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HANSARD

Monday, December 21, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2020 Fall Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

Yukon Liberal Party

Ted Adel	Copperbelt North
Paolo Gallina	Porter Creek Centre
Don Hutton	Mayo-Tatchun

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, December 21, 2020 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a matter regarding the Notice Paper. Motion No. 390, notice of which was given on Thursday, December 17, 2020, by the Member for Kluane, and Motion No. 394, notice of which was given on Thursday, December 17, 2020, by the Member for Lake Laberge, were not placed on today's Notice Paper as the motions were not in order as they sought an explanation on a matter.

The members may refer to my ruling of October 28, 2020, for further reasonings regarding these motions.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would like my colleagues to help me in welcoming a number of very special guests here today for the tribute for Annie Smith. We have Annie's daughter Shirley Smith, Dianne Smith, Edith Baker, Judy Gingell, and Kathie Smith. We have Annie's brother, Alfie Fred, and his wife, Effie Njootli; we have Annie's granddaughters, Georgian Smith and Josephine Holloway; and we have Annie's great-granddaughter, Kalea Smarch; we have Annie's grandson, Rick Gingell; and we have the Chief of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Chief Doris Bill. We have a really special friend, Nicole Bauberger, here as well.

We have many folks who are listening in on the radio from Tourism and Culture, I know for sure, and other people for whom Annie was really special. I also want to welcome Luke Campbell from the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

Thank you all for being here today.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further introductions of visitors? Tributes?

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Annie Smith

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government and the New Democratic Party to pay tribute to an extraordinary Yukoner and the eldest member of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation — the late Annie Smith. Gaanaxteidí Sháax wusateeyín, a woman of the Gaanaxteidí clan, was born on July 12, 1925, in a Yukon

River fishing village that was located on the east side of what is now called Schwatka Lake. Annie's parents were Suzie Fred, née Slim, Gaanaxteidí of Marsh Lake, and Casey Fred, Daklaweidi, belonging to Sháwshe/Dalton Post/Neskataheen.

Annie had three sisters and four brothers. To her surviving sister and brother and her surviving children — Judy, Shirley, Dianne, Edith, Kathy, Rosemarie, and John — and her many nieces and nephews, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, Annie was the family's Gaanaxteidí matriarch. Her life's journey of 95 years was Haa Kusteeyí, the Tlingit way, which she walked alongside her Christian pathway.

As a young girl, Annie moved around the southern Yukon a great deal. She spent time in the villages of Marsh Lake, Carcross, Champagne, and Klukshu, where she received her only summer of formal schooling. When growing up, Annie's parents taught her how to fish, hunt, and trap. Summers were spent at fish camps as well as picking berries, tanning hides, and sewing.

Annie's life spans a period of tremendous change in the Yukon, from snowshoes to satellites. Throughout her lifetime, she lived during a time when the train still ran to Whitehorse. She witnessed riverboats on the Yukon waterways, experienced a changing economy as a result of the construction of the Alaska Highway, lived through the Second World War, and supported her husband Johnny's efforts for the Kwanlin Dün First Nation to achieve self-government.

Although Annie's heritage is Tlingit, her customs and traditional knowledge were influenced by Southern Tutchone teachings and values because of her deep connection with the Champagne Aishihik people, for it was the Champagne Aishihik people who raised Annie's father, Casey Fred. These connections gave her many lifelong friendships.

Annie met and married her husband, Johnny Smith, in Whitehorse during 1947. He was a son of Kitty Smith from Marsh Lake and Chief Billy Smith, born in Dyea, Alaska. Together, the couple raised 10 children. In addition to Annie's surviving children, she is predeceased by her daughters Alice, Leslie, and Betsy. As a couple, Annie and Johnny spent a great deal of time in Robinson and moved to Whitehorse so that their children could attend school. Annie and Johnny eventually moved to the Kwanlin Dün old village in 1956 and moved to the current Kwanlin Dün First Nation community in McIntyre in the mid-1980s.

At a very young age, Annie was taught by her mother and aunts how to sew and do beadwork. In the summer of 1939, at the age of 14, Annie sold her first handmade dolls to tourists in Carcross. She liked to tell the story of selling her moccasins for less than \$1 a pair, which was very good money at the time. As Annie became an accomplished sewer, she supported her family with her exceptional sewing for most of her life. Through each and every significant family milestone — graduations, weddings, her daughter Judy's appointment as Commissioner of the Yukon — Annie was sure to have a work of art for the honouree to wear for just that occasion.

Annie was renowned for being a natural and dedicated teacher. She welcomed everyone interested in learning, starting

them off, of course, with a box of patterns to trace while they watched her do beadwork and assemble slippers. This learning sometimes took place in organized events, schools, and cultural camps, but just as often around her table at home.

Annie and her family also opened their Marsh Lake camp for learning and healing, welcoming countless students, friends, visitors, family members, and so many more. She encouraged others to be self-sufficient and said that, if you learn to sew, you would always be able to support yourself. She loved telling younger sewers how she bought her first car with proceeds from her sewing.

Annie Smith was a pillar of the Yukon indigenous sewing and beading community. Her creations, made from her own home-tanned hides and handmade sinew, included moosehide jackets, vests, shirts, mukluks, slippers, mitts, gloves, purses, booties, souvenirs, and dolls. They can all be found in collections and homes throughout the Yukon, Canada, and abroad. We are fortunate to have three of Annie's works in the Yukon permanent art collection — a gopher hat and two of her very beautiful dolls. These exquisite items will proudly tell all future generations of Annie's skills and incredible contribution to Yukon's life.

Annie's accomplishments were formally recognized in 2012 when she received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. She was again recognized in 2016 when Yukon hosted a meeting of the Council of the Federation. Annie and her family were asked to make moccasins for each of our Canadian Premiers.

But Annie's legacy is perhaps most meaningfully reflected in the skills, creativity, and inspiration that she passed on to younger generations of beaders and sewers throughout the Yukon, Alaska, and northern BC. Warm, welcoming, and kind, she had a gift for making people feel special. Living a traditional lifestyle, she valued her connections with the land and offered healing in her teachings. Annie's legacy will continue on in the amazing gifts of knowledge, cultural ways, and stories that she passed on, especially to her beautiful family.

Beyond her many cultural and artistic contributions, she was a tremendously giving and loving person. She will be remembered by those who learned so much from her as they continue to practise what she taught them and pass it on again to the next generation.

I ask all the members of the House to join me today in paying tribute to this truly legendary Yukoner. On behalf of the Government of Yukon, I extend our heartfelt condolences to Annie's family and many friends and, of course, the whole Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

Tsu woosh yéi gaxtoostéen. We will see each other again.
Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the amazing life of Annie Smith. Annie was born in 1925. Imagine what she must have seen and experienced during that time frame.

Her parents were Suzie and Casey Fred. Along with her siblings, Annie grew and played along the Yukon River around

the area of Schwatka Lake. During those early years, all the First Nation families lived from the land — hunting, fishing, drying, and smoking their bounty as well as herb and berry picking. They had the ability to use everything provided to them and they lived well. All had a connection to the water, so the river was important to the families to sustain their way of life.

The people were nomadic and moved with the seasons around the Southern Lakes region. As she grew into a young woman, Annie learned to bead and sew from her mothers and grandmothers. Once summer and fall gathering and preserving for long winters were complete, they spent hours making clothing, and the young women became skilled at their crafts.

At the age of 14, she sold that first doll to a tourist in Carcross, and she was hooked. Through her hard work, her legacy continued as she sewed and beaded her way into the history books with beautiful superior products. Annie married Johnny Smith and they were together for 63 years. They taught their many children independence and instilled a great work ethic. Johnny was the chief of the Whitehorse Indian Band for many years, and she was by his side through it all. The major change was moving the Whitehorse Indian village from the industrial area to the current Kwanlin Dün First Nation area in the McIntyre subdivision.

Annie was thrilled for her people when the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre opened and she saw the link back to the river again. Before Johnny passed, together as teachers, they shared so much of their knowledge to schools, cultural camps, and events. Annie was a mainstay at every Adäka Festival since it began in 2011.

On March 21, 2013, then-Premier and Finance minister Darrell Pasloski was preparing to present his budget speech. It is a tradition in every parliament and legislative assembly to wear a new pair of shoes when a new budget is given. He did a true Yukon thing. He purchased a new pair of home-tanned caribou and moose mukluks trimmed with beaver from Annie Smith. He described her as "an icon of Yukon's First Nation sewing and beading community". She, along with some family members, were present in the gallery that day.

Annie spent her final days at home in Whistle Bend Place. At age 95, she left us quietly on Sunday, November 8, 2020. She had handed down her rich traditional knowledge to family, friends, and young people. She will be missed. We offer sincere condolences to her family. Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further tributes?

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under tabling returns and documents, the Chair has for tabling: *Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly — Official Opposition and Third Party Membership of the Special Committee on Civil Emergency Legislation.*

In addition, the Chair has for tabling: *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer to the Legislative Assembly — An Update on Territorial Election Readiness.*

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have for tabling a legislative return related to matters outstanding from discussions related to the appearance of the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board chair, president, and CEO from the Committee of the Whole on November 10, 2020.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have for tabling some statistics on general debate on supplementary budgets.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 303: *Act to Amend the Taxpayer Protection Act (2020)* — Introduction and First Reading

Mr. Cathers: I move that Bill No. 303, entitled *Act to Amend the Taxpayer Protection Act (2020)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge that Bill No. 303, entitled *Act to Amend the Taxpayer Protection Act (2020)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 303 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills for introduction?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to provide a public update on the status of the Shallow Bay area zoning initiative, including expected timelines for completion, by January 15, 2021.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to include the provision of in-centre hemodialysis when implementing the *Putting People First* recommendations.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon Energy Corporation's 10-year renewable electricity plan

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Last week, I announced our new plan for a grid-scale battery that will be the largest battery project in the north and one of the largest in Canada. The battery project is part of a broader framework that aims to maximize the use of renewable electricity. Today I am pleased to endorse Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable electricity plan that the Energy

Corporation finalized earlier this month. As Yukoners, we take pride in our energy self-sufficiency. We are so fortunate that most of our electricity comes from renewable sources, but with Yukon's increasing population and high peak energy demands, we must expand our renewable electricity sources.

Strategies like the 10-year plan will allow us to keep up with rising consumption and will also help us to meet the 97-percent renewable electricity goal in *Our Clean Future*, our government's climate change, energy, and green economy strategy for the territory. New supply projects to support this goal include: battery storage, supporting green independent power producers, energy conservation initiatives, enhanced storage capacity, and hydro upgrades.

In close partnership with First Nation governments and development corporations, Yukon Energy's plan represents a bold vision for our territory's sustainability goals and will help to reduce Yukon's carbon emissions.

The 10-year renewable electricity plan identifies three important new infrastructure projects that will address the growing demands for clean electricity in the Yukon: the planned Atlin hydro expansion project, the potential new pump storage facility at Moon Lake, and the upgrade to the Southern Lakes transmission network. The project identified in the 10-year plan will promote energy conservation, maximize the amount of renewable power generated at existing hydro facilities, connect new sources of First Nation-owned renewables to the grid, store and use excess renewable power generated in the summer to decrease dependency on fossil fuels during the winter, and open new markets for surplus renewable electricity generated during the summer. They will also help to ensure that electricity prices stay affordable for Yukoners.

I want to thank the Yukon Energy Corporation board of directors, First Nation governments, and passionate Yukoners for their collaborative efforts on the 10-year renewable electricity plan. Renewable energy is a crucial step in keeping our economy strong and resilient as well as ensuring that we achieve the objectives set out in the *Our Clean Future* strategy.

I look forward to creating a more sustainable energy future for the territory together.

Mr. Kent: Over the past several months, we have consistently raised concerns with the approach this Liberal government is taking with our energy infrastructure. Two years ago, they made a decision to cancel the construction of a new 20-megawatt generation facility here in Whitehorse. Instead, they chose to rent diesel generators for the next decade.

We know from the Yukon Energy Corporation's material that this was not fiscally prudent. In their "what we heard" documents from 2019, the corporation clearly acknowledges that rentals are more expensive than owning. Then, last week, the CEO of the Yukon Energy Corporation confirmed that. He said — and I quote: "If you take it over the full lifespan that the data supports — what we said in the response is that the rental option is more expensive than greenfield."

On top of being more expensive, it also means that the money that we spend on those rentals flows directly out of the territory. Owning the assets ourselves would at least mean that

we would be investing in Yukoners. Now we're seeing the results of those decisions. Currently, the Yukon Utilities Board is reviewing a general rate application that will increase Yukoners' power bills.

On Monday of last week, the YUB referenced an increase of 17.1 percent. On Tuesday, we asked the CEO of the Yukon Energy Corporation for clarification about the amount of increase. Then on Wednesday, we asked the minister and he wasn't able to answer. On Thursday, we issued a written request for clarification. We were happy to finally get a clarification from the corporation that Yukoners' power rates would be going up by 11.5 percent, but we were a bit surprised that the minister himself wasn't able to answer that question. After all, it was the minister who proudly announced in this House by way of a ministerial statement that Yukoners' power rates were going up. This is of course on top of the 12-percent increase announced last year.

What this GRA shows is that Liberals' decision-making on this issue has consequences — and in this case, those consequences are higher power bills for our residents. We are happy to see the government looking at longer term renewable options to support our power needs, but we have some questions about some of the projects.

