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Tuesday, March 21, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Spring Sitting

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

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Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
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Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

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THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, March 21, 2023 — 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. Mr. Clarke: For the World Water Day tribute today, I have the honour of welcoming to the Assembly: Cian O'Neill, project manager of flood mapping; Anthony Bier, acting senior hydrologist; and Heather Jirousek, director of the Water Resources branch, all with the Department of Environment.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that is recognized around the world on March 21 each year. On this day in 1960, 69 people, who were peacefully demonstrating against apartheid, were killed by police in South Africa. This tragic event is known as the "Sharpeville massacre". In response to that senseless act of violence, the United Nations declared March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Racism devalues individuals and denies people their basic human rights. In Canada and in the Yukon, our society is committed, and we continue to make progress toward repairing systemic racism and promoting reconciliation, diversity, and equality. But we know that there is more that needs to be done. More unmarked graves are still being found on former residential school sites. Black, Indigenous, and people of colour still face overrepresentation in our justice system, and many people still experience racism and discrimination in everyday life. Hate crimes have increased more than 60 percent over the last two years in Canada. This behaviour is completely unacceptable and it is, in fact, a crime.

Here in the Yukon, we have a vibrant and diverse population, but we are not shielded from racism and discrimination. This day of recognition should lead us all to consider and acknowledge our own actions and what difference we can make in the world and in our own communities. It reminds us that we need to continue our efforts to understand, to recognize, and to address the struggles of racially

marginalized people and communities. Everyone should contemplate and examine our own biases and consider how we can contribute to the kind of society that we want to live in. We must all turn that work into concrete action. We must all work to ensure equality and equity for all, and to treat people fairly and with compassion. We must listen, seek to understand, and learn from the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and people of colour. Perhaps the most important action that we can all take immediately to fight racial injustice is to call out racial statements or actions of others when we see them or hear them, including anything that might be passed off as a "joke". There is no humour in racism and we all need to do our part to make sure that this behaviour is not tolerated in our lives or in our conversations.

It is all our responsibility to make sure that we continue on the path to a diverse, equitable, and safe society for all Canadians. Cultural and ethnic diversity is an asset in every community. The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination should serve as a reminder to everyone that we need to work together so that we can all benefit from a racially diverse Yukon, not only today, but every day.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition in recognition of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is observed annually on March 21. It was on this day in 1960 that police opened fire and killed 69 people and wounded 180 people at a peaceful demonstration to end the racial segregation in South Africa. Since then, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was proclaimed in 1966 by the United Nations General Assembly, which called on the international community to work to end racial discrimination. This is a continued goal that we must all work toward to achieve in the territory, across Canada, and worldwide.

Racial discrimination is not only the practice of treating people differently or unjustly because of their race, ethnic origin, skin colour, language, or religion, but it can also be systemic. Systemic racism is discrimination built into the structures and institutions of society and is often more subtle and harder to identify, but it significantly impacts lives of individuals facing it. Systemic racism exists around the globe.

In the Philippines, light skin is considered better. I was born with darker skin. It was not until I came to Canada that I realized that the colour of my skin does not define me. In my mid-20s, I often felt discriminated against just by holding a Philippine passport. Everywhere I travelled, there was prejudice and questions. What a difference for me to now travel under a Canadian passport and be treated differently.

We all have a role to play in ending racism, from individuals and family units to teaching inclusion and respect at home, in schools, and as a community. We need to ensure that we are all educating ourselves, speaking out against racism, supporting racialized and religious minorities, and promoting racial equality in all aspects of life for all. We must encourage our children to embrace our differences and celebrate the increasing diversity across Canada and here in the Yukon.

We want all Yukoners, now and future generations, to live in a territory where they are free to express their beliefs, traditions, and fully embrace their cultures without worrying about racism, discrimination, or violence.

I encourage all members of this House and all Yukoners to stand up and speak out against racism to ensure respect and inclusion throughout our community.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP in support of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

As much as we in the Yukon or in Canada want to believe that racial discrimination is not part of our community, that's not true. Racism is still alive and well across systems and structures of our society. It intersects with other forms of discrimination. Racial discrimination is entangled in many of our systems in the Yukon, from health care to justice to climate action. The decisions that each of us make impact racialized Yukoners in unique ways.

I would highly recommend a 2014 TED talk by Vernā Myers, entitled “How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them”. She talks about how biases can be dangerous — even deadly — for racialized people. As I watched and listened, it occurred to me that what Vernā said not only resonated with me because it is relevant for what we are continuing to grapple with today, but her insights are timely, and I think they are helpful.

It boils down to this, Mr. Speaker: We — you and me — have to get out of denial and recognize our own biases, because, like it or not, every single one of us has biases. Biases are the stories we make up about people before we know who they actually are, but how are we going to get to know who someone really is when our biases tell us to avoid them or to be afraid of them?

She tells us to walk toward our discomfort to confront those biases, move toward what is different instead of away. She says that it's not the hardest thing to do, but it also means you must be conscious and intentional about it. It's not about perfection, but connection. You are not going to get comfortable before you get uncomfortable. Be open and honest with yourself and those whom you perceive as different because, despite our differences, we are all human.

The last thing she says that we need to do is the hardest. When we see or hear something that isn't right, we must have the courage to challenge it, even to the people we love. Listen to conversations around us. Maybe I need to say things like “Grandpa's a bigot” or “Aunt Sally is racist”, and that doesn't change the fact that we love grandpa and we love Aunt Sally. We do. We know that they are good people, but what they are saying is wrong and we need to be able to call it out because you never know who else is listening — especially young people and children.

We wonder why these biases don't die and how they move from generation to generation. Well, this is the reason: Because we are not speaking up when we need to. We must be willing to say: “Grandpa, we don't call people that anymore” or “Aunt

Sally, it isn't true and he doesn't deserve that. No one deserves that.” We must be willing to not shelter our children from the ugliness of racism when racialized people don't have the luxury to do so — especially those with children.

The UN says that there are three key stands to the fight against racism: education; teaching the history of racism, slavery, and colonialism; and learning about human rights tools to fight against oppression, racism, and discrimination.

Actions — they speak as loud as words, so speaking out against intolerance often leads to concrete actions to stop it. Again, we are all agents of change.

We all have the power to tackle racism, but what is needed is courage and the will to act. Mr. Speaker, speaking up and out is even more urgent today — then we add the coated layer of racism, like the increases in online racism that continues to plague our society. We all have a job to do to eliminate racial discrimination.

So, today I pay tribute and give thanks to the Indigenous folks and people of colour fighting to the point of exhaustion for a world free of hate. To those who are doing the work to make the world a better and safer place for everyone, we see you and we thank you.

Applause

In recognition of World Water Day

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise today to pay tribute to World Water Day. Each year, World Water Day is held on March 22 to raise awareness about how we can solve the world's water and sanitation challenges through changing the ways that we use, consume, and manage water in our lives. Over two billion people around the world lack access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services, which furthers inequities in our global society and health.

This year's World Water Day also kicks off the United Nations 2023 Water Conference in New York, which will run until Friday. In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly established the sustainable development goals. These are a collection of 17 goals to increase peace and prosperity for people around the world and the planet we live on. The UN's sustainability development goal 6 is clean water and sanitation for all by 2030. I look forward to the water action agenda launching at the conference in New York this week. It will include commitments to help reach the United Nations' commitment under sustainable development goal 6.

Here in the Yukon, we have a very close relationship with our water — 95 percent of the Yukon's drinking water is sourced from groundwater. Our rivers and lakes have been life sources for generations of Yukon First Nations and continue to support our way of life in the Yukon today. Our water systems also support our territory's vibrant and abundant wildlife, from the king salmon swimming up the Tatshenshini River to the loons nesting on the shores of Chadburn Lake. We know that many First Nation world views are grounded within connections to, and caring for, water and land.

We would like to recognize the important work that many Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups are doing to monitor, steward, and

protect waterways. I also commend the First Nation and municipal governments that have source-water protection plans, or aquifer and wellhead protection plans, to ensure sustainable and responsible stewardship of our groundwater.

To mark World Water Day this Wednesday, the Yukon government's Water Resources branch, alongside the Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre, will be hosting a Beringia Centre science talk that will focus on water stewardship initiatives in the territory.

I encourage all Yukoners to attend the event, which starts at 11:00 a.m. at the Beringia Centre, or to tune in to the livestream on Facebook and Zoom.

Over the course of this week, the Water Resources branch will also be giving presentations in Yukon schools to encourage youth to think about how water affects our daily lives and to consider potential water-related careers.

Mr. Speaker, we have a strong role to play in ensuring the long-term health of our rivers, streams, lakes, and groundwater.

Applause

In recognition of Canada Water Week and World Water Day

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Canada Water Week and World Water Day. Canada Water Week is a national celebration of water and water's importance to Canada's future. Water is so important to our health, livelihood, activities, and experiences across Canada and here in the Yukon Territory.

Canada Water Week actually takes place in March and coincides with World Water Day.

Water is our most abundant and most scarce resource. It covers approximately 70 percent of the Earth's surface, yet we still have nearly two billion people living without access to fresh, clean water.

World Water Day is a means of advocating the importance of fresh water for health and prosperity for all. Within Canada, there are currently 32 long-term drinking advisories in place; therefore, achieving clean drinking water throughout all of Canada is important, and it is a continuing goal.

We are so fortunate here in the Yukon with the abundance of fresh, crisp, beautiful, clean lakes and water. We need to remember to respect the land and our water so that our beautiful territory can continue to provide and be sustainable now and into future generations.

We have seen the effects that climate change and other environmental factors have had on our lakes and river systems here in the Yukon. Increased snowpack and perfect storms of weather conditions have led to flooding that most of us have not seen in our lifetimes. Flooding has the potential to harm low-lying properties and inhabitants, impact infrastructure, and threaten waterside communities. It can compromise groundwater, and man-made structures in and on the ground can compromise the water systems. So, from what we have seen in different regions across the territory over the last couple of years, it is important to ensure that each community is protected from those threats in advance. Protecting our communities, our

drinking water, and our waterways must continue to be a top priority as we mitigate changes to our environment.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to World Water Day and Canada Water Week. When I think of my homeland in Vuntut Gwitchin territory, I think of the Porcupine River.

The Porcupine River is an essential part of who we are as Gwich'in people. It is the first river system that we dip our toes in after birth, and it is the last water that we are bathed in after death. The Porcupine River is an important part of our lifeline as Gwich'in. The river tells us the changing seasons; it brings us salmon and harvest and abundance. It is our highway system — how we travel to our hunting grounds, to our camps, and to our neighbouring Gwich'in communities. The health of the river is a measure of the health of our community and nation.

The Porcupine caribou herd also relies on our river systems in Vuntut country, which is integral to sustaining our identity, culture, and way of life. The culture of the Gwich'in continues to be intimately connected to the Porcupine caribou and the many water systems that flow through our traditional territory.

None of us can survive without water. No matter how big our cities are, no matter how advanced our technology is, we still need water. It is important that we never forget how important water is to us. We need to be good stewards of the land and to keep our water healthy so that it can keep us healthy in return.

Access to clean drinking water is often taken for granted. On First Nation reserves across the country, Indigenous people have gone without access to clean water for decades. Even in our communities here in Yukon, it is sometimes a struggle to access clean drinking water.

The United Nations' campaign for access to safe water and sanitation is asking people to act this year — to go beyond business as usual and work to protect and conserve our water now and into the future. It is about working to improve access to water at home and abroad and about protecting wetlands, rivers, and lakes.

Thank you to all of the people doing that work here in the Yukon and beyond, from scientists to sanitation and water-delivery workers to land guardians to the elders who share their knowledge with us. Today, I hope that everyone will pause to look with appreciation at the rivers and lakes, creeks and ponds that are a part of our home. Water is sacred; water is life.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon in working with the private sector to help meet their labour needs by utilizing all 430 Yukon nominee allocations under the 2023 provincial nominee program.

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

THAT this House adopts the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, which is that "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities".

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to review the Yukon Home Care Program to ensure that it is meeting the needs of seniors and elders in all communities and in rural areas.

Ms. Blake: I rise to give notice of the following motion:
THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to create a territorial action plan for endometriosis.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise today to share information on the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. Last December, we signed the agreement with the Government of Canada at the COP15 biodiversity conference in Montréal. As part of this agreement, our territory is receiving \$20.6 million to help reach the national goal of protecting 25 percent of land and fresh water in Canada by 2025 and 30 percent by 2030.

This agreement will help chart a new path by supporting Indigenous leadership in conservation, strengthening land use planning, increasing protection of sensitive habitats and recovery actions for species at risk, and supporting the protection and conservation of new lands in the Yukon.

Breathtaking wilderness, vast untouched spaces, and incredible bodies of water — that is what we are fighting to protect. That is why we were the first jurisdiction to sign a nature agreement and why we have already protected in excess of 19 percent of lands and waters across the Yukon. We know that bold action is needed to continue this fight. We recognize that climate change disproportionately impacts the north. These impacts are seen in our communities, homes, infrastructure, and way of life, as well as in the natural landscapes, plants, insects, and animals that we cherish.

Climate change and biodiversity loss puts pressures on ecosystems, wild species, and their habitats. We can mitigate

these effects through the protection and restoration of nature. With the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, we have established a shared vision and outlined a framework to help us get there.

As with any new measure or initiative, Indigenous consultation and leadership is essential. Over the coming years, we will closely work with Yukon First Nations, Inuvialuit, and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to bring this document to life. The resources provided under the agreement better position us to protect and conserve areas that will contribute to Canada's targets while respecting the land use planning process enshrined in the Yukon First Nations final agreements.

I look forward to working with partners to advance effective land use planning, protect areas of mutual interest, and manage and conserve species at risk in the Yukon. Protecting wildlife and biodiversity is a responsibility we all share. Through collective strength, partnership, and respect for this land, I know that we can better protect biodiversity, habitat, and species at risk for generations to come.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity and the chance to reply to this ministerial statement regarding the Canada-Yukon bilateral nature agreement.

