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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA*

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(Night Sitting)

The House resumed at 6 p.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means to consider certain resolutions and a bill relating to the imposition of taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages, Bill 29.

**SPEAKER:** The motion is that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, that the House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole, the Speaker left the Chair.

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Warr):** Order, please!

We are now debating the related resolution and Bill 29.

### Resolution

*"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

*"That it is expedient to bring in a measure respecting the imposition of taxes on sugar sweetened beverages."*

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Chair.

I am honoured to be back here in the House of Assembly for this sitting, representing the people of Windsor Lake.

As we all know, today, this evening we're debating amendments to the *Revenue Administration Act* to introduce a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. It is important to note that there's no tax being introduced on non sugar-sweetened beverages, so members of the public will always have a choice about which beverages to purchase and whether they want to pay a tax on beverages or not.

Chair, the effects of this tax builds on our actions taken to date, the ongoing work of the Health Accord, which will transform health care delivery in Newfoundland and Labrador. As noted in the House today, this is going to take time. It is not going to be something that we will see the effects of next week or next month or even next year. It will take a generation to two for all of this to come into effect.

I, for one, am proud to be a Member of a government that's taking steps not for current, immediate political gain, but that sees benefits for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the next generation and for generations to come.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**J. HOGAN:** Chair, in 10 years, my young daughter will be 14 years old. When I read this morning that she will have a fifty-fifty chance of having a chronic disease, it really hit home for me what we're doing here today. Over half of Newfoundland and Labrador residents aged 12 or older have at least one chronic disease and many people live with more than one. In fact, almost 50 per cent of our seniors have three or more chronic conditions. We know chronic diseases impact the health of the population as well as the sustainability of our provincial health care system.

In addition to the worst health outcomes in the province, as a province, the average household spends an estimated 2.8 per cent of its total annual food and beverage expenditures on sugar-sweetened beverages. It is the highest in Canada and twice the Canadian average of 1.4 per cent.

This tax is about prevention, Chair. It is about making people think twice about their purchases and giving them that choice about which is the healthier one to purchase. The tax will apply to regular soft drinks and fruit-flavoured juices, sports and energy drinks, pre-packaged milkshakes and coffee beverages, and concentrated mixtures such as frozen, concentrated juices, flavoured powders and syrups.

As the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, I'll make the comparison to tickets and fines. As we hope that tickets and fines act as a deterrent to bad driving, unsafe behaviour, it encourages safe driving habits. It's our hope that this tax will act in the same way and promote healthy choices, safe choices and better choices for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Chair, we will hear the Members opposite accuse the government of taxing the poor. Let me be clear, we are under no illusion that this one tax is the be all and end all. That is why it is being introduced along with other measures. Like more than a million dollars for Kids Eat Smart to support the education, health and well-being of school-aged children; a three-cent increase per cigarette and a six-cent increase per gram on fine-cut tobacco; \$1.8 million to prevent and reduce tobacco and vaping use; and a Physical Activity Tax Credit to provide a refundable tax credit up to \$2,000 per family. All initiatives to help improve and help address social determinants of health in this province.

Simply put, this tax is about a healthier Newfoundland and Labrador. As noted, sugar-sweetened beverages represent a significant proportion of sugar intake and daily energy intake in some groups particularly, unfortunately, in the youth of this province.

This tax will encourage a shift to have young people favour milk and water instead of soft drinks and fruit juices. It's about giving them a healthier choice. We need to create a culture that places greater emphasis on healthy living, healthy choices and better outcomes.

The goal of reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is consistent with the 2019 release of Health Canada's new Food Guide, which includes a focus on making water the

drink of choice and replacing sugary drinks with water. Health Canada's healthy eating strategy also includes initiatives targeting sugar-sweetened beverage reduction and promoting healthy hydration among Canadians.

Taxing sugar-sweetened beverages is supported by the World Health Organization, where a 2017 report found that a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages can lead to reduced consumption, which is the goal of this amendment. This tax is also supported by the Canadian Paediatric Society, Dietitians of Canada, the Childhood Obesity Foundation, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and Diabetes Canada. Chair, these are groups I am happy to support and stand with.

It is noted that we are the first in Canada to implement such a tax, but there are more than 50 jurisdictions worldwide where a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages has been implemented. According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, Berkeley in California decreased consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by 21 per cent just four months after a one-cent per ounce tax was implemented. So we do have evidence that it does work and it will work here.

The Canadian Paediatric Society says simulation modelling over a 25-year period in Canada has predicted a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages could prevent 12,000 cases of cancer, 30,000 cases of heart disease, 5,000 strokes and 1.4 million cases of Type 2 diabetes. Chair, I think those are outcomes we would be more than happy to see here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

With a healthier population and a decreased prevalence of chronic disease, like obesity, heart disease and diabetes, the overall cost to our health system will reduce. Additionally, the revenue generated from this tax, estimated at \$9 million a year, will be reinvested to help fund future education and support strategic initiatives that result in healthier choices.

I have mentioned choice here, Chair, and I do want to note that this tax does not remove consumer choice because the tax does not apply to: diet drinks; 100 per cent natural fruit or vegetable juices; alcoholic beverages; medical or therapeutic beverages such as infant formula and

nutritional meal replacement beverages; milk and fortified plant-based milks and yogurt beverages; ingredients primarily intended to be used in cooking or food preparation; beverages prepared for the consumer at the point of sale, such as tea and coffee beverages; beverage packaging containers holding less than 75 millilitres; and beverages brought into the province by a consumer in a total quantity of less than five litres.

Those are all the choices that members of the public will still have when they want to purchase a beverage. They can just choose now to make sure that they purchase the healthier choice.

Statistics Canada reports in 2019, the average household in this province spent \$207 on soft drink, which comprise the majority of sugar-sweetened beverages. This is the highest in Canada. This is too high.

No one wants to see tax increases on anything, but I hope residents of the province will come to see that this tax is being implemented in the interest of healthy living. Recognizing that tax increases are felt most by low-income earners and those on fixed income, this tax will be considered as part of the province's renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy.

I would say everyone in this House knows at least one person with diabetes. Well, the Canadian Diabetes Association is among those who have been calling on governments to introduce this tax. I can speak personally to someone I know who deals with diabetes on a daily basis.

There is someone who works in the Department of Justice very closely with me. I know that one of the hardest days of her life was when her daughter got very sick and she had no idea what was going wrong. She was rushed to the hospital. It was a very intense and emergency situation. Her daughter was diagnosed with diabetes. Thankfully, they found the diagnosis and her daughter was okay. But I see her every day – this lady in my office – more than once, two, three times checking with her daughter who has to make sure that she checks her insulin levels.

It's a very, very scary disease. One of the ways we can prevent certain types of diabetes is by reducing sugar consumption. It's very easy, very straightforward about how to get there. This is one of the ways that we can get there.

I do want to make a couple of notes about the implementation of the tax. It will be implemented September 1, 2022, which will give industry lots of time to adjust to the change. They may have some issues dealing with how they're going to do that. This is a reason we're not doing this tomorrow or next week. We are giving them lots of time to address it and deal with it at the level where they are able to make these changes that we are bringing forward today.

Overall, Chair, those are my comments on this issue. I know we spent a lot of time in the House today and yesterday listening to questions and answering questions about health care and the suggestion that we're in crisis in this province. I hope we can get the support of everyone in the House today, in one small way, to try and address this so-called health care crisis in this province, and improving health care outcomes by reducing the intake of sugary drinks is one way to get there.

Thank you, Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's great to have an opportunity to speak to this bill. Mr. Chair, I'll say that, of course, this is a money bill. As I understand it, it's our only money bill of this session so it's an opportunity to speak about anything that we want on behalf of our constituents.

But I will confine my comments, this time around, on this particular specific item around this bill, but I certainly have a list of items that I do wish to discuss before this evening is out or perhaps into another day, if necessary.

On this particular bill, Mr. Chair, I do understand government's rationale and what

they're trying to achieve. Nobody here on either side of the House, I don't think, is going to make the argument – I haven't heard it yet and I don't think you will – that sugar is good for you. I don't think anyone's going to make that argument.

I don't think anyone's going to make the argument that, certainly, if there are things we can do to encourage people to lessen their intake of sugar, encourage people to live healthier, to exercise, all those good things, I don't think anyone is going to argue with that. I don't think anyone's going to argue the points that have been made.

I know the Minister there just talked about someone that he knows in his life and who is impacted by diabetes. We all, I'm sure, know plenty of people, whether it be family, friends and so on, that have been impacted by diabetes.

The minister is right when he talks about the majority of it is Type 2, which is related to lifestyle. We know that.

We're not a healthy bunch here in Newfoundland and Labrador, generally speaking. We're simply not. The statistics are what they are. I guess it could be associated to a lot of factors. A lot of it is just the way perhaps we were raised, our diet, what we grew up on, what we grew up eating, what we were taught and so on. That's probably a contributing factor to all these things, no doubt. So I get the intent; I really do get the intent.

I'm not sure, though, that this strategy, however, is the way to go to get the results that we want. I'm not sure we're going to get the results we want. I know we're talking about human health versus – but I liken it to the carbon tax.

One of my colleagues over here, I can't remember who it was, said jokingly this is the carbonated tax instead of the carbon tax, now we have the carbonated tax, which I thought was kind of cute, but I liken it to that.

Why I had issues with the carbon tax is because, as I said at that time, taxing me extra money on my gas is just taking more money out of my pocket and giving it to the government. But, at the end of the day, it has not changed my habits

not one iota, not one bit. I still get my gas. Everywhere that I was going a year ago, I'm going this year. It has not modified my behaviour. I have not said I'm going to drive less because there's a carbon tax. All I'm doing is I'm just giving extra money to the government, paying for the gas. That's all I'm doing. They're collecting extra money. I'm still driving my car like I always did, never changed a thing, other than more money coming out of my pocket. Most people, who are able to absorb it, are in the same boat.

Now, there could be some people who are right on the fringe and there are a lot of people there, too; a lot of people there, too, on fixed incomes, low incomes and so on and they've had to modify their behaviour in the sense that, they can barely use their vehicle at all, just for the essentials only. Whatever little bit of enjoyment they might have gotten, in terms of going for a drive on a Sunday or doing whatever, has been taken away from them because of the high price of gasoline including the carbon tax. I wonder if imposing this tax is going to be similar.

If somebody wants to be healthy for their own reasons, they're going to be. If somebody don't want to be healthy, they're not going to be. It comes down to a personal choice. It comes down to a lifestyle choice. It comes down choosing what you feel is best for you, for your own health, for your own self; it's what it comes down to.

I'm really not sure that charging 20 cents on a two litre of Pepsi, other than that's another 20 cents gone from somebody and in the case of – listen there are people who want their Pepsi and they're going to have their Pepsi. That's not going to change because of the 20 cents, but you're taking more money out of their pocket; they're still going to have it anyway. I don't know that it's going to modify those behaviours.

Twenty cents on a Pepsi or on a bottle of Purity syrup, for example, which is a Newfoundland company, Purity Factories; been in business for years and years and years. A lot of Newfoundlanders have their bottle of Purity syrup or whatever, whether they should or not or whatever. I guess like anything else in moderation.

They're going to pay 90 cents on a bottle of Purity syrup, plus HST and everything else. But they're paying 90 cents. So people understand it's not just 10 cents on a litre. On a bottle of Purity syrup it's 90 cents because they're actually not just taxing you for the volume in the bottle, they're taxing you on how many bottles once you add the water and how many drinks you can make out of it. I think we were told it works out to 90 cents on a bottle of Purity. I don't know that it's going to have the impact.

Now, it feels like the carbon tax in that it feels like it's just another excuse, another tax grab. That's what it feels like. I think that's what a lot of Members over here are saying and a lot of people I've talked to they feel it's like a tax grab. Of course the minister and the government are saying: Oh, no, no, it's got nothing to do about taking in money, it has nothing to do with taxes; it's all about health.

I would put this challenge out to the government: If this is truly about health and it's not about collecting taxes and you're not in this to bring money into it, then let's amend the legislation and let's create a healthy living fund and every last penny that comes out of this tax must go into that fund and not general revenues and must be spent on healthy living initiatives. It must be; no discretion. You can't say: Well, we were giving \$2 million to Kids Eat Smart and so next year we don't have to give it to them because we're going to take the \$2 million out of this fund. No, no, you're going to maintain what you always did and all new the initiatives.

Now, you can laugh at it, I saw to the minister over there. You can laugh away, but if you are truly committed, if this is about people's health and not about taxing people to death, then let's make an amendment, let's put in a fund, a healthy living fund, and every last dime goes into that fund and every last dime is directed towards health –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**P. LANE:** – particularly for people who can't afford it, particularly for the people who can least afford it.

I heard someone talk about the gym membership and the tax break – and they're right. A tax

break for everyone in this House of Assembly is great. Go get a gym membership, and you do your taxes and you get your tax break. But if you're someone who's on low income you can't afford to pay for the gym upfront anyway, so let's funnel some of this money for subsidizing their gym membership. We can subsidize daycare for low-income families, so why can't we subsidize gym memberships or something? With the money, new money, brand new money that's not coming into the coffers today. We must remember: brand new money. Let's funnel it into programs like that, particularly for the most disadvantaged, the poor and the average working guy, too, and girl. Why not? They're the ones who are paying for all this. Let's change the behaviour by what you want to do, but then take that money and let's not grab that money and throw it into general coffers, let's put it towards the intended purposed, which is to get people healthy.

If you do that I can support it, and if you don't do it, as far as I'm concerned, then this is nothing but a farce and it's nothing but a tax grab.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

**B. DAVIS:** Perfect. Thank you very much, Chair.

It's going to take a little bit of time to get used to the slight changes that we've made, but they're good for what we need to be doing today. So I'm very happy to – I would say rise – sit in this House of Assembly to talk about the importance of what we are all going to talk about tonight: the province's new sugar-sweetened beverage tax, Bill 29.

I can go on and on and talk about the – not so eloquently as the Minister of Health, or maybe the Minister of Justice or even the Minister of Finance. Some of the topics that they did raise I may touch on, but I'm going to talk about a couple of things that some of my hon. colleagues had mentioned earlier. I'm very happy that I get the opportunity to speak here tonight. The MHA for Port au Port identified some issues that may be with some drinking water and I will touch on

that a little bit tonight, if time permits, as well; also the Member for Bonavista, who I agree with much of what he had to say. He's a very learned individual. I'm quite happy that he brought up some of the ideas that we're going to want to talk about tonight.

One of the things we can't always talk about the fact that if we don't change anything we do in the future then how are we going to ever expect to get a different result than we've always gotten? So one of the things that I'm very happy about is that we're taking a leadership role in this country with respect to a tax that's going to offer people an opportunity to transition. I'll get to the MHA for Mount Pearl - Southlands who seems to not agree with what I have to say based on his laughter. So I understand fully that there's a choice in the marketplace. The last decade or more – and the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands would know full well that the transition has started to happen from regular soda to diet soda. He would know full well from a previous involvement. So he would know full well that that's happened over the last decade. All we're trying to do as a government – which we all should be as stewards of the health of the people of this province – is try to help nudge people to make that choice a little better.

I listened to the Minister of Justice talk briefly about one of his staff people in the department whose child had diabetes, and I know full well what those impacts are. My father died as a diabetic, you know, he was a diabetic for most of his life and I know full well how the complications that go along with a chronic disease such as that, and anything we can do as a House of Assembly I'm proud to do, to try to make those chronic diseases less prevalent in our province.

