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HANSARD

Tuesday, March 9, 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
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*On March 8, 2021, Mr. Hutton resigned as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, March 9, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House that Motion No. 423, notice of which was given on March 8, 2021, by the Member for Lake Laberge, was not placed on today's Notice Paper as the motion is out of order.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask us all to welcome here today some folks from Engineers Yukon, who are here for the tribute for National Engineering Month. We have with us Ms. Kirsten Hogan, the president of Engineers Yukon; Mr. Chris Dixon, the past president; Kim King, the executive director; and Alison Anderson, who is part of the continuing professional development program and the 30 by 30 committee that works on increasing the number of women engineers in Engineers Yukon.

If we could welcome them, please.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today as the Minister of Education to welcome the Wood Street Centre ACES grade 10 class. They are accompanied by their teacher, Colin Abbott. We have with us today Will Taylor, Kalina Morrison, Neizha Snider, Kalie Bennett, Jason Schwalin, Paige Forester, Mackenzie Keefer, Olie Johnson, Sebastian Insley, Cambria Alford, Tenisha Mayes, Samantha Kirby, and Claire MacMillan. Thank you for being here.

Applause

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

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Engineering Month

Hon. Mr. Streicker: On behalf of the Yukon Liberal government and the Yukon NDP, I rise today to pay tribute to Yukon's engineers. March is National Engineering Month. Every year, this important event celebrates the invaluable role that engineers play in our communities. I unreservedly support its goal of inspiring young, diverse Canadians to explore and consider engineering as a profession. I think it is just terrific happenstance that we happen to have the Wood Street Centre School here today, so I get to give this tribute to them too.

Throughout the month, thousands of students, teachers, and parents will meet and interact with engineers to learn about what they do and how awesome it can be. Before studying engineering, if someone asked me what one plus one is, as the son of two math teachers, I would have said "two". Now I would say: "I'm pretty sure it is two, but we had better make it three, just to be safe."

Protecting the safety and well-being of the public, after all, is the engineer's primary function. It is a job they do so well that we often just take it for granted, whether it is satellites or cellphones, fibre optic networks, or roads, bridges, or dams, engineers ensure that our world works the way it is supposed to, as safely as possible. In the past, engineering professional conduct was largely concerned with safety, responsibility, and technical competence. While this is still the primary focus of professional development, the profession has expanded the view of its role to include wider environmental and social issues and to be more inclusive.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Engineers Yukon announced a landmark change to add caregiving as part of its continuing professional development program. I quote from their press release earlier today: "Engineers who are caregivers develop skills that both enhance the profession and enhance the public interest... Caregiving also enhances the protection of the public through the development of empathy and broader understanding of the needs of others." This is a first for Canada and coincides with International Women's Day and National Engineering Month, and I am so proud of what Engineers Yukon is doing to contribute to our overall well-being and bring in fresh, diverse ideas. Diversity is one of our greatest strengths, bringing different perspectives to the table, prompting us to re-examine our preconceptions, and it challenges us to try to do better.

We need to look no further than the team of hard-working Yukon engineers to appreciate this fact. They come from a range of backgrounds, from communities across the country and around the world, each bringing a unique perspective to their role as a result. This diversity of experiences and views enables them to develop innovative solutions to some of the territory's greatest infrastructure challenges and to do so while prioritizing the safety and well-being of the Yukon.

As Theodore Von Kármán, the Hungarian-American aerospace engineer, mathematician, and physicist noted — and I quote: "Scientists study the world as it is, engineers create the world that never has been." We see that here in the Yukon, Mr. Speaker, and our departments of Community Services and Highways and Public Works see that here in the Yukon as well. From the Nisutlin Bay bridge to grid battery storage, engineers are designing infrastructure that will improve Yukoners' lives for generations to come.

So, on behalf of the Government of Yukon and the Third Party, I would like to thank all of the territory's engineers. Through your dedication, innovation, and tireless work, you are helping to build safer, healthier, more prosperous communities for all Yukoners. Merci, thank you.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition and the Independent member to recognize March as National Engineering Month here in Canada.

Engineering is part of everyday aspects of society here at home and around the world. This month, we celebrate engineering achievement and advancement and look at the importance of inspiring the next generation of engineers. We don't have to look far to see the importance of engineering.

Using science and mathematics to make things work in the most effective, efficient, and magnificent ways, engineers are some of the most instrumental pieces to the fabric of society, of cities, of infrastructure, and more. Our buildings, roadways, subdivisions, electrical equipment, vehicles, engines — for these, we have engineers to thank. So, this month, we would like to recognize the work of engineers.

We would like to thank them for putting their brains to work for the greater good, for their ideas and forward thinking. Civil, mechanical, electrical, chemical engineering, environmental — such different fields, but all with the same goal: to solve problems. They work with dirt, construction material, cogs, pulleys, engines, robotics. They work with electricity, computers, and chemical components and so, so much more. Imagine a career where the sky is the limit and where different interests and abilities come together to create incredible things and solve impossible problems. Engineering could be that career.

I encourage all the youth who find they have an interest in any one of things I've mentioned today to explore a little further to see whether engineering might be an option for them. I think, here in the Yukon, such amazing work is done to get our youth involved and interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. We know that these important trades will continue to be major contributors to our economy and within each of our communities.

With International Women's Day taking place during National Engineering Month, I would like to acknowledge Engineers Yukon for their 30 by 30 campaign to increase the representation of women within the engineering field — their commitment to raise the percentage of newly licensed engineers who are women by 30 percent by the year 2030 from the current rate of 17 percent.

I would also like to commend Engineers Yukon for highlighting two of the women who make up the 17 percent during International Women's Day. The stories of Kirsten Hogan and Sandra MacDougall and the paths that they took in the fields of engineering can be found on Engineers Yukon's Facebook page.

I would also like to give a special shout-out to Engineers Yukon's newest female professional engineer and my friend, Jamie Davignon, who I was hoping would be here in the gallery with us today. I would like to thank these three engineering professionals for your leadership as more young women aspire to follow in your footsteps.

Once again, I would like to thank all of those involved in engineering here in the Yukon. Your contributions continue to

drive our communities forward and make our territory a better and safer place to live, work, play, and raise our families.

Applause

In recognition of Bonanza Creek gold discovery 125th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the 125th anniversary of the Bonanza Creek gold discovery. In August of 1896, Skookum Jim (Keish), Tagish or later, Dawson Charlie (Kaa Goox), and Kate Carmack (Shaaw Tláa) and her husband, George, changed the history of Yukon and its people forever.

In what was known as Rabbit Creek, a small tributary that flows into the Klondike River, the group found the first shiny nuggets of gold. George Carmack wrote the name "Bonanza" on a piece of bark and nailed it to the discovery post. The name stuck and the stream became known as one of the richest and most famous gold-bearing streams in the world.

Little did the group know that the discovery would spark the beginning of a major change in Yukon and one of the world's largest industrial migrations, the Klondike Gold Rush. Thousands of people from all over the world caught gold fever and poured into the territory by whatever means possible with dreams of striking it rich. Dawson became the Paris of the North where gold dust could buy anything. Along with the miners, others also arrived in the Yukon, looking to make a new life. Business, government, entertainment and much more exploded on the scene, creating a vibrant, bustling city. The discovery of gold in Yukon coincided with revolutionary photographic technology. Photographers and journalists came equipped with the newest hand-held cameras. The Klondike Gold Rush became one of the most photographed events of the time.

Although it only lasted a few short years, the gold rush impacts and effects are still visible today. Our Yukon licence plate features a goldpanner, and driving into Dawson, the tailing piles are a visible reminder of the huge dredges that remodeled the landscape in search of gold. Placer mining around Dawson, including on Bonanza Creek, still continues today and remains an important part of our economy and the way of life here in the north.

Two national historic sites of Canada have been designated along Bonanza Creek: the Discovery claim and Dredge No. 4. Dawson also has a number of historic buildings from that time, including the Palace Grand Theatre and the old territorial administration building. People from all over the world visit Dawson and the Yukon to see the special place that sparked the stampede for gold.

I know that this time in history was not always positive and the impacts of development and colonialism are still felt today, but working together on reconciliation and sharing all the stories from this time are important. In fact, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has put forward an application to have the region and this aspect of its history recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Tr'ondëk Klondike is a testament to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's enduring relationship with the land and their successful adaptation to a dramatically changing world initiated

by the Klondike Gold Rush. The gold rush made a dramatic contribution to shaping the culture and society of the Yukon today. I encourage all Yukoners to reflect on the history and significance of gold's discovery 125 years ago and the many impacts it has had on the Yukon and its people.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition, the New Democratic Party, and the Independent member to pay tribute to 125 years of Yukon history and the Bonanza discovery.

On Rabbit Creek near Dawson City in 1896, a group had settled for a few days in the area to fish. George Carmack, his native wife, Kate Carmack, Skookum Jim, and Tagish Charlie were synonymous with the discovery. Dipping into the crisp, cold, clear water of the creek, gold-coloured rocks caught their eye. "The rest is history" is the phrase we would use.

A year later, after a shipment of gold arrived in Seattle in 1897, news broke: "Eureka", "strike", "gold", "bonanza". With talk of the wealth in this far northern point, the Klondike stampede began. At the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon rivers, Joe Ladue and Arthur Harper staked and established a settlement called "Dawson City". From the swampy area of ground nestled between the rich hills, the population grew and grew to over 30,000 plus. Dawson City became the Paris of the North — the largest city north of Seattle — complete with dance halls, gambling, brothels, shops, and liquor.

What else was happening in the world at this time, you ask? Well, the first Olympic Games were held in Athens with 280 athletes. Marconi patented the first radio. Henry drove his first Ford through the streets of Detroit. The first movie theatre opened.

Oh my, the world was modernizing at an alarming rate. Up north, as the stampeders came, Canada realized that this area had to have a better system to protect Canada's interests, as the majority of the incoming were Americans. Three such Americans were Ira Van Bibber, along with his brothers Theodore and Patrick, who came from West Virginia to find their fortune.

Arriving at the Skagway port, they found they were not allowed to enter Canada without a large grubstake. So, all of them being well over six feet, four inches, they began hiring out their strong backs to haul for others over the trail. Once allowed into Canada, they had missed the main rush. The two brothers continued on to the Nome strike, but they missed that as well.

Theodore is now buried in Fairbanks and Patrick made it back to Washington State, where he is buried. Ira stayed, married Eliza, and their large family is well-known throughout most of Yukon.

Canada passed the *Yukon Act* in 1898 and made the capital of the new territory Dawson City. The price of an ounce of gold that year was \$18.90. The creeks had names that still resonate today: Hunker, Dominion, Eldorado, and Rabbit Creek, which was changed to Bonanza Creek. There were no road systems as we know today and the rivers plied the waterways with sternwheelers of varying sizes to move the ore, supplies, and passengers. These vessels also moved the gold. Joe Boyle, a

famous Yukoner, made his money by optioning land from the government and put his first dredge to work in September 1898. There were soon 12 dredges working along the valleys, churning and clanging slowly up and down the creeks in the Klondike region. The last dredge shut its power off in 1966. The companies that formed — the last, known as the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corp., or YCGC — constructed hydroelectric plants to supply power to those dredges by forming dams and ditches to channel the water to ensure that there was enough water to make power — innovative and challenging at the time, but it was done. The North Fork power plant and the diesel plant in Dawson City were sufficient for the area.

Within two years, the rush ended and Dawson's population dropped rapidly. I grew up in that sleepy, dusty little Dawson town with the relics of the history all around us, but we were oblivious to the values of the pieces of stuff about us.

One hundred and twenty-five years later, we are adept at sharing our history, especially the discovery of gold. When visitors started to come north in the late 1950s, there was a realization that we had something the world wanted to see and learn about this well-known part of history. As I can attest, born Yukoners have seen many, many changes, but in the scheme of the world, we have a young history and so much to be proud of, as we are a strong and resilient people.

I am going to end with my favourite quote from Robert Service's *Spell of the Yukon*:

I wanted the gold, and I sought it;
I scabbled and mucked like a slave.
Was it famine or scurvy — I fought it;
I hurled my youth into a grave.
I wanted the gold, and I got it —
Came out with a fortune last fall, —
Yet somehow life's not what I thought it,
And somehow the gold isn't all.

No! There's the land. (Have you seen it?)
It's the cussedest land that I know,
From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it
To the deep, deathlike valleys below.
Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some say it's a fine land to shun;
Maybe; but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth — and I'm one.

So, the 125th anniversary of discovery — cheers, Yukoners.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Istchenko: I have a letter for tabling dated October 29, 2020. It is from the Minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation to me, as the MLA for Kluane. It references a

gathering space for the St. Elias Seniors Society that they were evicted from.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No.19: Act to Amend the Family Property and Support Act (2021) — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 19, entitled *Act to Amend the Family Property and Support Act (2021)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 19, entitled *Act to Amend the Family Property and Support Act (2021)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 19 agreed to

Bill No. 20: Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (2021) — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 20, entitled *Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (2021)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 20, entitled *Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (2021)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 20 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Mr. Adel: I rise to give notice of the following motion:
THAT this House supports:
(1) plans to expand the existing Atlin hydro plant;
(2) negotiations for an electricity purchase between Yukon Energy Corporation and the Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership; and
(3) the \$10 million allocated from this year's budget for this project.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation to allow the St. Elias Seniors Society and their seniors advocate to move back into the dedicated space in their building, as promised, after removing them during the pandemic for now-completed renovations.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works, the Minister of Education, and the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation to work together on employee housing priorities in the community of Beaver Creek by:

(1) identifying or reallocating housing for full-time employees and their families appropriate in size and functionality based on their family situations and length of employment; and

(2) considering renting rooms in local hotels to accommodate temporary employees.

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

THAT this House urges the Liberal government to cancel their plans to implement new rules for agriculture land on April 1, 2021, that negatively impact the market value of agriculture properties and make it harder to get a building permit.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that the Liberal government's current plan to impose a 60-metre no-development riparian buffer on titled land in the Shallow Bay area is not fair to those property owners, especially those whose homes are impacted, and if approved by Cabinet, would set a dangerous precedent for such a measure to potentially be imposed on titled land in other zoning areas next.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to recognize the changing demographics of downtown Whitehorse and work with families, the school council, and the Department of Education to address concerns that children residing in downtown Whitehorse are unable to attend the school nearest to where they live.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to:
(1) take immediate action to address the avalanche hazards caused by near record-breaking snowfall on the south Klondike Highway between Carcross and Fraser, BC and the number of road closures due to avalanche and avalanche risk;

(2) have a third-party audit performed by qualified avalanche professionals of the Highways and Public Works avalanche safety program; and

(3) immediately adopt British Columbia's threshold guidelines for avalanche safety measures to inform the travelling public of road closures in advance of closures coming into effect due to avalanche danger or avalanches reaching public roadways.

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion:
THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to consult and work with the Selkirk Street Elementary School

Council to ensure that student safety and active transportation are factored in prior to finalizing plans for a parking lot and drop-off area behind the school on Selkirk Street.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to consult and work with the Selkirk Street Elementary School Council to address the lack of available classroom space at Selkirk Street Elementary School before expanding enrolment in French immersion kindergarten.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Atlin hydro expansion project

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, this year's budget includes substantial investments toward renewable energy projects identified in Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable electricity plan.

There is \$10 million included to advance the Atlin hydro expansion project. The project would expand the infrastructure and power production capacity on Pine Creek from 2.1 megawatts to approximately 10 megawatts. The additional energy would increase our territory's supply of dependable renewable electricity. This project has the potential to bring 46 gigawatt hours of clean, renewable electricity to the Yukon grid, which represents about 10 percent of our total on-grid energy demand. This would reduce our need for rental diesel generators by four units, bringing both an economic and environmental benefit to the north, and would provide enough power for roughly 3,750 homes. It would also provide more renewable energy in the winter when our demand is the highest.

The project will make a significant contribution toward meeting our renewable energy generation goal for electricity generation under *Our Clean Future* which aims for 97 percent of our on-grid electricity to be generated by renewable sources by 2030.

Over the past three years, Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership, which is 100-percent owned by the Taku River Tlingit First Nation citizens, has invested over \$3 million in evaluating the feasibility of the project and completing some of the initial design work for the facility. Last fall, the partnership with Yukon Energy signed an agreement in principle to work collaboratively to advance the project and negotiate an electricity purchase agreement for the project. The partnership recently secured \$2.5 million in federal funding to complete preliminary design and engineering work, and in December, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation issued a clan directive to support the hydro expansion project and the partnership has submitted environmental permitting applications to British Columbia and permitting applications to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board for the project's transmission connection to Jake's Corner.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is pleased to support this partnership between Yukon Energy and Tlingit Homeland

Energy Limited Partnership. Collaborating with First Nations to expand renewable energy capacity will create economic opportunities and keep our economy strong and resilient. Expanding the territory's renewable energy capacity will increase energy security and economic self-reliance in our communities, making them more resilient, and it will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

Access to funding is key to being able to move forward on these kinds of projects and ensuring that electricity costs for Yukon homes and businesses are managed carefully. Subject to legislative approvals, we are allocating \$30 million from the green infrastructure stream of the Investing in Canada infrastructure program over the next two years to this project and are actively engaging with our federal counterparts to find additional support that will ensure that electricity from this project will be affordable for the territory. A shared purpose, a shared vision, and a shared message will provide the critical foundation of making our case for funding support with the Government of Canada. Together with our First Nation partners, we can make a compelling story that will help bring this ground-breaking project to life.

Mr. Kent: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to this ministerial statement as the Yukon Party energy critic.

We support green energy and getting the territory off of fossil fuels. As you know, the Liberals have spent the last few years increasing our reliance on diesel as they have started to rent more and more diesel generators, shipping money to Alberta, leaving Yukoners with no assets, and even hiding some of those generators in Faro in spite of the additional cost to do so.

They currently have a rate application before the Yukon Utilities Board seeking to increase rates to Yukoners with money in there to install brand new diesel generators. So, seeing the Liberals focus on green energy and talking about that here today is a change that is welcomed.

I do have some questions about this project and what appears to be ballooning capital costs and the project going overbudget. According to Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable plan, this project was estimated to cost around \$120.7 million in 2019. However, in December 2020, while appearing here as a witness in this Assembly, the president of the Energy Corporation told us that the estimated cost had increased to around \$200 million. So, I am hoping that the minister can explain why the estimated costs have increased by around \$80 million and what the current estimated cost of the project is.

The 10-year plan from November 2020 said it would be a six-megawatt project, yet today we hear that it is going to be eight megawatts. So, has the project scope changed from November to now? I am hoping that the minister can elaborate on that as well when he is on his feet again.

Also, in December, the Energy Corporation told us that the project was expected to be on grid in 2024. Is that still the case today? The YEC president mentioned that an electricity purchase agreement was being negotiated and was expected to

be concluded in quarter one of this year. I am wondering if that is still the case, and if so, will that agreement be made public?

