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*Speaker: Honourable Scott Reid, MHA*

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Are the House Leaders ready?

**MR. CROCKER:** I am, Sir.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Yes, Government House.

Opposition House, Third Party House Leader almost ready?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Almost.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay.

Admit strangers and start the broadcast.

Order, please!

### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today we will hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Harbour Main, Windsor Lake, St. John's Centre, Topsail - Paradise and Stephenville - Port au Port.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past weekend I had the honour of attending the unveiling of a memorial sign in the Town of Brigus by the Brigus recreation committee. This memorial was in memory of a young man from Brigus, who passed away in Ontario on October 14 at 33 years of age.

Sergeant Herman Williams was a member of our Canadian Armed Forces and although I did not have the privilege of meeting Sergeant Williams, I departed this event feeling like a part of him was with me.

Sergeant Williams joined the Canadian Armed Forces at the young age of 18. He completed four missions overseas, three front-line combat mission tours in Afghanistan and one in Latvia peacekeeping throughout his 14-year career.

I am sure we are all aware of how hard and mentally draining these deployments can be on

our young servicemen and women. I have learned from Sergeant Williams' family many things about him, including that he had an infectious smile and wore the uniform with pride and honour.

I ask all Members to join me in honouring Sergeant Herman Williams for his service to his country and for the sacrifice he and his family made for all of us to live as we do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to acknowledge October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month – an annual campaign that aims to educate the public on the importance of early screening, testing and treatment for breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Canadian women, with one in eight expected to be diagnosed in their lifetime. I learned the importance of quality of testing when I saw what its absence did to the lives of breast cancer patients and their loved ones. Not a Member in this House is without friends or family who have fought a battle with breast cancer.

Wear pink to show your support. October is dedicated to all those who have lost the fight and all those who won't quit the fight.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul – St. Teresa's Conference has been serving the poor since 1968. Part of an international Catholic lay organization founded in 1833, the conference is one of several throughout the province.

Guided by the principle that no act of charity is foreign to the society, the conference serves monthly food hampers to those in need. Despite COVID-19, the members continued to serve their clients.

The conference is more than a food bank. It advocates for the poor and offers financial assistance. It also established education bursaries for the Murphy Centre and a Seeds of Hope initiative to help clients set up RESPs for their children.

Eight years ago, in response to the deplorable housing conditions witnessed by members, the conference took the bold step of building a six-unit affordable housing project with support from the municipal, provincial and federal governments. As the first conference to do so, it was unknown and challenging territory, but necessary to provide safe affordable housing that respects the dignity of people.

I ask Members to join me in recognizing the valuable work the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul – St. Teresa's Conference does in serving those in need.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member for the District of Topsail - Paradise, I would like to wish Mr. Nelson Murphy, or as everyone knows him Nels, a very happy 90th birthday.

Born in 1930 to Robert and Ester Murphy and one of 11 siblings, Nels lived his entire life in Paradise and has been married to his wife Rose for 64 years. Together they have six children, 12 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Nels worked all his life at construction. He worked at building the roads and highways of the City of St. John's and portions of the Trans-Canada Highway. He cleared snow off the Gaff Topsails to keep the trains going on the railway and there were times at the end of shifts where it was so stormy that they required guide ropes to get back to where they came from.

Farming is another passion of Nels. At the wonderful age of 90, you will still see him tending his vegetable garden. Nels is a well-respected member of the community and also a proud Korean War veteran.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in wishing Mr. Nels Murphy a wonderful happy birthday.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to the youth of our region, Vanessa Lee is a force to be reckoned with. She's an advocate on many levels and helps our youth benefit directly or indirectly in whatever she does to help impact their growth and development.

Vanessa is the Youth Engagement Coordinator at the Community Youth Network in Stephenville. She considers herself lucky that her work provides her the chance to support many organizations in our area with which she has a personal connection. Her involvement with these programs include: Kids Help Phone, Bay St. George Coalition to End Violence, the Bay St. George Pride Committee, Stephenville Winter Carnival and Block the Bus, providing school supplies to youth and families in need.

Vanessa works with and supports many community partners in our district. No matter what function I attend, Vanessa is there. Along with working and supporting all these groups and organizations, Vanessa finds time to volunteer with the Leo Club, is a member of the local Lions Club and is a board member of Stephenville Theatre Festival.

I ask all hon. Members of the House to join me in congratulating Vanessa Lee of Kippens for her vision and dedication to the youth of our district.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

**Statements by Ministers**

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as we approach International Human Rights Day on December 10, the Human Rights Commission of Newfoundland and Labrador is seeking nominations for the annual Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Award.

