



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 86

3rd Session

34th Legislature

HANSARD

Monday, March 8, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2021 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Nils Clarke, MLA, Riverdale North
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Vacant*
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

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
-------------------	-------------------

Independent

Don Hutton	Mayo-Tatchun
-------------------	--------------

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

*On March 8, 2021, Mr. Hutton resigned as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, March 8, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.**

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
At this time, we will proceed with prayers.

Prayers

Speaker's statement

Speaker: I have been informed by way of the letter that I am tabling that the Member for Mayo-Tatchun has resigned as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole and will sit as an Independent member.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.
Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of International Women's Day

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council for International Women's Day.

Today is a day to honour women and girls, to celebrate achievements of women, and to be emboldened for the work that is still ahead of us. The theme of this year's International Women's Day is "Feminist Recovery" here in Canada. Globally, the theme is "Choose to Challenge".

I am sure that every one of us know far too many women who have been challenged this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of many women in Yukon. We have seen increases in gender-based violence, barriers to accessing services, and extra caregiving responsibilities required throughout this pandemic. We have also seen incredible leadership throughout the health crisis. Of the 14 provincial and national chief medical officers across the country, seven are women. Many more women serve as deputies, like Dr. Catherine Elliott here in Yukon.

I recognize and pay tribute to the women who came before me and who chose to challenge discriminatory systems, gender biases, and inequality. It is because of these women that I am able to stand here today and honour the work of women in our territory. It is because of the work of women that a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls came to be and that the Yukon was the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide a comprehensive response. It is because of the front-line work of the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, and the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society that so many indigenous women are honoured, supported, and restored to their traditional roles as matriarchs.

Women in the LGBTQ2S+ community — especially transgender women and people who identify as non-binary —

have faced decades of discrimination in access to health, justice, education, and economic security. With this awareness, we celebrate the work of Queer Yukon, All Genders Yukon, and especially the youth-led high school gender sexuality alliances' successful initiative to ban conversion therapy in Yukon.

The continued work, expertise, and vision of these leaders will bring the Yukon toward a more inclusive future. I am humbled by the support that women provide to one another throughout the territory. The work of the Yukon Women's Transition Home Society, the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Dawson City Women's Shelter, and Help and Hope for Families in Watson Lake provides advocacy for women and their children, system navigation, and community. The women in our territory also support each other through creativity, innovation, and occupation. Yukon Women in Trades and Technology, Rock the North music camp, and the women's entrepreneurship hub offer young women an opportunity to see themselves in spaces where they are underrepresented. Les EssentiElles and the Yukon Status of Women Council are working every day to break down the barriers that still exist for women and gender-diverse Yukoners through research, advocacy, and community building.

We recently completed the 2021 rendition of the Bare Essentials campaign here in the Cabinet Office and throughout government. Thank you to everyone involved in this important work. We are always blown away by Yukoners' generosity. People leaving an emergency situation may not have the time or resources to get everything that they need. This campaign aims to collect these essential items to help, and they are small items like toothbrushes, shampoo, and deodorant. I went to the VIC and looked at the mountain of products that were donated by very generous Yukoners, and every year we do this and every year I am so struck by how desperately these products are needed. Mr. Speaker, every single one of these products gets used every year in our territory. Think about that for a second. I challenge us to change this. I challenge us to all work toward a future where women are safer and where the need for something like Bare Essentials is no longer there.

The Yukon is home to so many hard-working, adventurous, skilled, compassionate, and innovative women. We see women in our histories, in our communities today who have chosen to challenge the inequalities and the prejudice set before them. To honour these women, I hope that we all continue to choose to challenge the injustices that our communities face and to cultivate a brighter, more inclusive future.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to International Women's Day, which takes place annually on March 8.

We celebrate and recognize the achievements of women who have fought throughout history for equality and for rights. Today, women are recognized in every sector and in every community for their incredible achievements to society. Our young girls have opportunities today that they have not been

afforded historically. It's a testament to the work done throughout the years in Canada and around the world to level the playing field and to reach gender equality in education, sport, the workplace, and beyond.

This year, International Women's Day is focused on the theme "Choose To Challenge". With challenge comes change. Whether it is historical norms or the status quo, there is room for growth and room for change. This theme was chosen because a challenged world is an alert world.

Challenge yourself to do what you can to see that change continues. Think about how you can assist other women, young or old, to challenge themselves, because every action counts.

Mr. Speaker, we didn't get to where we are through inaction. It was decades of choices by men and women to challenge the norm and to change the trajectory of society. There are so many opportunities here in the Yukon for our boys and girls to equally become involved in our society — opportunities to balance workplaces that were historically staffed with either men or women, opportunities for women to succeed in politics, law enforcement, justice, health care, and much more and to take on leadership roles and to excel in those roles.

So, thank you to all those women who have helped throughout the years to pave the way for our children today. Their achievements have set the bar and sent a message that anything is possible for anyone regardless of their gender.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Hanson: I rise on behalf of the Yukon New Democratic Party and Independent member to pay tribute today, March 8, International Women's Day.

As we've heard today, the Canadian theme for International Women's Day 2021 is #FeministRecovery. We've also heard that it's themed "Choose To Challenge", and both are important; they go together.

As we mark the one-year anniversary of Yukon's collective realization of the impact of COVID-19 as the Arctic Winter Games were cancelled, it is timely to reflect on both the origins of International Women's Day and the absolute imperative of translating the social media currency of #FeministRecovery into action.

The seeds of International Women's Day were planted in 1908, when 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter working hours, better pay, and the right to vote. Three years later, in 1911, International Women's Day was honoured for the first time in Europe, and 110 years later, the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has sharpened our awareness that #FeministRecovery is important for us all.

COVID-19 has revealed the fundamental gaps in our society. It has shown us how the pandemic has disproportionately affected women who are already marginalized, vulnerable, or struggling. On every front, the COVID-19 pandemic has eroded hard-fought gains for gender equality. From lay-offs to lack of childcare to increased unpaid work to the rise of domestic violence, women have been most deeply impacted by the health and economic crisis. There is a

certain irony, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that we have been quick to celebrate the front-line workers in our hospitals and long-term care facilities, including nurses and personal care attendants — again, the majority of whom are women. We called them "essential workers"; we called them "heroes". We celebrated the front-line workers who showed up for work every day to make sure our communities had access to groceries, essential goods, and quality childcare. The majority of those are women. We even offered them a wage top-up for a while. Through all of this, we have been seeing clear evidence of the unequal negative impact of the pandemic on women who had to leave jobs to stay home with their school-aged children or who needed to care for aging parents, on women whose jobs did not allow them to work from home.

Women have been affected in other ways, including increased violence toward women who could not leave their homes during lockdown and women who had to quit jobs to be at home with children attending school from home. The evidence is clear: Stop-gap measures are not enough. Our economic recovery has been aptly named by economists as a "she recovery". Until our social policies match our economic aspirations, we will fail to reach anywhere near full economic recovery.

As we celebrate the potential of a feminist recovery, Gloria Steinem's words ring loud: "A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men."

It is for that reason that we also pause to celebrate the fact that some of the leading voices as we have struggled through the past year have been women — whether it was deputy chief medical officer of health Dr. Catherine Elliot, who had the onerous duty to announce the cancellation of the Arctic Winter Games — a decision that, as she said again this morning, was incredibly difficult, knowing the hopes and aspirations that were being dashed — or Dr. Theresa Tam, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada who has guided Canada through a global pandemic that the world hasn't seen since the Spanish influenza.

Across Canada, many of our provincial health officers are women, including Dr. Bonnie Henry in BC and Dr. Kami Kandola in the Northwest Territories. These women are public and well-known faces across Canada. As women, they have been subject to harsh criticism, not because of the advice and direction that they offer, but because they are women. We are thankful for their hard work and for the sacrifices that they made. They are clear demonstrations that feminism isn't about making women strong; women are already strong. It is about changing the way the world perceives that strength.

Applause

In recognition of COVID-19 vaccination teams

Hon. Ms. Frost: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my Liberal colleagues, I ask you to join me today in recognizing the tremendous efforts of the teams of immunizers, nurses, and logistics staff who are supporting the COVID-19 vaccine efforts. Team Balto and Team Togo have been travelling to rural Yukon communities throughout Yukon, immunizing community members with first and second doses of the

Moderna vaccine. Team Fox has been hard at work here in Whitehorse, working the mass COVID-19 vaccination clinic at the Whitehorse convention centre.

After much planning and preparation, the mobile teams successfully departed on January 18 and are continuing to administer vaccines to community members across the territory. With around 52 team members, these teams are composed of selfless individuals across all departments within the Government of Yukon — employees from Wildland Fire Management, from Health and Social Services, from Finance, and others from Emergency Medical Services. They all raised their hands to take part in this historic moment. This is not to forget that community members in all of our communities are stepping up to help with the logistics as well, and I just want to give a shout-out to them. They have all graciously volunteered their time and energy to protect Yukoners. They are all our heroes, and we wouldn't be where we are without them.

We have even had some nurses come out of retirement to be a part of the great effort to ensure that Yukoners receive their shots. That passion and that commitment make me so proud. It truly demonstrates the heart of this territory and the profound level of care. I am humbled to see the efforts of both teams as they continue their second visits to the communities.

In partnership with the surrounding communities, Team Balto and Team Togo have ensured a safe and comfortable environment for community members to inquire about and receive immunization. We have heard countless comments from citizens about their upbeat personalities and how it has made a difference. The professionalism and positivity of all three vaccination teams have been truly inspiring to see. These individuals continue to demonstrate such zeal, perseverance, and warm devotion. They ensure that Yukoners' safety and well-being are of the utmost importance during such turbulent times. They know what it is to give, and we can all learn so much from them.

Together, let's celebrate the efforts of these teams that have risen to the occasion to provide Yukoners across the territory with immunization against COVID-19. This week, the mobile teams advance to complete the second doses in communities. I wish them the best and continue to support their efforts from afar.

Here in Whitehorse, Team Fox is working harder than ever as we embark on the second week of vaccinations open to the general public in Whitehorse. The immunizers and logistics staff have served thousands of Yukoners since the clinic opened its doors in mid-January.

In closing, I would like to ask my fellow members to recognize and acknowledge the efforts of teams Balto, Togo and Fox as they continue to administer vaccines and offer support within the communities throughout these coming months. Thank you, mahsi' cho, teams Balto, Togo and Fox, for your dedication, commitment, and the support that you provide to Yukoners. Your efforts are recognized and very much appreciated.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to give thanks to the mobile vaccination teams that are working their way through their second round of community visits.

Since early January 18, teams have circled the Yukon to ensure that all Yukoners willing and eligible are able to receive their first and second doses of the Moderna vaccine. As one can imagine, this was no easy feat. Not only were these clinics organized quickly and efficiently, but Yukoners showed up, waiting in freezing temperatures to be among the first in the country to roll up their sleeves.

The organization and management that goes into the vaccination campaign of this magnitude is immense, and we commend all those who have dedicated their time to ensure that all of Yukon is afforded the opportunity to receive the vaccine at home.

So, we are fortunate here in the Yukon, not only to have the ability to vaccinate all eligible Yukoners, but to have such a dedicated, hard-working group of people to get the job done.

My community of Haines Junction welcomed the vaccination team with around 150 ice candles. I think we made the national news. It was a pleasure to take part in the candle lighting. It was a challenge to get the candles lit sometimes, but being part of the set-up — setting the wall tent up with my fellow Ranger for the community to come to learn about the vaccine or the vaccination was wonderful. I want to thank those who volunteered in my community and those who took part in the clinic.

These teams have travelled to Beaver Creek, to Watson Lake, to Old Crow, and to communities in between throughout the territory, and they're not finished yet, as the minister said. So, thank you to those who make up teams Balto and Togo and those who are doing an incredible job here in Whitehorse on Team Fox, working long hours to boost vaccination numbers and keep Yukoners safe. Of course, thank you to all Yukoners who have stepped forward to get your vaccine.

Applause

Ms. White: I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP and the Independent member to celebrate the accomplishments of Yukon's rural vaccination teams.

We can draw parallels between Yukon's rural vaccination response and the 1925 Nome serum run. Teams of dedicated individuals both taking to the trail, the road, or the air to reach rural Yukoners in their home communities to deliver the important COVID-19 vaccine — aptly named teams Togo and Balto, after Leonhard Seppala's lead dogs that ran the longest and most dangerous leg of the 1925 serum run that saved the children in the small northern community of Nome, Alaska. Yukon's own Balto and Togo teams have been criss-crossing Yukon, setting up in recreation centres, community centres, and health centres to support Yukon's battle against COVID-19.

Our thanks and gratitude to all those behind this incredible feat. Thank you to those on the ground answering the questions and delivering the vaccine. Thank you to communities who have welcomed these teams with rolled up sleeves, knowing that we all have a role to play to keep each other safe.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Hutton: I have for tabling a report entitled *Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Canada: A Review of Provincial and Territorial Policies*, which gives Yukon a failing grade in that regard.

Ms. White: I have for tabling the *Yukon Employment Standards Board Review of Yukon's Minimum Wage*, dated November 30, 2018. It contains the recommendation for a minimum wage of over \$15 an hour by April 2021.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 18: *Act to Amend the Child Care Act (2021)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 18, entitled *Act to Amend the Child Care Act (2021)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Education that Bill No. 18, entitled *Act to Amend the Child Care Act (2021)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 18 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the budget commitment of \$25.2 million for early learning and universal childcare.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to reconsider changes to the use of individualized education plans for students in Yukon and ensure that students who need additional supports have appropriate resources.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works to:

(1) review and update if necessary the avalanche safety plan for Transportation Maintenance;

(2) increase resources to Transportation Maintenance in order to deal with road closures resulting from avalanches; and

(3) work with commercial operators to mitigate the effect of avalanche-related public road closures on commercial traffic, particularly on the south Klondike Highway.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, if the Legislative Assembly stands adjourned for an indefinite period of time, the Government House Leader and at least one of the other House Leaders together may request that the Legislative Assembly meet virtually by video conference, with all the Members of the Legislative Assembly being able to participate remotely, notwithstanding any current Standing Orders regarding members' physical presence in the Chamber.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to COVID-19 symptoms, illness, or protocols may participate in the sittings of the House by teleconference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by teleconference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) contribute to constituting quorum of the Legislative Assembly, under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(4) be considered to have attended the Sitting of the Legislative Assembly with no deduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting:

(1) the Clerk shall keep a daily list of paired members, in which any member of the Government and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by noon on that day to indicate that they will not take part in any recorded division in the Legislative Assembly held on that date; and

(2) following each such division held, the names of any members entered into the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and the Votes and Proceedings.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to take immediate action to reduce alcohol-related harm based on the recommendations of the 2019 report *Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Canada: A Review of Provincial and Territorial Policies*.

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

THAT it is the opinion of this House that Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly should be amended to

remove the ability to use the guillotine clause to amend the *Elections Act* or the *Electoral District Boundaries Act*.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the Government of Canada to take over the chief firearms officer position and ensure that the next chief firearms officer is appointed by the territorial government.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon Liberal government to live up to their promise to tell Yukoners when the next election will be and announce the date of the 2021 Yukon general election.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Universal childcare program

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our government believes that all children should have access to affordable, high-quality childcare and early learning opportunities. That is why we are making the single largest investment ever in the territory to support early learning and childcare and help make the lives of Yukon families more affordable.

This year's budget includes more than \$25 million toward early learning and childcare initiatives. This includes approximately \$15 million to support a new Yukon-wide universal childcare program. High-quality childcare programs and early learning opportunities are the foundation for later success in school and in life. The new funding program is designed to address affordability and improve the accessibility and quality of early learning childcare. Moving to a universal childcare model on April 1 will put more disposable income in the hands of Yukon families, provide parents and guardians more choice if they want to work outside the home, help to close the developmental gap between Yukon's rural and urban children, and ensure that, regardless of income or employment, all Yukon families can access high-quality, affordable childcare options for their children.

Starting on April 1, families will save up to \$700 per month per child if they attend a licensed, participating, full-time childcare program. For example, a family that currently pays \$850 for childcare each month for one child will, under the new program, pay only \$150 in fees. This will put more money into the pockets of Yukon families to help them cover a mortgage payment, the cost of groceries and maybe extracurricular activities or save money for their children's future. These savings are significant and a key part of building a stronger economy and recovering from the pandemic. This program will complement our current subsidy model so that the lowest income earners will qualify for very low and, in some cases, free childcare. Also, grandparents solely responsible for their grandchildren and teen parents attending high school will continue to receive subsidies for licensed childcare.

In addition to supports for families, we will support existing operators in developing and maintaining high-quality early learning environments and foster the establishment of new centres to address demand. We are also increasing wages for early childhood educators in recognition of the important role that they play in our children's development and help us attract and retain early child educators.

We know that investing in universal childcare will support families on the road to economic recovery and set all Yukon children on a path toward a brighter future.

I am particularly happy to be discussing this on International Women's Day. We know that women are the primary caregivers of children in our territory, and this new program will support them to enter the workforce and participate in the economic growth of our territory.

We recently heard from a constituent who said — and I quote: "This program allows me to dream again." This will allow single parents and others to think about career advancement, starting a business, or going back to school. The choice is theirs. By putting money back into the hands of Yukon families, the doors of possibility can be opened. There is no question: When we invest in families and education, we create stronger, thriving communities.

Mr. Kent: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to respond to this statement today as the Official Opposition critic for Education.

We believe that investments in our early learning and childcare systems have incredible benefits that stretch well into the future. While this was certainly the case before the pandemic, the experience of Yukoners throughout the past year has heightened our awareness of the importance of well-resourced, quality early learning and childcare. So, I would like to indicate that we are pleased that the government has finally made this a priority. We do note, however, that it took an election year for them to act on this — which is not entirely surprising, as this government has been known for being unable to get things done.

Despite our support of the idea of investing in early learning and childcare, we do have a number of questions about how this program will work. There are two main components of this program, as far as we can tell from the minister's statements: an affordability component and a quality enhancement component. With regard to the affordability component, it is our understanding that the new program will be run through childcare operators, which means that some sort of agreement will need to be signed by the individual operators. So, our question is: How will this work, and will operators need to send an application in for each child, and who will receive the application and verify it?