It seems this agreement continues a trend with the Liberal government of putting the cart before the horse when it comes to consultation. In the minister's own words — quote: "As with any new measure or initiative, Indigenous consultation and leadership is essential." He goes on to say: "Over the coming years, we will work closely with Yukon First Nations, Inuvialuit and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to bring this document to life."

I have to ask the minister: Did he give any indication to the First Nations and the governments he has listed that the Yukon government is going to embark on this agreement? Also, what about consultation with renewable resources councils, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the Fish and Game Association, and environmental groups? The minister didn't even mention these groups in his statement, yet we are talking about a nature agreement. Again, the Liberal government is moving forward, then consulting.

I know that many in the hunting and wildlife management community noticed that grizzly bears were included as species at risk in December's press release. Here is a quote: "This will support Indigenous leadership in conservation; increased protection of sensitive habitats; and recovery actions for species at risk, such as the northern mountain caribou, the grizzly bear, and vascular plants..." I wanted to note that, while grizzlies are listed in the federal species at risk process, they are not listed here in the Yukon. This is what the Yukon grizzly management plan said in 2018 — and I quote: "This conservation is intended to be proactive: Most grizzly bear populations appear to be stable and the issues are largely well managed."

So, I would appreciate it if the minister could give us some insight as to what changes Yukoners might expect for the management of grizzlies as a result of this new agreement. I also note that section 5.2 of the agreement deals with species at

risk legislation. In particular, there is a commitment to begin legislative development by the end of this budget year.

So, can the minister tell us what the current timeline is for the development of species at risk legislation? More specifically, what consultation has the minister begun with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the renewable resources councils about this legislation?

Moving on to the section about land use planning, I note an important part related to mining claims. Section 5.3.4.1 references the relinquishing of mining claims and special management areas in the Peel watershed land use plan. Can the minister update us about the government's plan for the remaining mining claims in that region and how many of them are left? What is the government's policy for the relinquishing of those claims? That question will be very important in the context of the Dawson land use plan, so I know that many Yukoners will be listening carefully to the minister's response to that question.

I also have some questions about the section called "Potential Protected Areas". The first example listed in this section is the Agay Mene Territorial Park. So, can the minister provide an update on park management planning for that park? Last time we asked the minister, he said that the park has not yet been designated for park status under the *Parks and Land Certainty Act*, and that the park management plan is currently on hold.

Finally, I wanted to ask about staffing. I understand that there are some term contracts to be implemented with this agreement. Will there be full-time staff hired?

So, a few questions for the minister.

Ms. Tredger: On behalf of the Yukon NDP, we are delighted by this announcement of this agreement back in December. We are very happy to see the firm commitment to protecting 30 percent of the Yukon by 2030 and, in particular, the commitment to do it in partnership with Yukon First Nations.

It was pretty exciting to see the money for species at risk legislation. In eternal hope and optimism, it has been tradition for the Yukon NDP to ask every Sitting about progress on species at risk legislation, each time hoping that this would be the time the Liberals or, before them, the Yukon Party would shock us by telling us that there had indeed been progress. Well, I am delighted to be putting that tradition to rest now that there is real commitment to moving forward on species at risk legislation. It is happening, and that is fantastic.

This is also an opportunity for the Yukon to course-correct on an issue that we have been lagging behind on: Indigenous protected and conserved areas. This is a chance to give real backing and support — and especially funding — to First Nations to set their own conservation goals and to train and hire their own citizens to be land guardians. We have seen nations across the Yukon, most recently the Ross River Dena Council, propose IPCAs on their traditional territory. Supporting them in this work is an incredible opportunity for both reconciliation and protection of biodiversity.

I am also hopeful that this agreement will help finally expedite land use planning in the territory. The pace of planning to date has been an offence to the spirit and intent of the final agreements. The delays have forced many Yukon First Nations to the court system to uphold their rights. I do hope that the minister will keep in mind his commitment to biodiversity and First Nation rights as he considers that his government is in court right now fighting First Nations over issues of land use planning and conservation. As he considers his government's decision to approve Kudz Ze Kayah mine over the clear dissent of Kaska nations, I hope he will consider how his stated commitment to these values should influence all of the decisions that his government makes.

With regard to the implementation of the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, I was told by officials in the briefing that there is not yet a work plan in place for how the money from Canada will be spent, although I know that the department is hard at work on it. So, I have lots of questions about the details, but I suspect the minister doesn't have answers yet, so I look forward to more specifics on how that plan will be realized, and for now, we will just say that this is a wonderful agreement for the Yukon and for biodiversity.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: There was indeed a hopeful energy in the room last December when I signed the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* alongside the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault, at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Montréal.

In the days that followed, the agreement was highlighted in media coverage across Canada. We also heard from many partners and stakeholders that welcomed the agreement. In fact, the Yukon chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, or CPAWS, issued a statement applauding the landmark agreement. Several months later, our work continues. Yukon First Nations, Inuvialuit, and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups are vital in implementing the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*.

Unlike the Official Opposition, our government is committed to meaningful consultation when making decisions that impact the future of these lands and waters. Not only that, but we know the importance of Indigenous leadership in shaping these plans.

The funding available through the new agreement will further strengthen the participation of Yukon First Nations, Inuvialuit, and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups in identifying areas of interest in traditional territories or settlement regions.

There will be a collaborative approach to species at risk management with First Nations and Inuvialuit. There will also be effective land use planning, which is our main mechanism to protect our wild spaces and biodiversity, and also the availability of background knowledge and upcoming regional land use planning processes.

As I previously mentioned, the resources available under the agreement will better position us to protect and conserve areas that will contribute to Canada's targets while respecting land use planning processes. This work will help create

certainty and clarity to industry by clearly identifying the areas that we mean to protect.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that bold action requires transformative change, innovation, and proper accounting for the value of nature across all sectors. We also know that this level of collaboration takes time, and we continue to balance this with the need to act fast to fight climate change and to protect nature.

While the Yukon has not formally adopted its own percentage-based targets, we are taking meaningful steps to contribute to establishing protected areas. The goal is to protect or conserve an additional six percent of Yukon's vast wilderness and to reach 25 percent by 2025. This complements our work that we are doing to build our clean, green future, including a number of priorities outlined in our latest budget.

Mr. Speaker, the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* is a strong foundation that we can use to further build responsible management and sustainable use of our lands and resources. It also provides an opportunity for the Yukon to advance key conservation priorities, together with Yukon First Nations, Inuvialuit, and transboundary Indigenous government groups and all other stakeholders. We look forward to embarking on this work together. With the support of the Government of Canada, we are protecting and conserving Yukon's wild spaces and biodiversity for future generations.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Animal shelter support

Mr. Istchenko: We have heard from some Yukon mayors that the Mae Bachur Animal Shelter that is operated by the Humane Society Yukon is facing some serious issues of financial sustainability. Municipalities have raised concerns with us about the possibility of this important service shutting down. So, according to the society, without additional financial support, the current shelter will be forced to stop taking animals by the end of the month and to cease operations shortly thereafter.

So, what steps is the Yukon government taking to ensure that the animal shelter does not close later this month?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question from the member opposite. The Humane Society Yukon received an increase in annual funding from \$79,500 to \$110,000 in 2018. As well, the humane society also received an increase from \$20,000 to \$25,000 in 2018 and holds a two-year contract with the Government of Yukon of up to \$21,000 to rehome surrendered animals from the communities.

The humane society and the animal rescues in the Yukon provide a valued service, not only by rehoming animals, but through the tireless work of volunteers who promote responsible pet ownership and care. The Department of Environment provides annual core funding to the territory's two registered humane societies, those being in Dawson and Whitehorse, proportional to the number of animals that they house annually.

In addition, the department pays the humane societies a stipend for each animal surrendered from a community or First Nation government through voluntary dog surrender programs. We recognize that there can be a gap in support when established rescues close and we have worked directly with the humane society and, importantly, the City of Whitehorse to address operational funding pressures.

I look forward to further responses.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that answer.

Even if the humane society is unable to secure funding for this upcoming year, it is clear that there need to be changes to the overall model that has allowed things to reach this stage. The society has pointed out that they believe they can provide this much-needed service in the Yukon at a cost that is significantly less than if it were delivered by the Government of Yukon or a municipality, but only if they are properly resourced on an ongoing basis.

The alternative to this is for the government to take on these services itself or to hand it over to municipalities, so which model does the government prefer? Having the society continue to provide this service or having the Yukon government take this service over?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Each community has unique needs and concerns when it comes to the care and control of companion animals. Through the community dog care initiative, the animal health unit is committed to working with community leaders to improve public safety and the care of dogs in Yukon communities. Options under this initiative may include reducing the number of unwanted dogs, improving access to veterinary services, protecting people from uncontrolled dogs, and working together to improve awareness and education.

We also support local governments to host volunteer groups that provide veterinary care, including vaccinations and spay/neuter services. We encourage any municipality, First Nation government, or community leader who may have a concern with dogs in their community to contact the animal health unit to discuss ways we can provide support. We recognize — and I have been briefed on this topic — that the humane society has faced pressure over the course of a number of prior years, not just this year, and the Department of Environment with the City of Whitehorse is working closely with the humane society. We certainly are providing stop-gap funding right now, but certainly to the Member for Kluane's point, there may very well be different delivery models, which will be explored. We certainly look forward to working collaboratively with the —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Istchenko: So, beyond providing immediate funding support, the society has been asking for help from the Yukon government to develop a new model for the delivery of these services; specifically, they have asked the government to provide expert assistance in developing a new model and a multi-year bridge fund during the development and establishment of this model.

So, how much funding will the government provide to the society, and will they provide this funding over a multi-year

horizon? Finally, what role does the minister anticipate municipalities playing?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I think that I did answer some of those questions in my second answer with respect to the professional expertise that the Department of Environment is providing to the humane society. I would also note that it is not particularly usual for a department of environment in a provincial or territorial jurisdiction to be the prime funder of an NGO humane society, but this is where we are at right now.

Once again, for all Yukoners, I would advise that the humane society has historically had issues in sustaining operations and experiences cycles of challenges in public support and leadership challenges that have resulted in high annual funding agreements being an issue. They did receive an additional \$135,000 on February 23, 2023 as a one-time increase to meet a projected deficit. This fiscal year, the society also received \$21,500 for operational projects and \$8,000 to improve fencing. They also hold a two-year contract, as I advised previously, with the Government of Yukon for up to \$49,500 to rehome animals under the voluntary dog surrender program. So, the solution is there to be had, but it certainly is a challenging file. I am committed to finding a solution.

Question re: Whitehorse air tanker base

Mr. Hassard: So, after years of promising a new air tanker base for Whitehorse, it appears that this year's budget has put the brakes on this project. The new air tanker base has been a moving target for years now. Back in 2018-19, the five-year capital concept, the project was supposed to start in 2018 and be completed by 2021. As with so many of the projects that are identified in the five-year capital concept, nothing happened.

So, can the government explain why it continues to put off the replacement of the air tanker base here in Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and it is great to be speaking through you to the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin again. We haven't had a conversation in some time, so I welcome the question this afternoon, and we are talking about air tankers.

I have to take exception, as I often do when talking with the member opposite about his characterization — it is not a five-year capital concept; it is a five-year capital plan. It is a plan that we put in place so that contractors in the territory have a better idea of what is coming down the pike. It is certainly an improvement over where the government was prior to the Yukon Liberal government taking over.

Historically, we have contracted a light and heavy air tanker group to aid in wildfire suppression activities. These types of aircraft are suited to operations in the Yukon. However, with modernization of the industry, combined with aging infrastructure in the Yukon, it is time for a comprehensive program review. Air tanker contracts are now in place for the next six years, allowing Wildland Fire Management time to conduct a program review prior to the next iteration of the program. The tender for the next air tanker contract is posted in 2022 in anticipation of the next five-year term, beginning in 2024. This process included updated

specifications for modernizing avionics and existing types of aircraft used in the Yukon.

I will have more to say on this in coming questions.

Mr. Hassard: So, in the 2019-20 budget documents, the new air tanker base was identified with a \$10- to \$25-million budget and was planned to be done by 2023. In the following year, in 2020-21, it was refined down to a range of \$9 million to \$16 million and was planned to start in 2022 and be done by 2025.

So, anyone who has read the five-year capital concept, thinking that it could be relied on, was let down again. So, why would anyone rely on the Liberals' five-year capital concept when, so often, projects that are promised and planned fail to materialize?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, I am terribly disappointed with the characterizations made by the member opposite.

We have made vast improvements in the way we manage the finances — the contracts in the territory. I was certainly involved in that process in the early days. My colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, has certainly carried on that work. It is a vast improvement over where it was before.

We knew what happened in the contracting industry before, where contracts would go out late in the year and they couldn't get done early. We did early contracting out.

I am talking about contracting, Mr. Speaker, because that is really where the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin went this afternoon, so I am going to talk about that a little more. We knew that their schools were started before they were even approved — for environmental approval. They held news conferences on the side of the highway up in Dawson to get the Dawson rec centre done on a dime without actually having any money or any intention of following through on that.

The way we are managing contracts, the way we are managing projects — the things that we are doing to help Yukoners and to make their lives better — from the work on the north Klondike Highway to the work on the airport, which is absolutely incredibly important to the territory — is a vast improvement over where we were, and I will take our record over the Yukon Party's record any day.

Mr. Hassard: I am not sure which planet this minister is on, but I will continue.

Last year's five-year capital concept showed the same timeline as before, with a planned start of construction in 2022 and a completion date of 2025, but in last year's budget, the project had been refined again to a cost range of \$11.2 million to \$13.5 million. However, it should come as no surprise that, once again, this project was dropped. This year's budget includes no forward timeline and it no longer has any major capital funding attached to it.

