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HANSARD

Wednesday, May 26, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

SPECIAL SITTING

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2021 Special Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Emily Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
Emily Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
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Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 63, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge, was not placed on the Notice Paper, as motions should be expressed in the affirmative, and Motion No. 65 was not placed on the Notice Paper, as motions should not be argumentative or in the style of a speech.

I would like to remind all members that the rubric for notices of motions in the Daily Routine is not an opportunity to make members' statements. Motions that do not follow the guidelines for drafting motions will not be placed on the Order Paper.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would ask my colleagues here in the Legislature Assembly to help me welcome to the gallery — no stranger to the gallery — the Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations, Peter Johnston.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would also ask my colleagues to help me welcome some special guests to the gallery today.

I would like to introduce Luke Campbell. He has been here before, but Luke is a language expert in his nation and I am happy to have him here today with us.

Also, I would like to introduce my ministerial advisor, Dario Paola, and Emily Farrell, who is also a ministerial advisor. Thank you for being here today.

I would also like to recognize — and I know that he is likely here as a guest for the New Democratic Party — my good friend George Bahm. I welcome you here today as well.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, just to add to that introduction, today, a good friend, a mentor, and someone who I feel is a language champion, who is doing so much to revitalize his own culture and language, our friend George Bahm is also in the gallery today.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of the 28th anniversary of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, today I rise in recognition of the 28th anniversary of the signing of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, also known as the UFA.

May 29, 1993 was a historic day for all Yukoners. The Council for Yukon Indians, which we now know today as the Council of Yukon First Nations, signed the UFA following 20 long years of hard work and negotiations with the governments of Canada and Yukon. That same day, four Yukon First Nations joined their Yukon and federal partners in signing final and self-governing agreements. They are Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Teslin Tlingit Council, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and Vuntut Gwitchin. By 2005, 11 Yukon First Nations had signed agreements. It was the UFA that made it possible.

The UFA is a blueprint for Yukon land claims and heralded by indigenous peoples from across the world as a model for modern treaties. It acts as a framework for individual land claims and self-governing agreements asserting indigenous rights, titles, and interests with respect to First Nation traditional territories and settlement lands. It guarantees that Yukon First Nation voices are heard and have an effect by ensuring representation on more than a dozen boards and committees. It lays out the terms of engagement between First Nations, Yukon, and Canada, government to government. It provides certainty for Yukon First Nations, citizens, and for Yukon. It protects a way of life and spirituality that was stripped away by colonialism.

We have all seen the image of respected elder and former Commissioner of Yukon, Judy Gingell, in her capacity as the chair of CYI in 1993, signing this document alongside the later former Yukon Premier John Ostashek and the Hon. Tom Siddon, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs. Judy was also there when Chief Elijah Smith and other leaders presented the visionary document *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* to then-Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in Ottawa in 1973.

Judy continues to work hard on behalf of all Yukon First Nations. Shaw nithän to Judy.

Thank you also to all First Nation governments and citizens who continue to work tirelessly on implementation of their land claims and self-governing agreements.

We know that the work is far from over. To the contrary, the UFA and the signing of the agreements signalled a new beginning. It started Yukon on a journey toward a better, more inclusive, and more just society. It has brought us together and it has made us stronger. It has given us hope that reconciliation is still possible.

During my time as Premier, I have witnessed and participated in countless collaborative efforts with Yukon First Nation governments. The Yukon Forum is thriving as a safe and productive place for chiefs and ministers to collaborate on shared goals and initiatives.

Yukon Days, where the Yukon government has the opportunity to meet one-on-one with federal ministers in

Ottawa, has evolved into an inclusive team Yukon approach with chiefs and ministers now representing Yukoners together. This collaborative spirit did not develop overnight. It has taken decades of perseverance by countless individuals, especially those who negotiated the terms of their land claims and self-government agreements and the UFA.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, congratulations to Yukon First Nations for all of your accomplishments so far and so many more to come.

Günilschish.

Mr. Dixon: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the anniversary of the signing of the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and the first four Yukon First Nations final and self-government agreements.

On May 29, 1993, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Teslin Tlingit Council, and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation made history by ratifying the first self-government agreements and paving the way for seven others to do the same.

The *Umbrella Final Agreement*, signed by Canada, Yukon, and the Council for Yukon Indians — known today, of course, as the Council of Yukon First Nations — acted as a template for the 11 modern treaties that we have in the Yukon today. From there, negotiations made way for the signing of the first four self-government agreements. Self-government agreements recognized the right of First Nations to develop their own constitutions and pass laws for their own citizens and settlement land. They recognized the right to provide governance in areas such as justice, land management, and education and defined self-government powers, programs and services, taxation, and law-making.

Yukon's modern treaties and self-government agreements have been instrumental in making Yukon self-governing First Nations partners at both territorial and federal tables in shaping policy across the sectors.

Yukon First Nation governments have been leaders in economic development, environmental stewardship, resource management, business, tourism, and much more. I would like to recognize and thank each of our 11 self-governing First Nations for the contributions that they have made to the Yukon across all sectors.

My colleagues and I are proud to celebrate the Yukon First Nation final and self-government agreements today and the benefits that they have created for all Yukon.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the anniversary of the signing of the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and the four Yukon First Nations that first signed their self-government agreements. The first set of final and self-government agreements were signed in 1993 by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Teslin Tlingit Council, and the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation.

Decades of courage, strategic thinking, and hard work of our visionary leaders established the historic *Umbrella Final*

Agreement on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

We recognize Ta'an Kwäch'än Council's hereditary chief, Jim Boss, who was a visionary leader of his time. In 1902, Chief Jim Boss wrote to the Government of Canada, seeking recognition and protection for his people and their lands. His efforts triggered the path toward Yukon First Nation modern-day treaties.

We also pay tribute to the Yukon delegation of Yukon First Nation leaders who, in 1973, made their journey to Ottawa to present the document *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* to the Canadian Prime Minister. I recall, as young children, sitting at the feet of our elders and leaders as they shared with us the importance of self-government and the work they were doing to secure the future for our lands, our language, our culture, and how we exist in the world.

We listened to our elders talk about their lives transitioning from a nomadic lifestyle that was based on traditional laws and practices to a community-based setting where their lives and ways of being became dictated by the *Indian Act*. At that time, our elders and leaders were teaching us, as children, the responsibility that we would one day inherit.

The *Umbrella Final Agreement* is a pivotal document that guided 11 Yukon First Nations to negotiate their individual final agreements for a path forward to autonomy and self-determination. Our modern-day treaties are living documents that hold us all accountable for the work we do today to secure our future. We pay tribute to all those individuals and groups representing Yukon First Nation governments, the federal government, and the Yukon government who fought so hard for a common vision of mutual growth and collaboration and who contributed to the establishment of these agreements.

We also remember those who are no longer with us. It is because of these agreements that we, as Yukon First Nations, are able to raise our children in our homelands and why we are able to live within our traditional territories. Our self-government agreements ensure that we are active participants in determining our future and all aspects of the decision-making processes that have direct impact on us as a people.

There remains plenty of work yet to do toward reconciliation and supporting the prosperity of Yukon First Nations and in encouraging the continuation of relationship-building between all governments. As we celebrate the 28th anniversary of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, we encourage all Yukoners to continue to strengthen and uphold the shared vision of cooperation, collective prosperity, and justice, which fill the hearts and minds of those who forged these agreements all those years ago.

Applause

In recognition of Dákwänjē Southern Tutchone adult language immersion program graduates

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to recognize the first graduating class from the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' Dákwänjē Southern Tutchone adult language immersion program. The intensive three-year program is

entitled Dän K'e Kwänjē Ghäkenīdän, which translates to: "We are learning our native language program".

The class of nine Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizens began the program in September 2018 and attended full-time classes from September to June each school year. Champagne and Aishihik First Nations funds these adult learners as language apprentices so that they can fully participate in the immersion program without trying to hold down jobs. Their program is based at Da Kū Cultural Centre in Haines Junction and has a large on-the-land component where students practise the language and learn through traditional activities, including land-based camps with elders, storytelling, and other interactive experiential methods. The program is entrenched in prayer and ceremony. Each day starts with a prayer.

I would, first of all, like to pay my respect and give thanks to the elder instructors, Lorraine Allen and Audrey Brown, for their dedication and sharing their expertise. They are truly at the core of the program's success through teaching and language as inseparable from the world view and the way of being of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations people.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizen and language teacher Khâsha — Stephen Reid — the lead instructor who developed the curriculum and delivered the program full time, as well as instructor Mary Jane Legér and the additional members of the leadership team: Leslie Cromwell, who is a support officer, and Erin Pauls, as their education director.

On behalf of the Government of Yukon, I would like to express my gratitude to the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations general assembly, which has committed \$1 million to reclaim their language. The Government of Yukon is pleased to support language revitalization as part of the recovery of Yukon First Nation language fluency and proficiency. Revitalizing language is a very challenging task. Yukon First Nation languages were deeply impacted by colonization and residential schools.

This first cohort of students is called the "Dän Nàkwàkhèl" or the "trail blazers". Breaking trail is not an easy process. The students had to pull together and work really hard to overcome the trauma that surfaces in the process of reclaiming their languages, which involves examining the reasons why a nation has lost their fluency.

Champagne and Aishihik First Nations worked closely with the Simon Fraser University to have the program accredited. Students earned their certificate in language proficiency in Southern Tutchone in the first half of the program and their diploma in language proficiency in the second half.

Today we celebrate the significant achievements of this first graduating class of adult learners, who have dedicated three years of their lives to mastering their traditional language. It is incredible to think that we now have nine additional Dákwänjē Southern Tutchone language speakers.

Thank you and congratulations to our hard-working graduates: Natane Primožic, Earl Darbyshire, Elizabeth

Gladue, Marianne Joe, Sarina Primožic, Sheila Kushniruk, Marcus Sparvier, Heather Jim, and Liza Jacobs.

I also congratulate and offer best wishes to the next cohort of 10 students who will begin the program in the fall of 2021. On behalf of Government of Yukon, I extend my gratitude toward everyone who has been involved in developing, supporting, and delivering this innovative and successful program. I would like to particularly recognize Chief Steve Smith for his unwavering vision for the well-being and advancement of his people. I also again want to thank Yukon teacher Khâsha — Stephen Reid — for his personal commitment to language revitalization. It was through their collective vision, passion, and leadership that this program came into being.

I want to quote Chief Steve Smith from a recent conversation that I had with him. He said to me: "Education and languages are our highest priority. We do everything else because we have to."

Through language revitalization, we will preserve the traditional ways of knowing, being, and doing, as well as the identity of each Yukon First Nation. Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' program truly inspires hope by using creativity and working together, and through immersion language programs like theirs, over time we will restore the number of indigenous language speakers in Yukon.

Shaw nithän.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: Before I start, I just — one of the graduates, Sheila Kushniruk, while she was going through this course, constantly would speak Southern Tutchone to me when I would see her. For her, I'm going to try to incorporate, as the minister did, a few Southern Tutchone words as I do this tribute. Luke is here today, so I'll probably get a little critique later on that, too, so I'll give this a try.

Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the Dän K'e Kwänjē Ghäkenīdän program, "We are learning our native language" program. This adult Dákwänjē Southern Tutchone language immersion program began in 2018. The students are called "Dákwänjē", which means "trail blazers". Breaking trail, like the minister said, is not an easy process, and its hard work. The students had to pull together and work hard to reclaim their language and unpack the reasons why their people have lost their fluency. These have been among some of the hardest hurdles and lessons that these students have had to face.

Champagne and Aishihik First Nations work closely with the Simon Fraser University to have this full-time, two-year "we are learning our native language" program accredited. Students earn their certificate in language proficiency in Southern Tutchone in the first half of the program and go on to earn their diploma in language proficiency in the second half.

The "We are learning our native language" program was borne from a general assembly request, at which the government put \$1 million aside to reclaim the Southern Tutchone language. The program is based at Da Kū — "Our Home, Our House" — Cultural Centre in Haines Junction, but

students will also practise the language on the land through traditional activities, where it is most meaningful.

Khâsha, who is a Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizen and also a language teacher, is credited and should be very proud of the development of this curriculum, and he teaches with the program. Of course, the program could not have gone forward without the knowledge and expertise of Khâsha and our elders, Chughâla, who is Lorraine Allen, and Khut'âla, who is Audrey Brown.

Congratulations to the 2021 graduates: Natane Primozic, Earl Darbyshire, Elizabeth Gladue, Marianne Joe, Sarina Primozic, Sheila Kushniruk, Marcus Sparvier, Heather Jim, and Liza Jacobs. Language is connected to the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations people. Their language holds the key to the world view and the ways of being. The program is entrenched in prayer and ceremony, as we heard earlier from the minister. Each day is started with a prayer.

The program has a large on-the-land component and traditional pursuits. To end, I also want to quote something that Kaaxnox — Chief Steve Smith — said when the program first came out: “This is one of the most important endeavours the Champagne and Aishihik people will ever undertake. We are committed to having a successful program to teach our people, Dâkwânjê ... The students will have a critical and important role in maintaining who we are as a people.”

Big hands out to all those who made this program possible. Shâw Nithân. Thank you.

Applause

Ms. Tredger: Mr. Speaker, the Yukon NDP is proud to pay tribute to the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' language immersion program. As they get ready for their first graduation and fluent speaker recognition ceremony, it is a chance to celebrate this program and all it does to help keep the Southern Tutchone language alive for now and for future generations.

A few years ago, I was at Gwaandak Theatre's annual silent auction. As I looked through the prizes, one caught my eye in particular, and it was a private Southern Tutchone language lesson. I bid on it and was delighted when I won. I thought I was going to learn a few phrases in Southern Tutchone, but I learned much more than that. That lesson was a window for me, a glimpse of what language is and can be. I learned that it is a lot more than a way to pass on a message or to keep track of a grocery list. My teacher explained to me that when she introduced herself in her language, she was telling me much more than her name. She was telling a story of relationships between people and relationships with her traditional territory and all the responsibilities and privileges that go with those relationships.

The Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' *Language Act* speaks to this very directly. One section reads: “The elders remind us that our words themselves contain values, spirituality and principles of respect within them. Knowing the words and languages instills the way by which we live on the land, with the animals and how we treat each other. As well, the words and phrases contain knowledge, traditional and cultural, as well

as scientific details which must be preserved in a living language that we learn from.”

Congratulations to everyone who has been part of the Champagne and Aishihik language programming and to everyone who will be recognized at the upcoming ceremony.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a legislative return regarding mine closure security in response to questions that were asked on May 13.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Notices of motions.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Liberal government to publicly explain and provide evidence as to why the state of emergency needs to be extended 90 days.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to dedicate a portion of the Department of Highways and Public Works 2021-22 capital budget to upgrade with BST the gravel stretches on the Champagne access road.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to dedicate a portion of the Department of Highways and Public Works 2021-22 capital budget to improve maintenance of the Kusawa Lake and Aishihik Lake roads, which lead to popular territorial campgrounds.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Community Services to work with first responders, governments, and unincorporated communities to develop a strategy to strengthen rural fire and ambulance services, including:

- (1) holding recruitment drives for new volunteers;
- (2) increasing retention of EMS and fire volunteers, including improving supports and addressing barriers;
- (3) looking at a possible way of making training more accessible to volunteers;
- (4) reviewing training standards and qualification requirements to ensure that they strike the right balance between keeping people safe and not leaving communities without coverage as a result of high minimum standards; and
- (5) improving fire protection and ambulance coverage for rural communities.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to uphold their commitment made in the Speech from the Throne to subsidize the cost of period products for Yukoners in need by providing menstrual products in all Yukon schools.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to require the Yukon Liquor Corporation, when approving offsale licences, to collaborate with the Department of Health and Social Services by assessing locations and hours from a public health perspective.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Housing initiatives fund

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, in 2018, our Liberal government created the housing initiatives fund to support the development of affordable housing options for Yukoners. The fourth intake concluded in January of this year. \$3.6 million was made available through three funding streams: one for shovel-ready projects in Whitehorse, one for shovel-ready projects in communities, and one for project concepts.