First of all, it seems extremely optimistic that some of these projects will be completed in 10 years or less. For instance, the Moon Lake hydro project seems to be at least eight to 10 years away. That's assuming that there are no delays in permitting, design, or development. It comes at a significant cost — hundreds of millions of dollars. So, it would be helpful if the minister could confirm that this project is why the Liberals increased our debt cap. Are the Liberals going to be asking Yukon taxpayers to borrow hundreds of millions of dollars for this project?

Also, we would like for him to elaborate on the plans in the meantime. How will we make up the generation gap between our forecasted load growth and our capacity? It seems that the only answer that this government is willing to look at is renting more diesels. In fact, they are looking at 12 and a half megawatts of diesel capacity in this plan as well.

We also note that the plan contemplates a 10-megawatt greenfield diesel generator in Takhini in the potential future resource options on page 48. So, we would like the minister to explain the status of that project when he gets a chance.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we are happy that there are portfolios of renewable energy options that lie ahead for Yukon, but many of those are quite a ways off, and in the meantime, the Liberals' plan is to continue to rent diesel generators from the south to meet the needs of our territory. We don't think that makes sense for our economy, our environment, or for our ratepayers.

Ms. White: In the years that I've been in this Chamber, we've had more than one future-looking energy plan presented and we've seen at least one dropped by the wayside. In the last nine-plus years, we — along with many others — have gone to meetings and presentations that have covered a vast array of

topics focused on energy over the years, but we have seen very little progress on completed actions.

As a territory, we've been standing at the edge of an energy cliff for far too long, so now is a good time as any to move away from that edge. We truly believe that energy planning needs to withstand four-year election cycles. For the sake of the generations of Yukoners to come, we fervently hope that the government — no matter who is in power — is seriously committed to implementing this latest plan. We are hopeful that, after years of disappointments in the energy file and continued years of hard work by those tasked to lead us forward, finally there is a plan that will go the distance.

Having a plan to maximize our storage capacity and seasonal generation is a positive thing, but again, without the follow-through, we will be back at square one.

Mr. Speaker, I do not need to remind this House that we unanimously agreed that we are in the midst of a climate crisis. We did not do that in isolation. We joined in solidarity with the voices of Yukon youth to remind us that, while we will die of old age, they will die of climate change. We did it in solidarity with First Nations and municipal governments. Our words must not ring hollow.

The Yukon NDP will continue to support serious initiatives that will see the Yukon have a combination of hydro, wind, solar, and storage solutions to displace our dependence on fossil-fuel generation.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I appreciate the comments from the Leader of the Third Party. I am sorry to share with her that I think the words are absolutely ringing hollow with the folks sitting next to her.

Going through this, we have looked a number of things that we have discussed over the last little while. First of all, just to set the record straight, the rentals that we have had in place are a backup source of energy. We had the president of the Yukon Energy Corporation come in. Folks from the Yukon Party had the opportunity to ask that question, and it was clarified. Again, just for the record, we should probably have the right information out.

There was a conversation about a brand new diesel plant versus retrofit. I think that the words that were used to illustrate the approach from the Yukon Party was "apples and oranges" from the CEO.

On the rate question, the member opposite asked the question — and the CEO said that he would get back within a day. The next day, less than 24 hours later, I was asked the question. I made that commitment. Within 48 hours, I had the question. What had happened is that, in the interim, the Yukon Party put out a press release. What we saw for the first time — I have never seen this — was the absolutely unprecedented approach where the Yukon Energy Corporation actually came out and had to correct misinformation from the Yukon Party. They came out and said, "No, that's wrong", and so they put a statement out to do that. Again, seeing an independent corporation having to do that really says a lot about what we have had happen here over the last 44 days.

I think that the projects that are being worked on between the Yukon Development Corporation to support Yukon Energy Corporation — whether it be the construction of our one-megawatt project on the north Klondike Highway, in conjunction with the private sector, construction of small-scale solar projects throughout Whitehorse, feasibility work for solar projects in Watson Lake, design work for the Beaver Creek solar project, feasibility work for a combined solar and wind project in Pelly Crossing, feasibility work on the North Fork — all of those projects, as well as the other three main components that we have talked about, really show good progress.

We are working with each one of those communities. They are leading these processes. We are providing human and financial capital where necessary.

I want to thank folks. In a period of 48 months to get from “We are just going to build diesels” to independent power production policy in place — almost every community in the Yukon building their own renewable project — and then actually going back to the table and sitting down with First Nations, not like next generation hydro where \$4.1 million was just spent and evaporated quickly, but where we have that opportunity to sit down with folks and walk along with them so that they can look at self-reliance, self-determination, and provide us with clean energy.

We don’t have to look far back to understand. I think that even the new leader for the Yukon Party, when the last climate change plan was being built, actually took the emission targets right out of there. So, we kind of know where folks stand. We will leave it up to Yukoners, I guess, to see what they think about the decision-making here.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Yukon First Nation procurement policy

Mr. Hassard: So, over the past week we have been raising concerns with the Liberals’ lack of consultation with the business community regarding their new First Nation procurement policy. Other than some high-level meetings with certain business organizations, it seems that no one from the actual business community has been consulted on the details of this new policy. The minister has said that one-on-one meetings would begin soon, but some contractors have asked what the point is of consulting on a policy that is already completed and approved.

Can the minister tell us: Is this actual consultation, and is he willing to go back and make changes to this policy as a result of these consultations? If he isn’t actually willing to make changes, why should businesses even bother providing input?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Well, Currie Dixon’s post-Peel, post-Bill S-6, Erin O’Toole-endorsing, Jason Kenney-loving conservative Yukon Party is asking questions about First Nation procurement. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if they support it, or not. I hope that we hear that fairly soon.

If the members opposite would like a briefing on First Nation procurement — a legitimate, sincere briefing on this document — I am happy to provide it.

I know that the procurement policy is a completion of a commitment to Yukon First Nations identified in self-government agreements. These are legally binding agreements signed between the Yukon government and First Nation governments. It wasn’t done by past governments — none of them.

In 1993, the UFA identified this as a commitment. Every subsequent final agreement included this commitment. This was not something invented by our government. It is a long-standing commitment that had been glossed over or outright ignored for decades.

This policy will strengthen Yukon companies in their bids for government contracts. It will work to keep dollars in the territory, and it will be to the benefit of all Yukoners in the years to come. We have worked on this policy for two years with First Nation governments. We have completed that work. We are now working with businesses to inform them about the policy in this living and breathing document, and we will continue to work with them through January and February.

Mr. Hassard: I’m happy to hear that the minister is offering up briefings because I think that he maybe should take that up himself. He could probably use it.

Another group that the Liberals forgot to consult is municipalities. Some municipalities are under the impression that capital projects that are funded by Yukon government will be subject to the First Nation procurement policy, even though they will ultimately be owned by the municipality.

Can the minister tell us if this new policy will apply to municipal infrastructure projects?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We have, as I said last week — and you can go through the Blues, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Official Opposition can certainly go through the Blues and see the list of consultations and briefings that we’ve had with the business community and with other stakeholders. Those meetings are going to continue in the coming weeks and months. We have already had several interactions with business leaders and others in the community. Those are going to continue, because we support and absolutely have to get behind this policy. This has been decades in the making. We worked very closely with our First Nation partners over the last two years. This is a commitment that we made as a government, as a society, more than 20 years ago, and we’re fulfilling that obligation.

We thought that the Yukon Party might be against this procurement policy, and I’m not really sure what their position is. Despite Currie Dixon’s pledge to build a kinder, gentler conservative Yukon Party, it’s painfully evident that this is the same tired old party pushing a battered figurehead, Mr. Speaker, the old Yukon Party that sees First Nations as an obstacle to business and as an inconvenience — the party of Bill S-6, which was backhandedly introduced in the Senate, and the party of “pave the Peel”, which sought to subvert land use planning processes. I’m happy to talk about this going forward.

Mr. Hassard: It's pretty hard to form a position on something when you can't get the details out of this minister. I've asked questions and got absolutely no responses — just personal attacks against someone who is not even in this Assembly.

You know, Mr. Speaker, these questions wouldn't be necessary if the Liberal government had simply taken the time to meet with the affected stakeholders before the policy was actually signed and delivered. It seems that the Liberals have developed, approved, and are getting ready to implement a new First Nation procurement policy before many of the affected groups have even seen it. It's not consultation when you just tell someone how it's going to be.

Mr. Speaker, why did the Liberals wait until after the policy was finalized before they decided to consult with the affected stakeholders?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I really have to take issue with the assertions of the Leader of Official Opposition. We did not wait, Mr. Speaker. I have said on the floor of this Legislature several times in the past week or so that we actually did meet with businesses and other stakeholders prior to this policy being endorsed and ratified by virtually every First Nation of the Yukon Forum just a couple of Fridays ago.

We did meet. We actually provided a draft of the policy — as a matter of fact, the same draft of the draft document that Cabinet has seen, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is frankly wrong.

Now the policy has now been ratified by the First Nations. We're very happy to have that done. Now that it has happened, we're working with our business community on informing them about the details of this policy and how it will work going forward. We've worked very, very hard on the procurement file for the last several years since we took office in 2016. We have endorsed and have worked with the business community to get all of the recommendations of the Procurement Advisory Panel in place within two years. We made that deadline and we're improving the definition and doing all the good work to try to keep as much work and as much money in the territory as possible.

This is the next phase of that implementation. We told the business community that there would be a First Nation procurement policy. We told First Nations that. We have delivered.

Question re: Early learning and childcare program

Mr. Kent: On December 10, the Network for Healthy Early Human Development — a local NGO that provides the partners for children program in Yukon — wrote to the Liberal government with concerns about their lack of involvement in changes to the programs the department offers.

The programs this group offers are aimed at supporting the healthy development of children under the age of 6 and provides supports in many areas of child development, parenting, and childcare. In their letter, they expressed concern and disappointment about the lack of consultation from the Liberal government. To quote from their letter: "... we are

surprised that our organization has not had involvement or consultation concerning this large-scale change..."

Can the minister tell us what changes the Liberals are making to these programs and why this organization was not consulted?

Hon. Ms. Frost: What I would say with respect to early learning supports and early learning childcare is that we have expanded the scope of practice when it comes to supporting resources for childcare centres and opportunities for capacity development. If there is a specific letter that the member is referring to, I am not aware of the letter and it would be nice to see it so that I can appropriately respond, but I can speak to what we have in place with respect to early learning supports for all childcare centres across the Yukon.

Mr. Kent: I have a copy of the letter in my hand. It is dated December 10 and it was addressed to the Minister of Health and Social Services. I am quite surprised that she hasn't even seen it, let alone considered a response. The copy list is quite extensive as well and included members from both opposition parties.

What I asked about was a lack of consultation with a partner. Yukoners are starting to get used to the Liberal government making decisions and then consulting with stakeholders afterwards, but we are also concerned about the growing trend of the Liberal government pushing out local NGOs and replacing them with government-run programs and services. In their letter, the group says — and I will quote again: "YG has always led us to believe that they have no desire to replace non-profits and their services and take over the private sector. Unfortunately, this is what appears to us to be happening."

Why is the Liberal government pushing out yet another NGO and trying to replace it with government-run programs?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to the specific letter, I still am not clear on the details of the letter, who the letter is from, and what it contains. I would be happy to go back and get the details and, of course, respond appropriately. We are doing all that we can to support our childcare centres. In fact, we have a pilot project to ensure that we have supports for non-government-supported childcare centres, such as Little Blue Daycare in Dawson City and the Watson Lake program.

We have expanded the direct operating grants, we put in supports for capacity development, and we are now looking for K to 4 supports. We have incorporated early learning development, we are working with our First Nation communities, we are looking to resiliency into the future, and we are ensuring that all children are supported.

I am very pleased about the efforts that we have put into the department. If there are any specific concerns that are brought to us, we certainly look forward to that coming to our attention so that we can respond appropriately. Thank you — and I would be happy to respond to the letter. That will go through its due course — as the member opposite knows, a letter arrives, it is case-managed, and it is responded to accordingly, and that is where we are.

Mr. Kent: I had assumed that the minister would have had a copy of this letter, but clearly she hasn't seen it, even

though it was sent on December 10. So, I will table it now, and hopefully the minister then has a copy of it.

Mr. Speaker, this is just the latest attack on the NGO sector by the Liberal government. Here is a telling quote from the letter that the minister hasn't seen from this important NGO — and I quote: “It was honestly always our understanding and belief that the Yukon Government was supportive of and respectful of the significant and extraordinary work completed by non-profit organizations in the Yukon. We are presently at a loss to understand in this instance why instead of supporting an organization already providing an exemplary service, a decision has been made to provide the same service and potentially being an end to our organization.”

We couldn't have said it better ourselves. So, what is the minister's response to this?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I think that is absolutely not the case. What we are working toward is universal childcare. We are working toward supporting all children in Yukon. In fact, we have put into place a program, working with our indigenous partners and our First Nation childcare centres, called “Honouring Connections”. It is an opportunity to work with our communities, that have never been supported historically — to put on the record.

We have early learning childcare — a universal extension of our early learning childcare agreement, which we worked on. We will continue to ensure supports. We have no intention whatsoever to take over and operate childcare centres. We have every opportunity to support all children in the Yukon.

With respect to the letter — that is being caseworked through the department. The specifics around that — I would certainly be happy to respond. The members opposite certainly haven't had that as a priority in their long history past. We have made every effort, and we will continue to do that to ensure that every child in the Yukon is well-supported, that all families are supported, and that we work with our operating childcare centres — as we have — and we will continue to do that into the future.