So, why has the government promised this new air tanker base for Whitehorse for five years in a row only to drop it now two years after it was initially supposed to be completed?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Earth. That's where we are, Mr. Speaker, and it is round; it is round.

We have made incredible improvements in the way we contract in the territory. We are doing more planning. We are

certainly putting more information in the hands of the people of the territory, in stark contrast to the party that locked down ATIPP and refused to do projects — fast and loose, Mr. Speaker.

We are in the process of rebuilding the Whitehorse International Airport. That's incredible work. It's important for northern sovereignty. It's important for the territory itself. It is important for the way we supply the western Arctic and all of the Yukon. It is important for tourism.

We are doing that work, Mr. Speaker. We are doing a review of our air tanker program. We are doing all of this work on behalf of the territory, on behalf of the people of the territory, to make sure that we are better suited to provide services to them — be it for wildfire management or for, really, taking in more flights at the airport. There is lots of work happening. I am happy to talk about all the work that we are doing, and I will continue to do that if there are more questions.

Question re: Pioneer utility grant

Ms. Tredger: The pioneer utility grant is an important source of financial relief for seniors. This program is an income-tested grant to help seniors cover the rising costs of heating their home, whether that is wood, oil, or electric heat. Every year, more seniors apply than the government has budgeted for. The last time the government increased the budget for this program was 2017. Every year, the allocated money remains the same, even though we know that it is already nearly \$700,000 over the budget from the past fiscal year.

Can the minister explain why the amount budgeted every year has stayed the same, despite an increasing demand every year?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We are monitoring, right now, the effects of inflation, extra costs on individuals — especially in the scenario where they have a fixed income. Again, our government understands the challenges that Yukoners are facing, and that is something that we are watching each quarter, as we see the rates tabled when it comes to inflation. I think it is important to not only talk about the pioneer utility grant, but there are a number of other things that we have been doing to make life more affordable.

We have extended the inflation relief rebate program — that is \$50 per month — and you will see that in the interim supply bill that we just put through. There is another quarter that we also will — once the mains are passed, we will have an opportunity to support individuals, and we have our food in schools. Also, the quarterly top-up to the eligible recipients for the Yukon seniors income supplement, which we think was an important tool, and that was part of our work with the confidence and supply agreement. It was also the \$100 monthly increase to eligible social assistance recipients — again, looking at partnering with the private sector to reduce other costs and supportive services for seniors. We are focused on this; we understand that it is important, and I look forward to question 2.

Ms. Tredger: Seniors, especially seniors living alone on a small pension, rely on the pioneer utility grant to help them

through our winters — and have for a long time. Every year, we hear from seniors living alone that the system is not fair. Heating a home costs the same regardless of how many people live there, but a single person receives less financial support than a couple with the same household income. For example, a senior living by themselves in a condo will receive hundreds of dollars less from this government compared to their neighbours in the exact same condo with the exact same household income.

Can the minister explain why a single senior receives less than a couple with the same household income?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am happy to speak to the way that this government is making life more affordable for Yukoners — and truly recognizing that this is an issue for individuals and Yukon households, seeing that their budgets have been stretched by higher prices. Certainly, lower income households are feeling the worst effects.

The government has already established a strong record of making life more affordable for Yukoners with almost \$10 million of inflation relief made available in last year's budget. This included more funding for Food Network Yukon — \$1 million — a 10-percent top-up to the pioneer utility grant, which was asked about previously, and rebates on the purchase of firewood. There are also other rebates that the Premier has noted.

I know that there is a continued effort here to make sure that we are providing supports for Yukoners through this very difficult time of inflationary costs across Canada, recognizing that we are feeling them here in the Yukon as well.

Ms. Tredger: I appreciate hearing about the other programs, but I was really hoping to address this unfair way that the pioneer utility grant is administered.

With the new policies regarding seniors applying for public housing, more seniors are having to stay longer in their homes in Whitehorse and the communities. Aging in place is one answer that this government continues to promote. It's a great idea and one that Yukon seniors and elders would like to embrace. Unfortunately, programs like the pioneer utility grant are not balanced when considering couples versus single seniors. This needs to be reviewed so that all seniors and elders can have a fair chance to age in place.

Given the underbudgeting every year and the concerns of single seniors applying for the program, will the minister review the pioneer utility grant to see if it is, in fact, meeting the current needs of Yukon seniors and elders?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very pleased that the member opposite has noted the *Aging in Place Action Plan* and the work to improve the lives of seniors and elders in the territory.

Our government remains committed to implementing all 56 of those recommendations and recognizes the impact that they will have on seniors' lives. The *Aging in Place Action Plan* is working to ensure that Yukoners can access the supports that they need to live safe, independent, and comfortable lives in their own homes or in their own communities for as long as possible, regardless of their age, their income, or their ability level. That is a goal of the action plan, and we will continue to do that work.

With respect to the concept of the pioneer utility grant, we have increased it this year. It is a long-standing support for Yukon seniors. We are always looking to make sure that the impact of the design of the programs is beneficial to Yukoners. Yukoners are also receiving inflationary relief at this time from the federal government. It includes accelerated Canada workers' benefits, the elimination of interest on student loans, the doubling of the GST tax credit, dental care, and the Canada housing benefit for renters — all pieces of support for Yukoners. We will continue to evaluate programs so they benefit Yukoners.

Question re: Mining sector greenhouse gas emissions

Ms. McLeod: Yesterday, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources released a “what we heard” document on mining intensity targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The minister mentioned last week that the target would be a 45-percent reduction by 2035 and net zero by 2050. Power generation is a leading contributor to emissions from placer mines and those hardrock mines off grid. The role for the government will be to ensure that there is ample green power available for these mines.

Will there be enough supply of clean energy in 2035 to ensure that the industry can meet the 45-percent target, and if so, where does the minister envision this power coming from?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, we envision the power coming from a suite of fronts including: independent power producers; microgeneration; renewables, for example, like the Atlin project that we have been working on; demand-side management; and ways of load shifting so that we increase our efficiency, for example, through our battery energy storage project. We have also now embarked on a dialogue with Yukon First Nations, British Columbia First Nations, the Province of British Columbia, and the federal government on a grid interconnect with British Columbia.

So, that is the suite of ways. The main one would be through the 10-year renewable Yukon energy strategy. I have spoken about it many, many times here in the Assembly. I am happy to talk about it again today.

Ms. McLeod: There is nothing in the 10-year renewable energy plan that can meet the power generation needs of new mines, like Coffee and Kudz Ze Kayah. Their plans are to generate power on-site using thermal options such as liquefied natural gas. Of course, they are not currently connected to the Yukon grid, even if there was enough generating capacity to meet their needs. Most placer mines in the Yukon are also off grid with no access to green power.

What is the Yukon government planning to do to help these off-grid mines meet the 45-percent reduction target by 2035?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Again, there is a suite of ways in which we will work with all mines here in the territory. Where possible, we will try to support mines to get on the grid. This is part of the strategy. I just listed all the ways in which we are working to shift more toward renewable energy with our grid.

By the way, we have the *Clean Energy Act*. I know the Yukon Party voted against it, but that is a commitment to

renewable energy across the territory over time. We also have a range of programs that we are working on already — some under *Our Clean Future* — for example, renewable diesel. Some will be specific to mines. There are a range of ways in which we are working with them. There was one mentioned earlier today for protected areas.

There is a suite of ways that we will support mines in this work, including the programs that we already have in place — for example, the independent power producer policy and microgeneration. So, there are a range of ways.

Question re: Skagway marine services

Ms. Van Bibber: Last week, Minto Metals announced that it would cease shipping its concentrate through Skagway, and here's what the press release said: “Despite Minto's best efforts to reach a mutually beneficial agreement, the town of Skagway recently came to a decision to shift the focus of its port towards cruise ships and tourism.”

The Yukon government has committed to providing up to \$24 million CAD for the redevelopment of the port. Will the Yukon government commit to ensuring that the replacement ore-loading infrastructure to be built in Skagway will be suitable for the Yukon mining industry before it flows any money that it has committed?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am glad to stand on the floor of the House today and talk about the exceptional work that has been done by the Department of Economic Development when it comes to ensuring that there is access to tidewater, not only for Yukon mining companies, but for this country when it comes to the move toward critical minerals. What is lacking in knowledge across the floor is really the sensitivity that still is in place in Skagway concerning the historical liabilities and historical impacts in the community. It has been challenging.

There have been comments made from across the floor to do things like influence the community, and I know that this certainly has not been accepted well. What we have tried to do is have a long-term vision for the next 35 to 50 years. There was no plan from the previous government in place when we got here and we have worked really hard at a number of levels of government and, as well, we continue to work with the mining sector. There are different opinions about what the infrastructure should look like. Of course, we want to ensure that we work with the community to make sure that they will support it.

I think that anybody here in the House would understand that we are working with our neighbours and we have to understand what they want to see in place and, at the same time, work with industry here. That is what we have been committed to doing. I commend the folks who have worked so hard on this. This has been a great story for Yukon and a great story for mining in Canada.

Question re: Beaver River watershed land use plan

Mr. Kent: So, in 2018, the previous Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources announced a sub-regional land use plan to deal with the proposed tote road into some mining claims north of Keno City. He touted the Beaver River land use plan

as — and I quote: “... a new way of doing business and would be completed in two years.” Well, here we are, five years after it was announced, with goal posts that move every time we ask about it. When we asked in the fall of 2021, the minister said it would be ready in 2022. When we asked in the fall of 2022, it was 2023.

So, will the minister tell us when the Beaver River land use plan will be ready?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We did enter into an agreement with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun to work on the Beaver River land use plan, and we have updated that work plan and it is available on our website. The Premier and I met with Na-Cho Nyäk Dun at Roundup a couple of months ago. We talked about the importance of completing this plan and also beginning regional land use planning and about how the two could work together.

The timeline that I was last given is this fall. I appreciate that it has taken longer than we wanted, but I also appreciate that it is important to work constructively government to government, and we will continue that work.

Mr. Kent: So, this process has been a real blackeye for this Liberal government when it comes to mining. In November 2020, a mining CEO took the unprecedented step of putting out a press release in which he stated: “If this road can’t be permitted following a positive environmental and socio-economic assessment decision and years of governmental encouragement to invest in the project, then you have to wonder if Yukon is in fact open for business.”

So, can the minister tell us why this process will take well over five years rather than the two years promised by his predecessor?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I think that mining is doing very well in the territory, and second of all, I think this is about making sure that we have a respectful working relationship with the other order of government, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun. I appreciate that it has taken longer, but I say again that we will continue to carry out that respectful and diligent work.

Mr. Kent: So, in a February 13, 2023 legal bulletin published on mcmillan.ca, it states: “A January 31, 2023 decision of the Yukon Supreme Court has raised serious questions about how permitting decisions will be affected in cases where the government has established *ad hoc* ‘land use planning’ initiatives...” This is, of course, in reference to the Beaver River land use plan. We know that the government is appealing this decision, but our question is: Are other *ad hoc* land use planning initiatives being considered as part of the Liberals’ new way of doing business, and, if so, where are they?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will note that the Premier put into my mandate letter to accelerate land use planning here in the territory. In the meeting that the Premier and I had with Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, we talked about moving forward on regional land use planning. In my conversations with Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, Selkirk First Nation, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, Kluane First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council — all of them — we have been in conversation about moving forward

on regional land use planning, so that is the work that we will continue.

I appreciate all of the work that the planning teams within governments, within our commissions, and within the councils have been doing on land use planning. It is the right thing to do. It is not easy to do, but land use planning is an important step. I am especially excited to get moving on regional land use planning across the territory.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 207: *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — continued

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Yukon Housing Corporation — continued

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Ms. Tredger: When we left off, we were talking about the costs for Normandy, which are a total of \$201,000, and the minister was breaking it down for me. I was just re-reading the Blues. I think he said that there was \$33,000 for the FTE, but I wasn’t quite sure how that broke down. I was wondering if he could break down the \$201,000 into how much was for that staff person and how much was for the services that are included in Normandy, maybe by per person, per month.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We were talking about the \$201,000 and a breakdown of that. I thank the member for coming back to that question. I have a bit more detail here with me today.

Let me just start by thanking the officials — Mr. Ferbey, our president of the Yukon Housing Corporation, as well as Marcel Holder Robinson, our director of finance — for the work that was done since yesterday to prepare some more materials so that we could give more detail and breakdown on some of the questions yesterday.

The \$201,000 was pertaining to our support that we were putting in place for seniors with more financial need, and it was about the opportunity for us to partner with the private sector and provide supportive services for 10 units in Normandy Manor. The supportive services — the 10 units — and that was a multiple of just under \$3,000. So, supportive services were \$2,990 per unit times four months. The four months were December to March, for a total cost of \$119,600.

We had, as well, holding fees for three months for those units which were \$16,000, and that came to a total of \$48,000. So that subtotal, for the member opposite, is \$167,600. Then, as I stated, we had an FTE for just January to March, which was, as I stated, \$33,000. So, the total was \$200,600.

Hopefully, that gives a better breakdown for the member opposite.

Ms. Tredger: I thank the minister for that and, of course, thank you to the officials for being here again and to all the folks at Yukon Housing Corporation.

That breakdown was really helpful. What are holding fees in this situation?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The holding fees were a cost that we paid to hold 16 additional units that we're hoping to use. So, we had our 10 units and now we are looking at an additional 16 units. We paid that fee over a period of months while we were negotiating to lock down the next 16 units. Basically, we did not want those to go to market. We believed that this was very cost efficient for us. That was the holding fee of \$48,000.

Ms. Tredger: Could the minister tell me what the FTE — what that person — is providing, and is it just to those 10 units or is it to everyone in the building?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: One FTE is there to support overall programming needs resulting from an increased focus on housing supports for seniors. While this will include seniors housing at Normandy, this individual is also working to provide for seniors who are currently housed in Yukon Housing units and those wait-listed, again, choosing to reside in a mixed-income building or seniors-dedicated building with additional supports. So, it's somebody there to support the people we have. I am going to clarify, go back, and make sure — but my sense is that it is the 26 units in totality — the 10 plus the 16. We hope to have 26 seniors in that building.