Negotiations were also underway with ATCO on upgrades to the portion of the line that they own from Jake's Corner into Whitehorse, and I am curious if that work has concluded as well. With respect to this project, the 10-year renewable strategy stated — and I quote: “Without federal funding, these projects are not considered cost-competitive, and would most likely not be approved by the Yukon Utilities Board.” It also states — and I quote again: “YEC and THELP are actively collaborating on securing government grant funding for the project, which will be critical to supporting the project economics while keeping the price of energy and capacity procured under the EPA affordable to Yukon customers.”

So, I am wondering if the minister can let us know if the money that he mentions today is sufficient enough to make this project cost-competitive and to have it approved by the Yukon Utilities Board.

Also, finally, when this project is all said and done, what is the minister expecting that the impacts to our energy bills will be?

Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, we wish to congratulate the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership on the leadership that they continue to show when it comes to developing clean, renewable power. I remember the first time that I listened to CEO Peter Kirby lay out the vision that was held by the Taku River Tlingit First Nation in the community of Atlin — one of 100-percent renewable power generated in the community, by the community, and for the community. This community worked long and hard to get the Pine Creek project up and going, and since then, it has been transformative.

In a Yukon Energy press release dated February 25, 2021, Peter Kirby, president and CEO of the Taku Group of Companies, said this: “TRTFN began operating its first hydro project in 2009. For over a decade, it has shut down polluting diesel generation and provided clean energy to Sunny Atlin. As our community moves toward clean energy, citizens in our homeland have also made personal decisions and investments to move from oil fired furnaces to utilize this clean energy to heat their homes. Our first project was a small step towards reconciling our collective history and this expansion project will be another significant step in that direction. Socially, culturally, and economically we are Yukoners and so we are honoured to be able to share our resources to provide a cleaner energy future for Yukoners and a brighter future for our citizens and all Atlinites.”

Then, Yukon Energy president, Andrew Hall, went on to say — and I believe that he sums up what we all believe future energy projects can look like when he said — and I quote: “This project is also special because of the opportunity it provides us to work directly with yet another First Nation government and development corporation to build the clean energy future that Yukoners need and want.”

So, Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to support this initiative between the Taku River Tlingit, Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership, and the Yukon Energy Corporation. This is an excellent example of what happens when partners truly work together. We look forward to seeing this project completed, knowing that Yukon will be able to reduce our dependence on fossil fuel when it comes online.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I will try to quickly do a speed round on answers here.

First of all, from the Yukon Party, I think that it is a mischaracterization to say that, while we are in government, we have increased our reliance on fossil fuels. What we have done is that we have ensured that we have a backup in place so that, if one of our main assets such as Aishihik were to go down, we would actually have a backup in place. I think that is first and foremost, and I think that, as people see this year again with water levels the way they are, we are going to again be in very good shape on the amount of renewable that we will produce, but still moving toward increasing.

As for the project, we are now getting to a point where the engineering work is being done. It is just starting, and it is project open. For my engineering friends here, they would sense that this is where we are scoping out what our budget looks like, what our cost is, and our business model that we are using.

I have seen this over and over again by the Yukon Party. They refer to numbers before the project has started, in the early stage of budget, and here we are now, working with the TRT to build this project. We will take this project and our electricity purchase agreement to the Yukon Utilities Board with complete accountability to show exactly what the deal is as it is inked, and that will give opportunity for them to go through the rigour and show.

I think that, so far, the group has been doing a fantastic job at looking at what it will be. I think that Yukoners will be extremely pleased with the costing of this, the model that is in place, how we can reduce the cap ex by leveraging money with our partners, as we have done already on this project, so I look forward to that.

I appreciate the kind words from the NDP toward Mr. Kirby and the work that they've done and the success of this project. Again, we have to remember that what is difficult about this is that shots about our budget on this and our financial approach to it from folks in the back of the Yukon Party hollering out — these are the same folks who spent \$4 million having roundtable discussions over a period of two or three years. It was almost \$5 million. The only thing to show was some pretty logos and some branding — no projects. When we wonder how we got to the place where we are now, all we have to do is go back just a bit in time and we would understand how we got here.

I am also happy that this year's budget will have \$4.5 million in it for our grid-scale battery, which will be the largest battery in the north and potentially in Canada. I think that is a very significant step forward. There is \$2.3 million included for the Mayo-McQuesten transmission line upgrade,

which is another significant piece — getting it done, building it, previous promises, and building being done. Also, as I said, there is the \$10 million for Atlin.

Again, I think it's also important to talk about those partnerships. The Haeckel Hill wind project — again, we are in partnership with Chu Níikwān Development Corporation for that to be in place. Now that we are freeing up infrastructure funds — of course, because of COVID, there were some challenges, but we will be able to have the Old Crow solar project with Vuntut Gwitchin go live. Anyone who has listened to Chief Dickson will know that they are now procuring from a new source and their wind project continues to move forward with financing from the government and expansion on biomass.

I am happy to be working with the Carcross Tagish First Nation Energy Corporation on their feasibility work for their wind project, on the wind and storage project in Pelly Crossing with the Selkirk First Nation, as well as the work that we have embarked on with the White River First Nation. Again, there is a lot of work and a lot of thanks to the Yukon Energy Corporation, the Yukon Development Corporation, Energy, Mines and Resources, and all the folks moving these many projects ahead.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic public health measures

Mr. Hassard: Yesterday we asked the Liberals about their path forward to reopening. The Premier said that we can see the finish line from here when it comes to getting life back to normal in the Yukon; however, the *A Path Forward* plan that he introduced on Friday afternoon tells a different story.

It says that we can expect to remain in the next phase until the end of 2021 with no timeline to enter that phase; however, the old path forward plan stated that the next phase would be implemented once a vaccine was available. So, this new document announced last Friday adds additional requirements beyond vaccines to reach it, and unfortunately, it provides no metrics or numbers explaining how or when the Liberals will make the determination to switch to the next phase.

Can the Premier tell us: When are we going to reach the finish line?

Hon. Mr. Silver: A shout-out to Dr. Hanley and his ability this morning to reach out to folks on the airwaves to add to my voice as far as where we are right now with the variant and where we are with *A Path Forward*.

I will say that the changes that we made to *A Path Forward* are based upon the new realities. Imagine developing a path forward and talking about vaccinations nine months ago — not knowing that Yukon was going to be prioritized, not knowing which and when vaccines are going to come out, in what kind of order and those types of things. The work that the team at Health and Social Services and the chief medical officer of health, the ECO and I — working together to bring certainty to very uncertain times — is, I think, great work that has been done.

What we see with the new plan is basically a filling in of the fact that public health orders and guidelines must be followed. Testing and contact tracing are available and need to be used. The risk of importation needs to be minimized, and the health system has the capacity to meet the needs and to prepare if responses are necessary. We have proven that in the past by opening to a bubble to BC but also then being able to move backwards as well when epidemiology says that we have to for the safety of Yukoners.

So again, Mr. Speaker, we anticipate being able to lift restrictions very soon, and I'm going to continue to work with the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health and give those answers as soon as they become available.

Mr. Hassard: When we asked yesterday about a return to full-time, in-person classes, the Premier mentioned that we would be there — quote: "... once we get to an effective level of vaccination..." However, the *A Path Forward* document released on Friday also says that one of the requirements to go back to in-person classes is for students being eligible for a vaccine and that the vaccine needs to be effective against onward transmission for this to occur.

Can the Premier clarify: Is that determination only being made on "an effective level of vaccination" or is it also being made based on whether or not children are eligible for vaccines? When does the government expect students to be eligible for vaccines?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm going to have to look back to Hansard to see exactly what information the member opposite is putting forward. To me, it's about effective vaccination levels, and right now it's the adult population that can get vaccinated, so that's what we're talking about. We will be having an update press conference tomorrow. Dr. Hanley and I have been working tirelessly to update Yukoners every week, if possible, and we will continue to do that and we will do that tomorrow as well when we get the information. We're working with Justice right now; we're working with Education right now; we're working with Health and Social Services. All the departments are working together to get the most timely information out for Yukoners.

We're in a situation right now in Yukon where we are ahead of the curve. Where other jurisdictions in Canada are finally able to go into restaurants and open up sports clubs and then seeing sports clubs close down again, we are in the enviable position of most other jurisdictions in Canada. We are asking Yukoners to be a bit more patient here as the rest of Canada catches up to where we are. We are all asking people to — if you're healthy and over 18 years old and if you have any hesitance, please come forward and let us know and share what your hesitance is, because the best thing that we can do while we are in this situation is to get vaccinated if possible. If we get to those levels of vaccination here and in Canada, this will be a very, very bright spring and a very, very bright summer.

Mr. Hassard: It's not very bright when it doesn't appear that the Premier has even read this path forward that he announced on Friday. It indicates that there are four considerations that must be met to create a bubble with another

jurisdiction. One of them is that we need a high overall vaccination rate for the entire Yukon population.

So, a very simple question — what number is considered a high overall vaccination rate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, the chief medical officer of health has been very clear on that. When we started with the number of 75 percent, that was a number that was guided by national conversations, both with his team and with my team as well, about what would be — we felt at that time — an acceptable level of people who would be willing to get the vaccination.

What is the actual number of vaccinations needed for us to stop variants that are now being tested in Brazil? The member opposite is asking me for something that the medical community at large doesn't have an answer to. With all due respect to the member opposite, I can't answer that question right now.

What I can say is that, since the pandemic became a reality within the Yukon, we have worked with the chief medical officer of health and our partner governments to keep Yukoners safe. We have followed the advice of the medical officers, the experts of the territory, because that's what we want to do — to follow science, not politics, when it comes to keeping Yukoners safe. We'll continue to do that.

Tomorrow will be another day of updates with the chief medical officer of health and with me, and I would ask members opposite to pay attention to those weekly meetings and to help us spread the information from those meetings to the general public in their ridings as well. The best thing that we can do as legislators working together is to help spread the best, most up-to-date information on the vaccine schedules and the availability of those vaccines and the information from the chief medical officer of health.

Question re: Government of Yukon borrowing limit

Mr. Cathers: As we pointed out on October 2, 2018, the Premier said this to the Legislative Assembly: "I'll just say up front that we're not contemplating taking on any extra debt for our five-year capital plan..." But then, just nine days later, the Premier wrote the federal government and asked to have the territory's debt limit doubled so he could take on extra debt for their five-year capital plan. So, the Premier told the House one thing and then did the complete opposite just days later.

Can the Premier tell us what changed between October 2 when he said that he wasn't contemplating extra debt and October 11 when he wrote the federal government saying that he is contemplating extra debt and wanted them to double the debt limit?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Increasing the ability to borrow is different from borrowing, so nothing changed; there is no difference between those two.

Mr. Speaker, I will say this for the record — and we have answered this question ad nauseum at this point, from the member opposite. It is the same question; it is kind of lazy.

When the government took office, we did inherit debt from the Yukon Party. As of March 31, 2016, the outstanding balance was reported to be \$201.558 million of debt left over

from the Yukon Party. This is directly attributed to the time that the Yukon Party was in power. Our government has paid \$30.591 million to reduce the debt over the last four years. That was not mentioned in my previous discussions, so I want to add this information for the record. After paying that \$30.591 million of the inherited debt, there is still \$170.967 million outstanding from the \$201.558-million debt as of March 31, 2016.

Now, if we look at the total government debt — not debt limits, but debt — as of March 31, 2020, we see a total of \$228.4 million in outstanding debt. Of this, 75 percent is attributable to borrowing from the Yukon Party.

Mr. Cathers: We are holding the Premier to his own words in the Legislative Assembly, which are contradicted by a letter that he sent just nine days later. Let's get the timeline straight. On October 2, 2018, the Premier said this in the Legislative Assembly: "... we are not contemplating borrowing." Then, on October 11, just nine days later, he wrote to the Trudeau government and said this — quote: "... I would like to request that our borrowing limit is raised \$800 million."

So, in just nine days, the Premier went from "I don't want to borrow money" to "Yes, I want to borrow up to \$800 million", which is, Mr. Speaker, of course, doubling the debt limit.

Can the Premier tell us on what day between October 2 and October 11 that he made the decision that he would ask the federal government to double the debt limit?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yeah, I can imagine. We've sat here for four years and been chastised on our ability to handle the finances — again, working with a surplus budget and now there's a contingency this year with the opportunity for surplus pending the outcome. Again, there was \$201 million in debt when we arrived in 2016 and then of course we're now at \$228 million, so folks can do the math once again. But I will say that what comes to mind is one of the biggest liabilities that I had to deal with in my responsibility, again, was the member opposite who is asking the questions — the architect of a \$40-million loan to be paid back over two years, Mr. Speaker, was the plan — with no plan in place. I walked into the briefing with the Yukon Development Corporation and was quickly told — I said, "Where is the money to pay this back in two years?" There is not.

I've never — can you imagine sitting with your business partner and saying, "Sorry, I took a \$40-million loan out; we're going to pay it back in two years" and a year into it, sitting back with that person and saying "You know what? I actually don't have any way to pay this back."

The Member for Lake Laberge was the architect of that. Yukoners and taxpayers are now paying that back over the next 40 years. I can't wait to hear the next question.

Mr. Cathers: It's not surprising that the Premier is choosing to hide behind his minister instead of answering why he said one thing in the House and did the exact opposite just nine days later. I would remind the minister: It's pretty rich coming from a gentleman who spent \$13.6 million renting

diesel generators to criticize the previous government's record on energy.

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about the Premier's statements in this House which were very clear on October 2, 2018, and then it was just nine days later that he wrote a letter that completely contradicted his statements. It's very hard to believe that in just nine days the Premier completely changed his mind and decided that he did want to borrow money after denying it here in the Legislative Assembly.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about the Premier's letter with the Premier's signature on it. How can Yukoners trust the Premier if the Premier will not tell the truth in the Legislative Assembly?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: The Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The member opposite has breached section 19(g) of the Standing Orders by using unparliamentary language. He has accused the Premier of failing to tell the truth in this House and in other locations. I note that this is contrary to the parliamentary language as set out in section 19(g). It is, in fact, insulting and it is improper for him to use that kind of language in this Legislative Assembly.

I note, Mr. Speaker, that in addition to the Standing Order itself, the annotated Standing Order notes that the context of the comments must be looked at by the Speaker in making a ruling — the intention of the conduct by the member opposite must be looked at. As a result, I submit to you that those are both improper in this instance.

Lastly, I note that the annotation in the Standing Order indicates that there is a concept of whether or not disorder has been brought about by the comments that are unparliamentary. I note in my submission to you, Mr. Speaker, that just because the members on this side of the House sit politely and listen to such improper language, it should not affect the ruling that you might give that such language is, in fact, improper, unparliamentary, and should not be used and should be withdrawn in this instance.

Speaker: The Member for Lake Laberge, on the point of order.

Mr. Cathers: I don't believe that there is a point of order. I would hope that the minister's long recitation of parts of the Standing Order will not count against the time allowed for Question Period.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: I likely could have dealt with this quite quickly because the final words that the Member for Lake Laberge uttered were really — and he likely knows this — directly in contravention of Standing Order 19(h), where he was —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: I could have dealt with this unassisted, thank you.

Saying "not telling the truth" has the mental element of uttering a deliberate falsehood, so the Member for Lake Laberge well knows that.

As far as the time, in my view, this was relatively straightforward. We will take 10 seconds off the clock.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: It is upheld, but it would have been a quick finding. I also will review Hansard to confirm what I believe I had heard, but I take all members' points that it became a bit muddled because of the contributions of members. I am virtually certain of what I heard, but I will review Hansard and return, as required.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, if it helps at all, I did press pause on my timer as we started into the Point of Order and I do have a timer of 12 minutes and 35 seconds for Question Period, if that is helpful.

Speaker: If you just have a moment, I will confer with the Clerks.

The Clerks will provide me guidance as to what the cut-off time is, but as I indicated, I estimate that it would have taken me approximately 10 seconds to make this determination.

Let us continue.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, you know, we just think that it is really important to correct the record, going back to 2001, \$201 million in place and now \$228 million. Shouts from across the way to answer the question — I think it was more accusations than questions.

When I look at my notes here — just for the good people of Lake Laberge — one thing I would add is that, if you want to talk about saying one thing and doing the other, today there was a motion tabled by the Member for Lake Laberge and then a fear tactic on a riparian zone from a recommendation — so, just to add, the Member for Lake Laberge scaring people about a 60-meter riparian zone. I think, again, that he forgets that, while he was in government, he — in his own riding — put in a 100-metre riparian zone. So, what we consistently get here is one action and it not lining up with the values that are being shouted.

Again, when we talk about debt, our biggest liability that we had to deal with was the \$40-million loan. He was the architect of it. He said that it would be paid back in two years. The CFO who was there at the time was the person who briefed me, and there was no plan to pay it back. That's the way things used to be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question re: Early learning and childcare programs

Ms. White: The Premier has stated and budget documents show that \$25 million will be invested in early childhood education and childcare. The funding for this programming used to come from Health and Social Services, but now it's coming from the Education budget. Yet the Education budget is only going up by \$18 million, not \$25 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, the \$7 million question is: Where's the money coming from? Is the government cutting \$7 million from elsewhere in the Education budget?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite can be laid at rest to know that \$25 million is being dedicated in this year's budget to early childhood, which includes the early childcare piece but also some work on pre-kindergarten as well as some amazing initiatives here. I don't recall making any cuts, but again, the two different ministers in Committee of the Whole will have an opportunity to speak in-depth about each one of their budgets.

I will talk with them as well to make sure that everything's copasetic, but yeah, I don't recall cuts to the Department of Education in order to fund the universal childcare. What we'll do is we'll take a look to confer, but there is \$25 million available for this initiative and we're very, very happy and proud of the work that the two departments have done together to make sure, as we come out of COVID and look toward the new normal, that part of that new normal is more supports for parents who are raising young children in the education system and in the daycare system as well.

Ms. White: I thank the Premier for that answer, but he didn't explain where the \$7-million difference was coming from, so Yukoners are left to wonder.

Last October, without any consultations with parents or education partners, this government moved more than 130 students away from individual education plans. As a result, many students lost their educational assistants and other protections under the *Education Act*. The move was denounced by the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Yukon Learn, the Yukon Teachers' Association, Autism Yukon, and parents and caregivers, yet this government has refused to listen and reverse their decision.

Why did the government choose to cut supports to students who need it most, and when will the Yukon Liberal government reverse their decision to unilaterally move students off of individual education plans?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. I disagree wholeheartedly with much of the information that is contained therein as a result of work that has been ongoing in relation to individual learning plans in the territory. The most important part of the situation at the moment for Yukoners to be aware of — and we have been working diligently to make this in fact the case — is that there is a review of special education initiatives with respect to determining how students, how children, how families are experiencing the current situation. We began this work back in 2018. It was indicated to the Auditor General at the time that the work needed to be looked at by the Auditor General, that our current situation needed to be reviewed by them and, in fact, was the case. As a result, the report that came out in June 2019 from the Auditor General indicated that, in fact, Yukon schools were not doing the best job that could be done in relation to supporting our students who have special and individual needs.