I noticed the Minister of Health spoke as well about the health concerns that are existing and I would tend to agree with all of those statements. I'm not a doctor, by no stretch, and many of us in this House, except for two, aren't. There are some health care professionals in this House, but there are two doctors in this House who are trying their darnedest to ensure that the public is as healthy as we possibly can, and knowing full well that it's not an easy task, by no stretch.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about some of the priorities that we have had in my department and some ministers prior to me that we've placed on our priority for safe drinking water in this province. I think it was touched on by a couple of Members on both sides of the House on how important that is. But each and every resident in our province on a public water supply should have access to clean and safe drinking water. There is no dispute in this House that that should be the way it is. No dispute. It's a priority and an objective of our government.

I have to give credit to the former Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels and the former minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment who really put a push on our colleagues in the municipalities to push – instead of funding recreation facilities, let's make sure that the priority is clean drinking water for all of our residents that we all represent. That's why we put a very favourable share – a federal, provincial and municipal share – in developing water resources for our people, and we've also made some significant and substantial improvements in those areas.

I had the pleasure of visiting one of our potable water dispensing units that were put in place in Port au Choix with the minister. It was great to see how the town was so happy about what they have had put in place. That was a cost-shared initiative with the province, the federal government as well as the municipality. It allows people in that community to get safe drinking water pretty much as much as you would like to have, with very reduced costs and very little work from the municipality to maintain it. You try to make that as much as we possibly can to reduce those boil-water advisories that we have in our province.

We've made significant progress. The number of long-term boil-water advisories in this province has been at an all-time low for the past five years. That's good. Is it perfect? No, absolutely not.

The number of PH exceedances are at an all-time low. The number of communities with a number of certified operators and number of certificates awarded for water system operators that have been given out in any given year is at

an all-time high. Which is an important piece that we should all be proud of. Is it enough? Absolutely not. There still has to be more.

Number of water treatment plants reached an all-time high. They are a partnership between the province, the federal government and our municipalities. That is how this works. We offer that optimal cost-sharing ratio with communities to ensure they can improve their water systems. We provide funding through the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure for water treatment plants and potable water dispensing units, including dedicated call for applications for communities for long-term boil-water orders, water – sorry, advisories in 2020.

We trained to assist operators in maintaining water systems. We offer cost accounting assessment tools for public water system owners. All of those things are important pieces that we've brought in place over the last four or five years. Fund a regional water operator pilot program that's been extended for regional service boards. We've launched a special Boil Water Advisory Reduction Initiative to work with communities on long-term boil-water advisories. There have been 15 long-term boil-water advisories lifted as a result of this reduction initiative.

Some of the important facts and figures for quality in this province: 33 potable water-dispensing units, which I talked about earlier, have been placed in locations across our province; and 21 full-scale water treatment plants with upgrades under way to systems in Pasadena to become full water treatment plants. Funds were provided in January 2021 to the Town of St. Anthony to obtain point-of-use water treatment pilot project. For communities on long-term boil-water advisories, only projects that will address the boil-water advisories will be eligible for Municipal Capital Works funding. That's an important piece that we all have to focus on. We all have to get behind this in the province.

I know all my hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that everyone in this province should have clean drinking water as a first and foremost thing. I thank them for that. But this is only going to happen if we all get behind it and encourage our municipalities, our local service

districts and our people to get behind those initiatives and invest in those programs that we have a very optimal cost regime for that.

I'd also like to take the opportunity in the little bit of time that I have left to say some of the amounts of money that we've put into the system. We've approved over 280 water projects in this province for a total \$114 million. It's a staggering number that we did, but it's only going to be done with the partnership of our municipalities.

Last but certainly not least, we are working to develop our Drinking Water Safety Action Plan. That is going to be out for public consultation now over the next little bit. I look forward to hearing from all Members on how we can make the system better and how we can ensure that everyone has clean drinking water.

The bill today I have no problem supporting. I think it's an important opportunity for us. I'll close by what I said before. If we're going to be intent on doing the same thing that was always done before, we're going to get the same result. Health care outcomes need to be improved on. One of the ways to do that is reduce the consumption of sugars as we have in regular soda pop. If we can do that, it's not going to be seen by me, particularly, but it's going to be seen in our kids, their kids and the next generations coming behind, which is what we all should be looking forward to.

So I encourage everyone in this House of Assembly to get behind the initiatives that we're trying to make our population healthier, and encourage you to vote for this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't think any of us would disagree that we have health issues here in the province that need to be addressed. I don't think that's a debate



here tonight. I guess it's how we address them. I'm really not sure that this tax is the right first step. I think there has to be a full plan in place here.

One word or one term we've heard – I heard the Premier use it a couple of times – is around behaviour modification. When I think of behaviour modification, I think of you do that psychology 101 course and Pavlov's dog, the conditioning response that you get from the dog. Every time the light goes on, he's going to get a treat. Then, when that light comes on and there's no treat, he's still drooling, looking for that treat. They're trying to get a conditioned response from that dog.

Now, behaviour modification is probably a little bit more than that. Behaviour modification, if you look at the definition and what it's designed to do, it must contain an element of teaching, an element of learning. I'm not quite sure a simple – and it's not so much a simple but a regressive tax as we're putting on sugared beverages, it's teaching or learning anything, because you can't do that unless there's an education element involved.

We look at the Health Accord that's happening. One of the biggest things that the Health Accord is going to look at for us, this province, is looking at the social determinants of health. So in that vein I would look at this and say, well, how does this affect low-income families? We can go back and forth on this.

I'm looking at a document here, a report that was done on the proposed sugar-sweetened beverage tax. It was done by a Ph.D. Thomas Cooper. I'll just take two quotes out of this that relate to that: There is also evidence that sin taxes – as he calls it here – of this sort take a greater share of income from the poor than from the rich. Since low-income groups tend to buy larger quantities of sugar beverages, the impact of the sugar levy will particularly be regressive.

If I go further on in that document: Jurisdictions that have had this tax – steep increases in the retail price of common household consumer products. This can be considered a regressive form of taxation disproportionately affecting the consumption habits of the low-income consumers. I think it was mentioned earlier

today about some of the physical activity taxes and such. That's all good for those who can afford it.

The Minister of Finance, the Member for St. John's West, two quotes today: This is about healthier choices. Further on she said: It's about ensuring people make smart choices. Two key words there: choices. Not everyone has a choice. Not everyone has a choice between healthier drinks. Diet drinks can be debated that the aspartame is not healthy in them, but healthier choices – and it was mentioned here. I believe the Member for Windsor Lake mentioned choices like milk and water.

We know there are 213 boil orders in this province, at last count. We know not everyone has the choice of water. We know that milk is 160 per cent to 200 per cent more expensive than soft drinks. So, really, is that a choice? I don't think so, not for low-income families. They don't have a choice.

Then we look at, again, that quote: Ensuring people make smart choices. If you're talking about smart choices, you're talking about education. You're not talking about a carrot and a stick to get people to make a choice. You're talking about education, making sure people are aware of the pros and cons of their lifestyle.

The Member for Gander tried to simplify it. He simply said: It's simply about connecting the dots; simply about addressing childhood obesity.

Well, if I look at the quote here from a 2014 Fraser Institute study on obesity, it states: "... obesity is not a soda problem, nor a 'junk foods' problem, nor even necessarily just a calorie problem. The causes of obesity are multifactorial, where obesity in each individual case may be influenced by literally dozens of physiological, psychological, and socioeconomic factors." That's from the Fraser Institute.

Now, I'm not arguing that sugar doesn't have an effect, but there are many, many more factors involved there. And it's interesting; the last one was socioeconomic factors. Again, back to my point on low-income families and being able to make healthier choices and our Health Accord looking at the social determinants of health.

I think we've put the horse before the cart here in looking at this taxation. I think we should be doing more in terms of education. I don't think there's been any formal consultation with industry. We've spoken to industry, we know they've done much to reduce the calorie and sugar content in soft drinks. We know they have offered, by letter to this Premier, to do further consultation and have offered to help with an education program. That's on the table.

The Member for Gander also noted that as you increase the price of something, the consumption goes down, and he used tobacco as an example.

Well, we all know when the tax went on tobacco you look for alternatives. We know that more and more youth took on vaping. So that doesn't necessarily lead to a healthier outcome. It becomes an education process here. It's not a simple transition. If you're living in a low-income family, you don't have a choice.

The Member for Mount Pearl used a good example on Purity Syrup. But let's take it a further step because this deals with powered drinks and that as well. Something as simple as a cup of hot chocolate.

Now, I can go down to Tim Hortons and buy a hot chocolate over the counter, no problem. But for a low-income family – or any family, because I like hot chocolate – I can buy the tub of hot chocolate and you're being taxed on how much that tub of hot chocolate produces. So if that tub of hot chocolate produces four or five litres, you're talking a dollar or more in taxes. It's crazy, right? It all goes on what that tub of hot chocolate can produce.

My point here is there are many, many pieces to dealing with the health issue here. I don't disagree with that. But you really need to have a plan. You really need to have a chronological approach to dealing with this. And if we're not educating people first, I think we've missed the boat.

What's happened here is a very easy thing to do: When you cannot be innovative, tax. As the Premier mentioned today: If you can't be courageous in making solutions, tax. And that's where we've gone here.

I think we certainly need to move forward with looking at a healthier population here in the province, but I really need to see a fully thought-out plan that outlines: Here's what we're going to do, here's the steps in order of how we're going to address these issues. But a simple tax, to me, as a starting point is not the way to do it. It certainly doesn't show innovativeness at all, nor does it show, really, an understanding of the problem.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the discourse over the last number of hours concerning the sugar-sweetened beverage tax. I certainly would like to say that I do believe, in all sincerity and fairness, that there is choice here.

People walking into a store can make a choice of either, you know, a sugar-sweetened beverage, which contains – in a can of soft drink, there are about 10 teaspoons of sugar – 10 teaspoons of sugar, approximately. Or they can choose another alternative – and there are lots of flavoured waters out there, there are lots of diet alternatives to this sugar-sweetened beverage.

As I said earlier today, this is not about, really, income. It's more about healthier choices and making better choices and that will have, as the Minister of Health has indicated, long-term benefits to our population. I know everyone in this House is concerned about health and ensuring that we have considered how we can help ensure a healthy population.

This type of tax has been applied in 50 jurisdictions around the world. I have multitudes, honestly, multitudes of studies here that I'd be happy – if anyone would like to see them or if anyone would like to have me table them: The health and economic impact of tax on sugary drinks, a proposal from the Canadian Paediatric Society. Here's one: *Liquid Candy: Working Together to Reduce Consumption of*

*Sugary Drinks* by the Heart & Stroke Foundation.

There's plenty of evidence from those that are involved in health, plenty of evidence to say that this is something that we should proceed to do. So I certainly appreciate the discourse this evening, and I know the Members opposite are concerned about this. More, they are concerned about it from a low-income perspective, but I say to the Members opposite, quite frankly, regardless of income, this is about healthier choices. We want to make sure that people have those healthier choices.

I did hear a little earlier a Member opposite raise the idea of boil-water orders and allow me to say – because I think that's a very important issue and one that we all in this House should be concerned about and continuing to make sure the public water supply is safe – as a government, since April of 2019, the provincial government has approved 280 water projects for a total provincial contribution of more than \$114 million.

Is there more to be done? Without a doubt. This is important. Without a doubt there's more to be done, but let us continue to move toward that and ensuring that the boil-water orders in this province are eliminated. I think that's critically important. I will also say that we need increased awareness of this issue and I think the debate today does bring a lot of that awareness to people. Education is going to be very, very important and surely we must continue along that line.

Now, I did hear, and my colleague, the critic for Finance and Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, did raise the idea and the prospect of surely we can allocate this money. I did raise this during my opening remarks of how important it is that we allocate any money raised to programs, and I named some of the programs that we've already allocated to: Kids Eat Smart, for example, I talked about the diabetes Insulin Pump Program and I talked about the Physical Activity Tax Credit. I will give all Members opposite credit for really making sure that we're focused on allocating the monies that are generated by this tax to do just that: education, making sure that we have it for the diabetes program and for others. We can't do it under this

particular act because this is not a supply act. The Member opposite, my colleague from Stephenville - Port au Port, understands this is not a supply act.

I will say, in listening to your concerns, listening to the way you're raising it, understanding what you're trying to achieve here, that all revenue generated from this tax will be reinvested in healthy choices for kids, in educational programs and in diabetes programs and we'll build it into the fiscal framework. I'm trying to remove all doubt and confusion, because I have listened to what you've had to say. We'll make sure that in the supply act of next year the appropriate appropriations for the next budget is there. You have that commitment and I think it's an important point that you have raised and I'll make sure of that.

Now, I will say to you again that –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

I just want to make sure I'm really clear that this is about healthier choices; not about income. Healthier choices: You have two, three or four cans of drink lined up and rather than choose the one with the 10 teaspoons of sugar, please choose an alternate. That's what this is about. Please choose an alternate, because we all know – everyone in this House – no one has disputed that we know sugar is having a huge impact.

I will say that we're working with industry and we'll continue to work with industry on this. We did move the date of implementation from April 1 – which is what we announced in the budget – to September to recognize that a longer runway is needed for the wholesale industry to make the SKU changes and things of that nature. So we are paying attention and we are listening to people about this. We do know that industry, overall, and the consumption, overall, is moving towards these healthier choices. But this is another way, another tool in the tool box for addressing the concerns that we all have.

As the Minister of Health has indicated, and as others have indicated in this debate, on both sides of the House, it is incredibly important that we try and make our society healthier, all the

time working towards that goal. So I ask for your support in those endeavours, and understanding it and listening to what you have asked and what you've said, I commit to you that all revenues generated from this tax will be reinvested in healthy choices for children, education programs and diabetes programs, and we'll build that into the fiscal framework.

I just wanted to make sure I made that clear to Members opposite, make that clear to those that are listening and to please implore everyone in this House, anyone who's tuning in and all of Newfoundland and Labrador to make those healthier choices. We know industry is moving towards this. We know they are. We want people to make healthier choices. We're not over that 50 per cent threshold yet. We want to continue to put emphasis on making those healthier choices as we move forward.

We all know, based on multiple studies – including the World Health Organization, which I think we all respect and understand, they are saying that we really do need to address beverage consumption and sugar consumption in beverages because this is empty calories and that we need to address this. So that's what we're trying to do here, is really address those concerns and make those changes that are necessary. We all understand the implications to health, we all want people to have a healthier choice and we also want to reinvest any monies gained by this tax in programs, services and education to help ensure a healthier population.

I thank you for your time this evening.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

If you had a chance to read Michael Moss's book, *Salt, Sugar, Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*, it was a very clear treatise on just not only the dangers of sugar, which he calls the methamphetamine of processed food ingredients, but also the dangers of such things

as salt and fat in foods. So there's no question about the deleterious effects on your health.

I'll come down to this. I've never had an issue with paying taxes because, as I said, it's what I pay for the privilege of living in a country that has so many amenities. I would have no problem paying extra money on the salmon licences or even the carbon tax. The key thing for me is always going to be: Where is that money going to be invested and are the programs going to be that effective? I've heard here in the previous speaker a commitment to bring other plans in place. Wait for them; trust me. Well, I think this has been announced in the budget. We've had time to start developing some comprehensive plans.