We have heard that the Liberals are hiring a number of new positions to deliver this. So, can the minister confirm how many new FTE positions are being created in the Department of Education to administer this program? We also understand that this will only apply to children and families who are already in care. So, can the minister tell us how many kids are currently

in registered spaces and what percentage of Yukon children they represent?

If a parent has left the workforce to care for a child and they have relinquished their childcare space, how will they benefit from this new program? If a parent has decided that they should stay home to deliver care to their own child, could the minister explain how they can take benefit from this system?

Switching now to the quality enhancement side of the program, can the minister let us know if it is true that the government is now going to regulate the pay for early childhood educators? Are childcare operators going to simultaneously face government-mandated fee freezes as well as government-mandated wages for ECEs? Can the minister also provide an overview of the consultation that occurred with these childcare operators in the development of this program and its policy?

We also noticed that the minister tabled changes to legislation earlier today. Can she explain if those changes are needed to bring this program into place? If so, what happens if the legislation is not amended by April 1?

We have many more questions, Mr. Speaker, but I realize my time is elapsing. So, I hope that the minister can answer these questions today and we look forward to getting into further debate on this program during the balance of this Sitting.

Ms. White: Yukoners need and deserve a universal childcare program. The Yukon NDP have long advocated for this and so we welcome others who have finally reached this same decision. The announcement today is a step in the right direction, but it's just that — it's only a step. Parents who do qualify will see welcome financial relief from current childcare costs. But the announcement won't help parents who have flexible work schedules and require part-time childcare services or services that match night shift schedules. It doesn't address parents who have children who are on a wait-list. There's concern that it could even lead to a situation where a parent who may be using childcare for only three days per week has to pay more than those accessing full-time service. That is not truly universal childcare.

While the minister's statement contains many words, it remains short on details; in fact, it raises many questions. After announcing universal childcare repeatedly for the last eight months, I think that many people were expecting more as to how this will roll out. Will it be money directly to families or to licensed childcare operators? Will it be a tax rebate? Will it be a cash transfer? Will it be monthly, quarterly, or yearly? How does one apply? Is it the same as the childcare subsidy, where an individual must reapply every month? Is this increasing the workload of childcare operators who are already burdened with required paperwork? This subsidy is available for parents with children already in licensed participating full-time childcare programs — families who already have childcare. Full-time childcare is great, but how can it be universal if it's not available to every family? What about working parents who only require part-time childcare? What about the parent who is self-employed and works according to

their contracts when the work is available? These individuals often find themselves left out of the childcare subsidies and now are concerned that they will be left out of the universal childcare subsidy.

Nowhere in this announcement have we heard about addressing the need for new spaces and new childcare centres throughout Yukon. We need a true universal childcare program that will take care of all of our children, and this means providing the funding and training for more early childhood educators, including those workers living in communities. This means providing ongoing investment and ongoing professional development for our early childhood educators, creating new childcare spaces to provide real, affordable, accessible, quality child education, not only in Whitehorse but throughout Yukon. I have heard from some childcare operators that they were not consulted ahead of these changes. Was the Yukon Child Care Board consulted on the rollout of this program?

While this announcement will provide welcome financial relief to some families, it may leave others behind and it doesn't address existing gaps in our system. One has to wonder why an announcement like this that could have changed things for so many families is happening right now on an eve of an election rather than in the previous four years of this government's mandate.

So, I will say it again: We need real, affordable, accessible, quality childcare — real universal childcare — that meets the needs of all families.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: This is about Yukon families. Yukon families are extremely pleased to hear this information and are well aware of many of the details going forward that members opposite have asked questions about. There has been an extremely detailed engagement with operators — with the childcare services board and other operators — throughout the territory. That work has been happening for the last number of months and will continue to happen right up until this process is worked out.

The details coming forward are coming forward through families and through operators and to operators through the extremely talented team of individuals.

We are committed to supporting Yukon families and making their lives more affordable, Mr. Speaker. This has been a priority since we took office in 2016. In 2018, we increased the direct operating grant for the first time in a decade. Funding was increased by 14.5 percent, and rural childcare programs received an additional 20-percent increase to reflect the reality of offering early learning and childcare programming in rural communities. We agreed with the stakeholders at the time who told us that an increase was overdue, and we made it retroactive to April 1, 2017.

Our government believes that all children should have access to affordable, high-quality childcare and early learning opportunities. That is why we are making the single largest investment ever in the territory to support early learning and childcare and to help make the lives of Yukon families more affordable.

My colleagues opposite are somewhat cynical about election year. Election years come and go, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that this is money in the pockets of Yukon families and they are appreciative of the development of this program.

This year's budget includes approximately \$15 million to support a new Yukon-wide universal childcare program. This is in addition to roughly \$10 million we have already invested in childcare through the direct operating grant and other subsidies. This new program will make childcare more affordable and accessible across the territory.

Starting on April 1, families will save up to \$700 per month per child if they attend a licensed participating full-time child care program now or in the future. Existing subsidies — such as the teen parent grant and the grandparent grant — will continue to be provided.

We know that investing in universal childcare will support families on the road to economic recovery and set all Yukon children on a path toward a brighter future.

I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to thank the extremely talented team of individuals who have been working on this initiative for months and have led the development of this programming by reaching out to Yukoners, reaching out to operators, reaching out to the Child Care Board, and individually working night and day to determine how this program can roll out.

We are introducing real affordable accessible childcare here in the territory. The licensed childcare programs and services that are available will, of course, need to be expanded. We need to protect our early childhood educators and have them be properly paid, properly resourced, and properly retained into their position so that children in the Yukon can benefit.

I will clear up one misstatement by one of the individuals opposite. This will be pro-rated for parents who work or use childcare part time; it is available universally.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic public health measures

Mr. Hassard: In response to criticisms from the business community and the education community, the Liberal government released a document late on Friday afternoon entitled *A Path Forward*. The document was intended to give Yukoners a sense of what the next steps are for the government-imposed public health restrictions. Unfortunately, the document doesn't appear to give Yukoners much new information or a clear sense of timelines.

Since the *A Path Forward* document doesn't offer any new information for Yukoners, I would like to give the Premier a chance to address Yukoners directly. When can students, parents, and teachers expect to see a return to full-time, in-person learning for all Yukon students?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I do appreciate the question from the member opposite, which gives us a chance to reiterate what we have been saying at the press conferences with Dr. Hanley, me,

and others. *A Path Forward* shows a glimpse of hope from relief to recovery. We are ahead of the curve compared to the rest of Canada when it comes to vaccines. Really, the devil is in the details about vaccines. We need Yukoners to step up. If you are hesitant, for whatever reason, the information is out there. These vaccines are safe. What we can do as a community right now is get ourselves vaccinated.

From *A Path Forward*, we explained that once we get to an effective level of vaccination, all of these things can happen. We can return to a sense of normalcy. We can return to full-time education here in Whitehorse for those high schools that aren't there. We can return to a sense of normalcy as far as gatherings and other things. We really need Yukoners to concentrate on the vaccination schedule. We have done a lot to get those vaccines front-end loaded, to get them here in the Yukon before the rest of Canada, and we really need Yukoners to step up.

Now, there is a variant right now from South America that the doctors and medical teams right across Canada are still very concerned about. Information will be coming very soon on whether or not the current vaccinations are able to affect the spike protein of these particular variants. Until then, we really need Yukoners to dig deep. The information is available in *A Path Forward* about the restrictions that can be lifted. Again, we can see the finish line from here.

Mr. Hassard: The Liberals new document, *A Path Forward*, is light on details or timelines. It does not reference any of the key metrics or data points that will drive government's decision-making. Yukoners understand that there will always be uncertainty and the possibility of change, but they would really like to have some clear communication from government about how they will make the decisions. These questions have been posed to us by Yukoners. Even the Tourism Industry Association has written to the Liberal government asking if their members should consider seeking different careers.

Since the document that the Liberals released is so scant on details, I would like to give the Premier another chance to speak directly to Yukon businesses. What should tourism operators plan for this season? Should Yukon outfitters plan for a hunting season in 2021, or should these Yukon businesses start looking for different careers?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, since the pandemic started, we have been very clear about how this Liberal government works when it comes to providing certainty for Yukoners in very uncertain times. That is that we will take the recommendations and the advice of the chief medical officer, and we will get that information out as soon as possible.

The members opposite may or may not be paying attention to the press conferences that we have on a weekly basis. I think that Dr. Hanley has been very clear about his hesitancy right now, and it is based upon that variant.

I think that Dr. Hanley has also made it very, very clear that all of the items that have been listed in *A Path Forward* are there for us to start working on recovery, a route to start working on a new sense of normalcy. By putting this documentation out, we are putting squarely into Yukoners'

hands that we need folks to get vaccinated. If you are hesitant, again, reach out to the government website. We have the most up-to-date information about the efficacy of these vaccines — really good news happening right now about the length of time between the first and second vaccinations.

As we look to the rest of Canada, and if they are going to become more mobile and if people are going to start moving around, well, it is about them getting their vaccinations on schedule. It is about those schedules being expedited, and we have been seeing that in the last few weeks. We have been seeing other jurisdictions cautiously optimistic that they also are going to get to herd immunity. We are seeing a planking of the curve. We are working together with the federal and other governments. The light is there, and we can see the finish line from here.

Mr. Hassard: So, we hear lots of talk from the Premier but no answers to the questions for Yukoners. You know, this is really starting to look like a step sideways instead of a path forward.

Mr. Speaker, Yukoners understand that this is a difficult situation and that things could change at any point, but they want information. They want clarity about how the government will make decisions and they want to be treated like adults. All that this government has been able to do is offer platitudes about us all being in this together and an extension of the state of emergency for another 90 days. Our education community is looking for a path forward, our business community is looking for a path forward, and all that this government has been able to offer is a sidestep.

So, when will the Liberals show some leadership, start communicating with Yukoners, and create a real plan for guiding Yukon out of this pandemic and into a prosperous future?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I completely disagree with the member opposite's narrative. It was interesting to hear the Yukon Party asking us to open up the borders to Alberta, when we were closing down borders to the bubble to BC because of the health and safety of Yukoners.

It would be interesting to see what the Yukon Party would be doing with the chief medical officer of health's recommendations if they were in government at this time.

The member opposite says that we are not doing anything but offering platitudes. I answered his question. It is the variant in South America right now that all attention is on. I don't know why the member opposite isn't listening to the answers, but we gave him the answers to his very specific questions. When it comes to the actual work that we have done to support businesses and communities in Yukon over the last year, we have done much. We have worked with Ottawa to receive vaccines quicker than other jurisdictions in Canada. That is not nothing, Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite would have you believe. This is extremely hard work — that we were able to get ahead of the curve.

Whitehorse, this capital city, the first capital city in Canada, at least — I won't go into North America because I don't have all that data, but definitely in Canada — to receive general population vaccines.

The business relief program and the tourism supports — other jurisdictions can't offer this, yet the member opposite would say that this is nothing — that the business community didn't get these millions of dollars for hundreds and hundreds of businesses. The sick-leave provisions — I could go on and on with the supports that this government has given through COVID, but the members opposite just don't want to believe it, I guess.

Question re: Government of Yukon borrowing limit

Mr. Cathers: On October 2, 2018, the Premier said this — quote: "I'll just say up front that we're not contemplating taking on any extra debt for our five-year capital plan..." However, just nine days later, the Premier wrote the federal government and asked to have the territory's debt limit doubled to \$800 million.

Why did the Premier tell this House one thing and then do the complete opposite just days later?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I've said many times in answering this exact same question from the member opposite that, again, we were not at that time considering taking on debt; we don't want to take on new debt, but we do want to have the financial wherewithal to make sure that, if we have to work with First Nation governments and develop next generation projects and green projects for energy, we now have that capacity to do so.

The member opposite keeps on asking this question over and over again; I keep on answering this question over and over again. We did increase the borrowing limit through the federal government. They were the ones that actually do it. They did it to all three governments at the same time. The Yukon Party has increased that debt limit more times than we have. They never asked for legislative oversight. They're now asking us for that legislative oversight.

Mr. Speaker, the amount of debt that we have on the records right now is mostly from the Yukon Party. We did get the increase from \$400 million to \$800 million. We have that flexibility. I will say again that responsible borrowing is part of strong fiscal management that I'm very proud of in this territorial government.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's response is pretty hard to believe. He would have you believe that, just nine days before he wrote a letter to the federal government asking for a higher borrowing limit, he wasn't contemplating more borrowing. We know that the Premier has not been open with Yukoners about this subject, and we know that his words in the House are contradicted by his own letter to the federal minister.

On October 2, 2018, he said this: "... I don't think the member opposite is paying attention to it — that we are not contemplating borrowing." Yet, on October 11, 2018, just nine days later, the Premier wrote to the Trudeau government and said — and I quote: "... I would like to request that our borrowing limit is raised \$800 million." The Premier made the request. Why did the Premier mislead Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Silver: That is how time works. You make a statement and then we move on. It's not like we go back in time in those times.

The member opposite is right. In the Legislative Assembly, I did say that we weren't contemplating taking on more borrowing; that is true. I have a copy of the letter as well from February 19. Absolutely — we talked in the Legislative Assembly about this letter — and very soon afterward as well.

Mr. Speaker, increasing the borrowing limit is one thing; taking on debt is something completely different. Again, Mr. Speaker, if you take a look at the debt that is on the books right now — it is modest compared to the other two territories — the majority of that debt was taken on during the Yukon Party's time in government. We said that we wanted to make sure that we can partner with Canada. The federal government has an ambitious climate change plan. So do we. We want to make sure that we have next generation energy that is of a green nature. We want to make sure that we have as many variables as possible when it comes to how we can accomplish this.

I will give credit to the minister responsible for energy right now and the herculean effort that he has made to partner with First Nation governments to take a look at how we can actually work together for a green economy and the ability to get one of the biggest batteries in North America — again, without borrowing. That is what we are doing on this side of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and his colleagues are known for flip-flopping, but to have us believe that, in just nine days, they made a complete about-face on the issue of borrowing is not believable.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we are referencing the Premier's own letter to the federal government where he himself drew the connection to the request for the borrowing limit to be doubled and the government's spending plans. Yukoners expect MLAs — and especially the Premier — to come to the House with accurate information, to tell the truth, and to not say things to them that are not true.

On October 2, 2018, the Premier told this House that he wasn't contemplating borrowing. Then, a mere nine days later, he wrote to the Trudeau government asking the federal government to double our debt limit to \$800 million. It is his letter, Mr. Speaker, with his signature on it. How can Yukoners trust the Premier if the Premier will not tell the truth in this instance?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I stand by my words. We don't want to take on new debt to deal with next generation energy solutions. We have proven that we are able to partner with the federal government, which has a very similar climate change strategy when it comes to working with First Nations and when it comes to working on energy. We've managed to use those partnerships and the flexibility to get financing for a battery, which is great to see.

We are looking at every single option possible to not take on debt. But at the same time, we also want to make sure that we have the wherewithal and the stability of borrowing as an option — as one option. So, again, if we were in the Legislative Assembly with a great plan where we came forth with a First Nation government to expand hydro projects and if we didn't have the capacity, we would probably be getting just as much flack from the opposition.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, not wanting to take on debt — absolutely stand behind that. Raising the debt level from the federal government when they're raising it right across all three territories — we'll take that raise, absolutely. But we didn't spend a dollar of debt on that yet for energy projects. But again, we want to work with the Energy Corporation, we want to work with the First Nation governments, and we want to have every option possible.

Now, I know the Canadian government has their investment bank that they want us to use as well. We would like to see, in partnership with the federal government, flexibility on federal dollars to be able to do this.

Question re: Death of Yukoner in custody in Alberta

Ms. Hanson: Under the *Coroners Act*, an inquest is a legislative requirement when an individual dies while in custody. In July 2018, a young man, Maxim Baril-Blouin, died while under the care and direction of the Yukon Review Board in a remand centre in Edmonton. He was waiting to be transferred back to Whitehorse after charges arising from an incident in Edmonton had been dropped. No Yukon inquest, inquiry, or investigation of circumstances of his death has occurred despite the fact that this young man was in Edmonton under orders of the Yukon Review Board after being found to be not criminally responsible for earlier actions.

Mr. Speaker, why would the death of a person under Yukon Review Board orders due to his mental health and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder who subsequently died in custody not trigger a Yukon coroner's inquest?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: This is an extremely delicate topic in which to deal with here in the territory because it involves the personal information of the Yukon family of a young man who died tragically in custody in another province, outside the jurisdiction of the Yukon Territory in relation to his custody level at the time.

I am aware that the individual's mother has been in touch with Yukon's Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services on more than one occasion. The information that she has sought has been provided to her. I don't think it is appropriate to go too much further into this particular matter. I want to be respectful of the family and I am happy to deal with this continually outside of this forum.

The question regarding the jurisdiction of the Yukon coroner is one that is available in the Yukon legislation. We will determine an appropriate answer and I will provide it to the member opposite, in relation to her particular question, but I am concerned about speaking any more freely about this in respect of the family.

Ms. Hanson: It is indeed delicate. It is painful, and the mother has asked us to raise it. She does not want to deal with it continually, as she has for the last two and a half years. Regardless of the fact that this death occurred in Alberta, the truth is that this young man was there under order from the Yukon Review Board, and under the *Criminal Code*, the review board and the Attorney General of the territory are responsible, even when a person is transferred to another jurisdiction. If I

read this correctly, not only is the review board still responsible, but the Attorney General — our Minister of Justice — has responsibilities.

When will the minister responsible do what is required and direct that a coroner's inquest be held into this young man's death?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will determine an answer to the question and I will provide it happily to the member opposite. I don't think that legal advice is appropriately given on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. It is the responsibility, pursuant to the *Criminal Code*, of the Attorney General. I take that responsibility extremely seriously. No coroner's inquest has been ordered — that is correct — to date, and I say that clearly expecting that we have no jurisdiction to do so. I stand corrected and I am happy to determine if that is in fact the case.

Ms. Hanson: The family has been looking for answers into the death of their son over two and a half years ago. Their questions and inquiries have been met with vague condolences but no answers. They have questions about what happened at a residential program that he was participating in and why he was placed in a hotel without supervision before he ended up in remand. They have been given no answers. Their son, Maxim, was to have been on his way back to Whitehorse, having not been able to complete the residential program.