I look forward to continuing this discussion.

Ms. White: The minister can disagree all she wants, but the Yukon NDP stands with the Yukon First Nation Education

Directorate, Yukon Learn, the Yukon Teachers' Association, Autism Yukon, parents, caregivers, students, and teachers. So, the *A Path Forward* plan published last Friday doesn't include a commitment to returning grades 10 to 12 in Whitehorse to full-time, in-person learning. The minister will say that this is because of epidemiology, but grades 10 to 12 students outside of Whitehorse are in school full time. Why is that? Well, it is because communities have had appropriate resources, both the space and the staffing, to do it safely.

We know that mental health and education outcomes of grades 10 to 12 students in Whitehorse have taken a hit this year. By September of this year, it will be 18 months since the start of the pandemic. Mr. Speaker, why has the minister not the resources to make sure that everything is in place to return Whitehorse grades 10 to 12 students to full-time, in-person learning this coming September?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: On March 3, I met with representatives of the Yukon Teachers' Association, Autism Yukon, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and Yukon First Nation Education Directorate. The four organizations met with the department, with me, deputy ministers, and senior officials. We had an excellent conversation regarding the feedback and ways that we can improve communication with school communities and collaboration on the issue of special and inclusive education.

I urge families who have experience with special and inclusive education supports and services that are provided through schools to participate in the current review that is happening. It is independent of the department. We are coming to the end of phase one. It is absolutely critical that we hear from the students and families who have these experiences, because we know that the issue does exist and has existed for many, many years and that the supports and services that are supplied to students may not be meeting their needs. We need to improve this. We need to improve these experiences for students and for families. We urge them to participate in this process.

We have had great feedback so far, and the work is continuing so that inclusive and special education — all learning types of plans — can actually achieve what a student needs.

Question re: Alcohol-related harm

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, 23 percent of Yukoners self-reported heavy drinking in the Yukon health status report in 2015. Our own chief medical officer of health, Dr. Brendan Hanley, the author of the above-mentioned report, has been sounding the alarm for years that Yukoners drink much more than the average Canadian. In the communities that I represent, we all personally live the struggle of illness, violence, and death caused by alcohol addiction, yet six years after this report, our territorial government has taken no action. This inaction has cost the health and lives of many people in my communities. This is not a political issue. This is a real-life struggle for the people I represent.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier of the Yukon understand the real and devastating impact of alcohol-related harm —

Speaker: Order, please. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. To answer his question very quickly: Yes, I do. I completely do agree. We have been having lots of conversations over the years, and even over the last few weeks here, about how it's really important that we grapple with not only the alcohol issues in our communities, but the opioid issues in our communities as well. So, to answer the members opposite's question, I absolutely do agree.

Mr. Hutton: The 2019 report, entitled *Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Canada: A Comparison of Provincial Policies*, evaluated all provinces and territories for their implementation of the best current practices to reduce alcohol-related harm. The Yukon received an F grade, meaning that we scored below 40 percent.

Two years ago, this report set out proven evidence-based policy action that the Government of Yukon could take to reduce alcohol-related harm, yet our territorial government has taken no action.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier of the Yukon: Why has he refused to take action on the recommendations from this report?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I'm happy to rise today to speak to the report that the member opposite is referring to — the 2013 to 2017 report. In 2018, the report came out with specific recommendations.

What I would like to reflect on for a moment is that this Liberal government over the course of the last four years has built up mental wellness and substance use supports in rural Yukon communities from almost nothing — two support counsellors to over 22 counsellors. We have now four mental wellness hubs in our communities. We recognize that these rural hubs are supported by the Yukon First Nation communities. We are working with our rural Yukon communities. We are working with the communities to address substance use in our communities. We are working with our mental wellness counsellors. The three hubs have provided and offered substance use counselling, trauma counselling, and outreach services to a number of programs, which I would be happy to refer to — outpatient counselling services, rapid access counselling, early psychosis intervention, intensive treatment programs, day programming, and safe withdrawal. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, we have been working very, very closely with the First Nation communities on their land-based initiatives, which I'm happy to speak further about.

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the luxury of looking the other way while people in my community struggle and are hurt by alcohol addiction. This is a health issue, a community issue. This is our responsibility in this House. What will the Premier do to reduce alcohol-related harm in our communities? When will this government take action?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like, first off, to advise Yukoners and the communities of the member opposite's riding that we absolutely respect the communities. We have had significant input; in fact, we have had feedback stating and certainly acknowledging that there's more work to be done. We have incorporated and recognized the pressures in all of our communities.

What we have seen is problematic; what we have seen is traumatic. In four years, we have provided support to rural Yukon communities — significant resources that have not been there historically — two positions, two social workers, no psychologist, and no supports. This government supports mental health, addiction services, and has improved services for our territory — four years, foundational framework running across the territory — because we care. We care about Yukoners, and we will endeavour to continue that work.

We put in place resources with the First Nations to develop and design wellness initiatives, and we know for a fact that this is very effective. We know that there was a men's treatment facility program that was just concluded in Selkirk First Nation and a women's program that they are about to embark on. All of the communities are working toward a wellness plan. We are very much a partner in that process. I acknowledge that —

Speaker: Order, please. Just a quick notice: The new cut-off is 33.05, as advised by the Clerks.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic business relief funding

Mr. Istchenko: I will follow up on a question that I had asked yesterday.

Over a year ago, we asked the Liberal government to take action to protect the tourism sector through the pandemic. At that time, the Liberals said that it was business as usual for the tourism sector. Well, sadly, they acted very slowly to get this relief money out the door. First, it took them seven months to finally announce the tourism relief package.

My question today is — based on what we heard yesterday, the minister said that the Liberals have only delivered less than \$1 million of this relief funding. So, 12 months after we started asking questions, they managed to deliver 15 percent of the funding.

So, can the minister tell us today when the rest of that money will flow to Yukon tourism businesses?

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

Our government acted very quickly when the pandemic happened a year ago and we put in place some of the most — well, I would say the best programs in Canada. Those programs are still running today. One of them was the Yukon business relief program. Businesses are still eligible for that. We also worked with Canada on the northern relief fund. More than \$6.5 million has been processed through that program to date. The tourism relief programs are supplementary to that. We are ensuring that businesses are maximizing those funds before they go into the supplementary fund, Mr. Speaker.

I went over the numbers yesterday of those two programs where we have administered funds. Again, it was just over \$569,000 from the accommodation fund. The non-accommodation fund has seen \$434,000. I'm happy to go into further details about other programs.

Mr. Istchenko: Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when we went into a briefing on the department, both opposition parties asked — you know what? If we had this information, we wouldn't have to ask these questions.

A big reason behind this is because the Liberals have created large amounts of red tape and hoops for businesses to jump through to get access to this funding. They bounce you around from program to program, from department to department, and from government to government. Instead of this mess of red tape and bureaucracy, they should be focusing on supporting these businesses and making their lives easier.

So, will the Liberals agree to cut the red tape and just start supporting these businesses and start rolling this money out?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Our departments are working tirelessly, and so is the Yukon Tourism Industry Association, to support businesses. We've supported the Yukon tourism association to hire two navigators to ensure that businesses are actually maximizing all of the programs that are available to them.

I know that our departments are working very carefully with each and every business to ensure that they are maximizing what is available to them.

The member opposite has mentioned the briefing. I asked my department if there were detailed questions that came from the opposition around the specifics in the budget, and I was told that there were no questions, really.

Anyway, we're working hard with our business community to ensure that they are maximizing the programs. We've had other programs that businesses have accessed under the accommodation fund through the labour force market program that has seen tremendous benefit to those businesses.

Mr. Istchenko: Yesterday, when we asked the department, we were asking about the different programs that they had, how many accessed them, and what the dollars were out there. That is pretty specific, and we were told that we would be given a legislative return. I had asked if I could get it before I went to the general debate so I could ask and have some information on questions.

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 said that we need to know ASAP so that we can advise operators whether to cut loose, move to a new career, and repurpose infrastructure.

So, will the minister in this House today give a clear answer, or will she just ignore the tourism industry?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, our government absolutely values tourism in Yukon. We have invested more over the last four years than the previous had in fact over 14 years, because we actually planned when things were really good. We released the tourism development strategy, the first one in 18 years. That has helped to guide us through this.

We absolutely do have a plan, and we have worked with our partners. It is the tourism relief and recovery plan that has 19 actions in it. One of them is relief; the rest is recovery.

We are still having to provide relief programs to our businesses, and we hope to get back to — and we do have light at the end of the tunnel, as the Premier has said. Our vaccinations are going very well. We released *A Path Forward*, the next version of that. We are absolutely in step with our businesses to ensure that they survive. Mr. Speaker, I have

talked about this a lot of times. We must protect our infrastructure, our airlines, our hotels, our experiences.

We are still holding on to the goal of increasing tourism over the next 10 years and I look forward to working with our business community as we go forward.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members' business

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, March 10, 2021. They are Motion No. 417, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South, and Motion No. 426, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge.

Speaker: Is there any further private members' business?

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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, Ms. Frost.

Speaker: Minister of Health and Social Services, you have 22 minutes and 50 seconds.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I commence my debate on the budget, I would like to just reflect a moment on where we left off yesterday. We were speaking about the Yukon Housing Corporation and, of course, the significant investment — the private sector investment with Normandy Manor, an affordable supported independent living facility for seniors. It's significant to the Yukon in that we have an aging population. We have an innovative approach to address seniors housing and supports in Yukon.

All of our work to support people, young and old, falls under the guidance of *Putting People First* and the Yukon Liberal government's plan to dramatically improve health and wellness in our territory. The 76 recommendations in the final report of *Putting People First* represent a path forward that will be achieved through continued discussion, engagement, and involvement from all of our partners, including NGOs, allied health professionals, health care providers, physicians, communities, First Nation governments, and of course Yukoners. The best care and support that we can offer Yukoners comes from a system that is integrated and where care is collaborative and holistic.

This budget invests \$1.4 million to make medical travel easier and more affordable for Yukoners. We increased the medical travel subsidy from \$75 a day to \$150. We created a new \$75-a-day subsidy for escorts. We have expanded medical travel destinations and have created a new care coordinator and medical travel unit. This unit supports Yukoners from the

time they leave their community to the time they return. Health and Social Services typically processes more than 700 medical travel cases per month, and every one of these clients will benefit from these improvements.

We have improved access to vaccines by publicly funding the shingles, HPV, and COVID-19 vaccines.

We are working with indigenous partners to provide more culturally safe and respectful care, including providing mandatory cultural safety training for all HSS staff.

We are projecting more than a \$1-million savings this year by successfully reducing the costs of prescription drugs by reducing pharmaceutical markups to follow through on our commitment to bring supports to Yukoners where they reside. We have adopted a social pediatrics model with the help of three resident pediatricians, expanded ultrasound services to Yukon hospitals, and created positions for full-time nurse practitioners in Mayo and Carmacks.

We have brought on a second orthopaedic surgeon to decrease the need for visiting orthopaedic specialists. We have reduced ophthalmology wait times from 37 months to nine months and invested in IHealth, which will be one of the most modern health information systems in Canada. In this budget, you will find \$3 million to support this initiative.

We have connected Yukoners in need of a doctor with physicians through the find a doctor and find a family doctor program and supported Yukon health professionals to receive training from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. We are putting in place regulations and standards for the practice of midwifery. We introduced universal coverage of the medication used for medical abortions to ensure that Yukoners have low-barrier options and more equal access to abortion services.

We worked with our partners to fully implement the sexualized assault response team in Whitehorse. We have budgeted \$1.5 million to work with the francophone community to review options for creating a bilingual health centre in Whitehorse that would be integrated into our existing health services. We created a departmental diagnostic and support clinic to provide both FASD assessment and diagnosis to adults and autism assessments and diagnoses for children and youth. We have reduced the number of children and youth who need to go out of the territory for autism assessments.

We have budgeted nearly \$2 million to improve front-line health care supports, including three additional community nurses and two new nurse practitioners in Yukon communities. Now more than ever, Yukoners need access to strong mental health supports. In the 2021-22 budget, there is \$21 million to support mental wellness and substance use services in our territory. We can acknowledge how hard this year has been on our collective mental health and well-being.

When COVID-19 hit, Yukon was well-positioned to respond after nearly three years of steady investments in mental health supports by this Yukon Liberal government. As such, four mental wellness hubs — substance use hubs in Dawson City, Carmacks, Haines Junction, and Watson Lake. These hubs offer a range of high quality, accessible, and consistent counselling services. A new agreement with the Canadian

Mental Health Association Yukon Division to provide counselling services in Whitehorse while expanding the scope of counselling services available in Yukon communities — we created a new delivery model expanding counselling services in Yukon through All Genders Yukon Society to provide services to transgender, two-spirited, and non-binary individuals and their partners.

We began providing counselling services at Whitehorse Correctional Centre. We increased resident psychiatric supports in Yukon through improved access to care. We hired a full-time cultural counselling coordinator with Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services.

We introduced a rapid-access counselling program to reduce the time to connect to a counsellor to 72 hours at the wellness hubs. Critical crises intervention, which used to take months, can now be accessed and reached within a community within 24 hours. We have improved access to the specialized services in our communities. We have signed new agreements that allow this to happen.

We are providing an opioid treatment program with access to Suboxone and methadone in Whitehorse, which is expanding to Dawson City. We are increasing virtual and online support. We are coordinated, and we are looking at our substance use programs with the Jackson Lake program. We are looking at land-based initiatives with all of our communities and the wellness plans that we have worked so hard on over the last four years.

Mr. Speaker, after four years of investments and leadership from the Yukon Liberal government, the landscape of rural mental health and addiction support is unprecedented.

Let me pause for a second to say it again: This government supports mental health and addiction services, and we have improved services in our territory. With four years, a foundational framework up and running across the territory, we can now take an even further step to help Yukoners because we know how much further we need to go, but we have not paused for a second.

We are exploring a safe supply and way to provide take-home drug testing in communities. We are exploring a wet shelter. We are exploring ways to grow our land-based healing programs. In fact, in its report, *Putting People First*, the independent expert panel recommended that we work with First Nation governments and the federal government to fund a rural, on-the-land mental health and substance use treatment centre. This will be a part of the *Putting People First* implementation plan going forward and will be done by working with our partners.

Responding to addictions isn't one easy answer. It's trauma counselling, it's low-barrier housing, it's education and employment opportunities, and it is support from families, friends, and communities. It's a continuum of support that will span across a lifetime. Real change is possible, but it is not something that can be accomplished in isolation, and we are working hard with our partners to improve addiction services offered in our territory.

For anyone to stand up and say that nothing has been done is really a sad disservice to the progress made by this territory

— in particular, the services and the supports that Yukon rural communities are working so hard to address. It is a disservice to the hard-working staff at the four mental wellness hubs built in Yukon rural communities. It's a disservice to the communities that are working hard, working together, and collaborating to improve health and wellness for their citizens.

We made quick adjustments to mental wellness and substance use services during COVID-19 to respond to support Yukoners while following the guidelines of the chief medical officer of health, which includes supporting virtual, phone, or in-person visits, as appropriate and safe for clients and staff.

We co-developed a campaign with the Council of Yukon First Nations that addresses some of the indirect and unforeseen circumstances and consequences of children and families of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We made improvements at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter to ensure that it was a low-barrier facility used by all who require support. It has been an enormous amount of work to bring the care of the shelter to where it is, and this work continues.

We are providing a full-time social worker and outreach workers to support guests and help connect them with the resources that they need. Since 2019, there has been an EMS paramedic station at the facility every day. They have provided pre-hospital and emergency care for over 2,500 client visits. Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services is also providing direct mental health services at the shelter.

We have also enhanced integration with the Referred Care Clinic through shared outreach nurses at the shelter to provide health services. We are supporting mobile fentanyl testing through the new outreach van operated by Blood Ties Four Directions. We are exploring what a safe supply program would look like in Yukon. We have promoted the use of take-home naloxone kits, which are available in every community and multiple locations throughout the Yukon.

Through the income support branch in 2019-20, we spent approximately \$10 million in supporting over 1,000 low-income Yukoners with housing and/or help in maintaining housing. Community outreach services has secured 118 permanent housing placements for individuals experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness since the creation of the program in 2018.

We provided financial support to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in emergency shelter in Dawson City. We are working to open an opioid treatment service clinic in Dawson City. We are investing over \$600,000 for nine FTEs at the Referred Care Clinic to provide integrated multiple supports for individuals with mental health and addiction challenges.

On-the-land treatment options are also a priority and have been for a number of years. We will continue to invest in the Jackson Lake healing camp for \$400,000. We will continue to coordinate our substance use treatment programs at the Jackson Lake healing program and through our other land-based initiatives across Yukon. We have requested and are providing them with clinical supports such as clinical counsellors, mental wellness support counsellors, mental wellness support nursing staff, and occasionally the opioid overdose prevention

coordinator. HSS routinely incorporates land-based healing components into its youth programming and intensive treatment programs through Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services.

In its report, *Putting People First*, the independent expert panel recommended that we work with First Nation governments and the federal government, and we will continue to do that on substance use treatment options. This will be a part of the implementation plan going forward, and it will be done in collaboration with our partners.

A driving force behind the *Putting People First* report is focusing on preventing harm rather than dealing with illness. To support this principle, we have become the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide coverage for constant glucose monitoring for all Yukoners with type 1 diabetes. We regulated vaping, and we are fully covering the shingles vaccine — SHINGRIX — for Yukoners between the ages of 65 and 70 and have worked with pharmacists to deliver this service. We have fully covered the costs of prep medication for individuals at risk of contracting HIV. We created community health nurse mobile positions specifically dedicated to health promotion, disease prevention, and wellness activities in Haines Junction and Mayo.

A major item in this budget is our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this budget, there is \$39.7 million for the public health response to the pandemic as we continue to do all we can to ensure that Yukon maintains its strong position against the virus. This past year is one that will be remembered by all Canadians and by all Yukoners. Keeping Yukoners safe has been our government's top priority. We have done a great job of listening to the science and doing all we can to keep our case counts low and Yukoners safe. We are winning this battle, and we are grateful for the effort that everyone has made and we continue to make.

In response to COVID-19, I am proud of the variety of financial supports offered to Yukoners, such as COVID-19 relief funding, which helped more than 195 families in our territory. We established the Health Emergency Operations Centre to coordinate and lead the government as the territory responded to the pandemic.

We continue to work closely with the chief medical officer of health, Environmental Health, and the Yukon Communicable Disease Control Unit to ensure that we have appropriate guidelines in place as we adjust to our new normal. The COVID testing centre was set up to provide a central location to test Yukoners for COVID-19 and other influenza-like symptoms. We established a self-isolation facility at the High Country Inn to provide individuals with an alternative place to self-isolate for 14 days.

Through the dedication and hard work of all our front-line health and social support workers — from doctors and nurses to social workers to continuing care workers to personal support workers to the custodial and cleaning staff who supported our chief medical officer of health — we have not only protected Yukon but have continued to offer the services and supports that our citizens rely upon.