It's been said by the Minister of Finance that this is about making better beverage choices without the added sugar, placing greater emphasis on healthy living is central to achieving better health outcomes and encourage residents to switch to healthier beverages resulting in long-term health gains for our province. I can't argue with that. However, it's akin to saying to a person who's hungry and homeless: Keep warm, stay well fed and talk to you later. If you do nothing about it, to address some of the underlying problems, what good is it? To me, that's where this tax is.

To say to people about making choices who already have limited choices, is not a choice. Twenty cents per litre on wholesale, I think it was, and one of the comments is, if I understood it and heard it right, that it will also cover beverages brought into the province by consumers. Well, that tells me right there. Most of the people I served when I served with the Saint Vincent de Paul and the food banks, they weren't making trips outside the province. They could barely afford to walk outside their door in some cases. You got no worries about them bringing in the sugar-sweetened drinks. A refundable tax credit works if you've already got an income.

School lunch: When I taught, I did my teaching internship over in Netteswell Comprehensive School in Harlow, England. One of the things that they had there was a school lunch program free for every student there. It was served by staff. It was obviously paid for by government

with the assumption that this was a significant investment that children, regardless of their economic circumstances – a levelling of the playing field – they would be fed.

Now, I support the school milk programs and the Kids Eat Smart. But let me tell you, there's a vast difference, because they depend on volunteers and fundraising. They depend on teachers to take that time out before class to do it. This is a commitment by teachers.

So if we're going to charge this money, then let's start putting it into funding school lunch programs – not Chartwells or any other group, but we pay them so that children who come to access the service don't have to pay for it. And put good food choices there.

How will taxing the Pepsi product or the Coke product or the sugar-sweetened product make the price of a carton of milk more affordable? Show me. It's not cheap to eat healthy. I can tell you my two grandchildren eat very well. They're got their choice of yogurt drinks, of milk. They haven't had a soft drink; it's water. But guess what? They live in a privileged family because they've got two professionals as parents, professionals as grandparents. They've got those amenities.

So when was the last time that income support levels were raised in this province? I think here of a constituent of mine – I brought this up here before – who at one point was living on \$40 a week after paying expenses. Tell me how you eat healthy on that. And times when he was trying to pay off an outstanding light bill, he was done to \$9. How does taxing sugary drinks help this person eat?

I have here a gentleman – a senior citizen – who's paying \$735 a month in rent, plus utilities which are not included. The cost of living is far higher than his senior income allows him. He cannot afford the other expenses. How will taxing a sugary drink help this person? If we're talking about doing something constructive and something proactive, let's start looking at the underlying causes.

What is our commitment, by the way, to minimum wage? We have a wonderful report; you might have heard of David Card, the Nobel

Prize winner for his research into minimum wage. That it's not a job killer, a living wage. Yet here we are steadfastly opposed and resistant to the idea of having a living wage for people. We can't afford to have a living wage, but we can tax – it's such a small measure. Be bold – if we're going to take action, be bold.

We had a guaranteed basic income program here. It was called CERB. An interesting thing with CERB is that during CERB, the usage of food banks dropped significantly. Now, what does that tell you? For the first time, people had money in their pockets to pay for food. Yet, this government, despite the pleas from a number of food agencies, decided to claw that back.

So you had a program that actually helped people out of poverty for a while, allowed them to pay for food, and we clawed that back. Where was the concern for those who are food insecure, who are hungry, at that time? For the families? We had an opportunity to be bold and to listen to the various food security groups that pleaded with government. We didn't.

We talk about connecting the dots and childhood obesity. Well, there's a clear connection of dots between a living wage, a guaranteed basic income and better food choices. If that's what we're about, then let's start moving in that direction.

There was mention was that consumption of cigarettes goes down. Well, I would ask why. Is it because people are no longer smoking or are they just smoking different cigarettes that they don't have to pay taxes on? I don't know how many people who have their supply of contraband cigarettes. I can guarantee you they're not paying taxes and smoking sales are gone down, but they're still smoking.

So, to me, it comes down to this: If you want to give people the choice of choosing between that sugary drink and a carton of milk, show me – then put money in their pockets so that they can afford it. For me, I can afford to eat healthy. I would say, looking around this room, many of us eat healthy – very healthy.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**J. DINN:** Including myself, Mr. Chair – very healthy.

So it comes down to this: making life affordable – don't worry, I'm not looking at the Member across; I can look at my own reflection.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** He said across, not around.

**J. DINN:** That's true.

Let's look at affordability, making life more affordable. Let's make sure we've got the best health care system possible to make sure that we look after people, that they have a doctor to go to, and let's make sure that whatever money we bring in, it's investing in the future of this province. That starts with investing in making food more affordable, about raising incomes and about giving people the means to which they can make a choice.

Thank you, Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Chair, I recall discussing this topic as a former minister of CSSD in 2016 of the pros and the cons of introducing a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. This amendment didn't happen overnight. Many hours were spent by staff from multiple departments researching the evidence about the impact of sugar on our health.

I don't know how many of my colleagues have ever tried to remove sugar completely from their diet, but I can assure you that this is no easy task. It's not easy because sugar is often hidden in what we consume. You may be surprised by the amount of hidden sugars that can be in what you eat and drink. Some of the names won't even register as sugars in your brain at first. Companies will try to trick you by using technical names.

Anything that has the term "sugar" or "syrup" in its name is a sugar. This includes maple syrup, raw sugar and confectioners' sugar and, yes, even corn syrup is a sugar. They may not look as

dangerous as your usual white sugar that you buy for sweetening your tea and your coffee, but they are unhealthy for you.

They will all cause the same risks of high blood sugar levels. And as your body releases more insulin, the body gets used to it and builds up a resistance and you can then end up with requiring more insulin. Eventually, your body struggles to release insulin and you struggle with diabetes.

The most common type of hidden sugar is fructose, another foreign name that most people don't recognize, and is added to energy drinks, granola bars and much more.

I would like to talk about sugar in general. Fructose has been linked to obesity rates in the most recent decades and this may be because it's the most popular, but it also shows how dangerous it is. Surprisingly, we can consume 10 per cent of our daily calories through fructose. Ten per cent – that's a high amount. Because it's linked to obesity, it's also linked to the rising diabetes crisis we are experiencing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Corn syrup and high-fructose corn syrup are very similar to each other and they're highly popular additives to products. They're found in canned foods, sodas, yogurts and even frozen pizzas. Yes, frozen pizzas have sugar added to them. Who would have thought?

Sugar is linked to increasing the amount of fat stored in the body, which leads to weight gain, and your body can't process corn syrup well and so blood sugar levels increase considerably. You're then left with a sugar crash afterwards leading to more sugar cravings and very poor energy levels.

Our government, after much research and thought, took the position to amend the *Revenue Administration Act* and introduce a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages effective September 1, 2022. While revenues from this tax are modest, they can help fund future educational opportunities and they can support strategic initiatives that result in long-term health gains for our residents. The goal is to encourage residents to switch to sugar-free beverages. This is not an attack on anyone in our society; you

have a choice. The sugar-laden beverage will cost you more than the sugar-free beverage, because choosing sugar is not a healthy choice and that is evident by the alarming data pertaining to the rise in type 2 diabetes in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chair, the negative impact of sugar-sweetened beverages on our children and adults has been known for years. In 2017, an article published in the National Library of Medicine focused on the results of the impact of sugar on childhood obesity from 2013 to 2015 and it compared those results with previous studies. Their conclusion was that evidence suggests that sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is positively associated with or has an affect on obesity indicators in children and adults. By combining the already-published evidence with the new evidence they concluded that public health policy should aim to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and encourage healthy alternatives, such as water. That is what our government is aiming to do here.

Chair, while the sugar-beverage tax will position Newfoundland and Labrador as a leader in Canada and will help avoid future demands on the health care system, we know that a tax alone cannot solve our health problems. It is one tool to deter people from consuming drinks with sugar in them.

To help address the social determinants of health a number of other initiatives were announced in *Budget 2021*, such as: over \$1 million for continued support of the Kids Eat Smart Foundation, which supports the education, health and well-being of school-aged children through nutrition; \$1.8 million to prevent and reduce tobacco and vaping use; and a Physical Activity Tax Credit was also introduced to provide a refundable tax credit of up to \$2,000 per family. This is a helpful incentive for families as they look to access sport and recreational activities. It also holds the added benefit of supporting the local health and wellness industry. Additionally, government provides the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, a tax-free payment made to low-income individuals, families and persons with disabilities who may be impacted by additional provincial tax measures, and

government is renewing the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Speaker, might I add, \$29 million towards the continued construction of a new mental health and addictions hospital and associated projects in St. John's. The new hospital will be open in late 2024.

Our children are our future. That is a fact. We, as adults, are their teachers and role models. The onus is upon us to provide our children with healthy, sugar-free beverages. Speaker, I am a proud mom of a 25- and 27-year-old, and I can say in this House of Assembly that my children do not drink pop. As a nurse and as a mom, who was lucky enough to stay home with my children for 10 years of their school-age life, I never gave my children pop products because of the sugar and aspartame in them. Thus, my children simply do not consume nor like these products as adults.

The average household in Newfoundland and Labrador spends an estimated 2.8 per cent of its total annual food and beverage expenditures on sugar-sweetened beverages. This is the highest in Canada and twice the Canadian average of 1.4 per cent. Our province also spends more per person on health care than any other province in Canada. By implementing initiatives to deter unhealthy habits in our population, such as the tax on sugar-sweetened beverages and the Physical Activity Tax Credit, the health of our population should improve. With a healthier population and a decreased prevalence of chronic disease, like obesity, heart disease and diabetes, the overall cost to the health care system will reduce over time.

Speaker, I have 22 years of behaviour modification experience and our government is supporting positive interventions to produce positive behaviours. I support my government in introducing this tax as a means to a healthier tomorrow.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

**P. TRIMPER:** Thank you, Chair.

It's a great honour to be able to speak to this one and it's also interesting. I feel that there's actually a lot more agreement than disagreement here. I'm going to make a couple of points and then I want to get to the heart of something, but I'm pleased to feel the sense of some progress being made here.

I did want to refer the folks that are sitting in this Legislature right now to what happened in the previous Assembly. There was a PMR that I was involved in, along with a gentleman by the name of George Murphy and Julia McCarthy, where we actually identified strategies for reducing vaping in the youth of this province. I saw today in government's announcement that they intend to put \$1.8 million towards reducing the use of tobacco and vaping. I would refer those in charge of that \$1.8 million back to those recommendations that came from all sides of this House, in a very unanimous way, to see what we can do to honour Mr. Murphy and Ms. McCarthy and all of the efforts from before. I think that would be a great thing to do.

I also want to throw in one other issue before I get to my main one, which is – and here I am, sitting in Labrador and always thinking about price differentials, whether it be gasoline, or alcohol or now sugary drinks. We do have retailers, for example, who are going to be selling these same commodities, these same products, on one side of a border that's now going to have an additional price differential from what is sold in Quebec. I think I haven't seen or heard of any reference to this, and so I identify that to the Minister of Finance and hopefully the minister will be able to identify that in their remarks.

I wanted to focus on a key aspect of the debate and I've heard some folks mention it today. I recall back in the budget of the spring when this topic of putting the sugar tax in place was first raised, and there was a very interesting interview that occurred with Ted Blades and a representative from the United Kingdom on *On the Go*, the radio show in the afternoon, and I paid close attention to that and it was very interesting. I'm going to refer Members of this House to some of the key words that represent what's happened in the UK and how they did it,

and I really want to understand from the minister, if the minister is able to, to explain to me the difference between the UK and what is being proposed here. Because the United Kingdom's sugar tax was described as working exactly as intended.

It's interesting that it's called the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, it was announced in March of 2016 and it was aimed at manufacturers and importers of soft drinks. It wasn't targeted at the consumer, which is what so much of the concern has been here today. It's actually done in advance, in the production of these products. It's interesting that the levy was applied in what was called a tier system. So there were higher tier rates and each one is based on a sort of a range of sugar in terms of grams per 100 millilitres and so many pence – we're talking UK – charged to each of the manufacturers.

What was interesting was that when – I won't go into it, as I said, it's a high, medium and low – and what happened, some 100 days prior to the actual implementation of the tax, the signal had been sent and, as with this situation, we're looking one year out from now, the manufacturers actually moved to address the intention of the move by the UK legislators.

What I'm getting at is that, at the time, there were something like 52 per cent of the sugared drinks of the day had been targeted. But as a result of this legislation being passed, it was reduced from 52 per cent to 15 per cent of the soft drinks. What happened was that the higher-tier drinks with the higher concentration of sugar, the manufacturers essentially said: Nah, we're really not going to be able to deal with that. But it was those ones that were at that range that government was intending to try to get below, manufacturers said: Wow, with a little bit of effort, we can actually drop our sugar content, avoid this levy and not have to pass that onto the consumer.

And it was a tremendous success. Like I said, it dropped from 52 per cent to 15 per cent of the drinks. So it was just those high, super energy drinks – I don't need to mention names here, but I think we can all imagine what they might be.

So I would like to understand, from the minister, how come we are not following that exact



model, given we seem to be referencing it, but it was a different strategy in that it was targeted at the manufacturer, it was targeted at the importer, but we are picking on the consumer. I think, as so many have very eloquently spoken about, there is the concern of that, especially if it can be seen to cause immediate reactions.

You know, I think a lot of our concern is that – particularly people with a lower income, and I think the Member for Topsail - Paradise was just talking about the cost of milk, an incredibly healthy product that we really try to make sure we have available to Kids Eat Smart in school and other situations like this versus a can of Coke.

Wow, you know, these pops are coming at you, as my mother would say, a lot less “expensive” than other products and therefore more available. Even imposing this fee, I’m not sure if that’s even going to get us to the price of a good glass of milk. But how can we get in front of that again? How can we get to those manufacturers, as they’ve done in the United Kingdom?

I’d like to leave that with the minister and I’m hoping we can hear a little bit of insight into that.

I think that’s really what I wanted to say at this time.

Thank you very much. I look forward to further debate on this.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation.

Sorry, the hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

**G. BYRNE:** I have to fight. I have to fight, Mr. Chair, for my opportunity to speak in this House, but I shall not be silenced.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**CHAIR:** The Chair concurs with the hon. Member.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps my words he shall not say – he’ll say that even louder once he hears my words.

Mr. Chair, as I reflect on the advice that has been given to the government from the Members opposite – notwithstanding the relatively reasoned and rationed advice from the Member for Lake Melville – I am struck with one glaring observation, which is, for the government in waiting it has one particular position which it advances, which is, we’re not sure.

We’re not sure is not a definitive response to a government proposal. In fact, what they suggest is that unless we can offer the perfect, we should let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

The range of initiatives to promote public health, personal health, are varied and proven to be effective by each and of themselves, but also together with a more contained package. But what I see here, Mr. Chair, is that we are speaking of sugar drinks.

There is little doubt in any expert’s mind that sugar in any excess – refined sugars in particular – is a danger to personal health. The contributing factors to disease, the contributing factors to morbidity and its consequences to poor health outcomes is very clear. So perhaps it may be time to simply take a short breath, to pause and to reflect on what it is that we’re trying to do here.

I have heard it over and over and over again – and while respecting the fact that sometimes opposition is offered for opposition sake – when goals are being advanced of this nature, this is where we have to loosen our partisanship and prevent offering opposition for opposition sake. If this were not a longstanding debate within the scientific community, I could understand why there might be some confusion or doubts. But it is not. This is something that is well reasoned within the scientific community.