He instead ended up in remand, which is police custody, where he died. The parents have questioned what happened between the program and remand. Who was providing supervision as required? Why has there been no inquiry?

Mr. Speaker, what do these parents have to do? When will there be a coroner's inquest into the death of Maxim Baril-Blouin?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am aware of the very important and serious questions that this family has in relation to what occurred with their son. I am aware that the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Services working together have provided as many answers as are available to them to this family. I am aware that many of the questions that they have are questions that cannot be answered by the Yukon government and, in fact, need to be answered by the Alberta government where this young man was in custody. I am happy to continue to pursue answers on their behalf to certainly take their matter seriously. It is a tragic situation and it is a situation in which the Alberta government has likely some responsibility, particularly because of the way in which he was held in custody. He was transferred in under their system. More answers are required. We will continue to work with this family to obtain those answers.

Question re: Affordable housing

Ms. White: Each and every day, Yukoners are struggling to find places to live that are both affordable and safe. We know that there are over 350 people on the Yukon Housing wait-list. This includes seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, couples, and single individuals. Rents continue to rise and availability is nearly non-existent. Projects announced recently by the Yukon government will barely make a dent in the 350-person wait-list.

If this Yukon government has an actual plan to house the 350 people who qualify for Yukon Housing supports, when will they share it with all elected members in this House?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am pleased to rise today to speak to Yukoners about the Yukon Housing Corporation's mandate and its vision to provide affordability and, of course, housing to Yukoners.

Over the course of the last four years, this government has worked very closely and realigned its support services and its loans program — its funding program — to direct grants to ensure that partners in our communities are well-supported to align with rural Yukon communities' supported needs.

With respect to the housing initiatives, we have put over 400 units on the market. We have 900 units currently within the Housing Corporation's portfolio.

We recently are building the 47-unit facility. We just received \$40 million from the federal government to work with our partners. We just now are reviewing the housing initiative process, which will align very nicely with Yukon communities' priority needs as we look at housing initiatives. We also have the rapid housing initiative, which we just announced, to support housing needs in three of our communities, and we have much more to offer Yukoners.

Ms. White: I don't know if I would cheer about that knowing that there are over 350 open cases right now on Yukon Housing Corporation's wait-list. Families and individuals are desperate to find housing. You can read desperate pleas every day on social media from people looking for places to live. Employers are unable to hire new workers from Outside due to the unavailability of housing. This is especially true in the communities. Housing prices continue to rise well beyond most people's ability to purchase.

Mr. Speaker, how is this government addressing the immediate need for housing, not just in Whitehorse but in the communities as well?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Creating safe and affordable housing for Yukoners is a priority of this Liberal government. We are making significant progress toward that goal. Since 2016, our housing investment activities have been guided by the Safe at Home community plan and our housing action plan. We will continue to use these for guidance as we go through the year. We just recently completed a virtual town hall with all Yukon communities to look at their community priority needs. We are in the process of transforming social housing to ensure that it better addresses the housing continuum and improves community housing outcomes for Yukoners.

We are implementing the recommendations from the *Putting People First* report with a focus on addressing the needs of vulnerable citizens while better meeting housing needs in Yukon communities. We have, through the housing initiative fund, another \$3.6 million in this year's budget for this important initiative. The new Canada housing benefit provides medium- and low-income renters with up to \$800 per month to help them afford to rent a home that meets their needs. So, no matter where you reside in Yukon, you are supported to ensure that you have affordability and a place to call home. We are happy about that.

Ms. White: Again, I am not sure why I would cheer about that statement either.

The minister can list all the projects that she wants, but the reality is that housing in Yukon has become less accessible since her government took office. Tenants and new homebuyers and those in communities know this very well. New hires are coming to the Yukon to work and turning around again and leaving. They either can't find housing or they can't find something that they can afford. This is not only happening with small businesses but with large employers as well, like the Yukon government; Whistle Bend Place is a perfect example.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister acknowledge this simple fact, and will they admit that housing has become less affordable in Yukon over the last five years?

Hon. Ms. Frost: We certainly have lots to cheer about. We would like Yukoners to know that the efforts of the corporation and our partnerships have put significant resources into our rural Yukon communities that have been sorely forgotten about. Historically, no resources, in fact, into our communities — so lots to cheer about — previously sat on \$20 million in cancelled affordable housing.

We have made significant dents in affordable housing. We are supporting 600 Yukoners to repair, buy, or build their own homes through our loans program. We have released more than 500 lots across the territory — and many more to come. We expanded the number of extended care beds for seniors. We are supporting initiatives to increase housing accessibility by supporting projects such as the Challenge Cornerstone project, Normandy Manor project, and more than \$6.1 million for a 10-unit mixed-use housing project in Old Crow. We currently have an initiative in Watson Lake that we're looking at with Liard First Nation and the municipality for a Housing First initiative. We are working with the community of Mayo to address the housing pressures there. We are also looking at supporting the market in Whitehorse. We just currently supported the Da Daghay Development Corporation for further social housing initiatives here in the city — so lots to celebrate.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic business relief funding

Mr. Istchenko: One year ago, we asked the Liberal government to take action to protect the tourism sector through the pandemic. One year ago, the Minister of Tourism and Culture said that it was going to be business as usual for the tourism sector. Now we see businesses on the brink of failure, and the minister still has not taken enough action to support their recovery.

In the fall, the minister announced \$15 million to support tourism recovery, but she still has not told us where approximately \$10 million of that money will be spent. Will the minister tell us today when the money will flow to Yukon tourism businesses?

Ms. McLean: Our government absolutely recognizes the value of tourism in our territory. It is the second most important part of our economic sector. We were quick to respond to business needs. We quickly established a Business Advisory Council. We also established our Yukon Advisory

Board. We have worked with TIAY — the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon — to find the right solutions for Yukon. Where we were at when COVID-19 happened in the territory and worldwide is that we had a plan. We had a *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*. We planned when things were really good and we had three record years. We were on track for another record year. As a result of that plan, we have been able to develop a tourism relief and recovery plan that we have done in full partnership with all of our partners, and the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* was built on that foundation. We have committed \$15 million over the three years. There is money absolutely identified out of that \$15 million in the budget that we tabled last Thursday. We are really looking forward to, of course, discussing that more in the Legislature and I look forward to the next question.

Mr. Istchenko: That is cold comfort for those businesses that are just about to close their doors. I asked about the \$15 million and where \$10 million of it is going to be spent, and the minister can't answer that question.

A year ago, we asked the Liberals to work with all parties in the Legislature to support the economic recovery of the territory. I would have loved to have been part of that. Instead, they used their majority to shut this proposal down and the Minister of Tourism and Culture even suggested that it was "business as usual". It wasn't until seven months later that the minister finally took action and announced \$15 million in relief money for the tourism businesses.

So, can the minister tell us how much of the \$15 million has flowed to actual businesses so far?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I feel that the member opposite is not listening to the answers that I am giving. I did just talk about an allocation from the \$15 million in the next fiscal year's budget. We identified \$4 million toward relief in the last supplementary budget out of the \$15 million. We established three funds: the tourism accommodation sector supplement, the tourism non-accommodation sector supplement, and a not for profit. These are all supplementary programs, Mr. Speaker, to the Yukon business relief program, which has seen millions and millions of dollars go to businesses. We have just recently announced that all of these programs are extended through to September.

Again, maybe the member opposite needs to have a close look at the budget that was just tabled. Our commitment is still to work with our partners and we have worked very, very closely with them all the way through. The Yukon Tourism Advisory Board has been giving us recommendations. We've been adjusting and the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon — I've met weekly with them and we continue to work with our partners to find the solutions that are best for Yukon.

Mr. Istchenko: The question was: Can the minister tell us how much of the \$15 million has flowed to actual businesses so far? I didn't get an answer. I'm listening, but I didn't get an answer.

On February 22, the Tourism Industry Association wrote the minister asking her to give a clear answer to the industry on what they can expect for the tourism season this summer. They say — quote: "We need to know ASAP so we can advise

operators to cut loose, move to new careers and repurpose infrastructure.”

Will the minister give a clear answer today?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I’m happy to talk about the programs. Again, Mr. Speaker, I’ve talked about this a lot in the Legislature — the supplementary programs that we announced are supplementary to the Yukon business relief program. There was a cap of up to \$200,000 per business that was accessible. We have recently extended the Yukon business relief program.

At the end of February, the department had received 24 inquiries for the tourism accommodation sector and received 10 applications. A total of \$569,392 was awarded to three applicants. Other applicants were directed to other programs within Yukon government that were funded through the federal government. They have accessed money through that.

On the non-accommodation — we had 44 inquiries; we have had 25 applications; we have given out \$387,698 from that. The good news is that we are ensuring that businesses are tapping out of those other funds before they come to the supplementary fund, Mr. Speaker. This is good fiscal management.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Unanimous consent to move without one clear day’s notice Motion No. 419

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I request the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day’s notice, a motion that, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, would enable the House to meet virtually by video conference should the House be unable to sit in person.

Speaker: The Government House Leader has requested the unanimous consent of the House to move, without notice, a motion that, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, would enable the House to meet virtually by video conference should the House be unable to sit in person.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Motion No. 419

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, if the Legislative Assembly stands adjourned for an indefinite period of time, the Government House Leader and at least one of the other House Leaders together may request that the Legislative Assembly meet virtually by video conference, with all the Members of the Legislative Assembly being able to participate remotely, notwithstanding any current Standing Orders regarding members’ physical presence in the Chamber.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, if the Legislative Assembly stands adjourned for an indefinite period of time, the Government House Leader and at least one of the other House Leaders together may request that the Legislative Assembly meet virtually by video conference, with all the Members of the Legislative Assembly being able to participate remotely, notwithstanding any current Standing Orders regarding members’ physical presence in the Chamber.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: This motion is identical to one that was passed during the early days of the Fall 2020 Sitting. The motion was introduced and passed to address the issue of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic should the House be required to meet virtually. I spoke late last week with the other House Leaders, and we agreed to bring these motions forward once again, hoping that we will never need to use them, of course. I would urge all members to support these motions for the benefit of the Legislative Assembly as a precaution.

I have two others that I will introduce this afternoon. Those are my comments with respect to the self-evident wording of the motion.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. Obviously, this motion and the other two that will be debated here this afternoon are ones that we in the Official Opposition support.

We would like to thank the Clerk’s office and the chief medical officer of health for coming forward with the plan, which includes, obviously, the masks that we wear and the unfortunate lack of pages as well as the new seating arrangement that we see in here today as well. So, thank you very much for that and we will be supporting this. Thank you.

Ms. White: All three parties worked hard on these motions in the fall of 2020, and I appreciate that they have been brought forward with date amendments. We, of course, will be supporting them.

Speaker: Is there further debate on the motion?

Motion No. 419 agreed to

Unanimous consent to move without one clear day’s notice Motion No. 420

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I request the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day’s notice, a motion that, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, the House enable the use the teleconference system for members who are unable to attend due to COVID-19 illness or protocols.

Speaker: The Government House Leader has requested unanimous consent of the House to move, without notice, a motion that, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, the House enable the use of the teleconference system for members who are unable to attend due to COVID-19 illness or protocols.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Motion No. 420

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to COVID-19 symptoms, illness, or protocols may participate in the sittings of the House by teleconference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by teleconference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) contribute to constituting quorum in the Legislative Assembly, under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(4) be considered to have attended the sitting of the Legislative Assembly with no reduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

Speaker: It has been moved:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to COVID-19 symptoms, illness, or protocols may participate in the sittings of the House by teleconference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by teleconference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) contribute to constituting quorum in the Legislative Assembly, under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(4) be considered to have attended the sitting of the Legislative Assembly with no reduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As noted earlier by the other House Leaders, this is a series of three motions to put in place protections for the operation of the Legislative Assembly going forward — again, hoping to never need them during this 2021 Spring Sitting but nonetheless wanting to be cautious.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on this motion?

Motion No. 420 agreed to

Unanimous consent to move without one clear day's notice Motion No. 421

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I request unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day's notice, a motion that, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, the Clerk shall keep a list of paired members and that pairings are recorded in any votes.

Speaker: The Government House Leader has requested the unanimous consent of the House to move, without notice, a motion that, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting, the Clerk shall keep a list of paired members and that pairings are recorded in any votes.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Motion No. 421

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting:

(1) the Clerk shall keep a daily list of paired members in which any member of the Government and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by noon on that date to indicate that they will not take part in any recorded division in the Legislative Assembly held on that date; and

(2) following each such division held, the names of any members entered on the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and the Votes and Proceedings.

Speaker: It has been moved:

THAT, for the duration of the 2021 Spring Sitting:

(1) the Clerk shall keep a daily list of paired members in which any member of the Government and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by noon on that date to indicate that they will not take part in any recorded division in the Legislative Assembly held on that date; and

(2) following each such division held, the names of any members entered on the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and the Votes and Proceedings.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, this is the third in a series of the motions as discussed by the House Leaders. I expect unanimous consent or support for the motion, the third of the series.

Speaker: Is there any further debate?

Motion No. 421 agreed to

GOVERNMENT BILLS**Bill No. 207: First Appropriation Act 2021-22 — Second Reading — adjourned debate**

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 207, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver; adjourned debate, Mr. Cathers.

Mr. Cathers: I am pleased to rise today on behalf of our Yukon Party team as the Official Opposition Finance critic. I will also be making some other remarks in relation to my other critic roles as well as in my capacity as the MLA for Lake Laberge.

I would like to begin this afternoon — as we start another Spring Sitting, I would like to thank my constituents for the opportunity to continue to work with them and for them as the MLA for Lake Laberge. I would also like to thank Currie, our colleagues, and our staff for their support as I perform my duties on behalf of our team. Last but not least, I would like to thank all Yukoners from across this beautiful land we call home who have trusted us and supported us in the work we do on their behalf.

In speaking to this final budget of the Liberal regime, I will talk about where things can be done better and some of our

concerns with government spending. As well, there are also things in this budget that we support, including a number of things that we pushed the government to do and are appreciative that eventually they did listen to.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this is the fifth and the final budget of this Liberal government. Yukoners are telling us every day how eager they are for a change in government. It is our job to be the government-in-waiting and we are ready for the job. Along with Yukon Party leader Currie Dixon, my fellow MLAs, and all of our candidates and volunteers who are part of the Yukon Party team, I look forward to seeking the support of Yukoners in the upcoming election.

Mr. Speaker, the winds of change are blowing. Earlier today, we saw another indication that the Liberal ship is on the rocks and slowly sinking, as one of their MLAs crossed the floor and made some strongly worded comments about the Liberal government and the Premier on the way out. It also leaves the Liberals with a fragile majority of one seat. This means that if just one Liberal MLA leaves the sinking ship, the government may be unable to pass their budget.

As quoted by CBC, in resigning from the Liberal caucus, the MLA for Mayo-Tatchun said this: "I am deeply saddened that I have been pushed to the point that I have lost confidence in the Yukon Liberals and Premier ... Our communities deserve better than what they've been given by this Liberal government."

A headline in tonight's *Whitehorse Star* quotes him as saying, "Liberals prove a 'deep disappointment'". After falling to last place in the polls, this is one more indication of a Liberal government in trouble. We are also reminded of history and what happened with the last Liberal government when three MLAs resigned from caucus and then the dominoes started falling. A few months later, that Liberal government lost the election and was reduced to just one seat in the Legislative Assembly. Perhaps history will repeat itself in the 2020-21 territorial election. When MLAs start leaving the ship like this, it's never a good sign for the government; it is never a good sign for the captain. The decks of the Liberal ship are awash and the ship is listing in the water. I expect that the Premier will dismiss this as he dismisses all criticism, but his government is clearly in trouble.

Turning from the news of today, on this beautiful March day, I would like to acknowledge the fact that it is International Women's Day. I would like to thank all the women who have helped me personally in my life and in my career. I would not be who I am or where I am without you. I am thankful to have you as friends, family, colleagues, advisors, staff, and supporters. You make the Yukon a better place and our world a better place.

In speaking to this budget, as I noted, I will talk about where things can be done better and about concerns with government spending, as well as identifying where we think that the government has done some things that we do agree with. In particular, I will highlight those items that we have worked for on behalf of Yukoners and are pleased to see the government respond to, in response to our efforts on behalf of the people who raised them with us.

I will begin by talking about some of those items that we have pushed for and are pleased to see in the budget. As people who follow the Legislative Assembly may recall, the Yukon Party Official Opposition has spent most of this term expressing concern about the Liberals' inadequate funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation. Members will recall that this began in the fall of 2017, when we expressed concern about the fact that the increase for the hospital's budget that year was just one percent — less than the rate of inflation and much less than the rate of forced growth.

That neglect has continued throughout the Liberal mandate, including in the fiscal year ending last March, which, of course, was the 2019-20 fiscal year. The Yukon Hospital Corporation's own year-end report shows that the government left them with a \$3.9-million hole in their funding that fiscal year. So, in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, they wrapped up that year with a \$3.9-million gap in funding for hospitals. The hospitals did not receive funding to fill that gap until after the start of the current fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, as you know, that literally means that the Liberal government didn't provide our hospitals with adequate funding until we were in the middle of a worldwide pandemic.

I'm relieved to see by looking at the budget this year that clearly the political pressure brought by the Official Opposition and others has resulted in the government providing the hospitals with a reasonable increase to O&M funding this year. While I do look forward to seeing a more detailed breakdown of the funding — including clarity on how much of this actually represents an increase to the hospital's core budget this year — it does seem that the increase is in fact more realistic in keeping with the hospitals' needs than we've seen throughout most of this government's time in office.

Now, I expect that the Premier may rise and spin the numbers, as he has in the past, and try to confuse listeners between new programs and cost pressures and increased drug costs and actual core funding, but I would encourage any Yukoners who are wondering about which version of events in the House is correct to simply look at the testimony provided here in the Legislative Assembly by representatives of the Yukon Hospital Corporation when they appeared last fall on November 19, 2020, as well as when they appeared here the previous November, and then look at the hospitals' annual reports. The numbers are clear. The testimonies of the Yukon Hospital Corporation's witnesses speak for themselves and they both prove what I have said here in the past and what I'm saying here again today.