Our territory is in a good position today due to the ongoing work of all Yukoners. My deepest thank you to all citizens who have followed our public health measures and adapted their business practices and changed their habits as required. Yukon should be proud of all of your work to keep us safe.

As the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, my mandate is clear. I'm guided by the housing action plan and the Safe at Home plan. With a steady and growing demand for housing in Yukon, the work has been cut out for us, and we have applied ourselves in the last four years to address the pressures.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the fantastic work of the Housing Corporation. It is only through continuous effort and perseverance of the team that our government is steadily improving the housing situation in Yukon. We all know that housing is the single largest expense of a Canadian household. Housing is a source of concern and anxiety for far too many, both in the Yukon and across the country.

Our work has been putting affordable housing at the forefront of our activities and emphasizing that it is essential to the health and well-being of Yukoners. This is a value that I am proud to cherish. I promoted a robust, cooperative relationship between the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Housing Corporation, which is paramount to a person-centred approach that helps Yukoners.

In the budget that has been presented, we have the figures that embody these investments in Yukoners across the housing continuum. These investments showcase a transformation of the social housing landscape in Yukon. We are working hard to provide solutions across the housing continuum and improve the community housing outcomes for all Yukoners. Housing needs vary widely. There is no quick fix, nor is there a perfect solution. That is why our government is working hard and refining the solutions for Yukoners.

I want to take this time to highlight some of these items as reflected in this budget. These include supportive housing, energy retrofits, subsidized community housing, and rental subsidy programs.

First let's talk about the Canada-Yukon housing benefit for a moment. This direct, two-house rent subsidy program was co-designed with the federal government to combat inflation and reduce stigma for Yukoners who have trouble affording rent. Launched in November 2020, the Canada-Yukon housing benefit is currently directly supporting over 170 households, including seniors and non-seniors, families, and individuals in the private rental market. This totals about \$750,000 in this fiscal budget.

I would like to also showcase our housing initiative fund. By working in partnership with other governments and the public sector, more than 350 affordable housing units are in various stages of completion across the Yukon. It is important to note that this figure does not include the most recent fourth intake of this fantastic and versatile fund. With the \$3.6 million budgeted for this fund, even more brave and innovative housing partnerships will be created and ultimately result in even more units added to the housing market in our territory.

All Yukoners deserve to be met where they are when it comes to social supports. To better meet the needs of Yukoners, we have opened the first Housing First residence north of 60 to tackle homelessness — a 16-unit facility. We are investing in new housing projects in Watson Lake to the cost of \$1.6 million. We are seeing a growth in housing initiatives across the housing spectrum, and we are certainly looking toward ensuring that we provide all the supports that are needed across the Yukon.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, there are further resources allocated in the budget to address other pressures to our rapid housing initiative through the recent announcement on the northern carve-out. I want to thank the members of this Liberal caucus for their collaboration and hard work and, of course, the departments that I am responsible for. Thank you. Mahsi' cho for doing an exceptional job for Yukoners. Mahsi'.

Mr. Hassard: It's a pleasure to rise today to respond to the 2021-22 budget.

I would like to begin today by again thanking my constituents of the amazing riding of Pelly-Nisutlin for their continued support over the last several years and, of course, as well during these strange and uncertain times that we've been going through.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a huge thank you to my family for their continued support and understanding.

A lot has happened during the 34th Sitting of the Legislature. While all of our seating arrangements are a lot different thanks to the pandemic and the need for social-distancing requirements, et cetera, some of us have even seen our seats flip all the way over to the other side of the Legislature. With all of these changes and things that have happened during this Sitting of the Legislature, the one constant has been that the Liberal government remains unable to make decisions, unable to take action, and certainly unable to consult and listen.

On that topic, I would like to take a few moments to first speak about the First Nation procurement policy, which as you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, has received a lot of attention over the past few weeks. Two years ago or thereabouts, the Minister of Highways and Public Works came to the Legislature and talked about a new procurement policy, but whenever the opposition asked questions about that new policy, unfortunately, there was total radio silence. Of course, again unfortunately, that has been a bit of a constant with this minister. There is a complete lack of understanding or mishandling of his files. As I mentioned, the Liberals, and this minister in particular, have been very bad at consultation with industry, so while the minister originally claimed that he had consulted with industry on this policy, it was later revealed that this was not the case at all.

Everyone in the contracting world agrees with the principles of the policy and with moving forward and implementing the economic provisions under the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, but the best way to ensure that a policy is successful is to actually involve the people in the consultation.

We want this policy to be successful. We want it to be implemented so that we can increase First Nation involvement in the economy, but we want the government to consult and work with all Yukoners, so it is disappointing that the government chose the path of divisiveness rather than a path of collaboration and ultimately success. This approach of inaction has unfortunately caused a number of problems across the territory.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Hassard: You can't hear me?

Sorry, I will try to speak up. I don't want you to miss any of this, John. It is very enlightening information.

So, if I could, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about Ross River. You know, there was an example of problems. During the 2016 election, the Liberals promised that all communities matter and they made grand, lofty promises for what they would do for rural Yukon, but since that time, we have seen inaction and inattention from this government. Over four years ago, the Minister of Highways and Public Works stood in this Legislature and promised that he was paving the Campbell Highway from Faro to Ross River. Now we know that this certainly hasn't happened. As a matter of fact, on the highway from Faro to Ross River, there has been zero roadwork done — zero improvement made to that stretch of road.

Now, interestingly, the government has touted their five-year capital — what I call the “five-year capital concept” — and yet the past two years have shown proposed Campbell Highway work that has not come to fruition. It has been in there for years and, despite continued promises from Liberal ministers that they would pave this road — nothing. There goes the idea of certainty that this capital concept was supposed to provide — not just for contractors, but for the communities as well.

I guess it kind of goes to the same note that there goes the slogan that the Liberals ran on — that “All communities matter”. On that note of all communities matter — or lack of matter — I would just like to read a letter from the Watson Lake Chamber of Commerce to the Premier, dated January 19 of this year. In that letter, the Watson Lake chamber wrote to the Hon. Premier: “The Watson Lake Chamber of Commerce ... is writing to you today to express our dissatisfaction with the Yukon government's consultation and communication practices.” That is a direct quote from the letter.

Further in the letter — I will quote again: “There have been limited community meetings from this government, even prior to the circumstances that have arisen from the Covid-19 pandemic. As an organization, we have reached out to several ministers to invite them to meet with us to discuss topics such as the South-East Yukon Forestry Management Plan, economic development, and the tourism industry, to name a few. To date, there have been no responses received and no meeting attempts have been made.”

Further on in the letter, Mr. Acting Speaker, I will quote again: “It is hard to trust a government that claims open communication is happening, when we know first hand that it is not. We are urging the Yukon government to step up to the plate, and start having conversations with all Yukoners. Online

surveys and closed-door meetings with municipal and First Nation governments are not enough. If we want to truly move in a direction of collaboration and partnerships, we need to start with an honest and open territorial government that is making sure that all Yukoners are informed, which can be easily achieved by having real conversations.”

These sections really paint a picture of a government that has treated Watson Lake and other communities in rural Yukon as an afterthought, a government that hasn't earned the trust of Yukoners, and a government that continues to share inaccurate information about what they are doing and when they are doing it. This is important because, in the upcoming election, Yukoners are going to have to choose who they actually trust to lead the territory.

Mr. Acting Speaker, if I could go back to the five-year capital concept, I would be remiss to not mention the disappearance of funding for the resource access roads, as well as the rural road upgrade programs. These two in particular are great funding pots for great projects. As well — and maybe just as importantly or more importantly — they are opportunities for our smaller contractors here in the Yukon to have the opportunity to bid and be successful in getting work for the territorial government.

I will go back to Ross River if I can and maybe talk about the Ross River School for a few minutes. We have heard mixed messages from this government. We have heard everything from that they are paving the parking lot to they are building a new school. I can guarantee you, Mr. Acting Speaker, that when I was there two weeks ago, there was no talk of a new school and there is no talk of paving the parking lot.

They are just more empty promises. It's unfortunate for the community to have the government come in and make all of these promises and then not deliver on any of them. We've seen a steady decline in the money allotted to this project and the five-year capital concept. Every time there is a new version of it printed, the money has gone from \$2 million to \$5 million a year to \$1 million to \$3 million a year to \$500,000 — it just seems to decrease continuously every time it's rewritten.

Another very important piece of infrastructure for Ross River that this government has seriously neglected is the swimming pool. Two years ago, volunteers filled the pool and had it ready to go. The government came along and said, “No, you can't do that. It's not suitable to be used, but we're going to fix it.” Unfortunately, there is still no pool for the people in Ross River.

We'll move down the road a few miles, down to a place best known as Yukon's best kept secret, which most of us know is Faro. Again, we see the results of this government's inability to — to quote one of the government ministers, “Get 'er done”.

Now, there's a fire hall and a town shop getting tendered this year — we're happy to see that — but not until after years of delay under this government.

A new RCMP detachment for the community of Faro — you know, it has been lost in this quagmire of political red tape since they got elected. But one thing that Faro did get was seven shiny, new, dirty-diesel-burning generators, but they didn't ask for those, Mr. Acting Speaker. They just showed up, and it's

certainly to the displeasure of several community members, but unfortunately, it's the way of this government, it appears.

So, now, thanks to the decision by this Liberal government, we're burning more diesel. We're producing less green energy, and now we even have to burn extra fuel because we have to haul for the generators an extra 400 kilometres. So, it just doesn't appear to make a lot of sense to be burning even more fossil fuels when the idea was to try to reduce that number. But I guess that's Liberal logic.

I'll move on now to my hometown of Teslin. So, we travel down the Alaska Highway to the shores of beautiful Teslin Lake and, of course, Nisutlin Bay. For the past four and half years, we've heard from this government about a new way of doing business, but unfortunately, that new way of doing business still hasn't produced a tender for the replacement of the Nisutlin bridge. The Teslin Tlingit Council have done an amazing job. They've taken the unprecedented step of building a biomass system to heat many of their own buildings. They even have one system set up in a subdivision to heat multiple buildings and it really is a great story of progress. I know the Minister of Economic Development has talked a lot about this project and how impressed the government is on what the community has been able to do.

Interestingly, the Teslin Tlingit Council even went so far as to hook up the Teslin school into one of their biomass systems. Unfortunately, it has been over two years since the system was hooked up and ready to go. Yet when I wrote a letter to the Minister of Highways and Public Works this spring asking why this system was not being utilized, the response was that it wasn't ready to be turned on. This unfortunately once again shows his lack of understanding for his own file because, like I said, it has been ready for two years. It is just the fact that the government can't negotiate a real agreement with the Teslin Tlingit Council for paying for that heat. Again, we see the government continue to burn diesel fuel, fossil fuels to heat the Teslin School, when there is absolutely no need for it. The infrastructure is there; it is in place, hooked up, and ready to go. It is just a matter of this government signing the paper and making it happen. So, it really is unfortunate, but it is just another example of this Liberal government talking a good game but clearly not being able to deliver.

I think that the final piece I wanted to touch on is the lack of plan or vision in this year's budget for a path forward to be reopening our territory. You know, instead of an actual plan, we have gotten more platitudes, no timelines — not even explanations as to how the government plans to make decisions moving forward. Unfortunately, this has only served to create more uncertainty for the territory, for families and businesses here in the territory. It is really unfortunate because this is a time when people and businesses really need the government to stand up and provide some certainty and some clarity on where we're going and what they can expect in the near future, as well as the long-term future. It is unfortunate that the government seems to have taken the attitude that it is not such a big deal because we are still collecting our paycheques every other Wednesday, but unfortunately, these businesses have not seen

a paycheque for several months and they need to know when they are going to see another one.

Like I said, this unfortunately and sadly has become a trademark for this government. You know, lots of talk but very little action. I think that more and more Yukoners have become disillusioned with the Liberals and the government as a result.

With that, I certainly hope that the government is listening to all of us over here in opposition as we make our pleas, and we certainly hope that they pull their heads out of the sand and actually take some advice from the words that we're saying and hopefully provide some of that clarity and certainty to Yukoners as we move forward through these strange and unusual times. With that, thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Ms. Van Bibber: First and foremost, I thank all the constituents from the riding of Porter Creek North. Knowing that I have been able to assist many with their issues has made me realize that, yes, I can make a difference here. Most often, the work we do behind the scenes doesn't make headlines. But the ability to assist people with everyday problems and worries has been pretty good.

To my husband, Pat, and all my family, I would like to thank them for their support and care during my time as MLA as well.

The problems that have arisen over the past few years that I have been in office are too many to list here. But specific to my riding, the amount of money spent on the aging-out home for eight teenagers is amazing. The total cost from purchase to renovating, retrofitting, and outfitting these very high-end apartments is still unknown. The problem was not the concept or the actual helping of teenagers who had no other home to go to or the "not in my backyard" that some residents are accused of, but the cost that is associated with this over-the-top facility, and it is still being discussed.

The lack of turning lanes from the Alaska Highway into Porter Creek were asked for by me many times in the Legislative Assembly and they were ignored. The crosswalks in the same area have gone ignored by this government for four and a half years. With broken crosswalk signage, unlit and uncontrolled, we have seen many pedestrians try to scoot across the highway in recent years, unnoticed by highway drivers.

In late December 2020, a call was put out for input and comments on the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board's website, along with the outline of a proposed project for Alaska Highway upgrades through Porter Creek. This was on changes to the whole highway from the top of Rabbit's Foot Canyon to Azure Road with frontage changes, service and access roads, changes in installation, water and sewer upgrades, and much more. Luckily, I was able to work with some very well aware citizens and thanked them for being the vocal opposition to the lack of public consultation. The project was postponed, giving time for the government to consult affected residents and business owners. I hope this consultation will begin soon. Again, there were no plans and no forethought. The consultation that is always bragged about by this government just did not happen and there was no resident who was talked to.

There will always be pros and cons to every project. I also realize that you can't please everyone at all times. But one must give proper information and communicate what is happening if it will affect someone's property, their property value, their business, or their quality of life.

I attend school council meetings in Porter Creek schools and so admire those people who volunteer to put their names forward to sit on councils. The issues that they face and make decisions on are not trivial issues and they have a lot on their plates, so kudos to the school councils and their support staff.

Urban and rural issues are brought up many times and at times they're at odds. We all need structure and social licence to be able to live together in harmony. When this breaks down, it pits groups or areas against each other, and it doesn't need to be so blatant at all times. We need the openness and transparency this government promised when they were elected. Yukoners are resilient and we can be agreeable for the most part, but we long for the days when the government didn't alter our lives so drastically and so quickly.

As our population grows, we have to make allowances for certain issues, and it would be healthy for all if we could access the simpler lifestyle that we all crave. We need to make life easier, not harder. We need to cut red tape for businesses to carry on serving Yukoners. We are drowning in legalese.

I have taken the time to go through the budget. Within the budget, there are so many broad statements and vague promises that it's hard to know where to begin. There are line items that are listed as large numbers with a title. We have department briefings, and thank you to the great department staff and the deputy ministers who ensure that we ask them questions, and they are forthcoming with the answers. Why the budget document could not break down the items so that everyone can see where the dollars are allocated immediately instead of pulling teeth to get the amounts — well, it's beyond me.

It seems that the floating and ever-changing five-year concept that is prepared is deliberately written to confuse the public. Many of the community highlights in the five-year capital concept are just repeats of some of the last ones, such as the Burwash Landing school and Ross River School stabilization. For this fiscal year, last year in the plan, it was \$3.4 million. This year in the plan, it's \$2.3 million. The Challenge Cornerstone, listed at \$2.3 million — and now in this fiscal year, it is \$1.2 million. These are items that are not new but re-announcements, if you will, with either the same or new dollar amounts allocated to them. One is never sure what is what.

COVID has added a lot of uncertainty to our lives. It appears that it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. We appreciate all citizens who are being responsible and caring for each other during these months — all the front-line workers in stores and restaurants and the cleaners. Of course, there are the vaccination teams that we tributed in the House yesterday.

We are facing another crisis, and we have been for a number of years. This crisis is related to opioids and is taking the lives of Yukoners. The issue is not being handled but rather is growing in momentum. We know that it's not limited to

Yukon, but it is impacting our communities, our families, and our friends.

I urge everyone to check in on your friends and loved ones. Mental wellness checks can make a difference to many. Reach out. Even a smile or reassurance that all is not lost will go miles for someone. A hello or just hearing someone acknowledge you is good. You are not invisible — maybe not recognizable due to masks, but you're not invisible.

I would also like to send out a special thank you and kudos to our incredible office team. Ted Laking, Robin Boss, Tim Kucharuk, and also Madi Pearson, who left us this past summer to move abroad. Without their hard work, political knowledge, and sense of humor, some of us would be very lost. They make it enjoyable to be part of this journey.

To all Yukoners, please make sure that you reach out, should you have concerns or issues that will affect you. To my riding in Porter Creek North, I will continue to work on your behalf, this being an election year. Along with leader Currie Dixon and our team, I look forward to continuing to be your voice and your MLA.

Mr. Istchenko: I am proud to stand as the MLA for Kluane to respond to the 2020-21 budget. The riding of Kluane is one of the largest in the Yukon, from the Takhini River bridge on the Alaska Highway to the Canadian border at Beaver Creek and south down the Haines Road to the Canadian border at Pleasant Camp. I am proud to say that these roads were a war effort to help protect our big country of Canada. Every time I drive and pass one of those signs dedicated to veterans, which my colleague from the riding of Copperbelt South and I dedicated during my first term in government, I am so thankful for those who contributed so many years ago to building that highway, but also thankful for those who came after, building our communities, and those who worked on settling land claims and who worked on making sure that there were community activities to keep people happy and keep our communities safe.

Unfortunately, I can't help but have a feeling of disappointment in the lack of attention, action, and interest that the Liberal government has paid to our riding but, even more, to the concerns of individual constituents who have raised issues over the last many years.

The Member for Pelly Nisutlin just said that their commitment was — they said that all communities matter. It doesn't seem that way. I can tell you that because this side of the House is growing.

Our riding is mainly dependent on tourism and, during a pandemic, it is so important to find ways to support the industry in rural Yukon. Press announcement with lots of dollars but no real plan — those are just hollow words.

We need action when it comes to Shakwak funding. The north Alaska Highway is affected greatly by permafrost, and when the funding dried up, it was time for action. Instead of ignoring it, this government had time to work on renegotiating the agreement or at least allocating funds to work on sections of the road that needed attention. Nothing done on our roads up there sure shows it — no funding. They have an O&M budget that they work hard to — but it needs extra funding. The

residents of Beaver Creek have told me that they were disappointed when the Minister of Highways and Public Works thought that they were constituents of Alaska — comments in this House — disappointing.

One other thing about the residents of Beaver Creek: They actually need a gym for their school kids and a pool in the summer. These are things that they once had. I brought these concerns forward — actually, I proposed solutions, but nothing happened.