If one were to suggest that we are preventing options and monopolizing any access to beverages, then I could understand opposition. But we are not doing that. In fact, so just to make this abundantly clear, as I understand it, if a consumer were to make a choice between a

two litre, sugar-enhanced bottle of soda pop versus a non-sugar-sweetened bottle of soda, they still maintain that choice. But we are incentivizing a good choice.

So while I heard it here this evening the opinion that sin taxes do not work and various small-seat conservative institutes were offering opinions or references to having opinions that sin taxes do not work; I have not reflected once on this Chamber ever suggesting that cigarette taxes do not work, that they should be abolished, especially even according to when the Opposition offering opposition for opposition sake were in government and not in Opposition, they promoted taxes to incentivize behaviours. So I can't think of a time when tobacco taxes was suggested as ineffective. I cannot suggest a time when alcohol taxes were not suggested as being effective.

We are talking tonight about a sugar incentive or de-incentivizing sugar beverages. Yet, the debate here tonight reels largely around the component of: It will not work. They are not sure how it will work. But if we can't be sure how it will work, or it will not work, it should not be done.

Mr. Chair, if we were to follow through on that suggestion and say that unless we have a perfect justice system, there should be no laws. Well, I think we would be all lesser off because we do not have a perfect justice system, but we do have a very good justice system.

Mr. Chair, what I'll say to anyone who would like to advance the cause, that until we have the perfect, the perfect shall overrule the good, I would suggest to you we are going down a very bad road.

This is about children. This is about families. This is about incentivizing better health outcomes. This is about ensuring that while there are still choices that are available those choices are incentivized towards better choices, healthier choices. There will still be sugar pops available. There will still be beverages available that are not sugar sweetened.

So before anyone gets too carried away and providing opposition for opposition's sake, don't try to promote a notion whereby this will be

incredibly disadvantaged to certain demographic groups or certain income groups. Those choices will still be available, but of course we'll incentivize other choices. Milk, in particular, I cannot think of a more perfect food. As the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board pointed out, funding for this appropriation will go towards supporting healthiest of choices, providing our children, providing our young people with the healthiest of options. So we'll continue on in that vein.

But, Mr. Chair, what this is not about, what this should not be about is about the perfect being the enemy of the good, and it should not be about opposition for opposition's sake. This is about healthier outcomes for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at a time when the one true debate and one true question of public policy that everyone in this province is interested in – outside of this Chamber and inside of this Chamber – is better health outcomes.

I'm very proud to be part of a government which is acting on all of these initiatives. And we're doing so from a position of strength, because we know that there's large support from the public at large.

So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity. I hope that at the end of the day, at the end of this debate, we all choose reason over rhetoric and support this legislation.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR (Trimper):** Thank you.

For the next speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's again an honour to speak in this House for the first time, other than Question Period, back in the General Assembly. I want to clarify first a couple of comments by my hon. friend, the Member for Corner Brook. I can speak for the Official Opposition and say we don't oppose for the sake of opposing. I thought we had shown that in this House of Assembly. I think I can speak for all Members on this side of the House here.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**D. BRAZIL:** We don't oppose for the sake of opposing.

I'm not against action, but I'm against tax action when the evidence is not so blatantly upfront that there's not a dispute around what's right and what's wrong in this situation. None of us dispute that sugar isn't and potentially can be a severe health issue for people. None of us debate that over here. The debate we're having over here is whether or not taxation will get us to the desired effect of curbing people's habits for intake of sugar; educating individuals to understand the impact it'll have on their health immediately and long term; and changing a lifestyle, particularly for a younger generation, to make healthier choices around eating, particularly around beverages.

I first want to start by acknowledging the Beverage Association who seem to be the big bad wolf in this, who, through self-regulation on their own, have decreased sugar content in drinks, in beverages, by 23 per cent in the last decade on their own and have found other ways to market in Newfoundland and Labrador diet drinks. We consume higher levels of diet drinks which have less-to-no sugar content in them. So the industry themselves should be acknowledged. There's not a big bad wolf here. There's been a culture for centuries. We're into the second century now where soft drinks that have sugar content was part of it.

The taxation process that we're having a debate here – and this is not opposing for the sake of opposing. What it is, is asking for clarification. It's expressing our views based on the facts and figures and the research that we've looked at, looking at it beyond just one jurisdiction in Europe that did a specific thing that isn't directly connected to what is trying to be sold here on this side of the House.

What we want to look at is how do we make and educate our society to be healthier. We had things that were already in play. If you want to talk about for sake of opposing, I want to talk about how we were keeping our young people healthier in this province for over a decade by supporting the JumpStart Program. From an

economic point of view, you were getting \$10 back on every dollar you invested.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**D. BRAZIL:** And that seemed not to be the proper lifestyle for Newfoundland and Labrador, who were the first ones in and, unfortunately in this country, we're the first ones out under this administration.

So when you want to talk about healthy lifestyles, we started having to make choices that have already been proven. So we've proven in the past things that have worked and for some reason we got rid of it.

Now we're starting to implement or bring in something that we're not quite sure will get the desired effect. So I'm going to jump right back to the beginning. We, on this side of the House, agree that we need to find a way to ensure that our society has a lower intake of sugar, not only immediately here now but that we be the lowest because we have other health issues here that can be increased because of sugar intake.

So how do we do that? What's the best way to do it? The best way is through education. It's through other inclusive social programs. It's through other alternatives and finding healthier ways and healthier beverages that people need to consume.

Even the beverage industry has started giving healthier choices. So the industry that you're targeting, as the big bad wolves, all of a sudden have said they accept they have a responsibility as corporate citizens. While they're entities and they're employers and they generate revenues, the issue here becomes around we need to find a way to do the best thing to get the best outcomes so that our society is healthier.

To do that, we need to have open discussion. I accept the fact that we have a democratic society here and the democratic society in the last provincial election chose the Liberals to have a majority government. So we know that this tax will go forward. We know it will be passed in the House of Assembly. It wouldn't be brought forward if it wouldn't.

So in the discussions, what we wanted to express and share on this side of the House – and it comes from the Opposition parties and the independents equally – was around what is the best way to ensure that people in our society are healthier, have less consumption of sugars and are educated to understand not only what sugar does to them, but other behaviours from a health perspective to keep them healthier.

That's been the dialogue I thought – that's what I've been listening to over here. I thought it was a very open – and I even give credit to the arguments back from the government's side, that they were logistically sincere, 100 per cent, that it was about people being concerned about their kids being healthy down the road. It's concerned about what seniors are and it's concerned about having healthy choices – 100 per cent, we agreed totally with the discussions here.

But again, our debate – and we've had some very intense debates as a caucus on our side. This wasn't flippantly just thrown and oppose for the sake of opposing. This was a factual – you've heard my colleagues talk facts, they've talked figures, they've talked alternatives, they've talked generic situations and they've even talked about some of the other scenarios that may be happening.

My colleague from Corner Brook had noted about the tobacco tax, but he didn't also note that hundreds – and I mean hundreds of millions of dollars have gone into an education campaign to educate people about the negativity and the risks of smoking. I think it was a great thing. I think that's the major reason why smoking has dramatically dropped over the last number of decades. No different than what we should be doing when we talk about sugar content, also, as part of the whole process.

So we can't just statistically say taxation will do it because that's not true; that's not accurate by no stretch of the imagination. Smokers still smoke. People will still drink soft drinks, sugar, no sugar tax or no tax. What we were talking about here is that if you're going to tax somebody and start a whole philosophy, that the easy way of solving all issues is tax it, it's not the right approach. Have an open dialogue and a discussion like we had. There was a multitude of

discussions, recommendations and viewpoints here on both sides.

They were very valued, very poignant and if they were all collectively put in one policy or one piece of legislation, I think it would go much further than just a tax to solve the issues around healthy lifestyles but particularly around the one issue we're talking about now, intake of sugar. So that becomes the issue that we're debating here right now. It's about whether or not the tax on beverages – sugar tax on beverages – would actually get any more desired outcome when it comes from a healthy point of view.

The one thing I am pleased about – because I do realize and I do accept the fact it's a majority government – this piece of legislation will pass. I understand that. I understand the legislation. I've been here for 11 years, so I understand what's coming in advance and what to expect. The fact that the government has acknowledged and the Minister of Finance – and I give her credit for it – that this money will not go into a general account, that's the discussion that's been talked about over here and I feel echoed on your side. Would not go into general account and would be earmarked specifically to address healthy lifestyles, education, alternatives and any other nuance there that may improve people's outcomes from a health point of view and their understanding, particularly, if we're addressing one of the health condition issues here around sugar intake.

We agree with that. We actually would've had a discussion about proposing something to that. So I'm glad to say through open dialogue and open debate we came to an understanding that would be the best path forward. The minister put that forward. Isn't that what I thought the House of Assembly was all about? I thought that's what we pretty well achieved here tonight.

So I get a little dismayed when the Member for Corner Brook says this is about opposing for the sake of opposing. I thought we were very cordial; we were very respectful. We talked in facts and we acknowledged the dialogue back and forth. We may not always agree, as you're not always going to agree with our viewpoint, but at the end of the day the intent here is to acknowledge that there is an issue.

There is an issue about healthy living in Newfoundland and Labrador. There is an issue about the impact that sugar content and sugar intake has on people. The issue became about what's the best way to address it. The government has put forward an alternative, a sugar tax. We don't see it as the best alternative. But at least at the end of the day now we see the discussion going to a point where any monies that are generated will go specifically to addressing that particular issue.

I see that as a win-win for everybody in the House of Assembly. I would've preferred that it wouldn't have been a sugar tax, that we would've found some other mechanism to educate our society, to find supports for agencies and organizations that could support that and to also find another collective way to improve our health care.

On that point, I do applaud the government for acknowledging the money will go in the right direction, but I still cannot support the sugar tax in the mode and the way it's presented here, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you to the speaker.

Next we'll hear from the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Chair.

Always a privilege to speak representing the people of the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair for eight years now – a tremendous privilege.

I'd probably be remiss, Chair, if I didn't say right at the beginning, the district's been going through an extremely difficult time with the tragedy from September 17. I attended a memorial for one of the boys on Sunday. I would ask all Members of the House to keep the families in St. Lewis, and Mary's Harbour in particular, in your thoughts and prayers.

Chair, everybody brings a different perspective to the House. Some have been talking about stats

across the country, taxes and various things about this. I've been thinking about the last 10 minutes as I was reflecting my thoughts to speak. I was thinking about the former Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, because often when he spoke he would tell a little story. I was thinking about my own experience in my family's life, which became a lot less sweeter on the 21st of November 2003. It'll be 18 years, I can't believe it, coming up in November when my six-year-old, three weeks shy of her seventh birthday, was medevaced out to St. Anthony and we got the diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes.

Living in an isolated community, living where no one else had Type 1, was certainly a steep education and learning curve for us where, over the next two weeks, I was with her. We were talking about units of N and units of R, sliding scales; when you go home if you find her passed out in a snowbank, this is what you do, you carry the glucagon. There was a tremendous amount of learning for us.

Her pancreas had stopped producing insulin. So when we eat sugar, as many of us would know – I didn't know a lot about it first – our pancreas will produce sugar. That all changed for her. So she would take insulin or also activity would have the same impact. I remember that first Christmas going home. Her sugar would be high and we'd all dress up in our snow clothes and we would walk through the community for hours looking at the Christmas lights, because I wasn't sure – I wasn't comfortable with how much insulin to be giving her.

But over time and every three months from then, until she became an adult and came in here to go to university, we would be in St. Anthony with all the Type 1 diabetics from the Northern Peninsula and the South Coast. We learned a tremendous lot. We were into counting carbs in the household. She actually did a science fair one year on counting carbs. She won in her school and she won regionally for that.

But, suffice to say, we learned about the impacts of sugar and things like a bottle of Gatorade never came in our household anymore. You talk about modified behaviour. There was one day when she was about eight years old she rushed in the door at lunchtime, like I thought some

child had committed the biggest crime. She had to tell me that so-and-so had eaten a Honey Bun for recess and now the amount of sugar in that Honey Bun was probably more than she was supposed to have for the week. So the education piece, the message was getting through.

We talk about the impacts. Fifty per cent of our seniors here in this province live with at least three conditions. Just on Saturday past, Chair, I had the privilege, once again, to walk with a very dear friend of mine, Guy Poole, who lost his wife to the complications of diabetes when she was just 57 years old.

Guy has now been walking for 15 years. He's almost 78 years old. Says he's in the best shape of his life. He's walked across this entire province. Now he's doing the side roads. He's walked from Labrador City to St. John's. He's walked 3,500 kilometres and we walk with him when we can. The first year he was walking, he met a little nine-year-old girl that gave him a card and a donation and said I hope you find a cure. That girl was my daughter. We've had a special connection ever since.

Yet, again, talk about modified behaviour, Chair. That first year my daughter went around at seven in our community on Halloween and everybody wanted to support her. They were calling saying: What do we give her? When she comes to the door, what do we give her? Everybody knew she liked scallops, so we'd come home at the end of Halloween night, she'd have bags of frozen scallops; she'd have loonies and toonies. There were all kinds of interesting things that people gave; it didn't have to be cans of pop. You talk about the good that's in small communities that we see. We certainly felt supported along the way.

So that's just a story of how we learned for the last 18 years. There are many things that are not in our household. I also want to add, Chair, that we are better for it. It couldn't be just a change for my daughter; it had to be a change in the household. We learned the benefits mentally and physically of active living.

Just to pick up on a couple of other points that have been said here tonight. We've heard people say we're not sure. Where's the full plan? I think this is a start. It's also important that we note –

some people talked about the vulnerable, low income. I just want to go back and reiterate this is about choice. It's about choice. If you see a can of Pepsi, regular, and a diet, choose the diet.

I remember for a number of years my husband drank regular Pepsi and I drank Diet Pepsi. I would always try to encourage him to drink the diet and avoid the 10 spoonfuls of sugar. He'd say I don't like the taste of that. Well, guess what? For as long as I can remember now, we all drink Diet Pepsi if we have pop.

The other thing, Chair, that's been coming out here, as the conversation has gone back and forth to all sides of the House, is it's a tax grab. It's a money grab. I can tell you that this government right now, led by a doctor – a doctor in health – we have many, many conversations around our table, saddened, really, by the fact that we're leading in a number of areas in this province that we don't want to lead in when it comes to chronic illnesses. I was thinking, often when we're travelling abroad and people find out we're from Newfoundland and Labrador they're always very friendly because they think we're from one of the best provinces in the country. What a wonderful goal that we want to become the healthiest province. What a wonderful goal that instead of leading in rates of smoking, obesity or alcohol that we're going to lead by saying we're the healthiest.

I've heard – I don't want to put words in his mouth – the Premier. I did hear him say many times: This is not a tax grab. Whatever money comes in, let's put it back. Let's put the education piece there. When somebody walks up to a cooler, let's have a sticker there so that they can see the benefits of choosing the low-sugar choice. So I think it's important that that be a part of the conversation here tonight.

We know, Chair, it's been mentioned many times, the strain on our health care. We know that we are spending more per capita in Newfoundland and Labrador in health than any other province or territory in this country. There's a saying: If you do what you always do, you'll get what you've always got. We need to change the dial. We need to change the channel. So that's why right now the Minister of Finance has this resolution before the House tonight, Mr. Chair. It's not about a tax grab.

