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HANSARD

Wednesday, October 3, 2018 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2018 Fall Sitting

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

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

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 3, 2018 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to welcome into the gallery the Mental Health Association of Yukon board, executive director and members. In the gallery today is Fiona Azizaj and Martin Smith, constituents from Vuntut Gwitchin — thank you for being here. Alongside her are Donna Kisoun, my EA; Kelly MacDonald; and the Mental Health Association executive director, Tiffanie Tasane. Also — although they're not able to make it today, I want to just acknowledge them, given that we are doing the tribute today — there are the board members and the executive: Nathan Schultz, who is the chair; Kim Solonick, vice-chair; Lisa Beck, treasurer; Leah White; Darcy Tkachuk; and Stephanie Padfield.

Applause

Mr. Gallina: I would like members of the House to join me in welcoming a few constituents in the gallery here today: Gerard Tremblay — welcome — and interpreter, Amanda Smith; my lovely wife Sarah Gallina, and my father Peter Gallina. Welcome.

Applause

Speaker: Just a reminder to all members that, where possible, please speak into your microphones. I think we're still in the process of sorting out the new sound system, which appears to be working reasonably well, but if you are not speaking into the general area of your mic it may be difficult for other members to hear what you are saying and also for the general public as well.

Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Mental Illness Awareness Week

Hon. Ms. Frost: I rise to pay tribute to the Mental Health Association of Yukon on the occasion of National Mental Illness Awareness Week. The Mental Health Association of Yukon is a volunteer organization that works to promote and improve the mental health of Yukoners. Before I talk about this organization and the good work that it does, I would like to touch briefly on the important distinction between mental illness and mental health.

Although these are terms often used interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. Mental illness refers to the range of specific disorders that affect a person's mood, thinking and behaviour. There are more than 200 identified forms of mental illness. Examples include depression, schizophrenia and anxiety disorder. About one-third of people will experience one of these disorders at some point in time in their lives. Every one of us here in the gallery and in the Legislature is impacted in some way, shape or form, or we know someone who is directly impacted.

Mental health, on the other hand, is something that each and every one of us has some experience with. I personally prefer the term "mental wellness". Our mental wellness is at its best when our mental, physical, spiritual and emotional lives are in balance. We thrive when we have purpose in our daily lives, hope for the future, a sense of belonging and connection to our family and community, and an understanding of our place in the world. At some point in our life we will all experience challenges to our mental wellness. We can be thriving one week but suddenly find ourselves struggling the next. We are all on the mental wellness spectrum.

In order to meet the mental wellness needs of Yukoners, it's important that our government works collaboratively as a community with all of our partners. One of these partners is the Mental Health Association of Yukon. With its focus on education, awareness, advocacy and support services, the association contributes to the mental wellness of Yukoners while reducing stigma towards mental illness.

To help support the great work of the Mental Health Association of Yukon, we have updated their funding by \$42,000 to a total of \$100,000 for the 2018-2019 fiscal year. This funding helps the association deliver education programs, group therapy programs and host support groups and special events.

One of its key programs just happens to be starting here this week here in Whitehorse. Living Life to the Full is a six-week course that gives participants tools and skills to improve their mental wellness and quality of life. I urge anyone who is dealing with depression, anxiety or just the stresses of dealing with challenges or changes to reach out to the Mental Health Association of Yukon to find out more.

Tomorrow night, the Mental Health Association is hosting a very exciting event in partnership with Northwestel and our Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services branch. Actress and comedian Jessica Holmes, from the CBC's *Royal Canadian Air Farce* program, is giving a special presentation at the Coast High Country Inn on mental health. Ms. Holmes, a Bell Let's Talk ambassador, will talk about the importance of destressing and laughing at life's shortcomings, as well as her own experience of dealing with depression and finding work-life balance. Her talk begins at 5:30 p.m. Admission to this event is by donation, and seating is first come, first served. I look forward to seeing everyone there tomorrow evening.

In closing, I would like to thank the staff and volunteers at the Mental Health Association of Yukon for their dedication to improving the lives of Yukoners. Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 1 to 7, 2018, as Mental Illness Awareness Week. Throughout the week, a pan-Canadian effort is made to destigmatize mental illness and raise awareness about the importance of not only understanding mental illness, but promoting whole-body health and wellness.

One in three Canadians will experience some form of mental illness or substance addiction in their lifetime, and in the north, statistics are even higher. Due to a combination of factors, northerners tend to face a greater chance of being affected by mental illness themselves, within families or with their friends. We have higher levels of addictions, depression and anxiety here in the Yukon and across the north.

Governments, organizations and individuals do a great job across the Yukon of highlighting the importance of mental wellness. People are talking and people are taking action; however, the stigma is still there and there are always more steps to be taken to ensure we're all doing our part.

There are a number of events taking place this week to highlight Mental Illness Awareness Week in the Yukon and the minister did reference them. I encourage people to take part in the activities. It is a great chance to fundraise and raise monies for necessary programs.

I also encourage Yukoners to check out the Mental Health Association of Yukon's Facebook page to see their list of activities and events that take place throughout the year.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to recognize Mental Illness Awareness Week. This annual national public education campaign has been designed to help open the eyes of Canadians to the reality of mental illness.

In 2016, Kids Help Phone announced that one in five Canadian youth from coast to coast to coast had seriously considered suicide and those numbers aren't any better or more hopeful today. Canada has entire systems in place to address physical illness, but we're still behind when it comes to mental health and illness. Mental health and illness must be considered on the same level of importance as physical health. One step toward that goal would be having a number similar to that of 911 specifically for mental health and illness emergencies. Toll-free numbers are great, but they fall short in that people can't easily remember them. Having an easily recalled three-digit number would be helpful, not just for mental health sufferers in crisis, but for the bystanders who might be able to more effectively help if they had a number they could easily remember and call.

One of my great heroes, Shane Koyczan, wrote a poem about this. It's called "152".

One in five

today one in five
wondered if being alive
was worth the cost
of another day
wondering if 2 in 10
wondered when
there was finally going to be
a 911 for mental health

4 in 20 wondered if the wealth spent on the self-decided
salaries of politicians
who claim the children are our future
could pay for it

maybe 1 of the 8
of the 8 in 40
quit wondering
and started making plans

maybe 3 of the 16
of the 16 in 80
feel like unrecycled cans
that are just easier to throw away

Maybe one fifth of 160
is easier to say than 32
because 32 is starting to sound like a lot

a toll free number is not enough
give us a number
everyone knows by heart
so the next time we see someone's world falling apart
we can do more than just stand there

because the scars we can't see
require different care than the ones left there by crime or
by accident
sometimes there's no hint
to tell you where it hurts
it just hurts

sometimes our minds are red alerts
you can't see
even when you look us in the eye
sometimes we cry for what others would consider no
reason
sometimes the treason we commit
is against ourselves

it's hard enough
trying to find who we are
amid the overcrowded shelves of pills
meant to manage how we function

sometimes the junction box is broken

and we miss the connections
that others seem to make with ease

imagine
if you threw away the 1
of the 1 in 5 keys
that could open the door
to the room the world forgot we were locked in

if kindness makes us friends
let compassion make us kin
don't let us get lost in the numbers again

illness is illness
sometimes the cost to heal it
is an ear willing to listen
sometimes a shoulder
volunteering to be a crutch

people are not a price to be weighed against your budget

1 in 5
is 2 much.

Applause

In recognition of National Family Week

Mr. Gallina: I rise in this House today on behalf of all members of this House to acknowledge National Family Week, which takes place the week prior to Thanksgiving each year.

The Government of Canada proclaimed National Family Week back in 1985, which makes this the 33rd year that it has been celebrated across the country. On August 30, 2018, the Commissioner of Yukon proclaimed the period of October 1 to 7, 2018, to be National Family Week here in Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, I have a young, busy family that includes my loving wife, four children and my father, who lives with us, along with extended family and relatives. When I reflect on what family means to me, many thoughts come to mind. I think of the activities we do together — whether hiking on the trails, preparing meals, making gifts for friends and family, or snuggling by a fireplace and working on a puzzle or playing a game together.

There is learning — lots of learning — on many levels — as a child, discovering the world around us and as a parent, learning to cope and shape and guide.

There is conflict. In my world, conflict oftentimes revolves around inclusion and communication. Our families are the keepers and transmitters of our culture, language and what keeps our communities alive and vibrant. Families touch our individual and collective being, from the personal to the professional. It is within our families that we as individuals come to know our place in the world and to know ourselves as part of a larger collective.

Today, as I pay tribute to all Yukon families, as diverse and unique as they are, I want people to know that they are

supported and that there are many places to celebrate our family values as we grow together. This week, National Family Week, provides such opportunities. Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services is once again coordinating events throughout Yukon and has published a complete list on their website at www.manyrivers.yk.ca.

Local businesses, organizations and governments have come together for this special week. As you look through the schedule of events, organizers have embraced strong, family values. Free events this week throughout the territory include indoor and outdoor activities, family meals, games, cultural experiences, contests, various arts and crafts, counselling sessions and, yes, there are even pajama parties.

I would like to take a moment to thank organizers and sponsors. This is important to help Yukoners know who has stepped up to make this week special and also to help people understand the scope and value placed on families by these fundamental community stakeholders. I would like to thank the following: Government of Yukon; Ta'an Kwäch'än Council; Na Cho Nyäk Dun; Champagne and Aishihik First Nations; City of Whitehorse; Child Development Centre; Yukon Wildlife Preserve; Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services; Leaf Solutions; schools in Whitehorse, Teslin, Haines Junction, Ross River and Teslin; Whitehorse Public Library; Yukon Family Mediation Service; Yukon Child and Youth Advocate office; society of Yukon and Northern Focus Counselling; Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon; Standard Bus company; ATCO Electric Yukon; Fraserway RV; and White Pass & Yukon Route.

Thank you to those community members who have worked behind the scenes to make this week successful. Mr. Speaker, for Yukon to be strong and to thrive, we must nurture and support our families and our communities. Our families are the webs that connect us all.

In conclusion, I am inviting everyone to take some time this week to celebrate their family and to spend some quality time with their loved ones at home or at one of the many events being hosted this week.

Applause

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

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Today, I have for tabling the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition report, entitled *Living Wage in Whitehorse, Yukon: 2018*.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Pursuant to section 12(3) of the *Arts Centre Act*, I have for tabling the 2017-18 Yukon Arts Centre annual report.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?
Are there any petitions?
Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 24: *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I move that Bill No. 24, entitled *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Highways and Public Works that Bill No. 24, entitled *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 24 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House commends the Government of Canada for including the northern affairs portfolio as part of the mandate of the federal intergovernmental affairs minister, in recognition of the evolving role of the north in the Canadian federation.

Mr. Kent: I rise to give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of all correspondence, including e-mails, received and sent by the Yukon government in relation to the recent consultation on amendments to the *Quartz Mining Act*.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to direct the Department of Education to communicate with staff and with the parents of children attending schools impacted by recent results of lead testing in water to:

- (1) clear results from their school in comparison with the Canadian drinking water quality guidelines; and
- (2) steps that are being taken by the Department of Education and Department of Health and Social Services to remediate current levels.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Whistle Bend Place continuing care facility

Hon. Ms. Frost: I rise today to provide Yukoners with an update on the Whistle Bend Place continuing care facility. The facility was substantially completed on August 15 and was open for tours on September 12. We estimated over 1,000 people visited throughout the day. I'm very pleased that we are on track to open in October 2018 for residents. The main contractor remains on-site, fixing minor deficiencies and completing landscaping work that can be done this fall. The remainder of the landscaping will be done in the spring.

There will be 150 standard beds available for use. At this time, given the waiting list in the communities and those in the hospital who need long-term care, we do not anticipate all of the beds will be needed in the short term.

We do not anticipate all of the beds will be needed in the short-term. The waiting list varies over time from about 60 to 80 and includes people waiting in the hospital. With approximately 50 people moving from Macaulay Lodge, we are estimating a high-end need at opening to be about 120. We know through our engagement sessions with our aging population that seniors and elders want to remain as independent as possible and stay in their homes and communities as long as they possibly can. We are working to fill the gaps in the continuum of services and supports that are available to Yukon. That is why we are expanding home care this year.

Our home-first philosophy is now fully integrated into our home care delivery. We are now providing the necessary supports to people with more complex needs on an as-needed basis. Our pilot from last year is now embedded in our operation, enabled through our new investment of \$1 million this year.

In addition, the new beds at Thomson Centre will be re-enablement and respite beds. Re-enablement will support people who need additional support and therapies to be at home. This will support people leaving the hospital and will also provide support that will prevent them from going into the hospital. In keeping with a person-centred approach, resident intake will occur four days a week with no more than three admissions per day. This will allow for a smooth transition as people enter their new home. We want to support every resident and their family as they move. We will move those from Macaulay Lodge last. This will take place at the end of the year and the beginning of next. We will keep the Macaulay Lodge open into the new year.

Strategies are underway to fill the 250 full-time employees required to staff the facility. We have recruited 70 percent of what we need to fully staff the facility and are ready to meet the needs of those waiting for room at the Whistle Bend continuing care facility. Recruitment strategies include hiring recruitment specialists and recruitment firms to attract health care professionals from other jurisdictions. We are working with our partners on strategies with respect to housing; we're working again with a peer rental campaign working with Health and Social Services. We're reaching out into the communities and, as a result, we have some short-term options that we are considering and looking to opening the Whistle Bend care facility in the coming months.

Overall, as a note for long-term care in the Yukon —

Speaker: Order.

Ms. McLeod: Today, I rise in response to the minister's statement regarding the opening of Whistle Bend Place, our territory's newest continuing care facility. We're happy to see this project moving forward so that Yukon seniors can continue to get the excellent treatment and care they deserve and rely on. I want to specifically thank all of the

staff from Health and Social Services, as well as Highways and Public Works for their hard work in getting us here today. It's a beautiful facility they can be proud of. I think that anyone who has been able to visit Whistle Bend Place and learn about the incredible levels of care and comfort that will be provided there would be embarrassed to call this place a warehouse, nor would one be able to call the unique, patient-centred care plan that this facility will offer a one-size-fits-all approach.

We look forward to seeing this facility officially open to welcome seniors, elders and others requiring complex levels of care through its doors; however, we still have some questions for the minister, most of which are with respect to staffing and staff housing.

Can the minister tell us when the facility will be fully staffed and how many staff are actually working there today? We're talking about staff who are not just hired, but how many have actually started the position. Will there be enough to run the facility by the end of the month, when the patients move in?

As the minister notes, there is an issue of housing for employees, but to what extent? How many rental properties were identified or secured through the expression of interest for rental accommodation her department ran? What are the short-term housing options that she mentions, and in the long term, how many Yukon Housing Corporation units are going to be allocated under staff housing to these new government employees?

On the topic of the expression of interest that she issued for rental accommodation, the government's website currently states that no bids were received. Can the minister confirm whether or not this is so — that no bids were received? Even more recently, we heard that the government has established agreements with a number of hotels to house incoming staff, but it sounds like not all hotels were initially included in the list the government was using. Further, this never went out to tender. Could the minister tell us how the government established the list of which hotels they would use and why they did it without going to tender?

This facility is one we can be proud of and we're happy to see it near completion. There's lots of work that still needs to be done and there are many questions that remain unanswered.

Ms. White: I want to thank the minister for her statement. We're pleased to hear that residents will begin to move into the Whistle Bend facility this month. This will certainly meet the needs of many Yukoners requiring a higher level of care, including those long-term patients who have been waiting patiently, or sometimes less patiently, in the hospital. Hopefully we'll also see the end of senior patients being transferred to community hospitals due to bed pressures in Whitehorse.

We're still concerned about the hiring and housing for staffing for this facility. With current low vacancies, high rents and housing costs, this continues to be a barrier for new health professionals moving here. It was mentioned in a

statement that was shared with us — and I quote: "A staff member working to assist potential employees obtain living accommodations, along with an expression of interest, was sent out to gauge interest in providing rental properties in Whitehorse. This resulted in some short-term housing options and some long-term options that we have turned over to the Housing Corporation."

With so many Yukoners, including some who have been here for decades, struggling with affordable or even available housing, this once again points out the need for concrete action by this government to respond to the housing crisis that is leaving Yukoners literally out in the cold. No mention has been made of a palliative care unit opening, which has been in the plan for the 150-bed facility. This has been an ongoing need that has not been addressed over the years, despite promises for that to happen.

Although there is a palliative care team offering amazing service and help, a hospital room that holds only a few visitors or family members is not adequate and it is not best practice for individuals requiring care at the end of their life.