There has been a bit of dialogue around the fact that our Jeckell building will also have some seniors. We have committed, as per the OAG report, to have services there. Then, of course, we have seniors living in a number of units across Whitehorse. My understanding is — additional supports for any seniors we are housing within the Whitehorse area.

Ms. Tredger: I really appreciate that detail. I think I'll come back to it in the mains, but I think that more or less answers my questions in terms of the supplementary budget.

I wanted to ask a little bit about a couple of housing projects, and I'm not sure if they are under Yukon Housing or under a different department. Maybe the minister can tell me. We talked about the tenplex in Old Crow. Is that under Yukon Housing? Who will be allocating those units and deciding who goes in them?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The 10-unit community housing project in Old Crow will provide a range of housing options and improve our ability to respond to the community's changing housing needs. The Department of Highways and Public Works is leading the construction project in conjunction with Yukon Housing Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services. Coordinating the construction of both projects is maximizing efficiencies while minimizing the effects on the community during construction. We will continue to work in partnership with Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation to ensure that the project meets the needs of the community. The 10-unit community housing project is currently scheduled for completion in June 2023.

So, again, the project — I can go back and look in detail. I know there was a conversation with the Vuntut Gwitchin government around the units in the early stages. Again, we have the authority, as we build that building out, to provide the allocations on it, and I know that there has been some dialogue with the Vuntut Gwitchin government — more on the Executive Council side — around an accord. I have to go back and take a look at that paperwork, which housing wouldn't have.

But, again, I think there are some terms as well based on the financing that we used around affordability. I think that Health and Social Services — we can go back in the mains — have a couple of units in there that they are using for medical staff, I believe, who are going to be in Old Crow. As I understand it — I might be incorrect, but there were medical staff at one point staying in the old facility. Of course, the one that has been used is inappropriate. There was also internal fuel storage, I believe, in that structure as well. So, my recollection is that there are six units put aside for Health and Social Services, I believe, and then four other units that we would be, I believe, allocating. Let me make sure that I have the right information for you on this.

Ms. Tredger: I thank the minister for that. I also wanted to ask about the seniors complex in Old Crow. I am not sure if that is also under Yukon Housing Corporation in collaboration with Health and Social Services, or if that is fully within a different department. I had the same questions about it: Who will be in charge of running it and deciding who lives there?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: My understanding is — and we will dig in — that this doesn't fall under the responsibility of Yukon Housing. My understanding was that I thought it was under the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation government, but I can also check with our folks at Health and Social Services.

I will be open. That is not a conversation or file that has come across my desk over the last number of years in this role.

Ms. Tredger: How many units does Yukon Housing have in Old Crow, and how are they allocated? Who are those units for?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We currently have seven units in Old Crow, and they are all allocated to staff.

Ms. Tredger: I have one last question, which might be more appropriate for the mains, but I will ask it now and we can always come back to it in the mains if that makes more sense.

In last year's budget and in this year's budget, there is a line for temporary emergency housing. I am on page 20-10 of the budget. I am wondering what that temporary emergency housing money is for.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Over the last number of years, it's a line item that we have held based on conversations with a number of local organizations that stress the need for us to look at some emergency — or potentially temporary — housing, more focused around seasonality.

So, of course, what I am getting at is looking at options for us for the wintertime. I think the number was \$450,000. We did use \$150,000 in our last budget toward Safe at Home. We have Health and Social Services using that building in the interim as temporary housing. We have contemplated a number of different things. We have looked and spoken to the private sector around — if it was appropriate for us to have temporary housing — whether it would be ATCO trailers, if we had to get to that point. Would that be appropriate? Would it be appropriate to try to work with an organization like public works Canada — the federal government — around something like the cadet camp. This year, we were in a position where Health and Social Services had the ability to work with the old Coast hotel on the Safe at Home project while they were trying to re-identify funds for the budget based on code changes that are required. That's what it has been used for.

I think, going into the next year, we are still going to be looking at different ways that we can ensure that we have backup options over and above our own housing stock. We have, in the last couple of years, tried to fast-track renovations on a number of units and tried to bring them to market. Two years ago, we did that to ensure that we had some options for people who were really in need. Again, we have seen fluctuations in temperatures — not quite as bad. We have seen some significant peaks over the last while — and not what we have seen in the past — but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be working with Health and Social Services and different non-governmental organizations to ensure that we do have backup stock, and this \$450,000 is the money that we would be looking to invest in some of those options.

Ms. Tredger: Thank you to the minister. That was really helpful, and that concludes my questions. I will save the rest for the mains. Thank you very much to the officials, the department, and the minister for these answers.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line.

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

lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$1,226,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$13,000,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$11,774,000 agreed to

Yukon Housing Corporation agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for five minutes.

Recess

Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Yukon Development Corporation

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: To begin, I would like to welcome colleagues to the Assembly today — our new president and CEO of the Yukon Development Corporation, Dennis Berry, and our senior policy advisor, Victoria Zeppa. It's lovely to have them here to help us provide information on the supplementary budget for the Yukon Development Corporation.

I will just very quickly go over what we are looking at for the supplementary budget. First of all, on the O&M side, the operation and maintenance spending was up by about \$4.5 million, and that is all about the inflation relief rebate, which will be coming in again. It will have been from this last winter and also this month.

The other thing that we have is the Atlin hydro project. We budgeted money for it, but we did not yet attain the full funding envelope. As we said in this Assembly several times even this Sitting, we are working to get that funding. We are working

with the federal government to seek it, but then the spending for 2022-23 did not occur on the capital side, so that's a decrease in that side of the budget.

There was a question raised at the briefing around our grid-scale battery, so I will just provide a little bit of information. Overall, the grid-scale battery is a \$35-million project. The funding for it is shared partly through the Investing in Canada infrastructure program. A little less than half is through that, and a little more than half is through Yukon Energy.

The question was around who the vendor supplying the battery is. It is SunGrid Solutions. That contract has a value of \$27,300,000 — just a little over.

There was a question, I believe, about agreements with Kwanlin Dün. So, the battery itself is located on settlement land of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and there is a 25-year lease agreement in place for \$1 million. I think there was also some funding that went toward the road itself.

Then there was some work that was done by a First Nation construction company around grading the lot for \$373,000.

I think that is the introductory information that I would like to provide, but, of course, I am happy to answer questions for the members opposite and look forward to our debate today.

Mr. Dixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the minister's opening remarks.

As we have done in other areas in the supplementary budget, I will be reserving the bulk of our questions for the mains, but I do have a few specific questions just while we have the minister here with officials, so I will jump right into those.

Last week, on March 15 in Question Period, the minister made some comments about ATCO's general rate application and I will read them back for the minister. It was in response to a question raised by my colleague, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, who said — and I quote: "So, when will the minister finally require ATCO to file for a general rate application to review the rates and profit margins?" In response, the minister said — and I quote: "Already done. I have risen in the House previously and said that we would encourage ATCO Electric Yukon to go to the Yukon Utilities Board to put in for a general rate application. They have done so. I will find the documentation on the Yukon Utilities Board's website, and I'll make sure to table it here for all members to see."

So, I would like to ask the minister about that comment. Has ATCO done a general rate application, as he suggested in Question Period last week, and, if so, where can we find the material? I note on the Yukon Utilities Board website that there is no such general rate application submitted by ATCO, so I would like to ask the minister to clarify that.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I went on the website to try to see where the information was. It is not there yet, but I am informed that the letter went from ATCO to the Yukon Utilities Board, indicating that they would file for a general rate application in the second quarter of this year. So, that is what is going on.

There are a couple of other things that are up on the Utilities Board website. The first one is — last calendar year, ATCO did put in for some rate relief. Those are still working their way through. There is also a joint application that the Utilities Board requested of both utilities — ATCO Electric and

Yukon Energy — where they asked them to simplify the electricity bills. So, there is documentation on that. The documentation is not yet up on the Utilities Board site, but in talking with the utilities, they are indicating to me that the general rate application for ATCO will go in, in the second quarter.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King's question was very specific about a general rate application, and, of course, the minister was very clear in his response that they have submitted — in his words, "put in for a general rate application". Of course, that has not happened yet. The two issues that the minister referenced, of course, were not in relation to a general rate application. One was the joint submission by YEC along with ATCO Electric Yukon, which related to clarifying which riders meant what. The other one was the rate relief submission, which I believe was ultimately denied by the Yukon Utilities Board on November 7 last year.

Again, I want it to be clear. While I appreciate that those two submissions from ATCO are there now, neither of those are general rate applications. So, the minister has said that ATCO has sent a letter to the Yukon Utilities Board. So, is he suggesting that the Yukon Utilities Board simply hasn't shared that yet? Is that what I am understanding from that?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, here is what I know. I know that ATCO has written a letter to the Utilities Board and indicated to them that they would like to go forward with the general rate application. We have also been informed that their intention is to go up in the second quarter of this year. I, too, have looked on the website; it is not up on the website.

I haven't talked to the Utilities Board to understand when they put it up and what mechanisms they use or whether that letter does make it up onto the website.

So, I am not sure about that and I don't want to speak for the Utilities Board — of course, they are independent — but I have, as I said in my response last week during Question Period, continued to reach out to ATCO because I understand that they have significant earnings over and above what their intended rate of return was, so I have encouraged them to put in for a general rate application. Through that conversation with ATCO, they let me know that they had submitted. I asked them whether that was public information; they said yes.

I can try to track it down. I did go to the website after I spoke here in the Assembly to try to see if I could see it; it is not there yet. I am not sure about timing, but I am confident that the information I have been given is correct — that they will be going to a general rate application in quarter 2 of this calendar year.

Mr. Dixon: Following what the minister said in Question Period, he went on to say — and I quote: "There is an application, which is still being worked through. I reached back out to them and said that it's not enough, that there is still too much that we see, and it's really because mining has been doing so well. That's why they have been getting more profits. It's not from households, but it is our mining industry. Because they are earning so much, I said to them, 'No, you really need to go back for a general rate application.' They did it."

So, I just want to understand that a little bit more. If they haven't submitted for a GRA yet but they intend to in Q2 of next year, how did the minister know that it wasn't enough? He said that it wasn't enough and he has asked them to go to a GRA. How did he know that it's not enough if they haven't submitted it yet?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just to be clear, it is this year, not next year — or maybe I misheard — in 2023. They have written to the board to give their indication. I believe that, in that process, there is a test year where they assess rates. We know, as we looked at ATCO's earnings against what they had put forward in their last general rate application, that they had earnings that were coming in over that, significantly. I know, from conversations with both utilities, that those earnings are — because they do this test year against what they anticipate their earnings to be, so they have to project how much demand there will be on the system, including growth of our residential base and commercial base but also around mining, and we can see that they didn't project mining to be as good as it has been in the territory. That is where these profits have been coming from.

My reference in my response during Question Period was that ATCO has put in for rate relief right now, and they made that application in 2022. We can see how much that looks like they will be providing as rate relief. Looking at that against the earnings that were over and above what were anticipated during the last rate application — that is what I am saying did not look like enough, so I have asked them to come forward.

You should always understand that whenever a utility comes forward to do a general rate application, they may have charges that may not yet have gone to rate, so we don't know where the rate ends up. For example, there could be infrastructure costs that they need to pay for through their business, and that will be what the Yukon Utilities Board considers.

So, we haven't seen the application yet for ATCO. It doesn't guarantee that rates will be lower, higher, or even different; what it guarantees is that there will be an application with a review by the Yukon Utilities Board. So, that's what we have asked, and it is because we can see that there are overearnings compared to what was anticipated during their last rate application.

Mr. Dixon: I thank the minister for that clarification.

A second question, though, relates to the comments about the mining industry as it contributes to ATCO. I would just like to clarify this: Do the three hardrock mines that have been operating in the last couple of years not have direct purchase agreements with YEC and not ATCO? I'm looking for some clarity on that.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It's a good question. I will talk to the utilities. I can say to the Member for Copperbelt North that both utilities explained to me that this was where their increase was. I will pose the question as he has posed it here and see if I can't get deeper information to share with the Assembly. If I can, when I get up for the Development Corporation during the mains, I will try to have an answer then.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister's willingness to come back to us. In case I wasn't clear before, I should just clarify. It is my understanding that the big purchasers of electricity — being the three hardrock mines that I'm sure the minister is referring to — have individual EPAs with Yukon Energy Corporation. Therefore, they purchase directly from YEC, so I was trying to understand why a direct purchase of electricity from YEC would drive ATCO's profits, as the minister has indicated that they do in his response to questions on March 15.

Noting that the minister will return — based on that question — at a later date, I will move on.

Can the minister give us an indication about where we are in terms of rented diesels currently? We had some indication from folks in the private sector that there was a movement toward a longer term rental agreement for the diesel rentals that are currently being used. We had understood that there are 17 currently in the territory and that the government was considering a multi-year rental instead of a year-by-year rental as has been the case over the last few years. Can the minister provide some clarity on that?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, there is some review that is being done by Yukon Energy right now on those agreements — I think around the range of things. Some of them have to do with how they are accounted for. So, you know, they can make differences in how they come onto the books. Others have to do with, like, making sure that we are getting the performance that is desired out of the units. But, overall, I have been told by Yukon Energy that they are looking at cost efficiencies around those contracts and considering whether the best way is single-year or multi-year. So, I understand that they are taking a look at that.

Mr. Dixon: Can the minister tell us how many rented diesels are in the territory currently?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are 17.

Mr. Dixon: We had also been led to understand that perhaps the government was considering adding to that number. Can the minister provide some clarity as to whether or not there will be five additional rental diesels coming to the territory at some point?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I think that is possible, Madam Chair. So, every year, I believe, they analyze to make sure that there will be enough diesels that are there for the energy demands in the capacity gap that we have and also to ensure that we are meeting the reliability of our system, should there be a failure of one of the bigger aspects of our system.

