team. In our brief briefings over time, that wasn't ever anything I asked. I think this is an opportunity for you to tell us a bit about the folks who are behind you — because you are a tip of the iceberg that we can see, but we know that icebergs are complex and mostly what we can't see is under water.

Dr. Hanley: Thank you for that opportunity. I really appreciate that. I think, if I'm at the tip of the iceberg, at least I'm still floating — so that's good — and holding everyone up.

I think that there are actually several teams — without getting too poetic about it. I think there is a core team which was, at the time that you first came over, what we called HEOC, or the Health Emergency Operations Centre, which was a very large team. I think it was up to 60 people at a time — often with high turnover in those initial stages of together very rapidly carrying out a large amount of work that was organized as an IMS, or an incident management structure — so that included the often overlooked financial part of that — the financial people who track the money, the operations people who were doing things like looking after and setting up the self-isolation facilities and the testing facilities, doing a lot of the day-to-day operations part, and then the whole planning team who looked at guidelines and policies — and then the logistics side — so all of what is required to make things work and happen.

Those four elements that are fundamental became the four sections of the so-called "HEOC" and then working with our allies in EMO and Community Services, the emergency management organization, as they looked at and helped to take care of some of the larger operational parts, such as operating the borders and helping to operationalize the orders as they came into play.

That was the large HEOC that eventually, in July and through the summer, gradually diminished; it gradually stood down and was replaced by what we now call the "CRU", which is the COVID response unit, which is a smaller team and is now an official unit of Health and Social Services, which is about 16 or 17 people and is organized roughly in the same way, but with some of those core pieces, such as the finances and logistics, taken over as core work by the rest of the department, as it should be — leaving largely the planning section where the guidelines, the policy writing, measures like resurgence planning, testing and strategy, and all of those kinds of thinking

parts that help translate a new issue, an idea, a concern, a worry, or an e-mail into an informed response, action, or guideline.

As public servants, I won't name all those people. My deputy, Dr. Catherine Elliott, who most of you know, works closely with me every day and oversees much of the medical, communicable, and epidemiological side. We have policy people; we have epidemiologists; we have modelling people; we have writers and a communications team, of course, as part of our unit.

I think the other team that I wanted to make sure I refer to is the communicable disease team that I talked about earlier — and that is, of course, YCDC and the nurses and the managers at YCDC who do the actual disease control — the on-the-ground disease control. As I mentioned, that is another team that I work with daily when we are actually mapping out not only the day-to-day case management and contact management — they do that expert work — but also developing, as we revise our guidance — whether it is around isolation periods, case management, or integrating new federal guidance. We provide that advice or the day-to-day kind of situational advice that might come to us because we also do on-call duties as medical officers of health. That YCDC team is really an important part — and also Community Nursing, which does the role of contact tracing in rural communities, as well as all of the other work that they do, whether it is acute care or public health care.

I don't know if that gives enough of a picture. There is a tremendous team that provides the support — the ability for me, then, to be the mouthpiece for all of that work.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that. The reason why I asked is that I feel like the folks behind the scenes are the ones that we don't see but that do a lion's share of the work to support you. I just wanted to give you an opportunity so that we could thank them. I think that this comes from all Yukoners, and I truly mean it. This has been a strange time, and the work that was done behind the scenes, I think, will change how we face future crises.

I was thinking, when you were talking about herd immunity — polio is an example of something that, as a planet, we came very close to eradicating, but it has reared again. We will continue to fight it. So, there is hope, right? We have seen it before and we have been able to respond. So, I just want to thank your team.

One of the things that we definitely look at — so we have had the success of 14,000 Yukoners being vaccinated against the flu, which are maybe our best numbers yet, but we need more for the COVID-19 vaccine. I wondered if there is a plan on how to try to encourage more people to get that vaccination.

Dr. Hanley: Yes, it is a really important question — and, of course, a good question. Yes, there is plan, but I will say that we really don't have all the details worked out. I think that we have dedicated communication staff specifically for the COVID vaccine. Of course, Canada as a whole, through the Public Health Agency of Canada, has what will be seen as an emerging strong communication strategy around immunization for COVID-19.

Part of it is information and part of it is engagement. I think that the engagement part can be sometimes easy to overlook,

especially when we're in a hurry. I want to make sure that we do this in a way that, even though we are looking at quite a short timeline for quite a lot to accomplish, we have to do it in an unhurried way. Part of that unhurried way means using the next few weeks to be able to describe all that we know about the vaccine, all that we know about potential side effects — the effectiveness of the vaccine based on the studies so far, what to expect — and also to be talking, just as I did previously, about what we don't know yet — what are the uncertainties and what does that mean?