Today, I'm pleased to announce funding for eight more shovel-ready affordable housing projects. The selected projects will support 102 new affordable housing units for Yukoners in Dawson City, Teslin, Watson Lake, Lake Laberge, and Whitehorse. Through this intake, we will also support four project development concepts. The applicants who receive this funding will continue to develop their project details and may reapply to the housing initiatives fund or other government funding when they are ready to move forward with construction.

In order to support applicants, we improved the fund process based on feedback from previous housing initiatives fund intakes. These included: increasing funding thresholds to reflect the higher cost of construction during the COVID-19 pandemic and in rural communities; allowing developers more time to prepare for the construction season; and increasing the support for the development of project concepts.

Over the past four intakes, this program has now supported 40 projects that will lead to more than 470 new homes in Yukon. Out of these 470 units, we are pleased to announce that more than 385 units are designated as affordable. This means that Yukoners living in these homes can expect rent to be held at below median market for 20 years.

The increase in housing units will help Yukoners to access affordable housing through the private market, through First Nation housing providers, and through community organizations. Under the first three intakes, eight shovel-ready projects have been completed, two are near completion, 19 projects are underway, and three projects are scheduled to start construction.

To date, 65 units have been completed in Whitehorse, Dawson City, Carmacks, and Haines Junction. This is a

significant accomplishment, and I want to acknowledge all First Nation governments, First Nation development corporations, developers, contractors, community organizations, and the general public who have applied to the housing initiatives fund and who have stepped up to partner with government to support the unique housing solutions of our communities.

Together, we are a strong community. I'm proud of the work of Yukon Housing Corporation in building these housing partnerships with the private sector community organizations and First Nation development corporations.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue today.

In the minister's statement, he mentioned that, in the last three years, they have supported the development of 470 units through this initiative; however, he also states that only 65 units have been completed. So, it would seem that there are still 405 units left to be completed.

Can the minister tell us when these 405 units will be completed?

Another question that we have is to do with the increase in the costs of lumber and other construction materials over the last year. Some have noted that prices of construction materials have tripled in the last year, and this is having impacts on the cost of construction and home building. The original fund was announced in 2018, before these massive price increases. Can the minister tell us if the increased cost of lumber and other materials will have an impact on the number of units that will be built from this \$3.6-million fund?

I look forward to the minister's answers.

Ms. Tredger: Mr. Speaker, today we heard a recap of a throne speech announcement. This is something Yukoners hear a lot from the Liberal government. We hear a long list of accomplishments about all the ways that housing is getting better, but that is not what Yukoners see. What we see are lots sitting empty. What Yukoners see is post after post in Facebook groups by families desperate for a place to live.

I would have more sympathy for the government if this were a new problem, but it is not. We have been in a housing crisis for a decade. It is starting to feel permanent, and we have a government telling us that this is the best we can hope for. I disagree; we can do better than accepting housing insecurity as the new normal.

I want to congratulate the applicants on their projects and thank them for their work, but we cannot leave all the heavy lifting to the private sector. Right now, there are 375 applications on the Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list. Some of those applications represent entire families. That is a problem that belongs to the Yukon government. I have not seen any serious moves to deal with it.

I am also curious about their promise that the units announced today will stay affordable for 20 years. How do they intend to monitor and enforce this?

Here is what Yukoners want to see: a day when housing is no longer the number one election issue. That will be an

accomplishment. When we can stop talking about housing because everyone can afford a place to live, that will be something to be proud of. Until then, we need to do better.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Every Yukoner deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. Our government supports a multi-faceted approach to providing Yukoners with increased housing options. Today I spoke of the fourth intake of the housing initiatives fund, which is supporting eight new shovel-ready affordable housing projects across the territory. Since we launched this fund in 2018, it has supported a total of 474 new housing units — again, including the 389 affordable housing units. These are projects built by First Nation governments, First Nation development corporations, developers, contractors, community organizations, and individuals.

The Normandy Manor project that is currently under construction is another project supported through the housing initiatives fund that will add 84 supported, affordable housing units for Yukon seniors. We are proud to be working with our partners at the City of Whitehorse, the federal government, and Northern Vision Development to provide more options for our elderly. This is a private sector senior-supportive housing project in the territory and it is a great example of our collaborative approach to addressing housing needs in the territory.

This year's budget includes \$8.5 million for the completion of a new 47-unit housing project in Whitehorse that will provide safe and affordable housing that meets the needs of families and individuals, including vulnerable populations. An additional \$2 million will help the Challenge Disability Resource Group complete their 54-unit Cornerstone Housing project. These are major projects that will substantially increase our housing supply.

We have opened our first-ever Housing First residence in the north in Whitehorse. This groundbreaking initiative is providing safe, secure, low-barrier housing for the most vulnerable in our capital city. Building on this success, we are working with the next Housing First project in Watson Lake. To help Yukon tenants, we have introduced the Canada-Yukon Housing benefit. It provides Yukon households with up to \$800 per month to help them afford to rent a home that meets their needs. This goes directly to the tenant and stays with them, even if they move homes. This year's budget also has \$1.4 million for rent supplements and millions for more housing projects.

Making land available for development is another important way to meet the growing need for housing. During the previous mandate, our government tripled the investment in lot development. Last year we released 250 lots, which is part of the largest land lottery ever seen in Whitehorse. This trend will continue and we will continue to release residential lots throughout the territory and in coming years.

We recognize that sustainable, affordable housing is foundational to the health and well-being of all Yukoners. While Yukon's population has been growing steadily for nearly two decades, the housing needs of our growing population have been overlooked in the past. We have taken a collaborative and multi-faceted approach to addressing housing needs in our

territory. I would also like to thank both opposition members for their questions.

In order to be respectful of the time allotted, I will work with the Yukon Housing Corporation to provide answers to the questions that have been posed today.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Mineral development strategy

Mr. Dixon: One of the mineral development strategy recommendations is to develop a modern mineral management regime by — and I quote: “Drafting and bringing into force the new mineral resource legislation and regulations within the next four years (by the end of 2025). Achieving such an aggressive timeline will require all involved to declare the work a priority and to dedicate the necessary resources.”

Yesterday, the Premier incorrectly stated that this reference to “an aggressive timeline” was not specific to the development of successor resource legislation. The facts clearly show that he was wrong, and this is concerning for two reasons: first, that the Premier shared incorrect information, but what's even more concerning is that it's clear that the Premier doesn't even know what the strategy says.

So, I would like to hear from the Premier. If the MDS says that developing these pieces of legislation in four years is an aggressive timeline, how does he think he can get it done in just 16 months?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We spoke quite a bit yesterday about the mineral development strategy. I'm happy to get up on my feet again today and talk about the mineral development strategy.

Again, the panel released its final mineral development strategy report and recommendations on April 15, 2021, and we are working on reviewing those recommendations. Many of the recommendations are within the scope of the development of successor resource legislation for mining. The components of the final strategy that are not within the scope of new mining legislation will also be evaluated for potential implementation.

With respect to successor resource legislation, we are committed to developing new successor resource legislation for both lands and mining. Work on the new *Lands Act* has already begun under the successor resource legislation working group, a process established in 2019 at the Yukon Forum by the Government of Yukon, Yukon First Nations, and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

So, we are committed to work toward this, and we will target timelines set out in the confidence and supply agreement, subject to meaningful consultation with Yukon First Nations. The conversations around mining legislation have been going on through the mineral development strategy panel's extensive outreach and engagement, and I have been working to follow up on that with the Yukon Chamber of Mines and the Klondike Placer Miners' Association and am happy to continue that work, as we move toward successor legislation.

Mr. Dixon: I see the Premier wasn't willing to stand up and correct the record on his incorrect statements from yesterday, but I will move on.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the minister mentioned the CASA, because we've seen what happens when the Liberals let the NDP write policy for them with the recent rent cap policy. One local economist stated recently in the *Yukon News* that the new Liberal-NDP rent control plan for the Yukon is further to the left than Bernie Sanders. Further left than Bernie Sanders, Mr. Speaker — that's what happened with rent control when the Liberals let the NDP write the policy. Now the Liberals are letting the NDP hold the pen on our new mining legislation.

How are the Liberals going to ensure that what happened with the disastrous rent control policy doesn't happen with the territory's mining legislation?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I think I just stood and talked about that process. I talked about how we will continue to work. I'm happy to stand again and say again that we're committed to responsible development and management of the Yukon's mineral resources in a way that protects the environment, respects the rights and traditions of First Nations, and benefits all Yukoners.

Mining and mineral exploration remain of central importance to the Yukon's economy and contributed significantly to the territory's economic performance throughout the pandemic. We're committed to working with our partners to develop successor legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the mineral development strategy represents an important conversation and mineral development and management in the territory affects all Yukoners. We will continue to follow and respect the process in place as we work toward successor legislation. As I've stated every time I have gotten up on my feet, that will include talking with industry, talking with the Yukon public, and talking with Yukon First Nations about that successor legislation. I'm looking forward to that because I think it's a great thing for the territory.

Mr. Dixon: We've now heard three different answers to this. We've heard the Premier's commitment to the CASA. We've heard the minister now say that it's a target that they are hoping to achieve if they work hard. But yesterday, we heard from the Leader of the NDP as well. When asked about the media, she said, "If it takes Yukon government with a full force of drafters, researchers, and others longer than 16 months then I think we have a problem."

However, yesterday during Committee debate, the minister started to walk back his commitment. He said that it was no longer definitive and that they would have legislation by the fall. He now is using weasel words like "make best efforts" and "try to achieve". Everyone knows that the 16-month timeline is unrealistic. However, the government will fall if they cannot live up to their commitments to the NDP.

Will the minister definitively tell us: Will the government table new successor resource legislation by next fall — yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This is the same question that I've been answering yesterday, last week, and again today.

I am really happy to get up on my feet, because I think it is an important question — although my answer is not changing; it is still the same answer. The Yukon mineral development strategy presents an important conversation. Mineral development and management in the territory affects all Yukoners. We will continue to follow and respect the process in place as we work toward successor legislation and will not predetermine the outcome of that process. I think that this is a great process and I am looking forward to carrying it out.

I am happy to have already had conversations with the mining industry. I had one conversation with Yukon First Nations — an early call with chiefs — and I am looking forward to the Yukon Forum where we can continue that conversation.

Question re: COVID-19 pandemic public health measures

Mr. Cathers: Yesterday, the Government of BC released a clear plan for reopening the province. That plan includes clear timelines and benchmarks for when next steps will occur. It is based on information that can easily be found by the public: new cases, hospitalizations, and vaccination rates.

If all goes according to current trends, British Columbians are expected to be able to travel around the province by mid-June, and by July 1, mask use is to become a personal choice. Attending professional sports in BC is slated for September. This kind of forward-looking, transparent plan is a good step forward and is basically what we had promised in the last election to provide Yukoners with — a clear path forward.

Will the Liberal government now agree to deliver a clear path forward for a safe reopening of the Yukon that includes clear timelines and benchmarks?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am actually very pleased to be able to get up today in response to this question, because I was thinking about this yesterday as the Leader of the Official Opposition was talking about them being the only party during the election to have committed to a clear path forward and that they would do such a thing. Actually, the wording used by both the member opposite today and by the Official Opposition leader yesterday is in fact the name of the plan that the Yukon has right now — *A Path Forward* — for the purposes of informing Yukoners, for the purposes of indicating benchmarks, for the purposes of discussing and making public for Yukon citizens exactly what the path forward is going to be for reopening, for dealing with issues around COVID-19, for dealing with vaccine rollout, and for dealing with concepts of variants that are here in the territory or that might come to the territory.

I think that it is an important opportunity to remind the members opposite that Yukon is by far the safest place in Canada. Kids are in school, businesses are running, the self-isolation requirements have been reduced if fully vaccinated individuals are here, and a success story it is.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the minister is missing is the importance of clarity and transparency. During the last election, the Yukon Party was the only party pushing

for a clear path forward for a safe reopening. In response, the Liberal Party held a bizarre and seemingly desperate press conference in the final days of the campaign to denounce such a commitment. Yet in BC, we see now a willingness to communicate openly and provide a clear and transparent reopening plan for that province.

The Liberals have taken some steps forward to reopening, but they seem to be making it up as they go and there is a real lack of clarity. For example, with the return to in-person classes in Whitehorse high schools, one day the Liberals said that it can't happen and, a few days later, they said the opposite without being able to explain what changed in just a few days.

Will the Liberals now agree to end the uncertainty and provide Yukoners with a clear path forward that includes clear timelines and benchmarks so that people can see when reopening will happen and businesses can plan for the future?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We have been clear throughout the pandemic. We have worked with the chief medical officer of health and our partner governments to keep Yukoners safe. Recommendations come without any political interference the moment that they are ready to be given by the chief medical officer of health and then the public servants, with our leadership, work on the implementation. In *A Path Forward* — the member opposite should read the document — it speaks very directly about a two-week to three-week window in between those things as we work with our partners.

What we have seen with the Yukon Party is, you know, this time last year, pen-to-paper criticizing the chief medical officer of health. We have also seen, when we were closing down the bubble to BC, them urging us to open up to Alberta. We also saw them on the campaign trail saying, "Come hell or high water, we are going to open up to the restrictions" — again, without consulting the chief medical officer of health and actually criticizing him publicly in the newspapers.

So, again, we are leading the nation and much of the world in vaccinations. We have announced plans to start lifting restrictions. We are following the advice of the chief medical officer of health to ensure that we lift the restrictions safely, and we want to thank all Yukoners who have been following along, doing the steps that are necessary to keep everybody safe, and we will continue to follow the evidence while the opposition says that they will arbitrarily give timelines without consulting the chief medical officer of health.

Mr. Cathers: We just saw the same sort of bizarre, desperate rhetoric from the Premier that we did in the closing days of the election campaign, where they lost the popular vote and lost seats. Saying that you are clear doesn't make it so. In fact, the government has criticized us for committing to do basically what the province of BC just did.

Outfitters, tourism operators, and other businesses are looking for a clear path forward, and we have seen a worrying trend of worsening governance under the Liberals since the election. They continuously leave things to the last minute, hastily make announcements without understanding how things will work, and end up missing the mark. Having a clear plan, clear benchmarks and timelines would help to give confidence

to Yukon citizens and businesses about what's next and what's to come.

Will the Liberals now agree to develop a clear plan, similar in concept to what BC has come up with, that includes clear benchmarks and timelines for reopening the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I would appreciate if the questions could be delivered minus the personal insults. I don't think it's worthy of this location or this House.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: Order.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We are leading the country in the fight against COVID-19. During the pandemic, Yukon Party MLAs called on us to ignore the science, as mentioned by the Premier, and to lift restrictions and even to bubble with Alberta when they were in a very difficult place.

Last week in the media, the Leader of the Yukon Party told Yukoners that he does not support the lifting of self-isolation requirements for fully vaccinated people. Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to make sense of where the Yukon Party stands on any of this.