Also not mentioned is the mental health unit. We know that in the Whitehorse Correctional Centre inspection report, it was recommended that the department revoke the statutory designation as a hospital. Without appropriate places to go for help, those individuals who might be in a mental health crisis are sometimes incarcerated at WCC for extended periods, even for minor nuisance infractions or while awaiting transfer to a treatment facility in another jurisdiction. Will there be a mental health unit opening in the near future that might relieve the pressures on the jail to be the hospital for these individuals? I am eager to hear from the minister on this, especially during Mental Illness Awareness Week.

It is great to hear about increases to home care and the implementation of the Housing First philosophy, and I'm interested to know whether the new services and programming will be available in all communities since we have heard from individuals and their families about the desire for seniors and elders to stay close to home and to live in their communities. Without a full continuum of care, there are still gaps that result in seniors being over-institutionalized — which, as we know, is the highest cost of health care — or in a care situation that is more than they would require.

Mr. Speaker, we congratulate the staff and the builders on opening this facility. I personally look forward to bingo days because calling numbers in this facility is going to be really fantastic.

Congratulations on the opening, but in our role, we will continue to ask questions that we think are important.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the members of the opposition for your comments today. Also, I would like to take this time to acknowledge the staff of Health and Social Services and the Department of Highways and Public Works for doing such a great job and keeping the project on time and delivering as required under some pretty tight timelines, looking at the key priorities that we said we would deliver on. I'm very proud of the accomplishments.

I also want to note a couple of things for the record on the recent history of this facility. We were very clear with the public in the last election that we would cap the construction at 150 beds. We opposed the previous government's plan to build a 300-bed facility and were very loud and clear about that.

Now, with regard to excellent care and treatment of our seniors and our elders, that's always our priority. It's always our priority to give Yukoners collaborative health care that they require in their homes and in their communities and, in particular, rural Yukon communities.

We knew coming in that the facility really didn't have any plans with respect to the operating costs. Those are things that we had to take into consideration as we advanced the project. Advancing a project of this magnitude in the Yukon — the biggest of its kind in Yukon's history — to take into consideration recruitment and retention strategies, housing, housing pressures, as well as delivering effective collaborative care was top of mind for everyone. It will always be and we will continue to work to that end.

However, it was a major feat and a major challenge. Without the efforts of our partners, without the efforts of the department, we would not be opening the facility today and being creative and innovative in addressing some of the concerns. I've highlighted some of that in my opening statement. It's very excellent work.

To the questions with respect to staffing and staff housing, we knew that we would be confronted with a challenge, given that we were recruiting 250 people for the Whistle Bend facility. Already, the Yukon was experiencing housing crises with respect to vulnerable populations and trying to be accommodating and address that.

We have taken into consideration the work of the Yukon Housing Corporation, the housing initiative group, Safe at Home, and the vulnerable people's groups. We have taken into consideration the implementation of the action plans that have been laid out for us — very well, I might add — and taken into consideration a balance — trying to balance the efforts of this government with respect to the shortcomings on the budget side of things with respect to programs and services. How do you balance if there are no resources set aside? Of course there are challenges, as noted by the Member for Watson Lake. The issue around housing for employees was a challenge, and there is no getting around that. We have taken some very proactive approaches, and that was to work with our staff and our partners to reach out into the communities to see what was available. I have to say that the department did a great job in addressing that.

The other matters with respect to palliative care and health care units — we said we would keep that on the agenda, move forward and make the adjustments as we implement and transition into the facility. Aging in place is a key priority, and that is a priority for this government. We are doing that consultation right now to address the needs in rural Yukon communities.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Children in care

Ms. McLeod: At the beginning of February, the Minister of Health and Social Services met with the child who made allegations of abuse within government-run group homes. For months, the minister and the Liberals plugged their ears and did nothing about this. It wasn't until after weeks of questions that they even launched an independent investigation.

Seven months later, the minister gave a half-hearted apology where she accepted no responsibility. The Premier tried to pass off this weak apology as courage. Real courage would have been if the minister took immediate action when she first met with the child. Real courage would have been, instead of denying wrongdoing for months, if she had actually believed the child and the whistle-blowers. Real courage would have been to accept responsibility.

Will the minister show real courage and apologize for doing nothing after she met with this child at the beginning of February and became aware of these allegations?

Hon. Ms. Frost: It is very interesting, coming from the member opposite with respect to children in group homes and work that has been happening recently. This government has taken some proactive actions to address some of the challenges. We have worked with our partners, and we have addressed the concerns. In fact, I have met with the youth in question. I have met with many of the youth, and I have gone out into the communities to look at some of the challenges. We have proceeded with the long-overdue *Child and Family Services Act* review. We have initiated the review by the Child and Youth Advocate's office.

We have hired an independent investigator to look at many allegations that have been brought forward. Only two of those allegations were found to have merit, and we were very proactive in addressing those concerns. Fundamentally, nothing was found historically. The issues that we found as I walked into this role as Minister of Health and Social Services responsible for children — there was not a lot done.

Historic issues and concerns, systemic issues with indigenous children in care — the highest rate of indigenous children in care, 70 percent — not a lot was done, and we have taken very effective and proactive action in light of the crises that we found ourselves in.

Ms. McLeod: One of the Liberal government's main strategies to deal with the allegations of abuse within group homes was to question the quality of the media reporting. In fact, the Justice minister went as far as to suggest that reporting was untrue. The Minister of Justice said that reports in the media — and I quote: "... are not necessarily the truth."

Now that the independent investigation has determined that the Minister of Justice was wrong, will she apologize to the media for suggesting that their reporting was untrue?

Hon. Ms. Frost: With regard to the information that we received and the information that was brought to our attention, we acted very quickly. We responded and we addressed the concerns that were brought to our attention. We will stand by that. We will stand by the facts that were before us at the time

that these issues came to our attention, and we acted on it. We acted on it very efficiently and very effectively, and I want to say that we have taken the necessary steps to address the crises in question and we reduced the number of children in care by 40 percent. We looked at extended family care programs, we worked with our partners and, with regard to information that was brought to our attention, we acted with the information that we had at the time.

Ms. McLeod: We will try one more time. The Premier himself suggested that the media's reporting was untrue. On CBC Radio on April 25, the Premier was point-blank asked why his government hadn't taken action on the allegations of abuse and he suggested that the reporting was false.

In fact, his exact quote was: "While the opposition and the media deals with allegations, we as a government are dealing with facts." Well it turns out that the media reporting was accurate.

Will the Premier apologize to the media, to Yukoners and, most importantly of all, to the children for not believing these allegations?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As the minister mentioned, we have taken a holistic approach to wellness. In her last response, she mentioned again the importance of understanding that families need a variety of supports to thrive. We are going to stick to the issues and we are going to stick to the work that this team does when we respond to these questions and these allegations from the opposition.

As we move from a system of apprehension to one of prevention and to addressing long-standing concerns within Child and Family Services, we are hard at work providing the preventive supports necessary to the families who are in need at these critical times.

Improving the provisions of mental health services in communities is a major priority for this government and for this minister, and I am very proud of the work that has been done with the mental health hubs that are open in Dawson City, Carmacks, Watson Lake and Haines Junction. We have created nine new positions for child and youth counsellors throughout the territory, and we are working with the staff at Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services counsellors, as well, in almost every community in the Yukon. We're partnering with the federal government.

We're doing more work in the first two years than we have seen in awhile when it comes to mental health and when it comes to dealing and working with children in care. I'm very proud of the holistic approach that the minister has taken. I'm very proud of the review that happened from the minute this became something that the minister was aware of. Again, from the beginning, this has been a systemic issue and this government is dealing with it.

Question re: School capacity

Ms. Van Bibber: This question is for the Minister of Education. The population growth in the territory is putting increased pressure on the schools. For example, we have heard from parents that the elementary schools in Porter Creek, Hidden Valley and Golden Horn are at or near

capacity. With Whistle Bend growing larger every year, there are going to be ever-increasing pressures on the numbers at these schools. What are the minister's plans to deal with overcrowding at these schools?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank the member opposite for the question because it's an excellent opportunity for us to talk to Yukoners about what is happening here. Of course, with the exception of F.H. Collins, which was a replacement school, there hasn't been a new school built in Whitehorse in more than 20 years. As a result, the population is growing — we have heard that. The economy is booming. People are wanting to move to Whitehorse and wanting to settle here.

We have growth not only in our employment — with something like Whistle Bend Place — but in other industries that are bringing people here to the territory. There are enrolment pressures at schools. We completely recognize that and agree. The department is working on a capital plan with respect to feeding the Education capital plan into the five-year capital plan of the territorial government — the larger version — to address these situations. I spoke yesterday about the fact that we are trying to purchase some portables for the purpose of dealing with some of those pressures but, so far, we have managed to speak with schools, with parents and with students and deal with the pressures we currently have here in Whitehorse. Long-term planning is the key.

Ms. Van Bibber: With respect to Robert Service School in Dawson City, we have heard concerns about enrolment pressures at that school. The expectation for population growth with potential mining activity in the region will create additional pressures on the school.

A year and a half ago, I asked the minister what plans, if any, the government had for additional portables at Robert Service School. At the time, the Minister of Highways and Public Works said he didn't know and would look into it and get back to us. Given that the minister hasn't provided us with an answer in a year and a half, I'm wondering if he could tell us today what the plans are to deal with enrolment pressures at Robert Service School?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: During debate yesterday, I had the opportunity to address a question about portables — in particular with respect to two schools here in Whitehorse but it applies, of course, in Dawson as well. The government put out a tender early in this year to attempt to purchase a portable, or more than one portable, and there were no responses to that tender.

As a result, we are working in partnership with Highways and Public Works for the purposes of assuming some funding so that we might be able to purchase more than one portable because we know these pressures are here. We have dealt with the situation at Golden Horn, which was the first school in Whitehorse slated to get a portable, and as a result, the enrolment for this year in that school is being dealt with, with some innovative ideas and some cooperation with the school and the school community, but certainly we hope to purchase some portables so they will be available for a number of schools here in the territory.

Ms. Van Bibber: We know the five-year capital concept has Holy Family listed. In the spring, the Minister of Highways and Public Works said this meant that a new Holy Family school would be built, but the Minister of Education contradicted him and said it wasn't necessarily the case, but wouldn't tell us what it meant. Will the Liberals tell us today why Holy Family is in the five-year capital concept? Are they replacing it? Are they painting it? What are they doing? Are they able to provide any detail of what work will be done on this particular school?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As we plan for the future needs of the school buildings, we're considering the enrolment pressures that are across all schools to ensure that we meet the educational needs of Yukoners. That involves, as I have said in my first two answers, intense pressure at the moment on the Whitehorse schools but certainly some pressures in our rural schools as well — particularly Dawson.

The government is developing a long-term capital plan, as I have noted, which includes all Yukon schools, to ensure that the buildings are safe and available for many years to come. We consider many factors in this work, including the changing demographics, the increasing student enrolment, which changes not quite from minute to minute but pretty quickly, and the safety and age of our school buildings.

With respect to the plan going forward, we need to consider all schools in relation to how they're going to appear as a priority going forward. Clearly there are some pressures in the Whistle Bend area. Clearly there are some pressures in the elementary schools as mentioned by the member opposite in her first question and all of those things need to be taken into account.

This is certainly a challenge, but it is not the worst problem to have with a growing economy here in the territory and our growing population.

Question re: Community nursing

Ms. White: For many years, Beaver Creek has only had one full-time nurse including during the busy summer months. In 2017, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the employees union to ensure that there would be two nurses available in the community in the summer months and this did not happen in 2017.

Were there two nurses stationed in the Community of Beaver Creek this summer as was agreed to with the union?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. Certainly our priority is always ensuring that we have all of our community health centres fully covered and that we provide the highest quality care to all of our communities and all of the constituents of Yukon. We are working with the communities as noted.

We've looked at primary care, emergency care and staffing and ensuring that we have a combination of permanent and auxiliary-on-call nurses. We've certainly worked with the employees union on initiatives to improve the ease of recruitment in the communities and we work toward permanently filling the positions. An independent evaluation of service initiatives for Destruction Bay and Beaver Creek

was completed with the union in August of 2018. So we have been working with our partners to address the challenges in all of our communities and we know that is certainly a priority.

Ms. White: I wasn't quite sure if I caught at the end as to whether or not there were two nurses in Beaver Creek this summer.

Beaver Creek is not the only community to experience a shortage of nurses in the community health centres. This has been an ongoing issue in many communities, leaving community members with temporary nurses coming and going and permanent community nurses overworked. A quick look at the employment board shows us that there is an ongoing search for primary health care nurses in charge, primary health care nurses and community health care nurses — mobile — who must travel and work between communities such as Haines Junction and Mayo. Mr. Speaker, those communities are not exactly neighboring communities. Communities have dealt with the situation for far too long. What is this government doing to resolve the problem of the revolving door of nurses in communities?

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I will go back to my opening comments. Clearly our key priority is ensuring that we provide the best possible collaborative care to all of our communities and we are working with our partners to ensure that happens. Yukon is not unique to the rest of Canada; there is a shortage in nurses across the country and we are working with our partners. We have arrangements with the union; we are attempting to provide options and being innovative and creative. We now have a physician in Haines Junction who will provide collaborative care and extend the care program needed for the citizens in that region. We are bringing specialized services to our rural hospitals. We are taking our best efforts forward, Mr. Speaker, to look at future service delivery and also looking at options. Certainly we will keep that in mind.

We did suggest and note that we would consider the options that come forward from the union and we are working with our partners there, and that came through in August from the recommendations. I'm happy to say that we are continuing to look for solutions and we will continue to look for primary care nurses as required in our communities.

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that was "no" to two community nurses in Beaver Creek for the summer.

In its very first budget, the government announced that it would hire 11 mental health and addiction nurses to work in Yukon communities. A full year later the Premier announced that only five of the 11 positions had been filled. In response to my questions in March, the Minister of Health and Social Services claimed that she was proactive — and I quote: "By the end of March we will have all the positions filled in the Yukon."

So Mr. Speaker, can the minister confirm that the 11 mental health and addiction nurse positions announced one year and a half ago have been filled?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am pleased, of course, to rise today to speak to the mental health initiatives we have, which have not ever been offered to the Yukon before.

We said we would look at collaborative care and specialized care for our communities, and we are doing that very successfully. We are working with our communities. We have created four mental wellness hubs in each one of our communities. We provide child and youth supports in those communities through the mental wellness support team. We have the mental wellness support hubs in Haines Junction, Watson Lake, Dawson City and Carmacks. We are working to ensure that all of the services are supported, and I am happy to note that every one of our Yukon communities is supported by the model that we have in place.

Question re: Medical case management

Mr. Cathers: I have heard from a constituent on the wait-list for cataract surgery, and a number of my Yukon Party colleagues have also heard from constituents waiting for this procedure. Losing your vision or having it impaired has a major impact on quality of life. We have been told by patients and health professionals that the typical wait time is two years, and that wait times can be as long as four years for cataract surgery. We have heard that the wait-list may have grown to over 350 people. People in need of this surgery, in some cases, lose their ability to drive which, especially for rural residents, has a major impact on their mobility and even their ability to leave home. Will the government take action to reduce wait times for cataract surgery?

Hon. Ms. Frost: What I can say to the member opposite is that it is a great question. We always look at ensuring that we bring the services to the Yukon as best we can. We will certainly take that recommendation under advisement as we work with the Hospital Corporation and we work with our partners to address the wait-lists that are there. In fact, I am happy to say that I have had that very discussion with the Yukon hospital board just three days ago around the specialized services and supports that we need to bring to the Yukon and how we reduce the wait-lists. It is a great recommendation, and we will certainly take it under advisement.

Mr. Cathers: Impaired vision can have a life-changing impact, and receiving cataract surgery in a timely manner is very important to someone's quality of life and their ability to function independently. This summer, I wrote to the Minister of Health and Social Services on behalf of a constituent who is waiting for this surgery. I received a polite reply from the minister, but what we have yet to hear is what concrete action the government will take to reduce wait times for cataract surgery.

My question for the minister is: What specific actions will the government take to reduce cataract surgery wait times and when will it do that?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I will go back to my original statements and comments. We are working with our partners. In fact, I had that very discussion with the hospital board just a few days ago. We will work as best we can with the

resources that are available to us to address the challenges, and that is to reduce wait-lists for all the specialized surgeries that are required in Yukon.

In an effort to do that — bring the supports to Yukon — we will see an overall reduction in medical travel. That is always our objective: How do we maximize the services and facilities that we have in the Yukon? Mr. Speaker, I note that we have two rural hospitals that have not been fully utilized to their maximum capacity, and we are trying to address those pressures as well. We will work with our partners to address the pressures that we see. I totally appreciate the member opposite's concerns that he brought forward. As noted, we will take that under advisement as we go ahead and we prioritize the various wait-lists that we have.

Mr. Cathers: Impaired vision can have a life-changing impact, and receiving cataract surgery in a timely manner is very important to someone's quality of life and their ability to function independently.