For instance, it's actually not uncommon at all, when we have the new vaccine, that we don't know about the durability of the vaccine, because sometimes that actually takes years of experience to know. The hepatitis B vaccine would be an example of that — the HPV vaccine as well — where it's only with years of experience that you actually know what to expect about durability. Sometimes that takes 20 or 30 years. That is one aspect that only time will literally tell you.

But we also want to have the opportunity for people — as I said in the media update — to feel comfortable knowing enough about the vaccine that they feel comfortable that they have the information they need at the point of receipt. I think that we just have to give ourselves the time. I'm talking about weeks because I think it can be done within weeks, but it has to be listening and then providing the information at the right levels so that there's sufficient understanding.

I think that there's a lot of really exciting information, particularly about these vaccines coming into the approval process. As you know, we're expecting approval through Health Canada of the Moderna vaccine imminently. As messenger RNA vaccines — they are the first messenger RNA vaccines to be produced, but it's using a technology that actually has been around for some time and has been in play for at least a couple of decades in the development of cancer treatments using the same technology. It's a well-developed technology. When it comes to the vaccine production — it is an approval process and a clinical trial and approval process that is just as stringent with these vaccines as for any other vaccines. I think that it's a good chance for us to communicate what the Health Canada approval process is, how Health Canada as a regulatory body for vaccines is one of the most stringent in the world, and how the accelerated timelines have worked. For instance, the ability to do the rolling data review — so, instead of waiting for the trials to be completed, to be receiving the data a little bit at a time so that it has enabled Health Canada to keep up, as it were, with the demand on data review so that the final approval process can be done in a relatively short amount of time but no step has been missed.

So, many, many opportunities to talk about new technologies, vaccines and what that means — how efficient they are, how rapidly — that, with the new technology, there's the ability to scale up very quickly — that is just orders of magnitude more than, say, traditional influenza vaccines that are still grown in chicken eggs.

I think that this really is the beginning of the 21st century of vaccines and that we are really in a whole new state of ability to develop and scale up production of vaccines. So, exciting

times — but there is a real onus on us to be able to interpret and provide the information that will help us to get to that goal of high population uptake.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that answer.

With Moderna, am I right to understand that it's a two-shot process? It requires two vaccinations? If it does, what's the timeline between the two? How does the witness — I'm sure that, at this point in time, we're looking toward the future and trying to figure out what that will look like and how to get people to follow up. So, if he could just share a little bit of that — understanding, of course, that plans change and things might change — but just what that might look like.

Dr. Hanley: I'm certainly happy to provide what I know. As the member states, there are still a number of contingencies around when the vaccine will actually arrive to what quantity and therefore that will affect how the implementation will occur.

As you know, there's a national prioritization process and there are a number of priority groups identified — so that, for example, if we did have an opportunity for early, smaller amounts of vaccine, we would be able to apply that prioritization sequence accordingly.

When we talk about the larger mass immunization clinic, the mobile teams of the community rollout — I think that it's important — that will take several weeks, at a minimum, to prepare those teams. That, I think, is ideal — because I think this is something we don't want to rush into, but we want to prepare our communities and our population with the right communication and the right comfort level of information to have that rapid uptake when it's available.

As the member indicates, the flu vaccine uptake was great for flu vaccine, but it's, I would say, far below what our goal will be for the COVID-19 vaccine. I think we will be looking to at least double, if not triple, that uptake. Therefore, that takes a lot of preparation so that, even for those people who are saying, "I want to wait a little more; I want to just see some more time" — there are clearly people who need some time.

I think that, if we look from here a couple of months forward, it will, in itself, give us the time to not only develop the communications and the tools, but to have those sort of more individual community-based engagement conversations and to watch the global uptake occur.

There will be concerns. We have already had concerns about allergic reactions. For instance, we heard about two people in Alaska having allergic reactions, and so these are not unexpected. If you vaccinate thousands of people, you will see people with allergic reactions. You will also see people with life events that follow having a vaccination. We need to make sure that the public is aware of post-marketing surveillance, for example, and what that means. It means that we have mechanisms at a national level, and also jurisdictional, to very actively follow people for side effects, for adverse effects, so that we have those mechanisms in place for that whole imperative of safety.

It's not just — do your studies and get the vaccine out there. It's a whole, continuous process that follows through implementation of vaccine so that people know that not only is

this a safe product, but that we have mechanisms in place to ensure the ongoing safety and we also have the ability to — for instance, we know how to immunize and we know how to treat allergic reactions. That's part of the competency built into an immunization provider — so that people are assured that we have as much capability, even with a new vaccine, to do this safely and to do it well.

I have said this before, but I do think that, in this territory, we know how to do this very well.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for the answer. It's true that the flu clinic at the Convention Centre was something to behold. I wasn't there during a busy time, but I can imagine that it would roll quite smoothly. I think, just to paraphrase what I think the witness was getting at — it was building confidence for folks, and wraparound — how once you receive the vaccination, to know that there was a wraparound process to make sure that you were okay. That's all part of the confidence building and getting people to buy into the idea that this isn't just about you or me, but it's about us; it's about the collective.