Year after year, the government announces work on the design or the building of a school in Burwash Landing — something the previous government negotiated during my time in government. Well, it has been five years. To this date, there have been no public meetings to discuss planning for the new school, housing for teachers, or what will happen to the old school. I wrote a letter to the minister about that. Now I'm hearing that there was a tender out, and hopefully they actually talk when they have the community meeting with residents — but until now, no action.

In this budget, the five year — and this is what I like to call it: “The five-year capital, fluid, always changing, never solid concept”. It doesn't show any construction of that school in 2022. We're in an election year — and still no school. You know, right in the budget from 2016 on, there was always money in the budget for planning for that school.

I wonder about — and I listened in debate today in Question Period. One of the projects that the previous government started — there was \$1 million put toward clean energy to help in cutting diesel generator emissions in Burwash and Destruction Bay. I was at the sod-turning with the minister and the Member of Parliament. There's still nothing happening. I understand that this is where ministers are responsible for these files. They need to work with the First Nations or work with the proponent to make things happen.

All in this House will remember the pressures from constituents, letters from First Nations, and many letters from me on the Destruction Bay marina. You might remember that. It made the media more than once. I was glad that finally something was done, but the job is not finished. There's still more to be done. Now I'm happy actually to see the \$600,000 allocated for a new marina in Burwash Landing, which is great and I hope the drop in water levels will permit it, but they have to finish things. There still needs to be work on the Destruction Bay marina.

When I brought up the issue of the planned street upgrades in Destruction Bay, I had issues because they weren't using local equipment. So, what happened? The minister halted the project. As of today, nothing has been done. Here we are in March 2021 — and this is something that's super disappointing — and the tender for the water and sewer upgrades for Haines Junction — and I've been to two public meetings and pressure from me as the MLA. I got a hold of residents — “You need to come and listen so we don't have the issues that we had on our last tender.” Well, guess what. The tender is not out. It takes time to tender, award a successful contract, and then they need to order supplies, which can take months during a pandemic.

It's starting to look like we'll miss another year of construction, putting us three years behind under this Liberal government.

Now we'll be two years during a pandemic when the business community could have used the business and our community is empty in the summertime. You know, the government should be tendering seasonally dependent contracts earlier, and they should have local content in these contracts that gives some guarantee to our local businesses, especially during the pandemic when the local business community has been devastated.

Another thing that was brought to my attention — and it's a good thing that there were food programs — federal food programs and food programs that came out, which the ministers knew about. But we have local stores in our communities that sell those groceries. You know, they're small stores, but I'm sure that if we had engaged them and had a conversation with them, they would have been able to provide some of that food and create some much-needed jobs and revenue.

One of the other big things that I hear about from my constituents is about land availability. I think we hear about it from across the Yukon. There has been local area planning going on from Takhini River bridge to Haines Junction on that portion of the Alaska Highway that started back with the previous government. For some reason, it stalled and has gone nowhere under this Liberal government.

I was so happy to see, when it comes to lot development — the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations worked hard. The previous government started the land titles process so that they could actually get out there and do that. I am looking forward to — construction is already underway — seeing those lots come out. In order to grow, we need affordable land available of all types. This is what we need. We need residential, country residential, agricultural, commercial, and industrial. It needs to be affordable; that is the key thing. There needs to be options and affordable opportunities, especially for our youth. I am hearing this a lot. As they look to move into home ownership, they need to have an opportunity.

This came up in the House today too from one of the MLAs responding to the budget. I have seen tenders go out for upgrading aging infrastructure, like our heating systems. We have so much potential in our riding for biomass, but instead, this aging infrastructure is being replaced with a propane system. The St. Elias Community School and our liquor store got a propane system. We have biomass. The government said that they would support the biomass industry, but they need to be doing it. They need to make sure that the wood permitting system is streamlined and more efficient. One of the largest wood providers — I was talking to him the other day — is basically out of wood. He is waiting for permits. The red tape goes on.

In Haines Junction, our pool closed because of structural issues, among other things. I have been hearing from residents for the last couple of years here, and there was an online petition with over 800 signatures asking for the mayor and council to look at a new one and other opportunities. I would like to see this happen. The government needs to sit down with the residents and municipality and have public meetings. They are

the ones with the budget. With the budget that we see — the 2021 budget — we don't see anything in there. They need to sit down and plan, cost stuff out to see how to undertake a project of this magnitude, but they need to meet and be out there so that they can be heard.

Currently — and I brought this up in a motion today — our seniors advocate and our seniors society are still not back in the existing facility after being forced out for repairs. The Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation said that they would be back, and that was late November. I'm disappointed, to say the least, but no more than those seniors who have no place to gather and work with their advocate on these important issues, especially during the pandemic.

I might add that — and I'll throw this out again like I do every year: Will the minister go meet with the St. Elias seniors? It's probably a no; she hasn't yet.

I want to talk a little bit about dumps because they are important in my riding and many others because we have many of them. A number of concerns were raised around our local dumps and transfer stations. Tipping fees have been implemented on rural users to complement — you know, of course, there are already higher taxes. You know what? The Minister of Community Services talked about shutting down the Silver City dump. So, for the Minister of Community Services, he received much opposition from the locals. I'm not sure if he has received letters from the First Nation and the local renewable resources council. This government campaigned on a promise that Yukoners would be heard. Lately, all we've seen is little more than Yukoners being told — told things like — when the minister is at a meeting, apparently — “We have a surplus of electricity, so just put your garbage in a deep freeze.” Yeah, that works when you're on solar panels and a generator at Silver City. It doesn't work. You create issues when it comes to human-wildlife conflict. That dump needs to stay there.

The Champagne dump — there were issues with the Champagne dump. I raised these issues to the minister and am thankful for a local who stepped up to the plate to solve these issues. So, the tender just was awarded and that local who — the residents of Mendenhall and the residents of Champagne were so happy that he had taken over because he's local and he understands people's schedules and times. The schedules were changed through the working with the communities of Mendenhall and Champagne. They changed the schedule for the dump. Now the contract came out; I read through the contract. There wasn't much in there for local content or anything that would give locals a benefit. So, now, the low bidder is not from that area, so I've already put the residents there on record that, if you have issues, let me know, because — you know what? We'll see. We hope no issues happen.

So, the decrease in the budget for essential services in rural programs definitely isn't what we needed. They closed the highway camp for a summer. Not supplying our camps with appropriate equipment leads to extended road closures affecting our public safety. We've seen our roads were closed for record times, especially during the pandemic, when the travelling public has 24 hours to go through and they're being hounded because they're an American who has to go from point

A to point B, but they can't get out, and they're being told to go back. We're thankful that the minister corrected that when we had that conversation. I asked him and it was brought to his attention that there was an issue. He said, “As long as you're staying there and not interacting with the community, it's good.” But that stuff doesn't need to happen.

My fellow colleague from Pelly-Nisutlin brought this up: No dollars for rural roads or the resource road upgrade program. That's a sign of how out of touch the government is. My riding is one of the largest ridings. The people at Champagne — the association wanted to put in for some money to do a road upgrade so maybe they could get on the rural road maintenance program. I have people who live closer to Whitehorse and people between Beaver Creek throughout there that see this as an opportunity to grow. You know what it's about? It's about public safety. It's about meeting standards so that our school buses may be able to travel down there, so that RCMP can get down there, ambulances, or any services — maybe a fuel truck or somebody who needs to provide something. There are miners in the community; we have a pretty active region of miners there. In the Gladstone area — up in the Twelfth of July Creek and Fourth of July Creek, that road in there would have been a great opportunity to apply for the resource road upgrade program, but it dried up.

Takhini and Mendenhall needed turning lanes and highway brushing. The government did some major road construction that happened for the better portion of the summer. I'm sure the minister got tired of me asking about cracked windshields. Like I said, they did major construction and we needed turning lanes at Takhini and Mendenhall, but that didn't happen. The roughest portion of the road where you turn off to Takhini — between there and the Takhini River bridge, where the two roughest parts are — they just didn't do anything. So out of touch and not listening, and the minister not paying attention to his budget and what his department is doing.

When we speak of clean energy and projects — that's why it was important for me to work with Kluane First Nation at the very beginning on their wind project. I sure hope to see that through to fruition. But we need to work with the First Nations and the business community to acquire investment in major clean energy projects here in the Yukon.

I think we have heard enough of this, but it has to be repeated because people are asking me this. I said, “Well, their only solution” — there are some long-term solutions, but their only solution right now — and the Energy Corporation has said is — is for the next 10 years to rent more dirty diesels — which is not affordable or sustainable, especially as this territory grows. As a result of that, our power rates continue to rise higher and higher, year after year. It is not sustainable; it is just hurting Yukoners.

I just want to talk a little bit about fish and wildlife. The importance of working and respecting our renewable resources councils, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and the many organizations as they work through their mandates — they need increased funding to do their work rather than funding cuts — some of the organizations — and the minister actually needs to meet with them. The Premier should meet

with them, too — I think he promised. They need to work together for the sustainability of our fish and wildlife populations.

As we continue on navigating the effects of this pandemic, I would like to close by saying that we need our government to be working on behalf of all Yukoners and all Yukon business owners. Businesses need support now. They need less red tape and we need the private sector to lead the charge when it comes to economic recovery.

So, in closing, I would like to thank my family, my friends, and of course my constituents for the love and guidance that they provide to me as their MLA. It has been a very tough year, and I put “love” in there because it has been so difficult to meet. We have had funerals. I just lost a very important person in my life not even a week ago, and to see a heart on a Facebook post, knowing that person would have given you a hug if you had the opportunity to see them — to see the Dakwakada drummers, the dancers drumming someone through town on their way to Burwash — someone who has passed. I have to thank the constituents for finding ways to celebrate someone’s life, mourn someone’s life, to get through this. You know they have to travel to Whitehorse for supplies and they have to travel for appointments and still have to try to live our life. It is so important, now that we have been vaccinated — most of us have — and hopefully we start to open up sooner rather than later. It has been hard for me. I am a guy who likes to get out and see and talk to people and that needs to happen.

Thank you for your time in this House today.

Mr. Gallina: I would like to take this opportunity to thank the constituents of Porter Creek Centre for their support of me in the past four and a half years, in working with me as we address community issues and we debate challenges and talk ideas about ways we can have a better community and live together. We have all been challenged over the past year with the pandemic that has rocked the world. It has been an honour to represent the constituents of Porter Creek Centre. They have been on a journey with me and I have been on one with them, but it has changed my life for sure. It is eye-opening being a part of a territorial government, working with your colleagues to address issues that are far-reaching and touch everyone in this territory in one way or another, making decisions on behalf of all Yukoners.

I am thankful that I have the support from my family to be able to do this job to the best of my ability. I thank my wife, my father, and my children who have grown with me as I have become a community leader in many ways. I thank them for that.

For many Yukoners, this budget does come at a time of uncertainty, but this year’s budget does make life more affordable and it builds on our progress. I am excited to keep the good work going. While members opposite speak of inaction — that we are unable to consider the opinions of Yukoners or that we are unable to deliver — I am going to take some time and speak about what this government is doing and how this government is moving forward with a solid budget that addresses many aspects of life here in the territory.

I’m going to talk about collaboration. I’m going to talk about partnerships. I’m going to talk about projects that are done and that are getting done. I’m going to talk about success, and I’m going to do that today here in this speech.

During uncertain times, you want to be confident that your government is working with you. Over the past 12 months, we’ve seen how this pandemic has reshaped our nation and our territory. We have seen first-hand what meaningful support looks like, and we’ve witnessed, from afar, tragedies unfold due to a lack of meaningful support.

A new standard has been set in our territory. The proverbial shoes that this government stepped into in 2016 have been recrafted into boots, and Yukon is poised for a swift and resilient recovery from this global pandemic.

For many Canadians, COVID-19 has affected everyday life like never before. It certainly affected my life. My father has had medical procedures delayed and rescheduled. Some have been cancelled, like for many Yukoners. My children have adjusted to new activity schedules, to new measures in being safe and understanding space from their friends that they had never experienced before, and to new schedules at school.

Mr. Speaker, supporting Canadians and supporting Yukoners is a fundamental necessity when combatting any emergency. Targeted financial support and relief for business owners, both large and small, and financial aid for families and individuals are essential components to ensuring that you maintain social stability.

This government has provided creative solutions to meet the needs of Yukoners during their greatest time of need. Support such as paid sick-leave rebates for employers and the self-employed, which has assisted 113 Yukon employers with \$448,000 in relief to ensure that they were able to make the responsible decision in staying home while necessary.

The Yukon essential workers income support program provided wage top-ups and paid over \$2.9 million to 110 Yukon businesses to support our essential workers during this time of great need. I’ve heard from many businesses, business owners, and entrepreneurs who have received supports, and I thank the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Tourism and Culture, who have mobilized, responded, and listened to constituents — and, in working with me as an MLA, to bring forward those concerns of constituents. I’m thankful for the opportunity that my colleagues have given me to collaborate on these programs.

The Yukon business relief program has provided 543 applicants with over \$6.3 million in non-repayable grants to cover fixed costs of businesses that experienced or continue to experience financial trouble because of the pandemic.

We overhauled our internal infrastructure to support government employees to work from home. This was a herculean effort. This was not something that was originally planned for at this degree. I thank the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission for working with his team to mobilize and to be able to support Yukon workers to be able to continue to offer service to Yukoners while working in a new environment and setting up the ability for all departments to be

able to continue to provide service to Yukoners while we were dealing with this pandemic.

Enhanced wellness and mental health supports across the territory provide access to information so Yukoners can remain informed every step of the way. Perhaps most importantly, we work directly with Yukoners in the business industry and tourism sector to develop relief programs that target the areas of support that communities needed most. This budget includes close to \$2 billion in spending, including \$443 million in capital spending and \$1.35 billion in operation and maintenance. Our capital budget is a 17-percent increase over the capital budget last year and almost 50-percent larger than the Yukon Party capital budget in 2016. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite question action and deliverables. I look at this budget and I look at these numbers, and this speaks to me. This is significant capital spending, and our government has done a prudent job in delivering on the capital budgets that have been committed to.

Last year, this government allocated over \$100 million to support Yukoners with relief through the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, we're allocating an additional \$50 million to ensure that Yukoners have adequate relief and support as we transition from a period of complete uncertainty to one that is better understood. Despite the economic challenges faced, our territory remains resilient. The government has seen GDP growth every year since we have held office. Combined with the lowest unemployment rate in the country, we are poised for strong economic recovery. Mr. Speaker, these numbers don't lie. This is the current situation. Yes, businesses are struggling, but we are seeing positive indicators that we are doing well here in the territory and that we are poised for strong economic recovery.

This isn't to say that there aren't businesses that are hurting right now. We know that this is an unfortunate reality, but as I have mentioned previously, we do have strong supports in place for those businesses that are suffering.

With a territory-wide immunization program underway, I am confident that we will emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever. Thank you to all Yukoners for your continued efforts and for your sacrifices. Times like these are not easy, but your resilience and determination are largely what have kept us safe.

Mr. Speaker, over the last 12 months, this government has made several commitments, including universal childcare and early learning education for Yukoners. This government recognizes the significance of childcare access for Yukoners. Last session, we debated the *Putting People First* report, which included a recommendation, among many others, for fully funded universal childhood education for all Yukon children over the age of one. This budget has identified \$25 million toward early learning initiatives, including \$12 million to support universal childcare. I am thrilled to see this come into effect, not just for my constituents, but for all Yukon children and families across the territory.

Fully subsidized universal childcare will go a long way to helping Yukon families. It will provide Yukon families with children and licensed childcare programs with flexibility and certainty. It will allow Yukoners to redirect childcare expenses

to investments and expenses here in the territory like never before, for Yukoners to pursue business opportunities that they recently thought were out of reach for them. As the Minister of Education stated, it allows Yukoners to dream again.

Mr. Speaker, with \$400,000 to integrate the new midwifery regulations into our health care system, Yukoners will have more flexibility and self-determination when it comes to bringing a new life into their world. This was a platform commitment that we made to Yukoners in the last election. I am proud to be a part of a government that has delivered on this commitment. I know that tremendous work has taken place within the medical and health community, along with the Minister of Health and Social Services, to get us to where we are today. I thank those who have worked tirelessly to get us here.

New parents can also expect \$667,000 toward the Canada prenatal nutrition program, which will support prenatal initiatives here in Yukon. Many young people today are making a decision to avoid having children due to the high associated costs or lack of support. The government is clearly demonstrating a commitment to enhancing those supports and reducing the associated costs of raising children here in the territory. As my riding of Porter Creek Centre continues to grow with new families — young and old alike — these supports will go a long way in ensuring that these children and families have the best chance at success. Mr. Speaker, education is a price we cannot afford.

I am also very excited to see that the community of Whistle Bend will be receiving the first new elementary school in over 25 years. Having immediate access to education for the young families in Whistle Bend will make daily commutes less stressful, it will relieve pressures, and it will relieve pressures throughout the Yukon school system. This budget is committing \$10.5 million toward the construction of this new school, and I thank the Minister of Highways and Public Works for including these dollars toward the construction of this new school, which will greatly benefit the community. For those interested, the Whistle Bend elementary school project is outlined, with considerable detail, on the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board's website. It includes road traffic studies, detailed maps, proposals for speed limits, and building design styles.

Since the declaration of a climate emergency, this government has taken action to deliver creative needed solutions to meet the Yukon's growing energy demand while ensuring that we are able to reduce our total greenhouse gas emissions. *Our Clean Future* is a bold strategy that involves strategic partnerships, economic stimulation, innovative solutions, and the development of a local green economy to ensure that our future remains green, clean, and vibrant.

Over the next 10 years, this government, in partnership with the Government of Canada, will invest over \$500 million to implement this strategy — creating jobs, new industries, and ensuring that our energy demands are being met using local renewable solutions.

\$16 million for community-based, renewable projects will help curb our reliance on diesel power generation, and

\$6.7 million is for energy rebates to assist Yukoners and Yukon-based businesses. The adaptation of renewable heating sources will help address the growing cost of living while improving efficiency in the north.

I, like many Yukoners, desire a clean future for my children and their future families. Strategies like these give me great confidence in their success for the years to come, and I am proud to be part of a team that shares this vision with me.

Since we first came into office, this government has passed some of the most inclusive legislation that Yukon has seen to date. Prioritizing equality and inclusion, we have updated laws that made it illegal to discriminate based on gender expression or identity. We removed the requirements for sex reassignment surgery to change the sex on birth registration. We provided funding for improved counselling services for LGBTQ2S+ persons and banned conversion therapy in Yukon. I want to thank the Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate and the Minister of Justice for leading those initiatives and ensuring that our legislation was modern and was inclusive for all Yukoners.

This Liberal government has a vision for an inclusive Yukon. It includes supporting all walks of life without passing judgment and without persecution. In 2021, we will be contributing \$125,000 to Queer Yukon to establish the first-ever pride centre in our territory. We want everyone living on this shared land to feel welcome and safe, and we are proud to be supporters in that.