This award recognizes an individual, living or deceased, who has made and/or continues to make meaningful contributions to advancing and furthering human rights in our province.

Mr. Speaker, each year the selection committee has a difficult task of choosing between very deserving individuals. In 2019, the Human Rights Award was presented to Jessie Lawrence, a 2SLGBTQ+ advocate and youth activist, while Bridget Foster was named Human Rights Champion for her over 30 years of service in the immigration and settlement sector. Other recent award winners included disability advocate Kim White; Innu Leader Anastasia Qupee; and Joanne Thompson, best known for her work at The Gathering Place.

Mr. Speaker, our province is full of people who work tirelessly to advocate and advance human rights for marginalized populations in our communities. I encourage people to take some time and consider nominating community members, professional contacts and anyone who has contributed to the diversity of our great province. The deadline for nominations is October 31, and details are available online at [www.thinkhumanrights.ca](http://www.thinkhumanrights.ca).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Mr. Speaker, our province is fortunate to be the home of many activists, volunteers and champions who diligently and tirelessly work towards progressing human rights. Jessie Lawrence and Bridget Foster are two such individuals who have made positive impacts in our communities.

As the minister noted, the nomination deadline for the 2020 Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Award is quickly approaching. There are only four days left to submit nominations. I ask all Members of this House to reach out to organizations and contacts in their districts to ensure that they are aware of the nomination deadline and to encourage them to submit a nomination.

I look forward to hearing about the successful recipient in December.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

All individuals must be guaranteed the same fundamental rights of equality, dignity and respect free from discrimination based on sexual orientation, religion or race. Too often, the rights we have fought for are taken for granted. From classrooms to artwork to advocacy to protests to climate marches and so much more, the struggle to advance human rights is laudable and often goes unrecognized, unfortunately.

I encourage all Members to nominate worthy individuals in their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to highlight to this hon. House a new e-mental health program to be piloted this fall in Newfoundland and Labrador by the Strongest Families Institute.

Strongest Families is an award-winning charity, endorsed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Governor General of Canada, which leverages technology and skilled coaches to deliver evidence-based programs across the country to children, youth, adults and families.

Approximately 800 children and families here will benefit from the Parents Empowering Kids – The Early Years program. The program is designed to promote positive parenting skills and prevent behavioural challenges in early childhood for children aged three to 12.

Funding of \$520,000 for the program, which is free for interested parents, was provided to the Strongest Families from the Public Health Agency of Canada's Mental Health Promotion Innovation Fund. For more information, visit the Strongest Families website, [bridgethegapp.ca](http://bridgethegapp.ca) or call toll-free: 1-866-470-7111.

Through *Towards Recovery*, since 2017, the provincial government has secured \$1.1 million annually through the federal health accord for e-mental health programs. This includes annual funding for Strongest Families.

Increasing access to evidence-based services via technology has made Newfoundland and Labrador a leader in e-health and a prime test ground for expanding these kinds of solutions.

We appreciate the work of Strongest Families and our ongoing partnership. Good luck with the program. We look forward to hearing the results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Maintaining good mental health is important now more than ever. A new e-mental health program will be quite beneficial to the people of our province.

It is great to see 800 children and families that will benefit from the Parents Empowering Kids – The Early Years program, but we must find ways that allow more children and parents to become involved in this crucial program. Programs such as Bridge the gApp allow our residents to connect with the mental health professionals who can help with both children and adults with their mental wellness. We must see more development to programs like these as people such as rotational workers rely on these resources while in self-isolation.

I join the minister in acknowledging the work of Strongest Families and I wish them the best of luck with their new e-mental health program. We also look forward to hearing these results so we can work together and make changes that enhance the mental health of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

It is uplifting to hear additional resources are being made available to parents and children. The challenging times in which we live have strained our mental health and well-being as well as our education system.

I thank the federal government for contributing \$500,000 to promoting parenting skills and to help prevent behavioural challenges. I look forward to seeing how this e-program dovetails

into our existing mental health system to ensure a continuum of supports for parents and children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

**Oral Questions**

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Cenovus and Husky laid out their plans in a conference call on Sunday. In an audio recording we obtained, the CEO says unless something new happens West White Rose is not accounted for in their business model and will not proceed.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier say yesterday that this merger was hopeful and positive news for our workers?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER FUREY:** Mr. Speaker, the CEO of Cenovus also said that the economics of this project are okay and favourable. We will be working together with them and their partners, Husky, to further advance this project for the women and men who work in this incredibly important industry for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** That's a selective quotation, Mr. Speaker, because he also said the project would be decommissioned over time unless something new happens. This is devastating news to our oil industry and the many families who rely on it.