I often refer to my grandmother when I talk to people about why I would do this, and I spend time with seniors and immunocompromised children in my life.

Just to switch gears a bit, because I feel like — we are obviously in a pandemic that we know with COVID-19, but there is a secondary pandemic that is happening right now. I will go back even further.

In 2018, I was asking the chief medical officer of health to do releases when there might be a series of overdoses and whether they led to death or even just the action of overdose. At the time, there was a disagreement in the media where I said, "Let's do it" — and the officer said, "No, not yet." But that changed in 2019 when we saw an increase in deaths due to opioid overdoses, which has been a hard thing to watch in the community, and we know that it has only gotten worse in 2020. There has been a lot of information coming out from the CMOH office about making sure — safe practices, "Don't use alone", and things like that.

In September 2020, the Canadian Health minister was urging — or is urging — provincial and territorial ministers to establish a safe drug supply as a method of combatting the opioid crisis, and I just wanted to know if the CMOH agrees with this approach. If so, why? If not, why not?

Dr. Hanley: I thank the member for bringing up such an important issue that has come to light not just in the face of a pandemic, but preceding — as the member indicates — the pandemic by at least three years when we started to see the influx of fentanyl into the territory in 2016. It has taken a number of lives, and as the member says, it has taken a particularly tragic toll in 2020 as well. Although, fortunately, in the last few months, we seem not to have seen an opioid-related death, but just like COVID, we know that the risk is always there.

There have been a number of initiatives thanks to the work of not just my office, but the work of the department and the work of Blood Ties Four Directions. Some examples are upcoming. There will be what I would generally call "expansions" in harm reduction services throughout the

territory. This is a work in progress, including more capacity rurally for harm reduction services — and going along with the expansion of mental wellness capacity in the communities and substance and addictions counselling, but also the exemption process. There was a process where we were able to download, in a way, the Health Canada exemption process to allow for fentanyl drug testing in-territory — so to have that process as a jurisdiction rather than seeking Health Canada approval for each exemption. That allowed us a little bit more latitude for approving drug testing capacity — for example, the ability to do that with the outreach van in addition to the fixed site of Blood Ties Four Directions. So, there have been initiatives like that.

Of course, there have been more supports over the last few years to the Referred Care Clinic and the OATS — or the opioid agonist treatment service — and the bolstering of that service at the Referred Care Clinic which, again, has helped to improve opportunities for opioid agonist treatment for those who are addicted.

I do agree that a safer drug supply is one of those elements. Supervised drug consumption is another one of those elements. I think that we have to examine how each one plays out in our territory — I think that, following the rollout in other jurisdictions and then how we can adopt, and adapt to adopt, similar measures in our own jurisdiction. I think that, in concept, yes, I support safer drug supply. I don't think that, operationally, we're there yet. I think we have to learn more about how it actually works and how it would work within our health care system. But I do think that is one of the multi-faceted components — the protections that we should be striving for to prevent opioid overdose in our territory.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that. I spent much of the time, when I was in the lower mainland — I have friends who work at locations like Insite and learning about what was being done there and how it was a safe supply and then it was a safe consumption site. I say "consumption", although it is an injection site, but in talking about more of our northern context, I have been told that I need to change my vocabulary from "injection" because, in Yukon, it's typically more an inhalant.

I wanted to know if the witness had opinions on safe consumption sites and whether that was something that his office is looking into.

Dr. Hanley: Another really important question. As I just referred to, I think that it is another one of those elements to consider. Yes, I do support — again, I support the concept. I think that we have evolved as a territory. If I had been asked, based on my collaborations with Blood Ties Four Directions, for instance, even as much as a few years ago, our sense was that the community was not ready for supervised consumption. There was such an expectation and atmosphere, I would say, of privacy around drug consumption that it wasn't seen to be acceptable to the community. So, I think we have to get to that point of feasibility, and I think that we are getting to where it does likely have a role to play.

The ministerial exemption process does allow not just for drug checking, but for supervised consumption. Again, I think that it's one of those things that we have already had

conversations about. I think it goes to: Where should that happen? How should it happen? Who should run it? A lot of those operational considerations — so I think it's something that does need further exploration and development, but that, in concept, yes — I think that there is a role.

It's always a question, in a very small place — how does it actually work? How is it staffed? Could it fit somewhere else? If so, what are the unintended or the possible unintended consequences? I do think that it's another direction that we've started conversations around and I think we need to continue.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that. I think that there has been movement in Canada to try to remove the stigma of drug use because it's not so much when we're talking about folks who might be street-affected — because they are quite often experts in their chosen consumptions — but I think that the most startling numbers were that it was single men, upper middle-class, who were actually dying the most in southern Canada, because they were consuming alone. Removing the shame, talking about it, and normalizing it is important because then we will be able to have those bigger conversations.