Question re: Alaska-to-Alberta railway

Ms. White: The Alaska-to-Alberta railway, also known as A2A, is a proposed railway running from Fort McMurray in Alberta to Delta Junction in Alaska.

Alberta's Premier, Jason Kenney, has aggressively promoted the railway as an alternative to running a pipeline from his province through British Columbia and bringing oil to the coast, but calling A2A a “railway” or a “corridor project” is greenwashing. A2A is essentially a pipeline on a rail system. It conveniently avoids any controversy in British Columbia by cutting through Yukon.

As A2A begins consulting with people along the planned route, we ask on behalf of Yukoners: Is this government in favour of the Alaska-to-Alberta railway through Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The Alaska-to-Alberta railway — of course, an ambitious project. It's in the early stages and has not been at the point of evaluation or assessment, which is key to understanding the magnitude of the project and even what the route is.

The presidential permit is one step on the regulatory path. It's an administrative approval for American infrastructure crossing an international border. At this point — and what we've said publicly is — we know that there is a proposed route. We've had the proponents reach out to us at the Department of Economic Development. We've urged them, in all cases, to speak to any community that would potentially be affected, understand the environmental assessment process, understand the land planning process, and also look back at really good work that was done previously in the Department of Economic Development and by consultants here in the Yukon around other routes — one being a route that is parallel to the Alaska Highway.

We're looking forward to seeing what this proposal brings. I think that it would be a bit early to identify support for something when you don't know what the route is yet or even what the magnitude is.

As the member opposite talked about greenwashing, there are other conversations that have occurred talking about agricultural products, mining export, as well as other goods and services.

Ms. White: Unfortunately, there was no clear message there as to whether the government was in support or not.

The Premier's mandate letter to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources directs him to promote oil and gas development in Yukon. As we hear about A2A ramping up their lobbying effort, we have to wonder: Is this what the Premier meant in his mandate letter?

Can the Premier clarify whether the A2A railway is the kind of project that he believes the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources should promote? Has his government taken steps to help the project move forward?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First of all, yes, it's identified in my mandate letter. What we've done, over the last number of years, is work with the northern chiefs table, which is primarily led by the voice of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation on anything that has happened outside of the Whitehorse Trough.

The member opposite would know that my other interaction is — I don't want to get in trouble with the Minister of Justice, but it's a pretty big lawsuit — in the billions — and my name is on it because we haven't let anybody go and frack. I think that this has kind of been our position for the most part on oil and gas.

When it comes to the A2A, I think that it would be premature to say you either support or don't support. You want to know where it's going to go; you want to know what it's going to carry. There's a commitment that it would be almost majority First Nation-owned. We haven't seen that business model put together. I think that there are a number of things.

The members opposite — maybe from the NDP's perspective, that's enough information to say that you're for or against something. Over here, I think that it's important to actually see the entire plan and maybe even see the submission to the environmental assessment process.

Ms. White: So, as Yukon considers its commitments to climate change, it also needs to consider its role as a leader for climate action. We are isolated, but we're not independent of

the states, provinces, and territories that surround us. We don't live on this planet alone. That's why it's important to look at the impact of the A2A rail on everyone. Promoting the A2A rail is promoting oil and gas development on a global scale. Projects like this one have a massive impact on our climate, our environment, and our planet. A railway from Fort McMurray, Alberta to the Alaskan coast is not meant to transport Santa's Christmas presents. Transporting oil from Alberta is the only way this project can see the light of day.

So, will the Premier simply state that large-scale oil projects like the A2A rail don't have a place in Yukon's future?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, the question that I pose when I'm thinking about this project is — you're absolutely correct. We do have a responsibility to our climate change plan. We know that the second biggest contributor to our emissions is transportation. I think that, when you take into consideration —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: — first from my colleague who knows best — so, those are the things that I'm taking into consideration. What goods are being transferred? What type of rail is this? Would this be able to reduce emissions in the north? These are all a number of questions that we want to be able to get the answers for. I think that is what is going to lead us to be able to make a judgment call on it.

Again, fun politics by the NDP on this one — but let's see what the project is; let's see where it's going; let's see who owns it; let's see what it's carrying; and let's see what it does to the overall emission effects here in the Yukon as well as across North America. Then we can make a judgment call.

Question re: Supportive housing for women and children

Ms. Hanson: Some of the most vulnerable in our communities have been hit hard by the pandemic. Some women are stuck at home with their abuser for a variety of reasons with few options. By October of this year, Kaushee's Place was reporting that they had reached 115-percent capacity. Kaushee's Place's capacity has been reduced from 19 to 10 beds due to COVID, increasing a demand for hotel rooms at a time when many hotels remain closed.

Hotel rooms might be adequate for the short term but are not even close to the same as staff-supported housing in a secure building.

Can the minister explain what next steps are being taken to provide supportive and safe housing for women and children trying to escape violence in the home?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm certainly aware that, in the middle of the pandemic, we have some major challenges with respect to accommodations, and Kaushee's is no different from any of our shelters or support networks. We have provided supports through case management to all of the clients and we are working very closely with the Women's Directorate. We are currently looking at a partnership arrangement for an additional shelter here in Yukon. We are doing that in collaboration with the Yukon Housing Corporation, Health and Social Services, the Women's Directorate, and partners in our community. We

have a project on the horizon that we hope to move along very quickly.

We are working on addressing the long-term pressures, but in the meantime, the department is working very closely with our partners through the Women's Directorate and through the client service agencies to ensure that women are supported and that we have the right wraparound supports and services. We absolutely agree that it is imminent and necessary that we provide the services. We will certainly work to do better and ensure that supports are there to support all women who are fleeing violence.

Ms. Hanson: Christmas is also imminent. With Christmas comes an increase in violence. It's not just Whitehorse experiencing increases in violence, Mr. Speaker. The Dawson City Women's Shelter is also seeing a 50-percent rise in calls to the shelter and more women dropping in for advice and assistance in creating a safety plan. Both shelters report that some of the incidents of violence have taken more extreme forms.

On top of all of this comes a report from Statistics Canada reporting that Yukon in 2018, before the pandemic, had the highest assault rates in the north. Fifty percent of women reported experiencing sexual assault. Red flags should be waving when you combine this report and the current state of women's shelters during this pandemic.

Can the minister tell this House how women fleeing violence will be supported now when they have no option but to stay in a hotel?

Hon. Ms. Frost: What I can advise is that — as I indicated — we are working with our partners. What is really important to note is that we have partnerships in every one of our communities. We are working very closely to ensure that we have safe houses and safe shelters in each of our communities. We continue to take steps to address housing and services around shelters — particularly in the communities that don't have shelters. So, that requires us then to work with our indigenous partners, given that most of our communities are indigenous and have some huge components and responsibilities.

We are working on ensuring that we have supports. We do that through consultation and engagement with our partners. Our long-term priority is to get a shelter here in the city and we are doing that with our partners. With regard to continued efforts to address housing and housing with social supports, we have efforts going forward in terms of ensuring that we have housing navigators and supports in place for women fleeing violence. We are working very closely with the Women's Directorate as well to ensure that all women are supported, especially now as we come up to the Christmas season.

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, I am not talking about long term; I am talking about now. The numbers of women and children experiencing violence in the home had been rising well before COVID became part of the reality faced today. Our numbers are not going down. We have seen great programs like the sexualized assault response team. Unfortunately, the rollout of this program has been slowed by COVID-19. We were honoured to witness the signing of the *Changing the Story* to

Upholding Dignity and Justice. These are important initiatives and we applaud them, but they need to be matched with an increase in resources for front-line organizations.

Directors from the shelters and the Yukon Status of Women have called for more housing, additional shelters, and an indigenous-led low-barrier option. Will the minister answer the clear call from Yukon women's shelters for immediate additional support?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are painfully aware of the rates of violence in our communities. I have stated before that in the north we have three times higher rates of violence — whether it's domestic or sexualized assault — and three times higher yet if you are an indigenous woman. I know that our Minister of Health and Social Services has worked very closely and very hard with the shelters, and those funding streams come through the Department of Health and Social Services.

I know that the member opposite has mentioned the sexualized assault response team, which we have put into action in March 2020. This includes a number of new measures — a 24-hour, confidential, toll-free Yukon-wide support system. I won't go into all the details. I have gone over this previously in Committee of the Whole during our debate there. But I do want to say also that we are working closely in all of the shelters in the Yukon, and all of the shelters in Yukon have received additional dollars through Women and Gender Equality at the federal level to help support additional costs. We are continuing to work with them. There is a new federal fund that was just announced and our shelters will be receiving additional funds for additional costs as a result of COVID-19.

Question re: Seniors' costs for long-term care and camping fees

Ms. McLeod: Last Thursday — a week before Christmas — the Liberals quietly passed an order-in-council that raised the rates for Yukoners living in long-term care. Starting in a few weeks, the daily rate for long-term care facilities in the territory will go from \$35 to \$40. While an extra \$5 per night might not seem like much, that works out to an extra \$150 over 30 days. They introduced a new monthly rate of \$1,217.

So, Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why the Liberals are hiking long-term care fees just before Christmas?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With regard to the care fees for our seniors, what I can advise is that we still have the lowest rates in the country. We provide services to seniors 24 hours a day. We have nurses on staff. We have direct access to physicians. We have care facilities that allow us to provide essential services and necessary supports.

With regard to the *Putting People First* recommendations — one of the recommendations from the *Putting People First* report was to look at and assess the long-term care facilities. We have done that and one of the recommendations out of that was to look at ensuring that we provide all the supports that are required for seniors. At the same time, we need to balance the supports and ensure that we have long term — that the fees of course need to become aligned with the services — appreciating that we still have the lowest rates in the country.

The \$5 rate increase will come into effect in January, not before Christmas.

Ms. McLeod: When private sector landlords impose a rent increase, they are required by law to give three months' notice to the tenant. The order-in-council was issued on December 17, with the increase taking effect on January 1. That's just 14 days' notice, Mr. Speaker. We have yet to even see a public announcement about this rate increase. It seems like the Liberals were hoping that this lump of coal would go unnoticed.

Why did the Liberals wait until the week before Christmas to announce this rate increase for seniors and residents in long-term care?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The notice didn't just go out. The notice went out in the beginning of November — the first of November, in fact. The new rate starts in January. The monthly rate was requested by the seniors. For the record, the standard monthly rate, as was previously noted, was not something that was working for the seniors. Now there is an average rate that was requested by the seniors.

The note from the member opposite — I want to just suggest to the member opposite that we should perhaps have a look at the whole package and what is encompassed in the \$35. It covers all seniors' three meals a day. It covers medical supports and all essential critical supports that a senior might require during their time and their stay in the long-term care facilities.

I would suggest that, if there are any specific concerns from seniors, we would be happy to have a talk with the families. Of course — as I indicated — we certainly do not want to pose any hardships on any of our seniors; however, it is still the lowest rate in the country and we worked directly with the residents to ensure that we took measures that they've requested which is the monthly rates.

Ms. McLeod: As we know, the majority of long-term care residents are seniors and many of them are on fixed incomes. Any increase in their monthly expenses affects them.

This announcement is on the heels of the Liberals' increase of camping fees for seniors as well. At least the Liberals gave the seniors a year's notice on the camping fees. It seems like the Liberals are waging a war on the pocketbooks of seniors, Mr. Speaker.

Why are the Liberals targeting seniors for all of their rate increases?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would say that \$40 a day is one of the lowest rates in the country — appreciating that the long-term care homes are publicly subsidized services and that pressure on seniors and forcing seniors to pay the full amount is not appropriate — I certainly acknowledge that.

The aging-in-place submission that the seniors put together — over 1,200 seniors submitted. Their proposals and recommendations and the augmentation of services and supports to seniors across the Yukon — I think that has provided many opportunities for us to work with seniors to ease their burden — the home first initiatives, working on the re-enablement unit at the Thomson Centre, ensuring that we have the necessary supports through Yukon Housing Corporation to

make alterations and adjustments to their homes so they can stay at home longer and not go into a long-term care home. We have provided many, many other alternative supports in terms of specialized supports and services that we brought into the communities. We have palliative care now in all of our communities to allow seniors to age well at home — of course, end-of-life services, home supports in our communities — so lots of supports to seniors in all of our communities.

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

Deputy Chair (Mr. Adel): I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

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

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

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

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Environment — *continued*

Ms. White: Welcome back to the official and the minister. I just have one last question — a follow-up to a question I asked on November 24.

When will the participants of the Youth Panel on Climate Change be announced?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. I welcome my deputy minister, John Bailey, here today. With regard to the youth panel, it's a very exciting opportunity for us to engage with youth in terms of

creating a Youth Panel on Climate Change as part of *Our Clean Future — A Yukon strategy for climate change, energy and a green economy*. The youth panel will include broad and diverse membership from across the territory. That broad distribution went out and expressions of interest came forward. I'm very excited to say that we have had a resounding number of individuals who had applied. It's a huge opportunity for us to look at working with youth and empowering our younger generations to contribute to policy decisions and enabling actions within our communities.

The application deadline was October 27. We received over 50 applications from across the territory. The selection committee — with representation from Government of Yukon, BYTE, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society — reviewed the applications.