I ask the Premier: What help can he offer them?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's selective memory for sure and interpretation of that call. We are continuing to work with – as the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology suggested yesterday – the partners to ensure that this project is moving forward and we're committed to doing so.

In the short time that I've been here, we've secured \$320 million in order to help families through this tough time, and that's what I'm committed to doing. That's what our government is committed to doing. That's the right and prudent thing for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, the Husky business plan is looking at the scenario of decommissioning unless something new happens, and there are only two new things that can happen: one, the oil price increases or, two, there is government intervention.

I ask the Premier: What is he going to do under number two, which is under his control?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member opposite correctly identified, this is a global commodity issue. Newfoundland and Labrador is not facing this issue alone. We're hearing it from Aberdeen; we're hearing it from Houston. We're hearing it from all oil-producing jurisdictions around the world.

What I will tell you is that we're looking to be creative and using that \$320 million to unlock new opportunities to support families, not only now but well into the future. The oil and gas industry is so incredibly important, not only for the economy but for society and the future of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, oil patch workers in this province are having to deal with this alone because their government is missing in action.

I'm asking the Premier: What safeguard does his government have on the \$100 million of equity investment they've made?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER FUREY:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for that question.

We're continuing to work with the stakeholders and with the operators to ensure that we're protecting that investment moving forward. That's paramount. More importantly, right now, we need to protect the workers in the oil industry. We're looking at ways to do that, through the use of this \$320 million, and other ways to protect this industry moving forward.

It would be very nice if we were in a different fiscal situation; we weren't burdened with billions of dollars in other off-the-scale debt from other projects, but the reality is we are. We need to work within our fiscal envelope to ensure that we're developing good decisions now for the future of this industry moving forward.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** The executive director of Trades NL said yesterday there's not a lot on the horizon over the next couple of years that we can count on for employment opportunities.

To the Premier: What is the way forward for these workers?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, it's a concern that we're well aware of. We've been in touch with Trades NL. In fact, we also heard from Noia who talked about how they still have optimism. The fact is that this deal that was struck over the weekend was not unexpected. In fact, if you look at any of the analysts that talk about it, this is a move that, basically, created a stronger company, one that we welcome into our offshore.

We continue to work with the workers, we continue to find ways – and, again, we have \$320 million. In fact, Husky has a proposal in to us right now that we're working through that would, hopefully, see 2021 work in the hopes of a 2022 start-up back at West White Rose.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, these people are without jobs, without income, many without hope. Yesterday, the minister said legislation to unlock pensions will not happen until next spring. I commit here today on behalf of our caucus, the PC caucus, to sit as long as it takes this fall to pass this legislation.

I'd ask the Premier: Will he immediately bring forward legislation to unlock pensions so people can access their own money to provide immediate help and hope for their own families?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

After Question Period yesterday, I did talk with staff. We are looking at if we can expedite it. I've been speaking with the House Leader and we will certainly bring the House back, if possible, if we have a recommendation around unlocking pensions.

I would, though, remind Members and the general public that we're talking about pensions; we're not talking about extra money to buy Christmas gifts. While many families are

hurting, especially at Christmas, when you think about pensions it's really about long-term financial stability, which is something that will be taken into consideration in the consultations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The director of the Harris Centre said that the decline in the oil economy is comparable to the cod moratorium and he would not be shocked that a similar mental health, family crisis impact is happening today.

Minister, what specific supports have been put in place to help those that have lost employment?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll speak to the bigger issue, which is we do have a serious situation that we face as a province. When you have a government and a workforce that has been very dependent on this one resource, when we see a worldwide pandemic like this, the fact is that we are especially hard hit. We feel that here and we certainly feel for the workers. We've been speaking with the various unions talking about the things we can do.

I'll leave it to the Minister of Health to talk about the mental health supports that we can provide, and certainly I'll leave to the minister responsible to talk about the employment side. What I can say is that we have a scope of work in front of us that we're working through right now where, hopefully, we can see some of the \$320 million provided by the federal government go to these workers in hopes of getting West White Rose and any other project – again, we're working with multiple companies to see these workers back to work, which is where we all want them to be.  
Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Come By Chance is at risk of permanent closure. The West White Rose project is at a standstill. Bay du Nord is deferred. Bull Arm is now an aquatic storage facility. Workers are getting anxious; people are calling our office every day looking for help.