I would also challenge my colleagues in this hon. House: If this isn't the way, what is the way? I've been sitting here listening intently, it's almost 8 o'clock on a Tuesday night, and I've heard many say: This is not the option. I heard the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands say – he started off speaking; left me a little bit confused, I say respectfully – healthy living initiatives don't work, but then he said let's put a fund in place to support healthy living initiatives. But that's what this is all about and I'm not sure if that was clear at the beginning. This is about the money that comes in, incentivizing people to make a low-sugar choice and then to take that money and to put it back into education, to put it back into physical options, Chair.

So I see that my time is almost gone. I'm very happy, Chair, to support this resolution and I look forward to a day when our province is leading as the healthiest province and not in chronic illnesses and obesities, and – like a TV program I used to watch one time – so that we can all live our best life now.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I will next hear from the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to have a few words on this tonight. I hear the comments going back and forth and it's a healthy debate, but I get a bit leery when you question that people on this side are just doing things just for the sake of opposing them or for the sake of just saying something in the opposite.

Just for the record, I want to put it on for the record: There was a negotiation going on with the government – which is the way this should work in this Parliament – with the Opposition, with the Third Party and with the independents to try to work out a deal on this. This is what we were doing outside. So for anybody to stand up now and criticize the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, anybody else or the Leader of the

Opposition, that's what we were doing. We were actually outside trying to work out something that we all can support to get the best results for the funds that are going to happen. That's what we were doing. This is how the Parliament should work. I know there are Members from the Opposition that were there, I know the Member for St. John's Centre was there, I was there and, Mr. Chair, you were there also. So, please, let's not just make these blanket statements that we're just here to say whatever you try to say and do that we're going to oppose. It's just not true. It's just not true.

I just want to give credit to the Government House Leader and to the Minister of Finance – I'm sure who's going to make a commitment on this. I know the Opposition, the Third Party and the independents are all in agreement. That is what we were doing. So when people talk about that we're just here prolonging this, this was a debate that was happening outside in this corner right here to make this work.

I thank the Minister of Finance for having that open suggestion –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**E. JOYCE:** – I thank the Government House Leader. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for being a part of it, the Leader of the Third Party, myself, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands and you, Mr. Chair, the Member for Lake Melville. I think we came up with a solution that we all can come up and support this.

Now, this is one issue of it. There's another thing I have to raise because I spoke to a lot of people on this: How are we going to initiate this tax? How are we going to initiate it? There are going to be a lot of issues. Will there be a loss of jobs throughout? How can we work on that? Because there are lot of people who are working with this here. There are a lot of people who depend – their livelihood – on this here through transportation, through the grocery stores and through the small convenience stores. So there's a bit more to this, and I know the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said she prolonged it to give more time, (inaudible). I think we need a dialogue with all the interested parties in doing

this, to find some way to make it easier on the people that have to initiate this here.

I'll say to people here in the House and the people who are listening outside, my wife was a dietitian and what she always said, she always said this: Foods don't hurt you; it's the choice and the amount of bad food you use. A soft drink is not bad, but when you continuously drink the soft drink that is where the issue comes in. The issue, I feel, is putting up a price for it and driving up the price, will that decrease it? I'm not too sure that it will. Who pays for the extra? If the kids are still going to buy it or families can't afford the healthy foods, they're going to have something to drink. They're definitely going to have something to drink.

In part of this here – and I know the Minister of Finance is involved with this here – is find some way that the funds, whatever the amount of money is, somehow is put in some programs. I use a few – the diabetes education; we heard that a lot here today. I'll use Heart and Stroke. There's some way that we could put it in for an education fund, not so much as you just take it out and give it to some group and say: Here's a grant. But do an education fund. I feel that if this bill gets passed and this gets put through the House of Assembly, that if we could take the funds and use it for an education fund that would be the best thing that this Legislature could do in the long run.

Now, if this is the way to go or not the way to go, that's another debate that we can have because, of course, the government has a majority and the government is going to get what they want. We understand all that. That is a part of the process. But there are a number of ways to do that. I know when I was coaching the kids in Sacred Heart, four, five and six, and I'd see them with the Gatorades. I'd sit down and I'd say: Guys, what are you drinking, Gatorade? It's only sugar. Let's have water, bring water. When you educate them for eight or nine years and you see them with the bottles of water instead of Gatorade, that's the education. If we could do it on a larger level.

I'll just use that – I don't mean to be picking on Gatorade. A person who drinks Gatorade, the average person should have to run about a

marathon. For Gatorade, when they need it, they actually need it.

Like, if you go out and play a volleyball game drinking Gatorade, you never burn enough energy to burn off the sugar that's in the Gatorade. It's a half-marathon up to a marathon before you can actually burn off the amount that's in a Gatorade. Why do we see so many kids with Gatorade? It's the promotion of it; it's the promotion.

So if we could promote – if the big stars in the world can promote Gatorade, how can we design a program in Newfoundland – if we're going to be leaders – how can we design a program here to educate and say no, you don't need Gatorade. Picking up water, just this water, will do you just as much benefit as any Gatorade; do better, actually. It would do better.

So this is where I think we should focus our attention, is the education part because a lot of kids that I know, if they feel that they're going to have something to drink and it tastes good and it's cool, they're happy. They're more than happy. So I think in the part of this here, we have to put the funds in the education program for the youth.

I hear all the comments about diabetes. I can assure you, with diabetes, there's not one factor that goes into someone creating diabetes; there are a number of factors. No doubt, sugar is one of it; sugar is one. Fatty foods is another. Lifestyle is another. There are a number of factors that goes into it. So it's hard to just take it and say, okay, it's this here, so this is why we're doing it. No doubt, it's a contributing factor; absolutely no doubt that it is a part of it.

But what we have to put in context, there are going to be, possibly, Mr. Chair, job losses over this if there's a reduction. There is a possibility, if there is less coming in that we're going to have consequences. We have to deal with the industry. I mean these are people, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that we're dealing with and their jobs. So we have to ensure that we're dealing with the industry on this part of it to ensure that if there's any job loss, they're minimal and is there any other way that we can work this out and branch this out.



So, Mr. Chair, I can go on a lot more but I understand that there is some movement by government, the Opposition, the Third Party and the independents that we will reach some kind of solution to this here. I'm not sure how the vote's going to go, but I think what we agreed upon is that there will be some kind of solution that we can put it into some kind of fund.

Again, this is the way Parliament should work and this is the way the House of Assembly should work. There was a very healthy debate on it. There are a lot of notes we can go to and from, who's right and who's wrong. We can banter this all day. And I'm sure everybody got their own point of view of what should be done and how to do it.

I know from my experience dealing with people with diabetes in my family also and dealing with people who treat diabetes in my family also, that there's a bit more to diabetes than drinking soft drinks. We have to keep that in mind.

So the bigger part of that is, if we're concerned – and this is one part of it – about the sugar, we should try to get some program for healthy lifestyle all across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I said before in the debate earlier, part of it is the expense to get proper milk, to get proper juice. It's the lower income that (inaudible).

I see my time is up, Mr. Chair. I may have another opportunity later.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's always a pleasure to speak in the House and this is – I suppose outside of QP and that – my first time speaking in debate. It's always a pleasure and it's always nice to speak for the people you represent, which happens to be the people of Conception Bay South. I'm proud to represent them; this is my third term and I hope to continue on.

And speaking of those people, I guess, in my district and all districts throughout the province, the word tax is not a nice word to most people and probably most people in this Chamber. Obviously, the word tax comes with extra monies in an economy that's really strapped, it's stretched; people struggle.

We have a lot of social issues out there. I mean, us being Conservatives, we've railed and I was, I guess, fortunate and unfortunate enough to sit here during the debate of 2016 because we learned a lot during that debate. That was a big, heavy, loaded debate on taxes and implications of taxes and many taxes. It was the last real filibuster, I guess, the House will ever see maybe – unless it's changed again – when we stayed four days and four nights on tax.

It still doesn't make it any more palatable to people. You know, you can take a tax and you can put any – you can try – and in this one you can sugar coat it – no pun intended, but that's what you're doing. It's meant to be: You don't have to pay this tax if you buy a diet drink. It's going to show on the shelves, you're going to pay 20 cents more for the sugar drink than you are the diet drink.

I get the Members opposite – and we've had a lot of conversations, a lot of debate even on this floor and off to the side – it's a choice you make, and life is about choices. We all make choices in life and there's no doubt you walk up to the cooler, right or left you're 20 cents out of pocket or you're 20 cents in, depending on your choice.

But it's a lot more involved in that. You're basically forcing behaviours and trying to change people's behaviours by penalizing them with a tax, is what you're doing. So you're trying to keep people away from these sugary drinks so you got to pay extra.

Does that work? I'm not so convinced that's the answer. I think there are much more deep-rooted problems sometimes when you get down to a lot of these issues.

Sugars in general, I suppose, if you want to get on another debate, I mean, there are a lot of people – that's a form of an addiction, too. The saying goes: the sweet tooth. You can be around

people who have a real craving for sugar, that's an issue in itself. I know lots of people like that.

It's a broader conversation and it's not one that I'm going to go down that road tonight by any stretch, but I think it's important to point that out in this debate.

I guess to go back to 2016 again, I know there was some conversation and I know the Minister of Health and Community Services quoted at the time about the sugar tax back four or five years ago, he didn't see the need of it. I think we all agreed there.

There was some other debate that went on. It was a former Cabinet minister across the way, actually, who reached out last night in the social media and put it up and remembered that it was pointed out – and I remember it – it wasn't worth the effort. A former minister of Finance was proposing it back in 2016 and was told it wasn't worth the effort. The amount of effort to collect this money, what you get from it, wasn't worth the effort.

I just wonder what changed in five years. So now it's all of a sudden it's worth the effort and we're going to get \$9 million.

Will we get \$9 million? Who knows, that's what they estimate. I mean, who knows, it might be more than that. It's really a shot in the dark.

I know when we did the cannabis bill there we were struck with the same thing: How much revenues will be collect? That turned out to be probably more. It was underestimated at the time. So it's getting more than that.

But the bottom line is: Really, what are you trying to do? When you bring in a tax of that nature and it looks good on paper, I mean, it was meant to be a revenue generator.

Now, I know the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has announced tonight that the money will be revenue neutral and it'll be funnelled into better programs, which we are happy about that. Make no mistake about it, we commend government for making that move and that's something that we all, on this side of the House, think that's a good idea.

We've also had discussions there. We'd like to be able to have some input on what these groups have – I think all the House would like to know what groups are going to be supported, because all of those groups affect each of our districts and their healthy eating initiatives will help our youth, and that's where we need to be focused.

But underneath all that is a tax. I guess my question comes out and sometimes I get caught in the common sense argument: Why didn't we go through this exercise in the beginning? So we're at a point now where the money is going to be revenue neutral, so the monies are going to go to good options. When this was brought in, that wasn't the reason it was brought in. It was brought in to create revenue to help the shortfall in our budget line.

They'll say it's not true, but what other reason were you bringing it in? They're bringing it in for people to eat healthier and make healthier choices. But when you had the money going, you had the money sitting there collecting \$9 million, it's going to general revenue, so what are you not doing in the beginning – this is the beginning; things have changed since the minister spoke tonight. In the beginning, it was still going into the government coffer. Where was it going? There was no direction, where the money was going to be spent.

That's a big problem with this and that's something that we've discussed. So what is the purpose of this? What is the purpose of putting the tax on – the sugar tax, which is unpopular. What's the sense of doing it? Why did we even start this process? Now the money seems to be heading in a better direction but, at the end of the day, I wonder why we didn't go through this exercise in the beginning. What's the purpose of it?

I know Members across the way will not agree with what I'm saying here but, ultimately, I wonder what's the purpose of the exercise because I don't think that's how you attain it. I think you got to dig deeper into your socio issues in your communities and figure out what's the root cause. There are root causes to all these issues. You got mental health and addictions right on through. There are root causes to these things.

Right now, a lot of this stuff is a band-aid and it doesn't get the desired effect. But, in saying all that, I will speak on behalf of our caucus; we are happy to see that the monies are going to be directed into healthy food choices, education – no problem. One issue that we had concerns about and our caucus met with the group – and I don't know if government did, but the industry didn't feel like there was proper consultation. They were made aware of this tax that put a lot of pressure on them and their bottom line and just their overall business models when it was announced last year. They didn't feel there was enough consultation and, after discussing it with us, we kind of agreed with them.

So, end of the day, any changes tonight is not going to help them. They still got to charge this tax, find ways – there is extra cost comes in for them, too, and it effects their business models. They're on tight profit margins, like I suppose everyone. Everyone has their own business model to operate on. There are extra costs to operate and if it's \$9 million a year, it's an extra \$9 million coming from their customers and maybe some from them, too.

At the end of the day, our caucus have debated this and we're not going to belabour the point all night, but we're not in favour of supporting a tax. We do commend government, though, for being willing to be revenue neutral, to bring the money and put the money into better uses for healthy eating choices. For that, we commend them but, ultimately, we will not be supporting it based on the fact of the mere principle that it's a tax and we don't feel it's a proper use.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

We'll next hear from the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this House and, as always, to represent the people of the District of St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows who have given me the opportunity to sit here and be their representative. I'm also

pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this resolution respecting the imposition of taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages, Bill 29.

Before I get into that, I would like to highlight some of the facts that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change presented here today, because I think he was reading my notes. He talked about how municipalities have stepped up and how they've placed a priority on clean drinking water, and I certainly do want to commend them for their efforts.

I want to reiterate how important it is for communities to recognize this concern and move towards reasonable solutions through programs offered like those in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. We recognize that there are struggles for some communities. They face aging infrastructure and challenges with capacity to address these things. Of course, here, I'd like to drop my little plug for a regional approach to managing some of these issues. Communities that are working together collaboratively can share services and bring benefits to areas that may never have been able to avail of such opportunities in isolation.

As we move forward and talk about regionalizing services or service sharing, that is certainly something that is top of mind as we go forward. How can communities work together to bring services to their residents that they might never have had an ability to do? You're stronger when you're together. So by putting our communities together, they have that opportunity to avail of.

A significant portion of our discussions in this House relates to health care and we talk about acute-, long-term and chronic care solutions and provisions and dealing reactively with health concerns. There might be some confusion across the way as to the intention of adding this tax, but let's be clear that the introduction of this legislation is a proactive measure to deal with some of the challenges that face our individuals in their health.

This is certainly indicative of a shift in thinking and approach to health care; it is just another example of how this government is committed to reimagining health care and transforming government. We're not content to stand on the

riverbank and haul constituents out downstream, we aren't content with the status quo and we're determined to move the camp up the line and try to prevent residents from falling in the first place: an upstream approach.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**K. HOWELL:** I think we can all agree that this is a very small step in a much larger journey. As the Minister of Health noted earlier when he spoke, this is going to be a long-term commitment. An investment that will yield results much further down the road. We're definitely a generation out. We have to make these important decisions now so that they pay dividends for our children and their children and so forth. As a population with the highest spending on health care and the poorest outcomes, it is imperative that we step up and make progressive decisions to address this disparity.

Working as a registered nurse with inter-professional teams, there is an immense resource that goes into caring for the implications of poor health decisions and the impacts of chronic disease in the population. Conditions like obesity, a result of diets high in simple sugars or carbohydrates, which also compounds the risk for diseases like diabetes, which have complications like neuropathy affecting the blood vessel supplying nerves and that causes some sensory motor compromise. We're talking about retinopathy, which affects the vessels of the eyes, and nephropathy, which affects the kidneys. You've got seven miles of blood vessels in your kidneys that could be affected or compromised. When that filtration is compromised, the end result is often dialysis, which significantly impacts a person's way of life.