Where are we with regard to the applications? All of the applicants have been notified — those that were successful on the panel. Public announcements will be made once consent forms are signed. That will be after the inaugural meeting in the new year. I'm looking forward to that exciting new venture for Yukon.

Ms. White: Just to seek clarification on what the minister said — on November 24, she said, "We are happy to say that we are going to go through that exercise and to the selection and make the announcement in December."

Am I to understand that the announcement won't be made of who those panelists are until the new year?

Hon. Ms. Frost: That's exactly what I said, but in order for the announcements to be made, of course, the consent forms have to be signed — recognizing and appreciating that the individuals have to have consent forms signed by their parents. Some of them are teens. Maybe the member opposite would appreciate that the youth who have stepped forward are excited to participate; however, we do need to have consent.

Once we have all of the consent forms signed and endorsed, we will quickly move forward. We are doing that in collaboration with our partners — so with BYTE and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. In this particular instance, we have had representation from across the Yukon. We are so very excited about that. We'll work through the Executive Council Office where the youth panel resides. We will do that with the Department of Environment.

We are working also in collaboration with the Council of Yukon First Nations and the Assembly of First Nations to coordinate the panel with their fellowship. We want to make sure that we maximize the opportunities in ensuring that we don't have duplication of efforts. There was a little bit more time required to ensure that this work was done appropriately and, of course, protecting the interests and ensuring that youth were supported by their respective parents.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all

lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: Ms. White has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: Disagreed.

Deputy Chair: We do not have unanimous consent.

We will continue with line-by-line debate.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

On COVID-19 Response

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to take a few minutes to speak to the operation and maintenance budget specific to our supplementary request. The increase in the operation and maintenance budget is as a result of increases related to COVID-19 responses and additional front-line personnel contract increases.

I would like to speak a bit about the valuable work that the Department of Environment contributed to the COVID-19 responses — why the supplementary we see before us is here and specifically what it speaks to. Also, during the early discussions on the main estimates with regard to the Department of Environment, the responsibility to safeguard our land, air, fish, wildlife, and water is not taken lightly and it is done in partnership with First Nations, Inuvialuit, and other governments.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Deputy Chair: Member for Lake Laberge, on a point of order.

Mr. Cathers: The minister doesn't seem to be speaking to the line item. It seems more like a filibuster to avoid getting to the next department. Her comments do not seem to be relevant to the line item that is currently under review.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: What I heard the minister talking about was the O&M line item, which is what I believe we are debating right now. I believe that she is talking about work that has happened this year, under the supplementary budget, on the operation and maintenance budget line item.

Deputy Chair's statement

Deputy Chair: I am just going to have to review what is going on before I make any judgment on that and before I come back to the House with an appropriate response.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to operation and maintenance and the Department of Environment, the supplementary before us speaks about the increase to operation and maintenance, where that results from, and the priorities for the Department of Environment with regard to safeguarding our land, air, fish, wildlife, and water. It is not taken lightly and it is done in partnership with our First Nation partners, the

Inuvialuit, and other governments, as well as many organizations and citizens. These are still the obligations of the department. Despite the fact that we have a supplementary before us for COVID does not deter or does not prevent us from still doing the good work of the Department of Environment to ensure that we focus on maintaining biological diversity and upholding the principles of conservation so that all Yukoners can contribute and can use the land for harvesting and for cultural, recreational, and economic purposes. These are the fundamental principles and objectives of the department. The overview that was put forward on the mains in the spring was to address that.

Of course, there was an adjustment made to the budget to reflect the requirements to support COVID. Of course, in the 2020-21 mains we saw approximately \$46.8 million in the budget, which covered a number of things. Those obligations were still required for us to fulfill the duties of the department, in terms of delivery of programs and services.

What I would like to do is talk a little bit about that, because what happens during the operation and maintenance requirements of the department — as we looked at COVID, we still had some huge underlying responsibilities of the department.

The underlying responsibilities of the department covered a number of responsibilities. It speaks about the workforce. To undertake the mandate of the department, we must attract a highly skilled and diverse workforce. The department is home to scientists, biologists, technologists, planners, conservation and compliance officers, policy advisors, and administrators who inspire and engage with other environmental stewards and our partners. This holds true as we look at the supplementary budget and the requirements for us to make the adjustments. This entails and highlights what we have within the department. The Member for Kluane would be very well aware of all of these responsibilities as the former Environment minister.

Focus on maintaining a diverse staffing complement that allows our objectives to be achieved is for the benefit of all Yukoners. The Human Resources branch has been focused on creating a barrier-free recruitment process to increase aboriginal representation and diversity. A total of 59 percent of the department's budget expenses, \$25.4 million, is for salaries and benefits and includes our obligation under the collective agreement.

The important thing to note in that statement is that, as we embarked on our journey through COVID — and the immense pressures that Yukon saw, in particular the Department of Environment — we certainly had to respond appropriately. It's important to note that the human resource capacity and the diversity of the staff had to be adjusted. A lot of our staff complements fall under the collective agreements. Working from home — and the opportunities for us to look at implementing the workplace and adjusting the spaces within the office and the environment in which the individuals are required to work and deliver their obligations.

So, staff returning — the plan around safe spaces in the workplaces, safe places in the field, looking at the overtime required, looking at parks strategies and the requirement of

parks staff, which is covered under the supplementary budget — so, acknowledging the department's unwavering commitment and professionalism during outreach, education, and delivery of its programs and services was a key component —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Deputy Chair's statement

Deputy Chair: The Member for Lake Laberge — I would appreciate it if you would stop whistling. Please, Ms. Frost has the floor. Your tunes are probably appreciated outside the House.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am sure that the members of the Official Opposition might have some specific questions, and certainly I would be happy to respond to those questions, but I see that their seats are all empty, with the exception of the one member.

So, I will just keep focusing on my presentation with respect to —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Deputy Chair: The Member for Lake Laberge, on a point of order.

Mr. Cathers: The minister, just in referring to the absence of members that she suggested was the case — in seats on this side — was in fact, of course, in contravention of the Standing Orders, referring to the absence of Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Deputy Chair's ruling

Deputy Chair: Ms. Frost, would you refrain from referring to empty seats and absence of members in the Chamber, please.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Mr. Deputy Chair, I retract my comments and I will continue on, respecting that the distractions of the whistling in the House is somewhat troublesome, as I am trying to do my report and answer the questions that are of the utmost importance with respect to explanations on variances and explanations on the budget.

I would request that the Member for Lake Laberge be respectful of this space.

Deputy Chair: I have already ruled on that, so if you would continue, please.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I acknowledge that the department's unwavering commitment and professionalism during the outreach and education in the delivery of programs and services is still a priority and a requirement, despite that we have to put the adjustments in to make accommodations for COVID-related activities. Part of the commitment included climate change and climate action.

So, our government has been and will continue to commit to addressing climate change. The Climate Change Secretariat is leading the Yukon government's response to climate change. During the early stages of the pandemic, we made the

announcement and the budget allocation — an estimated \$1.37 million — in operation and maintenance for the Climate Change Secretariat. These are still obligations that we have a mandate to deliver on, noting that the adjustments in the operation and maintenance variance still require us to deliver on this — so added pressures on the department.

This increase — we saw \$1.37 million in operation and maintenance, and \$570,000 of this is recoverable from Canada. The preparedness in the north program is to support adaptation projects. This increase of \$203,000, of which \$104,000 is recoverable for adaptation projects — so, I just want to make note that climate action and climate change is happening faster in the north than anywhere else in the continent, so we are still having to put that added pressure on the staff as they are still required to work from home and are still partnering and delivering supports and working with many other departments on releasing the draft — releasing the climate change, energy, and green economy strategy — and the requirement for public reviews.

In saying that, the department had to look at its information technology systems to ensure that staff are able to work from home and ensure that staff have the connectivity to continue to do the public engagements. As well, the requirement in developing partnerships with our transboundary indigenous groups and municipalities — the strategy on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing energy security, adapting to the effects of climate change, and supporting Yukon businesses and individuals to participate in the economy were still a key priority. Despite the fact that we were in the middle of a pandemic and staff were required to work from home, we still had an obligation. So, the strategy really was a road map to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent from 2010 to 2030.

As we look at Yukon's strategy and Yukon's vision, the changes to climate change and signs and horizons and our clean leadership programs were all very much a part of this original budget. They obviously had to be adjusted, and you'll see that in the supplementary as it summarizes.

We have a lot of work ahead of us to achieve the vision and the targets set. A public review of the strategy is now finished and the team is hard at work at reviewing the final feedback and, of course, moving forward. We have done all that work, and we are now past the climate change strategy and are focusing our sights on the future.

The changes to the complement of the delivery had to be adjusted accordingly during this time. At the same time, the parks and campgrounds were very much an obligation, so we speak about that in the supplementary as we look at travel costs for parks and environmental staff.

The parks strategy — Yukon's network of parks, campgrounds, and recreation sites — provided some of the access to valued spaces in the territory. Maintaining 32 campgrounds with more than 1,000 campsites, 12 recreation sites, and six territorial parks like the Tombstone park — use of the territorial parks has more than doubled in the past decade. What we focused on during this time was ensuring that we still have our parks staff working in the field, prepping up the parks

for the parks season, and also making increased capacity to open up the parks safely, ensuring that we have the necessary tools — safety and sanitization tools, the outhouses, the notifications, and making sure that we had the supports in place.

Although we continue to invest in parks, we also had to continue to invest in ensuring that Yukoners were safe, as we were encouraging Yukoners to remain in the Yukon during the pandemic and use the facilities that are here in the Yukon. With the services that are made available with the 1,000-plus campsites, we are trying to encourage Yukoners to stay here at home.

The operation and maintenance budget for the Yukon Parks branch at the beginning of the year was \$5.7 million. We had to make some adjustments to the job responsibilities and the duties of the staff. We have seen a total capital budget for Yukon Parks at \$1.4 million. This includes capital investment in campgrounds and playgrounds — a total of some resources in both.

This is just to look at ensuring that we have many more opportunities for Yukoners to use the parks appropriately during the pandemic and, of course, making sure that our parks officers are safe while they are in the field but also allowing for field staff to adjust to the protocols to ensure a safe work environment. We provided technical supports to many of our staff as well. Some of them worked from home, but we had some who were in the field and we adjusted to accommodate that.

As well, the department worked to ensure the health and safety of its staff. We continue to move through the COVID pandemic together. The department has maintained all of its services to Yukon while minimizing the potential risks and impacts on staff, clients, and our partners. The front counter remains open every week throughout the spring and summer. In the fall, the pandemic required adaptation and innovation and new ways of delivering programs and services. Encouraging clients to use online systems for hunting and camping permits and such and delivering online education and other events rather than in-person gatherings were some of the adaptations and the adjustments that had to be made under the increase in the operation and maintenance budget and the supplementary request before us. Staff were hard at work offering a virtual version of regular annual programming, such as the Celebration of Swans, Bear Fair — bear safety information — Wild Discoveries, and the Bioblitz.

There has been very limited impact on the responsibilities that the department had by adaptations and adjustments. We want to just give a shout-out to the Department of Environment and the staff for going above and beyond and still delivering the same level of services that Yukoners are accustomed to.

Successfully supporting all licensed hunting and fishing activities in the fall is another indication of the adaptation that was necessary and the supports that were in place. We've sold over 10,000 fishing licences and 4,000 hunting licences over the fall — over the whole season. As you can see, that was done because the supports that were put in place — the barriers that were put up in the office — the Plexiglass barriers, the office adjustments, and the spacing for staff returning to work. There

were significant cost overruns when we looked at environment enforcement and inspection officers and their contribution to COVID — their contribution as peace officers to be able to go to the job site, to make adjustments to their everyday workplace and to their everyday job duties and responsibilities to adapt and to ensure that Yukoners are kept safe during the pandemic.

The Environment enforcement and inspection staff contributed heavily to the front line, enforcing orders under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* while working the border inspections. I want to just highlight that, for sure — in terms of the O&M — there are other associated costs that I can speak to with respect to spaces and planning. But there are some other sections in this supplementary budget that speak to the increase around the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, climate change, Science Horizons, clean leadership programming — which I can speak more to with regard to the next specific line item — and breaking that \$1,534,000 down — \$1,191,000 — I spoke a lot about that. There is \$341,000 that I can provide details on when I get up again. Changes to the environment requirements and, of course, offsetting identical changes and cost recoveries, the North Slope conference — that is defined under the *Inuvialuit agreement*. I would be happy to speak to that when I rise again.

Deputy Chair: Is there any more debate?

COVID-19 Response in the amount of \$1,193,000 agreed to

On Corporate Services

Hon. Ms. Frost: For the record, Mr. Deputy Chair, it is \$341,000 in that particular line item that speaks to changes to the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, climate change, Science Horizons, clean leadership programming — all of which are offset with identical changes to the recoveries. The North Slope conference was cancelled due to COVID-19. Of course, there is still an obligation under the Yukon North Slope agreement and the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, of which the Yukon is a signatory, so we have an obligation. The North Slope includes 18,000 square kilometres of land and 343 kilometres of mainland coastline, which makes up approximately 3.7 percent of the Yukon. That is really important. It is important because we still have a legal, binding obligation under the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* around implementing the agreement. The changes as we see them in the budget reflect that obligation.

There are currently resource prohibitions in place in north Yukon in the North Slope. That applies to east of the Babbage River. There are specific requirements to look at the North Slope from the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* boundaries to the Beaufort Sea. The withdrawal orders of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* restrict entry under the *Quartz Mining Act* and the *Placer Mining Act* and prohibit the disposal of lands under the *Territorial Lands (Yukon) Act* and prohibit oil and gas development under the *Oil and Gas Act*.