We have heard that roughly 350 Yukoners are currently waiting for this procedure. The minister made reference to making do within the resources they had available in her last reply to me.

That brings me to a related topic. This week, Yukoners were concerned to learn of a leaked memo from the Department of Finance to enacting two-percent cuts across all departments.

Will the Premier and Finance minister commit to not having cataract surgery targeted as part of these two-percent cuts and, instead, to increase the resources available to cataract surgery?

Hon. Ms. Frost: The priority lists and the priorities that we have before us certainly can never be underplayed. It always drives what we do with regard to collaborative care in the Yukon.

The member opposite knows that very well. We will never cut funding to diminish programs and services to Yukoners. We will look at efficiencies as part of the health care review and the review of medical travel and the review of efficiencies in our rural hospitals. The review of efficiencies in specialized care that we bring to the Yukon is top of mind and at the top of priorities and things that we will certainly keep in mind as we advance this government and we advance the programs and services to maximize the opportunities for Yukoners.

Question re: Tourism development strategy

Ms. Van Bibber: The consultation for the tourism strategy ends today. Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Tourism and Culture this question but she didn't answer: Will the minister extend the consultation to all Yukoners beyond today — yes or no?

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Thank you for the question and follow-up from yesterday's discussion.

Yesterday I spoke about the extensive nature of this consultation and that it really started in July 2017 when we started having discussions with all of the partners in the

tourism industry and related sectors like the arts, museums and heritage.

All of our partners — First Nation governments, development corporations and municipal governments — came together and charted a path for us and gave advice on how to put this consultation together. We have had extensive consultation throughout this last year and a few months. We have given a lot of opportunity to Yukoners to be heard. We facilitated many, many sessions throughout the communities. We have a committee of 15 individuals who have put together this draft on the Yukon tourism development strategy.

To my knowledge, I have not received any requests to extend this consultation.

Ms. Van Bibber: Another action item in the tourism strategy is — quote: “Review financial programs, incentives and supports to ensure they align with, and support, the strategy.”

As you know, the Liberal Cabinet has told the departments they must cut two percent. Can the Minister of Tourism and Culture tell us if this review of financial programs and incentives referenced in the strategy means that they will be cutting funding to the non-government organizations, such as the Tourism Industry Association and Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association?

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Thank you for the question. We have done intensive consultation on this. As the member opposite is aware, there is a document that outlines what we heard. We are going to look at all of the proposals that have been put forward by our steering committee on the Yukon tourism development strategy. We will assess all of them and make the best decisions that we can with the information we have.

One of the things I would like to note is that we have never had data like this on tourism. We have gone to every community. We have such extensive information now that we have never had in our possession before. We have heard from Yukoners on a deep level. We trained facilitators to go out and provide facilitated consultation with Yukoners.

The evidence we now have will be very helpful to us going forward over the next decade as we move tourism forward in the most positive way.

Ms. Van Bibber: According to the government’s press release, this extensive consultation on the tourism strategy wrapped up at the end of March. The minister sat on the draft report and only released it on September 19. Can she tell us why this is only giving Yukoners two weeks to provide comment on it?

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Not all of those facts are correct. I would like to again go back to the process that we developed together with all of our stakeholders and all the partners and just emphasize again that we took a lot of time to talk to Yukoners and we collected data that we have never had before. We certainly have taken a lot of time. The steering committee has had several meetings to discuss what they have heard. It was an incredible amount of work to sift through all of the 12,000 comments we received.

We released the draft. We came to a place where the committee came up with their most recent draft and we released it to the public. We released it to Yukon First Nations, our municipal governments and all our partners, as we said we would. We’re wrapping up today the final stage of that. What will happen next is that the steering committee will look at what they have heard through these last couple of weeks and will table a final draft tourism development strategy.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 313

Clerk: Motion No. 313, standing in the name of Ms. McLeod.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Watson Lake:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to follow through on the review of the medical travel program that it committed to on March 14, 2018, which is intended to ensure that it is meeting the needs of all Yukoners by:

- (1) confirming if work has begun on this review and provide an update on work completed to date;
- (2) committing to public consultations as part of this review; and
- (3) providing a deadline for completion of the review.

Speaker: I am just asking a question of the Member for Watson Lake. Am I missing a number 4?

Ms. McLeod: Possibly, but I will re-read it. How is that?

Speaker: Very good.

Ms. McLeod: I rise today to speak to Motion No. 313, which urges the Government of Yukon to: (1) follow through on the review of the medical travel program that it committed to on March 14, 2018, which is intended to ensure that it is meeting the needs of all Yukoners; (2) confirm if work has begun on this review and provide an update on the work completed to date; (3) commit to public consultations that are part of this review; and (4) provide a deadline for completion of the review.

It was not long ago that I stood in this House and spoke to the first point highlighted on this important motion. In fact, a number of us spoke to the motion, and it received unanimous approval from all members of this House, and unfortunately we have yet to see action. I would like to reiterate to the government the importance of this review. We have already spoken in this House to the importance of this review. We have received the nod that it would go ahead and we have heard nothing since.

To the first point in the motion being discussed today, I urge the government to follow through with this review as they agreed to do in March of this year.

To the second point — to be transparent with the members of this House and to all Yukoners about the work they are doing on a review — I ask the government to confirm whether work has started and, if so, update us on the status of this work. This review is not going to be a small feat. It may take time and it will take input from Yukoners.

Medical travel is one small part of Health and Social Services but, to so many Yukoners and their families, it weighs very heavily on their lives: to parents of sick children who spend large portions of their lives booking appointments with doctors or specialists and booking accommodations, flying south and taking leave from their jobs to deal with illness; to individuals with chronic illness who at times feel they spend more time away than they do at home; to those who need surgery or procedures that they cannot get here in Yukon; to those from our communities who not only have to hop on a plane to fly south for an appointment, but must also make their way to Whitehorse first. This in itself has proven to be a hardship to many.

We have spoken about the trials of people and the burdens they face under the current medical travel program. We have also heard accounts from people who have a simple solution to avoid some of this burden or to cut costs. People have concerns that they are unable to claim medical travel if their travel doesn't begin from Whitehorse. Instead, they are told to return to the Yukon and fly from here again on a separate trip. Others have been told that they cannot take more than one child at a time for appointments and are rather forced to make multiple appointments and multiple trips.

Government employees and ministers are afforded the opportunity to tack on personal travel days to government-funded trips outside of the territory, but it seems some individuals on medical trips are not afforded the same privilege.

We know the government is looking for two-percent cuts in all departments, and that concerns us on the topic of medical travel. Are they looking for cuts to medical travel as well?

This brings me to the third point of the motion — committing to public consultations as part of the review on the medical travel program. There are so many aspects of the medical travel program that need to be reviewed and so many people who could contribute valid and responsible ideas based on their own experiences with the program.

This government committed to transparency and openness. They committed to working with the public. This was one of the most important initiatives being undertaken in all of government to Yukoners, and one can readily assume that they will be eager to take part in the engagement process. I certainly hoped that the consultation process would be more in-depth than an online survey.

Being the MLA for a community in rural Yukon, I have heard from many about their burdens experienced by those same constituents who are dealing with this medical travel

system. Rural Yukoners experience troubles that do not affect people in Whitehorse.

As I mentioned earlier, an individual from rural Yukon must first make their way to Whitehorse being heading south for medical procedures or appointments, and this often requires additional days away from home for travel, more bookings for accommodations and more expenses to cover from one's own pocket.

Imagine a senior with mobility issues: unable or without the means to drive, no family or friends able to help with transportation to and from Whitehorse, no public transportation and an unwillingness of government to purchase a plane ticket. These factors leave that individual in a very precarious situation, and we have seen it time and time again.

For someone who should be focusing on their health and well-being, travel predicaments should not be at the forefront of their worries, nor should they dominate their finances. An individual or family should be able to book medical travel without worrying how a single trip will place them into debt. An individual or family should be able to focus on their health care, not cancel a trip because they can't afford to finance a hotel room.

Finally, I would like to speak to the last point made in the motion being discussed here today — the importance of this government providing a deadline to the review. In order to ensure that this important work is completed and, further, to ensure it is completed in a timely manner, this government has to put a date on it. Putting a date on it shows that the government is taking this review seriously and, in turn, shows Yukoners that the government respects the need for this work to be done.

I urge the minister to initiate this review immediately. Do not roll it in with the departmental review where it will get lost — do a specific medical travel review. Show the program the importance and attention that it deserves. It is important enough to stand alone and not be at risk of being lost in the fray.

I would like to thank my constituents who have come to me to describe their concerns and their personal experiences, and I encourage all Yukoners to bring their suggestions and concerns forward during consultation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I ask all members to keep in mind that the medical travel program is a very important part of the lives of many Yukoners, and their experiences should help in shaping its structure and delivery.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, in starting, I just wanted to note something for the record — that is that the Order Paper that we were looking at is slightly different from the motion that the member opposite had made in this House not two days ago. I am assuming that we will go with the motion as it was read in the House two days ago. I just want to clarify that as we go forward.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: I had an opportunity to briefly consult with Mr. Clerk on this topic. I understand that there was basically a relatively minor editing exercise that took place between Mr. Clerk and the MLA who is moving this motion, the Member for Watson Lake. The wording that I have read out on the record during the proceedings today is the official version.

I have a document before me: No. 93, Order Paper of the Yukon Legislative Assembly for Wednesday, October 3, 2018. The subsection is: Orders of the Day, Opposition Private Members' Business, Motions Other Than Government Motions. This is (1) Motion No. 313. Then, the wording that I see on the Order Paper is the same as what I have read into the record.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: All I will note is that there is a slight difference in numbering. I think the intent and the content is virtually the same. I just wanted to note that because I was caught a little bit off-guard when I heard the number four, and I was trying to make sure I had not missed anything. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to make a couple of quick points. The first one is that medical travel is essential to Yukoners. I know how important it is. I think probably all of us in this Legislature hear from constituents about medical travel. I am going to also note that today I heard in Question Period important questions arising regarding services like cataract surgery and specialist services.

The minister rose and talked about how important it was to address all of those types of specialist service — not just cataract surgery but all of them. The note that she made, which I felt somehow got lost in the back and forth of question period, was that we do want to put an emphasis on them. In fact, that is one of the ways in which we can gain efficiencies, because if we're able to increase those services such that our citizens do not need to travel Outside, we can put more emphasis there while saving on the medical travel side. That is the type of work that I believe is being undertaken as a holistic approach and this is why it is important to look at it in the context of the whole of the budget around health and social services.

This is an excellent example of where we can find money from one area to support another. I see it as being very important that we see it in the context of that overall review. I don't take away from the notion that the member opposite has raised, that it is important; I don't take away from the notion that Yukoners would like to see some progress on this, but I also happen to think that there are lots of areas within health and social services that may support this and that is why I think it is important to see it in that context. I'll leave my remarks there.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to stand in this House to speak to the motion put forward by the Member for Watson Lake on medical travel. This government supports the medical travel program.

Everyone on this side of the House hears from Yukoners about how important it is to families and individuals across this territory. There is nothing more important to my community, which is the only isolated community in the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few minutes to remind members of this House of what medical travel is and how many Yukoners it helps. Last year, the travel for medical treatment program assisted 3,409 Yukon residents with more than 7,153 trips both within and outside of the territory for medically necessary transportation. The program covers both air and ground transportation. In the past fiscal year, program expenses were \$14.29 million for both medical travel and medevac services both in and outside of the territory. "Medically necessary transportation" refers to a medical emergency or to those non-emergency services not available in the territory but necessary for the well-being of the patient.

Most jurisdictions do not have medical travel programs, Mr. Speaker. Of course, of those that do, Yukon has the most generous medical travel program for its residents, without any deductible or any co-pay requirements. The \$75 subsidy for accommodations and meals is the highest subsidy of its kind in Canada. It is important to remember that the purpose of the subsidy is to assist patients in the cost of their accommodation, meals, taxis and any other expense incurred while on medical travel status. Medical travel costs continue to rise and our government is working on a number of areas that will help reduce medical travel costs.

Yukoners no longer have to travel outside of their communities or territories to access some medical services. Access to a suite of orthopaedic surgeries is available at Whitehorse General Hospital, reducing the medical travel costs and providing those services closer to home. This is one example of an effort we have taken over the course of the last year.

Enhancing access to health care providers through telehealth is another example. Expanding remote patient care delivery and connecting individuals to providers virtually in their own homes using technology is the way of the future. We want to bring the services to the communities. The focus is to provide increased services to Yukoners in their homes and in their communities. We have enhanced and reorganized our Health and Social Services staffing to ensure we can provide necessary pre- and post-care for substance use, as well as counselling and mental wellness supports for Yukon communities.

Four mental wellness hubs provide services in Haines Junction, Dawson City, Carmacks and Watson Lake. These hubs provide specialized services in addition to supports provided by resident workers who live in the communities. As honourable members are aware, our government successfully negotiated a territorial health initiative funding agreement with the federal government. This agreement will see \$25.6 million flow to the territory over four years to support the well-being of Yukoners and to grow stronger communities.

The negotiations on a new health investment fund has achieved greater flexibility to determine territorial needs and greater annual allotment for medical travel than was previously noted and addressed in budgets historically. With this funding, we intend to build upon several successful foundational projects started under the previous THIF.

We also plan to begin new innovative projects focusing on building capacity of our health care system and offsetting costs for medical travel.

I appreciate the Member for Watson Lake bringing this motion forward. This past March, we debated a similar motion and we understand the member's interest in this subject. At this time, we are undertaking a comprehensive Health and Social Services review. The review will take a broad look at the programs and services offered by the Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Speaker, in light of this, I want to move an amendment to the motion.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Ms. Frost: I move:

THAT Motion No. 313 be amended by:

(1) removing all words after the phrase "medical travel program"; and

(2) substituting the phrase "as part of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review" for them.

Speaker: Thank you. The Minister of Health and Social Services has copies of the proposed amendment.

If those copies could please be distributed, I will have an opportunity to review them and will report back to the House as to form and content of the proposed amendment.

I have had an opportunity to review the proposed amendment to Motion No. 313 with Mr. Clerk and can advise that, in my opinion, the amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin:

THAT Motion No. 313 be amended by:

(1) removing all words after the phrase "medical travel program"; and

(2) substituting the phrase "as part of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review" for them.

The proposed amended motion would read:

It is moved by the Member for Watson Lake:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to follow through on the review of the medical travel program as part the comprehensive Health and Social Services review.

Hon. Ms. Frost: With respect to the proposed amendment, it makes sense to look at the medical travel system, not by itself, but as part of a larger review that takes account of the range of services, both medical and other programs designed to provide Yukoners with access to the services they need. The comprehensive review will seek to find ways to contain historical growth to provide long-term sustainable health care and social support systems that continue to meet the needs of Yukoners. The review isn't

about immediate cost-savings or cutting programs and services, but is about identifying a plan to slow growth in our biggest cost drivers, working toward more sustainable health care and social services and improving service outcomes.

The review will build on work completed in, and recommendations from, the 2008 health care review, the 2018 clinical services plan and the 2017 Yukon Financial Advisory Panel report.

As a government, we are committed to engaging and involving the public, First Nations and other governments, and the non-government community, as well as staff and other stakeholders, in this review. We want to be able to capture their thoughts, experiences and expertise in these programs and services. In this way, we can identify potential improvements in the system to support the overall goal of ensuring that Yukoners live longer and healthier lives.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude and look forward to the comments from other members.

Ms. Hanson: I hadn't intended to speak to this at all, but I do think, that unless the minister or the government is prepared to suggest when this comprehensive Health and Social Services review commenced and will end, this gives very faint hope to anybody. It's a pig in a poke. It is really like Dave Joe would have said at the negotiating table many years ago: "That and fifty cents will get you a cup of coffee" — not worth much.

Mr. Cathers: In rising to speak to this amendment, I am disappointed to see that the government has brought this forward. I think that the focus on the medical travel program that was brought forward through the good work of my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, is something — that we were directly responding to multiple requests from Yukoners who were concerned about the scope of the medical travel program and identified a number of areas to us where they believed improvements could be made. I have raised before — as have a number of my colleagues, including the Member for Watson Lake — areas where we have received requests from constituents and supported government taking a look at this specifically in a context of review of the medical travel program.

Our concern is that the comprehensive Health and Social Services review appears to be a cost-cutting exercise that ties into the memo that was leaked this week and released on CBC that identified the request from the government — from the Department of Finance, as approved by Cabinet — for two-percent cuts across departments, including Health and Social Services.