Diseases like cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, stroke, and heart failure, none of these have favourable outcomes. In my past work as an OR nurse, I have seen several children who have come to the operating room to have significant dental work done as a result of overuse of sugar in sweetened beverages and in their lifestyle choices. It is drastic when they have to have those types of interventions. You look at your dental health often as an indicator of your overall health. We certainly don't want

to have these children facing these challenges at such a young age.

Sadly, in my time as a nurse, which was 10 years, it's relatively simple in the term of a registered nurse's lifespan. I saw drastic change in the demographic of patients that presented with these conditions. The toughest probably being children who were stricken with obesity and a lifetime of complications, young men and women who were facing the reality of chronic disease.

As the Minister of Finance detailed quite eloquently, this tax won't apply to milk or medical or therapeutic beverages, but only to those with added sugars. That will ensure that customers still have a choice but will aim to steer them in a healthier direction.

Friends, the revenue generated here is relatively modest; however, the cascade that it will inspire certainly is not. A million dollars to the Kids Eat Smart program: We speak of that like it just rolls off our tongue. But once you've sat there and seen the impact that this education and promoting healthier choices have on these children, it's certainly something that alters the way that they see their choices and impacts their lives their whole life through.

Chair, \$1.8 million to address tobacco use and the introduction of a physical activity tax credit are additional measures that are initiated to promote the health and wellness of the population. I think I heard it referenced across the way that a \$2,000 gym membership was the only option, but just to remind us all that this credit is available for any eligible physical activity program or organization that contributes to cardio-respiratory health, strength, endurance, flexibility – any of those things.

Additionally, the Minister of Finance has indicated that the revenues of this initiative will be reinvested in healthy choices for kids, educational programs and diabetes programs. I heard it referenced across the way – we talk about promotion. I think that's a great idea.

I don't know if you remember when the soccer player Ronaldo was sitting in front of the media and there was a sugar-sweetened beverage in the frame with him. He moved the beverage and

asked for some water and, instantly, the stocks dropped. That certainly has an impact. I think the education related to this program will certainly go a long way.

There's support for individuals and families who will require it. Income support is available for individuals with disabilities or seniors or those on low incomes. We're making major steps forward here. Steps towards reimagining health care and improving the lives of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. Which I would venture to say is certainly the goal or objective for each and every Member sitting in this House.

We have the opportunity here to be leaders in the country and to advance the lifestyles of our constituents moving forward. I'm very pleased to support this motion and urge all hon. Members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to briefly speak on this topic. I understand the merit and everything about behaviours, changing behaviours and education and all that. But I do have reservations and concerns in the fact that even with this tax in place, a two litre of pop will be still be cheaper than two litres of milk. That's where I have the issue with it, the extremely high cost in this province to access healthy foods.

You can go to any grocery store in this province, especially in Labrador, and look at the extreme costs of fresh fruits and vegetables, milks, fresh juices and those kinds of things. They're extremely expensive, especially to a family on a low income. But a frozen pizza or a bag of chips or anything on the other side of the aisle per se, is a lot cheaper and all those products contain high amounts of fructose corn syrup.

As the Member there earlier said about that word, the corn syrups and the fructose and stuff like that, that's a refined sugar. That's the thing that really – wraps my head around is if we're

going to do this we have to balance it with something on the other end. The balance on the other end needs to be something to bring down the costs of these very important foods in our diets that cost extraordinary amounts of money.

Obviously, we understand shipping and all the other things too, but we need to do something to bring back the balance because right now there is no balance in that system. Now, we're going to tax one side, but even with taxing the sugary drinks, they're still going to be cheaper than the thing that we want people to choose. They can't choose it because they can't afford it and that's the thing.

I know the hon. Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs said to bring something, an idea. Well, why don't we strike that Committee from my private Member's motion in last session? Let's strike that Committee on basic income, reviewing it and looking at it as a thing. That's a way to bring balance, to be able to have people of lower income afford these kinds of foods because we have to find balance everywhere.

If we can't make it affordable, then what's the point? We can tax but it's still going to be cheaper and that's the problem I have with it. These products are still going to be cheaper. We have to find a balance to be able to get these healthy foods and let these people to be able to make the healthy choice.

I know another Member across the way mentioned about the physical activity tax credit. That doesn't hit some of the right communities that would benefit from physical activity because you have to be able to afford these memberships, the equipment and all these things to participate in these sports. People on low income have a very hard time being able to do these things. So tax credits are great for certain portions of our population, but a large portion of our population that actually does really need this help can't avail of these things. Once again, the balance is not there.

My suggestion is let's find balance, let's find ways to make sure that mom of three, who's living paycheque to paycheque and barely can afford her rent or her light bill, to be able to go to a grocery store and pick up healthy fruits and

vegetables and stuff for her family. Because right now that is the barrier that I see every day is the affordability of these healthy fruits and vegetables. You can just walk around and see it. It's very present; it's very there.

So this is where I think we really need to hammer home the affordability of the choices that we want people to make, and I hope people make. Even in my own personal life I can tell you even I struggle to make the healthy choices. Because I'm sure I walk around the house with a can of Vienna sausages and my wife yells at me and says: Put that down. Even I am caught up in it. I know I thank my wife every day for her ability to keep us eating well and healthy, but I personally still struggle. I still like a can of Vienna sausages or a bag of cookies or something. I'm still working on it.

But at the end of the day I think the importance of it is we need to strike a balance and find balance in the sense that, yes, let us do mitigation on one side, but we also have to rise up the other side so the people can make these healthy choices and find ways that we can get healthy food to a reasonable cost. Right now, you can go to a grocery store and you can see it. It is outstanding how the prices have gone and skyrocketed. It's getting harder and harder for people to make these healthy choices because they can't afford it. That's my problem with it all; we're throwing it out of balance. That's where I can't (inaudible).

Like I said, again, let's work on solutions. Let's form that Committee on basic income and let's explore that as a way to be able to bring up some people in society so they can make healthy choices and they can afford to make the right decisions. That's how we get to a healthy population and that's how we get to the goals that we all want to see in society.

With that, Mr. Chair, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

**J. ABBOTT:** Thank you, Chair.

Good evening, fellow Members.

Obviously we're engaged in a big discussion around, relatively, a small amendment to an existing piece of legislation, and what I'm finding about this particular discussion is the different perspectives on leadership when it comes to a major public policy issue facing this province. The government, through the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, has taken on her shoulders to challenge all of us, all sides of this House, to really come together to think about the future of our children and grandchildren when it comes to the issue around the beverages that we choose, obviously those that are sugar sweetened.

I met with the industry representatives and I agree – I think it was mentioned that they're probably not opposed to the tax so much as they're opposed to how this is going to be implemented. I know the minister has had numerous conversations with the industry and I think the bill that's being proposed reflects how we want to do that. We'll give lots of time for the industry to ramp up and to incorporate that into their business practices.

The key thing, which is contrary to what the Opposition House Leader talked about, this is not about a tax or a tax grab, it's to promote a healthier diet and lifestyle here in the province. The World Health Organization, and it's been referenced earlier, recommends the use of fiscal policies to actually move governments and society in that direction. There was a recent study in 2020 that came out in the *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, so a journal that promotes academic and other research around behavioural nutrition, and it found, through a systematic review and meta-analysis that evaluated the impact of food pricing on dietary consumption, that it supports taxation as a method to reduce the intake of unhealthy foods and beverages. That is the key to this piece of legislation. The same report found that taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages has been reported to lower sales of these beverages, leading to the potential to reduce energy and sugar intake. That has been certainly something we want to see happen.

What is the intent of our proposed legislation? I think if we can agree on that we can see passage of this legislation quite easily. One is to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

The industry tells us that we are, in fact, going in that direction and diet drinks overtake sugar-sweetened drinks here in this province, but we are still consuming the higher percentage of sugared beverages relative to other parts of the country. We also we want to be able to support healthier food choices; in this case, healthier drinks without sugar. We want to improve the overall health of the population. Who can argue with any of that? The research and the real-world evidence supports what the minister is, in fact, proposing. Again, we have to get our heads around that.

Now, we will only know if we're successful if, in fact, we evaluate what we are doing here with this public policy objective. I certainly would challenge the local and national research community to, in fact, get behind this legislation, once it's passed, to begin some real-time evaluation to allow us to measure its impact on a go-forward basis. I think that would help us on this and future policy objectives when it comes to using taxation to, in fact, modify personal and human behaviour here in the province.

The concept and the idea, which has garnered a fair bit of interest here tonight, around using the funds from this tax to support healthy food choices, to promote education around healthy food choices and the like, that's something we've already started. With the support of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board during the current budget, she approved an increase in the funding for the Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement, which is the kind of initiative that we wish to see happen right across the board. We've already started down the road of allocating dollars within our budget to support better nutrition and nutritional diets in the province. I obviously want to see us do more of that.

Back to the industry, one of the things they were concerned about, and I've listened to them intently, was around possible employment impacts. I think the way we're going about implementing this tax should not see any change in employment and it should not see any change in the cost of them doing business. We've talked to them about how we can support them in doing that and we will be applying it at the wholesaler and producer level so that it will be

administratively feasible to do this without having an impact at the retail level. At the end of the day, the choices that the consumer makes will determine, really, how effective this particular policy and fiscal measure will be.

As the Premier and other speakers on the government side have addressed, we have to start to turn the dialogue towards a healthier diet and healthier lifestyles for the province. He, his Cabinet and our caucus are supportive of the leadership that he and this government are taking on this major policy initiative. I'm saying that the benefits of this will be both short term, medium term and definitely long term and that we will be able to accomplish multiple policy objectives by a simple amendment to a very large piece of legislation.

I encourage all Members, Members on the opposite side of the House and the public who are following this debate to really get behind the intent. Again, it's to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. We consume too many, too much and too often by young children, teenagers and even adults.

The Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, given her professional background, and the Minister of Health and Community Services, given his background, have spoken to the physical health impacts of these beverages. There's no doubt in my mind that we are given an opportunity here in this House tonight to change the course of direction on a substantive policy initiative. We have a choice here to do nothing or to do something. On this side of the House, we are focused on doing something and something significant so that the sweetened beverages that we are consuming will be reduced in a very short order.

I think I would ask the Members opposite to think about their decision when it comes to the vote on this particular motion because I think it would send a very strong signal to the citizens of this province and to those outside this province watching this debate that we are resolute in this province to make a change in the future of health and healthy lifestyles of this province.

If we were unanimous, I think that would send a very strong signal. With the commitment to allocate the dollars to healthy food choices and

education and the like, then I think any concerns that the other Members opposite would have would be – and I think are – addressed in that regard.

So, Chair, I support the motion as presented and encourage others to do likewise.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to read a few stats from Stats Canada's 2017-2018 Canadian Community Health Survey.

I'll start with this. I serve with a food bank, as I said before. That is not an upstream approach.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Three minutes.

**J. DINN:** Three minutes.

That is not an upstream approach to solving poverty. This is not an upstream approach.

Stats Canada: 1.2 million or one in eight Canadian households struggle to access sufficient food. That's one in six children live in a food-insecure household.

“A growing number of studies have also documented the links between food insecurity and adverse mental health outcomes, such as higher rates of depression, stress and anxiety, and poor self-perceived mental health.”

“There is consistent evidence that household food insecurity is associated with lower diet quality and a variety of physical health problems, including elevated risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.” Not just sugar consumption.

Sixty-five per cent of food-insecure households – that's households who are poor and are hungry – rely on wages as their primary source of income. Black households are 3.5 times more likely to face food insecurity. The three most

likely types of people to be food insecure are single parents, renters and people on social assistance. This is not about a sugar tax.

The food insecurity policy came to the conclusions using this research that tackling the conditions that give rise to food insecurity means re-evaluating the adequacy of the income supports and protections that are currently provided to very low income, working-age Canadians and their families.

Second recommendation: Governments must re-evaluate the adequacy of income supports and protections for low-income Canadians. We have presented, in this House, a way that we can start to tackle that. The Member from Lab West brought it up.

Interestingly, in a survey – and I'll finish with this – of Atlantic Canada perspectives on food insecurity by the Maple Leaf Centre for Action of Food Security, it noted that in Atlantic Canada, compared to the rest of Canada, 65 per cent of Atlantic Canadians basically support the notion of a basic income floor that would provide a safety net for all Canadians.

So while we play around with a sugar tax, we are not addressing the root problems of hunger, of food insecurity, of poverty. If we want a healthier society, then start addressing those problems and start addressing it now.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking on this; it's been covered quite well. But there are a couple things I'm wanting to say.

We all know that adding sugar to food and to drinks is not good. It impacts our children, it impacts adults; it impacts our society. We're learning a lot about the impacts of sugar now on the body and on a developing brain. Even adults, there's a cycle between craving and reward. They've done diagnostics on the brain and you can tell.



So anything that would deter people from choosing a sugary drink is a good thing. When it was brought up here in the budget, you know, about this tax, I agreed to it right away. I thought it was a good thing and I'm actually in the House of Assembly saying, you know, it's something that I would support.

An additional 20 cents per litre added to sugary drinks and that would act to deter people from selecting them, right? As my fellow MHA from Stephenville - Port au Port talked about: This is going to generate \$9 million in revenue. That's a good thing – we could see that as a good thing if it deters people from purchasing sugary drinks that impacts their health, their children's health and have long-term effects, and generate \$9 million. Well, woo-hoo or whatever that saying is.

But I have to say, in the debate I supported it, right. But when I said I supported it, I was looking at the benefits being twofold, not just as what everyone's talking about here – a money grab.

First, to put the additional 20 cents per litre on to deter people from purchasing and consuming sugary drinks. We acknowledge the impact of sugar on our overall health and, as I mentioned, about on growing brains of our children. It trickles cycles between reward and craving. Do you know something? That impacts decision-making.

I'll tell you how old I am now: my nieces have children. It seems like the younger generation are wising up to this because my nieces – all their children don't drink sugary drinks. You go to the fridge in their houses, there's not even the sugary – the red Kool-Aid, no soft drink, no Kool-Aid, none of that foolishness. Even the yogurt is rationed. That's about decision-making.

The twofold benefit to this tax, I was looking at twofold. One is to deter people from making the choice, the easy choice. But the other thing I thought of was that the second benefit should be that this tax should be earmarked to help and improve the overall health of our population. Our population is not doing well and the Minister of Health would probably agree with me. It's very, very important for us to make sure

that that \$9 million is earmarked to help improve overall the health benefits of our population.

Do you know something? I'm trying not to say, do you know something. But especially our low-income residents because we know now a lot of our low-income families make the choices based on money and what they take home in their grocery bags is not high nutrition. The twofold benefit, the second benefit is I'd like to see that \$9 million go to help people have more nutritional choices, affordable choices. We only got to look to my district.

I would stop talking about my district and all the woes and the poor this and the poor that, the lack of access to services, lack of access to affordable food, if something was ever done about it. Now, I realize I've only been in the House for two years, but I'd like to see some sign about something put in place to help my residents be able to access affordable, nutritional food.