The obligations under the —

Deputy Chair's statement

Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Ms. Frost, you are speaking to Corporate Services, the \$331,000. That is the line we are on.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Yes, Mr. Deputy Chair. Thank you.

The increase under the agreement speaks about continued projects that were not completed, but we still have an obligation. The requirement under the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* still requires the Government of Yukon to fulfill its legally binding obligations. The North Slope provides habitat for over 50 harvested wildlife species that directly contribute to the Inuvialuit's food security and, of course, material well-being. That also includes the obligation — given that this is in the traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin — to ensure that we protect critical habitat and the critical habitat of the Porcupine caribou herd, given that the caribou herd now migrates into this particular area 28 percent of the time. Historically, we have seen some adjustments and changes due to climate change and climate action.

Over the course of the last five years, we've seen major shifts. These observations with these scientific assessments still need to be considered as we have our bilateral meetings with the signatories to the agreements. The species that we are predominantly responsible for in that particular area, aside from the Porcupine caribou herd, are the migratory birds and the importance of that particular area to our migratory birds. The Yukon government's obligation under the final agreement was proclaimed in 1984 and it directs that the entire Yukon portion of the —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Deputy Chair: Mr. Cathers, on a point of order.

Mr. Cathers: In talking about a \$331,000 line item, which is the subject that we're on, the minister has strayed very far. Now she's delving back into the 1980s and has talked about a wide range of things that clearly have absolutely nothing to do with the change in this line item. I would ask you to have her confine her remarks to this debate or maybe even just let us finish the bill so that we can ask questions about Health and Social Services or Education instead of listening to a filibuster from the Minister of Environment.

Deputy Chair: Ms. Frost, on the point of order.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With all due respect, the additional funding to continue projects that were not completed in 2019-20 — less savings of the North Slope conference that was cancelled due to COVID-19 — the Climate Change Secretariat request and the amounts that are identified in this particular line item — conservation — all of it is identified in the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*. It's fundamentally important that we speak about the principles of the agreement and our obligations. Being in the middle of COVID doesn't eliminate that requirement, so we are sticking to implementing our obligations.

Deputy Chair: Ms. Frost, I just want to point out that the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* is down lower in Corporate Services, so if you could bring your remarks into the line item that we're doing, which is the \$331,000 — Corporate Services O&M.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Corporate Services — an increase of \$331,000 requested for the following: *Inuvialuit Final*

Agreement additional funding to continue projects — and that's what I'm referring to. There is \$331,000 — \$67,000 under the Inuvialuit agreement, and Climate Change Secretariat, \$264,000. Maybe you can provide a little more clarity to the —

Deputy Chair: When I get down to capital votes, it has \$1,000 in the supplementary for the final agreement. That's why I was asking. I was confused.

Mr. Streicker, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* is both in the operation and maintenance side under Corporate Services and under the capital side. The minister is responding.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to Corporate Services and their increased requests under the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, additional funding to continue projects that were not completed in 2019-20 — then we speak further about the recoverables from Canada and then part of that with regard to our Crown-indigenous relations with Canada. Then, of course, the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* speaks, really, about our obligations. That's kind of where I'm going to.

I just want to say that, as we look at Government of Yukon's funding from Canada to implement obligations under the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, including the operations for Herschel Island, Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park, and funding to conduct wildlife research and monitoring for North Slope — it is still an obligation of this government, despite the fact that we were in the middle of the COVID pandemic. We still had to deliver on those initiatives.

Although the projects were adjusted accordingly because we were in the middle of COVID, we had to make reasonable efforts to work with our partners. Some of the research projects that we have to still undertake — including the Porcupine caribou research and monitoring, muskox monitoring, polar bear genetic research on the Beaufort Sea, and wildlife monitoring on Herschel Island, including the hiring of an intern to do some field studies — all of this work is fundamentally important and is a critical element of treaty implementation and treaty obligations. The agreement and the additional funding for these projects were obviously somewhat delayed. We still had to ensure that we delivered them within the fiscal year.

The Yukon North Slope wildlife conservation and management plan has submitted a draft that was updated by the wildlife conservation and management plan to the Government of Yukon. The Inuvialuit in Canada — there are some key points in the plan that included an integrated conservation management regime for the Yukon North Slope where the Inuvialuit are an integral part of this discussion into all aspects of North Slope wildlife and land management because it's defined in the agreement. So, the obligations are still underlying and they are still there, and they still commit us to do that as a government, despite us being in the middle of COVID. The supplementary adjustments speak to that very clearly.

Maintaining the obligations in terms of the integrated conservation management regime in Yukon's North Slope to speak about habitat and the supports of diversity, abundance, and the obligation of the Inuvialuit land use requirements and

land use of that region and maintaining the current orders of prohibition on oil and gas and gas exploration and the development of activities on an immediate basis — these are all requirements and topics of discussion under the Wildlife Management Advisory Council for the North Slope, which is a co-management body established under the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* to provide advice to the appropriate ministers on all matters pertaining to wildlife policy and the management, regulation, and administration of wildlife habitat and harvesting for the North Slope.

You will see, Mr. Deputy Chair, that the North Slope conference was cancelled due to COVID, but these are still obligations. They are still obligations that we have to fulfill as we look at promotions and initiatives that bring economic benefits, that provide certainty around biodiversity, that bring certainty to ensuring that we have wildlife protection, and that all matters relating to wildlife policy, management, regulation, and administration of wildlife and habitat are directly discussed with all parties.

The proposed objective of the final agreement was to speak to all parties with regard to a planning process. The plan to have the interim protection area discussed in whole under the advisement of the WMAC initiative — the Wildlife Management Advisory Council — was still an obligation. The deferral of that does not deter any of our commitments. I want to just make sure that we get on the record that we are still working toward ensuring that we work with our partners and that we identify to Canada that the recoverable costs are identified, but also that we still are following through on our commitment to ensuring that we look at indigenous protected areas and conservation areas. WMAC has proposed that the Yukon North Slope is designated as an indigenous protected and conservation area and will receive funding from the Canada Nature Fund Target 1 Challenge initiative to determine the feasibility of indigenous protected and conservation areas designated in consultation with Inuvialuit, Yukon government and Canada. That's really critical. It's critical to highlight that for the record because the funding came from Canada. The obligation of the agreement defines the scope and practice as we go forward; however, we didn't follow through on some of this initiative in terms of face-to-face meetings and the requirements because we were in the middle of a COVID pandemic. The intended outcome of the proposal and funding is a designation that formally establishes the area of indigenous protection and conservation area — is still a requirement, still an outstanding obligation. The funding was received by WMAC and they are proceeding with their planning for that specific region, which is some 30 years in the making. It has been a long time anyway. It has never been addressed; it was just land set aside and never captured in any of the priorities of the previous government, yet we see the caribou migrating to that area and calving 28 percent of the time.

The efforts here — why they are important is because, as we look at climate change and we look at the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* and the obligations of the North Slope and the North Slope conference, we're seeing adaptation measures that have to take effect as we look at potential development, but we also

need to look at protection. That is part of the conservation area funding that was received. The Canada Nature Fund Target 1 Challenge initiative was received to do this great work — and funding that will facilitate meetings between the parties, as well as legal advice pertaining to the various designation options. It is really important that we get that on the record and note that for future conversations, rather than skip over it and not have that discussion because it is very much a part of land use planning. It is very much a part of land use planning that had not occurred in the Yukon North Slope area.

The land use planning is spoken to only briefly in the agreement. However, it is an obligation that was set aside, and the obligation that was set aside and not captured in the *North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan*, but captured in the Inuvialuit plan, has a transboundary obligation, and so it is very important that we note that, as we look at the additional funding and the continuation of those projects and we highlight that we are continuing our efforts with Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to ensure that we certainly follow through — where a land use planning commission is obligated to look at establishing area-specific supports and measures to protect the critical habitat. But we also have to look at potential oil and gas development and economic opportunities. We now have to look at the agreed-upon principles of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, and we have to look at our obligations — as we have to Canada. This does not, of course, deter us from continuing on with this very important work as we look at the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* in the territory and the interests and the purpose of land use planning specific to that region.

We have some good practices. I am very excited to say that, for the purpose of this discussion, the Yukon North Slope means that all those lands between the jurisdictional boundaries of Alaska, north Yukon, and the Northwest Territories spoken about — as the advisory council comes together, they speak about their obligations. It is important that we are at that table and have discussions around common, collaborative interests.

I want to just say that the agreement continues. Our agreement looks at fostering reconciliation. It is about fostering reconciliation between our indigenous and Inuvialuit partners.

The work in implementing the final agreement in Yukon includes management of various commitments, including wildlife conservation, wildlife planning, and potential development in that particular area and the interests in that area. That has to happen in collaboration not just with the advisory groups that have been established in the agreement, but also with the indigenous and Inuvialuit communities that have a vested interest in that area.

The *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* funding identifies our commitment in terms of the North Slope conference, so we were extremely excited and looking forward to hosting the North Slope conference in Whitehorse. We are still looking forward to that as quickly as we can facilitate that. I am hoping that we can still do that before the end of the fiscal year. The operation and maintenance budget for implementing the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* — you will see it in the mains — comes from Canada. The funding flows directly to the Department of Environment's main budget. The adjustments

had to be made because we weren't able to deliver on that. I want to just say that we look forward to that initiative.

Corporate Services in the amount of \$331,000 agreed to On Environmental Sustainability

Hon. Ms. Frost: The amount identified here is for the hiring of an intern under the team leadership professional internship program. The intern is for the water resource program under Science Horizons. The objective is to look at leadership development and to look at an internship program, and this initiative is fully recoverable from Canada. The objective of the internship is to look at healthy environments and healthy people and clearly looking at clean water.

The Government of Yukon's Water Resources branch monitors the quality and quantity of the territory's surface and groundwater. We continue to work together with our Yukon First Nations, transboundary indigenous groups, communities, and other partners to make sure that water is protected and managed responsibly and sustainably for current and future generations.

Water monitoring and data programming — we maintain long-term monitoring networks and baseline data programs to study trends of water and water resources, and the professional internship development will look at these initiatives. It's done through Canada's Science Horizons program. We conduct targeted research projects and work with communities on local water stewardships and monitoring. It's very important as we look at climate change and adaptation and we look at the importance of leadership development within the Department of Environment, together with our partners.

We operate 89 hydrometric stations, 57 snow survey stations, eight meteorological stations, 53 groundwater stations, and 13 water quality stations. It's important to note that the individual will be working with a diverse set of individuals with expertise in hydrology, as well as scientists and meteorologists. It's important to say that the opportunities for leadership development with the various department experts will work with our identified candidate to look at professional development and an internship program. I'm very excited about that. Dedicating resources to that is important.

This is done in partnership with our federal colleagues as we look at capacity development — always important. It helps to understand water-management conditions, hydroelectric projects, mine tailing structures, what is needed to operate wastewater treatment facilities, and it assists us in designing resiliency as we look at infrastructure.

The capacity development addresses many things in terms of implementing the *Water for Nature, Water for People — Yukon Water Strategy and Action Plan*. It identifies resources in the budget to provide that opportunity.

In November of 2019, we released *Yukon Water Strategy and Action Plan*, a five-year report. Out of that, there are a number of markers. The markers in terms of the ongoing work with partners to sustainably manage and conserve Yukon waters are all fundamentally important as we look at the strategy and we look at leadership development and the ever-changing environment and the ever-changing climate.

In February, a two-day workshop was held with 60 groundwater practitioners from across Yukon and Canada. The intent was to gather feedback about groundwater, foster collaboration, and share information. This is all a part of that work. Part of that work talks about co-hosting and working with the Yukon Water Forum and partnerships with indigenous communities. In particular, we had a two-day event with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation — so lots of really great work that came together during this time.

It's important to talk a bit about wetlands because they are very much a part of the strategy. It's very important — the work across all of the Yukon, with a significant cultural component, providing valuable input in terms of looking with two lenses — that of a traditional lens and that of a scientific lens — on a Yukon-wide policy and the future of land and resource planning. Interim project assessments and permitting all take into consideration capacity development. The amount identified here captures all of the initiatives and all of the obligations from the department.

Environmental Sustainability in the amount of \$10,000 agreed to

On Total of Other Operation and Maintenance

Total of Other Operation and Maintenance in the amount of nil cleared

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$1,534,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

On Corporate Services

On Inuvialuit Final Agreement

Hon. Ms. Frost: The Corporate Services increase of \$1,000 was intended to cover the equipment purchase necessary for the obligations under the implementation of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*. You will see that here in the budget. I'm happy to say that there are still *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* obligations — delivery of the obligations and the implementation of the negotiated requirements under the agreement. The \$1,000 covers the added costs required for equipment.

Inuvialuit Final Agreement in the amount of \$1,000 agreed to

On Total of Other Capital

Total of Other Capital in the amount of nil carried

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$1,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$1,535,000 agreed to

Department of Environment agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 205, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2020-21*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Education — continued

Mr. Kent: I would like to welcome the officials back to the Chamber here today to provide support and advice to the minister.

When we left off — I think it was last week when we had Education discussions — I had asked a question about the funding — the \$250 per student that was provided in the spring — so just wanted to confirm from the minister — of the \$1.28 million that was allotted, the administration fee, I believe she said, to support Sport Yukon was \$130,000, and it had 4,595 students.