Typically, that is considered Aishihik going down or the Aishihik-Whitehorse transmission line, so we have to make sure that there is sufficient backup that can come up. I know, for example, that we have a couple of the diesels — of our long-term fleet of diesels — that have been due for replacement. There is definitely analysis being done to make sure that we will have reliable energy for the system this coming winter.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister's response, and perhaps he can just review my question and come back when we have this discussion in the mains. Something that we will certainly be asking about then is: How many more diesels will

we be renting going forward this year? But I will leave it there because I certainly do want to move on eventually here.

One final line of questioning for the minister with direct regard to the supplementary budget that is before us — the Atlin hydro expansion project originally included, as the minister indicated in his opening remarks, a budget of \$15 million and that has been changed downward to \$12.5 million. My question was simply: What is the remaining \$2.5 million going toward? That is capital funding, obviously, so I would just like to better understand what this money is being spent on since this project is not advancing — underway, as far as I understood — right now.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The \$2.5 million was a contingency in case we heard from the federal government early that there was a bridging of that gap — that the Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership would want to begin moving early on some of its phases of the project. So, they are keen to go.

During the budgeting exercises — we were coming up to this Spring Sitting — we held back \$2.5 million in case we got an earlier indication and could begin to expend dollars, and we didn't want to be over the appropriation — so it was those dollars. Currently, what we are doing is — we believe that the time to watch for is the upcoming federal budget. We don't know yet what is coming there. We certainly have had conversations with the federal government. The Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership has also had conversations with the federal government. So, I don't anticipate those \$2.5 million that are remaining to be spent, but when we went into the budgeting exercise, that is how it was held.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister's response there.

Just so I am clear, then, is it the intent that the \$2.5 million will be lapsed in a few weeks here, when the budget concludes? And then will it be accounted for in the next supplementary? Or when would we learn the fate of that \$2.5 million?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Chair, I think it is fair to say that we anticipate that there will be a lapse right now. Overall, we have committed to \$50 million, and the cash flow of that — first, we need to see that the funding stack is in place. There is a funding gap right now. We are working to see if we can close that funding gap by working with the already generous support of the federal government. If it is closed, then our commitment to the \$50 million comes into play. We have budgeted money this fiscal period in anticipation of that possibility, and we will work out the cash flow of that \$50 million, based on — there will be a range of things that matter, but the sequencing of the project against the sequencing of all of the funding sources that are out there — again, just to remind us, we are in that funding model, and so is the First Nation, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, the Government of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada. So, all of those funding partners — well, there are multiple streams from the Government of Canada. So, we'll just have to work all that out.

So, if the funding gap closes and the project is greenlit, then we will work out that sequencing. I am happy to share that with members of this House as it gets sorted out.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the response from the minister. I have just a final question: Has any of the \$50 million that has been committed to this project actually flowed yet? If so, to what?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: None of the \$50 million has gone to the Atlin project. There has been some staff time, of course, put toward the project. There was dialogue that was going on between the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, and we supported it by assisting with some of that dialogue, and there may have been a few dollars that went to that, but none of the overall capital budget has been spent at this point.

Ms. Tredger: I will start by thanking the officials for being with us and all the ones who are listening.

I want to talk about the electrical distribution network, particularly in Whitehorse. We have this huge push to move to electrify transportation and heating. I think that is amazing, and I think that is really important if we are going to meet our climate goals, but we have a very old distribution network in Whitehorse when it comes to distributing electricity to people's homes.

I know that the newer neighbourhoods have — and all new housing is required to have — 200-amp services, but I know that's not the case in older neighbourhoods like Riverdale, downtown, and Hillcrest. It is pretty expensive for individuals who want to do it to have things like fast chargers or electrothermal storage.

My understanding is that, even beyond individuals upgrading the connections to their own homes, there are wider network changes that need to happen as more and more people move to electrifying their vehicles and their homes. This is a pretty big barrier to electrification, as I understand it.

I am wondering what the minister can tell me about what is happening in terms of addressing that problem?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This is an important question, although the lead of it really is ATCO because they are the company that deals with the distribution of the electricity to our homes and businesses. It's their work.

I know that Yukon Energy is aware of that and working with them. I have had some conversations with ATCO. I will reference them just at a high level, but I want to be careful to explain that it is not our direct role around that. We want to be supportive of the utility. There are code changes that have come in, and that changes things, but in terms of going backwards through other neighbourhoods, there will be upgrades that will be needed. I think that ATCO is considering whether they will be neighbourhood by neighbourhood, incremental — or how they will approach it.

I know that they have a couple of pilots going on around some of this, so there are ways in which they will try to tackle it. From the highest level, though, the thing to understand is that whenever a utility — whether it is ATCO as a private sector utility or whether it is Yukon Energy as a Crown corporation — does that type of work, it's always planned out and is part of

the infrastructure that goes in to support the electrification of the territory. That's part of those capital projects that end up going back to be considered by the Utilities Board as part of that ongoing activity.

At the same time, there is an advantage to the utilities because they are getting more sales because people are using more electricity. As they move to electric heat and as they move to electric vehicles, those sales go up. So, over time, they levelize those costs and try to distribute them.

Now, I have heard of some stories of individual Yukoners where it isn't working that way yet, so there are challenges, and I understand that. But our role will be to support them in that transition.

Ms. Tredger: I worry about leaving it to the utility for a few reasons. *Our Clean Future* is really pinned on electrification in so many ways, and we need to have a coordinated effort to have that happen. It doesn't matter how many electric cars we sell if people can't charge them at their homes or if there are no alternatives — the effort has to be coordinated.

But the other piece is that ultimately ATCO's only method of revenue — of funding these upgrades, which I believe are going to be very expensive — is to go back to the ratepayer. I know that there are efficiencies as electric sales go up, but I can't imagine they can do without significantly going back to the ratepayer, and that is really not a progressive way of thinking about funding collective infrastructure. When we build a road, we don't put a toll on it. When we are going to upgrade our electrical infrastructure, I don't think we should put that back on the ratepayer.

So, is the government considering taking a more active role in helping to provide funding and helping to coordinate the efforts and really coming up with a strategy for making sure that our distribution infrastructure can meet our electrification needs?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There is an active dialogue that is ongoing. There is an energy advisory group. It consists of the Energy branch here within Yukon government, the Yukon Energy utility, and ATCO Electric utility, and they meet often.

They deal with both demand and supply, so you are always trying to match those things up. In fact, we have the group at Yukon Energy that is doing the demand-side management to try to find ways to push the demand down. They call that "negawatts" — where you reduce the need for energy, period.

So, there is work; it is coordinated, but the physical work that happens is going to be typically ATCO's because they are responsible for the distribution network across the territory, generally speaking. There are a couple of communities where that is different, but let's just leave that generally there.

I think we always remain open to conversations if there are ways to shift — investing in infrastructure. For example, we have the Arctic energy fund and our independent power production policy. We have a bunch of ways in the Innovative Renewable Energy Initiative. So, there are all of these programs that are there, and maybe ATCO will approach us and say that they think this one is done better by working with tax dollars

and the Yukon government budget rather than ratepayer dollars.

We should also just remind ourselves that no matter what the utilities do, before anything goes to rate, they must turn to our Utilities Board to review that, and they are effectively the watchdogs for the ratepayers. So, it is an active role that we have, although the lead responsibility for the distribution network is ATCO.

Ms. Tredger: I do understand that all potential increases to rate have to go through the Utilities Board, and I think that they might actually not be willing to approve a rate increase on the scale that it would take to upgrade the distribution network. I don't know; I can't really speculate about what they would or wouldn't approve, but we are talking about a really significant amount of money here, I believe. I worry about waiting for ATCO to ask for that money because ultimately this is a decision that has huge impacts on the climate future and on the energy future of the Yukon, and I don't want to see that decision just in the hands of a private company; I think that the government needs to take a lead on that decision.

Would the minister be willing to direct that working group — the energy working group — to develop a strategy?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are two things that I want to say. The first one is that the advisory group is already working on this very subject. In fact, this is a specific subject that they have been focusing on lately. I don't need to direct them because they are already doing it. I agree that it is an important subject. I agree with the member opposite. I know that the advisory group is doing the work. Again, it is not just the private sector utility; it is ATCO, but it is also Yukon Energy, and it is our Energy branch as well.

The second thing I want to say is that whenever a utility goes to do work where they have to upgrade their distribution network because of the demand increase — that load increase — they don't just turn around and charge all of that back right away. What they do is they levelize that cost over the lifecycle of the infrastructure. We anticipate this infrastructure to be in place for quite a while, so even though the upfront costs can be high, they often get very stretched out. That's one of the ways that is standard in how our utilities smooth those investments.

The last thing I will say is that, when it comes to individual homeowners — if they are upgrading their system, for example, through the better buildings program that we have — we have a couple of ways we are supporting Yukoners through that so their costs are kept reasonable. One is that we have low-interest loans for them, and the second way is that we have grants around those improvements.

So, on the better buildings side, once you start to do the work, you often do multiple things at once, whether that is improving your insulation, the R-value of your home, or upgrading your service to deal with things like heat pumps or heat exchangers — those sorts of things — and getting ready for more electricity and less fossil fuels. Those are the several ways in which we will work.

On the main point of the question: Is this group working on this subject? Absolutely. I have just been told that the advisory group has a heavy focus on this topic right now.

Ms. Tredger: I thank the minister for that. That's great to hear. I guess I would make a pitch for having a timeline to have a strategy in place and making sure that work happens as quickly as possible, because I do think that this is a barrier that we're going to run into and it could really thwart our efforts if we don't deal with it.

We have been talking about it on the grid scale, but I also want to talk a little bit about the impact on individual homeowners who are required to bear the costs of upgrading their own homes to 200-amp services. They are being asked to pay tens of thousands of dollars to do that, which is really prohibitive for a lot of people.

One of the recommendations in *Climate Shot 2030* is recommendation E4, and the second half is: "Update utility regulations so that customers are not responsible for costs when upgrading to 200A services." I will encourage and ask the minister to look at ways that we cannot put that cost on individual homeowners in a prohibitive way and look at the way we can collectively bear those costs.

I want to talk about demand-side management. The minister mentioned that this is happening at Yukon Energy Corporation and I am wondering if he could tell me more about what is happening.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First, I thank the member opposite for her noting the Climate Leadership Council's recommendation. Again, all of those are being put through that system. I will ask specifically about that recommendation. I suspect that this is one that will require costing, so I have to do a little bit of diligence around it. I will just check on that and I'm happy to try to follow that up. I will make a point of checking in with the advisory group about what they anticipate with this overall initiative.

One of the ways that we are looking at it — the Minister of Environment and I are considering the work of *Our Clean Future* — is that we will integrate the recommendations from the Climate Leadership Council and make them actions that have timelines and reportability on them under *Our Clean Future*.

I said this just the other day, I believe — that we need to do more under *Our Clean Future* and that we still have a gap to close. Yesterday after session, I asked EMR to get me information about what they believe is the potential emissions reduction — once all of the recommendations are integrated in — so that I can report back a number about where we think we are.

With respect to the demand-side management, I had the opportunity to connect with the person doing the lead work — Eric Labrecque, I think, from Yukon Energy — just a couple of weeks ago and he is super keen on this project. It was good to have a conversation with him.

I should note that, even though Yukon Energy has that lead, there is also a working group with the Energy branch, ATCO Electric, Yukon Energy, the Development Corporation, I think, and Yukon University is involved in some ways too — their energy group up there under Dr. Michael Ross is doing a bunch of work on it. Anyway, what Eric indicated to me was that they have a goal to reduce — I am going to muck up the

unit, so I will have to come back with units. But whatever he told me that they feel they have in terms of energy reduction — because it's really about shaving your peaks down, and that is the place where they focus most on demand-side management. But he believed that there was the ability to — and he was excited about that — but he felt the potential there was to even triple that amount.

So, it was good, and it is going to be an important piece of the puzzle. It will never do it all, but it is one of the ways that you look for first because it is the lowest impact of all of the solutions that you look to come up with because you are just dropping the need, period. It is akin, in some ways, to the battery energy storage project because what the battery will do is recharge at night, when demand is not as high, and supply the energy for the peaks — during the morning and the evening when we hit our two peaks. That way, the overall capacity that you need for your energy drops. So, these are important projects. The team is keen on it, and I will try to get the numbers for the member opposite.

Ms. Tredger: I would really appreciate those numbers. That would be great, and it is really great to hear that this work is happening. Someone summed it up for me once by saying that the cleanest kilowatt hour is the one we don't need.

So, there are, of course, costs with everything we do. I do think that demand-side management is absolutely the way to go, and I am wondering: Is Yukon Energy planning to absorb the costs in order to implement those programs within its own budgets? Is it going to have to go back to the ratepayers for those, or is the Yukon government planning to fund them?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: From this amazing team, they got me some of those numbers.

The target is for seven megawatts of demand-side management. It is effectively saving seven megawatts, but that is the way it works. Although, again, Eric let me know that he thought there were more than 20 possible. So, he thinks that they are going to get there and much more. So, he feels that we will beat the target by quite a bit.

Second of all, you automatically always ask, "What is the cost of that?" Then you have to look.

Does it go to rate, or does it go through some other program? There is a budget that Yukon Energy has approved, but the question about whether it goes to rate or not is yet to be fully determined, because it is possible that there are some parts of the program that could apply through the Innovative Renewable Energy Initiative, IREI — I just remember the acronyms, not the words. It is possible that some of it gets offset, but I think it's also important to try to compare. I asked Eric that question right away — how it compares. For example, the cost is much, much better than fossil fuels, which is great. I don't think it's as good as hydro — or legacy hydro, for sure — but that is sort of the range that we are looking at. There are costs to do these things, so usually you are looking at metering, for example, your hot water tank so that it comes on off-peak or things like that. That's a way in which you shift that load.