An exercise that appears to me to be aimed at cutting areas in health care and coming up with the rationale to raise fees in certain areas — merging that with a review of medical travel definitely loses the focus on improving how the medical travel program is serving Yukon citizens. For example, in the area of the out-of-territory per diem that is in place and the scope of the regulations — those have not seen any significant change since I was Minister of Health and Social Services,

which was the last time we amended those regulations. When we changed it from the out-of-territory subsidy available to Yukoners being available on day two instead of on day four, which was previously the case, and we increased the subsidy as well — although not as much as I ideally would have liked to at the time — that \$75 per day now, about 10 years after the increase occurred, goes even less far than it did at the time.

Just in touching briefly on a few medical travel issues I wanted to raise this afternoon on behalf of constituents — because I don't want to see the focus lost from the medical travel needs that Yukoners have brought forward. As I mentioned when my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, first brought this motion forward — without getting specific enough to compromise personal privacy, I want to make reference to a concern brought forward by a constituent of mine regarding travelling outside the territory for specialists appointments involving more than one child and the difficulty she faced in terms of the eligibility for a second escort. In the situation that she was dealing with, the specialist being visited only wanted the parent and one child in the room at a time and didn't want to have other children present. Seeing a situation where, as at one point was being contemplated, she would have to travel down there more than once with individual children is not an effective use of taxpayers' money, nor is it a very patient-centred, effective or compassionate outcome in terms of the program. Ensuring that there is enough flexibility to provide coverage for those types of cases so that someone is not left without childcare for an underage child who is Outside when they're travelling with more than one is something that I again encourage government to ensure is looked at as part of the review — a reason for ensuring that the review focuses on medical travel needs, not purely on cost-cutting and the bottom line.

I want to again make it clear to staff dealing with this that I am not intending to criticize them for applying the rules that are currently in place. I understand that in certain areas there is discretion on the regulations, and in certain areas the regulations are very prescriptive.

I believe — and I think it is fair to say that many of my colleagues believe — that we should ensure that the medical travel program is focused on and is structured in a way that provides Yukoners the assistance they need when they need it and to do so in a compassionate manner while recognizing the need to effectively use taxpayers' dollars and be responsible in doing so.

One other possibility that I want to mention is that government may wish to look at the fact that the current per diem structure is based on patients travelling as individuals but wasn't really adjusted to deal with the situation of a family travelling where the costs may be somewhat different in certain cases.

Another area that I want to refer to — as well as my colleague, the Member for Copperbelt South, also noted during earlier debate — is that the structure is prescriptive about the cities to which out-of-territory travel applies.

There is the possibility, it seems to me, that, through an adjustment to the regulations or a broadening of the cities to

where travel can occur, there may be some opportunity for reducing wait times, especially for certain procedures, by travelling to less heavily visited centres. I would note, as well that, the regulation itself predates the direct flight by Air North to Kelowna, so this is one obvious area where potentially including reference to Kelowna or leaving the ability to add other cities through some other mechanism — whether that is director discretion or ministerial order or some other format — would be an obvious way to potentially provide increased access to services for Yukon patients, increased options and a reduction in wait times.

If the medical travel program is not the focus but is an afterthought, as appears to be suggested by the government wanting to lump it in with the comprehensive Health and Social Services review — you are talking about reviewing this one program as part of the review of a department with a current budget in excess of \$400 million. It would seem to me that the medical travel program is very likely to get lost in that broader review and that the improvement of services that we are proposing would not necessarily occur, and would in fact probably not occur, if it is lumped in with that broader program.

As I mentioned during the earlier debate, I believe that the program should also allow flexibility for patients going to specialists not in the prescribed cities in a case where their physician believes it is appropriate and allow for medical travel to be covered to that location. There have also been challenges that I have had constituents report — related to people who are normally resident to the Yukon but who are Outside visiting family, or temporarily on vacation outside the territory — that the program wasn't designed to easily adjust to their needs. In some cases, that has led to a situation where, if they return to the Yukon, they would have their travel back down south again covered, and the return covered, but travelling in between cities — an example in this case, without compromising patient privacy, is another city in the southern mainland of British Columbia where somebody with coverage travels into Vancouver and faces difficulties in getting that approved. The program is in need of an update because, even when the regulations were amended when I was Health and Social Services minister, we did not do a comprehensive amendment at that time. We made some targeted amendments to make use of medical travel dollars that we had available to use and to increase flexibility, but it was a targeted improvement to the program, not a comprehensive review of its structure.

I do have to point out that a comprehensive Health and Social Services review seems to be all about cost-cutting and raising fees and not about improving the quality of care for Yukon citizens. Our focus, when my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake brought forward this motion on medical travel, was all about improving the quality of services for Yukon citizens who are patients in a cost-effective manner and being compassionate with the needs of their families.

I would also like to touch on one other case where a constituent of mine brought forward a concern about the difference between the travel assistance that is provided if

someone is a government employee on government business versus what is covered if you're a citizen and taxpayer who is out of the territory not on government business. I know the challenge of making those programs identical, but I would point out that, on behalf of the constituent who raised it with me awhile ago, if someone is going out of the territory with coverage for medical travel to a required appointment, they should not lose that coverage by virtue of the fact that they plan to, at 100-percent personal cost, tack on additional travel after that trip.

Just as with government employees, if they are required to travel out of the territory on business and they choose to add on a personal side trip at personal expense, they are able to do so as long as there is no cost to the taxpayer for doing so. Of course, ministers are able to do the same thing and have, on a number of occasions, tacked on personal travel outside the territory when they're going out on government business, including, as the Minister of Health and Social Services is aware, members of their caucus.

Again, this is an issue just of the taxpayers' sense of parity and fairness and the suggestion that there should be some flexibility to allow people to do the same type of thing that government ministers and government employees can do, as long as the cost to the taxpayer is absolutely zero.

Those are just a few of the concerns that we have heard from Yukoners about the medical travel program. I'm sure I'm missing other specific examples. I know I'm missing other examples that other Yukoners have brought forward to my colleagues, including the Member for Watson Lake, the Member for Kluane, the Member for Porter Creek North, the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Member for Copperbelt South. We have all heard from constituents; we all care about seeing this program improved to address their needs, and I can't support the amendment to this motion and would urge the government to reconsider and withdraw the amendment and focus this review on the medical travel program, just as the motion passed earlier this year committed the government to do.

Ms. White: There are all sorts of concerns that this amendment draws forward, including the fact that we're not talking about a timeline. There are examples. I think that next week, my colleague and I and some others in this House will have been here for the last seven years — the stories we could tell, based on the fact of people depleting their entire savings because of medical issues.

I was just doing an Expedia search to figure out how much it would cost to stay at a hotel in Vancouver if I was to go on October 24 and wanted to be within walking distance — as a Yukoner, I figure 10 blocks is something we could probably handle. At this point in time, even with two weeks out, we're looking at close to \$300 for any hotel on Expedia, keeping in mind, of course, that it is a search engine. However, I could find a hotel that was under \$70 if I was happy to stay out in Burnaby, Port Coquitlam and further. What that would involve for a taxi or just even travel costs

into the City of Vancouver for those appointments would be exorbitant.

It's interesting to note that in the territory, if you have a sleeping condition, if you are required to go to a sleep clinic, the sleep clinic that a Yukoner gets sent to in British Columbia is located in Kelowna. It's fascinating. It's in Kelowna. That's the one you get sent to. You can get medical travel to get you to Kelowna on some flights because Air North will land there before they land in Vancouver because you can't go on multiple flights. On your way home, it's up to you to get from Kelowna to Vancouver to catch the Air North flight back from Vancouver. That seems a bit skewed.

I have a dear friend who was on a wait-list for a kidney transplant and is going to hemodialysis in Vancouver. Let me tell you that \$75 a day doesn't really cover the cost of accommodation there. It doesn't talk about the cost of the living in the city. I have another friend who actually had a kidney transplant. There were times even when it was super dire where her husband was denied medical travel to be able to see her prior or post-transplant. You can imagine what that might have been like.

I have a list of seniors, including a lovely senior who broke her leg and was flown out on a medevac and her husband wasn't sent along. Mind you, he was 84 or 85. The point is that there was no way to activate the medical travel. They had not been apart in 35 years, but that's just the way it was going to be because of the system.

When we're talking about medical travel and we're talking about the requirement of a review and having the ability to have people just talk to this issue, it's just as the Member for Watson Lake has said — it's about not getting lost. There were some interesting things in the 33rd Legislative Assembly, such as how we wouldn't cover the costs of medical travel from the community of Mayo to see a midwife. That was weird. That did eventually get adjusted, but that was after we talked about it here on the floor of this Assembly.

Whether we talk about the wording of Motion No. 313 or we just talk about the importance of reviewing medical travel just on its own, then we set a deadline. The reason why we talk about the importance of deadlines is because we have been talking about midwifery in the territory for probably 20-plus years because we have never set ourselves a deadline. There has never been a deadline about when we're going to be done that. The importance about asking for an end date and asking for that deadline and the completion of that review is so that people can see the end of it so that you know that you are going to participate and then you would see the finality of it.

When we talk about rolling this into a full Health and Social Services health review, as far as the public knows, it hasn't started. It's not on the engageyukon.ca website. We can't find it anywhere. It's not listed on the department's own website. It's not something that you can Google and find information about, so at this point in time, myself included, I can't figure out where it is, where it started or how I'm going to participate when it happens. This was talked about previously. When we ask about having a deadline, it's

important. When we talk about the medical travel program and having it reviewed on its own, it's because it is so unique in the realm of health care service.

Often people's first choice isn't to go Outside for those appointments and understand that for some people going to the big city isn't an adventure — well, it might be an adventure, but it's not one they look forward to. There are lots of people in the Yukon who, left to their own devices, would never leave and I appreciate that. Know that they are sometimes sent to Vancouver for an appointment with the booklet you can get online and it's the very first time they've been on a plane — you know, there's probably room for review.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you have gathered from the gist of it right now that we won't be supporting the motion and that we believe there should be deadlines. We believe people should be able to participate in this one part of the consultation about medical travel and we look forward to a time where people don't have to go into debt to get the healthcare that they need. With that, Mr. Speaker, we await the vote.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Let me begin by addressing the concerns from the members of the Third Party regarding a timeline and the importance of a timeline. Let me talk about the comprehensive review.

The comprehensive review will seek to find ways to contain historical growth in order to provide long-term sustainable health care and social support systems that continue to meet the needs of Yukoners. The review isn't about immediate cost-saving — and I note that for the member opposite — or cutting programs or services, but about identifying a plan to slow growth in our biggest cost-drivers, working toward more sustainable health care and social services while improving service outcomes. The review will be completed by the fall of 2019. So there is a deadline and we can talk about that further, but I'm just putting it on the record.

In speaking with the Minister of Health and Social Services — who has spoken to the amendment, so she is not able to get up again right at this moment, but I'm sure would be willing to talk to members opposite at some other point — the preliminary phases of the work have begun. That includes the research and analysis and the implementation of committee structures, so the work has begun.

Let me turn back for a second, Mr. Speaker, to talk with respect to the Member for Lake Laberge's comments. One of the things I heard him say was that he hasn't seen any significant change since he was the Minister of Health and Social Services in this area and I would like to thank him for acknowledging that. We note that there was a 2008 health care review and a 2013 clinical service plan, and I think we're looking to try to see some change. We saw under the 2017 Financial Advisory Panel final report that they suggested that health care be one of the areas that we look at and we agreed — we think it is a good area to look at. What I want to note is that the member opposite, the Member for Lake Laberge

himself just pointed out opportunities for improving wait times and he made suggestions of ways to reduce costs and wait-list times while improving services. That is an excellent suggestion.

I heard him speak about the constituents of the members of the opposition being concerned about medical travel. Let me suggest, Mr. Speaker, that all Yukoners are concerned about medical travel and that includes all of our constituents. I think it is an important issue. He spoke about the motion that was put forward by the Member for Watson Lake and we appreciate this interest in reviewing medical travel. We think it is important. He said that it is, of course, to increase the support. He ascribed an outcome or an interest. Why don't we also ascribe that to the Minister of Health and Social Services, who is looking to do a review of health care — that she, like all of us in this Legislature, is looking to improve the services for our residents? I think that is what we're trying to do.

Finally, I would like to thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for talking about the past seven years and her experience in this Legislature and concerns that when there are commitments put forward in the Legislature, in her experience, she hasn't always seen them followed through. I hope exactly that she takes us to account if we don't deliver. I am still looking for the ones where that hasn't happened. I am not trying to stand up here and suggest that we don't make mistakes — I think we do. I think all of us do, but I do think that once we have made that commitment it is our responsibility to live up to it.

Just to firm up, the deadline that the health services review is looking for is to be completed by fall 2019. It is our perspective that when you do it in a comprehensive fashion, you will find give-and-take important. I listed a specific example that we discussed here in the Legislature earlier this afternoon during Question Period where we can reduce the need for medical travel if we're able to improve the specialist services that are here, and that is a great goal.

I am confident that all Members of this Legislature would support that — that it isn't about trying to cut medical travel; it is about trying to improve the service outcomes for our citizens.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the amendment?

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. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. Hanson: Disagree.

Ms. White: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the amendment carried.

Amendment to Motion No. 313 agreed to

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the main motion as amended?

Member for Porter Creek Centre on the main motion as amended.

Mr. Gallina: I'm pleased to speak to this Motion No. 313 as amended. I wanted to reiterate some of the comments that my colleagues had made in speaking to this important matter — to the importance of this review.

It is important to Yukoners — we have identified that as a government. We have committed to a comprehensive Health and Social Services review to be completed by the fall of 2019. We will follow through with this review. Health and Social Services is committed to engaging and involving First Nation governments, the public, non-governmental organizations, Health and Social Services staff and stakeholders throughout the review to capture both their expertise and their thoughts on potential system improvements.

I would like to make note that the Health and Social Services comprehensive review was first introduced through a recommendation of the 2017 Yukon Financial Advisory Panel report, which reads — and I quote: “Consider a comprehensive review of the healthcare sector akin to the one done in 2008 focusing on the factors driving costs and on the quality of the outcomes being delivered to Yukoners.” The review will undertake comparative jurisdictional analysis to assess cost drivers, including pharmacare, medical travel, physician billing and the national and territorial aging population.

I wanted to reassure Yukoners that the comprehensive Health and Social Services review is not a cost-cutting exercise. I know that this point has been made a couple of times, and I wanted to assure Yukoners that is not the case. Constituents have expressed to me that they believe that, as a government, we should be finding efficiencies. We should be finding ways to deliver services in the best manner possible. Medical services being delivered effectively affect all Yukoners.

A new territorial health investment fund agreement with Health Canada was recently finalized. It will see \$25.6 million in renewed funds over four years, from 2017-18 to 2020-21, to support the well-being of Yukoners and stronger communities. Territorial negotiations have achieved greater flexibility to determine territorial needs through a grant and a greater annual allotment for medical travel than previous years. Within this funding, we intend to build on several successful foundational projects started under the previous THIF, as well as to begin new innovative projects focused on building overall capacity and offsetting costs for medical travel. In this agreement, \$4.3 million a year will go toward innovations aimed at strengthening health systems and improving health outcomes. An additional \$2.1 million per year will be allotted to medical travel.

THIF activities align with our government's enduring priority that our people-centred approach to wellness helps Yukoners thrive. Investments will be targeted toward health care priorities, including improved mental wellness, aging in place and collaborative care. There are four main pillar areas for innovative funding. The first is training and capacity building. The second is collaborative care delivery models. The third is access and technology and the fourth is data and performance measurement.

Innovative funding must be used to strengthen health systems and improve health outcomes through health system innovation through the use of human resource approaches and increasing access to health care and quality through the use of technology.

Medical travel funding must be used to offset eligible medical transportation costs incurred by the territorial government and may include transportation, accommodations and meals for patients, as well as for eligible escorts.

Yukoners are fortunate to have a travel for medical treatment program in place. Most jurisdictions in Canada do not have medical travel programs. Of those that do, Yukon has the most generous medical travel program for its residents without any deductibles or co-payment requirements. The \$75 accommodation and meal subsidy is the highest subsidy of its kind in Canada. It is important to remember that the purpose of the subsidy is to assist patients with the cost of their accommodation, meals and any other expenses incurred while on medical travel status, not to cover all of the costs. Medical travel costs continue to rise, and our focus is shifting to how we can provide more supports regionally and to reduce this need.

In 2017-18, the travel for medical treatment program assisted 3,850 Yukon residents with 7,639 trips both within and outside the territory for medically necessary transportation. The program covers air or ground transportation.

Through THIF initiatives, I noted earlier our government is working on a number of areas that would help to reduce medical travel and provide increased services to individuals in their homes or in their home communities. The minister referenced that today in her ministerial statement.

THIF initiatives include enhancing access to health care providers through telehealth, televideo technology, expanding remote patient care delivery, connecting individuals to providers virtually in their home through the use of technology and expanding on the mental wellness hubs in our communities.