Mr. Speaker, another area that the Liberal government was slow to act on is the new secure medical unit at Whitehorse General Hospital. As members know, when the emergency room expansion project was done by the previous Yukon Party government, there was a deliberate decision to put in place what was referred to as "shelled-in space" above the ER that was envisioning the potential for future use, with a secure medical unit being what was conceptually envisioned at that point in time.

The reason for doing that, of course, was to ensure that both the cost of the project and the speed of the emergency

room project were not delayed while allowing for the potential that, when the next phase of capital upgrades occurred at the hospital, the work could be done substantially cheaper than if an addition were required or a new space were required to be built at that point in time. Hence the decision by the hospital and government to do that so-called “shelled-in space” above the emergency room.

Now, in the area of the secure medical unit, after we pressed the government repeatedly on the topic, the government did take some action to commit to developing a new secure medical unit at Whitehorse General Hospital. However, after making a ministerial statement committing to move forward with it, the project seemed to have stalled for months because of the Premier and the minister’s lack of action on the matter. Now we are pleased to see that there is funding in this year’s budget for proceeding with the secure medical unit project, but the government can also correctly expect that we will continue during the remainder of their time in office — however long or short that may be — to press them on this topic and look for action, not just commitments.

Also on the issue of funding for the hospital itself, we will look for information, including a more detailed breakdown of the funding being provided and information about when that funding is actually being provided to the Hospital Corporation, including what is provided in the interim supply and what will be made available in April versus potentially later in the year, because cash flow does matter to government corporations, most especially to the one that is responsible for delivering our hospital needs.

So, we are pleased to see the funding in the budget for the secure medical unit. Another area in health care that the Liberals were slow to act on was the Meditech replacement project, now finally underway and renamed “iHealth”. That’s another area where we went through hours of debate in this Legislative Assembly between the Premier and me, as well as other colleagues on behalf of the Yukon Party bringing forward this issue, to have the Liberal government focus on the past rather than focusing on the needs of the day and the needs of the future. In that area, after years of very slow progress, we are pleased that they did commit to it. They have renamed it “iHealth” — the name is just a name — and does include funding in this year’s budget to continue forward with this project.

Next, another area that I would like to highlight is that I am pleased to see that the government has continued a pattern we started of regularly including funding for new fire trucks and ambulances in the budget on a more regular basis than had previously occurred. I recall my time as Minister of Health and Social Services, which at the time was responsible for EMS, and going on a tour of rural facilities and being made aware of the fact that staff didn’t even have confidence that some of the ambulances would actually start if necessary. We took steps to modernize the fleet of ambulances. We did so, as well, with fire trucks.

During our time in government, in addition to building fire halls and performing renovations at facilities — such as in Ibex Valley where we increased the water storage capacity of that

facility — we were pleased to see new fire trucks roll out across the territory, including new pumper tanker trucks to all of the fire halls within the Whitehorse area, including the two within my riding — Hootalinqua and Ibex Valley. I am pleased to see that, in this area, the government has largely continued to do what we had begun in that area, by ensuring that the capital needs of EMS and fire are considered in each year’s budget.

However, there continue to be issues, such as I’ve heard from rural fire halls, with some of the less exciting equipment such as pike poles and pumps in some cases being either missing and having challenges with getting them replaced or being old enough that they have issues with the reliability of the operation. I would encourage the government to focus on those needs as well and not simply on the more obvious and more photo-opportunity worthy, shall we say, needs such as fire trucks for those facilities.

Also, as the side events in Keno earlier this year have reminded everyone, there are gaps in fire service in Yukon. I noticed today that the government has announced a review of the current state of the fire service in rural Yukon with special attention to the community of Keno, according to their release.

This is a positive step, but it is one very much at the eleventh hour of this Liberal government. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, for people who have lost homes and businesses due to fire, this action also does come too late.

I do want to acknowledge that we realize the challenges that exist with providing services in rural Yukon, including the fact that, for EMS and fire, government and citizens largely depend on people who volunteer and provide those services, but ultimately, when gaps like that occur and when people see homes or businesses destroyed as a result, it does draw attention to the problem, and the problem clearly needs a solution.

I also want to emphasize the appreciation that my colleagues and I have for our rural EMS and fire volunteers and note that any initiative to support either service, if it is going to be successful, needs to recognize the importance of doing a better job of supporting our EMS and fire volunteers.

Similarly, the government needs to recognize the challenges faced by Search and Rescue, look at how it supports those volunteers, and do a better job in that area.

Another area that we are pleased to see in the budget is government taking some additional actions on wildfire risk mitigation. We would like to again thank the Yukon Wood Products Association, FireSmart Whitehorse, and other businesses and citizens who have been part of coming together and urging governments to take additional actions to improve wildfire risk reduction, to recognize and raise public awareness of the fact of some of the problems that have occurred in areas such as Fort McMurray, Telegraph Creek, and Lower Post, as well as fires in California that proved very tragic for those areas, and really recognize the fact that, through those private citizens and businesses who have worked hard out of a passion for this issue, we really all do owe them credit for the fact that they worked hard to put this issue on the radar screen for governments of every order in the territory and draw attention to the risk that exists within Yukon communities because, while we all do love the beauty of the boreal forest, we also have been

sadly reminded of the fact of the fire risk that also is brought by having coniferous trees close to homes and communities.

In the situation of those jurisdictions that I mentioned, the wildfires that have occurred there have reminded us of the tragic consequences of what can happen if wildfire risk reduction is not done effectively.

I would like to give credit to them for the work that they have done on this. As those who followed past sittings will recall, we supported those efforts shortly after they began and urged government to listen to those citizens and businesses. It is something that really, as many have characterized it — those fires in places like Telegraph Creek, Lower Post, and Fort McMurray were a bit of a wake-up call to people about the potential risks. I would just emphasize again — as I have in the House — that the solutions to this carry not just the need to reduce risk but also provide — if done right — potential opportunities for businesses as well as First Nation development corporations and others to see economic benefit — to do targeted harvesting and make use of that for uses such as biomass and other uses of the timber and brush-clearing of the area. We believe that there is opportunity in this as well.

We are pleased to see that it is a small start by government in taking action, as was pushed by Yukon citizens. Much more needs to be done in this area, but we do acknowledge this small start and we are pleased to see this part of the budget highlights for continued funding for a project announced last year.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to see government continue some of these successful programs that we started during our time in government, including the well program and the microgeneration program.

As my colleague, the Member for Kluane, reminded us earlier today in talking about last March, the Yukon — and indeed Canada and the world — has seen a year like no other within our lifetimes.

When we began the Spring Sitting last year, we were in the early stages of the COVID-19 health situation rolling out across the world. If memory serves, March 11, I believe, was the date that it was declared a pandemic officially. But in the early stages leading up to the official declaration, we were watching the news from around the world, but I think it's fair to say that the impact of this problem had not really sunk in to very many people. It was something that — past history and epidemiology had led to government staff and other planners warning us for years that there was the potential of another pandemic at some point. There was work as well that was done around the 2007 time period in the wake of the SARS epidemic and the H1N1 preparations. There was pandemic preparedness planning that went on in the Yukon, across Canada, and in some other jurisdictions. But largely, as time went on, everyone got busy with life and the events of last March came as a bit of a surprise. But as my colleague, the Member for Kluane, has pointed out, we saw a situation last March where the government was saying that it would be business as usual for tourism. It has been anything but business as usual for tourism or Yukon businesses.

There have been some that are doing well during the pandemic. There are others that are doing relatively well, others that are limping by, and others where it has simply shut them

down. So, the situations and the challenges that Yukoners in the private sector — particularly in tourism, in restaurants, and in some other exposed parts of the business community — have faced — those challenges vary widely from business to business, from community to community, and from person to person. But unfortunately, what we have seen with the government tabling the budget is that some of the rhetoric about how great the growth in GDP projects are has been very tone deaf to the reality being faced by a number of small business owners in the territory and employees. I have to remind members that, if your business is suffering — if you are suffering — hearing that someone else is doing well and that the overall GDP projections look good is very, very cold comfort.

As my colleague noted earlier, people do want clarity, and unfortunately, in the government's plan for reopening, what we don't see is a lot of clarity for Yukon's private sector. Now, most people understand very well the fact that the situation may change, but what I have heard from people is that they want government to listen to them, to treat them as adults, and to provide them with the information and clarity about (a) what government expects and (b) what some of the variables are that might change that. For example, as my colleague, the Member for Kluane, touched on, there are people in the tourism sector wanting to know whether they should be looking at opening up for the season or simply shutting down for this year and trying to make money somewhere else.

I have heard, as well — without compromising the personal privacy of a constituent who contacted me about it — someone who is in the tourism sector who is wanting information about whether he is likely to have a season — he knows that could change, but he wants to understand if it is likely that he is going to have a season. If not, that may affect both what he does for work and what he is able to keep in terms of stock and assets, because there is an effect on that. For many businesses, there is a cost to simply keeping somewhat ready to open up.

So, the government can rely on platitudes and pat themselves on the back for doing well, but again, what many Yukon businesses are looking for is more clarity about what is likely to occur this year and information on what the metrics are that might change that so that they can plan and make the key decision about whether they are trying to open up for the summer or simply cutting their losses, trying to manage with something else, and operating next year.

Now, those have been some of the problems with the Yukon's pandemic response, and of course, the responsibility for that lies solely on the elected government, but I want to move on with a non-partisan note and recognize one of the areas that has been doing well right now in the response.

I would like to thank the Yukoners who have worked so hard on the territory's rollout of the COVID-19 vaccinations. I know that this includes health professionals and managers, some of whom had retired and have chosen to re-enter the workforce due to their own personal commitment to our territory and to their fellow Yukoners. I note that, while we are doing well as a territory for vaccination rates in comparison to

other jurisdictions in Canada, the fortune that we have in the north by being able to get more vaccines per capita than southern jurisdictions has played a major role in it, but vaccines are of no use without the people who get those vaccinations out there. It is through the work of these Yukoners who deserve the credit for the successful rollout.

While politicians may try to claim credit for this work, the simple fact is that the heavy lifting is being done by front-line staff and those behind the scenes who are making this happen, including health care professionals, administrative professionals, managers, organizational support staff, IT professionals, and others, including those involved in transporting the vaccines. I am probably missing someone in that list, but I would like to acknowledge the work of every single Yukoner who is playing a part in this and recognize that they are doing this work because of their commitment to the Yukon and to our fellow citizens. It is not something that any one of us on any side of this House can claim credit for. We must give credit where credit is due — to the Yukoners who are making this happen and are providing the opportunity where our families have the opportunity to get vaccinated, which is simply not the case in southern Canada for most people.

Thank you, again, to everyone for all that you have done as part of this. Please keep up the good work and keep going.

I'm going to switch now to talking about some of the key problems with this budget in terms of the overall costs that we see here. I would note that, while the individual items within a budget often get more attention, it's also important to look at the financial resources and the spending trajectory. Those amounts are fascinating for those who are interested in numbers and less interesting for some, but they are fundamentally very important.

I want to begin by painting a picture, and what I'm going to use to paint the picture is the Public Accounts and the government's own projections. Now, as members know, the Public Accounts are prepared by government and audited by the Auditor General of Canada. When the Liberals took office, they had money in the bank left to them by the previous government, they had net financial assets, and they have taken this from — at the point of taking office, I should note, it was around \$100 million in net financial assets. From that, we've seen the Liberal government, during their four and a half years in office, take the territory from positive net financial assets — in simple terms, money in the bank — to an anticipated net debt this year of \$81.5 million and \$330.5 million in net debt projected for 2023-24.

Now, it's important as well to note that, during the time this Liberal government has been in office, the territory's revenues have actually grown at a healthy rate every year, largely due to annual increases in the territorial funding formula and other federal transfers. Despite this, they have spent money faster than it was coming in almost every single year. This is another area where the government rhetoric and their actions have not aligned with each other. So, again, revenues grew significantly every year, but despite that, almost every single year that they've been in office, the Liberals have spent money faster than was coming in.

The annual increases to spending are unsustainable and explain why, despite inheriting the best financial situation of any new government in Yukon history, the Liberals have taken our territory's finances from in the black to a lot of red ink. There's a lot of red ink on the balance sheet, and it was avoidable if the government had chosen to manage the territory's finances more prudently. They can correctly blame some of the spending recently on the pandemic, but their financial management had the Yukon on the wrong spending trajectory long before the pandemic hit.

Let's talk about what the numbers tell us. The Liberal government's first budget was in 2017-18. At the end of that year, the audited Public Accounts show that revenues increased at a rate of three percent. Expenses grew at a rate of two percent. That was the only year, it might be argued, that the Liberal government actually exercised some degree of financial restraint, although others would point out that delays in delivering capital projects contributed significantly to that financial picture. According to page 3 of the Public Accounts, lower-than-expected expenses totalled \$30 million that year, and of course, a significant portion of that is due to the delays in delivering on capital projects.

So, the Liberal government changed that the next year in 2018-19 where again, according to the audited Public Accounts — and most of this information by the way is on page 3 of the Public Accounts. For the 2018-19 fiscal year, revenues grew at a healthy rate of five percent, but expenses that year increased by a whopping 10 percent over the previous year — 10 percent, which is an increase of \$123 million in just one year.

The next year, in 2019-20, revenues again grew at a healthy rate of five percent, but once again, the Liberal government spent money faster than it was coming in, growing expenses at an unsustainable rate of six percent. Once again, that information can be found on page 3 of the audited Public Accounts for that year.

Now, fast-forward to this year, where the budget for the current fiscal year shows revenues growing again by 5.1 percent, but net expenditures are forecast to grow at a rate of 8.8 percent. So again, the trend continues — 5.1 percent in increased revenue — which is not bad — but net expenditures are expected to grow at a rate of 8.8 percent. I would point out that this is looking at the handout that the government provided us at the briefing. It is not just our calculations; it is found on the 2021-22 O&M summary provided by government to us last week.

So, to put that in real dollar terms: This year, we are receiving \$63 million more under the territorial funding formula alone — the largest transfer from Ottawa — but the Liberal government is spending beyond our means again and their plans show them doing that well beyond this current year as well. Their budget shows this year ending with \$81.5 million in net debt and taking the finances deeper into the red to a whopping \$330 million in net debt by 2023-24. This is despite having net financial assets when they took office.

So, in dollar terms, here are some of the annual increases by the government — again, I am going off the Public Accounts for reference, just for clarity and the fact that members know

that what is budgeted and what is actually done can be two different things. So, looking at the Public Accounts, the annual increase in expenditures in the fiscal year ending 2017-18 — according to the Public Accounts — was \$20 million. The next fiscal year, 2018-19, that grew to a whopping \$123 million. Again, that is growth in just one year of \$123 million. In 2019-20 — again, according to the Public Accounts — there was an increase over the previous year of \$81.5 million. Then, looking at the current fiscal year, the increase over the previous year — again, this is budgeted according to the government's budget, not actual — the increase is \$96.5 million. So, again, for a territory of 40,000, that is a pretty substantial increase in most of those years and that is not a sustainable trajectory.

As we look at the budget, it's also very obvious that 2021 is an election year. It contains a long list of promises — some of which are believable, some of which are not — and a list of items — including ones that the government promised in 2016 — that are currently in their pile of things that they promised but haven't actually delivered on.

I would also draw attention to another example of something that we're pleased to see in the budget: the commitment to midwifery. However, the government, after years of delay from when they originally committed to implementing it, has now, this year — at the tail end of their mandate — implemented it in a way that is actually going to create a gap in service. That's not good planning.

There was a way to do it better, but unfortunately, through the top-down, autocratic approach of this government, they came up with a model to plow forward and claim that they've checked the box on delivering on midwifery but do it while creating a gap in services that is impacting Yukoners this year. I know that this issue came up at the Community Midwifery Association Yukon meeting. I believe that the Minister of Community Services probably got an earful on that and I know that we in the Official Opposition have heard those concerns loud and clear from Yukoners about this gap in services.

I want to point out, again, that — especially after something that the Liberals committed to, as did the Yukon Party and the Third Party in the last territorial election — they took almost the entire mandate to deliver it and, when they delivered it, they delivered a gap in services — not a seamless move to funded and regulated midwifery. It could have been done better; it simply wasn't. They rushed it through at the eleventh hour, and they didn't get the transition right.

I have to remind all members that, beyond the Legislative Assembly and the political debates which occur here, there are real people being affected, there are expectant mothers being affected, and there are Yukon families being affected. When a gap in service occurs, unfortunately, people — Yukon citizens — pay the price for government's mistakes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I noted, it is concerning that, when we see the fiscal and economic outlook, the net financial debt is forecast to increase over the next three years. That refers to spending in response to COVID-19 as well as major investments in — and I quote — “needed infrastructure”. It is concerning again when government chooses to spend beyond their means but try to use the right branding campaign to

convince Yukoners that spending at an unsustainable rate is somehow a good idea.

I would also like to talk about the fact — in terms of getting things right or not getting things right — an issue that is, like the budget, coming into effect on April 1. That is part of the implementation of the Yukon agriculture policy which the government delivered last year. The policy was finalized a year late, according to their own target, and unfortunately, as part of the new rules that they've applied, I am hearing from constituents — I know that a number of my colleagues have also heard this from constituents — about people who have suddenly found out that, without any public consultation on the details, there are new rules being applied that will make it harder to get a building permit on your agricultural property. This includes for existing farmers and for people buying a new piece of property.

As the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes may be aware — since one of the sales that fell through was in his own riding — this has created a situation where people attempting to purchase agricultural property have looked at it and determined that the new restrictions would make it impossible for them to build a house or cabin, move there, and begin developing it, and it would limit their ability to build a primary residence within the first couple of years of being there. Understandably, this causes someone to walk away from doing that. It also has added an immediate negative value on existing agricultural land. These new restrictions — especially those on building permits — are not helping the housing situation any when government has proposed these actions.

So, I would urge the government to take a hard look at what they're planning to bring into place on April 1 and recognize that it has actually had a negative effect on the value of people's existing land and done so without consulting with those people. It's negatively affecting building permits, and unfortunately, the intent of this policy has been warped in its implementation and is actually negatively impacting the finances of Yukoners today and negatively impacting their ability to develop their agricultural property as well. So, again, it's not just a matter of ticking off the box and saying that you've delivered on your commitment; it's important that you work with Yukoners, listen to Yukoners, and deliver the right policy and the right results.