The good news for Yukoners is that we have a reopening plan, as mentioned by the Premier and by me, in a former answer to this question — *A Path Forward* plan. We are following that plan. We have overseen the most successful vaccine rollout in the country. We're working closely with our public health professionals to lift restrictions in a way that protects the health and safety of Yukoners.

We need steady leadership to get us on the path to recovery, and we will continue to provide that leadership.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: I just want to remind members on the floor that all the chattering in the background is very disruptive, and it's hard for me to listen to the members who are speaking at the moment. So, let's please be mindful and respectful of the members who are speaking.

Question re: Mental health services in rural communities

Ms. Blake: We have heard a lot from this government about the mental wellness and substance use service hubs in the communities of Dawson City, Carmacks, Watson Lake, and Haines Junction. When this program was announced in 2018, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services was to integrate the programs of Alcohol and Drug Services, Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services, and Mental Health Services. This change was made to improve access to mental wellness and substance use services for Yukoners.

Staffing in each hub was to include a mental wellness and substance use counsellor, a clinical counsellor, a child and youth counsellor, and a mental health nurse. Can the minister tell Yukoners who live in the communities if the mental health hubs are fully staffed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I will see if I have that at my fingertips; I don't know that I do. What I can commit to are the concepts of increasing mental health services and supports in *Putting People First* and certainly by my

predecessor in this role from the Yukon government in respect to having services for Yukoners, meeting them where they are, providing the services that they need with respect to mental wellness, mental health, and substance abuse services.

Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services continues to enhance services to provide Yukoners with high-quality, accessible, and consistent access to care. We have expanded the scope of supports provided by our mental wellness hub staff to include counselling for adults, children, youth, and families, mental wellness and substance use counselling, relationship counselling, trauma counselling, groups and community support, access to psychological services and psychologist services, as well as outreach services.

A key priority for me as I enter this important role is to determine what the current state of the mental wellness hubs are. Are they providing the services that are needed in communities? Are we assessing them properly? I hope to answer more in the next questions.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, this government has been holding up these hubs as proof of their action on mental health, but the situation isn't improving on the ground, to the point that, just weeks before the last election, one of their own MLAs quit. We know that the many positions in mental health hubs have remained vacant over the years. We have now learned that the minister has just thrown in the towel and relocated three mental health nursing positions from the communities back to Whitehorse. How can the minister justify the relocation of three mental health nursing positions from Yukon communities to Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that is a fair characterization of what may or may not have happened with staffing. It's certainly something that I will look into.

Obviously, the member opposite thinks that she has information that is not available to me with respect to a personnel matter. I will look into it. As I was saying in my previous answer, I have committed to looking at the services provided at the mental wellness hubs throughout the territory. They are a key improvement in the services that existed in the past. They are putting key personnel across the territory for the purpose of being accessed by Yukoners for their personal needs.

I think that it is certainly an opportunity for us to review the mental wellness hubs and determine how they can be improved, how they can be properly serving their communities, and, more importantly, how we can make sure that we are not duplicating services with First Nation governments, with community governments and councils, and we can determine how we can all work together to improve services for Yukoners.

Ms. Blake: The Yukon Bureau of Statistics has reported that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, over half of Yukoners feel their mental health is either somewhat worse or much worse now. We are all aware of the deaths from opioid overdoses and suicides across the Yukon, including in the communities.

Parents and families are raising concerns about the mental wellness of school-aged children and the impacts of COVID on

their mental health. Removing the mental health nurse positions from the community hubs is a step in the wrong direction.

How is the government going to provide the needed mental health services to communities without mental health nurses in these communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, information contained in the preamble to that question is not information that I have, but I'm happy to speak with the member opposite if that information can be provided to me. I am more than interested to determine what her information is.

The wellness of children, youth, and families is a high priority — the highest for our Yukon government, particularly as we navigate the stress of COVID-19. There is no question that, across Canada and frankly across the world, dealing with this pandemic has been a stress for individuals and for youth and families. Recognition of that is a worldwide phenomenon.

Mental health supports to school-aged children, youth, and families continue to be provided across the territory. The child, youth, and family treatment team, sometimes known as CYFT, is in a number of high schools, elementary schools, and other venues to meet student needs, to offer support and training, and to provide scheduled or drop-in counselling services on a weekly or as-needed basis. This is an important opportunity for children and youth to not have to seek out services, but to know they are nearby.

We have many supports available for youth and families. I'm proud of the work of the department and will continue to provide those services.

Question re: Marwell grader station remediation

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, in the last election, the Liberals promised to relocate the Marwell grader station and use the current site to build housing. They said this would be done within the next four years. This was a surprising announcement, because the site is a very high-profile, contaminated site. Has the Government of Yukon done an assessment of the cost of remediation, and who will pay to have the site cleaned up?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think to start, I would just touch on the fact also that another key component of this project is the fact that the Kwanlin Dün First Nation has the right of first refusal on that particular piece of land. Previous to the election, there were conversations — an unsolicited proposal that was brought forward by folks who were doing planning and working. It laid out some options for this particular site.

As well, when you look at a site that has been used for these industrial purposes, there are also — through organizations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities — different funds that can be leveraged for brownfield development. The key is really — especially inside these urban areas — to identify areas where you can leverage funds once you have been able to do the environmental assessment. This is an absolutely key piece of real estate in the downtown area; that makes sense, of course, because of the adjacent amenities as well as the transportation challenges we have seen in other areas. Of course, this is right on a transit line.

Upon first look, this looks like it has all the elements of a particular area that should be developed, and I look forward to questions number two and three.

Ms. Clarke: The final agreement of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation gives the right of first refusal to the First Nation should the government ever look to sell the property. Has the Government of Yukon begun consultation with the KDFN about their plans to convert this site into housing? Has there been any consultation since the election?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would just add that conversations with leadership have taken place with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, but no consultation has occurred since the end of the election. In the last 30 days, I think we have all been quite focused on the work here in the Legislative Assembly.

Ms. Clarke: The Liberals promised to release 1,000 lots in the next four years, and this grader station site was an important part of that commitment. It does not sound like they gave much thought to the previous uses of the land before they made this commitment. The site is contaminated and the KDFN have a right of first refusal on the site.

When can Yukoners expect the Liberals to live up their election commitment and turn this site into housing?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, the commitment that we made was for 1,000 lots over the next five years. It is not dependent on that lot. We didn't use that in part of the accounting and analysis for the work that we will need to do.

Another thing to note here, Mr. Speaker, is that, no matter what, that site has to be cleaned up. If there is environmental remediation required, then it is required — and then once that happens is when we will bring that land back into play.

I think that one of the great uses that the Minister of Economic Development and Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation just pointed out is that it would be a great place to have lot development and there is conversation going on with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. It is not situated on one bus route; I think that it is situated on five of the bus routes. So, it is really well located to be accessible for folks. It is a great location; it is a beautiful location. Once it is remediated, it would be really great to see it developed as land for housing.

Question re: Construction project costs

Ms. Van Bibber: Earlier this year, the government tabled their budget, which includes a number of major construction projects. Since these projects were initially budgeted for earlier this year, there has been a massive spike to the cost of construction materials. This will have impacts on the budgets of projects, likely causing many of them to cost more than originally planned for.

Can the minister tell us if the government has done a reassessment of what the spike of construction costs has done to the government's budget?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the Member for Porter Creek North. I am in the process of reviewing all of the major contracts that this government will be committing to over the course of fiscal 2021-22, including

things like the Carmacks bypass, the Dempster fibre project, the Whistle Bend elementary school, the Old Crow health and wellness centre, and the 10-plex.

Certainly, during the course of this fiscal year, we will be reviewing the unavoidable potential cost pressures which have been brought to bear based on international factors on lots of raw material, including steel and wood, and of course labour costs as well related to the now-15-month global pandemic.

So, yes, I would say there will be cost pressures going forward. Nevertheless, we are making best efforts to take action on the commitment of over \$400 million in capital projects to get out the door this year for the benefit of all Yukoners.

Ms. Van Bibber: According to the experts, some of the most common building materials have tripled in price since last year. It sounds like the minister is considering the rising costs on the budgets of the government projects that are going to be built or planned for next year. Will he make a commitment to complete this assessment and to release it publicly within a month?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the follow-up question from the member opposite. I would stand by my first response that there are now in excess of over \$400 million of capital projects which are planned to get out the door during the course of fiscal year 2021-22.

I agree with the member opposite's contention that there are cost pressures. We will certainly be in a position to report back. With respect to the issues of cost pressures, it's unlikely, I would say, that I will be meeting a one-month — somewhat arbitrary — deadline. But certainly, in the early days of me being the Minister of Highways and Public Works, I have been briefed by my department on the various major projects and concede that — as is the case in the 10 provinces and three territories and on federal projects across Canada and in fact globally — there are cost pressures on major construction projects that have been impacted by constraints on the global supply chain. The Yukon is not unique and is not immune from those pressures.

Ms. Van Bibber: The recent spikes in the cost of lumber and the lack of supply are having a serious effect on local contractors and the economy. Multiple small- to medium-size construction companies have reached out to us, saying that their clients are cancelling or postponing jobs, forcing them to scale back operations and, in some cases, lay off employees.

These projects range from fences to decks to homes. The Yukon is blessed with potential for a viable forest industry. What is the government doing to ensure a secure local supply of lumber?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There was a question that came up about this just yesterday during the debate on the budget. What I can say is that we have just signed off on the Whitehorse and Southern Lakes forestry management plan. There are several others. People in all communities that are accessible from Yukon highways have access to fuel-wood harvesting areas on public land. The Government of Yukon identifies and develops new areas for cutting fuel wood, in addition to the areas already in place, and we work with Yukon First Nations, the Yukon Wood Products Association, and woodcutters to provide wood

supply for commercial operators to support their businesses. We prioritize planning for small-scale softwood lumber wherever the timber profile suits those types of business opportunities.

As I mentioned yesterday, I went over the initial steps that are happening under the Whitehorse and Southern Lakes forest resource management plan, where we're starting to identify those resources right now. We recognize that it's a great opportunity for the local economy and for local supply, and I hope that it will assist in some of the pressures that exist on the global supply chain right now as a result of COVID. It's a really good opportunity for us and our economy here in the territory.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 61

Clerk: Motion No. 61, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

Speaker: It has been moved by Government House Leader:

THAT a Special Committee on Electoral Reform be established;

THAT the Government appoint the first member to the committee;

THAT the membership of the committee also be comprised of one member from the Official Opposition caucus selected by the Leader of the Official Opposition and one member from the Third Party caucus selected by the Leader of the Third Party;

THAT the Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and the Leader of the Third Party inform the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of the names of the selected members from their respective caucuses in writing no later than seven calendar days after the adoption of this motion by the Assembly;

THAT the Chair of the committee have a deliberative vote on all matters before the committee;

THAT the committee examine electoral reform;

THAT the committee be empowered to conduct public hearings;

THAT the committee have the power to call for persons, papers, and records and to sit during intersessional periods;

THAT the committee report to the Legislative Assembly on its findings and recommendations no later than March 31, 2022;

THAT, if the House is not sitting at such time as the committee is prepared to present its report, the Chair of the committee shall transmit the committee's report to the Speaker, who shall transmit the report to all Members of the Legislative Assembly and then, not more than one day later, release the report to the public; and

THAT the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly shall be responsible for providing the necessary support services to the committee.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak to this motion. I will be brief.

Yukoners have sent a clear message that we all need to work together for the benefit of the territory. That is what we are committed to doing, and I have heard members in the opposition — both parties — say the same. We believe that this Assembly works best when all members can put forward good ideas and come together to support those ideas that advance the public good.

We will continue to work with our partners across the territory to advance community priorities that benefit Yukoners. We have heard from Yukoners that this is an exploration that they are interested in having the Members of the Legislative Assembly explore.

My motion here on the floor today deliberately does not name individuals to this particular committee. It is, in my view, appropriate that each party choose who shall represent them, and as set out in the motion, the leaders of the individual parties would present those persons by letter in written form within seven days of the beginning of this motion being passed.

I urge the Members of the Legislative Assembly to cooperate in this important work, and I urge them to pass this motion today so that work can begin.

Mr. Cathers: In rising to speak to this motion, I would just note, as we have consistently on this matter, that we are not opposed to the consideration of possible changes to the electoral system if that indeed is something that Yukoners would like to talk about. But we have consistently laid out the position, and believe that it should be the case, that if it is being considered, it should not be left to just one party to write the terms of reference for some such a committee and that there should be a sincere all-party attempt to come up with a mutually agreeable process.

Unfortunately, I have to remind Yukoners who may not recall the history on this that this isn't the first time this Liberal government has talked about a committee on electoral reform. However, in their previous term in office, they adamantly refused to actually work with other parties on crafting the terms of reference. They insisted in unilaterally setting the terms of reference and unilaterally choosing the three members to sit on the committee. For that committee, of course, it was private citizens and not Members of the Legislative Assembly. We repeatedly made our position clear that we were open to a committee, either composed of citizens or of MLAs, but that the key components had to be that it should not be left to one party that was elected. Last time they were at about 39 percent of the vote. Now they have declined to 32 percent of the vote, I believe it is, in the last election. It should not be left to one party representing a minority of Yukoners to set the terms unilaterally that could potentially lead to major changes of our electoral system. It should be an all-party process aimed at reaching agreement on a reasonable path forward.

Fast-forward to today, their last committee did not achieve what it set out to do because, after repeatedly refusing to play well with other children, if I may use the analogy, the government found themselves in a process where their committee lacked the legitimacy, lacked public support, the chair of the committee resigned, and the government just stopped talking about the fact that they never really officially disbanded the committee with the two remaining members.

I want to also note, just for the record, that for people who did put their names forward to serve on the committee, we, as the Official Opposition, do not take issue with people choosing to put their names forward to participate and respect them doing so but believe that a process is fundamentally flawed by its very nature if it is left up to the governing party, which represents less than half of Yukoners, to determine the terms of reference and the membership of said committee.

So, that committee, after the four and half years that the Liberals spent in office, got nowhere. Now, as a condition of the Liberals clinging to power with the support of their NDP coalition partners — or a coalition by another name, if you prefer — have proposed this motion.

Again, we do not fundamentally object to the concept, but we do have to note that, just like last time, they did not actually show us the details and make a sincere effort to agree on the wording. There was absolutely nothing, other than arrogance, preventing them from doing so.

The Government House Leader could have sat down with our House Leader and the Third Party House Leader, or the leaders could have sat down, and we could have, I'm sure, come up with motion wording that we would all agree to for this process.

Problem number one is that the unilateral approach — or perhaps this wording was worked on with the NDP, but again cutting out the Yukon Party — the party that actually won the popular vote in the territorial election — is not an acceptable nor democratic approach.

The other key issue for us from the start has been, and will continue to be, that if a committee of a legislative assembly or any other structure that you choose to do in considering electoral reform is to recommend change, the Yukon Party continues to believe that our democracy belongs to Yukoners and that any proposal that would significantly change the way by which members are elected to this Legislative Assembly should be presented to Yukoners in a referendum. It should be up to Yukoners to consider both the status quo and any proposed change and to cast their vote and choose whether they wish to accept the proposed changes. It should not be up to Members of the Legislative Assembly, especially members elected with significantly less than half of the popular vote, to majorly change the structure of our democracy. That is not a democratic approach.