I'll make note that the last time medical travel benefits increased was in July 2006 and included a subsidy of \$75 per day beginning on the second day, and a mileage rate of 30 cents per kilometre. Previously the subsidy was at \$30 per day on the fourth day and subsequent days, and the mileage rate was at 18 cents.

In the 2017-18 fiscal year, the program's expenses were \$14,283,971 for both medical travel and medevac services within and outside the territory. The lion's share of the cost was for medevac itself. The subsidy to patients was approximately \$1.5 million in 2017-18. According to the *Travel for Medical Treatment Act* and regulations, travel must be for medically necessary services that are insured and cannot be provided locally. Requests for escorts are reviewed by a medical advisor to the program to determine if they are considered medically necessary.

All applications for medical travel must be certified in advance by a practitioner who is licensed in Yukon and forwarded to the travel for medical treatment program. The travel for medical treatment program pays airfare for the client and airfare for escorts when medically necessary. Patients and escorts may be eligible to receive a \$75 per day subsidy on the second and subsequent days while on travel status.

The Yukon health care insurance plan does not cover services provided in a private facility or for the purpose of clinical trials. Medical travel benefits are tied to those services insured by the health care insurance plan; therefore, persons who travel to receive services in a private facility or for participation in clinical trials are not eligible for benefits under the medical travel program.

The program also provides coverage for eligible Yukoners who require emergency medical transportation originating from or within the Yukon. Medically necessary transportation refers to a medical emergency and to those non-emergency services not available in the territory but deemed to be medically necessary and insured by the Yukon health care insurance plan, consistent with the *Canada Health Act*.

With the physician's approval and request, medical travel will sometimes cover a cost of an escort for individuals who cannot speak the language or have a disability and are unable to manage on their own. Increased local services could reduce this pressure as well.

Mr. Speaker, medical travel is an important matter to many Yukoners and constituents do bring medical travel issues to my attention. I am encouraged to hear the opposition also values the importance of this matter. Further, I think it's great to see that this House is working to come up with solutions for Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I will remind the members that our government is committed to review medical travel as part of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review.

We are happy to reaffirm that commitment today and I urge all members to support the motion as it has been amended. Thank you.

Mr. Hutton: I'm pleased to rise in this House today to speak to Motion No. 313 as amended.

For the benefit of my constituents and Yukoners listening in on this debate today, I will start by giving a brief history of a similar motion that was debated during the 2018 Spring Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

On March 14, 2018, the Member for Watson Lake brought forward Motion No. 45 that urged "... the Government of Yukon to initiate a review of the medical travel program in order to ensure it is meeting the needs of all Yukoners."

During debate, an amendment was proposed and was later withdrawn after Yukon Liberal caucus members discussed and agreed to let the Member for Watson Lake's motion stand.

This action confirmed that this Liberal caucus and government value the health and well-being of Yukoners by committing to include a review of the medical travel program in the comprehensive Health and Social Services review. I am pleased to stand today — and I see other members are pleased as well — on behalf of our government to reaffirm this important commitment to Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, the comprehensive review that's currently being undertaken by the Department of Health and Social Services will engage and involve First Nation governments, the public, non-governmental organizations, Health and Social Services staff and stakeholders and rely on their expertise and input on potential system improvements.

The last review of this nature was the 2008 *Yukon Health Care Review* — 10 years ago. The comprehensive Health and Social Services review is long overdue. This Liberal government is taking one of the 2017 Yukon Financial Advisory Panel's final report recommendations to — and I quote: "Consider a comprehensive review of the health care sector akin to the one done in 2008 focusing on the factors driving costs and on the quality of the outcomes being delivered to Yukoners."

Mr. Speaker, medical travel is an ongoing issue for constituents of Mayo-Tatchun, and this component of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review is extremely important to them and all residents of rural Yukon communities. I have listened to many stories of the struggles from constituents in Mayo-Tatchun. Their struggles begin in the territory; they don't start when they get to Vancouver and don't have enough money. They don't have enough money to get to Whitehorse to start with. I have a couple who stays in the seniors home in Mayo and they both have different medical issues. They wind up with specialist appointments scheduled here. One is on a Monday; the other is on a Thursday. \$75 a day — you find a hotel room for me in Whitehorse for that cheap.

The point I want to make is that, for rural Yukoners, the system as it is today is inherently unfair to rural Yukoners. It

costs us more to get the same level of health care, even though the funding that comes to the territorial government is for all Yukoners.

I am really hoping that this compressive review is going to sort out some of the inherent unfairness that is in the present system. I am looking forward to seeing the results of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review when it is complete in the fall of 2019. I'll do my part to be a voice for my constituents to represent their concerns and to encourage them to be involved in the review for the benefit of themselves and our communities. I would like to thank the members of this House for the opportunity to speak to the motion as amended today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi cho.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard on debate on the main motion as amended?

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Member for Mayo for his revisionist history of the events that took place in March 2018. In fact, the government supported the motion without amendment — they did not withdraw their amendment and they did not make an amendment. It is an interesting take on events, in any case.

By amending this motion I put forward today, the government has effectively shown great disrespect, I think, for the people of Yukon by refusing to put a timeline in. I know the Member for Mount Lorne has indicated that it is the fall of 2019 when the overall review of Health and Social Services will be completed, but the government hasn't actually committed to that — neither has the minister, by the way. Yukoners will still be behind the eight ball on their medical travel and still refusing medical treatment because they can't afford the travel. Thanks for that, it is really appreciated and I'm sure Yukoners will appreciate what you've done for them.

Even though the government says it is going to be done by the fall of 2019, what does that mean to Yukoners? Will it mean that in 2019 we are going to see some relief for Yukoners? I don't think so. I think that, even if the review is finished in the fall of 2019, we're not going to see any action until 2020 or right before an election in 2021. I think Yukoners are really, really going to appreciate what you've done for them. Obviously, this is not my motion any longer, so obviously I will not be supporting it.

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. Pillai: Agree

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Agree

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree

Mr. Gallina: Agree

Mr. Adel: Agree

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree

Mr. Hutton: Agree

Mr. Hassard: Disagree

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree

Mr. Cathers: Disagree

Ms. McLeod: Disagree

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree

Ms. Hanson: Disagree

Ms. White: Disagree

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

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion, as amended, carried.

Motion No. 313, as amended, agreed to

Motion No. 288

Clerk: Motion No. 288, standing in the name of Ms. White.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to acknowledge that:

(1) high rent and food costs are making it more difficult for individuals and families on social assistance to find adequate shelter or purchase nutritious food; and

(2) an immediate review of the social assistance rates is required to accurately determine the real cost of living in Whitehorse and the communities.

Ms. White: There are a lot of reasons why we brought forward this motion today, and it's interesting, because it's like I have seen the future. I imagine there is going to be an amendment. I have made the suggestion that it include a date because at least then it is a bit more palatable than an unknown time.

The government has talked a lot about the booming economy and how well things are going for people in the territory, and I think that's fantastic. I do. I think it's great. I think that knowing that our vacancy rate is so low, that our unemployment rate is so low — some of those things are tied together, though.

We talk about rent. There are a couple of members of the House who are rural MLAs and they have rental properties in town. They are in this really lovely, unique situation that, where they rent, it's something that they can afford. Median rent — and it's important that we talk about what median rent is because I hate the median rent. The reason I hate it is because it includes all types of rentals. The average is always really low. For a long time the median rent was kind of like at the \$700 point, and I didn't know a single person who rented a place on their own for \$700. The median rent right now for all

types of rentals for August — and this is from Yukon statistics — is \$1,000 a month. Of course that's according to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics.

If you go on Facebook and look at Yukon property rentals, you find rooms for \$900 a month in people's houses. You find shared accommodation for \$1,000 a month. You find houses for upwards of \$3,000. So when I think about the median rent and it is \$1,000, I wonder who pays, living independently, \$1,000, because if we're talking about the single rooms in the basement of the Barracks, that would fall under \$1,000, but those are literally bedrooms with shared bathrooms and shared kitchens. I wonder what else might be under \$1,000, and I'm often at a loss. You have real conversations as people try to figure out where their housing can be.

It's also important to know that, when we talk about median rent, it doesn't include utilities so it doesn't include the cost of electricity or the cost of heating. I don't know if all members in the Legislative Assembly knew this, but if you collect social assistance and you get your monthly rental allotment and if you are in a unit that has utilities included — there are still some apartments that have electricity and heat included — your housing amount is adjusted for the summertime because social assistance says that your cost of accommodation should be less.

I would suggest that what the landlord does is that they amortize it over a year, so instead of spiking it in the wintertime, they have the same amount all year-round. What this does is it forces social assistance clients to find the money to pay their rent from other pockets of money that they have. In April of this year — it is going to come as no surprise — there was a zero-percent vacancy rate in Dawson City. We know that Dawson has an incredible housing crunch. In April of this year, there was a 3.4-percent vacancy rate in Whitehorse. Even that is pretty low.

When we talk about housing and the importance of making choices, an individual should be able to choose if they want to live alone or if they want to share a house with someone else. I think what we see in the territory now is that this is forced. There is no more opportunity to be on your own if that is what you choose. You are looking at shared accommodation.

I learned a lot of really important lessons through the Yukon Association for Community Living, which says that someone with a disability should have the ability to choose where they live. Whether they choose to stay with their parent or they choose to live with a roommate or whether they choose to live independently with supports — that they have the ability to choose. I feel that it should be across the board. The current social assistance rates as listed to the end of October — in Whitehorse, it is \$558 per month for a single person. Just let that sink in a little bit. In Whitehorse, if you are a family of four, it is \$917 a month. My sister has three kids, and they are a family of five. I can tell you that she is a wizard with budgeting, but that \$917 would be a hard amount for a person or a family who has to pay utilities and heating on top of that, which is provided by social assistance, and that

only goes up to a certain amount. In Whitehorse, it is \$490 a month from November to March in winter, and it is up to \$595 in Whitehorse if you are a family of four, from November to March. The reason why I draw attention to this is that, when I purchased my house in 2012, not knowing what my heating bill would be, I left it at the really balmy — the thermostat was set at 13.5 degrees for the daytime. It went all the way up to 17 degrees when I was home. I can tell you that I had toques, mitts and slippers for people when they came by, and I can tell you that I am glad that I left it like that because my heating bill for more than one month at a time during that time was up to \$900. I live in a 1958 duplex. Just so you know, if you wanted to rent one right now, you are looking at \$2,500 to \$3,000 a month. Mine has now been renovated so it doesn't cost me that much to heat it anymore, but if I was renting, my heating bills would be high.

When we look at the different sorts of housing and we look at the different ways that people heat, even if we were to talk about wood — under social assistance, you can buy wood with your heating money or you can actually try to go out and get it on your own, but there are a whole bunch of other limitations for that. I mentioned in response to the supplementary budget speech that the wood smoke report just came out and it targeted two of my areas. It targeted Range Road north and the Kopper King.

So Range Road north was cleverly named that after consultation in 2012, so that is the part of Range Road that goes past the Takhini Trailer Park, Crow Street, Swan Street, a bunch of condo corporations and then Northland Trailer Park is on the left-hand side. Then the Kopper King — everybody has driven past the Kopper King on the highway.

What those studies weren't able to take into account is that they could identify that there were high particulates, like dangerously high particulates, in the air in the winter, but what it couldn't take into account was the poverty that is within those places. When I talked about the very real life situation — there are people with wood screwed to the side of their trailers and they have plastic on the outside because they are trying to make a vapour barrier, right? You can imagine what it would cost to heat a trailer like that when it essentially is a sieve.

We know social assistance puts clients into hotels in the winter months. I have got a lot of experience with — I would call them long-stay hotels, but anything six months less a day and you don't actually have any kind of rights, either, under Corporate Services or under the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act*. So maybe it's a longer stay hotel but not quite long enough so that you have any kind of power. You know, we have examples of hotel rooms in Whitehorse taking social assistance clients, taking a security deposit, taking the month's rent, evicting those people and then taking in new social assistance clients with the security deposit and their month's rent.

I can tell you that, because you are not in any kind of relationship that is protected under the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act*, you are actually out all that money. Then social assistance says, "We're really sorry, but that's it.

You're not going to get anything else for this month." But when I have asked why social assistance doesn't check out these hotels or why the social workers are not helping these people through this process, I get told that that is actually not within the responsibilities or the purview of the Department of Health and Social Services. That is a concern for me.

When we talk about these longer stay hotels, we're talking about a place with — if you're really lucky it will have a bar fridge and a microwave. If you're not lucky, it will just have a bar fridge and no microwave. If you're really not lucky, you won't have any of those things.

If you can imagine that a good portion of the money that you get from social assistance has to go to cover your accommodation, I guess the good news is that the Salvation Army has a three-time-a-day soup kitchen. So if you're a longer stay hotel client, you are most likely accessing the soup kitchens around town. With the closing of Sacred Heart, it means that there are very limited options. If you're a woman, you can go to Sally and Sisters on Wednesdays and you can also go to Victoria Faulkner, but if you're a man, then your only choice is at the Salvation Army. I would also like to point out that the Salvation Army has banned people, so you can't actually access their soup kitchen. But, hey, when you are paying for your hotel room and you can't afford food, there you go, so that is something.

There are really important numbers — well, I hesitate to call them "numbers". So just to put this on everybody's radar, although we'll be working October 23, there will be Whitehorse Connects. Whitehorse Connects is fantastic. The reason I mention it is because when we talk about the point-in-time count, which I am going to do now, a lot of the folks who I see all the time at Whitehorse Connects would be people who would get picked up by the point-in-time count. For anyone who is not familiar with what a point-in-time count is, it is a 24-hour period — it's a collection time — where there are volunteers throughout the community.

They have training, so it's not just people who are demanding information from others, but they go out into the community and have conversations — guided conversations — with people. The last point-in-time count we had in Whitehorse was on April 17 to 18. I was going to try to look for environmental information at that point in time, but I imagine at that point it was still probably 10 degrees at night — it wasn't very warm. It wasn't summer yet and it was still cold.

In that very specific time on the night of April 17 into April 18, at least 195 people experienced homelessness. So just let that set in: 195 people self-identified as experiencing homelessness at that point. So there is a difference, right? I mean, you always have to kind of figure out how this all works, but there's classifications of levels of homelessness. I say it that way only because it's a bit hard to get your head around the fact that we would even have a classification system, but you have to because there's absolute homelessness and there are others.

When we talk about absolute homelessness, we are talking about people who have no friends or families they

could go to; so we have 33 people at emergency shelters that night and 28 people identified as being unsheltered. This is another thing we should talk about: When you make those choices about where you want to be, for some people the Salvation Army is not the place they want to go; it's not an option. They would rather — it's called "sleeping rough" — stay outside, and people make their homes wherever they choose to be. On that night there were 28 people who were unsheltered.

Then we talk about "provisionally accommodated", which means that you've kind of been picked up by a system. We had 38 people who were in transitional housing, either Betty's Haven, the Salvation Army transitional units or the Yukon Adult Resource Centre. For anyone who is unfamiliar, the Yukon Adult Resource Centre is run by the Salvation Army — it's referred to as the "ARC" — and it's men who are leaving the correctional facility and then they're getting support from the Salvation Army at the ARC. I have talked about this a lot because I was in corrections before I got elected. There's no such place for women — just so you know, if you're a lady leaving corrections, you don't qualify for Kaushee's Place because you're not fleeing violence, and you don't qualify for Betty's Haven because you don't meet their requirements either. The only place you can stay if you are leaving corrections is the Salvation Army or you can go back to where you came from and often, based on what I've learned, it's not so great.

On that night, 15 people were staying at a hotel or motel on the night of the count. This is what we talk about when we talk about the hidden homeless — 56 people were staying at someone else's place. I think it's really important that when we talk about it, that we talk about that, out of those 56 people, some people were staying with strangers. If we don't think there is a sex trade in the Yukon, let me tell you: Unfortunately, there is. So out of that, there were people staying with people they didn't know. Out of those, 25 people were within the public system, so that could be the hospital, it could be the correctional facility, it could be detox — that could be any of those things.

So, when we take a look at this, some of these folks in the point-in-time count are on social assistance. When we talk about the point-in-time count, there were people who were picked up as being insecurely housed who have jobs.

If you can imagine the gargantuan work that would be included — because if you want to talk about the limitations of being able to get a job, how you smell is pretty important. I don't know if you knew or not that you can access the showers at the Canada Games Centre but you pay the daily rate. I believe there are shower facilities at the Salvation Army, but I don't know how that works. There are those challenges. Even at that point in time, there were folks who were working within those numbers.

Something that we should think about in those numbers is that 12 percent of the people who were identified were youth, so they were ages between 15 and 24. I also don't know if you guys knew, but if you're under the age of 15, you actually

can't stay at the emergency youth shelter; you're too young. Let's talk about vulnerable populations, shall we?