I am just realizing that I am nearly at the end of our time here with the witness. I wanted to know if there was kind of a message that you wanted to direct outwards, whether we were talking about safe drug use or what the future of 2021 looks like.

Dr. Hanley: Yes, thank you for that opportunity. I mentioned this morning — that I think that the next few months are going to be both exciting and challenging. I think that the challenge will be to — as I was saying in my media update — maintain our vigilance with regard to COVID risk while we await that relief of the vaccine — but that the relief is not an instant relief. It is a relief that is going to potentially take months.

I don't know if it will take 12 to 18 months, but it will take months. I think that we need to look forward to — yes, relief, and yes, hope and optimism, but also a lot of repair. The recovery — whether that is economic recovery or recovery of well-being — is going to take time. We have to allow ourselves that time. I think that living through a pandemic — we all are taking a hit. It's a stressful and traumatizing experience. I think that, to some extent while we are in this suppressed life — where we are socially suppressed and unable to have the social relationships that we normally thrive in — we have to realize that it is a traumatic experience. It is an experience that is, to some extent, an experience of grief.

As we look forward to the solstice and the return of the light, the coming of a vaccine, and the restoration gradually of normalcy, we also have to remember to give ourselves that recovery time and build that into our lives, as a society — not just as people and families, but as a society.

I think that's one — if I'm thinking forward, that's what I'm thinking.

I also think it's good to go back to some of my opening comments, where — that's why I have always tried to emphasize the balance. The member brought up the opioid crisis, for instance, as an example of where we are seeing the potential impacts of restrictions — and that likely has played

out in the opioid crisis and in worsening the opioid crisis — whether that's here or elsewhere — and potentially in many other areas of substance use. As a society in Yukon predisposed to substance use, that's a concern for me. Again, it not only speaks to the need to always look to adjust that balance according to risk so that we aren't introducing unintended mental health stresses and all the potential chain of stresses that lead to other consequences — to loss of livelihood, to financial hardship, to domestic violence, to influence on crime —

This is why, always, our lens should be more than just COVID. It should definitely take COVID risk seriously — as we have always stressed and as I have always tried to stress — but always being cognizant of what else is in the balance here — whether we're talking about the importance of physical activity, of being outside, of enjoying the winter, of maximizing our social interactions in a safe way, of keeping music in our lives — of all those things that keep us thriving. That is going to help us in the recovery, and that's going to shorten and strengthen our recovery.

I think that what we do now is so important for how we can live the recovery through the end and post-pandemic.

Chair: Are there any further questions for the witness?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to — I note the time, so I wanted to just take a few minutes to say to Dr. Hanley: Thank you for your time today and thank you for keeping Yukon safe. I know that we all appreciate all the great work that you are doing. I know that it has placed a heavy burden and takes a toll, and you are doing an exceptional job. I just wanted to say thank you so much. We absolutely appreciate everything that you have done for us and the guidance. We wouldn't be where we are in Yukon had it not been for you and your team — and, of course, Dr. Elliott — for leading us into a good place as we will accept the vaccines shortly in the coming weeks. We are all excited about that. So, I just wanted — before the day ends — to say thank you so much, on behalf of all of us.

Applause

Chair: Thank you very much for your appearance here today.

Witness excused

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Chair, 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.

Also, pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 8, a witness appeared before Committee of the Whole to answer questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled December 17, 2020:

34-3-61

Yukon state of the environment report 2020 – a report on environmental indicators (Frost)

34-3-62

Twenty-third Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (December 17, 2020) (Adel)

The following legislative returns were tabled December 17, 2020:

34-3-62

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Hanson related to general debate on Vote 53, Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 205, *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21* — anticipated royalties for placer and quartz mining (Pillai)

34-3-63

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 53, Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 205, *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21* — staff working from home (Pillai)

34-3-64

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 53, Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 205, *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21* — Beaver River regional land use plan (Pillai)

34-3-65

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to a ministerial statement re: Mayo-McQuesten Transmission Line (Pillai)

34-3-66

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to a ministerial statement re: land development (Streicker)

The following document was filed December 17, 2020:

34-3-46

Review of duplication in Yukon mining regulation — June 2020 (Pillai)

The following written questions were tabled December 17, 2020

Written Question No. 24

Re: *Coroners Act* (Hanson)

Written Question No. 25

Re: legal aid services (Hanson)

Written Question No. 26

Re: women's halfway house (Hanson)

Written Question No. 27

Re: Department of Justice human resources (Hanson)

Written Question No. 28

Re: Whitehorse Correctional Centre (Hanson)