Part of ending discrimination means changing the narrative and upholding dignity and justice for Yukon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and two-spirit-plus people. Together with First Nation people, we are moving forward down a path that supports healing and wellness as opposed to one of neglect and ignorance. I'm thankful to have been able to work with the Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate, the Minister of Health and Social Services, and the Minister of Justice, who have put forward a leading strategy to address the recommendations made in reports for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Part of moving forward with reconciliation means acknowledging the losses and the trauma and finding ways to support families and individuals who have lost loved ones and continue to grieve. The significance of this work cannot be overstated.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard from many Yukoners the growing concern for affordable housing in the territory. For my constituents, a \$20-million commitment in Whistle Bend land development means that we're working to address the growing market demand for houses, which we expect will slow the ever-rising costs of homeownership for those attempting to enter the market. Rental and purchase costs are higher than ever. This government recognizes that investments like these address the supply gap in the housing market of tomorrow and, in turn, will make living in Yukon more affordable for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, since winning the 2016 election, we have steered the territory forward in a positive direction, and this budget continues that momentum — a direction that includes necessary modernization of our legislation to bring Yukon up

to speed with the rest of the nation. We've come so far as a territory that for decades lagged behind the rest of the nation to one that is leading responses and revolutionizing the way we work directly with our stakeholders.

Our leadership under a Liberal Premier — the MLA for Klondike — and our team made up of indigenous leaders, climate defendants, school teachers, attorneys and social justice advocates, business and community leaders — we are making a difference. We are creating a better life for Yukoners by improving health care, planning and building new schools, expanding housing developments, fixing roads and airports to be safer for all, and cutting taxes to save Yukoners money. In this budget, we continue to establish respectful relationships with all levels of government, which means less time in the courtroom and more time in the meeting room, getting things done. We continue to show that Yukon can balance support for the mineral industry along with environmental stewardship to protect this place that we love and call home.

When COVID-19 emerged as a real threat in the Yukon, our team acted quickly to get financial and social supports in place for Yukoners. In this budget, we continue to manage the risk of this deadly virus to keep Yukoners safe and develop some of the strongest business supports in the country to keep our economy growing and moving forward. Unemployment has remained low, and through "buy local" promotions, retail sales have increased year over year during this government mandate.

Our aggressive approach to updating and developing new laws has made Yukon a more modern, inclusive place to live, and I'm proud to be sharing this territory with many folks who live here and who come from all different walks of life. This budget is strong and our record is strong, and we will stand behind this record. It demonstrates an unparalleled willingness to find creative solutions to problems that we face.

Mr. Speaker, it's undeniable that one of the most significant problems we're facing right now is the pandemic. While some may dispute the risks, the significance of the impact is undeniable. This Yukon Liberal government has worked hard to navigate the territory through the COVID-19 pandemic, and this work speaks for itself. Under this Liberal leadership, the government acted quickly to create support programs that set a gold standard across the country and ensured that businesses stayed afloat and Yukoners were supported when they needed it most. This budget will continue this good support work.

We implemented community health measures that have done a great job in curbing the spread of COVID-19. In fact, we remain the only jurisdiction in the country with no community spread.

Mr. Speaker, this government has shown a willingness to trust our medical science partners and community, which have played a significant role in maintaining safety in our territory, so much so that we see record numbers of people moving here. A strong economy, strong employment, and strong social supports are the basis of a well-functioning society, and we have that here.

We brought in paid sick leave and rent and eviction protection and have extended this support. We have developed business relief programs. It has also been extended once again. These are the strongest business relief packages in Canada, and these supports are fixed in this budget. To address this pandemic, we changed regulations so that seniors could continue to drive even if their licences expired during these challenging times. We adjusted regulations to make it possible for societies to continue to work where they do by meeting virtually.

We suspended in-classroom learning in the spring and reopened it on time in the fall with safety plans in place. We have subsidized childcare costs so that early learning childcare providers could stay open and support essential workers. We have offered wage top-ups so that employers could pay their employees. We obtained an isolation hotel. We obtained a respiratory assessment clinic to take the pressure off of our hospital. We have created a call-in line and a comprehensive online tool to provide Yukoners with all the information they need to manage this pandemic. We even appointed a committee of business people to provide direct and immediate information about what Yukon businesses needed in terms of support. We have worked with our stakeholders, not against them.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our work to ensure that the Government of Canada has considered Yukon a priority population for the vaccine rollout. We will have enough vaccines this spring to vaccinate every adult Yukoner who wants one. We did our part to get the doses, and if enough Yukoners choose to accept the vaccine, Yukon is positioned to be one of the first jurisdictions in the world to reach population immunity. There have been hurdles — delayed deliveries of doses and overloaded booking systems — but despite some challenges, Yukoners are being vaccinated. This is something that we can all be proud of and we should be proud of, regardless of our political alignment.

I want to thank the incredible work that is being done by the vaccination team — the nurses, the health care workers, Health and Social Services and logistics, and, of course, our essential workers who have remained vigilant and continue to persevere.

Undoubtedly, Yukon's tourism sector is a large economic driver of our territory. Globally, tourism is the hardest hit sector by the COVID-19 pandemic outside of health care. Our government was one of the first jurisdictions in the country to respond early to support local businesses affected by the pandemic. In fact, we were one of the first jurisdictions in the country to roll out a business relief program. Again, I will take the opportunity to thank the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Tourism and Culture for including their team and the community and continuing to connect with the community to ensure that the supports that are being rolled out are relevant and timely. The goal of response efforts has been to stabilize Yukon's tourism businesses by developing relief programs immediately to stabilize the industry.

A number of supports in Yukon's tourism relief and recovery plan have been extended. These include the extension

of the \$4-million tourism accommodation and non-accommodation sector supplements to September 30, 2021, a \$450,000 contribution to Yukon's Elevate business mentoring program, and a \$300,000 enhancement to the tourism cooperative marketing fund, bringing the total to \$1 million. Right now, our focus is to keep operators going to ensure that we have a strong tourism industry ready for when travel restrictions ease.

As we continue our necessary public health and safety response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the preservation of our local tourism economy is forefront in our minds. Mr. Speaker, strong responses to unforeseen circumstances require strong relationships, and this budget shows the strengths of our relationships. This Yukon Liberal government has proven that it can work with all levels of government to achieve goals for all Yukoners. Through strong collaboration with the federal government, we have seen unprecedented support to our territory through initiatives like the Gateway project, Normandy Manor and affordable seniors housing, the Arctic energy fund, and the investing in community fund, as well as money for green energy projects.

It is very important for us that we always remain open and transparent with Yukoners about why we are in the state of emergency. We are working with point-in-time legislation which never contemplated or took into account extended periods of emergency such as a global pandemic. Despite these challenges, this Liberal government has found creative ways to utilize its outdated legislation and provide confidence and leadership for Yukoners when they needed it most.

All orders put in place are to protect and support Yukoners. Without the state of emergency, all the ministerial orders we have made under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* would expire. We would no longer be able to enforce self-isolation, border controls, or the use of masks in public to keep Yukoners safe.

Our objective is to remain responsive to the dynamic situation and to protect the health and safety and livelihood of all Yukoners. We want to modernize the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*. We proposed a committee to modernize it and the opposition took offence to us having the most qualified individual from our team working with this committee which was for the benefit for all Yukoners.

Many Yukoners are struggling with affordable housing in this territory; we recognize that. We also recognize that stable, affordable housing is foundational to the health and well-being of Yukoners. We've taken action and this budget builds on that action to address housing. We've invested in the development of more than 600 homes since taking office. The housing initiative fund has supported over 350 homes since we launched it in 2018. We're completing a new 47-unit community housing project in Whitehorse to provide safe and affordable housing. We have supported the Challenge Cornerstone project — a 53-unit supported and affordable housing development. This year, we worked with the City of Whitehorse to release more than 250 lots — the largest ever lottery and tender of lots — in Whitehorse. These are historic investments and they speak for themselves.

We know that if supply matches demand, the cost will stabilize. Providing avenues for that supply is paramount in ensuring a more affordable market here in the territory. A huge part of affordability rests with childcare and early learning. We believe all children should have access to affordable, high-quality childcare and early learning opportunities.

We are committed to ongoing engagement and working closely with First Nation governments, stakeholders, and others as we integrate universal childcare and early kindergarten in all rural Yukon schools. In this budget, we are committed to an early learning childcare subsidy, and as I have mentioned, it will save Yukon families \$700 per child per month.

With respect to IEPs, we are committed to providing educational approaches that accommodate students with a diversity of learning needs, and this budget reflects our priorities in education. We are listening to your feedback and that is a change from the previous government.

We are committed to the review of inclusive and special education to determine how best to serve Yukon students and to see if the supports that we provide are meeting their needs. We are committed to that.

First Nation relations have never been stronger in our territory. The Yukon Forum has been an incredible success and we are building off that momentum with the First Nation procurement policy. This innovative policy will bring business opportunities for Yukon First Nations and advance economic self-sufficiency while moving government procurement policy in a more inclusive direction for all Yukoners.

It has already added more than \$430 million to the territorial economy. This is new money — new money stemming from agreements that we have been able to sign with First Nation governments. I know that the Minister of Highways and Public Works and his team have worked tirelessly with the business community and have been listening to the business community, and despite the criticism received earlier from the Leader of the Official Opposition, who stated that the minister wasn't listening to the business community at all — I challenge that. I know that the minister has been listening and has adjusted the schedule for this policy to roll out, to give the business community time to work with the department and to ensure that the policies make sense for every Yukon business. That is happening.

At the last Yukon Forum, leaders endorsed the Yukon's First Nation procurement policy. It is a major step toward realizing the vision of chapter 22 of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*. The Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nation partners will continue to meet with the business community to ensure that the implementation of this policy is a success for all Yukoners.

Following feedback from these meetings that I spoke about, Yukon businesses will get more time — until October 4, 2021 — to prepare for the two most complex measures under this new policy: bid value reductions and the verification process. This work is ongoing. The collaboration is taking place with the Yukon business community. Additionally, the Government of Yukon and its First Nation partners are now inviting business representatives to participate

on the Monitor and Review Committee. These changes are being made to help ensure that the policy meets its goals and supports competitive procurement in the territory.

This team and I recognize the struggles we have all faced over the last year and we are working hard to make life more comfortable, more affordable, and supported for each and every one of us who call this territory home. A lot of work has gone into reshaping Yukon into a more prosperous territory, one that leads and seeks innovative solutions for problems that we collectively face. I have confidence in my team and in this government and I do look forward to serving Yukoners for another term.

As the MLA for Porter Creek Centre, I do take pride in supporting my community and the people who reside in this beautiful riding. Over the past four years, I volunteered in community cleanup initiatives, worked directly with my constituents on their unique challenges that they faced, and I have engaged in outreach through various campaigns and collaborations with the community associations of Porter Creek and Whistle Bend.

Over the recent holidays, I worked with Yukon children to develop Christmas greeting cards that were hand-delivered throughout my riding. I received many compliments about how people were appreciative to receive these unique local cards. Most recently, I held a gratitude campaign where I received over 50 artwork entries from Yukon kids, which included both writing and drawing where they individually expressed what they were thankful for. Five pieces were selected to be displayed in various forums to promote positive messages and showcase and stimulate creativity within our community. These greeting cards were also hand-delivered to all constituents in Porter Creek Centre and throughout Whistle Bend. I have since held interviews with several media outlets that included these children. The feedback from the community has been incredible.

As a father of four young children, I know first-hand how hard this past year has been on families. Restricted visits with friends, changes in activities, and altered schedules for school and family life have made it hard for our young ones, so providing an avenue for positive expression is an important outlet that promotes positive mental health and stability for everyone.

I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to my constituents and families who participated. I look forward to future creative engagements with my community and constituents. The support that I have received through this has been heartwarming and greatly positive. Thank you again, everyone, for your continued support with these children's activities and their creative expression.

In closing, this year's budget does make life more affordable and it builds on our progress. I am excited to keep the good work going. I look forward to building on our progress. I want to thank my constituents, I would like to thank my colleagues, and I would like to thank my family for their support over the four and a half years.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It's my pleasure to rise today to respond to our 2021-22 main budget.

I rise today as the MLA for Mountainview and to speak also as Minister of Tourism and Culture and the Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate and the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board. I would like to start by just really expressing my sincere gratitude to Mountainview for giving me this tremendous opportunity to be in a leadership role in Yukon. I have not taken that for granted one minute of any day since I took this office.

I also really want to thank my family, particularly my husband over the last year and all the support that he has shown me to do the work that needed to be done in Yukon. It's really great to have that kind of support because that's not something that I had for the other few years in this position. I want to thank my sons and all my family and my friends for just standing by me and supporting the work that we're doing. It's not easy being in the Legislative Assembly. Sometimes it's a very painful place to be some days. I really cherish their support and I am thankful that they don't give up on me. I've said this a few times, but they keep reaching out even though sometimes I just don't have the time, because we're giving a lot here and for very good reason, particularly this last year, Mr. Speaker. You cannot be the same person after going through what we've gone through in the territory and worldwide. It has been an honour to be the MLA for Mountainview over the last four years, and I'm so eager to continue the work to improve community safety in Granger, Hillcrest, Valleyview, and McIntyre.

During this challenging year of 2020, more than ever, I've made it my priority to have all lines of communication open to the Mountainview constituents. I'm humbled that so many folks in the riding really trusted me with their most intimate issues. It has been an honour to work alongside them. Hearing that safety is one of the number one issues in the riding, I met with Kwanlin Dün First Nation, our community associations, and the RCMP to bring everyone together to make some much-needed positive changes. As a result, we now have a Mountainview community safety and wellness committee. I'm really proud of that. I know that our government is investing in community safety.

I think that is our job as MLAs — when things are happening in our riding, to actually take an active role and step up. That is what I stepped into this role to do, so I am proud of the folks in Mountainview who will carry this on. I know that it will make a difference.

McIntyre has particularly seen some really tremendous infrastructure changes from their new community hub, which is scheduled to be finished this spring — I am super excited for the community. It is a new, incredible space that I know they will be eager to share with all Yukoners. Also, there is their new fun and safe playground, and there is so much more in the community. I always encourage folks to just take a drive through the community and get a sense of the feel there.

After decades of previous government stalling, the Alaska Highway project is finally nearing completion. Phase 1 of the Hillcrest area project, which cost \$12 million, was completed last year and included traffic light improvements and proper

turning lanes to enhance safety on our highways. Phase 2 of this work is continuing this year. We have budgeted over \$4 million to continue this work. I really thank the Minister of Highways and Public Works for making this a priority project in our capital budget. You can now enter and exit Hillcrest, Valleyview, and the airport in a safe manner. I think that is a tremendous improvement from where we were when we took office four and a half years ago.

While I'm mentioning these, I would also like to discuss a couple of other capital projects, including airports and highways. This year, our capital budget will invest \$2.7 million into the Mayo airport, which was recently upgraded from an aerodrome. Over \$150 million will go into the north Klondike Highway project to continue the reconstruction of the road between Pelly Crossing and Dawson City. These are some of the examples where our government is investing in communities across the territory.

Mr. Speaker, when I put my name — and I know that when we all put our name — on the ballot in 2016, not one of us thought that we would be governing through a global pandemic three years in, but that certainly is what happened.

I'm so proud of the team that we have and the work that they've done to keep Yukon safe. I feel immense gratitude to be in Yukon during this global health pandemic. COVID-19 is a completely unprecedented and unforeseen event. Our Liberal government responded to the pandemic quickly and decisively. I think that a lot of credit has to be given to a steady hand. I think that's what we had.

I've heard my colleagues say, "I would stand shoulder to shoulder with this team." I echo that. We have worked alongside our partners to make sure that Yukoners get the support they need while remaining one of the safest jurisdictions in the world. I'm so proud of the resilience displayed by Yukoners and the steps that we have taken to protect one another's health over the past year.

One of the things that I've been reflecting on recently is that whole notion of resilience. A couple of years ago, my nation went through wildfires that devastated the landscape and changed our people forever. When we were in that, I always felt that we're in a really historic moment and our people will never be quite the same. I think that's exactly what I've reflected on through this.

One of the things that I want to say to Yukoners is that we're more than resilient, because "resilience" means that we're going right back to the same place where we were. I think that we're beyond resilient, and that's what I felt about the Tahltan people when we went through the wildfires and how I feel about the pandemic and the preparation that the crisis had on me as an individual to be prepared for this.

I don't take for granted any decision that we make, that we've made, or that we will make into the future because we know that every single decision that's made is going to have a lasting impact. I know that, during the last global pandemic, my people were almost totally wiped out from the Tahltan Nation.

Being a leader in this territorial government at this time has certainly — those are thoughts that I have had — that we have a chance to make different decisions and protect people so that

our indigenous communities and those sometimes most at risk are protected. So, I am proud of the work that we did together to protect Yukoners. One loss of life is too many. Our goal was zero. I really am saddened by the loss that we had in our territory and my heart really goes out to the family, friends, and community of the person who has been lost in our territory as a result of this pandemic.

I want to say that our partnerships with the business community, NGOs, and public servants all came together as a society, really, to respond to the pandemic in a responsible way. Still, this year has been so incredibly challenging and the pandemic has had a significant impact on our economy, our social well-being, and our communities. There is no portion of our lives that COVID has not touched.

I know that it has been an incredibly difficult time particularly for our tourism industry. Restricted travel immediately halted our tourism industry. When social distancing was implemented and reduced gatherings, it affected cultural practices and experiences. These industries were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and I am proud of the Department of Tourism and Culture for their responsiveness and ability to adapt plans, programs, and funding to support our tourism and cultural sectors. Thank you so much to all of the staff at the Department of Tourism and Culture for all of the work that you have done to be adaptive and to be on the job, sometimes way beyond what — again, Yukoners stepped up, and the staff really worked hard alongside Economic Development to be responsive.

It is not lost on me, for sure, that businesses that work in the tourism industry have dedicated their lives to it. They have invested a lifetime for some businesses to share the Yukon with the rest of the world.

I know that there has been a tremendous grieving process that has gone on over the last year. Our department is, of course, actively collaborating with Yukon's tourism industry, the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, the local chambers of commerce, all the other Government of Yukon departments, Destination Canada, and Yukon's chief medical officer of health to monitor and assess the impacts of the COVID-19 virus on the tourism sector. Our priority at the Department of Tourism and Culture is to protect Yukon's rich cultural heritage, promote its history and diverse forms of artistic expression, and to market and grow Yukon's tourism industry. I know that we will come back stronger and that's the spirit of Yukon and Yukoners.

During COVID, we honoured all of our existing funding agreements. This applied to museums, cultural centres, as well as art facilities, individual artists, and non-profit organizations. We also established the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board last year and the advice has been essential as we navigated our new normal. As we move through this phase and into post-pandemic recovery, I want to thank the hard work and dedication of this brand new board that came into effect during this particular time. A special shout-out to Denny Kobayashi as the chair and Lisa Dewhurst as the co-chair for stepping up and for doing this work. The department and Yukon's tourism industry are committed to putting people and their well-being first. We

know that we are stronger when we work together. I think that's what we've certainly seen — particularly this last year, but even prior to that — as we build new relationships with one another during other planning processes, which I'll talk about in a moment.