The rate question is still to be determined, but we can say that it is better than some of the other things that are going to rate right now.

Ms. Tredger: I thank the minister for that, and I appreciate those numbers.

I really hope it didn't seem as though I was implying that I think these projects are too expensive. I think they are excellent projects. I absolutely think they are the way to go, and when we think about the environmental cost, they just make so much sense.

I guess what I am suggesting is that it makes a lot more sense for the Yukon government to fund this than for the ratepayers to fund this. It's just a more progressive strategy. We don't put tolls on the highways. I don't think we should put it back on the ratepayer to fund these programs. That's my pitch to the government — to look at how they can fund those programs because I think they are so worthwhile and so important and needed.

With that, I am going to wrap up my questions for today, and I am sure I will have more for the mains, but I will finish there for today.

Thank you so much to the officials and to the minister and to everyone at the corporation.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the members opposite for their insightful questions. Like them, I thank the public servants who were here assisting with providing answers to questions today.

Mr. Hassard: I didn't want them to get away too quickly. I just had a follow-up question or maybe a clarification to a question that the Member for Whitehorse Centre asked earlier.

In regard to upgrades to ATCO's infrastructure — and the question was around someone wanting to put 200-amp service in their home, which is pretty standard, and the infrastructure isn't sufficient or isn't capable of doing that — did the minister say that this was the responsibility of ATCO, or is it the homeowner? Also, the minister talked about grants at some point in there, too, so I was curious if there was some type of grant that the minister knew of that was available for homeowners to help pay for those infrastructure upgrades.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, on the side of it where we are talking about the infrastructure that leads to the property — that is, the infrastructure of ATCO Electric — there are times when someone puts in for an increase in service and then that triggers something with ATCO where they would then pass that cost on to the homeowner. But what we were discussing earlier is the proactive way in which ATCO is working to bolster its distribution network so that it can take more of those loads — anticipating that those loads will come. I am not going to get into the conversation about that one-on-one that sometimes happens between the utility and the subscriber or the homeowner; I leave that for ATCO.

It is more about the work that we are doing with ATCO in trying to anticipate those increases in load that are coming in our older neighbourhoods — like my old home doesn't have 200-amp service in it downtown, so I can see that if we went for something more, we would have to upgrade it.

With respect to the grants that I was discussing — around improving the service — what I was referring to is that, under the better building projects and also under some of the

programs, for example, dealing with things like heat pumps — sometimes those initiatives require the homeowner to increase their service from, say, a 100-amp service to a 200-amp service.

In that instance, there is, for some things, a subsidy. I don't know that it is specifically for the panel increasing, but it is for the project around it — that might trigger that increase. So, that could also be under the better building loan program, where you are doing some improvements to the house and, at the same time, increasing the service, as needed, for those switches. Maybe you are moving off of a fossil-fuel furnace and moving to electric heat somehow, and you need to upgrade your electrical service. That is all potentially part of it, but the way those programs — well, there is a whole system with it. So, it is not targeted at just changing out the panel; it's that broader initiative to improve the energy efficiency of the house and to move off of fossil fuels.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line.

Ms. Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$4,406,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$12,500,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$8,094,000 agreed to

Yukon Development Corporation agreed to

Chair: We will now return to Schedule A of Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$28,984,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$28,984,000 agreed to

to

On Clause 1

On Schedule A

Schedule A agreed to

On Schedule B

Schedule B agreed to
Clause 1 agreed to
On Clause 2
Clause 2 agreed to
On Preamble
Preamble agreed to
On Title
Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Klondike that the Chair report Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

Bill No. 208: First Appropriation Act 2023-24

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Bill No. 208: First Appropriation Act 2023-24

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Deputy Chair, I would start by welcoming Deputy Minister Jessica Schultz to the floor of the Legislative Assembly and open up the floor for questions.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak at general debate. Of course, as always, we are interested in getting into the individual departments, but before we do, I did want to ask the Minister of Finance a few questions about some key fiscal indicators. I would like to start, though, by asking — I realize that this is a question that could be better answered in the Department of Finance, but since the deputy minister is here and the Minister of Finance is here, perhaps they can help me out.

When did the Business and Economic Research branch move from Economic Development into the Department of Finance?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I believe that it was in 2017, but we will check to see if that is accurate.

Mr. Dixon: The branch is, of course, in Finance now, which has added an important component to the way the budget is presented, because it includes the fiscal outlook as well as the economic outlook for the territory in the budget documents,

which I think has been a fairly useful development over the years.

I know that when the roles were reversed and I was the Minister of Economic Development and the MLA for Klondike was on the other side, we had a few discussions about that. In hindsight, I think that the decision to move it was actually a sound one.

To that, I will ask a few specific questions. Can the Minister of Finance tell us what the anticipated GDP growth is for this year, for next year, and for the year after? Those are the three years, I believe, that the budget forecasts. Could he tell us this year's anticipated GDP growth and the next two years as well?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I agree with the member opposite as far as the fiscal and economic update — and the branch coming over to Finance being a good idea from a financial perspective. We are also making sure that we put these out at the same time as budgets — a change as well that I believe we will get a lot of accolades on. Making sure that we have that known update at a set time is important to a lot of people paying attention to the finances of the government — this outlook providing that context for both the fiscal and the economic expectations for the year that we are in but also the year beyond, with GDP growth estimated at 3.1 percent for 2022 and also, from the fiscal economic outlook, the growth of 5.4 percent in 2023. And if folks want to see these numbers, they are all available online on our website, just typing in “fiscal and economic outlook” for this fiscal year of 2023-24.

Mr. Dixon: I was hoping that the Minister of Finance can just clarify. I think he said that the anticipated growth for 2023 was 5.4 percent. Did he have an anticipated growth for next year, for 2024?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is 3.7 percent for 2024 — my apologies.

Mr. Dixon: Can the Minister of Finance tell us what the change in GDP was for 2016?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm not really sure what the member opposite is referring to. We can give him the number of the GDP growth for that fiscal year, or is he looking for a change from a forecast to that year?

Mr. Dixon: I believe that Yukon's real GDP grew in 2016, but I am just asking the Minister of Finance to confirm what the growth of the GDP was for the year 2016.

Hon. Mr. Silver: It was 5.9 percent for the fiscal year, so 2016-17 would be the fiscal year.

Mr. Dixon: Typically, the Yukon Bureau of Statistics reports on the calendar year. I was just wondering if the Minister of Finance could tell us what the change in GDP was in the calendar year of 2016?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am referring to economic updates as opposed to the actuals when they come in, so, yes, the actuals are in a calendar year, so that will be in the calendar year of 2016.

Mr. Dixon: The Yukon Bureau of Statistics' Yukon economic accounts for 2016 show a growth of eight percent for GDP growth in 2016. I am not sure which number the Minister of Finance is referring to, but I will move on. My point was

simply that my understanding was that the economy grew at a fairly significant rate in 2016. As I referenced earlier, the economic accounts from the Bureau of Statistics — which falls under the Department of Finance, of course — reported eight percent. Then, according to Statistics Canada, that economic growth was strongest in the country at eight percent in 2016.

So, can I ask the Minister of Finance to confirm if the Yukon Bureau of Statistics' economic accounts are different from what he is citing? I am just wondering which number he is citing. It sounds like he was perhaps citing the forecast — if he could clarify that.

Hon. Mr. Silver: The number of 5.9 that we have is from Statistics Canada. I am not really sure where the member opposite is referencing the eight percent. If memory serves me well, which I wouldn't rely on right now, there was a forecast for eight percent, I believe, for that year a couple of years before that, but that might not be what the member opposite is referring to.

Mr. Dixon: I will just table the documents that I have here. One is from the Yukon Bureau of Statistics website, which is the Yukon economic accounts for 2016. The highlights in that document, of course, show that Yukon's real GDP increased eight percent in 2016.

Then, of course, I will also table the second document from Statistics Canada which shows that rate of growth in comparison to other jurisdictions. It showed that Yukon's economy grew by eight percent in 2016 and led the country. I will table that separately. I know that the Minister of Finance won't be able to see that right away, so I will just table those as soon as I can.

I will move on, then, to the next point of information that I am looking for. Can the Minister of Finance tell us where the Yukon stands currently in this budget with regard to net financial assets?

Hon. Mr. Silver: In the 2023-24 main estimates, we project \$374.8 million in net debt on a non-consolidated basis — net debt being the measure of a government's ability to pay off its liabilities if they were all due immediately. This does not mean that the government necessarily needs to borrow on these funds. The majority of the net debt is for long-term liabilities that will not necessarily materialize all at once — for example, severance entitlements.

The two main contributing changes in this year to the annual net debt for 2023-24 are an adoption of an asset retirement obligation liability, which is a new accounting standard that came across the country from the federal government that is effective in April 2022. There are two numbers that are pertinent to that. I believe that it is \$54 million of additional net debt, but now that this new accounting standard has happened, there will also be an ongoing obligation of — I believe it is \$1.4 million or \$1.6 million. I will just get my officials to confirm those two numbers for the asset retirement obligation liability. There is also the continued investment in capital spending, specifically capital assets.

I will just clarify that the ongoing obligation past that initial bump of the \$54 million is \$1.6 million each year that will affect the net debt.

Mr. Dixon: The minister provided the non-consolidated net financial debt for this budget. Can he also provide the consolidated net financial assets for the territory?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As we are here for the mains on the non-consolidated basis, I would have to get back to the member opposite with that number. I don't have it at my fingertips. As the member opposite knows, we are debating a non-consolidated budget right now. I do want to make that comparison as well, because it is a good way to take a look at the approach that the Yukon Party had used in the past of capital assets and how they loaned money through a corporation, compared to using capital dollars from the federal government in a non-consolidated budget. For right now, and for the purposes of these mains, these are non-consolidated mains, so it would take us a little bit to get those numbers for the member opposite.

Mr. Dixon: To the minister's point, I will stick with non-consolidated.

Can he tell me what the non-consolidated net financial resources were when he became minister in 2016?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Seeing as we are here in this current year debating this current year's budget, I would have to go back and take a look at the Public Accounts. I wonder if he means to compare maybe mains to mains or maybe even the Public Accounts compared to the mains. If he can give me some information, we will endeavour to get that information to him. Again, there is no problem getting it; I just don't have that information right in front of me.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that we are not debating the 2015-16 budget. I understand that, but the reason I ask these questions is because one of the profound observations we have heard over and over again from the Auditor General and from the former Deputy Minister of Finance appearing before the Public Accounts Committee is that we can look at any one year all we want, but what we should really be looking for is the overall trend. What we have seen by way of trend since 2016 is significantly declining net financial resources.

The reason I asked the Minister of Finance what the net financial assets looked like in 2016 was to establish a fact base around the trend of our net financial assets. Of course, as we have seen over the last six or seven years, our net financial assets have declined considerably over the years.

So, what I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, then, is: What should we make of that observation? We see declining net financial assets. We are now in a position where we have a net financial debt, as opposed to assets, and can he comment on the trajectory that we have going forward? I note that in the 2023-24 fiscal outlook provided by the department, and as a component of our briefing prior to the budget being tabled, it shows that net financial debt increasing to \$528 million in the next two years. So, starting when this Minister of Finance took over to where we are going in the next few years, we see a substantial decrease in our net financial assets.

I would like to offer the Minister of Finance an opportunity to comment on that. Is that a correct observation, that we have seen considerably declining net financial assets?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I would note that the numbers that the member opposite is looking for are all publicly available in mains of years past and also in the Public Accounts, so he has all these numbers. He can endeavour to get that, or I have no problem getting those numbers for the member opposite.

We do also know that the trend of cash in hand to help service the ratio of the net financial assets versus debts has been on a trajectory for over a decade, including during his time in government. I would say the main difference between how we provide the assets for Yukoners, compared to maybe the way that his government has, is that they would use our development corporations, and they would loan their money to the development corporations for assets — for example, a hospital in Watson Lake or a hospital in Dawson. As opposed to utilizing 75/25-cent dollars from federal transfers, they would loan the money, and the interest rates — well, we are still paying for that. We are still paying for those debts.

Right now, as far as actual external debt, \$216.4 million is reported in the Public Accounts for 2021-22. We could have a complete breakdown of the 90 — let's go with 90 percent of that debt that is still on our books now being from the Yukon Party's way of contributing for capital assets.

Again, I am not necessarily saying that is wrong or bad; I am just saying that it is the difference between a consolidated and a non-consolidated way of accounting for those numbers. Whereas, what we have done — and we've done this during a pandemic, when it was really dire times for the private sector and necessary to make sure that we had opportunities for our construction companies, but also addressing the historic lack of catch-up and keep-up that we had to do — the Office of the Auditor General wrote about this during the Yukon Party's time — where we had some catch-up and keep-up to do as well. So, we utilized and optimized our 25-cent and 75-cent dollars in building for Yukon's future.

Our commitment has always been to maintaining that fiscal sustainability. To achieve this, we have reviewed spending commitments to ensure that expenditures are effectively used within the framework of our expected revenues. These measures will help us to ensure that the government is able to meet spending commitments while also maintaining a healthy fiscal position.

We have talked in the past year in the Assembly, when it comes to the debate about the difference between a surplus and deficit and then the concept of whether you have a net debt or assets. We have taken a look at debt anchors, which is a comparison to GDP compared to net debt. We will acknowledge and confirm with the member opposite that the cash-on-hand situation over a decade is trending downward, but we also are doing everything we possibly can to be open and transparent about what we are spending and why.

We have talked in the Legislative Assembly about investing in health and investing in education. We have to do those things. The Yukon Party would be the first ones to say: "You need to invest in these areas", and so we are investing in those areas and, in doing so, making sure that our ratios of net debt compared to GDP need to be considered.

But what also needs to be considered is working through inflationary times, planning for the future, making sure, through a five-year capital plan — which I know the members opposite don't respect — to show that forecasted budgeting. It is extremely important to also show the over \$2 billion in spending that is going to be happening in the future, as well, so that folks know what we are spending on. We think that is important.