The first thing people will think of: Well, you get a subsidy for nutritional food. Do you know something? We don't. The reason why we don't really is because the nutritional subsidy that goes on our food only goes on for the freight cost, the cost of shipping. It is so labour intensive most of the businesses don't even bother. We were trying to find out whether they were skimming the subsidy. Were they pocketing the subsidy? When we looked at it, some of the companies weren't actually even implementing it because it was too labour intensive, and it is only on the shipping.

If you want to talk about shipping impacting costs, then we just have to go back to this government, the one that is sitting opposite of me. In my district, there was a Liberal MHA who went around with his own PowerPoint presentation advocating for the benefit of taking that freight boat off from Lewisporte that kept the food cost down, the building materials down, the things that we needed in our communities – our communities that basically if you don't fly, you have to go by boat and if you're doing that, you basically get five good months.

When you look at everyone talking about quality of health: Oh yeah, rah, rah, rah. For me, it is hard to get enthusiastic because in my district you're paying \$28 for four pork chops. That is

the picture that everyone is familiar with, not the \$17 for a box of cereal.

So, twofold, if you're going to have a tax put on for unhealthy drinks, sugary drinks, then that \$9 million should be put towards helping people in our province have access to healthy choices; not try to tax them into healthy choices. I think I said this before: I remember back when I was in university and there was a lot of controversy about milk. You brought up milk. Do you remember when milk used to go on sale? You get two litres of milk for 99 cents. I remember as a student because I used to live on milk and Kraft Dinner a lot of times because I had no money.

They were actually implementing this thing where milk wouldn't go on sale. It wouldn't go on sale. What they said was that they had to protect the dairy farmers. I think that this tax, if it helps deter people from making the unhealthy choices, that's a little bit of a benefit; but if we're going to take \$9 million out, we need to make sure that \$9 million is to help improve the quality of health in our communities. There will be another benefit. If our populations are getting healthier, then our health costs will actually go down.

People talk about a win-win, but I have to say, since this is a money bill, I'm just going to quickly bring up another thing too: physical activity for youth. In my district when COVID struck, the schools closed their gymnasiums and because more than half of my district had community-shared gymnasiums, my communities didn't have access to gym activities. While the rest of the province was actually playing sports, using the gyms, continuing to be physically active, in my district, this wasn't happening.

I think that if we go back into more restrictions again and that type of lockdown happens, we need to make sure that communities in my district have access to gymnasiums. It's a right. I talk about access to services that the rest of the province gets. Like I said, it's really important for me.

I think one of the things that we need to look at, though, is making sure that any benefit tax-wise

would go back into its intent, which is actually improving the health of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we've belaboured that point enough. I think people have their mind made up in what they're going to do. Seeing that this is a money bill and it's going to be one of the only opportunities this session to bring up a few issues, I'm going to bring up a few other issues that are very near and dear to me. One of them is the acute-care hospital in Corner Brook.

Mr. Chair, this has been something that I've been working on since 2011, first when the Opposition got elected and we went out and we proved that a radiation unit is viable in the West Coast. Also, we went out and showed that a PET scanner was needed for the area. One of the commitments that we made at the time when we were in the Opposition and then we went in government as the Liberal government, which I was a part of, was that all existing services that were at the Western Memorial Regional Hospital would be brought over to the acute-care hospital. That was a commitment we made. That was a commitment the Premier made; I made. It was well documented.

I even have it in the access to information where it was stated in the access to information, in the briefing notes, to speak. We know what happened with the PET scanner, Mr. Chair. Now it's in a trust fund with the Western Health Foundation to be put in at a later date. But the idea and the whole concept was to have it in as soon as we can with the radiation unit.

That was the commitment we made. That was the commitment I was a part of, making that decision as the Liberal government. I stood on the steps out here in Confederation Building when we were in government with the unions protesting. I remember walking out and standing

in front of the crowd and making the commitment that all existing services will be in the acute-care hospital. That was a commitment, well documented in the media, the premier also at the time.

Now I find out – it just happened one day that I stood up here and asked the question in this House of Assembly about laundry services. Now we're finding out that there are 75 jobs at stake at the acute-care hospital in Corner Brook as the laundry services now is gone out to RFP – 75 jobs.

I spoke to the local people at the hospital; they didn't know. I spoke to the head at CUPE; she didn't know that it was taken out. I asked the Minister of Health and Community Services about it and he said it was taken out some time on, I think, July 6 or July 8.

In actual fact, I just want to put something on the record. I just want to make it very, very, very clear. I had no idea that the laundry services were taken out of the new acute-care hospital in Corner Brook. It absolutely did not come to the infrastructure committee meeting – no meeting.

Here's what I got under access to information. On November 2016, representatives from the Department of Transportation and Works, TW, and Health and Community Services participated in a value engineering session with procurement and technical advisors to review the project scope for the Corner Brook acute-care hospital project.

The scoping was held to (inaudible) project elements in order to lower the expended costs. One of the underlying premises reviewed is that since the acute-care hospital is an expensive space to develop, project elements that are not critical inside the acute-care hospital should be provided elsewhere.

Mr. Chair, back in 2018, there's documentation here now where the Western Health steering committee asked to have the laundry services placed back into the hospital and that was rejected. This is coming from the access to information, Mr. Chair. Two of the scope elements that had been requested to be included in the P3 project: laundry services. It hasn't been included. It's gone out to RFP. It is taken out.

Mr. Chair, that is something that I can tell you I was a part of making a commitment by the Liberal government to the people of Western Newfoundland and to CUPE, their workers. That commitment is broken.

Now, Mr. Chair, I have no problem – absolutely none – if the Minister of Health or the minister of TW or the Minister of Finance had to go out and sit down with the unions and say here's what we're doing and the reason why we're doing it and be upfront and be very straight with them and be honest with them. But when you sit down and talk to the people who are directly affected, they weren't aware. When you have the steering committee from Western Health trying to get it back in because there are 75 jobs at stake, they weren't included in any discussions on it.

We take the PET scanner. I can assure you that we made the commitment, even Dwight Ball during the meeting that he had with the hospital committee. The premier stated the commitment was to have the PET scanner up and running as soon as the radiation unit was up and running. That was a commitment that we made. We made that commitment as a Liberal government.

The question I have to start asking, Mr. Chair – and I will be asking a bit more; I'll be doing whatever I have to do to get all the information – what else is taken out? What else? What other commitment is broken? What else?

Then we talk about all the commitments when you say a government makes a commitment and you wonder why you question things? I want to say to the Minister of Health and Community Services: I was never in an infrastructure meeting when that was taken out. Never in any discussions when that was taken out, the laundry services. Absolutely none. In 2018, the steering committee tried to get it put back in.

The other part, Mr. Chair, I can go through it and I can show the speaking notes when they were making the announcements about it. It says here – and you can read through it all. A lot of it is redacted. It's sad actually. I don't know why but if you go through it, there's one part there are 17 pages straight redacted – absolutely redacted about the hospital. I can show people

the whole part of it that is redacted, 17 pages and a lot more.

When you go through the briefing notes that they had for the speeches out there and for the questions and answers, here's one, Mr. Chair. I'll just put it there just to show that the commitment was made. Here are the briefing notes that they were making up for the people when they were speaking out there:

“Exactly what services and care will be provided by the public sector at the new hospital?”

“Nursing care services and other supportive services such as laundry, housekeeping and dietary, will be provided by Western Health staff.”

That was the commitment. Those were the notes given to the premier, whoever else spoke out in Corner Brook at the time for question and answer period by the media. Those were the actual notes, Mr. Chair.

So when this here moves along, Mr. Chair, I will also be asking questions about what else is in it and what else is out of it, because I have no problem – and I say it and I'll say it again: I know a lot of those workers. There are a lot of those workers who are going to be in the Premier's district, they're going to be in my district, they're going to be around Corner Brook, some may be in Pasadena. They now are wondering what's going to happen to their jobs that we committed that we would keep there.

I understand the cost. I understand now we can probably do it cheaper somewhere else. But if we made a commitment that we're going to keep those 75 jobs at the acute-care hospital in Corner Brook, then we should try to work right now to ensure that.

I know in this briefing and in the access to information it's saying that, okay, it costs too much to put in an acute-care facility. If we're going to do that and it's going to go out to RFP, how are we going to guarantee those jobs that we committed to it? This is why a lot of people in Western Newfoundland jumped on board with this hospital. This is why they jumped on board, because we made a commitment to keep all the same services in that acute-care hospital with

public sector employees. When I find out just because there wasn't enough time here in Question Period one day, I jumped up and asked a question to the minister and I get a response back. I said, hold it, there's something wrong here. That's not accurate. Then, a few letters that we got back and forth. Hold it now, there's a bit more to this. When I got it from access to information I realized that it was taken out.

I'll close and I'll probably have another opportunity to speak about this later, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to have another opportunity to speak to this. I'm going to digress from the bill as well, because this is a money bill so we can talk about whatever we want. I would say, just to reiterate, I guess, a point that my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands made – not this time when he spoke, but the time before that. I think we saw, in my view – and I would concur with him – how a House of Assembly should be functioning. How Members should be working together and collaborating regardless what side of the House that we happen to be on.

I just want to acknowledge certainly the government in this case for listening to the suggestion, and just to reiterate certainly my understanding of the commitment that has now been made, that indeed any money that is collected from this beverage tax, all those dollars will go into a healthy living fund, if you will. It will be distributed amongst healthy living initiatives.

I would have liked to have seen a separate fund but apparently I'm told now that the way the legislation works and the way government operates, it has to go into the general coffers. We have the commitment now, Mr. Chair, from the government and I put it on the record, if I'm going to support this. We have the commitment that every dime that comes in is going to be – it's not going to go into general revenues to be

spent on other functions of government. It's not going to be a tax grab, but every cent is going to be put into initiatives to hopefully get our population more healthy. Whether that be healthy eating, whether it be exercise, healthy living initiatives, advertising, things of that nature, promoting healthy living, that type of thing. I'm glad we have that commitment because that was all I said.

I say to the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, who was putting words in my mouth when she spoke about what I allegedly said, which I didn't say. I'm not against healthy living initiatives. I never said I was. I said I was supportive of them, but the point I made was that I wasn't convinced then and I'm still not convinced, by the way, that this is necessarily going to have the effect that is intended in terms of the taxation.

I'm sure it will to some degree. It will discourage some people from buying the sweetened beverages, but there are going to be a lot of people that are still going to buy it because they like their Pepsi and they're going to have it regardless. That's just the reality. That's no different than when you tax cigarettes. It may cause some people to stop smoking or whatever, but there are a lot of people that you can jack up the tax to \$100 a package and if they have the last \$100 to their name they're going to spend it on cigarettes because of that addiction. You can do the same thing with booze and everything else. That's just the way it is. So I'm not saying it won't have any impact, but I'm not so sure it's going to have, necessarily, the great impact that we're thinking. I hope it does. I really hope it does.

I would also say that when we talk about people on a lower income and so on, they are the people that are going to be impacted by this the most. There is an argument to be made there, but I will counter it, though, by saying that even if you're on a low income, you can't afford milk and so, therefore, you're buying pop, you still have the choice to buy diet pop. So it's not as if we're saying all of a sudden someone who bought Pepsi and who has a low income and so, therefore, they drink Pepsi all the time, that now they don't have an option because they could actually buy Diet Pepsi, Diet Coke or diet ginger ale. If you have a juice box, you can get the juice

boxes with the sugar and you can get the juice boxes without the sugar for relatively, I think, the same price. As a matter of fact, if you're buying bottles of Pepsi or cases of Pepsi you can go over to Wal-Mart somewhere and you can buy this here, this Kirkland water. I've seen, what, you get 24 in a package for \$4.99, or \$3.99, or whatever it is and sometimes it's on sale. You can buy a lot of bottles of water for a lot cheaper than you can buying pop.

There are alternatives. To suggest there are no alternatives or to suggest that all of a sudden someone who is on a low income now doesn't have a choice, they actually do because they could just go with the diet version of the same thing they're already drinking. Now, maybe they would prefer the regular Pepsi, but then that's got nothing to do with income because I could be a millionaire and still prefer the regular Pepsi. I'm still doing the same harm to myself regardless of my income status. I think that's a point that sort of needs to be definitely driven home as well.

The big thing for me on this was I did not want to see it as a tax grab, because I did not know what the motivation was. Because, quite frankly, when this bill came forward, when we received a briefing and everything, nobody actually said: Our main purpose here is to reduce sugar consumption, to get everybody healthy and, by the way, every cent that we take in here we're going to reinvest it in healthy initiatives. That was never said. So one can only be left with the fact that: Okay, maybe they're hoping it will have the desired effect, but, at the end of the day, they're making \$9 million that they can throw into the general revenues. Without someone actually saying: No, this money is being targeted as new money to further the cause of getting people healthy. If that had been said and made clear from the beginning, probably the debate would've started off in a more positive perspective from this side of the House, certainly from myself. So I'm glad that we have that clarification and I certainly would support that piece of it. I just wanted to clarify that.

I've got a couple of minutes left in this particular speaking time. As this is a money bill, as I said, you can bring up anything, and I just want to reiterate. I asked a question today in Question Period around motor vehicle registration. I just

want to take a couple of minutes just to reiterate the concerns that we have.

Now, the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, she said that she's got lots of emails from people who said they're pleased as punch with the service, it's all great and so on, and she feels happy with it all. I'm sure she has gotten some positive feedback from some people. I mean, the reality of it is I hated going to Motor Registration and standing in a lineup or waiting in there. I can't stand it. I don't go to the bank anymore. Everything I do, pretty much, is online. If I can possibly do it online I do, because I don't want to be going to these places. I don't want to be waiting in line. I don't want to be at it. I wish we could do everything that way so I wouldn't have to go there at all. I wish there was a way for driver's licences, your pictures and so on, that I could just take my picture here in my house and hit send and I didn't have to go there and get a picture taken. That would be perfect. Maybe it will be available at some point in time.

But the reality of it is that not everybody has a smartphone, not everybody has a computer and not everybody has Internet access. A lot of people who even have this don't even know how to use it or don't necessarily know all the functions and so on. We saw that with the election – if I can go back to that; that's another discussion – the issue of people trying to just take pictures of their ID and download it to Elections Newfoundland and Labrador and the trouble a lot of people, particularly seniors and so on, were having with that. So it doesn't work for everyone.

I can tell you that my office has been bombarded with calls, emails, messages and everything else from people. I know poor old Kelli Penney, the registrar, God love her. I got to say, man, she's been fantastic. But I got her drove off her head; I really do. I don't know if other Members got her drove but I know I do with the number of people that are having issues accessing services at motor vehicle registration. They make calls and you can't get an answer, and if you do, no one is calling you back. The wait times on the seniors' day is ridiculous –

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

Any further speakers?

Oh, yes, the hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, this is another money bill and I'm just going to speak on this for a few minutes.

I'm going to make a suggestion to government – I don't know if it's the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure or the Minister of Health – to sit down with the union and the workers and explain what's happening in the acute-care hospital setting for the laundry services, because there's a lot of anxiety there.

I know it has gone out to an RFP; I have a copy of the RFP that was sent out. We should at least have the courtesy to sit down. If the RFP includes these workers and if there is some way that we can include it so we can keep up with our commitment that would be great. I think out of courtesy, Mr. Chair, and the commitment that we made as a Liberal government, that I was a part of, that we should at least have the courtesy to go out and have a meeting with the union head and have a meeting with the workers in the Corner Brook area and explain why we had to make a decision, why the government had to make the decision, or how the decision was made and what is the process now? It's two to three years down the road, no doubt – it's two years down the road, actually. If their jobs are at stake or not, that is something that we need to speak to the workers about, Mr. Chair.