So, I wish to emphasize, as our lead speaker on this motion, that we continue to believe that, if a committee of this type recommends change, it is fundamentally undemocratic unless that proposal is presented to Yukoners in a referendum and that no changes should occur unless Yukoners support such a change through a referendum.

We would have ideally liked to propose a change to the motion; however, we understand that, due to the fact that the committee has to report to the Legislative Assembly and then the Legislative Assembly chooses what to do with it, it's not really possible to amend this motion to throw in a requirement that there be a referendum before change occurs, but I wish to make it crystal clear that the Yukon Party will continue to stand up for democracy, even if we are the only party doing so, and we will demand that, if a committee recommends change, no major change to our electoral system occurs until and unless that change is supported by Yukoners in a referendum.

Ms. Tredger: I'm excited to be talking about this topic, because it's something that I've been thinking about for a long time. I remember, when I was a kid, first learning about how our electoral system worked and how disappointing it was when I realized that often 40 percent or less of voters will actually vote for the person who represents them.

As I got a little older and it was my turn to start voting, I started to feel like: What is the point of voting in this system where so many people's votes do not count? At that time, I didn't have a model for a better way forward. I was lucky enough to spend a year living in New Zealand where they have mixed-member representation. It was pretty exciting to see that there was another way to do democracy and to do elections.

I was really inspired when I lived there by seeing the engagement of the citizens in their government. People had a sense of ownership in their government. They felt that they were being represented by who they voted for, and they felt they had a stake in the decisions and were able to influence change in the ways they wanted to. They felt that their votes made a difference.

When people don't think that their vote counts, they don't feel like the government belongs to them. This is something that I heard on the doorstep during the election. I heard frustration with feeling like the government wasn't accountable to people, but I also heard optimism that we could do things differently.

I believe that this motion is the first step toward an electoral system that truly does represent Yukoners. When people believe that their vote counts, they vote; when people believe that their voices will be heard, they speak up, and that's why the Yukon NDP fought so hard for this committee during our negotiations.

We're very proud to be moving this important issue forward on behalf of Yukoners.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Motion No. 61.

The Member for Lake Laberge, as he summed up his comments, is aware that he was being somewhat anticipatorily negative as to the outcome of any proceedings, and he did ultimately concede that all the motion does is direct that the committee report to the Legislative Assembly on its findings and recommendations no later than March 31, 2022.

I've heard the member loud and clear over the course of the last now almost five years that the Yukon Party is of the

view — and fine, they're of the view — that there ought to be either a plebiscite or a referendum going forward in order to determine if there is some sort of consensus and that, if a consensus on electoral reform is to be considered or presented, it ought to go to Yukoners for ultimate determination. I have heard that loud and clear from the Member for Lake Laberge and from other members of the Yukon Party.

Obviously, there is nothing in this motion that stops that from occurring. The findings would have returned to the 35th Legislative Assembly, and at that point, the wise members of the Assembly would presumably receive those recommendations and begin the process of debating those recommendations, including and not limited to the potentiality or possibility of there being either a referendum or a plebiscite if that were the ultimate democratic wish of this Assembly.

So, although, as I said, I have heard the Member for Lake Laberge loud and clear on the Yukon Party's position with respect to two, three, four, five steps down this process — that there ought to be a referendum — there is obviously nothing stopping that from occurring after this proposed committee returns with its findings.

As well, the Member for Lake Laberge is interpreting — and it is certainly his prerogative to interpret this motion as providing the terms of reference. In my view, that is not necessarily the interpretation that is to be preferred. This is really the brass tacks of how the committee is to be constituted and set up, but in my view and in my submission to the Assembly this afternoon, it is clear that the three members would have a great deal of latitude in determining how they were going to conduct the public hearings and what persons, papers, or records they were going to call for during interessional periods.

This motion is purposely non-prescriptive. It is only a framework, and a relatively simple and fair framework, as to how this committee ought to operate.

As I said, in my view, the Member for Lake Laberge is being anticipatorily pessimistic as to the good work that this committee could potentially do, and I think, importantly, there is nothing stopping there being a debate on whether there ought to be a referendum or a plebiscite at some point in the future.

Briefly then — and I thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre for her comments in support of this motion — I rise to speak in support of Motion No. 61, calling on this House to establish a committee on electoral reform.

We are committed to having an in-depth conversation with Yukoners about our electoral system. Do Yukoners want it to be changed, and if so, what system would best represent their voice? We are open and willing to work with the other two parties going forward on this. The task of ensuring an accurate reflection of people's wishes and preferences, as it pertains to the expression of their democratic franchise, is admittedly not a simple process. It is important that not one election or event prescribe or frame the terms of this conversation.

In the Yukon Liberal platform, we committed to consult with Yukoners about their vision of what comes next for electoral reform within six months of re-election. Our Liberal

government believes that this can only be done through a robust and fulsome conversation with Yukoners.

This proposed committee, as mandated through this motion, will closely examine electoral reform, conduct public hearings, and have the authority to call for persons, papers, and records for that specific purpose. This committee, as I said previously, will present its findings to the Legislative Assembly no later than March 31, 2022.

We do not believe that our party — or any other party, for that matter — should presuppose what Yukoners want from potential electoral reform. This is why we committed to having an equal number of representatives appointed from all three caucuses on this committee.

Many Yukoners have asked for there to be a conversation about our territorial electoral process. With this motion, we will deliver on our commitment to facilitate an exchange of ideas in the spirit of fairness and collaboration. To my colleagues from across the floor, I urge you to vote in favour of this motion in order to support the important work of this committee.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief in my comments speaking in opposition to this motion. I think that it has been made clear — some of our policy — by my colleague, the Member for Lake Laberge, but I wish to elaborate on his position and articulation of our position.

One of the issues that we take with this motion is the fact that this is yet another example of the Liberals and the NDP cooking up a system behind closed doors and presenting it through their CASA to the Legislature. It's not unlike what happened with the committee structures for the other standing committees of the Legislature, which we debated a few weeks ago, where an agreement has been made between the two parties and presented to us as a done deal, and we should just accept it and participate, even though we had no contribution, discussion, or consultation prior to it being presented to us.

What worries us, in particular, is that we don't know what else the Liberals and the NDP have agreed to on this file. With legislative committees, we know that their agreement, as articulated in the CASA, extended to the structure of committees. But we learned at the first House Leaders' meeting that the agreement also extended to the sitting length of this Sitting. We know that there are other things that are unwritten but obviously agreed to by the Liberals and the NDP that aren't in the CASA. We wonder what else has been agreed to by the two other parties with regard to this file.

I know, very clearly, where the NDP stands on electoral reform. They've been very clear about their position over the years. The Member for Whitehorse Centre just explained her take on proportional representation and, I believe, expressed support generally for the model as espoused in New Zealand.

I think that the Yukon Party has been clear as well. We are not in favour of proportional representation.

What we wonder about is the position of the Liberal Party, because we know that there are a variety of views. I have heard the Premier — both publicly and privately — express positions that sound to me like he is against proportional representation, but we have heard from members like the Member for Mount

Lorne-Southern Lakes express publicly a position that seems to be in favour of some form of proportional representation.

We know that there is a diversity of views in the Liberal Party on this, and we know that they were desperate to stay in power and willing to offer up just about anything to the NDP to do that. So, we wonder what else has been offered up and if our electoral system has been offered up as an offering to the NDP for the Liberals to stay in power.

That worries us, Mr. Speaker. It worries us because, while the committee has a representative from each party, of course, the committee itself is not proportionally representative of this Legislature; therefore, the two parties can very easily use this opportunity to force through something in this committee.

As the Member for Riverdale North has indicated, there is a stop-check that it will have to come back to the Legislature, at least, and so we are happy to hear that, but we do worry about what sort of side deals have been made between the Liberals and the NDP on this particular file. We are concerned about being forced to participate in this process if the outcome has already been determined as we have seen with other instances in the Legislature and as we have seen with other instances in this confidence and supply agreement.

We know that the Liberals have a very poor record when it comes to electoral reform. They made this promise in the last election back in 2016 to look at electoral reform. Naturally, they failed at that. They tried to unilaterally create a committee to look at that. That committee structure, despite their best efforts, collapsed under its own weight, and the incompetency of the government in naming it created a huge number of issues for that committee. Obviously, it resulted in the fact that the unilaterally appointed chair resigned, and the Premier, at that time, threw up his hands and let the process continue to just fail. Ultimately, it sat undone.

Of course, the Liberals didn't include, to my knowledge, a commitment to electoral reform in their most recent platform, but as we have seen quite frequently, they have adopted the NDP's platform. That is what we see here — that the Liberals have adopted the NDP's platform.

Again, Mr. Speaker, that's my concern with this motion. Obviously, if this motion passes, we'll be compelled by the Legislature to participate in it and so we will, but we remain concerned about what sort of deals have been cooked up between the Liberals and the NDP on this particular file, and we'll be watching the operation of this committee very closely.

So, we will be voting against this motion, but we know that it's a bit of a foregone conclusion that, because of the confidence and supply agreement, this motion will pass and that the Liberals and the NDP will get their way on this one, for sure.

Ms. White: I thank my colleagues for their comments today. It's fascinating, because this isn't the first time that we have had a conversation about electoral reform on this floor. As a matter of fact, it's important to note that we've talked about this numerous times — not just in the 34th but in the 33rd — and there have been a lot of times that this has come up.

The really interesting thing is that, during the 34th, when the then-Liberal government proposed an independent commission on electoral reform, both opposition parties were in opposition to how it was set up, and that was because, at that time, it did feel very unilateral. It was decided by government and members were appointed by government. It's important to note that there was a letter received from the former Clerk of the Legislative Assembly talking about why the independent commission on electoral reform wasn't the best idea.

It's interesting to hear the Member for Lake Laberge talk about select committees and terms of reference and how things were decided Outside, being the fact that, in this House, he is the member who has been on the most select committees, as a matter of fact, having been elected ahead of those of us who have been around since 2011.

It's important to note that select committees are set out with the members of that committee. They decide what work they're going to do, who they're going to invite, where they're going to go, and how that's going to look within that committee. It's one of those things — you get to hear things about cooking up a system or what other things have been done — because unlike maybe the way the Yukon Party behaves, the Yukon NDP have been really honest about what we're doing and about that.

As a matter of fact, the Yukon NDP and the Yukon Liberals released the confidence and supply agreement — it is a public document — which benefits everyone when it gets re-read into the record on numerous times every day in questions from the Yukon Party.

So, it has been clear. Spoiler alert to folks listening: There isn't a super-secret document that is private. There isn't one that is locked in a drawer that can only be looked at by people who signed the document to say that they are allowed to see it. There is no hidden agenda. This is a matter of going out and having conversations with Yukoners and finding out what they think about electoral reform.

We saw a large-scale national movement by the federal government and it is important to note that hundreds of Yukoners turned out to those consultations. They were held at the High Country Inn Convention Centre and there was standing room only. Hundreds of people came out because they had thoughts that they wanted to share on electoral reform. In that case, Canada's electoral system — and in this case, we are talking about Yukon-specific. It has not been pre-decided how it is going to look. It hasn't done any of those things.

It is important to note that, in the 34th, both opposition parties spoke against it — because at that point in time, it did feel like it was being dictated. I think that the important thing to note here is that we are talking about three members — one from each political party. That is very similar, I would highlight, to the electoral boundaries commission, where it had one appointed member from each political party — similar, one of each.

I think that it is important to note that this is a select committee of the Legislative Assembly, which means that it comes back to the Legislative Assembly — those conversations. I appreciate that the Leader of the Yukon Party

is concerned that it is a done deal, but — like I said on election night — maybe this was the time to have that conversation. Maybe we hear repeatedly the interpretation of the election results and how they are unfair, but here is that opportunity to have that conversation across the territory — which is something that I am looking forward to actually; I think that it is going to be really interesting. It is also one of those things too where I really do believe that this is an opportunity for us to work together, so I welcome that — because things have to be different; they do.

I can look back to the 32nd Assembly and I can think about how many things were cooked up and rammed through by that false majority government and how I didn't think that it worked. I can say the same thing about the 33rd — again, false majority. Things that got passed — we jokingly said that when there were votes being held that we were so close because we were always just one shy — one shy of tying. This is actually an opportunity, I think it's important, and I look forward to those conversations.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will take this opportunity — I appreciate the other parties weighing in — other Members of this Legislative Assembly weighing in on this particular motion, but I will take the opportunity to make a few comments.

I am quite concerned about the characterization of this motion by the Leader of the Official Opposition. He indicates that somehow this is not a valid motion on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, in his view — I don't mean technically valid.

I note that the wording of this motion, with the exception of the names indicated in the motion, is almost identical to a motion that was passed in the Fall Sitting last year for the purpose of again striking a committee to look at electoral reform. Several of the things that he mentioned about the former committee were not correct. Unfortunately, what I heard is that the Yukon Party conservatives are not interested in cooperating on a good idea, despite the fact that they keep talking about wanting to be cooperative and move forward.

What this motion is asking for is that we go and we listen to Yukoners. The motion is about gathering information and about speaking to Yukoners about an important issue. The motion doesn't mention proportional representation or any other kind of democratic process. Those are the Leader of the Yukon Party conservatives' — those are his words, not mine — in this motion. The conservative Yukon Party leader is really fear-mongering, I think, rather than wanting to support a motion that is looking to hear from Yukoners.

The committee, we're suggesting here, would be created by a motion, and that's what we're debating here. I have noted — and I'm going to take this opportunity to clear up a few things. I'm quite concerned about the Official Opposition's characterization and providing Yukoners with truly incorrect

information. The Member for Lake Laberge speaks endlessly about a popular vote, and he came very close today to even indicating that somehow this government is illegitimate, and that's clearly something that he should take care with. Those comments are not worthy of this Legislative Assembly; they're not worthy of Yukoners; they're not worthy of the democratic process. What is more democratic than an election? Yukoners have had their say. They have brought us to this Legislative Assembly to work together.

One point that I think is important in response to that is that the Yukon Party conservatives got 39 percent of the popular vote in the last election, which is a little over one-third of that vote. The Liberals got 32 percent, which is about one-third of the popular vote, and the NDP got 28 percent, which is a little under one-third of the popular vote. I don't suspect that will put an end to the Member for Lake Laberge continuing to put forward numbers that are not those, but those are what occurred in the last election.

The Leader of the Official Opposition also spoke about how this was somehow a concern to him. The CASA — I think the Member for Takhini-Kopper King makes an excellent point — is a public document. I'm not sure why the Leader of the Official Opposition is casting aspersions on what's to come next and what's a secret deal. It's a public document; it's open for all Yukoners to review; it's open for all members of the opposition to review. If they have questions, I'm sure that they won't bring them to us, but we would be happy to answer them.

It's important, with respect to this particular motion, to point out — Yukoners know this, Mr. Speaker, but to really point out to the members of the Official Opposition — that electoral reform, a concept that I have presented here in today's motion, was in our platform. A promise was made by the Yukon Liberal Party to consult with Yukoners about their vision — their vision, Mr. Speaker — for what comes next for electoral reform within six months of re-election. That is why I have brought this motion. I urge all members to support it in the spirit of cooperation and of hearing from Yukoners.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Ms. Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yea, eight nay.

Speaker: The ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 61 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (Ms. Tredger): Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 201, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 201: *First Appropriation Act 2021-22* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 201, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Health and Social Services

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am just being joined by Deputy Minister Stephen Samis from Health and Social Services and Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services, Karen Chan. I would like to welcome them here to the Legislative Assembly today for the purpose of assisting in the questions that will come in relation to the Health and Social Services main budget for 2021-22. Welcome to them.