Again, of course, that has been a theme throughout this pandemic — that the Liberal government has very much, from the top down, been very focused on a top-down approach to managing the pandemic and has shown a resistance to working with Yukoners on the details of things, including the rules of funding programs and the rules of — or the details, pardon me, of the rules that are affecting people's businesses and their lives.

As Currie Dixon, the Leader of the Yukon Party, noted during interviews after seeing the budget, we see no path in this budget to get through the pandemic. We see no path forward for the economy. That's a troubling indicator for the private sector. We know that the tourism industry is on life support, and what everyone is looking for is a path forward and it's not there.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would also like to note — as you will recall — that earlier today, we discussed the territorial debt limit. Again, we've seen a lack of transparency from the Premier and Finance minister on what the government is or isn't doing and might or might not be planning on doing in that area. The fact that the Premier dismissed being called on his statements in the House conflicting with his letter of nine days later is troubling.

For the Premier to lay two mutually incompatible statements out in the public record and then claim that there is no difference is not just troubling, but it is really not in keeping with government's commitment on being transparent with Yukoners. Any decision to plunge the territory further into debt is something that will affect future generations of Yukoners because they will have to pay for it. In contrast to the current government, we have been clear about the fact that we believe a decision to borrow money should be made in the Legislative Assembly, not behind closed doors in Cabinet, and there should be the opportunity for the public to know about what is being contemplated before government signs a commitment to large debt that they and their children will be forced to pay for whether or not they agreed with government's decision.

It is important to remember — and it is unfortunate for some of our colleagues across the way that they are about to get a rude reminder of this — that we sit in seats that the public owns. The seats belong to the voters. The titles are temporary and the seats are on loan, and they are on loan from Yukon citizens. Ultimately, in the coming election, Yukoners will choose who they believe represents them and who they believe will actually listen to them, rather than simply doing what they believe to be best.

Mr. Acting Speaker, another area that I should touch on as well in terms of government proposals that are problematic, as the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources will be well aware, the agricultural land is being threatened, not just by the changes under the agriculture policy, but also by zoning proposals in the Shallow Bay area as well as the government's draft wetlands policy — both of which go after titled property and are causing uncertainty and fear for Yukoners who would be affected by this. In the case of Shallow Bay zoning, I would note that this zoning imposes a just-under-200-foot — 60-metre — no-development buffer after the fact on titled property and that this includes people's homes.

When you, as a citizen, see a proposal that actually suggests that, if the zoning is passed in the current form and your house burned down, you wouldn't be able to replace it, that is very concerning. Quite frankly, that proposal should never have been made. It is unacceptable that it is even out there. It has no place in the Yukon.

I would note as well that, in addition to the people who are affected by it today, there are many Yukoners who have a house, building, or property within 200 feet of a creek, lake, river, or pond. If it begins in Shallow Bay, the concern for them is: Where does it stop? Of course, in the area of the wetlands policy, as members will know, this is of great concern to farmers who have been told by government officials that it could potentially apply on their titled property. It is a concern

as well to the placer miners who see this as just one more threat imposed by the Liberal government to their way of life.

I will move on from that area for a moment, but I do want to note that, of course, within this budget and in addition to the items that I highlighted, there are some other areas that we do agree with. As members will know, we do not have confidence in the government and will not be supporting their budget, but we do look forward to going through parts of it, as well as identifying other areas where we think that actions have been taken that are reasonable or that may not differ drastically in some cases from what we would do if in government. We look forward to also presenting to Yukoners in more detail our own vision for taking the territory in a positive direction and responding to the needs of Yukon citizens in a positive way.

I would note as well that I am pleased that, after again some delay in the government actually responding to the needs of the school in my riding — Hidden Valley elementary school — we see that there is money committed for new learning spaces and modular classrooms. I understand, based on a letter from the minister, that one that is on that list does include Hidden Valley School. I look forward to seeing this in that area.

I would also — I had intended to mention earlier on the subject of agriculture that one other thing that the government is doing as part of the growing list of things that they've done that actually make life harder on farmers — we see the commitments on page 7 that talk in glowing terms about economic development in the agriculture sector, but I hear regularly from farmers in my riding and elsewhere about problems that they've had with government. For many, government is either their greatest problem or their greatest source of uncertainty. Despite the work that was done by the previous government on the agriculture policy and local food policy and commitments that were made by this Liberal government, I've heard from constituents about government commitments made to increase government purchasing of locally grown products that have not really translated into reality — yet another case where the announcement and the photo opportunity have sounded great, but the follow-through has been absent.

I have also heard concerns from constituents about how the government is reactivating the concept of developing Stevens Quarry. Previously, in 2013, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources had listened to the concerns of farmers, other business operators, and surrounding residents about the negative impact that developing that project would have and rejected the YESAB application to develop Stevens Quarry.

As the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources will know, among the people most concerned about the impacts of this proposed quarry — the government is currently spending money trying to reactivate the previously shutdown proposal — are Yukon farmers who are worried about the impact of it being directly across the river from them or directly adjacent to them, and this includes cattle operations that are very concerned about the incompatibility of the quarry being right there with their own plans.

Again, we see government paying lip service to the agriculture sector but causing some Yukoners to question

whether they can continue with their farming plans as the government proceeds with ignoring past public opposition and plowing forward with a project that the Liberal government seems to support. There will be more to come on that in the future, but as members will know, the minister has been presented with a petition containing a couple hundred names of people opposed to development of that both because of those impacts and the negative impact on the research forest area to which it is immediately adjacent and which is much-prized as a recreational area by people out in the area as well as in Whitehorse. Again, this is something that is just one more reason that people are looking forward to the next election.

When looking at the budget — unfortunately, this continued pattern that members will recall me raising every single sitting since the Liberals took office about the decline in the information made available in the budget highlights — while it has gone from — it used to be typically 11 pages of information — it went down, at its worst, to four pages, heavy on infographics. It has increased this year to six pages, but some of the graphs and the pictures are bigger and there is a significant amount of it which talks about past budgets, not the current fiscal year. Again, there are areas where, even as people who are very familiar with budgets, as we go through looking at the budget and the capital plan, it is unclear what the costs of certain projects are. It is unclear what communities are seeing projects this year. In some cases, where it does mention them, there is a very wide range on the price tag for those projects.

Additionally, in looking at the budget — I will give another example where government has continued with some of the energy programs that we had initiated — such as the good energy program, the microgeneration program, and energy rebates — when looking at page 5 of the budget highlights. Under the banner of the government's tagline *Our Clean Future*, it talks about actions such as those. But even for somebody who is very familiar with the budget and has previously been the minister responsible for some of these areas, if one looks for the public transparency of what this document actually tells them, it doesn't indicate how much of the money for energy retrofit projects or residential retrofits or energy rebates or green infrastructure and retrofits is new money and how much of it is simply carrying forward money from previous fiscal years and slapping a brand new logo on it. So, the transparency is missing.

Mr. Speaker, there's much of this that, again, I'll delve into more details on as we get into other parts of budget debate. We are at this stage — because of the somewhat opaque nature of some of the budget documents — unfortunately, it takes us time going through this information with department officials sometimes to actually gain a clear understanding of what the high-level numbers actually mean — what is new money, what is simply repackaged and rebranded money being carried forward from previous years. Unfortunately, that is all part of the trend in government that we've seen of just less information being available to Yukoners to understand it.

This would seem to be a good opportunity to mention again the frequent complaints that we get about the website and how it has become worse during the Liberal time in office, including

that the staff directory is often very out of date for departments. If one is looking for information on local area planning or zoning initiatives, for example — those used to be readily accessible through the branch web pages. Now they're sometimes difficult to find, even if you know how to use the website. Ultimately, it's part of a general trend of talking a good line on openness and transparency but becoming less open and less transparent about the facts.

I think that I will move to wrap up my remarks at this point here, but I do want to make a few more additional points in closing — that this has been a very difficult year for people. The effects of it have not been universally difficult on everyone. It is probably fair to say that coping with the restrictions related to the pandemic and the economic impacts have all created some degree of difficulty for most Yukoners, but those effects are not universally spread across the board. It has been a much tougher year for some people than for others.

For people who are worried about their future and whether they can revive a business that they own that has been impacted by the pandemic, they are looking for more clarity from the government on what the path forward would look like. They need to make their own decisions as to whether they can hope to reopen or simply shut down and do something else until later. They are really looking for answers from government, and unfortunately, they have seen a tendency toward a lot of platitudes but not much in terms of details. It really seems to many of them that government doesn't want to be pinned down on the details. It is easier to make an announcement that is vague — and they can't really be pinned to the wall on it later. Unfortunately, in taking that approach, the Liberal government does a disservice to those Yukoners who are looking for help, who are looking for as much clarity as possible in information about what government expects to happen, when they expect it to happen, and what the key factors are likely to be that might change that.

Again, it has been a very difficult year for people. It has required Yukoners, other Canadians, and people around the world to make adjustments in their lives, some minor and some significant. As I reminded the House, while people are in a situation where almost everyone is experiencing some difficulty related to the pandemic, not everyone is experiencing the same amount of difficulty. Some people are making uncomfortable adjustments. Other people are looking at their future and trying to figure out how they are going to recover from the impact that the pandemic has had on their businesses or their lives.

I have heard from constituents and others who approached 2020 with optimism and are now, in some cases, just trying to figure out how to put one foot in front of the other, plan their way through, and hopefully recovery from this.

It is a big impact for small business owners in a number of sectors, and for many of these situations, it's also a situation where not only is their business at risk, but there is also substantial risk personally in terms of their financial future.

While we do agree with some of the actions taken by government, we will continue, during their remaining time in office, to push them on areas where government can and should

do better, because Yukoners who are experiencing tough times due to the pandemic and other factors are expecting us to listen to them, expecting us to bring forward those concerns, and are hoping that government will understand the importance of these issues to them.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I think I will wrap up my remarks for now. I look forward to further comments later on during debate on the budget. I look forward to providing additional comments in areas related to my critic portfolios as well as to things that are important to my constituents. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to someone else.

Mr. Adel: I would like to start by wishing the best to Yukoners who are struggling during this year in the pandemic. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues for putting together a forward-thinking budget that will, as time goes on, prove that there is a path forward. As a government, we are going to make this suite — the environment — such that people can find a way forward. I have great confidence in my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, a budget is a financial plan for a defined period, often one year. It also includes planned revenues, resource quantities, costs and expenses, assets, liabilities, and cash flows — all the stuff that sometimes, when you talk to people, you know they kind of glaze over a little bit. But it's important to understand that one of the functions of government is to put forward strategic plans with measurable metrics — things that people can follow.

Looking forward is what this budget is about. We have a five-year capital plan that has in it \$2.2 billion in capital spending. We have listened, as the Minister of Community Services says, through the Association of Yukon Communities, and all of the different towns and villages have put their priorities forward. We have listened and we have tried to work those priorities into those plans.

The five-year capital plan, moving forward — we can look back a little bit — a bit of a history lesson. We can look back at the last five-year plans and see where they have gone. We can see how this year's five-year plan moves forward and gives some security to where we are going with major capital projects.

The critic for the Yukon Party on the budget goes on at length about the credit limit. I don't know — perhaps he has not ever dealt with any major real estate investment or anything else like that, but at the time that you go ahead and deal with anything in that large a capacity, the first thing an agent or a financial advisor will tell you is "Go see what you are pre-approved for." This government went to the Canadian government and we got pre-approved for an \$800-million credit limit, which will give us the flexibility going forward as we move into larger capital projects that are going to provide this territory with substantial, reliable, renewable energy projects. That way, we are not waiting and waiting for approval. We have the money there in place to do it.

By the way, the Public Accounts, the Auditor General's report and the budgets are taken into account by Standard and Poor's, which has given us a double-A credit rating — second

from the top of their credit ratings — which basically says that the Yukon has a very strong financial picture and the ability to pay back any money that is owed in future without causing any financial hardship on people going forward — on our kids. I have kids who came back and are living in the Yukon as well. I don't want to have them saddled with a huge debt either. I think this budget takes a lot of that into consideration.

Government budgets and spending commitments heavily influence the shape and future of our territory. This government has experience in delivering meaningful financial commitments, and although it has not been easy or glamorous to navigate these past months during the pandemic, this government has proven its leadership on many fronts, as I will outline in this speech.

Commitments to capital projects and spending are what drive our economy forward, promote healthy business competition, encourage innovation across sectors, and ensure that taxpayers are rewarded with, functionally, a better quality of life.

Page 3 of our budget highlights — \$434 million in capital projects. By the end of March, more than \$200 million of those will be out the door. \$30.1 million for lot development — that is this year alone. Looking forward out, it is \$25 million to \$30 million a year for the next five years in the capital plan. That is an awful lot of money for lot development. There \$15 million for Resource Gateway projects and \$20 million for Yukon's diverse fibre line up the Dempster Highway to make redundancy in our fibre connection great so that we can have businesses here with digital enterprise and they can rely on the fibre. There is \$54.3 million for bridges and highways; \$16.5 million for airports — something else that drives the economy, our mining sector, and our tourism industry — when it comes back. There is \$5.7 million for a secure medical unit — I believe that the critic talked about that earlier — \$5.7 million and, going forward, there is more money in the next two years going out.

Whether through small business supports, enhancing our social security nets — including health care and housing — making education more accessible, or providing access to vaccines and financial supports during a pandemic, a budget is and always should be a commitment to investing in people.

Putting People First — \$86.8 million for continuing care, home care, respite care, palliative care, programs in community day programs — things that have been brought to the forefront during this pandemic. We have to look after our elders and our people who need help — the people who are compromised. \$70.2 million for social supports, mental wellness hubs, community practical nurses, substance abuse programs. There is \$25.2 million for early learning and universal childcare — another commitment to Yukoners so they can get back to work — so they can help themselves get back on their feet. I congratulate the ministers' hard work — Education, Energy, Mines and Resources, Highways and Public Works — all of these things — they put a lot of thought into where this money in the budget should go.

This government has proven that investing in people will provide the greatest returns of all. We understand that a better

quality of life — a healthy life — and a government that works for the people and with the people, rather than against the people, leads to a more productive, innovative, happy, and healthy society overall. These are givens, Mr. Speaker; we know this. The Liberal government has demonstrated that we understand this fundamentality better than the previous leadership. I am so proud to be standing here today with my colleagues to discuss the government's fifth budget and the main estimates for the 2021-22 fiscal year.

As many of you no doubt remember, last year, we were facing an onset of a global pandemic as it swept across our nation. I am humbled by how fortunate we are to be living in this territory, governed by strong leadership which has been incredibly successful in mitigating the risks of COVID-19. Yukon has set an example on the world stage with what a successful response to a pandemic looks like and I think that we should feel proud of the work that we have done and continue to do.

Mr. Speaker, relatively low case counts, community transmission rates — we know that we unfortunately have experienced a death in our community — our numbers remain strong overall. Strong fiscal management and responsibility is the cornerstone of strong leadership in government and the team continues to deliver both despite the major stresses incurred over the last year. This budget spending is an estimated \$1.79 billion, with \$1.35 billion for operation and maintenance.

As I said before, there is \$434 million in capital spending and, again, over \$200 million tendered ahead of the 2021 construction season. There is a \$15-million COVID contingency. It is like a rainy day fund at home. We don't know for sure what COVID is going to bring, going forward. We don't know for sure what the efficacy of vaccines will be, how they will affect the rest of the world, and whether they can come to us. There is a \$2.7-million deficit that is a direct result of the social, economic, and health support measures put in place for the benefit of all Yukoners as we collectively tackle this pandemic.

Within this budget are a number of capital spending projects that will greatly enhance our quality of living here in the Yukon, some of which are important to many of my constituents. On page 3 of the capital plan, we have — as I said before, if you go to 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 — close to \$2.2 billion for things like climate change and energy, community and First Nation infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, real property and asset management, and information technology moving forward.

There are some smaller things — some of the more intimate things that we deal with every day with people we know. For example, there is \$250,000 marked for Biathlon Yukon. This is looking forward to the 2027 Canada Winter Games. This again promotes healthy and strong living and teaches this segment of the population — the kids and the adults who have joined this — that there is a goal to work for. I spent a lot of time at that range over the years with my sons and other people's kids. From there, we have one Olympian and one who is attempting to become an Olympian. That is pretty good.

Also, Mountainview Golf Course will receive \$1.75 million to enhance their irrigation system, providing all Yukoners who enjoy the sport and all tourists — when we can have them back — a better experience during the regular season. It keeps an established sport facility going.

Sports and recreation are just a small component of our overall spending in the budget, but however we spend the money in the budget, it's with the lens of Yukoners first. My constituents in Copperbelt North have asked me over the years for different things that they need and they bring some great ideas forward, regardless of their stripe. It's not partisan. I'm happy to bring all the ideas they give me back to my colleagues here.

The Public Service Commission has made everyday life easier for Yukon public servants. The development of the *People Plan* enhances the workplace experience by fostering and engaging an inclusive workspace to attract the best quality of people and to shape a work culture that promotes continuous improvement in growth. Not only did they successfully negotiate new collective agreements with the Yukon Employees' Union and Yukon Teachers' Association, they also centralized human resources needs and supports.

Yukon Health and Social Services continues to be reshaped and enriched year over year. This budget is a great example of this continued effort.

We are implementing *Putting People First* with the early development of universal and affordable early learning and childcare to the tune of \$25.2 million.

We increased the travel subsidy — I think that's something we can all agree needed to be done — from \$75 to \$150 per day.

We improved vaccination access for vulnerable and at-risk Yukoners and successfully developed and delivered four community mental wellness and substance abuse hubs in Dawson, Haines Junction, Carmacks, and Watson Lake to the tune of \$70.2 million — important stuff as we reach out into the communities — page 4, if you're looking in the budget highlights.

We are also supporting Yukon health professions by providing free training from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, as well as adopting or developing many new programs and services to better support Yukoners with their broad range of health needs.