Out of those numbers, five percent were over 65. I mean, definitely what we hope for our parents and our grandparents is that they are not at risk of homelessness at that point in time.

Because there is training and because these are really compassionate people who go out to do it — and they often volunteer at things like Whitehorse Connects on October 23 — then they start to have other conversations. They asked people to identify their top barriers to finding housing. The first one was affordability. Across the board, the first thing that people identified was affordability. The second things that they identified were health issues, including disability, addiction and mental health. That's a pretty hard one to stomach. The third one was discrimination. That's also not very nice. I'm not sure if people in the House are aware that although landlords can't say they won't accept social assistance clients, guess what happens. Landlords can not accept social assistance clients. We see that's a form of discrimination right there. It doesn't have to be identified so then you can't do anything about it.

The other thing that was identified was poor housing conditions. I'm not sure if everyone is aware of how bad the bedbug situation is in the city of Whitehorse. Bedbugs are bad. Bedbugs are really, really bad, actually. To know that someone would choose to not go to a place because of the housing condition is an indication.

Out of all these folks who were surveyed, 97 percent of them wanted permanent housing. They just didn't want temporary shelter anymore; they wanted a place to call home, which I appreciate. It's one of the fundamental beliefs I have, that housing is a human right.

That's just accommodation and that's just the city of Whitehorse. I can talk about the city of Whitehorse because this is where I live and this is where I have most of my experience.

The Minister for Community Services tabled the annual living wage. Anyway, there was a document tabled today and they both bear talking about. In 2017, the Anti-Poverty Coalition undertook this task of figuring out what was the cost of healthy eating in the Yukon. I don't think it's going to come as a surprise to someone but it's different depending on the jurisdiction that you're in.

Everything gets compared to Whitehorse because Whitehorse was the cheapest. The Anti-Poverty Coalition hired volunteers or trained volunteers in communities to help them with this. They were across the territory. Anywhere that had a full-time store that was open all the time, then that community would have it. Carmacks has that fantastic gas station and grocery store. Watson Lake obviously has a grocery store.

We go like that — so if your community had a store that would qualify, then you would be on this document.

It bears mentioning that Beaver Creek doesn't have a grocery store. I have friends who live in Beaver Creek and their options are they drive into Alaska or they drive to

Whitehorse. Those are people who are able, but there are social assistance clients in Beaver Creek, so how do they eat? That's a question we should ask.

The cost of healthy eating in Yukon — I was trying to figure out the average weekly cost of a basic healthy diet for a family of four living throughout the territory. It was with the standardized survey tool, so people were given a list and they went to do the shopping so they could figure out what it was. What they found was that for Whitehorse, a family of four could eat healthy. They had really clear things. It was like the Canada Food Guide. You had grains, breads, fruit, vegetables, dairy, fat and sugar — I think that is what it was.

In Whitehorse, it cost \$274.78 a week; Watson Lake was \$348.86, although interestingly enough, all the trucks have to come through Watson Lake to get to Whitehorse, but it was still higher. Dawson City was \$303.56 a week; in Old Crow, our only fly-in community, it was \$524.00 a week.

It's important that we look at what social assistance provides. In Whitehorse, remember the cost was \$274; social assistance provides \$210, so there's a \$64 shortfall there. In Watson Lake, it was \$348 and, in Watson Lake with social assistance, you get \$231, so now we have just crested a \$100 difference. In Old Crow, the cost of healthy eating was \$500 and in Old Crow their food allowance is \$362.

What we're talking about is food insecurity. Food insecurity is real. I'm not sure — I would think everyone in this House is probably pretty good in the kitchen and you would understand that pre-made foods actually often cost less. If you're looking for a quick fix — for example, if I lived in a hotel room, I might be a fan of the Hungry Man meal. Really, over the long term, that's no good for me — if I had a microwave. If I didn't have a microwave, then there would be another issue.

The one thing that all this ties into when we talk about social assistance and we talk about social assistance clients is that the health outcome for people living in poverty is really bad. You suffer in education; you suffer in health; you suffer across the board. The further in poverty you are, the worse your health outcome is going to be.

We can look at all those. There are so many different things.

Right now, I am working really hard to help someone get dental surgery tomorrow. We're going to talk about dental emergencies, because social assistance will pay up to \$1,500 a year for dental emergencies. It sounds like it's an okay amount, but I can tell you that there are a lot of things that go over \$1,500. It's a limit. Social assistance will say, well, we're going to try to negotiate with your dentist to see if we can bring it down. We're going to negotiate; we're going to see what number we can do and what we can come up with. You think okay, I guess that's one option. Then social assistance will say, well, can you spread the treatment over two fiscal years? Well, maybe you could or maybe the emergency is such that you actually need the help now and it's going to cost more than \$1,500.

I still struggle with this. I don't understand why dental isn't covered in health care. If you don't have a mouth that

can handle chewing good, healthy food for you, then your health is going to be affected. Dental health and physical health are associated, but dental is discretionary spending within the Department of Health and Social Services.

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One good indication is Riverstone Dental in the last number of years has done a free dental day. They set up a wall tent with a wood stove in it, which is really generous of them, because people wait for such a long time. They set that up and all their staff volunteer that day and they will do what they can. You can get a teeth cleaning, a filling or a tooth pulled and they will try to do one of those things for you. People line up in hordes. The clinic opens at 8:00 and people are standing outside by much, much earlier than that.

This hasn't even touched on disability. If you have a disability, you can collect an additional \$250 a month. It never changes — even if you your needs increase, it actually doesn't change. The fascinating thing for me is, if you have a permanent disability, it doesn't matter, because every calendar year you have to go to your doctor to get your form filled out so you can prove that you're disabled. It seems like a fascinating use of both a doctor's and a client's time. So \$250 a month and that doesn't change.

When we talk about incidentals, this includes things like toilet paper, soap and anything that's not covered by your food allowance and, for a family of four, you can get up to \$169 a month. Clothing — there is a clothing allowance that you can access occasionally but, for more than last year, there hasn't been a thrift store. If we want to know what the Salvation Army thrift store closing down did for people who live in poverty, let's just say it was really hard for them to get clothes. Whitehorse Connects filled in that gap when they could; places like Victoria Faulkner did — absolutely — and Kaushee's was taking clothes donations. The ILC was taking donations for teenagers. We're relieved that it's open now on Saturdays, the new thrift store.

What these things don't talk about is they don't cover things like cell phones or transit passes or winter clothing, medications. If you're on a medically prescribed diet — maybe you have, not a gluten intolerance, but maybe you can't actually eat anything with flour. If we think that you can afford that on these prices, that's crazy.

After you have been on social assistance for a set period of time, and if you should be so lucky as to get a temporary break — so maybe you take a temporary job — that then disqualifies you from social assistance and you actually have to start over. You have to go through that entire process again, including identifying your needs. There are fascinating examples in our community about people who are on social assistance with disabilities. They have disabilities, but they want to participate in community — man, do they want to participate in community. You know what? The system does

everything in its power actually to keep someone who wants to work down, because you can earn — it doesn't matter; it's not spread over a calendar year, but at a certain point in time, your earnings can spike and you will be disqualified from social assistance and you won't know until your next cheque is supposed to come in.

Even though we have people with disabilities who are trying really hard to be self-sufficient — even self-employed, for example — they get cut off, because they exceeded an amount for the year — it is not regarded. Just so you know, if you have a disability and you are on social assistance and you have your own business, you aren't allowed to write off any of your business expenses. Those are all part of your earnings. It all gets counted in the same thing.

This is something that people might not know: wild meat, wild game — if your family member was to give you a moose, that could be considered as income and could be used against you at social assistance. If you have a garden and you are able to grow fruits — not fruits, I guess; maybe tomatoes are fruits — if you're growing vegetables, that can be used against you and can affect your income. If you are a family of four and you have a teenager who gets a part-time job — let's say, in a fast food restaurant — that can affect your ability and your household income — your teenager, who you want to have a job because you want them to be self-sufficient.

When I am talking about this — with the distinct privilege of being here for a couple of years now, I have met people who fall within all of these spectrums. I have an example of a family, some with a disability, who applied for the furniture allowance. With special permission, you can get up to \$500 a year per person for furniture. Do you know how much a bed costs? It is typically more than \$500, but that is neither here nor there. So there was an application made for furniture, and they were both approved and got the \$500 furniture allowance. It got deposited into the mother's bank account and guess what happened the next month? She was cut off social assistance because obviously she had gotten a job, and it was the social assistance department that had written the cheques for the \$500 to get furniture, so she had to start again — that is crazy-making.

When we talk about a review, it is because this is a real-world thing — it affects people. There have to be times when there have to be exceptions to rules. What I am dealing with right now is with dental surgery, and that has to be an exception. There has to be a time when we look at a human and say, "Okay, well this is obviously a crisis point right now and so we are going to take care of this and see you through the other side." My colleague here told me at one point that, according to whatever financial wizard, I was supposed to have six months of all my bills saved up. I was supposed to have a six-month padding — six months of my mortgage, of my electrical, of my house insurance, car insurance — all of those things — six months of all of that stuff saved up. I have been doing this job for seven years, and I haven't got six months saved up yet — and I don't live lavishly, just in case anyone was thinking about that.

So many people live so close to poverty and something can happen. You get sick and you lose your job. You hurt yourself and you can't work for six weeks. What happens then? A lot of folks on social assistance never intended to be there, and there are so many things in the system that are designed to keep people down that I think we need to look at it. We need to look at it in a different way and figure out how, instead of being a hindrance or a barrier, it does become the hand-up that it was designed to be.

So when we talk about a review, there are a lot of complicated parts about social assistance and I don't even pretend to know half of them, but I do know if you have a disability and it's not one where you are going to grow a leg — you know, you're not going to have the disability anymore — then it seems weird to me that we just don't calculate that as a permanent disability and accept it, but we do ask people to go and get it checked out.

I look forward to hearing other people's thoughts on it. Like I said, I think I saw into the future and hopefully my colleague will put a time frame on it, which I would be appreciative of. I look forward to more conversation about the issue. I actually got an e-mail from someone who was in the gallery and saw the Order Paper and said, what about like a photo card from the government that would give you 10 percent off at a grocery store? Great idea. You know, when we talk about the City of Whitehorse, why don't we talk about making sure that people who are on social assistance or live below a certain income line, within poverty, have access to the Canada Games Centre? Holy doodle — you want to talk about seniors and health? You want to talk about using that facility? Let's get people up there in the middle of the day. Any kid should be able to access the Canada Games Centre. I'm going on a bit of a tangent, but it is my opportunity right now.

I owned the Midnight Sun from 2006 to 2009. I was there for the opening day of the Canada Games Centre and it took very little amount of time for me to realize that there are a lot of little kids who were hanging out at the Canada Games Centre because it was the safest place for them to be. I told the staff, I said, "Look, you can do one of two things. You can either keep chasing them away from stuff, or you can give them a job to do and let them in." Any kid should have access to the Canada Games Centre, no matter what their economic background is. That is something that we could work with the City of Whitehorse on.

Any senior should have access. I had a senior who had a locked shoulder and, through the ElderActive society, he was able to have a pass for the Canada Games Centre, and then something changed and he could no longer afford that pass and his shoulder locked up. He used to go to the "lazy river", but he couldn't do that anymore.

There are opportunities. I don't know the answers — I'm not a social worker. I do know people, though, and I know that, for the most part, they want an opportunity, right? Everybody's success is going to be different, but everybody deserves that chance to be successful, so I look forward to hearing what others have to say, and I look forward to a review of social assistance soon, very soon.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would just like to begin by thanking the member opposite for her motion and her passion and compassion on this issue. She has been stalwart in raising issues for those with lesser means and it is most appreciated. I was thinking back as she was presenting her perspective today on the motion. She talked about sleeping rough and I remembered back to a time — I think it was in 2009, right around now — when the Leader of the Third Party and then-Mayor of Whitehorse, Ms. Buckway and I and I think a young Morgan Wienberg did an exercise that was led by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition as part of their Poverty and Homeless Awareness Week to couch surf for, I think it was, four or five days. I remember Ms. Weinberg decided to sleep rough and so did I.

I remember sleeping out near the river for one of the nights. It was wet out; it was October, so it was pretty cold. I went with a friend because she had some experience, and she showed me how to dumpster dive and get some food and cardboard and to try to stay warm. Then I spent another night sleeping at the old Salvation Army, and it was way worse. So I'm echoing the point of our colleague, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King. It was my first time staying overnight; I had volunteered often enough at the Salvation Army, but staying overnight there, what you found was that there was a lot of disruption, a lot noise. I didn't get one of the few beds in the back; you got the chairs; they line them up with each other and it wasn't a good sleep at all. Mostly it was because people kept coming in and things got very disrupted. In the morning, I talked with one of the staff members and I asked that person whether or not that had been a particularly disruptive night. He said no, that was pretty quiet. So you try to think to yourself, how could someone who is dealing with a lack of income or access to food or services or living close to the edge or dealing with a mental health issue — how would they be able to deal with it? Because after several days, I felt just completely beat up. It was hard.

So I would just want to start by acknowledging that the situation for folks who have lower means is incredibly difficult and hard to empathize with. To put yourself in those shoes is very difficult to do because, even in that moment when I was doing it for several days, I still knew in the back of my mind I had a complete social safety net back there. I had the comfort of understanding that it wasn't going to be for the long term for me. You know, I gained a better understanding — I could never gain a full understanding. I'm going to return to that theme later on in this discussion, because it's something that the Member for Takhini-Kopper King mentioned about the complexities of the system. It is a serious situation and I think we should begin by acknowledging that.

I would also like to thank the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition and other organizations around the territory that do great work at trying to build more inclusive communities and more respectful communities and more dignity. They've been responsible for many groups. I think they were part of helping develop the Mental Health Association of Yukon, and I think

that came out of there. They also have done many of the reports I tabled today, and I am going to try to talk about those things. I would like to thank the member opposite again for noting that October 23 is Whitehorse Connects day. It's a great day to go and volunteer; it's a great day to meet citizens — Yukoners — who have a different reality from our own.

To begin with, I just want to comment a little bit on the motion. First of all, the first part of the motion talks about high rent leading to challenges for families on social assistance finding shelter. I think that's true. The cost of rent goes up. In fact, I think it's the single most pertinent driver here. Listening to the researcher speak on the radio this morning or yesterday, that was noted for the 2018 living wage report and food costs. Yes, of course. I read with interest the 2017 report put out by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition.

Food security is an issue — or food insecurity. As I looked at that report and it talked about the folks from Carcross buying food there, I mean, one of the realities I think for many communities that are close to Whitehorse is that they tend to use Whitehorse as their hub. Much as I shop for some things at Montana Services, I don't know how well-used it is as a true grocery store.

For me, I think the first part of this motion is just pointing out or stating truths. In the second part of it, I got confused, because it says that we need a review of social assistance rates in order to accurately determine the real cost of living in Whitehorse and the communities. I went down today to speak with the Third Party to just try to get some clarity from their perspective. The thing that they noted for me is that number one, they want to see the social assistance system reviewed and consideration given to the rates to deal with the challenges that we have here in the territory. Number two, if I heard correctly — and if not, I hope that they will correct me — is that the cost of living in Whitehorse and the communities should be the metric that we use rather than something like inflation or CPI as it's indexed to now, which isn't the best indicator for those people who are low income, so that there is a better notion. I had some concerns with the wording of it, but if that's the intent, I appreciate that intent.

Let me just move on then to sharing some perspectives on the low-income situation here in the territory. First of all, our government is committed to a holistic approach to reducing poverty in the Yukon. We are working closely with community groups and other governments to address the needs of all Yukoners.

Yukon social assistance benefit rates are, despite the concerns that are raised — there are many and I appreciate them — I think it's worth noting to begin with that our social assistance rates are among the highest in the country. Our earned income exemptions, which support people re-entering the workforce, are also greater than many other jurisdictions. I think the argument that needs to be made is whether or not they are adequate for the cost of living that exists here.

I will also note that we have higher benefit rates in our communities that are outside of Whitehorse than we do, and there's a real challenge in trying to understand those differences. There are higher costs some of the time for our

communities, but the biggest driver, which is housing, might be higher here, although we don't have full information on it. When I first landed in this role, I turned to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics to try to get that information.

By the way, at that time, I knew that the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition had come up with their first report, the 2016 report, on a living wage. I asked that the Bureau of Statistics make sure to make as much data as we have available to the Anti-Poverty Coalition to ensure that they were getting the most robust information that we could. My perspective is that you undermine a democracy if you don't make sure that we're fairly informed.

I think it's worth noting that, as I alluded to earlier, here in the Yukon, our rates are indexed to inflation, so there is a way in which they are increased over time. That's one of not many jurisdictions with that indexing. I appreciate that the members opposite have put forward a suggestion that a better index than CPI would be the change to living wage.