I would like to take a moment to thank the department staff who worked very hard on this particular budget, and they, along with the whole department, have been instrumental in ensuring

that we develop a budget that supports Yukoners. I want to thank them for all of their hard work.

Keeping Yukoners safe has been our government's top priority always but particularly since the COVID-19 virus first appeared here in the territory and across the world. Our territory is in a good position today — a good position due to the ongoing hard work of all Yukoners. Yukoners have followed our public health measures, have adapted their businesses, their practices, and changed their habits and worked hard to keep us all safe.

I am pleased to say that through the dedication and hard work of all of our front-line health and social support workers — from nurses and doctors, to social workers, to continuing care workers, to personal support workers, to cleaning staff, and to all those who support our chief medical officer of health — we have not only protected Yukoners but have continued to offer the services and supports that our citizens rely upon — not an easy feat.

Thank you to all of our health workers for their extraordinary work. We are winning this battle and we are grateful for the effort that everyone has made and continues to make. The pandemic has been difficult. It has been a very challenging time for all of us and it continues to impact all aspects of our lives, including this year's budget for the Department of Health and Social Services.

Our estimated budget for this year is \$490,290,000. These funds are critical to maintaining and improving the health of Yukoners — all Yukoners. Simply put, they are investments in our health and well-being — directly or indirectly, this benefits us all.

I will review in summary the 2021-22 budget for Health and Social Services. The most substantial increase in this year's budget is to the funds that have been needed to fight COVID-19. This year, we are budgeting an additional \$14,299,000 to fight the virus and its impacts and support the vaccine rollout. This includes funding for an additional 72 temporary employees, and I want to emphasize that these staffing increases are temporary. These positions are needed to vaccinate and protect Yukoners now. Over the coming months, we will assess any ongoing needs as a result of the pandemic. We are all thankful to those individuals who have helped to keep us safe.

This COVID-dedicated funding also includes \$4,207,000 in direct transfers to individuals and organizations impacted by COVID. This includes transfers to the Yukon Hospital Corporation, Family and Children's Services, and other vulnerable clients. This represents an approximate three-percent increase to the overall budget when compared with last year.

While the pandemic continues to occupy headlines, the opioid overdose crisis continues to be one of the most serious public health crises in Canada and in our recent history. We have seen that the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening this crisis. The number of overdose deaths in the Yukon is heartbreaking. Our government takes this issue very seriously.

We are taking significant and immediate action to address the public health crisis. We are committed to opening a safe

consumption site in Whitehorse. We are also committed to creating a safe supply program. Safe supply programs have demonstrated that they save lives given the ever-increasing toxic drug supply that we see throughout Canada.

This 2021-22 Health and Social Services budget commits \$1 million to get these two life-saving programs up and running as soon as possible. Further efforts to address this crisis also include the Department of Health and Social Services assisting with the purchase of a mass spectrometer, which we then provided to Blood Ties Four Directions to support its drug testing services. Blood Ties makes drug testing services available through its location on Ogilvie Street via their outreach van and, since last July, to the Wood Street Housing First residence.

The Yukon government's referred care clinic began offering drug testing on-site for its clients last December. Our referred care clinic also provides an opioid treatment program that includes access to prescription medications such as suboxone and methadone.

Another priority of the department is continuing to move forward with the direction proposed in the *Putting People First* final report. *Putting People First* provides a road map to transform Yukon's Health and Social Services system into a more integrated, collaborative, and person-centred system that will better meet the needs of Yukoners.

We remain committed to implementing the report's 76 recommendations. Implementing these recommendations will provide better value for money, make services more effective, and improve outcome and experiences for clients, patients, families, and health and social service providers. If I seem excited about that, I truly am. I know our government has worked hard to have that report completed and are now looking forward to the path it sets out.

For this fiscal year, we are budgeting nearly \$10 million for *Putting People First* initiatives. This includes nearly \$6 million in O&M and \$4 million in capital expenses. \$1.9 million is proposed for health human resources. There is \$610,000 to support our commitment to health human resources in implementing *Putting People First*. There is \$806,000 in bringing care closer to home by increasing the number of nurses in communities, including increasing community nurses and the number of nurse practitioners.

Lastly, there is a proposed increase of \$542,000 for Continuing Care to introduce a number of system-level enhancements, including a new rural end-of-life program and operating funds for the community day program. Continuing Care will also be hiring a manager of indigenous services and relations as part of our ongoing commitment to advance reconciliation and improve access to care and support for Yukon First Nations.

Another important *Putting People First* recommendation is to provide Yukoners with universal dental care. Oral health is vitally important to a person's overall health. We are committing \$500,000 this year to develop a territory-wide dental care plan, which will be implemented and funded in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

We are investing \$1 million in capital funding and \$520,000 in O&M to help get the new bilingual health centre up and running. As the third-most bilingual province or territory in Canada, Yukon has a long-standing and growing francophone and French-speaking community. The centre will provide primary care services, using a collaborative model, and have an increased focus on preventive care.

The *Putting People First* report is, as we all know, a chart forward, and we look forward to modernizing and improving all aspects of the services we provide. When looking at the future, technology is always of primary concern. That is why our work on 1Health, Yukon's electronic medical records system, continues.

We have proposed a funding increase of \$3 million in capital and \$889,000 in O&M cost to support the expansion and implementation of 1Health. This funding will also enhance and support virtual care options for Yukoners. When 1Health is fully implemented, all care providers within Yukon will use the same system and all Yukoners will have access to their medical records through a secure online client portal.

We are on track to become the first and only jurisdiction in Canada to have an electronic health information system that connects public, private, and First Nation-led care settings through one integrated platform.

Complete and accurate health information is foundational to a person-centred approach to care. 1Health will soon provide that. All Yukoners will benefit from this investment in their health and well-being.

Medical travel in the north is a necessity — a fact of life — for those of us who live in this great territory. Improving and enhancing our medical travel program is something that Yukoners have been asking for. We have already doubled the medical travel benefit and have applied it to the first day of travel for patients who need to remain overnight for medical care. In addition, we are now providing a subsidy of \$75 for approved escorts starting on the first day of travel and a subsidy of \$75 to those travelling for medical treatment on the same day.

This fiscal year, we are standing up our new care coordination and medical travel unit. This unit will deliver a new model of service delivery that reflects a new vision for medical travel and the coordination of care.

This year, we are investing nearly \$1.5 million to improve medical travel. This includes more than \$1 million for increases to the medical travel subsidy and approximately \$400,000 in personnel costs to establish a dedicated team that will provide enhanced assistance to all Yukoners at every stage of the medical travel process.

I am pleased to say that the Government of Canada has renewed its investment and commitment to the territorial health investment fund. Yukon will receive \$12.8 million over the next two years through this initiative. These funds are used to offset medical travel, to strengthen services, to increase access, and to improve the quality of our health care system.

We are projecting more than \$1 million in savings this fiscal year by successfully reducing the cost of prescription drugs by reducing pharmaceutical markups. This is a

significant savings accomplishment at the same time as we are expanding the scope of services provided by pharmacists — again, with the aim to improve the health and well-being of all Yukoners.

I am going to turn for a moment to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. We are continuing to increase funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. They are a critical partner, and we are increasing core funding by more than \$4.2 million. This proposed increase to support the Yukon Hospital Corporation represents a 5.2-percent increase over the 2020-21 main estimates.

Between fiscal years 2015-16 and 2021-22, the Hospital Corporation services' operation and maintenance budget has increased by 35.4 percent, an average of 5.9 percent per year. I'm emphasizing this because there has been more than one comment in this Legislative Assembly during this Sitting from the members of the Official Opposition that somehow the Yukon Hospital Corporation is not being properly funded. So, I will repeat: In the last number of years, between 2015-16 and 2021-22, the Yukon Hospital Corporation services' O&M budget has increased by 35.4 percent.

This O&M funding includes \$1 million to improve safety and security. This year's budget includes nearly \$1 million to improve safety and security at Whitehorse General Hospital's secure medical unit. We will also be investing \$5.7 million in capital costs this fiscal year for the new secure medical unit project.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation will also receive \$1.2 million to replace aging CT and ultrasound equipment and \$800,000 to refurbish elevators at the Whitehorse General Hospital. Our government is committed to working closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to ensure that we are meeting both their core and their capital needs.

We're also making other capital investments through the Health and Social Services budget. Major investments include: \$1.3 million for renovations for primary health care in Yukon facilities and to replace aging equipment in community nursing facilities within Health Services; \$589,000 to replace operational equipment within continuing care homes and home care operations; \$500,000 for Whitehorse Emergency Shelter renovations; and \$162,000 to replace operation equipment for Family and Children's Services.

Family and Children's Services, in this year's budget, has a proposed increase of nearly \$4.5 million. This increase is for Yukon to begin working with the Canadian prenatal nutrition program, as well as enhancing paternal and maternal supports through investments in community-based projects throughout the territory.

Reducing the number of children in care remains one of our top priorities. We are increasing the child and family services budget by more than \$2.9 million this year to increase supports for children, youth, and families. This includes extended family care agreements, which are essential to reducing the number of children in care while making sure that children remain safe and attached to their families.

In conclusion, everything that we do within the Department of Health and Social Services is to maintain and

improve the well-being of Yukoners. Particularly in the last 15 months, the responsibilities that have rested on the shoulders on those who work at Health and Social Services have become immense. They have ultimately been responsible as a key player in the government's response to COVID, in the work to keep Yukoners safe, and in the work to keep our territory safe.

I am happy to have this opportunity to thank them for that work. I know that it's not over. I know that it will be continuing, and I know that the folks who have been on the front lines of this pandemic have supported all Yukoners, have done it for the good of our territory, and will continue to meet the challenge every day that comes through their work.

Madam Deputy Chair, I am pleased to answer any questions about the important work of the Department of Health and Social Services. I look forward to providing whatever information we might be able to.

Mr. Cathers: Welcome to the minister on her new role as she begins her first debate as Minister of Health and Social Services. We are pleased to have the opportunity to debate this important area of government, which spends almost half a billion dollars. In recent years, there has been a disturbing lack of debate in the Legislative Assembly on the department's budget and on the program areas related to that budget. It includes that the Liberal government has gone to great lengths to avoid debating the Health and Social Services budget in previous years and has put it to the back of the queue in terms of debate in more than one Sitting. It is pretty clear that, when a government doesn't want to call a department for debate, they are afraid of the questions that they will have to answer or the non-answers that they would give to those questions.

I do have questions today about a number of areas, including, of course, the government's response to the pandemic. I would also just like to take a moment to thank all the staff of the Department of Health and Social Services, as well as the Hospital Corporation and NGOs that are funded by Health and Social Services, for the important work that they do to meet the needs of Yukon citizens.

I would like to particularly recognize the good work that has been done by staff of the department and others in terms of the rollout of the Yukon's vaccination campaign for COVID-19.

First, I do want to begin by talking about the important area of our hospitals. We heard the minister earlier attempt to spin the government's record on it, but as the minister knows, in the area of hospital funding, we have seen chronic neglect under the Liberal government for this area during most of their first term. This includes that the territory literally entered a pandemic with the Hospital Corporation being short millions of dollars in core funding for the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Madam Deputy Chair, that is not just me saying it. The Hospital Corporation's own annual report — as tabled in the Legislative Assembly and available on their website — for the 2019-20 fiscal year says it. On page 14 of that report, it shows that the Hospital Corporation's total expenses for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, were \$96.5 million. Total revenues, on

the other hand, were only \$92.6 million. Again, that is according to the Hospital Corporation's own annual report.

On page 15 of the Hospital Corporation's annual report, it provides more detail. Both page 14 and page 15 show that, for a fiscal year that ended after the territory and the world were literally in a pandemic, the Hospital Corporation ended that fiscal year short \$3.9 million in funding. That was unacceptable.

Witnesses from the Hospital Corporation also confirmed our understanding of this chronic funding shortfall when they appeared in the Legislative Assembly in November 2020 and November 2019. The problem didn't start in either of those years; it began in 2017 with the first budget of the Liberals.

I want to also just point out, in specific rebuttal to the claims that the minister made about increases to hospital funding, that if you look at when the Hospital Corporation witnesses appeared to testify in this Legislative Assembly in November 2020 — on November 19, to be precise — on page 1970 of Hansard, we heard from the CEO of the Hospital Corporation, who indicated that the hospital funding — "... over the past five years, we have seen an annual increase in our core funding of two percent per year on average..." That is a dramatically different picture than the number the minister gave to this House. I think Yukoners know who they can trust on this issue.

As noted, the problem with the Liberals' chronic neglect of the Hospital Corporation didn't start in 2020 or 2019; it began in 2017 with the very first budget of the Liberals. Statements made by the Premier and his former Minister of Health and Social Services, which are recorded in Hansard, were very telling about their attitude toward the Yukon hospitals and unfortunately foreshadowed how the Liberals would act during their last term in office. They seem to see our hospitals as wasting money and naively believed that increasing core funding by less than the rate of inflation, and/or withholding millions of dollars in core funding for the Hospital Corporation until late in the fiscal year or even to the next fiscal year, was somehow a workable approach.

The former minister confirmed in Hansard in May 2017 that the increase that the government provided for the hospital that year was just one percent. She also confirmed that the hospital had asked for millions more.

Just for the reference of members and anyone listening and reading, you can refer to Hansard from May 2017, pages 427 to 431, and from the appearances of the Hospital Corporation witnesses in November 2019 and 2020, as well as the Hospital Corporation's own annual reports.

Unfortunately, at the time, the now-former minister also made remarks about the Hospital Corporation which in my view were disrespectful, going so far as to accuse them of not being accountable. Among her statements, which have not aged well, is this one — and I quote: "There was no accountability previously. It was just, here's a bunch of money, go run the hospitals." That, of course, is from Hansard, page 430, May 15, 2017.

I hope the minister has learned from mistakes of her colleague and that the Liberal government has learned from

their mistakes and their neglect in this area. I would give the new minister a bit of the benefit of the doubt and a chance to see what actions she will take to meet the needs of the Hospital Corporation, but I will also put both her and the Premier on notice that I will be watching this very closely as our critic for both Finance and Health and Social Services.

I will now go on to some specific other areas and will return later to some of the specific issues, projects, and programs at the Hospital Corporation, but for the moment, in the interest of maximizing the time for debate, I'm going to move on to a topic that's top of mind for everyone, that being the pandemic that we're currently in.

I would like to begin by returning to the topic that I raised in Question Period regarding reopening of the territory. We've seen a number of provinces — most recently, the Province of British Columbia — release their plans for reopening. I'm looking here at BC's plan, entitled *BC's Restart: A plan to bring us back together*.

That plan — for anyone interested — is available online and talks about BC's plan, starting May 25, for restarting social connections, businesses, and activities. It describes moving through the steps, with clear benchmarks, beginning on May 25, indicating the criteria for that step that would be required. It goes on to establish step 2, with the earliest start date anticipated of June 15 — again laying out clear criteria based on the percentage of the population vaccinated, as well as the case counts and COVID-19 hospitalizations.

In each of these areas, it describes changes to limitations on things, such as personal gatherings, organized gatherings, travel, business restrictions, and so on. The next phase in BC's plan is for step 3, for which they anticipate the earliest start date of July 1. That includes that the criteria for moving to step 3 is at least 70 percent of the 18-plus population vaccinated with dose one, along with low case counts and declining COVID-19 hospitalizations.