The government has made progress on land environmental protection for our territory and worked directly with First Nation partners to finalize the Peel land use plan. We're developing a plan for sustainable management of our forests and we've worked with both the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and the Vuntut Gwitchin on habitat protection areas in the north.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we began implementing the *Our Clean Future* strategy on climate change, the green economy, and sustainable, renewable energy production in our territory. We have been working with Yukon Energy Corporation and the departments to bring the plan to move forward to being a 97-percent renewable, reliable baseload grid while incorporating wind, solar, and geothermal solutions through a

robust IPP program which will allow private sector and First Nations to benefit off investing in long-term energy solutions.

This is important to note, Mr. Speaker — we are an isolated grid. We need to protect ourselves from what we saw happen in Texas. We need to have reliable base power as the Yukon grows. I think, in looking at this plan, Yukoners can see that it is attainable, sustainable, and renewable. Yukon asked the government that listens and provides solutions. The government continues to deliver every day.

Moving forward with sustainable energy solutions, this government strategically partnered with the Government of Canada, Yukon Energy Corporation, and First Nations to fund a new energy storage system in Whitehorse which will store excess electricity from renewable resources such as the dam during low energy demand seasons to offset demand during peak periods. It will also be there if we have what is known as an N-1 event, which is that our largest power production plant, Aishihik, goes offline.

We have also implemented an independent power production policy which allows communities, entrepreneurs, and First Nations to generate electricity from eligible sources and sell it back to a public-owned utility. We are also working directly with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation in Atlin through the IPP as a creative solution to meeting energy demands here in the Yukon — to update megawatts of power. This will also facilitate the update of the Southern Lakes transmission area, which will allow power to be moved to different areas in the Yukon or hooked on to from IPPs — be it in Carcross or wherever people want to generate power with wind, solar, geothermal. The more we can make our grid bulletproof, the better off we are as Yukoners.

Over the past couple of years, we have invested in geothermal exploration with First Nation partners, conducting research into determining the feasibility of this unique power source. There was just an announcement last week from the federal government of another \$3 million working toward this. There have been great advances in geothermal, which could be one of the next green energy solutions that we need to look at. These are great examples of how we are working with Yukoners directly to find real, innovative solutions to meet the increased energy demands and enhance the security of our grid.

Our economic supports through COVID-19 are what helped Yukoners weather the storm as well. There has been a lot of talk about that today — whether we did or did not support people in a way where they could see a way forward.

Looking at the highlights on page 2: \$39.7 million for public health responses; \$11.9 million for pandemic responses; \$3.1 million for education support; \$1.3 million for parents of students; \$26.5 million for business and relief recovery; \$7.6 million for tourism and cultural industry supports; \$6.4 million for community and municipality relief; \$10 million for the aviation industry to keep them flying and to keep our connection to down south; and \$1.1 million for the mining industry so far. That is some pretty good support.

This government also reduced the small business tax to zero to help out our small businesses. The government reduced the corporate tax rate from 15 percent to 12 percent. We know

that saving businesses money means more room for growth and expansion, which creates more jobs and opportunities for Yukoners. We also know that investing in Yukon businesses is an important step in promoting innovation in our territory, which is why we supported the Women's Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub at Yukon University.

We are developing a community pilot program to support employers in communities to make it simpler for Filipinos to move to and work in our territory.

When COVID-19 hit, we knew that there would be a direct impact on our tourism sector in the Yukon. We are not alone in that. Cruise ship companies have cancelled entire seasons. Skagway, I am sure, is a ghost town at times, or it will be a ghost time at times, but we developed immediately — a Business Advisory Council was established early on so we could work directly with businesses impacted by this pandemic to provide supports where they were needed most. We can advance a recovery and rebuild an industry that is vital to Yukon and Yukoners. This Liberal government is investing \$15 million over three years to support the tourism sector through our tourism relief and recovery plan, which includes supplements for the accommodation and non-accommodation sectors.

When I started this speech, I spoke about investing in people. The best way to invest in anything is to understand the needs and desires and ensure that they are being met as effectively and efficiently as possible. The only way to do that is to work directly with your stakeholders. This budget and this government continue to demonstrate an unprecedented willingness to challenge the status quo and change the way government works with the people. I am proud to stand here and speak today about a budget with a team of dedicated, hard-working, resilient, and passionate individuals who are committed to reshaping Yukon into a territory that serves all Yukoners, rather than just a few. It is a territory that promotes diversity, cultural expression, sustainability, healthy economic growth, and a more direct and supportive system to combat the ever-changing path that lies before us.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard the numbers, you have heard the numbers, and they will be debated back and forth in this House, but I wanted this speech to be more about assuring Yukoners that we are looking forward. We can switch numbers any which way, backwards and forwards. I want my constituents and Yukoners to know that this Yukon Liberal team has their best interests at heart, we have the interest of the Yukon at heart, and we are moving forward. There will always be criticism and differences of opinion on government spending. It is undeniable that Yukon has fared very well under the stewardship of this Liberal government.

I am confident in Yukoners. I'm confident in this team, and I'm confident in this government getting the job done.

Ms. McLeod: It's my pleasure, as always, to rise to make just a few comments on second reading of Bill No. 207, being the main estimates for 2021-22.

First of all, I want to thank my constituents of Watson Lake for all of their support for me over the past number of years. I

can say that I really do miss all of those community events that Watson Lake is famous for and our time to connect as a community.

In my role as critic for Health and Social Services, I've had limited opportunity to debate health budgets in the past number of years. I'm hoping that, this year, we'll get to debate and maybe get some answers that we haven't been able to get in the past. The minister took the opportunity at our last budget discussions to filibuster any discussion on the health budget, and of course, that doesn't go unnoticed by Yukoners who want to know how almost \$500 million of their territorial budget is being spent.

I'm going to reserve a lot of my comments to debate in individual departments because I think that is probably a better use of our time during the second reading of this bill.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Good afternoon and hello to my friends and colleagues. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Yukoners about how the 2020-21 budget will make their lives better.

First, a little context — what a difference a year makes. Last year, our budget was written before the pandemic swept into our country and was delivered in this Legislature as this then-mysterious illness crashed into us. Throughout our community, we erected Plexiglass and hand-sanitizing stations. We put arrows on the floor, station monitors on the doors, created online portals, and pioneered delivery services. We adapted and worked out ways to keep each other safe.

This year's budget was written as the country struggled with openings and closings and rising cases and tragic deaths throughout society. Fortunately, Yukon has been spared many of these things — these deaths and illness. In fact, the budget was tabled in this House last week as incredible teams of Yukoners are jabbing a brand new vaccine into the arms of citizens in record numbers. We are, without exaggeration, living in the safest place on the planet and leading the world in vaccine delivery.

To recap, a year ago, the illness was new and mysterious. This year, we have not one, not two, but four vaccines available to the country, working to curb the spread of the illness and give our lives back. That is frankly amazing. It is something to celebrate, and it is also a gift not to squander. So, I ask all Yukoners eligible for the vaccine to go and get it, because this scientific marvel can't end the pandemic if it's sitting in vials. It has to be in our arms bolstering our immunity to COVID-19. If we want to advance in our recovery, we need to embrace this safe medicine and to inoculate ourselves for our collective safety.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank the residents of Whitehorse West who have been so thoughtful and supportive over these years. I've made it a point to canvass the neighbourhood every year, either on the street, the doorstep, the dog trails or, during COVID, by phone, speaking to people in the riding, hearing their hopes, dreams, and concerns. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I've been out speaking to people recently, and once again, I'm struck by their ideas and passion for the territory, for their friends and neighbours.

I've said this often, but it bears repeating: The incredible sacrifices over the last years and those of all Yukoners have saved lives.

There are people walking our streets today who wouldn't be with us had it not been for the absolutely amazing effort shown by the communities across the territory. There are people walking the streets who would not be with us without the diligence and care that Yukoners showed for their families, friends, and neighbours in following the rules — wearing masks, washing their hands, keeping a safe distance, and limiting social engagements.

There are some who dismiss our success as a mixture of luck and geography — we are isolated. That does Yukoners a grave disservice. The territory is on an international highway and saw thousands of Americans driving from the viral hot zone of the Lower 48 to Alaska and back again. Despite this, we have had less than 80 cases in the Yukon. That is because we were thoughtful, caring, disciplined, innovative, and respectful of each other. Yes, it has been a strange and lonely and often difficult time for many of us. Don't ever let yourself believe that those sacrifices were for naught. You saved lives and prevented lingering illness because of all you did. Yukoners are a hardy lot and have shown perseverance and resilience in the face of this pandemic and we supported that to keep Yukoners healthy, safe, and employed with more than \$107 million in nation-leading supports for business and tourism operators, for parents, for workers, for educators, and for schools.

Unlike many places in the world, our schools remained open. Restaurants, bars, and businesses kept operating. We avoided the whipsaw "open-close-open-close" that we have seen in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Québec. Working together, we created the safest jurisdiction in the country — arguably one of the safest places in the world — and we currently lead the world in our vaccination efforts. We are one of the only jurisdictions in the country to grow our economy throughout the pandemic and we still have the lowest unemployment rate in the country.

This budget aims to keep all this incredible progress going. Some will say that this is a pre-election budget, but that is only because of a date looming on a calendar — November. This is our fifth budget and it represents an extension of our previous four budgets. Think of it as the next volume in a great series, if you will.

So, where is the money being spent? It is being spent to support young families, to improve our mental and physical health, to protect our environment, to expand our green energy supply, to support Yukoners as we move beyond the pandemic, to support our tourism operators sidelined by global travel restrictions that are affecting every country, to diversify our economy, to improve our sewer and water systems, our buildings, our roads, our bridges, and our airports. So, I know people are asking: "What does it mean to me?" Well, I'm going to provide a little context.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of childcare has been a decades-old problem in the territory for families. I heard it on the doorstep in Whitehorse West many times. I heard it in 2016 in February, in March, and in April. The problem that many families are

facing is: Does someone work a 40-hour week, away from the children, and bring home 100 bucks a week? I was having this conversation with people just yesterday. Or do they pause their career and stay home with the kids? I get it. My wife and I couldn't afford to work and send the kids to childcare. That was 25 years ago.

Now, today, starting in April, parents won't have to make that choice. This year, with an unprecedented investment, we are launching universal childcare in the Yukon. Parents using this service will have \$700 more in their pocket every month per child — every month, Mr. Speaker. If you have two children — \$1,400 more in your pocket. That's a mortgage payment. It's more food; it's more groceries. It changes the entire economics of the territory, Mr. Speaker. It makes huge impacts on the wages that people earn and how much money they have in their pocket.

If a parent wants to work, they can. They don't have to pause their career because they can't afford to work. Businesses in need of labour will have access to more workers, Mr. Speaker. Our tight labour market will get a boost. This is an enormous step forward. We did it. We took the bold step that has plagued families for decades.

Midwifery — in the 1990s, as a journalist working in a tiny room at 3rd Avenue and Wood Street, I remember my colleagues and I speaking about regulating midwifery and bringing it into the health care system. People wanted it then. It was a public issue written about in the papers. That's more than 25 years ago, Mr. Speaker. We got it done. It is in the budget this year.

When speaking with constituents in Whitehorse West, I heard how important it was that we support early nutrition. I am very happy to see us spending \$677,000 for the Canada prenatal nutrition program this year to improve the health of pregnant women, new mothers, and their babies. Through this program, we are improving the health of babies and mothers, promoting breastfeeding. We are also supporting vulnerable pregnant women and new mothers.

We have also heard about the ghost pandemic, Mr. Speaker — the fentanyl crisis. Too many people suffering the disease of addiction have died through this insidious and conscious poisoning of illicit drugs. This is a societal issue. The deaths know no social barriers. We all know people killed by this plague. We also know people who are beset by alcoholism. Again, people are falling ill and dying from this disease. We recognize the problem and the grave need for supports. We are providing more than \$70 million for social supports, mental wellness, and substance use programs in this budget this year.

Across Canada, through the pandemic, we have heard about the warehousing of our seniors and the toll COVID has taken in these facilities. Here we have stepped up to provide supports that allow workers to dedicate their careers to the care of our seniors. In this budget, we will spend more than \$86 million for continuing care, home care, respite care, palliative care, and community day programs for our elderly and infirm Yukoners.

People in Whitehorse West have also told me how important it is that we have a secure medical unit. I wrote about

our jail being designated as a hospital back in the early 1990s. We spoke about it ourselves. It has taken more than 25 years, but our government is building a secure medical unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. That work begins this year and, when complete, will end the practice of putting people who are sick in jail because that's the only place that they could go.

We know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, so we're making the shingles and HPV vaccine available free of charge for eligible Yukoners.

For more than a decade, the medical travel subsidy has been an issue. Once again, I remember writing about this before 2010. The support was far too low in the face of costs when you went down to BC. It was last increased in 2006. Well, again, our government has taken action on this long-standing problem. We've doubled the medical travel subsidy to \$150 and expanded eligible destinations to give patients flexibility.

We recently built a French first language high school in Whitehorse — a project that contractors called the best project they have ever worked on, Mr. Speaker. Now, using that model, we're building more elementary schools in Whitehorse. The first is going into Whistle Bend, the fastest growing neighbourhood. I know that my colleague, the Member for Porter Creek Centre — and members who represent Porter Creek — has provided invaluable guidance for this project through his strong connection with the community. The new school will alleviate crowding and improve education throughout Whitehorse and is the first of other new schools to be built in the city. We have budgeted \$36.5 million for this project; however, the true cost will be confirmed after the tender closes. The project begins this year and occupancy is planned for 2023.

We are also spending \$1.9 million on education supports and \$2.6 million to improve online and digital learning to provide the tools and skills that children need to learn in this digital age.

Over the last four years, we've worked to advance inclusion. That work continues this year with \$125,000 for a pride centre for LGBTQ2S+ Yukoners. We are also the first jurisdiction in the country to respond to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It's seen as a model for Canada, and we are committed to implementing it over the next decade.

We know that people in the territory want houses. We're building lots at an incredible pace. We've built more than 500 lots since taking office, Mr. Speaker, and again, we're setting records, getting lots developed and making them available for the community because we know what an issue housing is.

Now, I know the conservative Yukon Party leader, Currie Dixon, has publicly said that there's nothing in this budget for business, but I respectfully disagree. The capital budget this year is \$434 million — \$434 million, Mr. Speaker. This is a 17-percent increase over last year's capital budget and almost 50-percent larger than the last Yukon Party capital budget in 2016. Not only that, but we're delivering the budgets we put on the table.

Contrary to the naysayers and handwringers, this is great news for our economy as we move into a recovery from the

pandemic. This increase is not altogether unexpected. As I've said, some of the growth is through the relationships that we've built with First Nations over the last four years. Repairing the distrust and acrimony of decades fostered by sneaky Senate bills, subversion of land use planning in the Peel watershed, intimidation, and forced legal challenges has taken a lot of work.

We are now in a better place, and that is building the Yukon economy. So far, over the coming years, we have more than \$430 million in new work in Ross River, Watson Lake, Teslin, Carmacks, and Mayo, all starting to flow into our budgets and swelling our budgets, Mr. Speaker, because we are working with First Nations, not against them. This is new money.

With the procurement file, I have had the pleasure of working closely with contractors and their associations, with business people, and with the chambers over the last four and a half years. We got the Procurement Advisory Panel's recommendations in place within two years, as promised. We have the \$1-million exceptions in play, which we used every year. The work that I'm talking about — all of this stuff — is new work that contractors are currently bidding on — contracts for construction, roadwork, engineering, architecture — you name it. It's all about economic reconciliation. We have to be careful. We have to support it. It's the future for the territory. We don't want to put in peril the hard-won trust that we have fostered over the last four years. It is important to build the territorial economy, to draw it together, and to make sure that all of its elements are working together in synergy.

It is also important that we restore and build new infrastructure, because some of the existing stuff that we have is well beyond its best-before date.

I am confident that this capital budget will go a long way to addressing the territory's infrastructure deficit. Some of this stuff isn't flashy. It sits in the ground or in a basement, but it is essential to our health, our well-being, and our progress into the future. Replacing some of this aged infrastructure is going to save money in the long term.

For example, let's turn to transportation infrastructure. We do a lot with a tight budget. We maintain more than 5,000 kilometres of road on a budget less than the cost of a single highway turnpike in Victoria. That's not bad for a wild, rugged jurisdiction with really extreme weather that is populated by fewer people than live in Campbell River, BC. Those roads and highways, as I said, that traverse some of the most remote and rugged country on the planet connect us to our families, our friends, our communities, and the services that we rely on.

The community of Ross River comes to mind — a remote First Nation community that has relied on a dirt road to this day, while every other community in the territory, save for Old Crow, has a BST or paved road servicing it. Why has Ross River been ignored for so long? Well, that's a question; it's not for me to answer. But I can say that Ross River doesn't have to wait anymore. Our government has already started work upgrading the community's roads and correcting past negligence. The good citizens of Ross River can rest assured

that they will soon have much safer and smoother roads to their community.

The capital budget also contains significant investments into the Carmacks bypass road, thanks to agreements that were signed with the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. As I'm sure you can see, Mr. Speaker, the Resource Gateway projects are well underway in Liard, Ross River, Carmacks, Mayo, and soon up in the Dawson region. I look forward to touring them with my colleagues this summer.

Again, it's thanks to our productive relationships with First Nations, municipalities, and the federal government that we've been able to reprofile and deliver these important improvements to our network.

In Teslin this year, we will keep moving ahead with our plan to replace the Nisutlin Bay bridge, which is a critical piece of infrastructure, not only for Teslin but for the entire territory. This is yet another project that had to be pulled back because there was a failed relationship with First Nations. Having restored those relationships, we're now able to push ahead with this work.

Our \$157-million north Klondike Highway project is continuing this year after the work of last summer, which saw 13.5 kilometres of road rebuilt between Pelly Crossing and Dawson City. Again, the federal government deserves some thanks for providing the bulk of funding for that vital project, a road that has been ignored for a very long time. Construction tenders for this work will be released this spring, and I'm sure our local road construction companies will be on the lookout for those.

In the aviation field, we've allocated \$16.5 million this year to upgrade our airports and aerodromes. This demonstrates a continued focus on this sector. From day one of our mandate, we've greatly increased the budget for aviation. In fact, we've invested much more in this sector than previous governments. This, of course, included a major commitment of ours to pave the Dawson runway. That's also something that had been promised for years but was never delivered. Well, I am happy to say that we got this done in short order after being elected. I have the T-shirt to prove it.