If she could confirm those numbers and then give the House a sense of how many students in total were eligible for that program. She mentioned that 4,595 applied for the \$250 per student. How many students were eligible in total — just to confirm those numbers for the record today?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: To confirm the amount of students — this wouldn't be the amount of families because some families have more than one student — who applied for and received the \$250 per student that was administered by the Sport Yukon program was 4,595 students. They would all have been students in grades K to 12 in the Yukon school system. The funding was administered, as I said, by Sport Yukon and the administrative fee for that service was \$130,875, or approximately 11.39 percent of the total funds that were disbursed. The number of students who were eligible to do so — this would be based on the enrolment numbers as of May 2020 — was 5,610 students. I won't do the math or the percentages, but the number I have for enrolment in May of 2020 is 5,610 students and 4,595 of them applied for and received the funding.

Mr. Kent: This program in the documents that we were provided with at the briefing states that the total for this activity has been identified from savings realized and forms part of the internal transfers. Going through the rest of the document — I think it's from schools and student services — it says that this decrease is part of the departmental internal transfer to support K to 12 financial relief to families as part of the COVID-19 response, the significant shortfall in human resources staffing, and a facilities and transportation position.

If I read that correctly — and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong — it sounds like it came from HR positions, essentially — so if I could just get some details from the minister about where that internal transfer came from or if it is indeed all from schools and student services or if there are other line items in the department where that money came from.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The funding for the \$250 that was provided to each family per student in order to assist with — certainly not cover but assist with — the idea of additional expenses when students were learning at home during the early

part of the COVID-19 pandemic did come from schools and the student services part of the budget.

It primarily came as a result of funds that were not spent on teachers on call and transportation — generally, the operation of schools, which of course were reduced during that period of time. I just want to clarify that I think, in part of the question, it was noted that some of it came from human resources and staffing and facilities during that period of time. That is actually not what occurred. There was a breakdown of some additional funds that were transferred into HR because there had been a shortfall there. So, it wasn't additional HR funding that went into that. I can provide the breakdown as follows: \$1.280 million in internal transfers of available funding went to support the partnership with Sport Yukon to provide — we have been talking about the \$250 per student to eligible families who may have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 while students were learning from home — \$28,000 came from Policy and Partnerships, \$54,000 came from First Nations Initiatives — those being line items in the Education budget — and \$1.198 million came from Schools and Student Services, as I have noted — primarily from savings from teachers on call and transportation. If a further breakdown is required, we are able to do that as well, but those are the numbers that I have today.

Mr. Kent: Just before I move on from this particular expenditure, I am curious as to why Sport Yukon was chosen and if this amount of administrative fee of \$131,000 was offered to any other NGOs. Obviously, it has been a tough year for many of them. I am not saying that Sport Yukon wasn't qualified to do this; I am just wondering if this was offered to other NGOs as well and Sport Yukon put forward the best proposal or what the rationale was for having Sport Yukon administer this funding program on behalf of the government.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The decision was made with respect to having these funds put in the hands of families very quickly to look for an organization that was able to move the funds as quickly as possible. Sport Yukon had a relationship with a lot of parents and students. They had experience in the ability of getting these funds quickly into the hands of families. Parents were familiar with the society. I should indicate that Community Services was a partner with respect to having these funds moved quickly.

The last and probably most important part of the decision moving forward was that the administrative fees went into the kids recreation fund, which is a commonly known recreational fund where families, students, and children can apply to have funds and expenses with respect to recreation and sports covered for them if they are not able to afford it themselves — or have access to sports and opportunities that they might not otherwise have. As a result, all of those factors went into making that decision. There was some discussion — of course, there was some discussion because it's spending taxpayers' money — about how children could benefit from this. The determination was made that the administrative fees going to the kids recreation fund was an appropriate use of those funds, as well as the opportunity to have those programs dealt with

very quickly and by an administrative system that was already in place.

Mr. Kent: So, there were no other NGOs considered. As I said, I have confidence in Sport Yukon and what they're doing, but there were no other NGOs considered and there was no consideration for this to be done internally in the department; am I correct?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We certainly considered a number of options in determining how to have this fund administered or how these payments to families were administered. There was a scan of NGOs. Earlier today, we were being asked in Question Period or being, I'm going to say, accused in Question Period of not supporting NGOs or of somehow wanting them to do less work — or certainly not being supported by this government. That's clearly not the case.

There was certainly a scan. There was a consideration of whether or not the department could do it themselves — clearly for the purposes of saving the administrative fee, because clearly no one was going to be able to manage such a large project quickly and efficiently without some sort of administrative support. Ultimately, the discussions that we had with Sport Yukon — and the fact that the administrative fee would be put to the use and benefit of kids here in the territory was a decision that was easy to make at that point because there were benefits on both sides — a clear administrative process, families familiar with them, ability to administer this quickly and efficiently, getting the money into the hands of families, and ultimately a benefit to children through the administrative fee.

Mr. Kent: That issue from Question Period is with respect to Health and Social Services. Those remarks or concerns were brought forward by an NGO; they weren't brought forward by the Official Opposition. It was an actual NGO that wrote the letter, so once the minister has a chance — not the Minister of Education, but the Minister of Health and Social Services — to read the letter that I tabled earlier today, hopefully she'll respond to the concerns that were raised.

I just wanted to move on to the program that was launched with First Nations and providing electronic devices to First Nation students during the pandemic. I'm wondering if the minister can give us an update on how much has been spent so far and how many students have benefitted from the program up to this point.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. This initiative that is being asked about is a partnership between the Government of Yukon, First Nation governments, and Yukon University. There is a recognition that online and digital learning technologies and resources are a key part of modern learning and skills for the future and an important tool for continuing learning not only during COVID-19, but at all times. COVID-19 and the responses have brought it to the forefront. Students who do not have access to personal devices are unable to support their learning in a way that they may want to. Access is provided through their school, whether during in-person study halls or borrowing a school device that is needed for their learning. That is all available.

To further support the equitable learning opportunities for students, the Government of Yukon is contributing up to \$478,400 as part of a partnership with Yukon First Nation governments for the purchase of up to 1,300 devices to support First Nation students. This partnership ensures that Yukon First Nation K to 12 students have the necessary technology for learning inside and outside of school and to develop digital skills to participate in modernized learning.

The specific question is if we know how much of the funding has been spent or how many students have had that made available to them. I can indicate that Yukon University is the lead, and the work that they are doing — I'm sorry, I don't have the numbers, the actual numbers of students, but the plan is to have technology in the hands of students in January, so just in a number of weeks — perhaps not all students, but that will be the beginning of the rollout of that programming and opportunity for students. I certainly can in future check in with the member opposite once Yukon University reports how much uptake there is on the program and how many pieces of technology and students have benefitted from that program.

Mr. Kent: Just to clarify, have none of the devices been sent out yet to any of the students? I just wanted to make sure that this was what the minister was talking about. I think she mentioned January.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I just want to be clear that there are two separate things that I've mentioned here.

One is supporting students in Yukon schools from K to 12 with available technology from their school, either having it at the school or being able to borrow it for their personal use and learning opportunities.

The other is the specific program that's being funded by the Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations. It's being administered by Yukon University.

The first is ongoing and students have access to technology through their schools.

The second is the specific program that is a technology initiative administered through Yukon University. The information I currently have is that the devices that will be distributed to students through this program have been purchased and are scheduled to arrive here in January and will be distributed at that time. Has anyone received a device through this program prior to this moment? I don't know, but I can check with Yukon University. The information that we have is that the items have been purchased and will be here for distribution in a few weeks.

Mr. Kent: I'll check back in with the minister on that one sometime in the new year.

I'm going to move now to the federal funding priorities that were identified by department officials at our briefing in October.

This, of course, is the \$4.1 million that the federal government has allotted to Yukon for school reopening priorities. Now, my understanding is that half of it came in October and the other half, I believe, is subject to some reporting perhaps in the second semester or the second half of the year. If the minister can confirm that this still is the case, or

if the entire amount has flowed without any additional reporting requirements, that would be great.

While I am on my feet, I will ask her about the first priority that was identified here by department officials in October, and that is health and safety. It said that there was a number of items funded: extra custodians, sanitation costs, ventilation costs, sanitation on busing, special services to pay for health and safety training, and health and safety for teachers on call. The number that I got, as of September 30, was \$355,477 — so if the minister has a more recent amount.

We will start with the first one — if she can tell us how many additional custodians have been hired with these resources.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have some updated numbers. I am going to answer the question back to front if that's helpful.

The number of additional custodians who have been hired pursuant to this process is 16. There is another insertion for the answer — yes, the money is coming from the federal government in two instalments, as they said it would earlier in the fall. I understand that there is a requirement to report to the federal government this week. I saw a draft of that report just this morning. I know that it's there, although I haven't quite read it. It will go to the federal government this week in order to report on the information that we have regarding the spending of those particular funds. In addition, we expect that this process will roll out much as has been reported and that there will be an additional payment made to the territory by the federal government in January 2021.

I have updated numbers with respect to the actual funds that have been expended as well as the projected funds. We can be clear that this is actual and projected expenditures, pursuant to the response to COVID-19 with respect to Education. As I have noted, the federal government is requesting a full reporting of the expenditures and projections by December. That is what I had noted earlier. These projections are subject, of course, to some change in actual numbers but are provided here as an update. As of November 9, the health and safety expenditures — actual and projected — have been a little over \$703,000, including extra custodians, sanitation costs, ventilation costs, sanitation on busing, health and safety, training for school staff, and health and safety training for teachers on call. As of November 9, \$1.35 million — a bit over that — has been calculated for continued learning. Again, those are actual and projected expenditures. It involves adapting K to 12 programming and includes the move to Wood Street for the grade 8s and some fit-up costs and IT costs with respect to the Wood Street Centre, special services pay for principals and teachers who worked during the summer to help with getting their schools ready, and the COVID-19 response of school staff to support programming adaptations, additional transportation costs of busing, field trips, et cetera. Those come under the heading of “continued learning”.

There have been additional supports for students. As of November 9, approximately \$900,000 — a bit over that — is for Student Support Services, including trauma-informed instruction, virtual study hall costs, study hall, additional supporting costs for school staff to support student learning,

additional tutoring costs, and lastly, under the heading of “flexible learning”, as of November 9, about \$95,000 — a little over that, \$95,766 — has been spent or is projected to be spent on IT technology, curriculum training, Zoom costs and communication, IT infrastructure costs, and extra network personnel.

I think those are the most up-to-date figures that we have, being clear that it includes the actual and projected costs and much of this information is included in the reporting that's required by the federal government in December.

Mr. Kent: I thank the minister for those updated numbers. Obviously, there are some changes from where we were in late September.

When we talk about continued learning, one of the items that was flagged was a move to Wood Street — the costs of the move and the fit-up and IT costs. I'm curious if the minister can break that out of the continued learning piece and let us know how much that cost to move the grade 8 students in there was and then what the costs were to move the MAD program to Porter Creek and the subsequent costs to move them back down to Wood Street.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thanks for the question. The figure that I have with respect to the — we'll call it the “Wood Street move” that involves having the appropriate work done so that the grade 8 students could properly move into that space. There was some IT, some fit-ups with respect to the location, as well as having the Wood Street experiential programs move to a different location, including storage of their equipment and the moving of their equipment. It totals a little over \$77,000. I don't have figures yet on the move back, which was, of course, earlier — I am going to say the middle of November; I think that was the right date. We don't expect there to be an exorbitant amount of funds required for the move back. The space was available for them. Much of their equipment remained at Wood Street, and I am talking about the MAD program. Some of their equipment, costumes, and things that they weren't able to use due to COVID-19 remained at the Wood Street location and have remained there. The matter of moving the students back there and having their transportation sorted out was not any significant additional cost, but I don't have those figures yet. They will be reporting in the next number of weeks, I expect.

Mr. Kent: Also, in that continued learning amount are additional transportation costs for busing and field trips. So, I'm curious: With the changes to the guidelines announced last week, as well as the addition of three buses, how many additional students will be able to be accommodated on school buses for transportation in the new year?

The last number that I had from our October briefing was that there were about 1,750 students on the bus in a normal year. I guess that, even last year, it would have been about 2,000. Will the new guidelines and the three additional buses essentially cover off anyone who is on the wait-list, or will there still be people without student transportation options to their respective schools?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The number quoted by the member opposite in the question was a September number. I think he said that there were approximately 1,700 students. We have

been clear that this work has continued through the fall. In November and until very recently, we have accommodated 1,907 students on the buses.

The addition of three more buses, as well as some minor changes to the busing routes to make sure that some students could be accommodated who hadn't previously been accommodated, or an additional bus stop, would help with that as well. All of those changes, which were announced last week, will allow 2,250 students on the buses. I think that the question was about how many additional students — from 1,907, approximately 350 additional students.

That work took a long time. It was clearly complex. We were doing what we had committed to do — getting as many students as possible on those school buses, and that work was done expertly by the folks who deal with busing not only at Standard Bus, but most particularly by dealing with families and parents through the Department of Education — the portion of the department that deals with busing and the busing requests going forward.

That means that, as of January 4, some 2,250 students will be accommodated on school buses. The projected cost — I anticipate that this may be the question — done by the department for the operation of those buses was approximately \$300,000 or \$298,000. I know that I've answered that question here in the House before. The updated information that we have about it is that we expect the costs to be somewhere in the range of \$150,000 of actual costs between January 4 and the end of the school year. That is subject to change based on all kinds of things that may or may not occur in a world pandemic, in a situation that's changing quickly. I'm happy to provide that information as of today's date.