It's notable, in comparing those steps, that it does seem that the Yukon appears to be in line with what in BC would meet their step 4 criteria, where they have indicated that their earliest start date is September 7. Quoting again from BC's document: "The criteria for moving to Step 4 is more than 70% of the 18+ population vaccinated with dose 1, along with low case counts and low COVID-19 hospitalizations.

"The earliest date we move to Step 4 is September 7."

As we have been hearing from businesses, especially within the tourism sector, within the outfitting sector, as well as restaurants and retailers that derive a significant portion of their income from tourist traffic during the summer months and the fall — one of the things that my colleagues and I have heard consistently from business owners is that they need clarity, and they are not getting clarity from government. They have had vague and high-level terms tossed around, but we have seen a real lack of clarity in the reopening.

As the minister recalled — and as I reminded them of in Question Period — we have seen the government also flip-flop on issues such as whether high schools can return to class or not just within the space of a few days. Business owners do not have confidence in this Liberal government and do not see the

details that they want to see in the government's plan for reopening. The Liberal government's plan, compared to others — including, I will note in this case, especially the province right next to us, British Columbia — when you compare the Yukon's plan with BC's plan, the BC government's plan is a lot more clear and a lot more transparent, and it establishes clearer benchmarks and timelines as well as indications on what restrictions that are currently in place will change if everything goes according to what the government expects.

Most business owners and citizens understand that things may change, but that is why an approach basically in line with what BC has done — in terms of spelling out the steps — is a good model for identifying what the government expects will happen and when they expect that will happen and giving people clarity about what the key criteria are that have to be met for that to occur and what could interfere with that.

The question for the minister is: Does the government now realize that their plan is not sufficiently clear enough to meet the needs of Yukon businesses and will she agree to revisit this and actually come up with a clearer plan and clearer timelines, comparable to what the province of British Columbia has announced, in terms of its details?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am happy to address this question. I addressed it earlier today in Question Period. I appreciate that the member opposite seems to be enamored by and likes the BC plan — I think “BC's Restart” or something is the title of that — but I am not entirely sure that the member opposite has read *A Path Forward*, which is the Yukon plan and the plan that has actually been in existence — with some changes, going forward — since last summer and benchmarks have been required to meet opportunities that exist here in the territory. Yukoners can look at that document and see what those benchmarks might be.

Of course, we have to remember that any plan, going forward, needs to be responsive to reality, it needs to be responsive to the science, it needs to be responsive to the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health, and it needs to be rooted in reality.

I just want to clarify a few things. Firstly, we announced our next steps and the reopening that occurred — the concepts and the plans and the changes that were made to *A Path Forward* on May 5 publicly in a presentation made by the Premier and the chief medical officer of health. I'm not sure that the member opposite knows that those are weekly public media events where announcements are made and ultimately media gets to ask questions and members of the public can look online, they can send in questions online, and they'll be responded to. It's always Dr. Hanley and either the Premier or another minister. In fact, two weeks ago, I had the honour of doing that announcement with Dr. Hanley.

What Dr. Hanley tells the public during those media events are recommendations he makes, what the science is, how his recommendations are rooted in science, what the rationale is for recommendations that he is making — and ultimately, it becomes the government's responsibility to determine whether or not those are recommendations that are accepted, that can be implemented, and that are meeting the needs of Yukoners.

Luckily — and with a lot of work and a lot of cooperation going forward — the opportunity has been there for those to be sound recommendations that are ultimately implemented by government.

I think that is a system that has been working well for Yukoners, and it is the system that has occurred.

On May 5, our government announced that there would be a number of changes taking place on May 25. British Columbia, in contrast to that, announced their next steps the day that their lockdown ended — which I think was yesterday — and there was certainly no advance notice — although that was something in the Yukon — although there have been complaints about how much advance notice that was and whether or not that was sufficient, it certainly — as the Premier and I have said publicly — in the event that a recommendation is made and if it's going to change something, we have been telling the public immediately.

We are in a very different place from British Columbia and have opened up in ways that British Columbia is still only contemplating. That is as a result of our vaccine uptake and as a result of our implementing the safe six plus one, of Yukoners keeping each other safe and of abiding by the rules. Unlike our path forward, British Columbia's benchmarks will depend on epidemiology and vaccine rates.

What is important to note is that the member opposite, in his haling of the BC restart program and ignoring the Yukon's *A Path Forward* — which I say are individual to those jurisdictions, but are not unlike one another — he has failed to note the proviso that, if numbers rise again in British Columbia or if they do not reach their vaccine uptake or if the epidemiology changes, the plan will need to be changed or stopped or retracted.

What he has also failed to note is that the dates set out in the BC plan are earliest possible dates; they are not carved in stone. They depend on a number of factors, and all will need to be responsive to the health and safety of folks in British Columbia.

I don't want to spend a great deal of time comparing the two. Clearly, I urge the members opposite to read *A Path Forward*. It's available online. It is a plan that has been in place here in the territory — with the necessary changes, with the necessary responsiveness to our situation — for well over a year — I should say for about a year, to be clear.

One of the components used to inform our response is the epidemiology of COVID-19, which provides some evidence related to patterns in cases, to spread, to effectiveness of measures, and risk factors. This includes but is not limited to looking at demographics, locations of outbreaks in other jurisdictions, and the prevalence of the COVID-19 variants and those effects on reopening.

The CMOH reviews weekly international, national, and territorial epidemiology and technical reports to inform advice and recommendations.

Based on a review of the epidemiology, modelling scenarios for the Yukon and knowledge of our territorial health system are critical. The CMOH makes recommendations meant to ensure the health and safety of Yukoners.

As we have mentioned many times here in the Legislative Assembly — but I think it is valuable, because the *A Path Forward* document is based on this kind of information. As discussed, decisions and the document take into account a number of factors, including ways of reducing the risk of introducing new cases of COVID-19 to the Yukon Territory, as well as ways of limiting the risk of transmission within our community.

I think that is what I can say about *A Path Forward*. I appreciate that the question at the end of the commentary by the member opposite was: Will we make a document, make our plan going forward similar to BC's? I daresay, not only do we have that, but BC has been looking at our plan to figure out — and other jurisdictions have as well.

I think, perhaps lastly, what I should say in response to this question is that step 3 of British Columbia's plan is dependent on British Columbia hitting 70 percent of British Columbians receiving their first dose of a vaccine. Of course, already today in the Yukon, we have 78 percent of individuals having received their first dose, and the epidemiology is a factor. As I have noted, lastly, it is why we are well down the path to what British Columbia hopes to achieve — and the rest of Canada. This is in no way critical of the British Columbia plan or of any plan across the country. It is critical to recognize that the Yukon is in a very positive place as a result of the hard work that Yukoners have done.

I take the member opposite at his word that he will ask questions with respect to the Yukon Hospital Corporation budget. I could take some of my time in response to this question to go there. I certainly challenge the facts that have been put forward as part of that commentary in this debate, and I certainly will take the opportunity to go there in the event that I have the opportunity to do so.

I'm not interested, at this time, in taking more time. I hope that we will get to many more questions. I will cede the floor, but I certainly don't agree with those comments about the Hospital Corporation funding. I guess the one thing that I can say is that there is timing with respect to the Hospital Corporation annual report, and then there are supplementary budgets. The Hospital Corporation is made whole through that process.

Mr. Cathers: In the interest of the time of the House, I won't spend too much time debating the minister's inaccurate comments about the Hospital Corporation, but I would remind the member that I'm not going to buy their numbers because I can actually read a balance sheet and an annual report and the facts speak for themselves on the government's chronic neglect — the Liberal government's chronic neglect — for the Hospital Corporation during their last term in office. But it's a new term, and they have a chance to do better this time and I hope they will.

I want to talk again — so, comparing plans to plans, the minister has attempted to suggest that we were somehow enamoured with BC's plan for reopening. In fact, I would point out to the minister that the reason that we're pointing to it is that the government itself, the Premier, and Dr. Hanley have often referenced what BC was doing and referenced looking to

the model of what Dr. Bonnie Henry was doing in British Columbia. That is the big part of the reason why we are pointing to British Columbia and saying, simply put, that you yourselves have said that BC is a good model and that you are looking to them in how they're handling it. Their plan is far clearer than yours. Will you commit to fixing it and doing what, by the way, the Yukon Party committed to doing in the territorial election of providing Yukoners with a clear plan for reopening?

Now, the minister questioned whether I had read the government's *A Path Forward* document. Not only have I read it, I re-read it while the minister was talking here this afternoon, and it looks to me like the minister may not have read that document herself because, comparing BC's plan for reopening to the Yukon's, what I would challenge the minister to point out to me is where in the Yukon's document does it actually say dates. Where does it establish clear metrics for moving from one stage to another? Please feel free to reference the exact pages, because I have the document right here with me, and it is not clear in the way the minister has suggested that it is.

I want to point out that, as a number of people have said throughout the pandemic, we are all in this together, but we're not all in the same boat. This pandemic and the restrictions associated with it are having a far greater impact on Yukon business owners who are desperately wondering whether they are going to have a tourism season or fall, depending on what their specific business is. For those people who are looking for clarity about what government's best guess is, when will they know what factors would change that — and not in the way government has presented them, as vague, possibly, maybe, but without clearly saying that if this happens, this would change?

Business owners, some I have heard from — and I know my colleagues have as well. There are a lot of business owners who, at the start of the pandemic, were looking forward to the future with optimism. Some of those very same Yukon business owners are now just wondering if their businesses can survive and recover. For those who are considering whether they can have a summer tourist season and/or a fall tourist season, they need details. They need clarity from the government, similar in concept to what British Columbia has provided their citizens, which provides an indication of what date government expects to move to another stage and what the key variables are that could change that.

Again, for the minister and her colleagues, this may be a bit more of a theoretical debate because, for everybody here in this Assembly — at least every Member of the Legislative Assembly — our paycheques keep arriving in our bank accounts, regardless of whether the territory is open or not. The same applies to anyone who works in the public service.

Not to disparage the efforts that are being made by anyone, but for business owners who are dependent on whether they can operate or not, there are some people who are really facing a very uncertain future and a very uncertain summer, and they are turning to us, in some cases with desperation, asking us to push the government for clarity so that they can plan for whether they have a chance of operating in June, in July, in August, in September, in October.

I am asking the minister to commit to doing a better job of providing clarity. If she really wants to say that the government's document released in March provides more clarity than BC's, then take that document and show me where the dates are in it. Reference the pages and I would be happy to see it, because I have read through it here again this afternoon and that clarity is simply not there.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will provide some commentary. I apologize if I am not directly answering the question, which I think is: Will you provide dates? But I will make a comment on that.

Dates were not included in *A Path Forward* because I think that it is irresponsible, frankly, to say to Yukoners that something is going to happen on June 1, or something is going to happen on July 1, or something is going to happen in November 2020. When the waves of COVID-19 — and the effect that they have had on the health and safety of Canadians and the effects that have taken place in other places as a result of COVID-19 have seen many, many people die as a result — I appreciate that the member opposite thinks that certainty of dates in a chart would help people, but I don't agree with that.

What we have been doing very carefully is outlining the circumstances that must be achieved in order for us to move forward. They've been based on science; they've been based on the epidemiology recommendations; they've been based on, more recently, the vaccine uptake by Yukoners and how positive that has been. We have set out the criteria for when things can move forward.

The other piece that I'm puzzled by is — Yukon is leading the country. That doesn't mean we're out of the woods, but Yukon is leading the country, and the restrictions that were lessened yesterday for Yukoners have allowed increased gathering sizes, have allowed increased personal bubbles, have allowed bars and restaurants to open at full capacity — so long as people are being safe with registering and saying who they are when they come in and wearing masks when they move around the room, restaurant, or bar — so that those businesses can recover in a way that was not anticipated even a few weeks ago, to be frank.

If we had produced a document two months ago that said that you can do all of that on the first of July and here we are on the May 25 and we can do it already, I don't think that would be helpful for Yukoners either and certainly not helpful for the businesses and organizations that are planning things like school graduations or having a tourism season. Everybody is in this uncertain area, but our government has produced *A Path Forward*, has produced the criteria for what would make those changes a positive thing, and then frankly changed very quickly when the recommendations have changed by the chief medical officer of health.

I will speak about something in my former portfolio because it has been brought up in this Legislative Assembly at least once, twice, or maybe more than that — that somehow having the grades 10 to 12 youth return to high school in a number of weeks was somehow a political ploy or somehow a political move. I take great offence to that. I know that won't matter to anybody on the other side of this House, to be frank,

about whether I'm offended by that or not, but the truth is that grades 10 to 12 students have benefited from returning to school.

The chief medical officer of health's recommendations changed quickly as a result of all of the things I mentioned earlier that he takes into account when he makes those recommendations, and he made the recommendation that those children could safely return to school. That happened very quickly. It happened within a couple of days of a previous announcement being made. Again, the criticism would be: "Your chart said it could happen on this day", and sure enough, it happened sooner than that.

Nonetheless, the reality is — and I'm sure that's not necessarily the reality of the opposition, but these things are changing quickly, and it is the responsibility of this government to respond to those quick changes and to open things when they can safely for Yukoners and to provide implementation of how that can be done. I am very pleased to say now that we are very likely to be able to have Yukon graduation ceremonies at Yukon high schools for students that were not available for them last year, and all of that is very positive.

A Path Forward's next steps, on page 9, sets out the criteria and the monitoring that needs to be done. Page 13 is the table that sets out the Yukon risk levels and the thresholds. That's what I'm speaking about with respect to those. Do they have dates? No, they don't have dates; they have thresholds; they have risk factors; they have things that have to be taken into account for us to move forward.

Our plan was put out months ago when dates were not possible to forecast. In my view, they would be irresponsible in any event. I truly hope that the British Columbia plan and the British Columbia chief medical officer of health and their citizens can achieve the dates that they have set in that. I truly hope so, because that will mean that they're out of a very difficult third wave, a serious lockdown that they have just come through, and that other provinces and territories will be able to follow. But if and when those dates come and go, I think that they will need to be adjusted based on the epidemiology and the science.

Jurisdictions have been tragically hit by a hard third wave, Madam Deputy Chair, and this was not known when we first put out *A Path Forward*. It needs to be responsive. I suggest to you that it is. BC has come through a major circuit-breaker lockdown, as they term it, while we have been open, relatively speaking, for several months. Our experiences here in the territory are the envy of many. I'm sure that we all have friends and family across the country who are saying: "What — you can go to a restaurant? What — you can go grocery shopping?"

The personal effects of those situations are yet to be known in those places. In places in Ontario, they have been in lockdown for months; there are places in Ontario where children have been going to school and then not being able to go to school; in Alberta, schools opened, then closed. We have been lucky enough, by strict management and the very hard work of Yukoners, to not have to experience that in a way that other places in Canada have. As a result, we are further ahead of British Columbia. In some jurisdictions, as I have mentioned,

like Alberta, they have had to make many announcements about what will be open and what will be closed, and when it will be in lockdown and when it will be open, and schools in and out. I suggest to you that those are even more complicated or more complex for citizens to sort out. We have been lucky enough to avoid that.

I said before, and it is worth saying again — I know that Yukoners are listening — that we are leading the country and we are ahead of others. Other jurisdictions in Canada are looking to us. The deputy minister, the chief medical officer of health, the Premier, the Minister of Community Services, other ministers — depending on the areas — the Minister of Tourism and Culture, I, and others have been weekly on the phone with their counterparts across the country — if not more than once a week in some cases.