We are a government that takes action, and I have heard on the doorstep that Yukoners appreciate that. This year, we have invested \$2.7 million in the Mayo Airport, which was recently upgraded from an aerodrome and made into an airport thanks to work over the last couple of years. This investment is for a lighting upgrade which will allow for scheduled and non-scheduled operations at night. That is something that the community of Mayo, Air North, and mining companies in the area have been asking for and something which we will now deliver.

For the Whitehorse airport, we have, throughout our mandate, invested in many areas, including the new airport bridge for passengers to transfer from the building to an aircraft and vice versa. We have also made investments in airport runway maintenance vehicles, which were badly needed, as the old ones were constantly breaking down and brought employees no end of anxiety and grief, as they had aircraft coming in and were wondering if the plows were going to work

— an absolutely terrible state of affairs and I am glad that we were able to rectify that.

We are currently in the final stages of replacing the baggage system, which was long overdue. This is something no one ever sees. It operates in the basement and looks like something out of *Mousetrap*, but it is vitally important to the airport and its operation. It is in the basement; it isn't flashy, so perhaps that is why, in the past, previous governments cut funding for this project when the airport was upgraded. It would have been a lot more efficient to do it then. For some reason, that money wasn't spent. Boring or not, Mr. Speaker, this is something that had to be done. Its condition was putting certification of our airport at risk, so we got it done. It will be finished in the next month or so.

At the Whitehorse airport, we are also replacing the maintenance facility, which is more than 60 years old and greatly narrows the Alaska Highway, which we are currently working to upgrade and make safer. We have done design work budgeted for this year and a review of the project schedule — all that work is currently underway. The project has a budget of \$10.5 million and a completion date of 2023. We are also planning other investments to the Whitehorse airport, which I hope to announce very soon.

As for the Alaska Highway, we are continuing with our safety improvements and upgrades. As you likely know, Mr. Speaker, we have already completed projects for the Carcross intersection, the north Klondike intersection, and a portion of the highway in Range Road in front of Valleyview.

Phase 1 of the Hillcrest area project costing \$12 million was completed last year and included traffic lights and crosswalks, which the community had been asking for and which we were happy to deliver. Phase 2 of this work continues this year and we have \$4 million budgeted for that with the same contractor who completed phase 1. This work will include signal lights at the Burns Road intersection and upgrades to the trail adjacent to the highway.

The Dempster fibre line project will kick into high gear this year as well, following planning and preparation work we've already completed. This project will give the Yukon the Internet redundancy it needs and is critical for all sectors of the economy. It will give businesses confidence to invest — the high-tech sector, especially — because they will no longer be left in the proverbial dark for periods of time following a disruption to our single fibre line to the south.

Staying on the topic of tech and information technology, we have budgeted \$2.5 million over three years to upgrade Yukon government's phone system to voice-over IP. Starting this year, the project is expected to be complete by 2023 and will save the Yukon government more than \$1 million per year. That is a significant saving — money that can be allocated to other government services.

We also have a new school site identified in Burwash Landing and funding has been set aside to support the planning and construction of it in this budget. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, we've made, and continue to make, education a top priority for the territory.

On the legislative front, we have now put in a new ATIPP act and regulations. The package we've put together is one of the most progressive pieces of legislation and regulations in the country while also greatly expanding information available to Yukoners and will ensure that their information is properly protected in a digital age. This is what Yukoners expect and, again, Mr. Speaker, we have delivered.

Our airport act regulations will be coming into force very soon, and in this budget, we are continuing to fund the rewrite of the *Motor Vehicles Act*, which is decades overdue. Everywhere I go in the riding, Mr. Speaker — Whitehorse West — I hear people talking about speeding, about noise, about trying to make sure that the people driving through our community do so better, safer, and — frankly — not while they're intoxicated. The new legislation will certainly bring those things into sharper focus.

Switching to the Public Service Commission, I would like to highlight the continued funding for the American Sign Language interpretation program in this budget. This is critically important to our deaf community, so it's one of the highlights of my time as minister to make this life-changing service permanent in the Yukon. I'm happy to say that it's now being used by more than 45 businesses and service providers, drawing a segment of society back into the fold where they can be heard and understood.

Within this budget, we have also allocated funding to continue dealing with the ongoing pandemic and all the disruptions it has caused within the Yukon government's civil service, which has just done an extraordinary job over the past year. With its management routines and management-employee relationships stressed and broken, with new technology, they managed to deliver — in record time — supports for Yukon people and businesses that have been vital to their survival through this pandemic.

The human resource management committee that was set up to coordinate this response has been doing a tremendous job on this front. I offer my heartfelt thanks to them. Despite the pandemic, the Public Service Commission remains fiscally responsible and anticipates financial changes due to COVID-19 to be close to net zero. The Public Service Commission's diversity and inclusion branch will continue to implement initiatives under *Breaking Trail Together*, our new representative public service plan which was launched in 2020. There is so much more that I could go on and on about in relation to the public service. My time this afternoon is running short, so I will have to leave some of it for our discussions in Committee of the Whole.

We have also done an awful lot on the legislative front in keeping people safe, improving the education system in the territory, our health and wellness supports for mental health and addictions — we have kept businesses operating through the pandemic.

We have done all that with a relatively — in relation to the size of the job — small deficit. It's just a little more than \$12 million. We have done all this, of course, through the incredible efforts of our public servants who continue to tirelessly support our agenda. We are getting things done. We

are successful because we work together as a territory, as a government, and as a caucus.

For the last four and a half years, it has been my privilege to work on behalf of Yukoners and my constituents in Whitehorse West, so on behalf of myself and my caucus colleagues — the team — I say thank you for all your sacrifices and thoughtfulness toward your families, friends, and neighbours during this pandemic. You have made the territory the best place to live on the planet. Working together, we will continue our progress toward a more prosperous, cleaner, more inclusive, and better Yukon.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you for the opportunity to rise today to speak to the mains. I would just like to begin by acknowledging that it was one year ago yesterday that we had to cancel the Arctic Winter Games. I think back to that time. I remember, in the week following that, being in lots of conversations with athletes and with parents and organizers and a lot of people were questioning whether it was the right call. But in just a couple short weeks after that, we saw that it was absolutely the right call. This is the challenge with taking these decisions.

At the time, when Dr. Elliot came and made her recommendation to us, to the City of Whitehorse as co-host and the host society, she explained that it wasn't because she assumed that people would be arriving with COVID; it was that, because the risk had increased, you would have to treat everybody who ended up with a cough as if they might have COVID, and so you were going to have to isolate everybody — the teams, the chaperones, the coaches — everybody. It just became an overwhelming challenge.

So, because we couldn't ensure, if someone had a cough, that we could keep everyone safe, we were going to have to cancel. I was in many conversations about whether that was overly cautious. Here we are, one year later, and I'm still in some of those conversations because it's challenging — COVID is challenging.

I think, today, as we've had this year together — as a territory, as communities, as a country, as a planet — as we've looked at this, we keep trying to make these hard, hard decisions in the face of uncertainty. But one thing I can do, as I look back to try to see how we've done — clearly, the three northern territories and Atlantic Canada have done better than the other provinces.

Some of that is going to be geography but not all of it. Some of it has to do with the choices that we made, and those were always tough choices, and they still continue to be tough choices today. The one that is clearly different has been this one to put in place border measures and isolation. Some people say to me, when they talk to me: "Look, there is no COVID here. Clearly, you are putting in place measures that are in search of a problem." Usually, the way I try to describe it back to them is "No, actually, I think we don't have COVID here because we put in place these measures." It is challenging to understand, and I will acknowledge the Member for Lake Laberge's comments that it has not been even or fair across the territory. I will also acknowledge that, for Yukoners, it has been a time

of anxiety for everyone to navigate. It has been challenging, but as the Premier said earlier today during Question Period, we can see a light there. We feel that we are getting to the end of this and there is some hope. I will talk about that, hopefully, as I finish up my remarks today.

I want to just start by talking about this budget, and I want to start by talking about the \$15 million that we put in there as a COVID contingency. Just for a second, I want to just imagine pulling that out and then thinking about what we have for a budget. Taking out that \$15 million, what we have is a budget that is in the black. It is a balanced budget, but that balanced budget includes \$35 million for COVID — the spending that we anticipate, that we can see, that we projected, that we have to spend to keep everybody safe. But we know that there is uncertainty, so we tried to put in that extra \$15 million, but just leave that aside for a second — \$35 million to deal with COVID, \$25 million to have universal childcare and early learning — and that is in that budget — that would-be balanced budget. There is \$50 million to address the climate strategy — to acknowledge that there is a climate emergency and we need to do lots on this front. *Putting People First* — a massive infrastructure budget. There is \$30 million for land development — all of it is balanced. Then we said to ourselves: "We need to be careful. We need to protect Yukoners, so let's put in an additional \$15 million as a contingency. Let's be transparent about it; let's put it there; let's show everybody that this is what we are looking at."

Just for a second, I want to talk about how we've done. My colleague, the Member for Whitehorse West, talked about how our health situation is strong right now because we put in place these measures to protect Yukoners, and that's good. I will acknowledge, as he did, that the praise goes to Yukoners for keeping us safe together, because it's a collective thing. It's a journey that we're taking together.

Just recently — I was looking at the economy. I had felt that we were doing better than other places, and I'm not talking about projections of GDP. There were some things that I looked at recently. One of the members of our Financial Advisory Panel, Mr. Trevor Tombe, was looking at Stats Canada, and he looked at the total labour compensation, month over month from February, and the changes to it over time so we could compare provinces and territories. He did this analysis of provinces, and he showed which provinces were spending more on employees' wages across their jurisdiction overall and which were not. I thought, "I wonder how the Yukon is doing and the other territories?" I went back and found that same data, and I replotted them. Here's what I found: Alberta is still seven-percent lower than last February in overall spending on wages across the province. Canada is roughly back up to last February, so Canada has recovered in terms of wages and earnings and, on average, Canada is back. Nunavut and NWT together — because the stats aren't listed for them separately — are up one percent above last February. PEI is the furthest ahead of all provinces at three percent. And leading the pack is the Yukon at four percent, so that's great news.

I'm not saying that every worker is doing better, but what I'm saying is that overall the Yukon has recovered the most and

overall there's more going to employees' wages now than there was pre-pandemic.

So, what are we doing in this budget with COVID and the work that has gone in ahead of that and on the trajectory that we've been on as a territory? Well, let me go through a few of the departments just talking about highlights that I think are worth noting. When the pandemic hit, we suspended in-class education.

The Minister of Education and her team, in working with schools, have now safely returned students to school. This is done where we can get them with as much face-to-face time as possible and as much in-person learning as possible. There still are many parents who want us to get grade 10 to 12 classes here in Whitehorse back full time. I know that we're working toward that and we're working with the chief medical officer of health, and we'll do it once it's safe because it's about making sure our kids are safe. We don't want to put them at risk; it's plain and simple.

Today, I had the pleasure of going over to a school because there were four students who had come up with a project talking about the Legislature and the stained-glass mosaic that goes across the front of the atrium — talking about the history of this place in time. They gave me a little quiz to try to see whether I could match up their cue cards with the various panels. It was wonderful to get to connect again with students. I would just like to give a shout-out to Luca, Lucas, Theo, and Seth for inviting me over. I'll invite them here to the Legislature to listen to us debate and answer questions.

We, as I mentioned earlier in the budget, have put in place now affordable universal childcare starting on April 1. We have early kindergarten programming coming for all rural schools as of this fall. That's in our budget. We're suggesting, through the bill that was tabled today, that early learning moves from Health and Social Services to Education, recognizing that learning starts at birth.

Last year, we transitioned from a college to a university — the first one in the territories, in Canada's north. We have money in our budget for that.

We have money in our budget for our first new elementary school which will be coming in Whistle Bend.

We amended our labour relations act to bring teachers on call into the Yukon Teachers' Association bargaining unit.

We have strengthened our relationship with the francophone community and we completed the first French first language high school and we reached an agreement with Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon.

I spoke with a constituent today about the importance of the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate and talked about reconciliation, working through those issues with the Yukon Forum.

The Member for Whitehorse Centre talked about FH Collins Secondary School. My part in that was just to help get some new sport infrastructure there — our first artificial turf and track north of 60 here in Canada. That's wonderful stuff. I know it will support our students, but it will support the whole of the Yukon.

I talked earlier about the \$50 million in the budget that we are investing in *Our Clean Future*. This one, for me, has been decades of work in coming. I have devoted a lot of my life to try to help our way of thinking about our economy to be smarter, to be thinking in the long term, to be working so that it will serve all our generations to come. I think about those people in our past who took decisions — for example, to build the Whitehorse dam or other hydroelectric facilities — I bet you that it was hard at the time, and I bet you that the choices that we have coming in front of us are hard, but I know that they're the right choices. I know that a lot of those choices are coming through aligning with Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable plan and aligning with the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources' strategy around our future. A lot of them have to do, as it turns out, with my riding because a lot of those energy projects emanate out of Southern Lakes, including Atlin and down toward Skagway.

So, that strategy with the \$50 million in this budget has 131 specific actions that we're committed to following that range from limiting our greenhouse gas emissions all the way to new rebates on electric vehicles. By the way, rebates on electric vehicles include e-bikes.

We now know that we have the new battery coming in here. It's coming into Whitehorse. It just really needs to be on the main grid somewhere. The beauty of this is that it will help us to meet the demand during peak periods and it also makes renewables like wind and solar all the more effective — those non-baseload renewables.

Other things that we have done that are worthy of note — we are starting to work on the *Motor Vehicles Act*, but we came out just recently with off-road vehicle regulations after a ton of consultation with Yukoners. We have now fully implemented a true independent power production policy that allows First Nation governments, communities, and entrepreneurs to generate electricity from eligible sources and sell it to our publicly owned utility. We helped the Teslin Tlingit Council to install 10 biomass boilers as a district heating system for 13 commercial buildings owned by the First Nation. I see that project as a good example for all of our communities. As noted by the Member for Lake Laberge, he appreciated the work that we are doing to reduce fire risk. That is how we can turn an environmental risk into an environmental opportunity for us.

We partnered with the Ta'an Kwäch'än' Council and the Ross River Dena Council to drill deep monitoring wells to measure ground temperatures and determine the potential for geothermal. Now more communities are getting involved. I just saw announcements about it last week. We have been supporting Old Crow in its move toward energy independence through a community-led solar ray installation and a contribution to purchase LED street lights, which consume less energy. One of the ways that we did that was to talk about avoided costs rather than — I remember that previously when I worked in this area, it was always about what the average cost is. Well, you don't want to use the average cost in Old Crow because, for goodness' sake, you have to fly diesel up there.

We revived the Gateway project. What we did was that we worked with communities by reaching agreements with

affected First Nations to make sure that those projects were the ones that made sense for the communities. I will just again acknowledge that the road between Ross and Faro was one of those agreements. I still have the little stone on my desk that I used in stick gambling and lost magnificently in Ross River when we were there opening the footbridge. Right as I was playing, they said that the stakes for this are paving — well, not paving; it was chipsealing. I don't want to get in trouble with the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin. It was chipsealing between Ross River and Faro. I am glad to see that work happening through this budget.

I will just say a couple more things about environment and energy. We recently established the Youth Panel on Climate Change. I love that group. They were inspirational to talk to and I am sure there is stuff going on right now with Shakat and there are conversations happening around climate change. It is one of their themes. I just want to say that it was great to talk to that group of young folks. It is a little humbling because you can look at them and you see that you have been working on the issue of climate change longer than they have all been alive. They are sitting there saying, "Hurry up." They are saying, "Get on with it. What is holding you back?" So, I hope — and now I am talking to all of us as legislators in this Assembly — that we all work to move farther and smarter and further on the climate emergency.

Two more things I will just note with Environment in particular — we did finalize the *Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan*, which was such a momentous occasion that I think it is worth noting again in this speech. In this budget, we are working to get the land planning process back on track.

One other thing I will mention is that I was really excited and talked with a lot of constituents about campgrounds and about how last year, during COVID, how much pressure went onto our communities around us, where people were trying to get outdoors and weren't always good campers. There is a campsite rule about how you leave places better than you find them, and that wasn't the case. I had many constituents who were taking me around to show me some of those pressures. So, I was really excited when the Minister of Environment announced that campgrounds would be opening earlier this year than ever before — as of May 1, I believe, is the target. But I also look around at how much snow there is out there and I know that we are going to have to put some extra resources into getting those campgrounds open, so that is part of the budget.

With respect to health, as I have gone around the territory meeting with communities, it is one of the things that we have talked about — and especially during this past year with COVID — it is our mental wellness and our mental health.

I just want to give a shout-out for the new mental wellness hubs. In particular, I just want to acknowledge some of the great counselling work that's happening out of Carcross. I think it's probably happening all over the territory. It just happens that I'm in contact with those folks and I think they do a wonderful job to assist in Carcross to make it a better place. I just want to also acknowledge that we're investing more.

I've already mentioned how we're investing in universal childcare.

We are increasing the medical travel subsidy from \$75 a day to \$150 a day, which is great.

I would also like to talk a bit about vaccines. I don't want to talk yet about the COVID vaccines — I will get there before I'm done — but what I would like to talk about is that we put in this budget to fully cover the SHINGRIX shingles vaccine for Yukoners between the ages of 65 and 70.

I do want to talk about midwifery. I was at the annual general meeting of midwifery recently. Often, the Member for Lake Laberge has been there, but he wasn't there this time — that's fine. What I heard from all of the members was that they were super happy and very pleased that we have our regulations passed and out. While the member opposite characterized it as an issue where there is now a gap, what I heard from midwives who have been hired as implementation coordinators to Health and Social Services — Yukoners who have been in midwifery for many, many years — is that this gap always has existed in every program that has come and what we're doing work on right now is to minimize that gap as quickly as we can.

I also would like to give a shout-out in this budget to expanding home care support for seniors to age in place. Mr. Acting Speaker, I think you are aware of my communities — Tagish, Mount Lorne, and Marsh Lake. They're kind of the oldest demographic communities in the territory. Aging in place is so important for my communities. They really care about being supported to be in their homes as long as possible and it's such a smart investment, because the longer that folks can live in their homes and be supported by their families and neighbours, then the better off it is for everybody's well-being.