If you notice in this year's mains, our capital budget has come down from a historic high. Again, we did this purpose-built — catch-up and keep-up — done. Well, not done, but we have done a lot better to get these assets out the door. We are on the other side of the pandemic and now we need to plan for right-sizing our budget when it comes to our capital assets and showcasing that on the five-year plan as well.

As the net debt is forecasted to increase over the next five years, primarily due to investments in infrastructure, maintaining a higher level of capital spending would put pressure on the fiscal plan and financial resources — cash flow is what we're talking about — and will require considerations in the future. But, at the same time, I would be interested to know which capital projects in that five-year capital plan the members opposite would have us not accomplish, whether that's in health or whether that's in education.

I think my final piece to all of this is that we also, in our budget, have a \$50-million contingency for areas of expected but presently undefined expenditures. This is money that we wouldn't have to come back to in the supplementary budget for forest fires, for floods, and for things that we now historically have trended toward supplementary budgets. So, not only are you seeing in the mains this year a surplus, but there's also a five-year capital plan that includes \$2.15 billion in spending over the next five years. There is a contingency in this budget that we won't have to come back and add to the deficit, if there was one.

Even with a trend down in the cash reserve that we've seen over the last 10 years, the commitment to assets, the five-year capital plan of where we are going, the stabilizing and right-sizing of that for a healthy, competitive industry, and the First Nation procurement plan that helps circulate dollars in the Yukon, we believe that our accounting is helping to grow the economy and helping to make sure that our GDP actuals match up with those forecasts in a positive way. We are leading Canada in a lot of these pursuits.

Mr. Dixon: Can the Minister of Finance tell us, now that we are in a net debt position, what our debt-to-GDP ratio is?

Hon. Mr. Silver: When looking at the Yukon's net-debt-to-GDP ratio, the territory is among the lowest in the country. Generally, the higher the ratio, the longer it might take for a government to return to a net financial asset position. In Yukon, our forecasted net-debt-to-GDP ratio for the 2022-23 fiscal year is 7.4 percent. For 2023-24, it's 8.5 percent, placing us in a very healthy position compared to our peers across the country and significantly lower than many national jurisdictions as well.

Mr. Dixon: So, when we look at the next few years, based on what the Minister of Finance has told us about the

anticipated GDP growth and seeing the fairly substantial increase in the net financial debt, is it fair to say that our debt-to-GDP ratio is increasing considerably over the next two years?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would say that showing our two forecast years is a good indication of where we are. I always worry about getting too far out in forecast land. In opposition land, I would have used forecasts and bragged about forecasts against the party in power at the time as well. So, I don't want to speculate too far into the future.

To ask if we are worried about our ratio, I'm not necessarily worried about our ratio. It's concerning that we are in this situation for the first time — with the trend over the last 10 years — where we are like other jurisdictions having a ratio. That includes a net financial debt, but again, if we compare this — oranges to apples — with provinces and if we compare oranges to oranges right across with the territories, and we look at the economic output of the Yukon in general — both the private sector and the public sector — the ability for us to spend on assets to make sure that we have a thriving private sector — our forecasts for the labour market, our own-source revenues because of income — I believe we are in a strong fiscal position.

I do recognize, as well, that this is new — being in a situation with a net financial debt and the cash reserves being different from what they were when the Yukon Party was in, necessarily, but we have chosen to use our financial assets to invest in the future of the Yukon, and that investment will pay off dividends. And it is. We are spending on our roads. We are spending on our bridges, schools, and health facilities to help grow our economy and to provide vital public service, and these investments in infrastructure and services improve the lives of Yukoners right across the territory.

We could go back and forth about the historical deficit of assets that we faced when we first got here and ask the general public if they believe that we should have invested, even if there wasn't a pandemic — that whether or not we should have invested as we had in our capital assets, in our hospitals, in our schools, in our infrastructure, our roads, and our bridges. The debate of whether or not the half a billion in new money is coming from the federal government for the north Klondike, for example — that is a lot of money, but it's great for the industry and it also comes with a commitment of ours.

We are the envy of the provinces when it comes to the ratio of how much money we put up compared to the federal government on these infrastructure projects. I would make the argument every day that we are doing things — financially sound. We are getting the accolades from national organizations by doing so.

We recognize that we are in a situation now that is different than it was under the Yukon Party — where we have to check our ratio. But, again, when we look at our net-debt-to-GDP ratio now and forecast into the future, we are in a very, very healthy position compared to our peers across the country. We are actively monitoring and reviewing our financial position as it relates to the management of government operations. This is

allowing us to plan and to ensure sustainable and effective capital spending to meet Yukon's infrastructure needs.

Mr. Dixon: So, I appreciate the minister's comments there, but I wanted to note the reason why I am asking these questions. It is because we are often asked about why we are concerned about the spending trajectory of the territorial government. When we look at the broader trends, we see some concerning aspects of those trends.

Now, on December 7 last year, the former Deputy Minister of Finance told the Public Accounts Committee this: "Net financial assets are important because they show how much the government has in financial assets to finance future transactions." That is why I asked about the trend of our net financial assets, and if folks were to review the Public Accounts, for instance, on page 5, they show that the downward trend in our net financial assets began in that 2015-16 period.

Going back to 2013, which is the only information I have in front of me — from 2013 to 2015, they were increasing, and then, in 2016 and since then, they have been declining. Now we are in a position where — not only do we not have net financial assets, we have net debt. Net debt, of course, is an important measure to look at, as well, especially when we consider the fact that our net debt is growing more quickly than our economy is growing, which I think is concerning as well.

So, here is also what the former deputy minister told the Public Accounts Committee — and I quote: "As I said, in the Yukon, on a consolidated basis, we don't have net debt; we have net assets. So, it's not as relevant to use net financial assets to GDP as it may be in other places, but for purposes of comparing from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, it's still an important measure to use because it is a measure that is very commonly used by credit rating agencies and by financial analysts. So, for consistency purposes, it's important that we continue to show that ratio."

So, that is why I am asking these questions, Deputy Chair — because we were told by officials that these metrics are important, that net financial assets are important, that our debt-to-GDP ratio is important, and that we should be thoughtful and considerate about the direction in which those metrics are going.

As I have explained, when it comes to net financial assets, there has been a fairly dramatic drop in the last six or seven years, and now we are beyond that to the point where we see a concerning trend of increasing our debt relative to the growth of our GDP. So, that is why I am asking these questions in general debate. It is to raise my concern about the trajectory in which we are going.

In addition, I wanted to note that the reason why I mentioned the growth of our economy in 2016, compared to today, was because we have seen a growing trend of ministers in the government making comments about a supposed recession in 2016, and, of course, that is simply not true or not reflective of the facts. For instance, back on March 6 of this year, the Minister of Community Services said — and I quote: "In late 2016, we inherited a recession." Of course, that is simply not true; that is not an accurate statement.

As we have explained and as the statistics show, the economy was growing in 2016. In fact, it was growing at a rate that was leading in the country, and this is what this government inherited. They inherited a growing economy that was leading the country in economic growth. They inherited net financial assets that were fairly considerable in nature, and since that time, we have seen those net financial assets dwindle, we have seen our debt grow, and we have seen the forecast for the next few years of a growth in net debt at a rate that is larger than the projected rate of our economy growing.

So, these are all things that concern us. These are all reasons why we will ultimately, obviously, be voting against this budget, but I wanted to explain that because we have had a number of conversations between my colleague, the Member for Lake Laberge, and the Minister of Finance, which I don't think have arrived at that conclusion, so I wanted to note that.

Now, I will move to another question that I have for the Minister of Finance in general debate. Back on March 7 of this year, his colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, made some comments that I'm curious about. The Minister of Finance made these comments — sorry, not the Minister of Highways and Public Works; he made them about the Department of Highways and Public Works.

The Minister of Finance said — and I quote: “Also, the member opposite has brought up this parking lot issue quite a few times now, and again, it's insulting to the Department of Highways and Public Works. Here is why. When we do Management Board, we will get an envelope for certain things from Highways and Public Works. To think that the paving of the actual parking lot that we as ministers decide upon — it's not — we give allocations to envelopes of spending for the department. They will prioritize that spending.”

My question for the Minister of Finance is: What is the name of the envelope with which the parking lot project paving in question was funded, and how much funding is attributed to that particular envelope?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, when it comes to line items, I will leave that to the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I believe the context of that conversation was, as well, that he was making it seem like we had made a political decision for some kind of advantage politically to pave our parking lot — that really was the insinuation. My comments were that we are not doing a Management Board submission on a parking lot. We have bigger Capital Planning Office — I use the word “buckets”.

But, again, the member opposite knows all this information because I am sure they did a very similar process when they were in government. To make it seem like we decided that we needed a parking lot and that was a priority of our government — we have our five-year capital plan that talks about our priorities as assets.

The parking lot here — I am not sure why the members opposite are so against a parking lot that hasn't been upgraded since 1976, I believe. But I am just going to leave where that is found in the budgets to the Minister of Highways and Public Works. It is interesting — the member opposite is not bringing up any new debate in the Legislative Assembly, although he is

saying that he may be doing a new analysis, I guess, but he is also now saying that our success is based on a trend that his government clearly started — I guess that this is what he is trying to say.

I'm not trying to put words in his mouth, but I believe that's what he said — that we just basically inherited — the good times are rolling in because of the Yukon Party's work, I guess, with First Nations or work with the federal government. I don't know what he is taking the credit for, but all I know is that I was in opposition at that time and the definition of a “recession” holds very well for the consecutive periods of stagnation here in the Yukon under the Yukon Party.

I have had this debate before as well — where we know that previous Yukon Party ministers also took a lot of liberties with whether or not their political decisions were responsible for the growth in Yukon. We have former ministers directly quoting, saying, “It's everything to do with our decisions.” That was before the member opposite's time. It was in the Fentie government, but this goes back and forth.

So, you can believe me, or you can believe the member opposite. How about we look at the Conference Board of Canada and their economic outlook? It was very scathing of the Yukon Party's last year. I will read a quote from it about how bad times keep piling up for the Yukon: “Real GDP is then forecast to drop by 7.7 per cent in 2017 and 3.1 per cent in 2018.”

Now, that's when the Yukon Party was in power. The forecasts were very dire. What changed? Well, they weren't in power during those years.

I will continue to quote from the Conference Board of Canada: “The Government of Yukon will help weather the storm with high public capital spending.” — which we are being criticized for now. It goes on, and I will continue the quote: “The forecast for Yukon's construction industry mirrors the struggles in the mining sector.”

They were predicting “a lull in capital [projects] until 2022” at this point — again, in the Yukon Party's last year, so where they were or where they were trending and what was the forecast — now, those GDP predictions did not, thankfully, come to fruition. I will continue it here — looking around in the last six years, there was definitely not a lull in any of these capital projects.

Again, according to the Conference Board of Canada's economic outlook of the Yukon Party's last year and taking a look at forecasts as well — employment was down again, contracting by 1.3 percent from the previous bad year. Also — and I quote: “This negative trend is poised to continue in 2017 and 2018.” That didn't continue, thankfully.

Also, at that time, the report was saying that we could expect to see relatively steady population growth until 2030. They were projecting that by 2030 — again, under the Yukon Party — that we would probably reach just over 39,000 individuals. Well, I mean, we are way past that projection. We are growing larger than any other jurisdiction in Canada. The Yukon Party, back in their last year, would tell you that if carbon pricing was going to be implemented — well, diapers would be so expensive that everybody is going to leave the

whole town, the whole community. These things that they said just didn't come to fruition.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Silver: So, again, the member opposite is speaking off-mic because he doesn't like these numbers that are coming from the Conference Board.

He is definitely, again, the one who brought up 2016.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Silver: He is telling me now, off record, that the Conference Board of Canada is inaccurate, which is —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Deputy Chair's statement

Deputy Chair: Order.

The Member for Klondike has the floor.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you very much, Deputy Chair. These are forecasts, and the reason why those forecasts became inaccurate, in my opinion, is because the changes that were good at the time were theirs, but the trends that were bad at that time are ours. That is fine, but we will take the grade in financial reporting that the Yukon Party used to have — overall "D" — and we will take ours, which is leading the country, in comparison, any time — no problem.

I also would like to talk a bit about financial infrastructure: \$51 million in upgrades to our highways; \$40 million in upgrades to the bridges; \$81 million on airports; \$147 million on buildings; \$48 million on housing; and \$69 million on land development over the last six years. These are the things that are causing our net debt numbers that the member opposite is criticizing us for. I am going to ask him: Which one of these categories would the Yukon Party cut as far as spending?

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 208?

Ms. White: Thank you, Deputy Chair. I'm delighted to be here and having conversations.

The conversation that I want to have today — maybe we can't answer the questions, but I am just interested. It was brought to my attention that folks who get the northern resident deduction — that people who earn less than \$40,000 a year actually aren't able to claim the full deduction amount. The reason it was brought to my attention is that there are many people in the territory who earn less than \$40,000 a year, but they live here. They have homes — whether they own them or rent them — but they are paying and they live here. I appreciate that this is an issue for the federal government, but I believe that there is also an opportunity for the territorial government to champion that.

So, I just wanted to know if the Minister of Finance has looked into — specifically, I know that the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition — I believe that we were all cc'd on the same letter that went to Minister Freeland. But I just wanted to know if the Minister of Finance was aware of the concerns that people have highlighted about the northern resident deduction amounts.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes, I am aware and, yes, I am on that same e-mail list. I am also aware of a motion, I believe, that the NDP put in yesterday, but since that time, have I reached out to

the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada or the Minister of Finance? I have not, but I would be very interested to hear from the member opposite what that letter would look like.

Ms. White: What fun — we really can, at times, work together, I think, collaboratively — well, often we do, to be honest, in this House, from all sides.