I know that the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services is on the phone, if not daily, conferring with counterparts across the country, and they are often seeking to determine what has happened here in the territory.

I hope that I have answered the question with respect to *A Path Forward*, and I hope that we can move on because there are many other important aspects to talk about in this Health and Social Services budget.

Deputy Chair: Would members like a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 201, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Cathers: I just have to point out the fact that, when the minister last rose, when I pointed out the fact that BC's plan for reopening included dates and said that the Yukon should as well, the minister said — and I quote: It's irresponsible to provide dates.

Madam Deputy Chair, providing dates is exactly what the Government of BC did, so I do have to point out to the minister that she just indirectly accused Premier Horgan and Dr. Bonnie Henry of being irresponsible by providing dates in BC's plan for reopening.

The minister then went on to talk about how she was offended by the characterization that this government had made a decision for political reasons regarding children going back to school full time. Can the minister explain why the government's *A Path Forward* document that they released in March says that kids could not go back to school full time for high school until "children are eligible for vaccination" but then, five days later, they flip-flopped and did the opposite? What changed in those five days?

The next point I should make, actually, regarding dates being provided — when the minister says it is irresponsible to provide dates for reopening, the minister is just showing the Liberal government's lack of experience in business. I know that few of them have any experience running a business. Unfortunately, that is showing through their complete lack of understanding of what life is like for Yukon business owners who are currently unable to operate as normal because of the pandemic.

Again, we have consistently stated our position that the reopening plan should be clear and it should be based on smart decisions based on the best available information. If businesses take a plan such as British Columbia's, they can see what government expects they will be able to do and when. They can make decisions on that basis, being aware that it may change. This government has been vague and wishy-washy and they have flip-flopped on their plan for reopening. The minister and her colleagues, through their shared lack of business experience, are showing a lack of understanding of what the Yukon's private sector needs — particularly for businesses in the tourism sector as well as big game outfitters, restaurants, retailers, and others who are dependent on the clients of those first businesses. They are in the situation where, if people are making a decision to come to the Yukon, typically they are looking months out. They're not generally making a decision about whether to travel here for a vacation next week. There are some exceptions to that, but as a general rule, most people — most potential clients of Yukon businesses in the tourism and outfitting sectors — are planning for months down the road. If those businesses can't tell their clients whether they are likely going to be able to operate or be able to explain the variables there, they simply can't get those clients to book.

In response to national efforts to encourage Canadians to travel within Canada this summer for vacations, those Canadians are going to choose to travel somewhere other than the Yukon if the Yukon isn't clear about whether operators can book them and when and how.

The minister views Premier Horgan and Dr. Bonnie Henry as being irresponsible for providing dates in their plan. I would counter with the assertion that it looks like they've actually listened to businesses enough to realize that businesses need information about what's going to happen over the next number of months before they can plan and make decisions around booking clients, hiring staff, and so on. Unfortunately, it seems like this Liberal government is not listening to Yukoners in this area. We know that they have been afraid of consulting with Yukoners on the rules that are affecting their lives and they have been adamantly unwilling to consider any of the proposals we've made to have a government consult on the details of ministerial orders, either prior to their implementation or afterward, with businesses that are affected by them.

The question I have to ask the government is: Why are the minister and her colleagues so resistant to consulting with Yukon businesses and the public on the rules that are in place? Why are they not making more effort to actually sit down with people whose lives are affected by this, listen to them, talk

about it, and take that as part of the information that guides government's decision?

So, in closing, I just would provide the minister an opportunity to answer these questions again before I move on to other matters on my list. I do have to remind the government that the ink was barely dry on their *A Path Forward* document that was released in March before they flip-flopped on a provision related to when kids in grades 10 to 12 could return to full-time instruction. The government has yet to provide any real explanation of what changed other than the one that's obvious to most people — that they decided to call an election.

Another opportunity for the minister: In that five-day period, back in March, can she explain what, if anything, changed other than the politics of the situation?

The last question I will have for this current round is whether the minister has actually met with, or attempted to meet with, industry associations, such as the Tourism Industry Association, the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, the Yukon Outfitters Association, Wilderness Tourism Association, Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, Yukon Convention Bureau, the First Nation Chamber of Commerce, or any of the community chambers of commerce? Has she made any effort to reach out to the businesses that are being affected by the government's rules to actually understand what they need to be able to plan for the possibility of having a summer or fall season?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It never ceases to amaze me — it shouldn't anymore. The member opposite has said — and I appreciate him being the critic for Health and Social Services and for Justice. He said earlier today that he will be giving us a chance but watching closely, and I hope that he listens closely, if those two things could go together.

What I said about — and it will be characterized however it is characterized, Madam Deputy Chair. But what I talked about was that putting out dates when *A Path Forward* was first initiated would have been irresponsible here in the territory. I am not criticizing any other jurisdiction; they have their own issues to deal with.

I would like to remind those listening in the Legislative Assembly that British Columbia includes dates in their documents — earliest possible dates, not dates when these things will be ticked off.

I am going to challenge — I mean, I don't want to get into the weeds here. I would really like to answer these questions and be able to answer the budget questions, but the comments regarding lack of business experience on this side of the House — simply untrue. I don't want to name the 20 or so businesses that many of us have been involved in running over the course of our careers. I am going to just leave that to say that it is not only an irrational criticism; it is simply untrue. As a result, even if we hadn't run businesses, like the member —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. Cathers: The member has twice used the word “untrue”, which has always been ruled out of order in this Legislative Assembly. I would ask you to rule that out of order and have her retract that statement in keeping with past practice.

Deputy Chair's ruling

Deputy Chair: There is no point of order. In my opinion, this is a dispute between members.

The Minister of Health and Social Services has the floor.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I can say “inaccurate”. I'm not interested in saying things that are offensive to this Legislative Assembly. The information that none of the members on this side of the House have run businesses is inaccurate.

It wouldn't matter anyway, because the assumption there is that if we hadn't run businesses, we somehow can't understand the concerns of the public and of the business corporations, the business community, and industry throughout the last year during the COVID pandemic — again, not a link that is rational.

Yes, we have met with industry. Have I personally met with the tourism sector? No. Am I meeting with the chambers of commerce in the next number of weeks? Absolutely, yes. Have my colleagues started to meet, since the election, with individuals in business and industry, understanding their concerns and their needs in the tourism sector? Absolutely, going forward — and that work is done.

We have worked very closely with so many individuals in the private sector, businesses, in providing industry-based guideline documents, as has the chief medical officer of health, including the wilderness tourism sector. Some of these guidance documents have been leading the way in Canada and have enabled many businesses to proceed this year.

As I noted earlier, we are one of the first jurisdictions to start to open up. It is a true achievement and success that rests on the backs of Yukoners. It would have been noted that we have processed almost 800 self-isolation plans through the process to enable businesses to proceed and Yukoners to continue on with their lives. We have met with business sectors constantly throughout this process.

I know that the chief medical officer of health also does. I know that all departments are meeting with business. My colleagues responsible for aviation have met with the aviation industry. My colleagues working, before and after the election, in tourism have met extensively with the tourism industry. We have met with businesses — the business relief program, which came out very early in the process in response to COVID. I don't want to be trite to say that we are meeting with industry and businesses constantly in order to have their input into how the response to COVID not only affects them but how it can be done in a way that recognizes their importance and will benefit all Yukoners.

I note that we have spoken with the Yukon Outfitters Association and the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon most recently and throughout this process. Those are the questions that have been asked here in this group, and I will

stop, hoping again that we can get to some questions about the budget.

Mr. Cathers: In keeping with past practice, I'm asking questions about the issues related to the minister's department that are affecting the lives of Yukoners — none more dramatically so than the issues related to the government's management of the pandemic.

The minister has seemed to walk back her comments a bit, but she did say — in response to my question about whether they would commit to doing like BC did in their planning, including dates of the earliest possible reopening or expected reopening or however you wish to refer to it. The minister responded and said that it “would be irresponsible”.

So, if she's now walking back her comments or attempting to retract them, that's fine. But it's clear at the time that she was saying that the reason the government couldn't do what BC did — that we suggested they follow the basic model of — was because it “would be irresponsible”.

If the minister no longer thinks that it's irresponsible to provide those timelines, will she agree to revise the government's *A Path Forward* and include clear timelines for steps of reopening like BC has?

I would also invite her to clarify, as well — Yukoners will be asking, as they compare the Yukon's vaccination status, which, according to the government website, shows 77 percent of the population 18 and over vaccinated with dose 1 — and we have, as a territory, typically low or no case counts and low or no COVID hospitalizations. People will be asking us, and will be asking the government as well, for a comparison to the restrictions in place under BC's step 4, which are very different than some of the measures in place here in the Yukon.

I would note as well that I'm going to quote again from BC's document: “The criteria for moving to Step 4 is more than 70% of the 18+ population vaccinated with dose 1, along with low case counts and low COVID-19 hospitalizations.”

The Yukon is currently doing better than that, which will leave Yukon citizens and business owners looking at what you can do under BC's step 4 and wondering why they could actually now travel out to British Columbia — which has a higher active case count and a lower vaccination rate — and do some of those things there but can't do them here now.

Moving to the next area, I would like to thank the minister for confirming that she has not yet met with the business community to discuss the type of information that they need to see for *A Path Forward* to provide certainty. I would encourage her to correct that quickly, because for Yukoners who are in the tourism sector or the outfitting sector or dependent on those who are, they are looking now with a sense of urgency at the question of whether or not they can have clients coming to the territory and, if so, when. They do not have the same clarity from government that BC has provided to businesses in similar sectors down there.

I would urge the minister to make it a priority to meet with organizations representing the business community, including all of the ones that I have mentioned, and listen to them. I know that the minister cannot meet with every single business owner, but the list that I gave was not that long and it would not take

that many hours to meet with them. All of those organizations represent business owners who are wondering whether their business can survive this year and are wondering what the future will mean for their family as a result — not to say that every single business that they represent is in that situation, but every one of those organizations represents some businesses whose owners are in that situation.

I would urge the minister to treat that seriously, sit down with them, and listen to them about their need to see a clear path forward for reopening. Hopefully, they will be able to save their businesses and have a positive future for them.

I want to move to comments that the Premier made during the election campaign about comprehensive rapid testing. The Premier, at the Council of Yukon First Nations party leaders' all-candidates forum on April 1, 2021, said a few things that were interesting. One is that he said: “Moving forward, we need to continue to ensure that Yukon businesses have the assistance they need. We are going to implement a comprehensive, evidence-based, rapid testing program.” That, of course, was in reference to COVID-19. The video of that is available on the Council of Yukon First Nation's Facebook page, so the minister or others can view that if they wish. The Premier promised evidence-based, rapid testing. My question is simple: When and where? We know that the Yukon, like a number of other jurisdictions in Canada, has been criticized for having fast testing kits for COVID-19 and not using them. The Premier said that they would use them. The question is: When and where?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. The testing noted by the member opposite has been used in several situations in the territory. It has been used on occasion at mine sites in order for workers to be able to return there and participate in work activities as part of an alternative self-isolation plan. It has been used most recently as students have returned to the Yukon Territory — mostly students and some others, but primarily students coming back from university or post-secondary studies outside of the territory who have been permitted to leave self-isolation for the purpose of going to get a test and then, if that test is negative, being permitted to get their vaccine. So, they are not having to wait for that. So, the earliest possible opportunity for them to get a vaccine has been used, in some cases, in some long-term care facilities, for the purpose of ascertaining levels or negative tests with respect to COVID.

I can also indicate that the excellent uptake that we have had by Yukoners on the vaccine has meant that our need to use testing as has been done in some other jurisdictions has not been as acute. I can also indicate that the chief medical officer of health has continually been doing analysis, but is continuing to do analysis with respect to testing now, and we have been very successful in our testing to date.

Yukon's main testing stream uses the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control's gold-standard PCR testing technology. Samples collected in the Yukon are sent to the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control lab for processing and test results are generally available within 48 hours for that kind of testing — the rapid testing, the one that has been used

for instance with students returning — and they are able to get a response answer or a test result — if I could say that, in a way — has been rapid test, of course — so that if they have a negative test, they can proceed to get the vaccine, as I have said.

The chief medical officer of health has not, as of yet, recommended widespread asymptomatic testing, as it could create pressures on Yukon's testing ability and contact-tracing strategy without benefiting our ability to control the disease. I think that there are limitations with rapid testing as well, and evidence suggests that asymptomatic individuals will rarely produce a positive test result. It has to be carefully done and I think that we have been very successful. We have used it in places — on the recommendation of the health experts about how it can be used to better the experiences of Yukoners — again, the opportunity for students to be vaccinated early or others — mine sites allowing work and those kinds of things. So, that is where we are — although constantly being analyzed and determined how and when, if that is going to be the case, that the testing is increased or used for expanded scope.

Mr. Cathers: I would appreciate if the minister could provide some information on how many have actually been used. According to the federal website, it is indicating that zero test kits have been used, and we understand that there were thousands shipped to the territory, so we would appreciate that information. With that, I would be happy to take that through a letter or legislative return, if she doesn't have it at her fingertips.

I want to move to a few other areas, in the interest of the short time that we do have in this Sitting — recognizing it's a third of a normal Spring Sitting. That includes the area of wait times. I would like to draw the minister's attention to the information provided by the Hospital Corporation on November 19, 2020, in referencing page 1972 as well as page 1971. We had a good discussion about wait times, in which the Hospital Corporation CEO noted — and I quote: "Because we're physically constrained, wait times for accessing specialties, basically for most specialties, are not where we would like them to be from a benchmark perspective. But again, as I mentioned, we're at 100-percent capacity. To be able to address that would mean probably increasing physical space, and that would allow more visiting specialists to be able to come to the territory and see patients here."

I would again note that some of those specialists are not the responsibility of the Hospital Corporation so much as the department, but ultimately, what we're interested in — what Yukoners are interested in — is not the hospital or the department debating who is responsible for it. Yukoners want to see the government taking the lead and working with the hospital, with the Yukon Medical Association, with the YRNA and others involved and other specialists to determine what action can be taken to improve Yukoners' access to health care through a wait-time reduction strategy.

Again, in the interest of time — briefly referencing some of the information provided last fall from the Hospital Corporation — we learned, on page 1971, that the current wait time to see a visiting cardiologist is approximately five months, with 74 people on that wait-list as of last fall. We also learned that, in 2018, under the Liberal government, there were 350

people on the wait-list for cataract assessment, with wait times for referral to surgery of almost 40 months. By the end of 2019, the wait time for referral to surgery was down to 12 months — as a result, I might point out, of my colleagues and I pushing the government on this issue and the need to reduce wait times for those procedures.

What I really want to centre on is what the CEO told us when he said — and I quote: "... if we don't create a strategy that maintains this, those wait times will increase right back to where they were previous to this plan and this program."

Again, in that case, I am not even pressing the minister so much for an answer here today; I am just flagging the importance of taking action to reduce wait times for those services, specifically the ones I mentioned, but others as have been touched on by the CEO of the Hospital Corporation.

I want to now move to another area of an important service that has been unavailable in the Yukon since the start of COVID-19. I should note that this is one of the areas where Yukoners — with us having lower case counts and higher vaccination rates than British Columbia — do not understand why a service such as this would not be available here in the territory.