Other things that we've had just recently — more improvements to the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter to support vulnerable Yukoners; connecting Yukoners in need of a doctor with physicians through the find a family doctor program; increasing seniors in long-term care at Whistle Bend, including a new community hospice house that offers 12 hospice, palliative, and end-of-life care beds and six long-term care beds; investing in telehealth; and investing in the secure medical unit. That's part of the infrastructure that we're investing in with the \$400 million plus that we're putting in infrastructure.

By the way, what I want to say is: You know where we've had a deficit here, Mr. Acting Speaker? It has been in infrastructure. This territory has lacked investment overall in infrastructure. When I went on those trips to communities and started talking to them, there was a need for that investment all over the place. So, I think of this as investing in putting people back to work coming out of the pandemic and investing in the future of the territory. That's what I think of it as.

We also just recently — we're the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide coverage for continuous glucose monitors for all Yukoners with type 1 diabetes.

I have just a couple of other things that are coming up shortly — not so much to do with the budget but just previous acts that we had passed. The *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Societies Act* are coming into force on April 1. I just wanted to acknowledge those.

Let me turn for a moment to lots and housing. We've worked in partnership with other governments, and we have, over recent years, developed more than 350 new affordable housing units. They are not all complete, but they are in various stages, and we have another \$3.6 million in this year's budget for this important initiative.

We have the Canada-Yukon housing benefit, which provides medium- and low-income Yukoners with up to \$800 per month to help them afford their rent and to support them. I talked about Housing First. The Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation has also stated that we hope to invest in a new Housing First project, and that will be in Watson Lake.

Earlier this year, we released more than 250 lots. In this budget, we are investing \$30 million for lots across the Yukon. I just very quickly want to look back for a second. I added up the investments by the Yukon Party during their term in office over the four years. In their final four years, it was \$7.7 million, \$3.4 million, \$2.6 million, and \$10.3 million respectively for a total of \$24 million in lot investment over four years. We are beating that this year in one year. We are going to be developing lots here in Whitehorse and in virtually all communities.

Just some other things that we have been talking about — we have been investing in the Challenge Cornerstone project. We just recently announced that we are investing in Normandy Manor, which is going to offer supportive housing for seniors. I will leave it there for a moment.

One last thing that I will mention is that we have secured \$40 million as part of the northern carve-out of the national housing co-investment fund to support housing projects across the territory. Again, that is money that we have hunted and brought into the territory. It will help us both on the housing front and also on the infrastructure investment side.

Let me talk about infrastructure for a moment. I am just going to talk about infrastructure that we are investing in across the territory. Let me start with Watson Lake. We have a public works and fire hall building in Watson Lake that we are investing in. In Ross River, we are building a new sewage lagoon. In Faro — a public works and fire hall. In Keno, we have announced the Mayo to McQuesten transmission line. In Mayo, we just completed a fire hall and we're also doing water system upgrades.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: In Keno, we are doing the Mayo to McQuesten transmission line.

Sorry, Mr. Acting Speaker. Now I understand the comment. Yes, we just announced in Keno that we are working on the review of our fire service.

I will say that when the Member for Lake Laberge was talking about investing in the fire service, I just went through and listed off — and I went, "Okay, where are we investing in the fire halls and fire service?" Well, the fire service is everywhere, but fire halls — Mayo, Carmacks, Faro, Teslin, Watson Lake — and here in Whitehorse, we're not investing in the fire hall, but what we are investing in is the new city hall, which has moved their fire hall over. So, that's great.

So, let me just keep going with Whitehorse, then — the public transit hub and the city hall energy upgrades we're investing in. In my own communities: in Carcross, lagoon upgrades; in Mount Lorne, we're investing in a new public well and water treatment facility — I think that's \$500,000 this year to do the planning work and \$1.5 million the following year to do the infrastructure work — which is terrific; in Haines Junction, land development in Marshall Creek subdivision; on Burwash Landing, we're investing in the school — I remember driving with the Minister of Education to talk to the Kluane First Nation and we had in hand a letter that was — from 100 years to the day before we were arriving there — requesting an investment in a school.

For Carmacks, we're investing in the public works building, the fire hall — as I've already mentioned — and that rink; I have to get that rink going again. In Beaver Creek, there is a new sewage lagoon; in Pelly Crossing, a swimming pool; in Dawson City, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in youth centre; in Old Crow, the community centre and the 10-unit mixed-use housing.

This is a tremendous amount of investment. When I hear members opposite say that we should be careful about how much we're investing because they're concerned about the net debt — by all means, I just encourage them to stand up and tell me which project they don't want. I'll go talk to the community and let them know that it's not appreciated.

From my perspective in talking with the communities, they have a list that's much longer than this. They would like us to invest even more. So, part of it is that we go, we talk to the communities, we get their priorities set by them, and we're investing in the territory.

Let me talk, just for a second, about further investment in the budget around COVID. We have invested in supporting northern aviation with Air North and Alkan to make sure that they are doing well — or as well as they can be under such a tough time; pardon me. We have increased the eligibility criteria and extended the timeline for the Yukon business relief program. We have extended the paid sick leave rebates. We have invested a ton in tourism and culture and we are working hard to provide relief and then to transition to recovery.

Everyone wants to know: "When is it done?" I do, too. We all want to know that. I wish that I could tell you that. The thing that the Premier talked about today — and I will just comment on it as well — is that we know that the vaccine rollout is going very well here in the Yukon. We need it to go well across Canada. We have some positive news that we hear about that. The part that we need to watch and just check to make sure on are some of the variants — in particular, the Brazil variant or the South American variant and how well the vaccine works against that variant. I think that the signs are encouraging, but we are not there yet — we don't know yet — but when that happens, things will move very quickly.

So, I would just like to build on International Women's Day, as I finish up my remarks. When this pandemic hit, I said earlier in my remarks that it has not been even or fair across the Yukon — the types of jobs that it hurt, the people who were more affected — really, women have shouldered a lot of the

burden — whether that has been through domestic violence or whether that has been through the types of work that were adversely affected by COVID — kids at home for school and being the chosen caregiver to stay home — it has been tough on women. Just for a moment, especially on a day like today, I would like to acknowledge what they have done for us. One of the things that I would like to say is that, through what they have done — I see that how we recover out of COVID and how we rebuild out of COVID is really going to also be led by women. That is why I was so excited about universal childcare. If there is one economic policy that I see in our budget that is a game-changer, that is it.

I don't want to try to belittle any of the hardship that people have gone through in dealing with COVID. I was speaking with a constituent this weekend and she was talking to me about how tough it is that, if you want to go Outside to see your family or bring someone in, that there's still this 14-day self-isolation. That has been really tough on people, and I know it. I think that we all know it. We have still with us the need for self-isolation — or at least that is the advice that we get from the chief medical officer of health until we can be sure about — or closer to confident about — being safe.

But here's where the light is at the end of the tunnel: I've been looking across — not just Canada but also North America about vaccination rates. The Yukon is topping out that vaccination rate. The Yukon and NWT are the fastest. The Yukon has now — and probably today will surpass — 20 percent. Twenty percent of Yukoners now have both vaccines. We made this choice to vaccinate our most vulnerable — that was elders, seniors, front-line health care workers, those who are vulnerable at other times, and our communities. At the end of this week, we will finish that vaccination — the second round of vaccinations in our communities. I'm just so excited about that work that's happening. I know that there are some Yukoners who are hesitant in their choice. There are some Yukoners who will choose not to get vaccinated. I respect that is their choice, but there are some Yukoners who are just waiting for a little more confidence or information or certainty and I will work hard to get them that information.

Of the American jurisdictions — the US is doing better than the provinces — not as well as us, but it is doing very well — but Alaska is leading which is terrific news. Then we got this great piece of news late last week, which is that the Public Health Agency of Canada is starting to say that the time between the first dose and the second dose can be extended. With that, what will happen is that more Canadians and the provinces will get their first dose because the provinces won't wait to hold the second doses. They will get them into the arms of Canadians who want to get them. What that will mean is that the risk profile will adjust.

I think that there is light at the end of the tunnel. I think that this budget is talking about that. We put in place this \$15 million to be safe and to be careful, but more than that, we are investing in the territory — whether that is through infrastructure, universal childcare, *Our Clean Future*, or *Putting People First* — with all of these investments. Now is

the time to invest. I am excited about the budget because it will help the Yukon to transition into a positive future.

Hon. Ms. Frost: It is an honour to rise today to deliver my response to our government's fifth budget, the main estimates for the 2021-22 year. The budget marks a major turning point as the last main estimates budget to be tabled by this government in this mandate. Here you can see what the future holds for the territory.

Our future looks bright. Yukon is leading the country in the rate per capita of immunizations delivered as of today. We have held strong together through the worst of the pandemic.

Outside of the pandemic, this government has worked hard to chart a bold path to reform Yukon's health care systems. Mr. Speaker, we are hard at work creating a gold standard of person-centred wellness for the first time in our territory. We have created an ambitious plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions, we are building a green economy, and we are protecting our incredible, vast wilderness for future generations. We have created strong programs in partnerships to take on affordable housing concerns for our territory. We are demonstrating that, through partnerships rooted in collaboration and respect, anything is possible.

Mr. Speaker, this collaboration started here with this Liberal caucus four years ago. This is what one government looks like. We are a strong, compassionate team of leaders who have bridged gaps between our own portfolios to improve what this government can offer Yukoners. Early learning is now becoming a part of education. Social services are collaborating with housing through a social housing transformation that better aligns with client needs. The list goes on.

When collaboration happens, everyone wins. I can't help but look back at the team around me and feel the deep acknowledgement of how much growth and leadership has happened in these last four years — growth for our caucus and growth for the Yukon as this team has worked tirelessly to chart a new path of leadership for our territory, and here we are — more than four years into our mandate and finally able to take a deep breath and look back at all that has been accomplished.

That looks pretty great, Mr. Speaker. We've moved mountains to get here today, to provide the services — the essential services to Yukoners, services that have been neglected, services that have not specifically been provided to rural Yukon communities.

It has always been my first and deepest honour to represent my community of Vuntut Gwitchin. I am proud to speak today to the members of my riding, my home, about what this budget means to them and the future of our territory. As I say — and I've said this before — as a child growing up in Old Crow rooted in my teachings, the Gwitchin knowledge, and the teachings of our elders — as the Minister of Environment and of Health and Social Services and the Minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation, growing up in my community has brought me the strength and the knowledge of my people. It has taught me lessons that serve me well in this government, in my time working with the federal government, and in my time working with First Nation governments. These are lessons of

perseverance, of collaboration, of community compassion and strength and the importance of family. It's about reconciliation — reconciliation with our indigenous communities. These are the truths that don't always make it to the political arena. There are lessons learned early on with respect to land management, family ties, and the values that guide us that should really guide us here in this legislative Chamber, speaking about the truths, speaking about the realities of our communities. This work — we're guided here to represent the voice of the people. The path has not been easy, but true strength comes not from fear but from the conviction that you are doing the right thing.

From day one in this role, I knew why I was here and where I was going, because the direction is not my own. It is the direction put before me by the elders and knowledge-keepers of our community. Throughout the past four years, I have remained connected to the elders as they have always guided me on the right path. In light of this support, the politics of this job have never mattered to the work I do. Why? It is because true leadership is never just about one person. It's about the progress that you can make as a community — the progress that you can make working in collaboration with all stakeholders. It's about listening and putting into place programs and services that align with the core needs of our communities.

In all of my work, on a personal level and a professional level, I feel strongly about the gaps in services and supports that we have not provided to rural Yukon communities and that we are now providing to our communities. These are the realities of life. I live it because I grew up in an isolated rural community. I grew up without housing. I grew up without running water. I grew up without food on the table. I know what it's like to fight for our very existence — indigenous rights in this territory, reconciliation. It's about making sure that people are strong and healthy and that supports are there to heal the trauma and support the families to come together. It is support for elders to age in their own homes. It is support for safe and affordable housing. Have we met all of the targets? Absolutely not, but we are striving to meet the needs of Yukon communities.

We have put in place innovative approaches to address social housing transformation, to allow the elders to age well in their home communities. As a lead working for many of the First Nations on treaty implementation, I knew what it was like to work on the other side and push forward policies and policy direction as it relates to changes in implementation on the Peel, on YESAA, on land management, and on social transformation.

A few key issues for me and my community include a long-term vision that cares for the environment and the land that we call home. There is nothing more important than the health and well-being of our environment because we rely on our land for our subsistence and survival.

The harsh realities of climate change are affecting us here in the north faster than anywhere else on the planet. It is incumbent on us here, in the north, to stand together with our regions to change the course and protect the earth. There is no economy without the environment. I thank my Cabinet colleagues for this acknowledgement in working toward *Our Clean Future*.

With respect to the work accomplished by the Health and Social Services department, one of the first things that I took on — that our government took on — upon coming into our term was to improve supports and funding to ensure that our children remain in their home communities and not apprehending children. We established the extended family care agreements, as the majority of children in Yukon government care are indigenous — 78 percent of children, in fact. These agreements ensure that First Nation children who come in contact with government care agencies are placed within their family or community whenever possible. These traditional adoptions have been the custom of First Nation people since time immemorial and this reflection in Yukon government is the new standard of practice. It's monumental for the success of our children and our families. We are breaking the cycle of apprehension. Children are our most precious resource, and as adults, parents, guardians, and decision-makers, we must ensure that they are nurtured and cared for. We need to ensure that they are safe from harm, that they are fed and clothed, and that they have a roof over their heads, and, more importantly, that they receive the love that they so much deserve. We need to think of all the things we do or wish for our own children and multiply that for all Yukon children.

As a mother, as an aunty, as a First Nation — *dinjii zhuh* — and as the minister responsible for the welfare of children in this territory, I know the long-term effects and benefits of an early start to life. Strong supports at home and in the community are essential. Reducing the number of children in care remains one of my top priorities.

We are increasing the Family and Children's Services budget by more than \$2.9 million this year to increase supports for children and families. We are doing this in collaboration with First Nations on a progressive approach to supporting First Nation children in care. We created a trilateral table on child welfare to establish strategic priorities for child welfare activities and to promote capacity within First Nation government to improve outcomes for First Nation children and youth.

In January 2020, we embarked on Honouring Connections, steps toward reconciliation initiatives which propose guiding principles and a way forward for the collaboration reconnection process. This was created in equal partnership with Yukon First Nations and the Council for Yukon First Nations.

Another area for work with youth was improving supports for children aging out of government care. We created a new live-in and outreach program to support youth at Nts'aw Chua, including those transitioning out of care. For years, youth who aged out of government care didn't have the resources and supports they needed to transition into young adulthood. We did this in the face of criticism from the opposition members who didn't support a group home residence in Porter Creek — a "not in my backyard" approach that only serves to further marginalize youth. However, we know that raising youth in a residential setting instead of the downtown core provides a better environment and opportunities to create healthy and important connections to the community.

For our youngest learners, we increased the direct operating grant to daycares for the first time in 10 years. We developed the rural sustainability pilot project with the non-profit daycare centre in Watson Lake and the Little Blue Daycare in Dawson City to help these important facilities to continue to provide daycare services.

In total, this budget invests more than \$25 million toward early learning initiatives. This budget also supports \$670,000 in matching for the federal government's prenatal nutrition program and \$400,000 for integrated midwifery into our existing health care system.

Another huge initiative that we are embarking on to support our children is universal early learning childcare, a recommendation from the *Putting People First* report, which this government is proud to be implementing. In this budget, you will find \$15 million to support this new initiative, which saves families, on average, \$700 per child per month. This program will bring benefits to our youngest learners but also to parents and families who are burdened with heavy daycare costs. This will allow many parents the opportunity to re-enter the workforce, if they so choose — another great example of how *Putting People First* creates benefits shared by an entire society.

As Health and Social Services follows the continuum of life, we have worked hard to better support Yukoners at all stages. Elders are very important to all Yukon communities as an integral part of the family who provide love, support, guidance, and wisdom — the wisdom in history that has been very much a part of our story and very much a part of Yukon's story.

Just as I am committed to improving the lives of children and youth and supporting them to be the best they can be, I am committed also to support our aging population by conducting the aging-in-place consultative efforts. Last year, we were able to come away with significant recommendations from that group. We have a number of recommendations to implement that are care models. We are fortunate to have a growing senior population. In response to the needs of our seniors, we have budgeted \$86.8 million in the 2021-22 budget for continuing care, home care, respite care, palliative care programs, and community day homes.

To better support our seniors, we have increased seniors housing and long-term care at Whistle Bend Place, including a new community hospice house that offers 12 hospice, palliative care, and end-of-life care beds and six long-term care beds. We are continuing to develop education and resources to support caregivers for those with dementia. We are integrating First Nation programming at Whistle Bend Place with protocols developed for culturally focused services and ceremonies in the healing room. Imagine that. We have never had that in the Yukon — recognizing and appreciating the uniqueness of our traditional communities and tying that into program supports, knowing that we have a lot of our seniors now residing in these facilities.

We have greatly expanded home care to support Yukon seniors to age in place through successful programs like the home first program, which greatly improves supports for

seniors to return home after time in the hospital. We've also supported seniors through our housing initiative processes to conduct retrofits and renovations to allow them to age well in their homes through mobility supports and renovations. We opened a respite and re-enablement unit at the Thomson Centre in December 2018, and we are continuing to support individuals working toward their personal independence goals as part of the home first philosophy.

Through these measures, we have decreased the number of people in hospital who are waiting to return home or to a permanent place in a long-term care home. Historic pressure on hospital beds has been greatly reduced — another great example of how putting people first brings forward solutions in the health care system.

We are working with Yukon Housing Corporation and the private sector on the Normandy Manor, an affordable, supported independent living facility for seniors in Whitehorse, which I will expand on.

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

Debate on second reading of Bill No. 207 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled March 8, 2021:

34-3-74

Resignation as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole, letter re (dated March 8, 2021) from Don Hutton, Member for Mayo-Tatchun, to Hon. Nils Clarke, Speaker (Speaker Clarke)

Written notice was given of the following motion March 8, 2021:

Motion No. 426

Re: excluding bills amending territorial elections from Standing Order 76 (Cathers)