Let me turn for a second and talk about food security. The motion talks about food, and I just wanted to mention a few things. I turned to the Agriculture branch to ask for a bit of information. First of all, agriculture has been increasing here in the territory. I spoke with the director and he said that — and I'm paraphrasing here, Mr. Speaker — more or less from 20 years ago to 10 years ago, agriculture doubled, and from 10 years ago to just a couple of years ago, it doubled again, and it is poised to make that kind of change one more time.

I know we have been making investments in the territory — for example, around the local food strategy — and we are trying hard to support the development of local markets to see locally grown food getting into those markets — investment in greenhouses and the production of market vegetables. Overall, the goal here — and that isn't always going to help those people who are lowest income, but what I have learned in dealing with very complex problems like poverty, which are very difficult to resolve, is that you have to treat the spectrum. For example, with housing — at some point here I'll talk about the need to address the spectrum of housing, because if what happens is that we get a shortage of lots — which isn't really where I see the lowest income going — but then that spikes housing prices and that then drives up rental housing prices, which drives up affordability. If we don't pay attention to the spectrum, we risk dealing with the challenges at a specific end of the spectrum.

The same is true with agriculture. The upside of this is that, if we focus on agriculture, we really get almost all the wins we can.

It's good for the local economy; it's good for food security; it's good for reducing our dependency on food that is arriving from Outside, which is good for transportation, which is good for the reduction of greenhouse gases. It's just good all-round to have good, locally developed, healthy food more accessible. I believe that's true for low-income Yukoners as well as all Yukoners.

Let me move to housing. In listening to the researcher speak about the report on the living wage — the latest; this is the third in three years — and also in reading the report itself,

it seems like the number one driver — or challenge, if you like — with respect to poverty is housing. I think I heard the member opposite discuss that and talk about affordability and the condition of housing as being number one and number four, from talking with those with lived experience.

In reading the report itself — and listening — it looked like the number one issue was housing. Let me discuss a few things around housing. First of all, with respect to social housing — no, let me just keep going this way, Mr. Speaker, because I will probably get it wrong.

Under the guidance of the housing action plan, we have undertaken strategic initiatives and partnerships to increase affordable housing in Yukon, and we have made commitments involving the mandates of several of our departments to improve access to affordable housing across the housing continuum — in particular, the lead is the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, but also the Minister for Highways and Public Works and me as the Minister for Community Services.

In this year's budget highlights, we included an overall \$40-million investment — it was \$39.7 million — in housing and new building lots, and this included \$6 million for affordable housing — allocated through \$2.4 million to a northern housing fund and \$3.6 million for a housing initiatives fund. I know, from speaking with the minister, that she is looking to leverage those funds as much as possible to create even more investment in affordable housing.

We're also committed to the Housing First approach. I recognize that our first buildout is happening now and it is 16 units. It happens to be right across the street from where I stay in town with my mother-in-law. I see the work ongoing and I hear it, and I'm very happy that we're there. I want to note this. This is our first time having Housing First, and I'm just really appreciative that we're getting there. I don't claim that 16 units will be enough, ultimately, but I think it is incredibly important that this initiative is underway.

This 16-unit Housing First building will have supports, and I believe this is one of the best ways to get at the hardest to house. There are other initiatives.

I was able to go when we were pouring the cement for the tiny home community — and that included moving the Steve Cardiff house just a couple of blocks away from the Housing First building. It is being led by Blood Ties Four Directions, who were really happy that they were involved.

I am going to move now to talk about social assistance. I just want to acknowledge that it is really important to tackle both the issues of food security and housing security. I agree with the member opposite that those are important issues.

Let me talk about social assistance. Let me do it by making some introductory remarks and then let me dive through the living wage report itself. First of all, income support services provide support for more than 1,000 individuals and families throughout the Yukon. Our social workers work with clients on multiple issues. The housing and Community Outreach Services team provides ongoing outreach and intensive supports to those clients who are assessed as having the highest needs. We have committed to

this important work through Yukon-specific initiatives such as the housing action plan for the Yukon, *Forward Together*, *Yukon Mental Wellness Strategy* and the Safe at Home plan. Some of these plans are led by us, and we support some where others have taken the lead. It is really important that, when you deal with the issues of poverty, you do a whole-of-community approach as much as possible because the solutions, in order for them to work — if you don't work together, you just cannot achieve the same amount as you would by working individually. That includes being supportive of those with lived experience to be involved in that decision-making and planning.

Canada's first poverty reduction strategy was released this last August and captured the complexity of poverty through three pillars, including: dignity, opportunity and inclusion as the second, and the third pillar as resiliency and security. We signed on to be part of that. An important aspect of addressing poverty includes ensuring that basic needs — such as safe, affordable housing, healthy food and health care — are met. That is how it was identified and we agree with that. We are working hard to ensure that Yukoners have more access to these services. Having said that, we understand and I understand that issues related to poverty are extremely complex and that more has to be done in order to fully address the very real, systemic barriers and issues that people face.

First, let me talk about that complexity. I thought that the Member for Takhini-Kopper King articulated it quite well. She discussed clawbacks, disabilities, changes, discrimination and a spectrum of issues. The system is complex. There are a lot of issues to try to address. When she talked, she used the phrase "crazy making", talking about when you come into the system and you see that there is a lack of flexibility.

We want to ensure that there are exceptions and we build in that flexibility — that we still need some tests of fairness, dignity, inclusion and security, and I know that she would be supportive of that.

By the way, she also mentioned the determinants of health. I have had conversations directly with Dr. Brendan Hanley, who is our chief medical officer and he has said the same thing to me — that if you're looking for determinants of health, one of the most significant determinants is income.

Let me turn now to the report — the 2018 living wage report — because if I understood the intent of the members opposite, it is really about trying to use that as an index, rather than CPI. There is some great stuff in that report and I would just like to go through it here today.

Their first recommendation is to renew and implement a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy for the Yukon. We agree with this and, again, when we had anticipated and taken a look at the review of Health and Social Services, we saw that within that review, that we felt this was the right tool to use to look at poverty, treat it as part of that and ensure that our social support system continues to meet the needs of Yukoners. So a comprehensive review will offer recommendations related to programs and services offered for low-income Yukoners. This may include the modernization of

the *Social Assistance Act* and regulations to allow for alignment.

I heard the Member for Watson Lake express her concern that these things would move too slowly. Respectfully, I saw that there was a 2008 review of our health care system and there were eight years in which the Yukon Party had the opportunity to make some of those changes as part of those recommendations. I understand that it is a difficult problem. I understand that it is complex, but I didn't see those changes come. I heard members opposite discuss that they hadn't changed in their time, or since their time, I think it was. I agree that it is challenging, but I think the right place to start is a review; however, the review that we have been anticipating all along was part of this overall review — again noting that there are relationships for social assistance along with other issues that we face. We had thought the correct approach was to treat it holistically, to allow for alignment of the Yukon with other jurisdictions and to ensure that the program operates according to the national best practices that are relevant to the Yukon.

The second recommendation in the 2018 living wage report was to invest in social and affordable housing to reduce homelessness and wait-lists for social and senior housing. Under the guidance of the Yukon Housing Action Plan, we have undertaken strategic initiatives and partnerships to increase affordable housing in the Yukon and we have made commitments involving the mandates of several of our departments.

We talked about this year's budget and money that we had put in there and the \$6 million specifically for affordable housing. I know that the minister will be coming back at some point with announcements about ways in which that money has leveraged. I'm just letting that go. I've already discussed the Housing First initiative and others. We are committed to investing in social and affordable housing. I think that a review will help us to understand whether that investment is significant enough, and we will continue to work with our partners to see the continued investment in affordable housing. I look forward to hearing from the Minister of Health and Social Services and Yukon Housing Corporation to continue to expand on that.

The third recommendation out of the 2018 Living Wage Report was to develop a comprehensive transportation strategy for Whitehorse — well, that, of course, is a municipal initiative. I know that they have recently done a transportation strategy and I know that I sat down personally with the mayor and gave support on that. I appreciate that they're moving forward with it and am happy to continue. We just signed our memorandum of understanding with the Association of Yukon Communities last week and, with that, we talk about our principles and how to work together, and I think they are the right lead. I am not trying to abdicate responsibility; I just think that's the right jurisdiction and we will work supportively.

The fourth recommendation by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition's living wage report talks about subsidization of public transit passes. The one thing that I can say about this —

again, it is a municipal jurisdiction — is that we are investing money in public transit. We have announced that \$13.3 million over the next 10 years will go towards public transit within the City of Whitehorse. Generally, that's for capital investment, like buses. I hope that these will be buses with lower operation and maintenance costs. As we get into the future, we're going to see ones which rely less on fossil fuels and that may lead to a reduction in their operating costs. Certainly they don't have to put money towards that capital infrastructure because we're able to provide it. Hopefully that then can translate into the opportunity for them to have the means to be able to support it as they are able.

The fifth recommendation is talking about minimum wage. Specifically, it suggests increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. This year our government committed to a minimum wage review and this past spring I requested that the Yukon Employment Standards Board conduct a review of the Yukon's minimum wage and provide advice to myself as the minister and to us as Cabinet on any recommended changes to minimum wage rates. That is underway and it's nearing completion. I was in contact with the board this week because I passed them the living wage report to make sure they had it in their possession. They wrote back to say thanks and that they already had it — that's great. I want them to do that work.

I also want to state that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been working diligently not to direct them. I want them to do that work and to come back with their recommendations, so I am not standing up to say one way or the other what their recommendations should be. I will state for the House that, in their last letter to me, they indicated that they thought they would be done toward the end of November, so I'm looking forward to getting those results by the end of next month.

The sixth recommendation was to enhance the Yukon child benefit by increasing the annual maximum benefit and to tie increases to inflation to the CPI. The government's new poverty reduction strategy includes initiatives to reduce poverty through the Canada child benefit program. There are a number of ways in which we support families with children. One of those ways is by reducing costs associated with childcare. This helps parents to overcome barriers to employment imposed by childcare responsibilities and to re-enter the labour market. High quality, accessible and affordable childcare is a priority for our government. More than \$4 million of the \$7 million in funding under the early learning and childcare bilateral agreement is being used to improve the accessibility and affordability of children in care in the Yukon.

With respect to early learning and childcare, as a result of this finding, we have taken a number of steps, including increasing the amount of the direct operating grant that each childcare program receives, moving forward with the development of culturally appropriate curriculum, creating an early childhood education bursary program to provide Yukoners with funds toward early childhood education studies, and increasing the financial support toward childcare

fees available to grandparents who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. So we do agree.

If I can just again focus for a moment — when the lead researcher of the report put out the report, he talked about those two issues as being key: the cost of affordable housing and the cost of childcare. I do think it's important that we continue to work on those fronts. I know that we have a social housing evaluation underway. I know that we are currently providing over 700 social housing units for Yukon families, including seniors and non-seniors in communities across the territory. I know that over 100 households receive rent supplement subsidies from the Yukon Housing Corporation across the territory.

I just want to again say thank you to the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition for their work on developing the living wage report. One of the things that I will note for us is that this is the third report. The 2016 report listed the living wage as \$19.12 an hour. The second report from last year listed it as \$18.26 an hour. This current report lists the living wage — here in Whitehorse, anyway — as being \$18.57 an hour. One of the several reasons that those things move around is that, of course, our minimum wage has gone up somewhat over that same time.

There has been inflation over that same time. There have been changes to the costs of food. There have been the programs that I was discussing. For example, the Canada child benefit program assisted in bringing those costs down. There are ways to change those costs.

I will note, as the lead researcher noted today, that — and as I have said here in the past — a living wage is a different thing than a minimum wage. I will just make that statement. Of course, if the minimum wage goes up, that will have an effect for those who are earning the minimum wage and that will bring them closer to a living wage.

I said that I would talk a little bit about the complexity of the situation. As the Member for Takhini-Kopper King described the situation, she talked about how complex it is, even to begin with, whether that is because of the circumstances and the situation of those people but also because of the system itself. We completely agree that there is a need to review the program to try to ensure that it is adequate for our citizens and to work toward addressing the issue of poverty broadly here in the territory. It will need to be part of a broader strategy, of course — that must be clear now — because of all of the pressures that we have discussed. We want it to always be fair and maintain dignity, inclusion and security of our citizens.

I had a conversation with the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, and she asked, if I was going to propose an amendment, that I please add in it a specific date. I, unfortunately, did not prepare that ahead of time. I am going to propose an amendment, but I will stand up and say again that the review of our health care system, including the review of social assistance and social assistance rates, has begun. It hasn't made the Engage Yukon site yet because that is yet to come. It is the internal work that has begun. The information that I have received from the department is that they are

working toward the fall of 2019 for completion. I want to acknowledge that it is a large task.

I would like to respond a little bit to the Member for Watson Lake. Her comments that the Minister of Health and Social Services hasn't stood up and said that yet — well, I'm hopeful that we will get that here when she does speak to this motion. It's not some desire to shy away from talking about it. I read from her speaking notes. I assume that it's fair to come out.

The other thing I want to talk about in response to the Member for Watson Lake is that, yes, after you do a review and you articulate something — if, for example, what you decide is that you have to do some amendments to legislation, well yeah, that does take time and there are processes. I wish that government could move faster. It isn't always the case. I think there are necessary requirements for us, especially in a legislative process that we have built, that require the diligence of time and the responsibility of all of us to weigh in on these things, including the ability to engage Yukoners.

Yeah, governments take longer to get at them. That doesn't take away from the desire to see change and the desire to make improvements. I will just say that my experience in working with the government — and, of course, I have a closer relationship with those who are on this side of the House — but my sense is that all people in this House have integrity and are working hard to try to improve the lives of Yukoners. I really don't think that it comes down to partisan politics about whether or not we wish to improve social assistance for Yukoners and the lives of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to propose an amendment.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move:

THAT Motion No. 288 be amended by:

(1) removing the words after the phrase “Government of Yukon to”; and

(2) substituting the phrase “ensure the government's income support regime is reviewed as part of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review” for them.

Speaker: The minister has the requisite copies for distribution. If a page could please distribute the copies, I will review the proposed amendment with Mr. Clerk.

I have had an opportunity to review the proposed amendment to Motion No. 288, as proposed by the Minister of Community Services, with Mr. Clerk and can advise that the proposed amendment is procedurally in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes:

THAT Motion No. 288 be amended by:

(1) removing all the words after the phrase “Government of Yukon to”; and

(2) substituting the phrase “ensure the government's income support regime is reviewed as part of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review” for them.

The proposed amended motion would read as follows:

It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure the government's income support regime is reviewed as part of the comprehensive Health and Social Services review.

Minister of Community Services, on the amendment.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I won't speak for too much longer on the amendment. I have spoken for some time on the original motion. I want to just discuss for a moment, from a high level, what we have been trying to do here. The members opposite had asked for a review of medical travel. We agreed, but want to do it as part of this overall piece. The members opposite have asked for a review of social assistance rates with a different way to index them. We agree, but we want to do it as part of this overall piece.

I believe in my heart that all the people here want to see these reviews done. I sense from comments by the members opposite that their concern is that there is no definitiveness to it and that the scope is too broad. It is our goal, though, to try to see this review through, knowing that the scope is broad and wanting to see it in a holistic fashion. Even as I heard the Member for Takhini-Kopper King talk about the need for flexibility, one of those ways that you create the flexibility is to see improvements in one area by adjusting another.

For example, when we talked about trying to have better health outcomes for those citizens, we said, "It's not good to put them in acute care if what they need is continuing care." Even though there's a cost to continuing care, it's a cost-savings from treating them through acute care. We said that dealing with our citizens in a way that keeps them healthy in their homes costs money and you have to invest there, but it saves you from dealing with continuing care. There are ways in which we can create both a better system, in this case, for social assistance and find the ability to provide more service or opportunity because we've generated a better system that is more flexible.

However, I appreciate that the members opposite may not be supportive of this amendment. I hear their concern. I want to be respectful that their perspective may be different, but I believe that overall we are seeking the same thing; we're just using a different tool to get there — that is our desire.

I thank the members opposite for the suggestion. I didn't get it out of the motion itself but through the conversation with them, which is that they believe that the living wage as an index is a better tool for —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Sorry, maybe I have that wrong. Whatever the suggestion is about how to index social assistance so that it is doing a better job, we are open to those suggestions. That is fine. It's great that it can come in as part of the review. I would never try to prescribe it. I would look to let the review do its work and let those people who are involved with the review do that. But I think there was a good suggestion there.

Doing this is also following the recommendation of the Financial Advisory Panel report — something that the members opposite have been asking us and encouraging us to do. We have also stated that, through this, we hope to improve social assistance.