The *Yukon Parks Strategy* — which will be a strong tourism driver in support and environmentally respectful path forward for our territory — is a really important element of this budget. It also provides new opportunities for Yukoners to experience their own backyard, and we encourage residents to take advantage of the many incredible parks and campgrounds across the Yukon. I'm really excited that the campgrounds are going to open on May 1; that's the plan right now.

Our Clean Future is providing certainty for Yukon's sustainable future and enhances industry innovation and creativity. We are creating a new green economy, working directly with Yukoners and industry to shape Yukon into a sustainable and environmental leader, so \$240,000 has been allocated from this budget to advance sustainable tourism to meet the objectives of *Our Clean Future*.

Another example of a one-government approach — despite our small footprint, Yukoners are very passionate about environmental protection, such as the movement for the Peel watershed. We want to make sure that our strategies represent Yukoners in the best way possible. I know that this was a key issue in my riding and throughout Yukon during the last election. I was very proud — it was an emotional day — when we were in the community of Mayo to have that ceremony together and ground it in ceremony in that moment. I know that for every one of us, that will be one of the days we remember — and there are a lot of days that we will remember for sure.

Putting People First will challenge the current standard model for social services and health care in the territory. The vaccine rollout for the territory is going very well, and because of the careful management of the pandemic response, Yukon is in a very unique and advantageous position when travel opportunities become safe again.

Prior to COVID-19, we experienced three straight years of record-breaking performance for Yukon's tourism sector and forecasts were for continued growth throughout 2020. It was during this time that the first *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* in 18 years was released. We are a Yukon that leads. We planned when tourism was thriving during the best time that we have had in our history of tourism, and this growing industry makes significant and irreplaceable contributions to Yukon's economy. We are committed to enabling the tourism sector to not only survive this global downturn but to rebuild and strengthen for the future.

The *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* is not a government strategy; it's a value-driven, all-of-Yukon approach, and I think that we did see those values shine through in this last year as we worked together. Sustainable tourism is tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.

Through greater alignment and collaboration, we can maximize our competitive advantages and take tourism to the next level. This cutting-edge plan gets to the heart of who we are as Yukoners, why we are passionately proud to live here, and how we want to engage with visitors. It has guided us through the biggest challenge of our lives. This work with our partners laid the foundation for a sustainable tourism sector in Yukon and directly informed the COVID-19 tourism relief and recovery plan.

Through this plan, we are investing \$15 million — as I've said many times in the Legislative Assembly — over these three years to support the tourism industry during the unprecedented impacts of the pandemic and to position Yukon as a premier wilderness and cultural destination. \$6,475,000 has been allocated for Yukon's recovery and relief plan. That breaks down to: rebuilding confidence, industry adoption of standardized safe travel protocols, resident perception of tourism research monitoring, rebuilding trust to invite visitors — \$225,000; place brand for Yukon story is \$500,000; the Elevate program is \$450,000; enhancement to the base of the tourism cooperative marketing fund is \$300,000, which will bring it up to \$1 million; enhancing marketing — \$1 million; and then the continuation of the relief programs of \$4 million.

Under the tourism relief and recovery plan and through working with our colleagues in Economic Development, we launched two important relief programs as supplements to the existing Yukon business relief program. We created support for the tourism sector through the tourism accommodation supplement and the tourism non-accommodation sector supplement. Together, these programs have \$4 million available to the industry, and we recently announced the extension of these programs to September 30, 2021.

To help businesses respond to COVID-19 and to prepare for recovery, we are a partner to the Elevate program — a program to assist businesses to modify, adapt, and enhance their services now and post-pandemic. I've already mentioned that we've allocated \$450,000 to that work and we're really working with Canada to continue our partnership with them and to support artists during this challenging time. We doubled the Advanced Artist Award and immediately allocated \$1.8 million to the temporary support for events funding. Those were initiatives that we had in place in the early days of the pandemic.

We also created the cultural and tourism non-profit sector supplement and allocated \$300,000 in support of organizations impacted by the pandemic. We worked with the non-profit society to help administer that program. The silver lining of COVID has been the opportunity to re-evaluate what holds importance in our lives. Artistic expression is part of the human experience and creativity is the meeting place of imagination and knowledge and the backbone of culture. With in-person gatherings limited, many of us are spending more time at home and it is the creative and cultural industries that we have turned to for our entertainment for sure.

The creative and cultural industries are a distinct and important part of Yukon's culture, providing economic and social benefits to the territory. These industries are quite diverse

but essentially include all industries which generate culture, artistic heritage products, and content for consumers and marketplaces. Creative potential advancing Yukon's creative and cultural industries is the first-ever strategy to support and grow these important industries and I am extremely proud of the work that has led to this great strategy that we have worked alongside Yukoners to develop. The 10-year strategy guided by seven principles, 22 actions, under four strategic objectives will help the sector rebuild and recover from the pandemic.

A prosperous, creative, and cultural industry sector will not only strengthen our creative community, but implementing this strategy will also contribute to Yukon's broader economic recovery and overall well-being. For example, to protect and preserve Yukon's art and heritage resources, we have committed funding in the five-year capital plan to build a new arts and heritage resource centre.

We are also investing \$300,000 in the implementation of the creative and cultural industry strategy. We know that tourism and cultural experiences need to be safe, supported by residents, attractive for visitors, and provide economic viability. The Department of Tourism and Culture and the Yukon government as a whole will continue to innovate and adapt to meet the needs of Yukoners and, when the time is right, inspire travellers to safely visit, because we know that the Yukon is the place to be. I think that it's not just a place people want to be; it's a place people need to be. I know that we'll have that experience for folks when the time is right.

Our territory is increasing, and a diverse population is a sign of our strength. We are proud of Yukon's modern society that sees people of all backgrounds thrive together and live happy lives. Still, there's always a lot more work to do.

Putting People First is an ambitious reimagining of Yukon's health and social services. This budget contains dollars for some of the 76 recommendations that come from that plan, including allocating \$677,000 for the Canada prenatal nutrition program and \$400,000 for midwifery.

COVID has impacted the lives of all Yukoners, but some groups have experienced disproportionate economic, social, and health-related impacts. We know that women are particularly hard hit by the impact of COVID-19. Women have disproportionately assumed extra caregiving responsibilities, and in recognition, we are supporting women through the sick leave programs, access to funded childcare, and essential workers and eviction protection. The universal childcare will be launched on April 1, and that's an investment of \$25.2 million. Parents receiving childcare will save an additional \$700 a month per child. These savings can then be used at the discretion of the family and go toward the well-being of Yukoners.

I want to say that a lot of the discussions over the last year with women and gender equality with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners have included a lot of discussion around "she-covery", which is a term that's being used around the recovery from the pandemic. One of the key elements to that — to she-covery — is childcare. We heard it from experts from around the world at the last FPT saying that, if there's

something to invest in around economic recovery and social recovery from the pandemic, invest in universal childcare.

That is what we have done — whether it's saving for future education, making the family bills more affordable, or perhaps covering the unexpected life costs that hit us when we least expect them.

On that note, over \$86.6 million has been allocated for continuing care, respite programs, palliative care, and community day programs to support Yukon's aging population. The pandemic has also contributed to an increase in gender-based violence and has created barriers to accessing services. In response, we have budgeted under one of the programs that I am directly involved with — the sexualized assault response team. One of the initiatives within that is to provide a 24-hour confidential toll-free Yukon-wide support line for victims of sexualized assault. The Women's Directorate is directly responsible for working with our organizations to support that, and \$60,000 has been allotted for that contract. This is under the sexualized assault response team initiative, which we are very proud of. We have worked very hard on it and are looking forward to the next level of that initiative.

In tandem with this program, we took quick action in April 2020 and partnered with Northwestel and the Yukon Status of Women to provide cellphones to women in need. These actions are not only about protecting Yukoners today but also protecting the generations to follow us. Rates of sexualized violence against women and girls — and particularly indigenous women and girls — are high, and we are working hard to change that reality. The Yukon is the first jurisdiction in Canada to develop a strategy in response to the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. *Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice: Yukon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit+ Strategy* outlines a territory-wide approach to address violence against indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people.

I thank folks from the Legislative Assembly for the support that you have shown. I think that, whatever the party line is, the goal of that strategy was to bring every single partner to the table, and we did that. I am really proud of that work and I'm proud of Yukoners for standing behind it.

It's deeply personal and difficult work, and there has been a lot of heartache throughout this process for all of us who have worked on it. It's not easy, and we've had a lot of difficult moments as we worked toward developing this. Keeping families at the centre of the work was always our goal. I'm looking forward to the implementation of this important strategy. The Yukon strategy on MMIWG2S+ is extremely important and establishes guidelines on how we move forward together as a territory. The main theme emerging from other conversations that we had — and we included it — is the emphasis on land-based healing, the role of men and boys, the need for accountability of the Yukon strategy of MMIWG2S+. To help guide capacity to implement this important strategy, we are providing an additional \$600,000 for indigenous women's equality to the indigenous women's equality fund, and \$300,000 has been allocated to work with the indigenous

women's organizations to continue their advocacy and to move to a place of implementation.

I believe that this particular strategy will be a very deep dive into many of our systems in Yukon. Our goal is to absolutely change the story. I know that, by changing the story for indigenous women and girls, we will change the story for all Yukon women and girls because these system changes are at the heart of this strategy.

Advancing equality and safety in our territory remains a priority. Our government has a vision of healthy, vibrant communities where all Yukoners feel safe and welcome. Supporting greater inclusion and equality of LGBTQ2S+ Yukoners in our community is an important step toward realizing this vision. Our government has fundamentally committed to fostering an open and inclusive society.

In this budget, we have budgeted \$125,000 for Queer Yukon to continue their important work toward realizing a pride centre to further support and celebrate our LGBTQ2S+ community. I'm committed, as a minister, to work alongside the LGBTQ2S+ community to realize that dream and to see it come to reality.

We listened to Yukoners and banned conversion therapy in the territory with the passing of the *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Protection Act*. The work that we have done alongside the LGBTQ2S+ community has resulted in a number of acts being updated, including the *Vital Statistics Act*, the *Human Rights Act*, *Gender Diversity and Related Amendments Act*, *Equality of Spouses Act*, and the *Public Service Labour Relations Act*. We repealed the *Married Women's Property Act*.

We are working with Yukon's LGBTQ2S+ community to improve inclusivity throughout the government, both as an employer and as a service provider, and the LGBTQ2S+ action plan will do just that.

We provided funding to improve counselling services for transgender, two-spirit, non-binary individuals and their partners. Yukon was also the first jurisdiction to offer free training to health professionals to provide kind and culturally sensitive transgender health care. We are taking steps to reshape what it means to be an inclusive government, and we recognize the societal changes that have occurred over the years and are working to challenge the stigma and change the narrative.

The steps taken to implement safe workplace training will enhance the physical and psychological safety of individuals in all areas of life.

I can't mention safety without highlighting the important work of the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board. Protecting the rights of workers and providing them with appropriate support is for the betterment of all Yukoners. Workers must be protected from workplace hazards, including violence and harassment, and we are making sure that acts and policies put in place achieve this goal.

After extensive public consultation through the fall of 2019 and 2020, the *Workers' Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* have undergone a full review. Our government is committed to reducing the number of workplace incidents and injuries, increasing the efficiency of

claim administration, reducing red tape and delays, and maintaining a solvent compensation fund. Modernizing this framework enables Yukon employers and workers to stay safe and healthy in their workplaces and establish a fair system of compensation in the case of workplace injury. Under one new comprehensive statute, the *Workers' Compensation Act* will provide clear and effective legislation that ensures workers' safety and is in step with changing workplace conditions.

The importance of mental health has been captured in this modernization to protect and preserve Yukon's small but mighty workforce. COVID has shone a spotlight on societal mental well-being, but mental health was a priority for this government well before the pandemic. In the beginning of our mandate, I tabled amendments to provide post-traumatic stress disorder presumption to recognize a unique and often traumatizing nature of emergency first-response occupations. These amendments in the act established presumptive PTSD legislation for first responders, which means they won't have to prove their post-traumatic stress disorder in work related under the compensation board.

Further, if any worker covered under the *Workers' Compensation Act* is diagnosed with PTSD and the cause is determined to be work-related, the worker is eligible for compensation benefits. When we passed that act, we also passed an act to prevent psychological injury in all workplaces. I'm really proud that the regulations have been passed and this will come into effect in September. Prevention is more effective than treatment for sure, and regulations that support prevention reduce the stigma attached to mental illness.

I just want to go back — modernizing the acts that govern the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board's business brings Yukon in line with other Canadian jurisdictions and will provide Yukoners with safety and a compensation system that works for them when they need it most. We value inclusive governance and support all Yukoners to stay safe and return home to their families every day. I'm proud to lead the passing of new legislation that addresses the realities of safe workplaces and mental health in the 21st century.

We are a government that listens. Taking a people-centred approach to our work upholds our values and has been integral to our success. Our Liberal government will continue to prioritize the interests and needs of Yukoners and support Yukon businesses because we are all in this together.

In closing, I am deeply honoured to be the MLA for the riding of Mountainview. I am proud of the work that this government is doing to improve the lives of all Yukoners. We have achieved so many of our commitments to date and I am excited to keep the good work going.

Ms. White: It's something else to be here and standing for another Budget Address in another year. I guess that I am in my tenth year now, so it has been quite a few.

Of course, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the folks in Takhini-Kopper King, a riding that goes all the way down the Fish Lake Road, where we have houses that are off-grid. We have houses that have been living the renewable lifestyle for a long time. We come, of course, all the way back and I have the

pleasure of having three mobile home parks. I have old Takhini duplexes and new Takhini construction, soon to be home to Normandy Manor, which will be interesting for traffic along Range Road. We have condo corporations and stand-alone houses. It is an exciting place. It has Yukon University, it has the correctional facility, the youth correctional facility, and the John Howard transitional housing, which has been an adventure, mostly due to the lack of communication on all sides with my neighbourhood, but it goes on and on.

The one thing about the folks in Takhini is that, no matter where you are, it's like you are in a neighbourhood. One of my favourite things is that we have a tiny library in front of my house and that has been lovely. I say this because folks in my neighbourhood get out. They walk around, they talk to each other, and it has never felt less than a neighbourhood, which is great.

I have been elected since 2011. I was here under the Yukon Party and now we are here on the cusp of the end of the Liberal government's term. I can look back, I can look forward, and I can look to the present. When I was elected, it was a Yukon Party government. In fact, their current leader and I were elected in the same election. We were both elected at the same time and media did some parallels, talking about how we were both young, though it turns out that the Member for Lake Laberge is actually younger than I am by a bit. So, the Leader of the Official Opposition and I were elected at the same time. It's important to note that he played a leadership role in that government because it's hard to separate what was to what is now and to what may be in the future, because the Yukon Party government was driven by ideology.

What I really lived through between 2011 and 2016 — or folks outside this Chamber lived through — was that it was government that just didn't listen to people; they just didn't listen.

I learned how to speak in this Chamber with the sound of drums outside my back shoulder, because every first day of the Legislative Assembly, there were dozens and dozens if not hundreds of people outside this Chamber because they wanted to be heard.

I came in here and some of my friends have passed now — like, I think about Gerry, who sat in this Chamber every day that I was in this Chamber between 2011 and 2016, with his T-shirt that said: "Protect democracy, protect the plan, protect the Peel". It was a Yukon Party government that tried to develop the Peel. They wanted to rewrite the Peel plan, and that's the leader of the Yukon Party who was part of that.

I guess there are some parallels though, because we can look at what's happening in the Indian River wetland right now under the Liberal government, where the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation has said, "Please, stop staking; put in a moratorium until we get a wetlands policy", but that's not happening.

Under the Yukon Party, the housing crisis reached a tipping point. When I was first elected, there was a tent city on the lawn. There was a tent city on the lawn. But I feel like we're getting closer to that again. The challenge with that though is — because under the *Financial Administration Act*, the Yukon Party passed a law that says you actually can't camp on

government property like that anymore, but if that hadn't been passed, I imagine we would be reaching that point again, because under this Liberal government, the housing crisis exists again.

The Yukon Party tried to sell off Yukon Energy to private interests. That got dragged to the light; that stopped. They took tens of thousands of dollars from Outside mining companies. Well, there's a parallel there, because in 2017, the Liberal Party did too. It's harder to see in 2018 and 2019 because the reporting has changed, but if you go to Elections Yukon and take a look, both parties accepted money from Outside mining companies. I got told by the housing minister at the time that housing wasn't a human right. That answered a lot of questions about what was or was not happening.

I think about all that and we flash-forward to the 2016 election. I don't think it was surprising when Yukoners decided that they had enough. I like to think that it was with optimism that they voted for change.

I mean, of course, I was disappointed that the Yukon NDP didn't form government in 2016. We had a great platform; we made some really solid commitments. You know, one of the many that I feel sad about is electoral reform. But I was optimistic like everybody else; I really was. I was hoping that the Liberals would be different from the Yukon Party, that they would bring about the real change that people were hoping for, because people felt like we needed the change.

In the 2016 election campaign, the Liberals had their platform under the title of "Be Heard". They said that they would listen to Yukoners, and by all accounts, I guess we could say that there are lots of ways that you can be heard with endless surveys, consultations, and meetings, but whether or not you are actually heard when you say the things is different. It turns out that it is not enough to hear what people say, because you actually have to take action on that, too. You can't ask for feedback and then not incorporate it, because then we are going to see what happened with the multi-year Peel plan. The big concern was that folks would stop wanting to participate in the land use planning process, because they participated in that one for almost a decade. But then we see the halting of what happened and what is going on right now with the Klondike land use plan. It has ground to a halt. We had a chair resign because of feelings that what was being asked wasn't being granted. Again, the Indian River wetland — the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation is asking for it to be protected. There is that going on. We still know that staking rules all — right? — because we haven't gone to successor resource legislation. There are parallels there.

So, Yukoners wanted action on the housing crisis. There was a housing crisis in — I mean, the first time I ran was in 2006, you know, and it was maybe before it really took off, but by the time I ran again in 2011, it was full-blown. When I was knocking on doors in 2011, people were concerned about housing, and they weren't concerned about housing for themselves because they were housed, but they were concerned about it for their neighbours. In 2016, people were still concerned about housing. I am sure — like my colleagues in this Chamber, I have been out, and I am hearing on the doorstep

that people are concerned about housing. It is unaffordable; it is unaffordable.

Knowing that I live in a neighbourhood of 1950s duplexes — it will go across the spectrum — knowing that houses have been sold in my neighbourhood for more than \$450,000 — that was the asking price. They sold above — duplex, 1950s, half of the duplex — not the entire thing — not both units. To know that, in the last four-plus years — we are into our fifth year — housing is even tighter than it was in 2016 — we see houses being sold in Whistle Bend and lots being sold in Whistle Bend, knowing that as soon as a rental opens up — people just can't keep up.