Spirometry services have been unavailable since the start of COVID-19 here in the Yukon, with urgent referrals being sent to Vancouver, as well as for some simple, routine testing. The wait-list, as we understand recently, was 595 non-urgent requisitions and growing at the rate of 30 to 40 per month. I have heard from constituents — and I know a number of my colleagues did — who were directly affected by this. A tender to provide services here locally was released on March 1, closed on March 31, 2021, and according to the project manager, the election was directly responsible for delaying the award of the contract, which has still not been awarded as of the last information we have. Can the minister provide an update on this contract, why it has been so delayed, and what they are going to do about it?

I would also note that, during the initial months of the pandemic, there was no communication between the department or the CMOH with the private respiratory service provider. They made a decision to close down on their own, and I would note that, at the time, as the MLA for one of the owners of that private company, I was cc'd on e-mails that went to the former Minister of Health and Social Services and received what can only be characterized as a late response that was a bit of a blow-off response, if you will pardon the informal characterization of it. It really didn't treat them seriously or respect the role that they had in providing for the health care needs of Yukoners.

Will this minister commit to doing better than her predecessor at improving communication and the working relationship with private service providers in this area, including the company that I made reference to in this area?

Also, just before I sit down, I want to briefly touch on another area, that being medical travel. We are pleased that the government did take action to increase the medical travel rates, which we had been calling for, for years, but I do have to point out to the minister, as I did earlier in either the budget debate

or the throne speech, that they made changes to the program in the Yukon — the in-territory travel subsidy — that I don't think they fully understood the implications of, because they cut funding for people in rural areas outside communities. I have heard from constituents of mine, especially seniors living in the Braeburn area who are directly negatively affected by this loss of support and who, to receive the health care services that they need to take care of themselves and live a long life and be able to stay in their homes for as long as possible, need to be able to access testing and other special services. Previously, through the in-territory travel subsidy — actually, changes that I instituted in 2006 — they were able to receive that support when travelling into Whitehorse. For someone on a fixed income, that amount can make a big difference. The amount they received, I would point out, is actually less than what any MLA or government employee would receive for traveling the same distance, but it made a big difference to them.

I just want to recognize that the current minister wasn't the minister when that decision was made, and I would just sincerely urge her to recognize that a mistake was made, it's negatively affecting Yukoners, including senior citizens, and I would urge you to just reverse that change and restore that support, particularly for seniors and others who are needing those services.

Directly related to the issue of wait times, I would just ask the minister what steps they are taking to respond to the request made by the Yukon Medical Association during the election as one of their highest priorities to work on improving and expanding the surgical services area at Whitehorse General Hospital.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that there are three areas to touch on. The first is wait times, and I'm happy to note that our government is committed to investing in service enhancements to reduce wait times for specialist consultations and surgeries. We are continuing to make investments that will allow Yukoners to access a responsive, high-functioning health care system.

To date, our investments have resulted in improved wait times for multiple specialist services, including ophthalmology, pediatrics, psychiatry, and orthopaedic surgery. We implemented a plan that successfully reduced ophthalmology wait times in the Yukon, bringing down wait times for cataract assessments from 37 months to nine months. Is that still too long? Quite likely, but improvements are being made, and we will continue to work on reducing wait times for Yukoners to have important health care services.

We have worked with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to build on the successes of our resident orthopaedic program with the addition of a second orthopaedic surgeon, which has helped to further reduce wait times for orthopaedic consults and total knee replacements. I know personally a bit about this, having been a patient. My colleagues might remember that I was limping around in December. The services of the orthopaedic team here in the territory are second to none.

Health and Social Services, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and the Yukon Medical Association are all exploring ways to reduce wait times for specialist services,

including increasing the frequency of visiting specialists, repatriating services to Yukon when appropriate, a more robust use of virtual technologies, and working on efficiencies to improve access — things like technology and health system planning. So, that work is, of course, underway. I note that the comments by the member opposite are, I think, addressed in that. It is important for all Yukoners to know what is being done by the Department of Health and Social Services to reduce wait times and to improve medical care here in the territory.

I can note that — with respect to the question regarding spirometry testing and the lung function tests — due to COVID-19, other Canadian jurisdictions, including British Columbia, reduced the services provided and limited them to urgent or emergency cases only, which was truly unfortunate for Yukoners. The next steps in the tendering process for the spirometry services are underway. The request was for a provider to develop and execute a spirometry program for the next three years. It is important to note that this is what is being sought.

I think I was asked — I will get to that in a second, about where we are in the process — the chief medical officer of health is currently working with the Department of Health and Social Services and reviewing the spirometry services here in the territory. We are assessing the risks of restarting the spirometry program now, given the COVID situation, but we are working to find a new provider here in the territory, which was mentioned by the member opposite. With respect to the March tender, I am told that the tender is in its final stage — sorry, the respondents to the tender are in the final stages of being reviewed and that should be awarded soon.

With respect to the medical travel comments and question, we will check to determine whether or not — clearly, some changes were made. They were described by the member opposite. They resulted in much better coverage for individuals who have to travel outside of Yukon for medical services. In particular, I'm very pleased and proud of the provision that an escort can also be provided with some compensation for needing to go. That's not something that was ever done before. As a matter of fact, we all probably know cases where not only was the escort not necessarily permitted to have compensation, but they weren't authorized to go. Clearly, the opportunity for us to change Yukoners' experience of medical travel is an important one.

I noted in my comments earlier that we have proposed in this year's budget \$1.5 million for the purpose of increasing the medical travel services. There were changes made to those individuals who were travelling from very close to Whitehorse — maybe Marsh Lake or Wolf Creek, those kinds of things — Wolf Creek is not a good example, but very close outside the city limits — but the circumstances mentioned by the member opposite had to do with Braeburn. I will look — I think Braeburn is a place where medical travel is still possible, but I stand to be corrected, and we will look into that. I would appreciate if the member opposite would encourage the individual — if there is an individual who is not getting that service — to contact me so that we might be able to determine the situation. As a result, I hope that we can look into that.

I don't have with me the parameters of where the line has been drawn, but the concept was that individuals who are living very close to Whitehorse and have to come for all of their services, including medical services, wouldn't be appropriate recipients of the medical travel opportunity, but those who live much farther than that would still be covered.

Again, I hope I can get information so we can determine that, and I will certainly be looking at the details of where the parameters of that program are.

Mr. Cathers: In the interest of allowing some time for the Third Party to ask questions, I will put together a few things here in my remaining questions, as we are short of time. One question that we pressed the former minister on repeatedly, and could never get an answer on, is what the total cost is of operating the former Centre of Hope, now known as the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. That is something that — even if government believes all of the programs there are valuable — Yukoners deserve to know what the total cost of any area is.

In the area of midwifery, I would just briefly touch on that and note that government, by bringing in regulations, has not brought in midwifery. They've brought in a gap in care. I have heard from constituents — as I know have some of my colleagues — who are affected by it and are very upset by it, as they prepare to have a child during that gap in coverage. I would urge government to actually come up with a solution — whether it's hiring midwives quicker or through contracts — to actually address that gap in service.

In the area of medical travel coordination that is referenced in the budget, I would ask the minister if she could identify how many people are being hired in association with providing that service and whether they're all in Whitehorse or whether any are in communities.

I would ask the government, as well, for two projects referenced in the budget — the secure medical unit, which we know was announced by the government and then delayed — what the status of that project is. In the area of the Meditech replacement project, now known as IHealth, I would ask the minister to clarify the current status of it. The Premier, at the CYFN party leaders' all-candidates forum made a statement that suggests that he thought it was already up and running, saying — quote: "We have IHealth established beforehand..."

In fact, we understand from what the hospital has on its website, as of this morning, that the new health information system is currently targeted for launching in June. As the minister will recall, we have been pushing for this project for over four years and I refer the minister, for her reference, to Hansard from May 15, 2017 on page 428.

I will leave it with that list of questions in the interest of providing some time for the Third Party.

Madam Deputy Chair, while the minister is getting information about that, just in the interest of time, I would also ask if the minister could either now, or with a legislative return, commit to getting back to us on the status of projects funded by THIF and what the changes have been in that area.

As well, in terms of the government overall, what are the total increases in terms of the number of employees, by branch? We have some information regarding that but have, in some

departments, seen a lack of clarity about whether positions were showing only the increase in permanent, full-time equivalent positions or all FTEs. Of course, all FTEs is the more accurate reflection of the increase in the cost of government overall.

I would just also ask if the minister could identify — we have seen a typical pattern, in the last years under her predecessor, of the government underbudgeting for social assistance in the spring, and typically, in period-7 variances, we would see a request for increased funding in that area. For example, looking at the period-7 changes for the last fiscal year, we had \$1.5 million identified under social assistance for Whitehorse.

Another area where we have yet to receive information from the member's predecessor is with the extended family care agreements. We see funding for it in this year's budget, as well as the increased funding requested last year, as in the previous year, but we have yet to receive clarity on what is actually being done with those agreements, what the parameters of them are, what level of support is provided to families under that — sorry, I missed in the area of social assistance, that amount, just comparing the year that is just wrapping up. The government appears to me to have underbudgeted by \$2 million for that area — \$1.5 million for the Whitehorse area, according to the handout they provided, and \$500,000 for regional.

It's not the first period-7 change that we've seen recently. It's a change that has been common, so it does leave me wondering whether we have a situation wherein we're going to see the government coming back with another increase of money that they actually reasonably expect to need.

Madam Deputy Chair, I would also ask about the money that has been provided for insured health, hearing, and vital statistics for projected growth — if the minister could provide more detail on partial operating and planning funding for primary health care reform in the Yukon.

We know that there was an issue with the government not doing the costing on the implementation of the 76 recommendations from the health review. We know that we heard very clearly from their panel members that they didn't know what it would cost. We believe that the announcement was premature and ill-advised, and I would begin by asking the minister if she is prepared to revisit that announcement by her predecessor.

We know that the government failed in their process, including failing to consult properly with key partners in health care delivery, including the Yukon Medical Association. I think it's important to emphasize that the government — especially considering some of the remarks that the Premier and the previous minister have made in the past regarding this point — doesn't seem to recognize that the YMA is not just a stakeholder to check the box and consult with, but physicians are integral to the delivery of health care across the territory, and for most Yukoners, physicians through privately owned medical clinics are providing a large portion of the primary health care services here in the Yukon.

So, we know, in particular, that the area of the commitment to polyclinics was made without adequately consulting with the people affected by it. The government had no understanding of

the costing of it. We know that the YMA has formally expressed concerns about the government accepting the report and about that recommendation with them. If government is planning on going down the road of buying out physician clinics, that is a multi-million-dollar bill that government doesn't even have a clear estimate for, and it seems to me like an irresponsible use of money to go down that road. It is very irresponsible to make major decisions such as accepting the 76 recommendations without costing out what the impact of those changes will be financially. If you don't know the cost of it and you don't know the logistical location, then you can commit to implementing it, but you really have no idea whether you can actually do what you have committed to.

With that — and I would also note that, when we asked the panel members — and my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, asked one of the panel members about the cost of implementing it. Back in October 2019 on page 1461, the Member for Watson Lake said — and I quote: “Just before I carry on with that line, I would like to go back to one of the four goals that the panel was addressing, which was fiscal sustainability —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible).

Point of order

Deputy Chair: Member for Takhini-Kopper King, on a point of order

Ms. White: There is supposed to be a time-sharing agreement between the Official Opposition and the Third Party, and I believe that we have gone past that allotted amount of time.

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

Mr. Cathers: On the point of order, Madam Deputy Chair, I don't believe that there is an official time-sharing agreement, and when the NDP agreed to a shorter Sitting, that cut into the time that the Official Opposition has to ask questions. So, we are asking questions.

Deputy Chair: Member for Riverdale South, on the point of order.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: On the point of order, I appreciate that it is not exactly on there, but I also think that there is a 20-minute — I mean, I appreciate that the question was finished, and then I was looking for some information, and then it started again, so I am just not sure if we're past that 20-minute limit.

Deputy Chair: Member for Riverdale North, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I just don't recall it happening in the 34th, but once a member sits down, generally speaking, another member stands up to speak, so I am not sure about the ability of a member to pop up after he, she, or they have ceded the floor.

And in the Committee of the Whole — as my friend —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Well, my point of order is that the Member for Lake Laberge ought not to have been recognized the second time.

Deputy Chair: I will take a moment to confer with the Clerk.

Deputy Chair's ruling

Deputy Chair: With regard to the party agreement to share time, that is not enforceable by the Chair.

With regard to the rest of the points raised, I will review Hansard and return with a ruling, if necessary.

At this point, I give the floor to the Hon. Ms. McPhee to answer the questions.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very mindful of the time, and I expected to do this quite quickly, but I can answer at least three of those questions quite quickly.

The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter funding in this year's budget is approximately \$3.6 million. On the midwifery question, the Department of Health and Social Services has hired two midwives. They are both here in Whitehorse. They are working on setting up the program. There are currently no midwives in the territory to provide the services under the new act or regulations, but there is always a gap in doing that, having that come into effect, and we expect that it will be resolved — hopefully in the very near future.

Health is expected to launch on June 1, and we are working with the Hospital Corporation and the physicians to prepare for that launch. I will sit so that more questions can come.

Ms. Blake: With respect to time, the one issue that I wanted to bring forward was regarding access to counselling supports for children and youth in the territory.

A concern that has come up from several of the communities is regarding the wait times that children and youth have to experience when in need of counselling supports and the question about availability of child and youth counsellors available in the communities in time of need and the need to support our children to have immediate access to counselling supports when they deal with trauma.

The question I have is: What are the current numbers of child and youth counsellors within Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services as well as with the Child and Youth Family Treatment Services? How much are those counsellors available in the communities? Also, what are the wait times for access to counselling for children and youth in the communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Madam Deputy Chair, a very important question was brought up earlier today in Question Period as well. I did provide some information about counselling services available in communities and primarily with respect to children and youth. We are trying to connect those counselling services to a school where hopefully they have a safe place and can access those services without much difficulty or a separate doctor's appointment or something at least to get connected to some services.

As I said earlier in Question Period, we will be looking at the mental wellness hubs and how they can be improved and whether there is an opportunity for making sure that we are

connecting with services in communities and certainly those provided by First Nations and governments and others.

I will provide the information directly to the member, or through a legislative return, with respect to the number of counsellors and wait times. I think that earlier today there was a question about positions moving from the communities into Whitehorse. That has not been the case. Individuals might have applied on jobs and moved, but it has not been the case that the positions have been moved, so those are remaining in the communities. Recruitment and retention have been issues, of course, during COVID and at other times, but life in the Yukon is great and an opportunity for individuals to come and experience, and that is certainly something that we will be working on for all areas of health services.

I'm going to sit quickly in the event that another question could come, but I will get back to the member opposite.

Ms. Blake: I just had a follow-up question regarding the mental wellness positions in communities. Can the minister confirm if all positions are fully staffed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm not sure if they are all fully staffed, but it's something we can return the information to you on. As I said, recruitment and retention are issues. I wouldn't want to guess at a number today and say that yes, they are, or they aren't, but we'll get a number and a date and we'll provide that information to you. We're always looking for talented folks to provide these services across the territory, so there might be some postings or that kind of thing, but we'll provide that information.

I'm going to add that currently there is a 14-day wait time for counselling for children and youth to connect with a counsellor. I'm just going to check if it's in Whitehorse or across the territory, but — across the territory is the information we have.

Seeing the time, I move that you report progress, unless the member opposite has another question I can sneak in.

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

Motion agreed to

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by Ms. McPhee that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 201, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2021-22*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that the House do now adjourn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled May 26, 2021:

35-1-1

Response to oral question from Ms. White re: mine closure security (Streicker)