Mr. Kent: For the minister, I don't think she answered the question about how many — will these 2,250 students — will that accommodate the entire wait-list, or are there still outstanding individuals who have applied to ride the school bus but still aren't able to be accommodated? If so, how many?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm sorry — I remember now that was part of the question. These 2,250 students being accommodated on school buses are the vast majority of individuals and students who require busing.

I can indicate that there remains a small number of requests that are not able to be accommodated. Again, these would be students who are not eligible for busing — as are many of the ones who are being accommodated — but these special requests tend to be requests for students who are traveling to a school that is very far outside of their attendance area or students who reside far outside of our current route system.

So, there are some — a small amount of individuals — we are working with those families to discuss transportation assistance of some kind or additional opportunities for them to have assistance from the department. There is a transportation subsidy, for instance — those kinds of things. But these would be — I would call these extreme requests. Certainly, the vast majority of the individuals whom we have heard from and who have been applying are being accommodated through these changes that have been announced.

Mr. Kent: So, does the minister have a number? I know she said there is a small number who are not being accommodated, but I'm just looking for if she has a specific number of how many students will not be accommodated after Christmas.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't have a number because the department and the busing team are continuing to work with them. But I should be really clear that there is no wait-list. Everyone who was seeking and expecting accommodation — because we were, through the COVID process, not able to have the same routes as we've had in the past — the routes have been adjusted and the additional buses take care of all of those students. There is no wait-list and these special requests are being dealt with one at a time. But I am sorry that I don't have a number.

Mr. Kent: So, I'm going to just move on to a few other topics. I will turn the floor over to my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King shortly, but I do want to touch on a few other issues before I do that.

With respect to the grade 8 students who are currently studying at the Wood Street Centre, can the minister tell us how they have access to PE programs and shop programs? Are they currently being bused to alternate locations so that they can have access to those types of programs?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. The grade 8 students who are being taught and attending school in the school facility — albeit it a certainly historic building — the Wood Street Centre — are accessing additional programs at various locations throughout the city, including back at F.H. Collins. I can indicate that, prior to it being winter, a lot of the PE or their physical education was taking place outside. The teachers, administrators, and educators have been very innovative in their approaches. I know of hiking classes — of walking from the school on to a hike and then returning to the school. I know that they have accessed the Canada Games Centre.

There is busing provided for that. I know that they have accessed the F.H. Collins facility back at the school for the gymnasium and that has also been supported through busing.

I am also aware that there has been some innovation and great imagination by the educators to have those students — and many others, not just the grade 8 students at the Wood Street program — participate in additional things that they might not otherwise have done. I know that, for instance, some students have attended the Lumel glass-blowing facility here in Whitehorse when they hadn't accessed that place before. They are using the opportunity — if I can say it that way — that is COVID to really branch out and have new experiences for those students.

The specific question with respect to PE — some of it was done at the Wood Street Centre School, some of it was done outside as additional activities, and some of it is done at other locations throughout the city. Those are supported by way of providing busing and transportation to those students.

Mr. Kent: I am hoping that the minister can give us an update on the attendance area review for the Whitehorse area. Can she let us know the status of that work? I know that there

were a number of meetings that were supposed to be held with affected school councils. I am wondering where we are at with those, given some of the obvious other priorities that have probably moved to the top of the list over the past number of months.

Also, does the minister have an idea or a sense of when that attendance area review will be finalized?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am sorry, could the last part of the question be repeated? I am not sure if it was about when it will be online or when it will be completed. I am not sure; sorry.

Mr. Kent: Yes, when it will be completed or when does the minister expect that review to be finalized?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. The attendance area review is an important aspect of the Department of Education's work going forward and certainly long-term planning for schools and school communities.

We have conducted — the department has conducted a review of the Whitehorse school attendance areas. The key, of course, and the focus is to plan for future enrolment, future student needs, school governance, and to enable the most effective use of schools and the resources to support students going forward. For some schools, there will be no proposed changes to their attendance area. Those school councils are being informed — I want to say they have been informed, but I will confirm that they will be informed, if they haven't been already — that their school attendance area is not changing, and that's the vast majority of school councils.

For other schools, there are some proposed changes to their attendance areas that affect four schools in the Whitehorse area. We are meeting. We have met with one of those school councils. The proposal is to meet with those school communities to seek their input on the proposed changes. The school communities will be able to speak through their school councils and their administration to discuss the proposed changes and to seek feedback for consideration before our final decisions are made.

A new attendance area will be created for the new Whistle Bend elementary school based on city boundaries for that subdivision overlapping with the current attendance area for Jack Hulland Elementary. I can indicate that the four schools that have proposed to have some minor changes to their attendance area include Golden Horn Elementary, Takhini Elementary, Selkirk Elementary, and Elijah Smith Elementary.

As I said, one school council has been met with already. There is a timeline for that to proceed. We are seeking feedback from those school councils and a conversation, of course, with them about the proposals. Those are the only schools that are affected as a result of the attendance area review. That is exciting in that our community is growing, our neighbourhoods are growing, and it is critical that we look at the school attendance areas to make sure that we are providing appropriate plans for future enrolment, for student needs, and for school governance going forward.

The meetings schedule — I daresay that we all hoped we might be nearer to the end of COVID-19 and the pandemic than we are at this time of year — for school councils to provide their feedback and to meet face to face with the department for

opportunities to consider this information has been pushed back slightly, but the plan has been to establish the Whistle Bend attendance area as soon as January 2021. Hopefully, an election for that attendance area — that school council — will be not too long after that, and we will continue with the schedule to meet with the individual school councils and obtain their feedback going forward on this important aspect of education in the territory.

We have met with Selkirk. Of the four schools, we have met with the Selkirk school council and will schedule meetings early in the new year with the other school councils to address this issue in particular. Of course, we meet with school councils on lots of other topics and lots of other schedules, but in particular to deal with this one, that will be the case.

Mr. Kent: I have a number of issues that are still outstanding, but I will touch on one more before I turn the floor over to my colleague. Then, if Education does come back before the end of session tomorrow, I can perhaps get into some of the other items that I wanted to talk about.

This last one is with respect to the Ross River School remediation. It looks like there is an \$800,000 decrease in that — with the documents provided at the briefing. It says that the original budget of \$4.6 million for this work will not be spent this year. The Government of Yukon anticipates spending \$1.5 million on the Ross River School remediation work in this fiscal year. After discussions with the Department of Highways and Public Works, the Department of Education has worked to redirect some of this lapsed budget to other education initiatives to respond to COVID-19.

I am just curious as to why that original budget wasn't spent, if the government is still on track to spend that in Ross River this year, and then where the remaining budget was redirected to within the Department of Education.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am happy to provide what I have today. I think we have significant details about how this occurred, but there may be additional questions directed to Highways and Public Works if that is of assistance to the member opposite.

The information that I have with respect to the \$800,000 not spent on the Ross River remediation project is a result of more complex work relating to the mechanical room, and the thermosiphon cooling system is noted to continue into the 2021-22 budget. That work is currently in the design phase.

There were some delays in getting consultants to the site at Ross River School over the summer due to the pandemic and related travel limitations. I don't have all of the details with respect to that, but I am aware that some companies were not prepared to come and self-isolate prior to July 1, and then that changed, but that did affect the schedule. The original budget of \$4.6 million for this work will not be spent this year, as noted by the question. The Government of Yukon anticipates spending \$1.5 million on the Ross River School remediation work this year — the stuff that can be done and the work that can be addressed. After discussions with the Department of Highways and Public Works, the Department of Education has worked to redirect some of the lapsed budget to other education initiatives in the department and to respond to COVID-19.

I can indicate that \$480,000 of that money was used to match funds from Yukon First Nations to the Yukon First Nation COVID foundation to provide the personal mobile computing devices that we talked about earlier, being administered by Yukon University. Those are being provided to Yukon First Nation learners to support blended learning and digital skill development.

\$220,000 of that lapsed funding was to be used in this supplementary budget for two technology infrastructure specialists, based on employment of two-year terms, to develop and maintain IT services to support blended learning, which has been expedited due to COVID-19 and our intention and requirement to do that sooner than might otherwise have been.

\$100,000 has been used for professional services to enhance cyber security to ensure that student personal mobile devices can safely and securely connect to school IT infrastructures and access IT services.

While some of those funds from that remediation project in Ross River were lapsed, they were redirected to other education initiatives to the benefit of students.

Mr. Kent: Just a quick thanks to the officials for attending with the minister today. Seasons greetings and happy holidays to all of those school communities. I think it is extremely rare that we are still in here while they are on Christmas break, but they are, so I wish them all a safe and happy Christmas and a very prosperous new year.

Thank you, and I will turn it over to my colleague.

Ms. White: I echo my colleague's sentiments, this time as a welcome as opposed to a goodbye. I am excited to get the chance to speak with the minister today about the Department of Education.

Just to start off, I was looking for the survey results for the most recent survey on people's experience of education in this first semester. I wonder if the minister could share an update with us.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. First of all, I should say that the survey ended on November 30. I am just trying to find out if we know how many responses there were. Those are being assessed. Similar to the last survey, we will release that information again. It is planned for the week of January 4. I can indicate that we will be reporting Yukon-wide results as well as by school. That is the breakdown that is happening now.

I can pop up again, but if we get the number of — I think that there was very good uptake again, but I am just looking to see if we have the number of how many people might have responded.

Acting Chair (Mr. Gallina): Ms. White.

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Acting Chair, and I appreciate the prompt. I think it is very exciting once we go down the line of who is there. I thank the minister for that answer. I look forward to seeing how the experience was for folks in January. I am sure that the minister and her officials are not surprised — based on the questions, as Education critics, that we have been asking this Sitting — it has been very difficult for high school students in Whitehorse in grades 10

through 12 with the half-days. I understand that, for some, it has been good, but for others, it hasn't.

Just before I go into more of the questions, I just want to thank the minister and her officials, because I sent a letter early on after the \$250 of support for students was announced, asking if there was the possibility of splitting that between families because of the challenges that exist. In some cases, families can't sit down and actually have a conversation about the money being divided. I just want to thank the department for making that happen. In the end, I know that there weren't very many families who did apply for the split, but for those who did, it was incredibly important and it removed just one more stress factor at the time. So, thanks for that.

The pandemic has revealed to some parents that their children are struggling with basic reading skills. Unless children learn how to read in their first few years, they cannot learn to read in later years and this results in poor graduation rates and more special education students as they get older. When students cannot read well, they display behaviour problems in classrooms. So, in Yukon, reading skills are developed through what is referred to as a "whole language" or "three queuing" system. So, if a child sees the word "dog" written enough times with a picture of a dog, then he or she will associate it with that word. It's not a phonetic-based reading, which is taught by having children identify letters with certain sounds and then piece them back together — a process called "de-coding".

So, phonetic instruction is emphasized in pullout remediation for students who are struggling with reading skills and not with the entire class in the classroom, where the emphasis is typically on thematic language lessons. So, to be clear: The fault doesn't lie with the school-based teachers, because they are following the Department of Education directives.

I don't think that anyone would argue right now — we can all agree that our teachers are under a great amount of stress — and from the pandemic, parents have first-hand experience on how difficult the teacher's job is. So, why does the Department of Education — why are phonetic-based skills not emphasized in each classroom?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. It is quite specific and I will attempt to provide some information, but I really think that this is the kind of conversation that we should be having with some experts in language and reading skills.

That said, I can say that the curriculum redesign here in the territory is based on foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. There are a wide range of learning requirements, particularly in the primary school area with respect to a focus on not only — we're looking for a balanced approach with respect to literacy and numeracy, which are absolutely core values and core competencies. A balanced approach in literacy means skill development in both oral and written, and of course, that involves reading skills as well.

All grades in Yukon schools are now following the modernized Yukon curriculum for K to 12. In addition to taking these core competencies to the forefront of learning and

working with individual students to meet them where they are and to help them achieve their learning goals, that curriculum is designed to reflect Yukon's context and Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being. I know that the member opposite asking these questions grew up here in the territory and would no doubt see a significant change in the new focus of this curriculum from her time in school. This is critical for the future of education here in the territory.

With respect to the contextual inclusivity of the programming, it was mentioned in the Auditor General's report of 2019 as a recommendation. We continue to develop and distribute guidelines to address these particular cultural deficiencies in our education system, and we continue to work with Yukon First Nations on additional materials and supports for teachers who are learning and, as noted by the member opposite, having to add these responsibilities to their lesson plans and to their programming for students.

The foundational literacy and numeracy focus is critical. I certainly respect the question about the differences between the approaches for language skills and language arts, but I don't think that I have the appropriate information to provide that answer, but I am happy to meet otherwise with the member opposite to discuss these. Curriculum development, changes to that curriculum, and new ways of doing things rest often in the hands of teachers and their expertise, but absolutely, the department wants to support them in that work. They are always looking for better ways to do the spiral of inquiry, the learning concepts for students at every grade, and better ways to help them achieve their own learning goals.

Ms. White: The reason why I am asking this question is actually from having learned that there was a problem, actually, from reading experts. It was just kind of signalling that there were perhaps some deficiencies in programs that are happening now.