I tabled a petition with the Yukon Party government asking for protection for mobile homeowners. I asked the mobile homeowners to be treated differently than renters of apartments because they are different. They own the asset; they rent the land. More than 400 people signed that petition — nothing happened. We had an election, and I thought, "Well, okay. I guess I will do it again." I took out another petition, and I had close to 400 signatures the second time. I took it to a second government and said, "Hey, this continuum of housing is really important. People who live in mobile home parks are important. They deserve certainty. They deserve the ability to plan for the future." Guess what happened. Nothing happened. I got an e-mail today, which I also sent to the Minister of Community Services, because I asked that person to send it on, saying: "My pad rent is going up by \$20 again. It's going to be \$480 a month." At what point does it stop?

I think about my property taxes, and I think that it is \$240 every three months or something. I think about that comparison, and pad rent is substantially more. So, mobile homeowners asked for support. That didn't happen. In the fall, I brought forward a motion for debate. I don't know why I was surprised by the reaction. I should know better by this point. I asked that we look at putting a freeze on rent until July. I thought, man, if we could just give people a little bit of space. I brought that forward because I had been contacted by people who had both a 30-percent increase and a 40-percent increase. Yes, people were following the law; they gave them three months' notification that their rent will go up by 40 percent in three months from that day. That was following the law. It's legal, but is it right? That is the question. Lots of people will have different opinions and I appreciate that, but you know, I thought that we could give people just a little bit of space.

Yukoners wanted action on the environment. Who doesn't want action on the environment? We talk about climate. In 2019, I was amazed — it was great. Yukon declared a climate emergency. It was such a big deal that it was picked up by news media outlets around the world.

Yukon declared a climate emergency. I thought, okay, this is the opportunity that we're looking for. This is the opportunity. I thought, okay, here's the chance where every decision we make with infrastructure will use a climate lens and things will change. Then I waited, and then I asked the question and I waited some more. I thought, okay, maybe something is going to come out. Then we get the *Our Clean Future* document. There are lots of things that are really good in it;

there are. The challenge that I have is that it doesn't consider mining emissions. Even if we accomplished every single goal set out in that, Yukon is still 25-percent short of our climate targets; we're still 25-percent short. It has just the very concept that, even if we do every single measure that we can do in the next 10 years, we're still going to be short by 25 percent, and it's not included in there.

I think about the fact that we still don't have species at risk legislation. I've been told by the minister a couple of times now that it's on the way. In 1996, Yukon signed that accord — 1996.

Comparisons between the Liberal Party and the Yukon Party — I asked the Yukon Party government every Sitting for five years about species at risk legislation. I have asked the Liberal government every Sitting for four solid years, and I'll probably ask this spring sometime because — maybe I'll ask this spring. Who knows? I don't know when the election is going to be.

Species at risk legislation — you know, we still have mining happening in wetlands. Wetlands — they are like the biodiversity haven. They are where life comes to start. Wetlands are so valuable, and the fact that we allow them to be mined is disappointing.

Yukoners — they understand poverty. When everything shut down last spring and seniors, of course, who were vulnerable and didn't know what was going on with the pandemic, the Whitehorse Food Bank — the average age of a volunteer there is retired. I just thought I would start with that. It's phenomenal. The Minister of Education — her mom is a fantastic gardener and spends a lot of time there. But the food bank — we saw record numbers of people come to the food bank.

Of course, we saw the meal program when we separated the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the meal program that is being delivered out of the food bank — the partnership with the Boys and Girls Club, the food bank, and all those things happening. What I saw was more of a need than I could have ever anticipated in our community. That's what I saw. The need was so great that the food bank that is based in Whitehorse — the initial aspiration of what they were going to do is to focus on Whitehorse — started sending hampers to communities. Then to know that you're sending just about 100 hampers to Haines Junction, you're sending more than 100 hampers to Watson Lake, you're sending them to Mayo, you're sending them across the territory — food hampers — and people are asking for that support not because it's glamorous and not because what you're sending from the food bank is like all those luxurious extras — it's the staples.

So, Yukon understands poverty, especially now with rents at the rate they are. When I was asking about — I wasn't even asking to raise minimum wage. I just said to send it to the board because we're not keeping up right now. I was told that, until we fell below the 50-percent mark, we were fine. So, then we dropped, and we were like, I think, seventh in the country or something, and I was like, okay, now we're going to get a look at it.

The Employment Standards Board had an extensive consultation period. I went. I submitted. I went there and I

presented about why I thought we in Yukon should look at raising it to a \$15 minimum wage using what was learned across the country.

To know that minimum wage this year, on April 1, goes up by 14 cents — 14 entire cents — 14 cents an hour. To know that the Employment Standards Board, with the recommendation that they had made when they submitted that report, it would be \$15.20 this April — what that translates — from \$13.85 to \$15 — to is that it's up to \$2,000 a year that this government is taking out of the pockets of the lowest wage earners in Yukon. That is appalling.

Yukoners wanted investments in mental health services. I appreciate the idea behind the hubs — I do; I really do — but they're overstretched and they are under-supported.

I didn't even think about it until it was pointed out to me by the Member for Mayo-Tatchun — that Dawson City has a regional hospital. They have health care providers, they have doctors, and they also have a mental health hub. But a community like Mayo doesn't have access to a hospital. They don't have the doctors, they don't have the nursing staff, and they don't have facilities, nor are they the home base for a mental health hub. I have the privilege of travelling around the territory. I like to do it, and I have done it in a safe way in the last year, but there is not a single community that is served by a mental health hub that I don't go to — when the staff fly in — where there is not the hope that they can get just a little bit more or that the visits can be just a little more regular or maybe the people coming back will be the same, whether it is in Mayo or in Old Crow or wherever it is.

FASSY had this great advertising campaign for Rendezvous. I imagine that everyone got it in their mailbox. There was this cute little card and there were two cups of hot chocolate on it. It had "Rendezvous for two" on the label. On that label, it had the numbers for addiction treatment. I know this because, when someone was in crisis and they were trying to support their friend, they called that number. There was no help available.

If you want to go to detox right now, instead of having 14 beds in Whitehorse, there are only eight beds available. If you are at that crisis point and you are finally ready to get help, it doesn't mean you can get it. It means that the help that you need and that you want and that should be there for you to access isn't there when you need it.

I think about the opioid crisis; think about that. There were three confirmed cases between January and February of this year of people dying — a possible fourth. I can think about the 36 folks who have died since 2016 — 36. Compared with our population, that puts us up there in the top three in Canada for overdoses. Each of those overdoses is preventable. Instead of taking action, what we hear is that we are investigating solutions — solutions that have been proven to work in Ottawa, in Vancouver, and in other jurisdictions across the country, whether we're talking about a safe supply or safe consumption or managed alcohol programs. Instead, what I get told is: "We're going to continue to investigate; we're going to look into it." People in our communities continue to die. It's just incomprehensible.

Again, I'm lucky and I get to travel around. I get to travel. I was in Old Crow and someone who is much smarter than I am said, "Two years ago we were told that we're going to get the health centre. But two years ago, we didn't start the gravel process, so now I'm worried that when this project goes out to tender — and there's this big push to get it started this year because it's an election year — how is my community supposed to have the gravel ready when it's going to take us two years to do it?"

Then I was told that you can put in all these fantastic buildings. You can put in these new buildings. So, the new rec centre is beautiful. What I was told was: "But what we really need is programming. If we get this building now, will we get programming? Will we get that support?"

Then I was just in Pelly on the weekend. If we want to talk about housing, I had a conversation with this lovely human — a 55-year-old guy. He said, "You know, I'm 55 and I live at home with my mom and my adult brother. It's because every government promises me that there's going to be housing, but still, I have to live at home with my mom because there's not housing. But you know, we have almost \$2 million for an irrigation system at a golf course." That's kind of a harsh comparison.

I was in Watson Lake. I happened to be in Watson Lake two years ago when all these folks got together to talk about the importance of a men's shelter and everybody in the community was saying the same thing which is: "There's just no housing in Watson Lake." Since that meeting happened almost two years ago, the apartment building was condemned and 22 units shut down there. Watson Lake has such a housing crunch right now — it's such a crisis that it overflows into everything. It overflows into everything.

I was in Beaver Creek last summer. I was talking to the chief and the chief said, "Yeah; yeah, it's hard." We heard from the Member for Kluane that there needs to be staff accommodation in Beaver Creek. I mean, the principal lives in the basement of the school — talk about work-home separation. That is just a challenging thing and that is not her complaining about it; that is just me merely stating that, really, we should be able to have that separation.

I think about Burwash Landing and I had a meeting with the council this last summer, and they said: "You know what, if you could just get the Yukon government to understand that we would really like the boat launch in a spot that makes sense for the community. This is where we would like it; this is not where they are going to put it."

You can look around; you can look around. I think it's fair — what would I do differently? I mean, if I am going to criticize the budget, what would I do differently? Here are six things that I would do differently. So, we have a budget that is almost \$1.8 billion. It is shocking to think that, when I came in — I think initially, like in 2011, we had just crested — we were at \$1.1 billion. It felt like a big deal when we hit \$1.2 billion and now here we are at \$1.8 billion. So, a \$1.8-billion budget doesn't mention at all government's choice to reject the \$1.10 minimum-wage increase that was recommended by the Employment Standards Board. So, we have the government tell

us a lot about YAPC's calculation for the living wage and now we have even had the Minister of Community Services say that they have a better job of bringing that up, but it is still a \$5 gap between the living wage and the minimum wage for Whitehorse, and everybody deserves economic dignity.

I appreciate that universal childcare is something that we are all talking about now. I think that is really exciting. I do; I think that is really exciting. Families desperately need this help. This has been a really long thing. I mean, this is a feminist decision; I think that is fantastic — a really long time in the making, for sure. It has been a federal commitment multiple times; it has never followed through. I think this is really exciting, but the childcare plan, as far as we can tell, doesn't have any funding for new spaces or the ability to hire and train more educators. The reason why this is an issue is that wait-lists are very long and sometimes parents have to compromise or settle for fewer days or something that doesn't necessarily work with their schedule, or they have to travel to a facility that is really far from home because that is what the option is. So, I think we also need to consider how we are going to create new spaces to give parents better options. That doesn't even begin to discuss the K4 issue, because when I talked about K4 in every school, it was before we all got on the same page about universal childcare and I was just like — anything to help out families.

But you know, Watson Lake — the elementary school — I went for a walk around it at the time I was there and he was just like, "Well, I think we could probably re-jig some things and maybe get a classroom open." But, you know what? The playground in Watson Lake is not designed for four-year-old children; it's not. Because there's a difference between early childhood education and early development. That is what I've learned. There is a big difference.

Then Dawson City says, "No. There is no room in the school for K4." What the Dawson City school would like to do is they would like that money to get funded to the Little Blue Daycare, which does have a purpose-built facility, which does have the right playground equipment.

And this doesn't address Pelly Crossing, where they have been working really hard. But, here's a sad thing: Their daycare burned down last year. There is fire equipment, but there was no volunteer fire department. We could touch on Keno at the same, but we'll come back to that. But in Pelly Crossing, they worked really hard to prepare their kids for school. They've been running a K4 program through the daycare and they're just about getting ready to move into a house, because that First Nation has done a really good job and they're opening 11 units right here in the near future.

So then, if we go toward housing, and I think about looking at the Yukon housing and land development and all those things, but it doesn't come close to clearing the more than 350 folks on that Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list. Those who do have a place to rent face uncertainty every time their rent goes up with no cap on increases and no ability to plan for the future. Unlimited rent increases; 14-cent minimum-wage increase. So, to have unlimited increases and stagnant wages —

well, that's a toxic combination. The families I've met across the territory are at the breaking point.

Then I think about addictions. The budget speech doesn't even mention the opioid crisis — I would say the opioid pandemic. I would say that we were in a crisis long before this point and I would say that there are two parallel pandemics happening right now. Knowing that there have been 36 opioid overdose-related deaths since 2016 is a tragedy. That's on top of the harms caused by alcohol, which keep taking the lives of our neighbours. And yesterday, we saw when the Member for Mayo-Tatchun bravely resigned from the Liberal caucus over this issue. That took more guts than I think I will ever have. But he reached the breaking point.

We need a safe supply for drugs. We need to stop talking about it. We need safe consumption sites. Something I have learned as well is that we don't need a safe-injection site per se because not everyone in the Yukon uses needles. We need a safe consumption site because of the way drugs are used here. We need a managed alcohol program. We need to treat people like people, as opposed to just their addictions. It's all about dignity.

I think about health care. The budget speech talks about putting people first, but it is not taking significant steps right now to bring people the care that they need when and where they need it. There is no commitment to make hemodialysis available in Yukon. I think about my friend and colleague for Whitehorse Centre, and she has lost a friend to kidney disease here because the choice was dying outside of the territory or dying here. Then my friend Terry came home to die. It's just been over a year. There is no commitment to making hemodialysis an issue here or to expand home care. What about pharmacare? I have sent a lot of casework letters.

When I turned 30, I shattered a bunion on my foot, which then led me to a bad cast, which led me to being on blood thinners for an extended period of time. Not all blood thinners are created equal, so if you are an older person and you're on blood thinners, depending on which one you are on, you might have to go to the hospital weekly to get blood tests done to make sure that you are at therapeutic levels. This is fascinating to know: There is actually another blood thinner that is not significantly more expensive and you only have to go once every six months. It might cost a bit more, but what does it cost for that person to go every single week? Every time I send one of those letters out, guess what happens. I get told that, no, it's not covered under the pharmacare plan.

I send a lot of casework letters about dental care. Who knew that there would be some bones in our body that we would consider luxury bones and that they should only be taken care of for people who can afford it? When I aged out of my parents' insurance, I didn't have dental coverage again until I got my job at the correctional facility in 2009. I hadn't been to see a dentist from when I was 18 until whatever age I was in 2009, because cleanings can be \$400. I don't think that this is a luxury. We're talking about basic maintenance of the entry into your body where food goes. Why aren't we talking about dental care when we talk about health care?

Then I think about climate change. I tell you how I think. We had this real opportunity. The media around the world was looking at us when we declared the climate emergency. There was an awful lot of pressure to get those traffic lights where people could push the button — not that they could reach the button because it's covered in snow — to be able to cross the highway at the airport, because that was really scary — trying to cross the highway without a traffic light. For people on bicycles, that was really scary.

You think about the fact that in *Our Clean Future*, we can only reach three-quarters of our target if we do every action in there because it's not planned for. It says that in the future we'll talk about it. We don't even talk about mining. It says we're going to talk about it in the future. It's just something, isn't it?

The opposition sides — we're left at the mercy of government. We don't know when the election is going to be called. I think it's a really valid question. We passed legislation last year that sets it out for the next government, but the current government is excluded. What a luxury to say: "Behave as I say and not as I do." So, we're on the eve of an election. I'm probably not alone. I thought that maybe it was going to be called yesterday, but that changed. Maybe it's going to be called next week; maybe it's going to get called tomorrow. Maybe it won't get called until the end of the Sitting. Who knows? The Premier won't tell us. I keep on telling everyone I see when they ask me, "When is the election?" I say, "I don't know, but if you know, let me know. If you hear something, let me know."

In the fall, the Premier said that it was going to be the Liberal Party's election planning committee that would decide when the election was going to be called. As if there was ever any doubt that this was a question of political strategy — I guess that would be the answer.

Mr. Speaker, this might be my last time speaking in the 34th Legislative Assembly to a budget response. I want to tell Yukoners not to worry, because I'm ready. I've been building a really exciting team, because it turns out that if you invite people to join you to do something that's really different and you go out looking for people who are passionate about their communities — and maybe not the political types — it's pretty fun. So, Yukoners have made it abundantly clear that what they want is a government that follows through on its commitments and delivers results.

I can hear the government. I listen to them say all of the things that they have done, and they have checked the list and checked that. I also remember when this government said that they would work with everyone for good ideas. It turns out that good ideas only come from one side of the Legislative Assembly. That is what I have learned.

Yukoners have also been clear that they want a government that puts Yukoners first. It's true. That makes sense. This incredible group of people that I'm working with — we have people who are in health care and education. We have parents and we have children. When we were talking about minimum wage, it turns out that I don't have to look too far to find someone who makes minimum wage right now. That is not a child; it is not a child or even a youth.

Mr. Speaker, we have the budget. It definitely looks like an election budget. It has to happen sometime this year, but we don't know when. What I'm really looking forward to is to give out my vision of what we can do. I think that Yukoners are ready for differences. I think that they are ready to see what the three of us are going to offer. If the Liberal government is not going to deliver, I'm ready to give it a shot.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me sometimes how you could proceed on budget debates. While I appreciate many of the comments that my colleagues across the way have brought to this — the responses to the budget speech — it's quite fascinating to me that, in the representation of all Yukoners, there is almost nothing that pleases anyone.

Nonetheless, we heard from the Premier on Thursday for well over an hour about all kinds of things that have been put into this budget to respond to the needs and wishes of Yukoners — and, in particular at this time, the leadership of this team to keep them safe.

It is truly my honour, Mr. Speaker, to speak about our Yukon government's 2021-22 budget today. I am a proud representative of Riverdale South. I stand as Minister of Justice and the Attorney General and as Minister of Education, all of which I am honoured to do on behalf of the people of the Yukon.

Our Liberal government and our team have always been clear that, every day, we work for the people of the Yukon. We are dedicated to doing our work collaboratively with integrity, with initiative, and with fairness. This has always been our approach. It was our approach for the past four budgets, the pre-COVID budgets, and it was the process followed in developing this, our fifth budget and the only territorial budget developed during a world pandemic that we are all experiencing.

I dare say that everything may now be divided into things that were done, drafted, or happened pre-COVID and someday, we hope, post-COVID. Others — our elders, grandparents, and great-grandparents — have lived through life-changing events like the Second World War or the Spanish flu or others, and they would be able to tell us about the effects of such events — that they will have on our lives as we go forward. I know that we are looking forward to the post-COVID-19 pandemic world. I know everyone is, but that is yet to come.

What has occurred in the past 12 months is the usual, regular, and everyday business of government: health care; program and service delivery; court systems; capital projects; infrastructure building; supporting NGOs; highway projects; schools and education; policy development; Yukon University; and drafting and introducing laws. But in addition to all that usual, regular, everyday work of government, we have all spent the last 12 months working daily to keep Yukoners safe and respond to a world pandemic.

I dare say that no one in this House expected that would be part of the mandate when they chose to seek election in 2016. It has truly been unprecedented work. I know that word is sometimes overused these days, but this is a great example of its correct usage — “unprecedented work”. No government in

the history of the Yukon has had to rise to such a challenge — to such a pandemic and public health crisis.

I know that it is hard for us to remember — particularly up here in our little left-hand corner of Canada where we have been relatively safe and where we have pulled together to keep each other safe and healthy.

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debated on second reading of Motion No. 207 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following document was filed March 9, 2021:

34-3-58

Gathering Space for St. Elias Seniors, letter re (dated October 29, 2020) from Hon. Pauline Frost, Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, to Wade Istchenko, Member for Kluane (Istchenko)