So, I didn't expect, actually, since the motion — I think I tabled it yesterday, but the minister is correct. At this point in time, days kind of meld together and I couldn't be sure if it was yesterday or if it was last week, but recently — in recent time — I tabled the motion actually asking for the Government of Yukon to reach out to the federal government to have this discussion.

I guess, really, in reading the letter from the Anti-Poverty Coalition and having conversations with the individual who brought it forward, it is really just an issue of fairness — knowing that people who earn higher incomes are able to access that full amount and that people who earn lesser incomes aren't able to access that full amount. But, ultimately, we all live here and we all have higher costs because of that. It is not to pre-date; it was just mostly to flag it for the minister and just say that I hope it is something that we can work positively on, just as a territory.

It is interesting because the Anti-Poverty Coalition has some really interesting numbers about the 2021 income statistics. It really highlights that, for 35 percent of the population, they weren't able to access those full amounts. If we're talking about that tax fairness, it would be nice to address it.

I didn't come here today with a clear "This is how we should write the letter and this is what we should say." I think it's just a matter of — we talk about the responsibility that we have here in the Assembly and how we have a responsibility to the people who live here and how to best work for them, and I think this is an example. I am happy to know that the minister has heard of the issue and is also on that same list. I just wanted to make sure that I flagged it. I don't know when those conversations happened. I haven't been privy to that previously, but I am just hoping that this is on his list of things to talk about.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I appreciate the line of questioning from the member opposite. I did, after that motion, whichever day that was, talk to my ministerial assistant, Aaron Casselman — one of the hardest working people in government, because I know he is listening right now — to take a look. It is a federal responsibility, but which departments — the Public Service Commission, Finance, or others — to get some information. Maybe there are historical reasons why it is set up the way it is and that type of thing. So, I will share that information with the member opposite because she's right.

The member opposite is correct in that, a lot of times when we talk about statistically relevant information, we do miss certain demographics of our population. I am just going to give a quick example. When we take a look at forecasts, fiscal outlooks, and those types of things, we know that there are high salaries in the Yukon right now for people who are employed. There's a strong demand for workers at a time where supply is

tightening and there are upper pressures on wages and earnings, basically, so that is the reason why we, as government, are also showing an increase in income tax that we have collected this year compared to our forecasts.

The average wage for vacant positions in the Yukon is the third highest in Canada, at \$26.20 per hour in the third quarter of 2022, which is well above the national average of \$24.20 per hour and up almost 10 percent from the same year in 2021. One quick little stat — and I'm going to make a point. These are up. The average worker in the territory earned \$1,334 per week through the first 11 months of 2022. This is up 2.9 percent from the same period in 2021, nationally ranking us third in the country.

That sounds great, but we all know that, in Indigenous, rural and remote communities in the north, it is much more expensive than other areas, so you can be lost in some of the statistics. With the index of well-being and the statistical analysis that we do in that — one of my favourite parts of Executive Council Office — and there are lots of favourite parts of Executive Council Office — is that wellness index, because, again, we get caught up in these ratios. They are important financially — like net debt to GDP — but we need to do more.

We need to do an index of well-being to be able to compare every demographic of our region — this beautiful small region of Canada — to how folks from the same demographics fare in other areas. One way in which the federal government does that is in these deductions, but to not question them and the relevance in today's post-pandemic world might be a little bit short-sighted.

I completely understand where the member opposite is coming from on this — when we take a look at this from the index of well-being perspective — and I will share any information I garner from my departments.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*?

Seeing none, we will now proceed to clause 1. The bill's schedules form part of clause 1. One of the schedules is Schedule A, containing the departmental votes.

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Highways and Public Works

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I would like to welcome to the Chamber, to my left, Deputy Minister Catherine Harwood from Highways and Public Works and her assistant, to my left, Alyson Miller.

Madam Chair, I am pleased to present the Highways and Public Works budget for fiscal 2023-24. The Department of Highways and Public Works is dedicated to ensuring that our transportation network and government infrastructure are there for Yukoners, whether that is getting to work safely, flying between communities, going to school, or staying connected digitally. We strive to do this through a wide range of programs and services that have a lasting impact on our territory and its communities, all while ensuring a sustainable future.

Our work ensures that anyone travelling through our territory does so safely and that children can access schools. Our department is also responsible for the buildings and communication infrastructure that the public service needs to serve Yukoners. Across the Yukon, we do our utmost to maintain existing infrastructure so that it continues to be there for Yukoners now and into the future. We are also investing in infrastructure projects that will benefit the territory and contribute to a prosperous future. I am proud of the many programs and services that our department offers both to the public and to other parts of government.

All Yukoners are affected by the work of the Department of Highways and Public Works. At its core, the department's role is to maintain and improve our transportation network and support government services through building maintenance, information technology, government procurement, and our fleet vehicle program. At Highways and Public Works, we strive to do work that builds our communities, grows our economy, and ensures a clean, green, and sustainable future. These projects range from ensuring safe and effective transportation systems, like roads, bridges, and airports, to implementing new technologies that make government services more accessible and efficient.

Highways and Public Works is a big department. We have been entrusted with the maintenance, improvement, and innovation of so many important aspects of Yukoners' daily lives that it is hard to describe them all, but I will do my best to give a short summary. We assist all government departments with procurement and facilitate the procurement of goods and services in a fair, timely, and transparent manner.

Our Fleet Vehicle Agency provides vehicles for government use. This includes vehicles for conservation officers, natural resources officers, wildland fire personnel, community nurses, social workers, and others. One important thing that I want to share is that the Fleet Vehicle Agency is leading by example in the transition to a greener economy by adding zero-emission vehicles to the fleet and promoting sustainable vehicle options. We currently have three battery-powered electric passenger cars and 12 plug-in hybrid SUVs. Further, two fully electric cargo vans should be delivered in late 2023. Electric vehicles are part of the green future, and I am pleased that we are taking steps now to electrify our fleet.

Corporate Services support for all Government of Yukon departments does not end there, however. Staff within Supply Services branch keep track of government assets and make sure that our government practises the principles of “reduce, reuse, recycle” on a daily basis. The team at acquisition services and planning works closely with all government departments to facilitate the purchase of goods and some services. The mail and courier services team ensures confidential, rapid, and reliable delivery services between communities, departments, and facilities within the Government of Yukon. Our travel services unit provides a variety of services to all government departments and agencies, including airline reservations, hotel, car, and rail bookings, and transportation logistics. They also assist with medical air travel for Yukon residents.

These services and the people behind them help all Yukon government departments work efficiently. We have implemented and continue to improve many processes and policies that are increasing economic opportunities for communities, Yukon First Nations, and all businesses, all while ensuring value for Yukon taxpayers.

The new technologies developed and implemented by our Information, Communications and Technology branch, or ICT, make government services more efficient and accessible to Yukoners. ICT works with other departments to provide online services like 511 Yukon, road condition reports, camping permits, and business entity searches. An important aspect of ICT is innovation and finding better ways to deliver these services. For example, we just launched a new online login service called “MyYukon” that will make accessing a wide range of government services easier and more secure. Through MyYukon, citizens can now use one login to access any online government service that is integrated with the platform. Not only does ICT deliver services, but they provide tools like Microsoft Teams that allow us to offer remote work arrangements where appropriate. We know that many Yukoners value living in our communities and we will continue to offer them the tools to securely access their desktop and connect with other employees when working remotely.

We construct new buildings, such as schools and health centres, to support the needs of Yukoners, and we are actively making public buildings more energy efficient. We are working on several projects that will lower public buildings’ greenhouse gas emissions, helping us move closer to a greener future. I am happy to say that some of these projects have already been completed. For example, the skylight replacement at the Andrew A. Philipsen Law Centre has improved insulation and will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 23 tonnes per year. The project also enhances the natural light available in the building, further reducing the need for artificial lighting. In addition, our government successfully completed nine building retrofits in 2022, resulting in an estimated reduction of 101 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

We are responsible for maintaining just over 5,000 kilometres of road. This includes plowing, grading, surfacing, painting, and the list goes on. Our crews inspect and maintain 136 bridges, 260 large structural culverts, and over 6,000

smaller drainage culverts. We also support the aviation industry through our network of airports, aerodromes, and airstrips.

We administer the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Under the act, our ATIPP office carries out work that simplifies public access to government information while protecting the privacy of individuals.

We also assist the entire government with their leases, contracts, risk management assessments, and insurance.

Finally, our Capital Planning Office leads the development of the government’s five-year capital plan. They work closely with the Department of Finance and all other government departments to create the plan. The five-year capital plan honours our government’s commitments to communicate capital spending intentions to Yukoners, municipalities, the private sector, and First Nation governments. Each year, we release the five-year capital plan. Businesses and contractors are provided with an updated timeline for projects. This provides greater certainty and promotes a strategic approach to the forecasting and timing of procurement.

Through it all, we work to advance reconciliation with Yukon First Nations. Indeed, I know that this is a focus of the department and I am proud of the work that the Department of Highways and Public Works has done to advance reconciliation in our daily work, long-term projects, and department-wide policies and practices.

This year, our budget will help us deliver on key mandate items such as continuing work on the Yukon Resource Gateway program, meeting our commitments under *Our Clean Future*, and continuing progress on the Dempster fibre line. Let us take some time to discuss these and other budget items in more depth.

With respect to the Dempster fibre project, we all know that our technology has evolved and that a stable Internet connection is integral in our daily lives. Most of us are also aware that, currently, the territory depends on a single fibre optic line. When the line goes down, the Yukon is largely cut off from the digital world. Reliable Internet is necessary for a strong economy, quality health care, and dependable air travel.

This year, we have allocated \$24.4 million toward continued construction on the Dempster fibre line. I should note that over two-thirds of the total project cost is recoverable.

Work on the line started in the summer of 2021 and is scheduled to be completed in 2024. This new line will connect the Yukon to the existing Mackenzie Valley fibre link, creating a 4,000-kilometre continuous network loop. Approximately half of the installation has been completed, including the installation under three major rivers: the Mackenzie, the Peel, and the Arctic Red. The Dempster fibre line will provide a much-needed backup line in the event of service disruptions. Having a backup will enhance the participation of Yukoners in the digital economy and provide more reliable access to government services. I know that we all look forward to the fibre line being completed in the near future.

Moving on from Internet connectivity, I would like to speak about our transportation network. Keeping the Yukon moving is vital. We have high demands for our highways, bridges, airports, and ferries. These transportation systems

connect us to necessities like groceries and medical appointments, our loved ones, and even economic benefits from the tourism and mining industries. However, to meet our needs, we must maintain, inspect, and sometimes replace the infrastructure that keeps us connected.

This year, we have dedicated \$4 million to the roadway safety program, which focuses on road-safety improvements like vegetation control and line painting throughout the territory. We plan to brush over 1,000 kilometres of highway, to repair and replace barriers at 10 sites, and to paint lines on 800 kilometres of highway.

We are investing in keeping these vital transportation links safe and open for business, a responsibility that we take very seriously. Indeed, safety is our primary consideration when we upgrade our transportation infrastructure. To that end, our government has dedicated \$8.5 million to continue the upgrades to the Alaska Highway through the Whitehorse corridor. This will include improvements to the Robert Service Way and Hamilton Boulevard intersection. Our government is committed to projects that increase public safety and reduce the risk of collisions along the Alaska Highway. Safety upgrades at this intersection are an important piece of that work.

We are also continuing our work to rehabilitate and reconstruct various portions of the north Klondike Highway. This year, we have allocated \$15.3 million to continue work on this important project. The north Klondike Highway is a vital link for industry and a well-travelled route for Yukoners and tourists from around the world.

These upgrades will increase safety, improve driving conditions, and better connect the Yukon's resources to markets. Of the approximately \$267-million total project costs, 75 percent is recoverable from the Government of Canada. Eventually, this project will reconstruct 209 kilometres of the north Klondike Highway from Carmacks to the Dempster Highway intersection.

Along the north Klondike, we are also building more efficient drainage systems, like culverts, to accommodate climate change impacts such as increased water flow resulting from larger precipitation events.

Other improvements could include raised roadways and wider ditches in key areas to protect against flooding and slope erosion. These upgrades will allow us to remove seasonal weight restrictions for heavy trucks, making it more efficient to transport goods. This project will also make travel from natural resource development areas in Canada's north more efficient and will support approximately 800 jobs over the construction period.

On this note, we are also making progress on the Yukon Resource Gateway project that will help link mineral resources to market. This year, we will advance several Gateway projects. Gateway is one of the territory's most significant construction programs undertaken.

This year, we have set aside more than \$13 million for the Carmacks bypass project. The Carmacks bypass project includes the construction of a new road and bridge, which will allow industrial vehicles to bypass the community. This will create and enhance safer flow of traffic for local residents. It

will also improve access to key mining areas. Construction of the road and bridge is well underway. The contractor completed approximately 80 percent — and 60 percent of the bridge work — this past construction season.

As well, Highways and Public Works has committed \$44.4 million in the 2023-24 budget for the Nisutlin Bay bridge project. This bridge is an integral piece of the Alaska Highway's transportation infrastructure and is an important landmark to the community of Teslin. Through the project charter between the Government of Yukon and the Teslin Tlingit Council, we have been working together to design and build a safe, reliable infrastructure. The new bridge will be able to accommodate more traffic while also improving access for pedestrians and cyclists. Approximately 57 percent of the total cost to construct the bridge is currently recoverable from the federal government by the Building Canada fund and the national trade corridors fund. This project will provide a significant positive economic outcome for the territory, the Teslin Tlingit Council, local businesses, and the community of Teslin.

Finally, we have been working to replace the Lapie River bridge. Work on the Lapie River bridge replacement is continuing in 2023-24. Our department has allocated just under \$1.3 million to complete this initiative.

There are still some additional comments that I could make about the infrastructure projects that are ongoing in the territory. However, at this time, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Riverdale North that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

Committee of the Whole has also considered Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the House do now adjourn.

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.