Ms. Hanson: I just want to start out that I want to be respectful, but I am frustrated. I'm not frustrated with the misunderstanding that I think is at the base with respect to the minister opposite's comments with respect to what my colleague, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, and I in putting forward this motion are speaking about with respect to any suggestion or linking of social assistance to the living wage. That wasn't the intention. The intention or the discussion was that at least with the living wage you have a means of determining how that shifts over time. Just as he said, there are different factors that play at hand.

What we're talking about is rebasing social assistance so that when it's indexed as it is right now, it's indexed based on a wholly inadequate base to start with so there's no correlation between a living wage and income assistance. It's the methodology that we're talking about and getting a better methodology for establishing it.

Quite frankly, though, my frustration is much deeper than that. In 1975, I started working as a social worker in Prince Edward Island.

Two years later, I worked on a diocese and social justice committee report as a social worker working for the province on social assistance rates. We have been talking about keeping people poor in this country for decades. We have had provincial and federal governments do piles and piles — you could fill this Chamber with the reports that have been done on poverty in this country. We had all parties of the Canadian Parliament in 1985 commit to eliminating child poverty by the year 2000. We can study these things to death. We've done it.

In this Chamber, there are people who attended, in January 2010, a session with Senator Hugh Segal — a Conservative senator who, along with Art Eggleton, a Liberal senator, had done a landmark report on poverty in Canada. It was to launch the social inclusion and poverty reduction strategy for the Government of Yukon.

Poor people are still poor eight years later because we're talking about it. We're not even paying attention to the studies that have been done. The cost of poverty in Yukon, December 2010 — the price tag of poverty at that time was between \$71 million and \$93 million a year. That's equivalent to 5.2 to 6.8 percent of the gross domestic product. You can sit around and talk about if it's a nanopenny here or there to increase somebody's allowance. These are fundamental structural things. There are costs to us keeping people poor. So you can go on and say we're going to have another working group that is going to do another study but, in the interim, people are poor and they're not living in a situation where they can make the choice to take advantage — and I fully agree with all the initiatives that we're trying to do as a territory in increasing local food security, and there are some amazing things going on around this territory, but if you're in poverty, you can go to

the farmer's market and buy food there. You can barely make it to the food bank to access food there.

To suggest that putting it off for yet another — this is ignoring — and I'm trying to be respectful. I understand that the members opposite, for the most part, are new to being legislators but you are not new to being Canadians. You are not new to understanding the realities that people are facing every day. The fact that people demonstrate that they're not aware of the work that has been done by so many dedicated people over the years in this territory — at least over the last 15 years. That shouldn't be coming out in two years — by now, in terms of understanding and incorporating — but to suggest that we need to rebase and start all over again with the same studies — I will imagine that I can go back and I will look at those studies and they're going to say the same thing that I have read over the last 25 years or more in this territory.

I'm frustrated that we're being asked to ignore the realities, the everyday realities of people today. If there had been a modicum of seriousness from the member opposite, he might have suggested that there be a review of an interim rate increase pending the outcome of this comprehensive review, which, as he has indicated himself, is no guarantee — there is no guarantee being given — that this will be completed within one year. So that is faint comfort to someone who is living in real poverty in this territory.

If the minister and the minister responsible for Health and Social Services and the Minister of Finance were serious — when we talk about 1,000 people who are living on social assistance — maybe they would be looking at really serious systemic change. Maybe they would be embracing the proposals that have been put forward across this country and including from the Conference Board of Canada that actually suggested that Yukon, as a government, consider — because of the size of us, the scale of us — being a Canadian experiment in basic income. Again, Senator Eggleton and Senator Segal — five or six years after the report when they realized how frustrating it was to see neither the federal, nor provincial, nor territorial governments making any concrete movements to eliminating aspects of poverty — came out — pretty radical for a Conservative Senator and a Liberal Senator to come out fully endorsing basic income and taking away the stigma of income assistance because, for god's sake, there is stigma associated every time someone has to apply — and reapply, as my colleague said — when you have a permanent disability and you are told to go back year after year after year to prove that you are still permanently disabled.

So I'm frustrated, Mr. Speaker, because I am hearing the same things I've heard in this Legislative Assembly for almost eight years. That hasn't changed.

I am going to continue to press, with my colleague, for government to actually say, "We're going to do this and we're going to do this by..." then. Until then, it is empty words — simply empty words.

Ms. White: I thank my colleague for that. There are times when I think that those are big shoes that are one day

going to need to be filled, and I'm going to have to do a lot of reading if that's something I'm going to try to do.

When I look at what this will change — I'm just going to put this on the record now, because when the vote comes forward, I want it to be known that this is not the motion that I wrote. I appreciate the intent but, when we talk about putting it off into the future — maybe by the fall, this time next year, the review will be done and then there will be changes, and then we're talking 2020. If we talk about the ability to be fluid and flexible and to move quickly — as far as government is concerned — do something, we'd be looking at doing something sooner rather than later. I just want it to be on the record that, when it gets pulled up in the future and it's got my name on it, the motion has been changed. That was not my motion. I do thank the minister for his comments and I know his intent is good, but we come at it from two different angles.

I'll leave it at that.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the proposed amendment?

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. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Frost: Agree.

Mr. Gallina: Agree.

Mr. Adel: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Mr. Hutton: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. Hanson: Disagree.

Ms. White: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the amendment carried.

Amendment to Motion No. 288 agreed to

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the main motion as amended?

Ms. McLeod: I would like to thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing forward this motion. It is kind of hard for any member to stand in this House today and

not be able to acknowledge that prices are rising. Rent is higher than ever and is reflected, not only Whitehorse, but in rural communities. Costs of food and other necessities have been increasing and Yukoners are worried about the impending cost of food, goods, fuel and services with the implementation of a Liberal carbon tax. The carbon tax is going to hit all Yukoners in the pocketbook. It is going to create hardships. This government has yet to disclose to Yukoners how the rebate structure will look, how it will affect their finances.

During the election, the Premier promised that Yukoners would not lose their hard-earned money, that 100 percent would be rebated back to their wallets. Then, earlier this year, we heard him flip-flop on that promise. There is talk of the government undertaking a full review of Health and Social Services this year, although we may need to remind government that it's October. We are running out of year. We also know that the government is looking at cutting departmental budgets by two percent. Is Health and Social Services going to be caught up in that cut? I certainly hope not. There are many areas that would benefit from a departmental review to ensure programs and services are up to date and serving Yukoners to their full potential.

Today we spoke about a promised review of the medical travel program. It is getting lost in the discussion, and I don't want to see this discussion on social assistance rates get lost in that departmental review, but clearly government sees it differently. Perhaps the government could still separate out these programs, could still initiate some early reviews, because it is completely up to the government's ability to do that. Even though they have amended these motions to really mean nothing, they can still serve Yukoners by moving these forward in advance of some future airy date of when this might come to some kind of fruition and we can ensure some proper consultation, we can ensure proper oversight and evaluation of any reviews.

The government should undertake a review of social service rates now to ensure that the people are able to cover basic costs for everyday items.

As I have said — and it should be no surprise that I think this can move ahead of the full review, because we have nothing on that — it's up to the government. I will not be supporting the government's new motion. I think it is rather astounding that government has decided to take this avenue to treat opposition members the way they are.

So thank you for that and good day.

Hon. Ms. Frost: I am honoured to stand up today to speak to the issue before us. I would like to acknowledge that we do want to see the review proceed. There was never an indication that we did not want that to happen — very much so. I think it is a good idea and we want to see it through. When we look at advancing, of course, the changes, we're doing that now with respect to policy changes to try to address some of the opportunities that we have and appreciate the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing the motion forward. It not only offers us an opportunity to have a robust

discussion about the care, about the equity and transparency for all citizens of Yukon — I most certainly want to see adjustments and amendments brought forward to reflect the rural communities. We know that, of course, nutrition and nutrition baskets in our communities — disparities for sure.

We know that there hasn't been a review of the income support processes for quite a long time. We will consider through this process and make sure that we tie it into the review that we will be conducting in the coming weeks and months.

I noted that my colleague from Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes noted that the review was going to be concluded in the fall of 2019. We are still shooting for that target. We want to work together to support vulnerable Yukoners and low-income Yukoners. We want to work with our partners and our stakeholder groups.

It is imperative that we consider where we are in the north and we know there are unique circumstances in the north. Our remoteness factor is huge and the cost of living is huge. So there are many aspects that affect us — many unique challenges — but we can look for local solutions. We can work together to highlight some of the opportunities. We have a few areas that we have been focusing on within a short period of time, trying to make some accommodations and adjustments within the policies that we have in place right now.

I appreciate the points that have been brought forward because they are real issues.

We see it every day. We see Yukoners come. I know for a fact — first-hand — what it takes to live in Vancouver for five months while you're taking care of your ailing father, for the community and the families to come together to raise resources, because we don't have the resources or the system is not able to provide. I absolutely recognize and appreciate that. There is no doubt about that.

Cost drivers are significant. Cost drivers that affect us with building, with building infrastructure, housing, transportation — real insecurities in the north. We know that the Nutrition North Canada program is one of the big issues in our communities. You still go to the community and pay \$14 for a jug of milk and you expect a parent on income support to provide nutritional food baskets to their children. That isn't the reality. Absolutely, we must take that into consideration.

On August 21, 2018, there was a report released, *Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy*, outlining how the federal government intends to reduce national poverty by 20 percent by 2020 and 50 percent by 2030.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Ms. Frost: Exactly the point I wanted to make: There are national initiatives happening, yet we have unique circumstances in the north, in particular, and in remote areas of the north. We appreciate the efforts and the complexities around the three pillars that have been put on the table for us to consider. Dignity, opportunities, inclusion, resilience and security, as it affords all jurisdictions an opportunity to address the different facets of poverty throughout our country.

I particularly applaud the efforts of the federal government, because it goes far beyond poverty; it goes beyond inadequate income. It includes components such as food insecurity, social exclusion and inadequate housing. We know that first-hand. We have communities that have never been considered in the national housing initiative strategies. There are 14 indigenous communities in the Yukon that have not been given any resources from the previous government to address housing challenges and that's significant. It's significant because housing is defined as a human right; it's fundamentally wrong if you don't provide services and you have over-crowding. Those are some of the complex issues.

Collaboration with local partners and stakeholders ensures that we must work together and we must listen to Yukoners. This is important work that has to get done to reduce poverty, reduce our strategies around how we measure, reflecting the realities of our unique circumstances in each one of our communities.

The approach that the federal government is taking with respect to the vision released — those are things that we have to consider in terms of the parameters of our discussions regionally. We also have established a comprehensive review, as recommended by the Yukon Financial Advisory Panel, to consider options.

Health and Social Services is growing. We know that we're spending more than we're receiving. We have to find ways to contain historical growth, but we also have to look at sustainability of our health care systems and social support systems that continue to meet the needs of Yukoners where they are.

This review isn't about immediate cost saving, nor is it about cost cutting, as perhaps indicated. It's really about identifying a plan to slow the growth of government but also to ensure that we adequately meet the needs of Yukoners — ensuring that sustainable health care and social services and improving service outcomes are our key priorities.

As indicated, the review will be completed by the fall of 2019 and we will consider all programs and services within the review. That's imperative. I don't intend for us to do a review and not put any action around it. As we know, we need to consider how and what we do with the recommendations that come before us. We're committed to engaging and involving all of our partners, including Yukon First Nations, the public, non-government organizations, our staff and our stakeholder groups to capture their expertise. The member of the Third Party noted she has significant history in Yukon and significant experience that would lend value to what we do going forward and that's exactly what we intend to do.

We have an independent expert panel that will provide feedback and strategic advice to the department on ways to improve program efficiencies.

Now, where I wanted to take us is that what we've done, Mr. Speaker, most recently with some policy adjustments and some new funding that we've received is to try to reduce some of the burden on our families and on our single parents to provide more funding for childcare fees, childcare services — also making that available to extended families — extended

family care programs — and grandparents who are low income or who are on pensions, raising their grandchildren. That, Mr. Speaker, has never been considered in the history of the Government of Yukon. We expect grandparents on minimal income to raise their grandchildren — multiple grandchildren, I might add, in some communities — to be the primary caregiver and not give them the support. Why? It is because they didn't fit into a policy. A minor adjustment to some policy and directives internally allowed that to happen. That's one initiative.

The universal childcare has a number of benefits, including making childcare more affordable for low-income families and improving a child's cognitive and developmental processes with the supports that they require. As we know, we have some children within our communities who don't have one-on-one supports. We are working with our communities; we're ensuring that the families have the supports that they need. Affordable childcare is a priority for our government. Not penalizing parents who are on income support — taking away the resources that they are getting in and clawing it back when they are getting child tax credits? Is that acceptable?

What I want to note brings us to social assistance rates. As of July 2018, the average monthly benefit rate for a one-person household in Whitehorse is \$1,332. It is adjusted for the communities. We know that through supplements it goes up to as high as \$2,900. Is that sufficient, as noted, when you have rent of \$1,000 and food baskets with a jug of milk for \$14? Before you know it, it would be gone and there would not be a lot left in the piggy bank for clothing and such or extra-curricular activities. These are things that we have to consider. I am not in any way downplaying the stories that we have heard and the concerns that have been brought forward.

It is a vision of this government to provide transparent, fair and accessible services to every Yukoner — every child deserves that. Our effort to ensure that every Yukoner lives with dignity and pride is top of mind for everyone. It certainly is for me as the minister responsible. Embedded within the vision that we have in terms of three priorities, we appreciate that social and income security reflects the realities of today. We need to be adaptable to the trends and the challenges of the future, and we need to reflect accordingly.

Understanding these trends and challenges includes discussions that have to be had with our stakeholder groups and other governments. Not only does this have to be raised at the national level, but we need to really look at innovative solutions from the Yukon — look to progress, look to our own programs and services and look at ways to focus on our long-term quality of life. We have made some efforts through implementation of the housing initiative plan through Safe at Home, ensuring that we provide families with subsidies when they are not able to afford rent. Their rent supplements — we just increased that by \$200,000 and that allows us to give families a little more support.

We know that the Yukon income support program continues to have one of the highest rates in Canada, but we're hearing that, although it is the highest in Canada, perhaps it is insufficient in some of our communities that have a high cost

of living and where accessibility to food is difficult. Of course I want to commit that this is what we will consider as we advance the comprehensive review, and we will ensure that it is a part of the mandate and it is a part of the consideration.

In fact, what we do want to do is make sure that we incorporate in that process those organizations that have been actively involved in poverty reduction strategies: Safe at Home, initiatives in our communities with organizations that have lots of experience and that also have a lot of knowledge — and the knowledge-keepers will be a part of this process.

The results of the project will inform us and our critical thinking and our policy approaches as we move and advance the government in the interest of all Yukoners. We do need to balance our budgets, but we also need to ensure, as we do that, we provide the most effective supports and services to all Yukoners and that every family, every child and every grandparent who is raising their grandchildren without the supports are considered. Balancing low-income, vulnerable populations with the complexities of our growing economy and our economic factors that we consider — those are things that we certainly need to tie into the comprehensive review, and we aim to do that.

I would like to conclude my comments by saying that I appreciate the comments and the feedback given today. We will certainly take them under advisement and ensure that we work to address some of the concerns and look for relevant solutions that better support Yukoners through their ability to thrive wherever they reside in this territory. The comprehensive review, as noted, will be completed in the fall of 2019. I look forward to continued dialogue with Yukoners.

Mr. Gallina: I just wanted to elaborate on the comprehensive Health and Social Services review that the minister was speaking about. The minister did reiterate for the Member for Watson Lake on a time commitment. The review will be completed by the fall of 2019.

I also wanted to make note that the Health and Social Services comprehensive review was first introduced through a recommendation of the 2017 Yukon Financial Advisory Panel final report. I know that we had spoken to this earlier, but there are times when it's brought to our attention as a government that there were recommendations made in the Financial Advisory Panel and their recommendations and we have — there are times that it has been brought to our attention that the Financial Advisory Panel has made recommendations, and some of them we have considered and some of them we have not considered as much as others think that we should have.

In that Advisory Panel report, it suggests that this government consider a comprehensive review of the health care sector akin to the one done in 2008, focusing on the factors, driving costs and on the quality of outcomes being delivered to Yukoners.

Further direction was received by Management Board in 2017 to proceed with a comprehensive health review focusing on the factors driving costs, the quality of outcomes being

delivered to Yukoners and with an emphasis on ensuring cost efficiencies are fully explored.

The comprehensive review will seek to find ways to contain historical growth in order to provide a long-term sustainable health care and social support system that continues to meet the needs of Yukoners.

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on Motion No. 288, as amended, accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled October 3, 2018:

34-2-70

Yukon Arts Centre 2017/18 Annual Report (Dendys)