Because, I can tell you, when I made the commitment back with the Liberal government to put in the PET scanner, radiation unit and all the services, I was sincere and I thought that it was going to be followed up on. If it's not going to be followed up on, let's go out and sit down – I'll even go with you. We'll go out and sit down

with you and have a chat to see what we can do to help out with that situation.

That's all I'll say on the hospital now but I had to speak about it because it was brought to my attention by a number of the workers. I spoke to the president of the union, as I said earlier. That's something that I'm going to bring to the government's attention and I'm going to look very closely now at the acute-care hospital in Corner Brook, Mr. Chair.

My colleague just brought up, again, about Motor Registration and it bewilders me. It bewilders me why changes were made because it worked during COVID. It bewilders me. If we brought in a system that's going to be more beneficial, that's going to help services for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I would be all for it. But I can tell you and I can tell the government and I can tell the minister, this is causing more anxiety and more frustration than you can imagine with the changes that you made.

As I read earlier today, one of the letters I read earlier today was appointment only. This person was trying to reach somebody. They went online and on the note it said: Because of the high volume, our systems can't handle it right now. This person tried to phone online and couldn't get no one to speak to. They got the email back: You have to put in for an appointment.

There's another issue that's raised – I thank the staff for this – when you get a vehicle inspection, you have 30 days to get the – the inspection is good for 30 days. The vehicle has to be done within that 30 days. A lot of times now you can't get an appointment for five, six or seven weeks. What they're doing now, they're grandfathering in the inspection slips, which may be over 30 days but they're accepting them. It is a courtesy thing, but, then again, that's another drawback that we have of this whole change to the system for Motor Registration.

Again, I'll ask the government: Give me a plausible reason why it was changed? Everybody is not online. Everybody don't have a computer. Everybody can't get through on the system. Even when you can, there are certain circumstances where you need to go in ASAP.

Now, I know that I heard the minister say on several occasions that the doors are open but it has to be by appointment. When you walk into that system and you look at that system and you look at the corner where there are people sitting down, lined up and trying to figure out: Am I going to get selected today because someone may have missed their appointment? Will I be the lucky one today? It's just not right. It is just not right.

It's far from being proper, and if the minister got a plausible way to explain it, I'd love to know. Because I'll try to explain to the people, but I can tell you right now the frustration, the lineups is just not worth the changes that's being made by this government. It's just not.

I went down there last Wednesday, I went down and there was some people that just moved in from Baie Verte way, actually, living with their son and daughter. I brought them down. I showed them where the building was and they walked in. I walked on in and the same thing. There's one line here for seniors, there's one line here who got appointments and there's one line over here. There are chairs over here, people waiting: Am I going to get in?

Why? Explain to me, Minister, why you made the changes. That is what I need to know. I will keep on this. I got petitions after petitions after petitions that people are so upset with this. We're causing a lot more aggravation for the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that we're supposed to serve and we're not doing it.

There was a lot of stress during COVID. Why are we adding to all this stress? Why are we adding to the stress?

Minister, I'm asking you, you can stand up at any time or someone in government can stand up at any time and explain how this is a better system. I'd love to hear it because I can tell you it's not a better system. It's definitely not a better system.

As I said back years ago when Service NL was put in place the way it is now, you can go in and get mostly anything in there. So if you got to get a picture taken for your driver's licence, you got to make an appointment or go in and just wait.

So if you live an hour or two hours away, you got to take your time to drive in, come on in and sit down in the corner. Hopefully, you're going to get in. If not, spend another hour, two hours, to drive on home again.

This is the problem that you're seeing on many occasions. I hear about it on a regular basis. I had emails that I can show how people are so frustrated trying to get through, trying to get online; the system is up, the system is down. You phone and you can't get to speak to anybody, and we're supposed to be serving the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is a very serious issue. I know my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, has been hearing the same issues also.

I ask the minister: Let's put it back. Let's step back a bit and ask the staff, because I can tell you that the staff that I speaking to said we want the doors open. We want to be able to serve people. We don't want to have this frustration.

The other part about it more so than a lot of it, Mr. Chair, a lot more of it is that the staff are the ones that have to turn people away. It's not us here in the House of Assembly. It's the staff out there who has to tell someone: No, b'y, we're not open or no you can't get in today. We're full, all the appointments showed up today so you have to leave. We can't get you in. It's sad. We shouldn't have to put the staff through that.

I'm asking again, as the old saying is, put a bit of water in the wine. Let's step back and let's see if we can get the system back where people can avail of the services; people could go in at their leisure to get the services and then people can come in, if there's a lineup, they can leave. Right now, they have to stay because they don't know when they're going to get in.

I'm going to ask this question: Later on in the winter, when people have appointments, it takes five or six or seven weeks to make an appointment and then there's a snowstorm, they have to wait another five or six or seven weeks to get what they need done. What if it's a stormy day and people won't drive up there because it's a bad weather day?

These are the concerns. Right now, it's just frustration and anxiety that we're putting people

through. Later on, it's going to be a lot of logistic issues with the winter coming on, ice, snow and people travelling from outside Corner Brook to come to these services.

I'll have another opportunity to speak later.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to pick up where the Member left off and I guess where I left off.

As he said, the calls that I have been fielding from people is unbelievable, actually. Whether it be people that are phoning and phoning and phoning, they can't get through; can't get a return call. If they finally do get through and they need something, they're given a time of a month or six weeks to get an appointment to get something done; the lineups and so on, on seniors' day and everything else.

I'll give you an example. I had a gentleman call me on Thursday past. So his wife – 80 years old, now, a lady in Mount Pearl, and she needed to get her licence renewed. So she had to go to the doctor and get a medical certificate saying that she could keep her licence. She goes to the doctor and gets the medical certificate. She goes over to Mount Pearl there, because it's only up the road, Motor Registration. She goes in there; there's nobody around. She knocks on the door; a person from inside opens the door and lets her in. They said: Yes, can I help you? She said: Yes, my dear, I'm here and I need to get my licence renewed. I have my medical certificate here from the doctor. Now, a lady 80 years old.

They said: Do you have an appointment? No, she said, I didn't know I needed an appointment or anything. Oh yes, you got to have an appointment, and this is not seniors' day. So she said: You can go home and call and make an appointment, or you can show up again on next Wednesday on seniors' day.



Now, there was nobody in the building, according to the person. There was nobody in the building, only the staff behind the counter and the person who let her in. So they're just sat there basically doing whatever. Instead of saying to that lady there's nobody here now, my love, come on up to the counter and we'll take care of you. No, go home, make an appointment or come back next Wednesday on seniors' day.

That's just one example. I could give all kinds of examples that are like that and similar circumstances. I don't understand it. I got no problem with technology. If we can use technology and people who want to and are able to avail of it can do it and it makes life simpler for them and simpler for the system, that's a good thing. But the bottom line is – and the minister can stand up and tell me if I'm wrong here – to the best of my knowledge everyone that was on the payroll before we put in this system is still on the payroll. This is not about shutting down offices and eliminating staff or whatever. So the costs are the same today as they were before you did it.

If we're talking about COVID-19, when I went to get my COVID shots over to the Village Mall, there was a big old lineup of people outside the Village Mall, then you went inside and there was a big old lineup. There were two or three lines you had to go to. They'd send you here, there, whatever. And they had X's marked on the floor and you'd go in, you'd get your shot and then they had chairs set up. They said: Sit down on one of those chairs now, Mr. Lane, and wait for 15 minutes to make sure you don't have an adverse reaction. There were probably 30, 40 or 50 chairs there and they were all spaced apart, like we are here in the House of Assembly. And everyone sat down on a chair and they waited 15 minutes and they got up and left.

Now, that's at a COVID clinic. I could go to the Avalon Mall. I could go to a movie. I could go to a restaurant. I could go down on George Street. I can go, I can dance, I can do whatever I want to do now, as long as I got my shots now and we got the VaxPass.

But, for some reason, people cannot go into Motor Registration like they always did, walk in through the door, stand on an X on the floor and space the chairs out. There have always been

chairs there. Space them apart a bit and do like we always did. I don't understand it. It can't be about COVID because we're doing it at the clinics; we're doing it everywhere in the private sector. You go in to Costco, for God's sake, sure, you're banging into people. There's people going mad everywhere, trying to get toilet paper – it's not toilet paper now. What's the thing everyone's after now that we're going to run out of? Salt beef, isn't it?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Turkeys.

**P. LANE:** Turkeys and salt beef, right? Everyone is there fighting over the turkeys and salt beef. It's madness. But we cannot go into Motor Registration.

Like I said, if it was about saving money, if it was that we're going to lay off half the staff or something and we're going to, you know, reduce the hours and make appointments and do it online and save money – not that I'm in favour of doing all that – but at least that would be a reason. At least it would be some justification; we're trying to save the taxpayers money by reducing the cost to operate.

Like I said, the buildings are still there, the overhead is still there and, to my knowledge, everyone that was working there before you implemented this system are still working. They're still on the payroll. So the only thing that's changed is the service levels. It makes no sense – it makes no sense, Mr. Chair.

People are asking me about it and asking what is the justification. I cannot justify it and it's not for the sake of just trying to beat up on the government. I'm really not. They're doing a lot of good stuff. I've acknowledged them in the House on a lot of things they've done, voted for most of the legislation they put in. I'll probably vote for most of what they bring in this time, if not all of it. So it's not about that. But what's right is right, what's wrong is wrong. And what's going on here is absolutely ludicrous.

Somebody said to me jokingly – I thought it was pretty cute, actually – that we're looking at the mess over at Motor Registration and the issue about trying to get your phone call answered, computer crashing, no one calling you back and all this kind of stuff. And someone said to me

one day that they must have the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. They must have gave him a lateral transfer over to Motor Registration because it's just like what happened at the provincial elections. He must be in charge of that now. That's what someone said to me one day.

It's sad, what's going on. And I cannot believe, Mr. Chair, I refuse to believe that it's only me and the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands that's getting it. I know I've talked to other Members here. They're getting it. So I do not believe for a second that the government Members are not getting those issues from their constituents. There's no way that they're not having those same issues. They've got to be.

But no, they don't want to talk about it. I guess they were told to shut up and say nothing about it. They got to be having those issues because I am hearing it from all over. I am getting it from everywhere with the same issues, Mr. Chair.

Again, I am not trying to beat up on the minister for the sake of it. I'm just pointing out a problem that should be obvious to every Member in this House of Assembly. Not just on this side of the House, every Member in this House of Assembly has to know that what's going on with Motor Registration is absolutely madness. It is madness.

I say to the minister: Put things back the way they were. You can still continue on with your experiment with the technology. I think it is a great thing. I think it is wonderful. Like I said, if you can come up with a way now that I can take a selfie here on this phone and hit send and send it to Motor Registration so that I don't have to go in there and line up or get an appointment to get a picture taken and I can avoid doing it, I'd be all for it, 100 per cent.

I'd stand up here and I'd give you a standing ovation, thank you very much, Minister, if you could do it for me. But there are a lot of people that just don't work and they need these services that they're used to, especially senior citizens and lots of people who don't have technology, don't know how to use the technology or don't have Internet connection. It is a big problem.

One of the things I've learned in this House of Assembly over the years and being around politics, it's funny about it. Sometimes we'll come in this House of Assembly and we'll debate the budget, millions of dollars – expenditures of billions of dollars and we think it is all heavy duty and it's a big thing, but it is the small things, it is the day-to-day things that the average citizen – the average citizen don't pay attention to half the stuff that we do in this House of Assembly. A lot of these bills that we pass, it's all good stuff. It is all necessary stuff, but the average person don't pay attention to any of that. But what they do pay attention to are the day-to-day things that impact their daily lives.

Motor Registration and access to Motor Registration is something that impacts the average Joe and the average Jane on a regular basis. All you're doing is frustrating people and really peeving them off big time, I can tell you that now. I say to all Members over there: If the minister is not willing to make a change, b'ys, you need to put a bit of pressure on her because it is impacting you too, I can tell you that now. Everybody over there is taking the political hit on it, I can tell you that now, guaranteed – not from me, from the people. They are very, very upset about this one. It's in everybody's best interest to get that solved.

Mr. Chair, with that said, I'm going to conclude for now. I think my colleague has something he wants to say.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to go back to the bill that we were just talking about. Someone just sent me a note on it. I ask the Minister of Finance if she can answer this.

There's going to be a 20-cent tax on a litre of some kind of sugar drink. Someone just sent me a note, and I haven't got the answer so I ask the minister: You take McDonald's, for example, who can sell 860 millilitres of a drink, 140 millilitres short of a litre; it has 19 teaspoons of sugar. Are we going to be able to tax that at the

source or is it because it's under – that's the question I ask the minister. If the minister wants to answer it or she can get someone to answer it. I guess I won't get the answer but that's fine.

I was just wondering if you can get the –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**E. JOYCE:** Pardon me?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**E. JOYCE:** It's a question someone just asked me. Like, the quantity that goes through somewhere like McDonald's or when it's put down to a 140 millilitres short of a litre, do that count as any tax whatsoever? That's a big question because with 19 teaspoons of sugar, that's a question –

**P. LANE:** I think it's prorated.

**E. JOYCE:** Is it prorated? That's what I'm asking the minister. This is what this person is asking me. If it's prorated, I don't know if it's prorated or not.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It's done on the canister.

**E. JOYCE:** It's done on the canister. Well, if it's done on the canister that's fine. That will answer the question.

Thank you very much for that.

I'll conclude tonight with my comments and with my few words that I had.

Again, on the Motor Registration, I urge the government to try to look at the human cost that we're doing things; the anxiety that we're causing people for no reason, absolutely no reason.

I'll be bringing this up every opportunity I get because everyday I'm getting more and more calls about frustration of people can't get in. I agree with my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, I don't know why we're putting people through it and why we're doing the changes.

I'll close there, but I'm sure I'll be back again to have a few words later on the Motor Registration during other debates.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Shall the resolution carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

Carried.

On motion, resolution carried.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3." (Bill 29)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Clauses 2 through 6 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 2 through 6 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 6 carried.

**CLERK:** Be it enacted by the Lieutenant-Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3.

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report Bill 29 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** This motion is carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the resolution and a bill consequent thereto, carried.

**CHAIR:** The Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 29.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 29.

Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville and Deputy Chair of Committees.

**P. TRIMPER:** Speaker, the Committee of Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

**SPEAKER:** The Deputy Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means has reported that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

When shall we receive the report?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

**SPEAKER:** The Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the resolution be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the resolution now be read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

**CLERK:** *“Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

*“That it is expedient to bring in a measure respecting the imposition of taxes on sugar sweetened beverages.”*

On motion, resolution read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the resolution be now read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the resolution now be read a second time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

**CLERK:** *“Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

*“That it is expedient to bring in a measure respecting the imposition of taxes on sugar sweetened beverages.”*

On motion, resolution read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3, Bill 29, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3, Bill 29, and that the said bill now be read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

Motion, that the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader to introduce a bill, “An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3,” carried. (Bill 29)

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3. (Bill 29)

On motion, Bill 29 read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 29 be now read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a second time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3. (Bill 29)

On motion, Bill 29 read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

This House do now stand adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 29 be now read a third time.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that Bill 29 be now read a third time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3. (Bill 29)

**SPEAKER:** This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 29)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move that this House do now adjourn.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.