I will go back to — between 2011 and 2016, I was lucky enough to work with a retired educator who had been a principal and classroom teacher for many years. He was passionate about the Reading Recovery program and the Wilson Reading System. Just a question: Are those still being utilized in Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. She has described a former colleague as being passionately interested in reading. If my child was here in this House, he would be attesting to the fact that, for his entire life, I've been hammering home the concept of reading and how important it is and how important it is as a person's learning takes place over a lifetime, and that's reading for pleasure, reading for work, and reading for learning and all kinds of really critical opportunities that come with great reading skills.

The specific question regarding Reading Recovery is that, yes, it is still used, primarily at the kindergarten and grade-1 levels — following that. It's quite school-specific as well, I should say, with respect to the reading programs, but overall, Reading Recovery is supported for very early readers to help develop those skills. I can also indicate that schools are doing individual assessments with students using a plan known as "Fountas and Pinnell". This allows assessments of benchmark

reading levels for the purposes of providing that data. They also build on the data that comes from the Reading Recovery program. I've said that those are school-specific. The purpose of the benchmark assessments by school are so that there can be early detection of issues, if there are such issues, or of students who might need to learn in a different way.

The goal is that all students would be reading for the purposes of their learning by grade 3, and so the focus is on early changes and early addressing of any issues that might arise. That is a brief description of some of the programming involving the focus on reading at early ages and the opportunity to assess students and continue.

Ms. White: I appreciate that answer from the minister, but if I was to go back to the Public Accounts hearing that we held here on December 11, 2019, it was said by the witness at the time — the deputy minister — and I quote: "We know that, if students are not reading to learn by grade 3, their likelihood of graduating is significantly reduced. If they are not reading to learn by grade 3, they have a less than 20-percent chance that they are going to get back to grade level, even with interventions in the school system."

The reason why I am bringing up the phonetic-based reading is based on the recommendations and thoughts of experts. How will the current program that is being used get audited? How do we know its efficacy in making sure that students aren't falling behind?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, not being an expert with respect to literacy education and teaching literacy, I will explain or provide information regarding how the assessments are done in the current system, noting that we are always making sure and auditing internally and externally whether or not the approach is working, based on the best evidence and experts in the education world.

Speaking with respect to literacy here, which I understand to be the focus of the questions — as students enter school, there is an early years assessment, as well as a BOEHM assessment, which is, for Hansard, an acronym. Both of those assessments are done as kindergarteners enter school and during their first year of school, both in the fall and in the spring, to provide data.

The focus of my answer here today will be about data collection because that is how we learn about supports and where they are needed. At grade 2, students undergo a district assessment reading test, and that is providing more information. At grade 4, young students participate in a foundational skills assessment regarding reading and writing. All of this information is formative. It is used to identify where students are, where they are going, and how we can best support them in their learning. Again, I am specifically speaking about a literacy focus here — always asking ourselves how this process is benefiting students and if it needs to be adjusted and how we have the experts in education provide that information going forward and how our curriculum and schools need to respond to provide the best possible education to our students.

I will return to another question, if I can. It may be of assistance to the member opposite. I have numbers now about the response to the second survey. We have had 2,085 people

respond. The breakdown is: 1,340 parents responded; 496 students responded; and 249 educators responded. Earlier, I was speaking about the results of that survey being available in early January and they will be, but I thought it would be useful to provide the information about how many people responded.

Ms. White: Just in looking at it, I mean, that is just about 300 responses fewer than for the survey that was sent out earlier in the year. It is a significant percentage of parents or students — just to put that out there.

I have sent the minister a communication about delays in students receiving the Yukon grant. Was the timing that the Yukon grant was delivered in — was that typical, or was it delayed this year?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: First of all, I should say that I have not personally seen the note that the member opposite refers to, but if it is about a specific case, I will track it down by tomorrow and see if we can get a response.

The government has adapted the Yukon grant process this year and taken the opportunity during COVID-19 to modernize the administrative delivery of the Yukon grant program. The short answer is that I am not aware of any excessive delays, but there may be a particular case. It is important to note that the changes were partly as a result of institutions not being able to or choosing not to verify students' enrolment. For example, to ensure that students received their funding in a timely and safe manner this year, we have now implemented a direct deposit system for the Yukon grant to the student as opposed to the institution, which it has been in the past.

Department officials are working with other jurisdictions to monitor how students are impacted by COVID-19 and continue to ensure that any financial impacts are mitigated and that their specific needs are being met.

The number of Yukon students applying for the Yukon grant and Canada student loans for post-secondary education is slightly lower than in previous years — some students not choosing to maybe go back to school.

I just wanted to confirm a couple more pieces of information.

The application process for the Yukon grant in the past has generally been about a five-month window. We've condensed that, at the department, to about three months. If there is a specific case where there has been a delay, I would be happy to know about that and try to address it on behalf of a student.

Through the workplace development fund with the federal government, there has also been an announcement that students will receive \$500 each for IT costs because there is a recognition that the technology costs are likely to have been increased for individual students who are attending school remotely or not being able to be in a classroom, depending on what their programming is. I can indicate that the changes, as I've said, with respect to having those funds go directly to students has been a change in the program. In the past, they have been sent to institutions primarily and then any additional funds are provided by the institution back to the student, but this year — due to all of the reasons that I've noted and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic — students were to receive these funds directly. If there is a specific case or perhaps even

more than one, I would like to address it with the member opposite so we can make sure that our Yukon students have the financial support that they need.

Ms. White: I appreciate that very much. The letter was sent to the minister on November 19 with all of the information.

I'll just make note that the young person says — and I totally appreciate it — that they work hard, they budget, and then having a \$73 interest charge on their credit card is actually a hardship because of how they try to plan.

All of that information was sent to the minister on November 19, so I look forward to hearing back about that. Sometimes what can seem insignificant to us is actually really a barrier for others.

The minister and I have talked at length about the Yukon grant and its application to non-academic programs. I am the perfect example. I did a \$10,000 culinary program, and my Yukon grant at the time was insignificant. I worked full time and went to school full time. That education led me to a job until I was elected, actually, in 2011. It's not to say that non-academic courses don't lead to employment. They more often than not do, but they don't have the ability to access the same support and funding.

Since we spoke about this initially — which I believe was in 2019, but it might have been as far back as 2018 that we started talking about the Yukon grant. The example is the mining program up at Yukon University. They have an environmental remediation program, and I just wanted to know where we were with that. I think that the minister shared my interest in trying to get support for students. I just wanted to know where we were with that.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: This is something that I — well, there are lots of things that I share interest in with the member opposite, but certainly this is one that we have talked about. The Members of the Legislative Assembly and the member opposite will remember that some of the difficulty — when you talk about Yukon University — with respect to Yukon student financial assistance as well as Canada student financial assistance provided to students for certain programs has to do with the requirements of those programs at the federal level and the *Student Financial Assistance Act* eligibility criteria. Certainly, we need to look at those eligibility criteria in that piece of legislation.

In the meantime, the Department of Education is working with Yukon University, and we have suggested — although I am sorry to say that I don't know the update at the moment with respect to how far along this project is, based on a number of adaptations that have had to take place at the university with respect to providing programming during a pandemic, et cetera. Again, it's not an excuse, but something that is just the reality in where and how much attention this particular project has received. We have sought and continue to work with Yukon University, suggesting adjustments to the program design and structure that would allow students to be considered under the current legislation and the criteria there. We are looking for wording with respect to the description of programs and the concepts of programming that would align with the Canada student loans legislation as well, which is required to be

complied with. The department is considering and recommending changes to the eligibility criteria in the future review of the act and, in the interim, is working with the university to suggest that descriptions and some of their programming design could help individual students meet that criteria.

I am going to say that one of the opportunities that has presented itself through the COVID-19 pandemic — on the basis that education at the post-secondary level, in all of its forms, is going to need to adjust to the realities of a new world and to the realities of what has presented itself to us this year — we see university students across the country attending virtually. We see hands-on programs being affected. How does one become a nurse or a mechanic if they can't be in a hospital or can't be in a learning environment — a garage and other important places — for hands-on learning to take effect?

Clearly, adjustments are being made, but long term, those adjustments are going to need to be looking at how we learn and how traditionally we have — and I'll say it in this case — put certain programs into a box and certain programs out of a box. Whether those be skill development, whether they be the length of a program or where it's delivered, we have the opportunity to look very broadly at how education will need to develop into the future going forward.

I can commit, and will commit, to continuing to work with Yukon University to do the very best that we can for individual students. I urge individual students who are thinking that they're not fitting into the box to contact us at the department so that we might be able to assist and even work with the university on individual cases if they're a student there or try to assist in looking at real program descriptions and development and how students might be assisted.

It's more important now than ever that we are focused and flexible with respect to how students receive financial assistance, particularly in the days of a pandemic — who knew that we would ever be saying this? — but where people might be pursuing an education in a way different from what they had planned. They might have been planning to work in a particular industry or sector and are now choosing to pursue education because of the circumstances of COVID or because of the circumstances of being able to not travel or to be in a particular place. We should be doing everything we can to assist them in that endeavour.

Ms. White: Thank you, both for the recognition and the answer from the minister.

Another problem that we ran into this year, or that I was supporting someone through, was eligibility for the Yukon grant. I think that it's important to note that families are different. Every family is different. If the student who is applying for the grant has made Yukon home — so they have Yukon health care, they have a Yukon driver's licence — and they go away to school, they come back to Yukon to work for the summer, and they're here, but their primary parent who doesn't financially support them leaves the territory — why do we punish the student? If the student has met the requirements for everything else for the Yukon grant — they went to school here, they come back, they're committed to Yukon and have

also seen the appeal process — how can we do a better job in making sure that students who may come from a different family set-up are still supported through the application for the Yukon grant?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I spoke about the direct deposit process, but I think what the member opposite is asking about now is the concept of the criteria that is administered at the department. I am happy to speak about that process and, more generally, about the process for an appeal of that decision.

At the Department of Education level, for individual applications that come forward, criteria are applied. The criteria are available to all under the *Student Financial Assistance Act*. It is clearly enunciated there about what requirements there are — residency and a few others. I won't get into the details of that, but in the event that the decision is made — and it is a relatively blunt decision because it's about whether the act applies and, if so, how and what is the effect of that decision — then students are encouraged, if they are unhappy or unsure of the reasoning for those decisions, to apply to the student financial assistance appeal process. That is an independent panel whereby applications go before an individual panel whose responsibility it is to reconsider those kinds of decisions and confirm whether or not there are circumstances that they find that would mean that a student should receive financial assistance if the department had initially said that this is not the case. Then, if there is a recommendation from the Student Financial Assistance Committee that, in fact, a student be funded, that matter comes back to me and I review it. I don't think that I have ever denied their decision or request. The matter is resolved in that way.

I can indicate that, in 2016, the act was reviewed and updated, but we are always looking to make sure that the concepts of fairness and administrative justice are the guiding principles with respect to the student financial assistance process. The Student Financial Assistance Committee has been requested, by a letter from me, to review the current process and their perceptions of procedural fairness and to consider any appropriate amendments to that process. A family had written to me, and of course, I can't direct them — the independent panel — on what to do, but I did forward the concerns and asked that they review their process and consider the comments that were made by the individual student.

Lastly, I think it is important to say that the requirements of residency and the requirements of an individual student's circumstances — something that I am quite familiar with — must be considered and that the Student Financial Assistance Committee and their panel is the place for those circumstances to be described and for the request to go. While a strict application of the legislation might mean that somebody is not eligible for student financial assistance, the opportunity exists at that panel level for those personal circumstances and personal family situations to be described and to be considered.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I will just put out the notice that nearly \$5,000 a semester is a significant amount for a person who is living independently in a different place, and so, even having the delay — you know, applying for

an appeal and having an appeal delayed is problematic because that is \$5,000 that you didn't anticipate necessarily needing.

The last question that I have is — in conversation with my colleague, the Member for Copperbelt South, there was mention of the Takhini Elementary School attendance area being looked at. Can the minister tell me more about what is being looked at for the Takhini Elementary School?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the time. I'll answer this quickly and I'm happy to review it otherwise, outside of this Chamber, if the member has more questions.

It's a relatively minor change in relation to Takhini Elementary. I should note that Takhini Elementary and Selkirk Elementary will be adjusted by assigning the Marwell subdivision to the Takhini Elementary attendance area. This area is not currently assigned but, in practice, attends Selkirk Elementary. There will be that minor change to the attendance area for Takhini Elementary.

I will take this opportunity to thank the officials, Deputy Minister Nicole Morgan, and our director of finance, Jackie McBride-Dickson, for attending and assisting today. Seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by Ms. McPhee that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Government House Leader 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 Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

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

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled December 21, 2020:

34-3-63

Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly – Official Opposition and Third Party Membership of the Special Committee on Civil Emergency Legislation (Speaker Clarke)

The following legislative return was tabled December 21, 2020:

34-3-67

Response to matter outstanding from discussion related to the appearance of witnesses from the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board before Committee of the Whole on November 10, 2020 (McLean)

The following documents were filed December 21, 2020:

34-3-47

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer to the Legislative Assembly — An Update on Territorial Election Readiness (Speaker Clarke)

34-3-48

Partners for Children Program, letter re (dated December 10, 2020) from Tanja Westland, President, Network for Healthy Early Human Development Board of Directors, and Tara Wheeler, Vice-President, Network for Healthy Early Human Development Board of Directors, to Hon. Pauline Frost, Minister of Health and Social Services (Kent)