Will the minister implement specific supports for those who have lost their jobs as the result of the collapse of our oil and gas industry?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that speaking with the unions and different groups, that's not where they've asked us to go at this point.

What they've asked us to do is to work on the things that we have in our control in order to get these projects up and going, and that's what we've committed to; speaking last night with the various community members regarding Come By Chance and we have work ongoing to deal with that. Again, we're speaking to Husky every day; we're speaking to Suncor.

I can say that I do appreciate the fact that I do believe union members realize we're doing what we can, how we can. I have an email from the head of Unifor, it says: Thank you for the continued support for the workers in the oil industry. It's greatly appreciated and not going unseen.

Thank you very much.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



We have emails too, Minister, to the contrary from workers who are wondering where their next paycheque is coming from.

Individuals who are out of work are now asking themselves: What do we do now? Mr. Speaker, I feel for those individuals who are struggling to pay their mortgages, make their car payments and pay their bills.

Where is the help for these workers?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour.

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for the energy sector said, our plan (a) is to get the industry back in good form, productive form and that is what we are concentrating on; however, as the hon. Member opposite did point out, there have been job impacts and job losses.

What I can report to this House is our work with the federal government through our Labour Market Transfer Agreements, our work with our federal colleagues to make sure that we have the resources in place to be able to respond to increased training needs to be able to allow workers to pivot, not only within the industry, but potentially in some instances, outside of the industry, but most importantly to be able to pivot within the industry.

We've been able to work with our federal partners to gain additional millions in training benefits that we will be applying to areas which we've seen job losses or job insecurity.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One union president, Mr. Dave Mercer, said: "The biggest thing we can do for mental health right now is – guess what? Let's get back to work."

Minister, workers need help; they need hope. Minister, where is the job-creation plan for this

industry? Those are all fine words just said, but workers are looking for more than that.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I've had an opportunity to speak to Mr. Mercer on a number of occasions. In fact, that's who I quoted previously, saying that they realize that we're doing what we can. They fully realize that we're not responsible for the price of oil; they fully realize that we're not responsible for the pandemic.

At the same time, they've been very strong in advocating for their members, which is why we're at the table every single day trying to ensure that these companies come to us with a scope of work that can be ongoing as soon as possible, involving hundreds of millions of dollars for the direct purpose of getting these people back to work. That's what we're going to do. However, that requires due diligence. That requires some effort.

We're not just going to hand the money out. We've had Members opposite suggest just give everybody money, and we realize there that sometimes that leads to bad decisions. We're going to do the due diligence to make sure things get done properly.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask a question I didn't get an answer to yesterday. In September 2019, the minister advised that the new paramedicine delivery model with an effective date of April 1, 2020, would be delayed for two years, adding more stress to the workers in this industry. We've had the Fitch report of 2013, Grant Thornton audit of 2018, and the Ernst & Young report of 2019.

Is the minister going to ensure it sticks to the new deadline and delivers a new model as promised?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Out of hospital, community-based paramedicine, these are key pillars of moving forward with our community-based approach to health care delivery. I'm pleased to be able to inform the House that the regulatory apparatus around paramedicine will be moving into the Department of Health and Community Services as soon as this budget process is completed. That way we can align our algorithms and support our community paramedicine organizations in terms of expanding their scope of practice and generally developing what has been a very much underdeveloped resource.

I look forward to being able to present the House with further information as that plans rolls out, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The union representing the largest portion of the private operators are currently in negotiations and at an impasse.

I ask the Premier: Does he accept the inaction of the minister over the past year with respect to private ambulance workers being forced to take job action and strike?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The private ambulance operators are currently in negotiations with the department over a new

agreement. Whilst I will not be negotiating in public, these are going very well. I would hopefully be in a position to announce a resolution to those negotiations to everyone's satisfaction very shortly.

The issue then of how the operators are negotiating with their unions actually lies outside the control of the regional health authorities and the department, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we watch this with interest.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've been hearing for two years that they were getting close to a deal. We're not hearing that from industry and I'm hopeful that it happens but it doesn't seem to be the case.

Premier: Are you comfortable that the ambulances will be parked in rural Newfoundland and Labrador because of your government's inaction and will you intervene to show leadership on this issue immediately?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again, from the point of view of the department, we are confident that these negotiations are in what one of my staff called a very happy place and will actually be concluded very shortly.

We obviously watch with interest the negotiations between those private operators and their unions, and if there's any role we can play to facilitate what is a negotiation between a private company and their trade union members, we would be happy to do that. As yet, Mr. Speaker, neither party has approached us for any assistance.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That happy place can't come soon enough for the private operators from the discussions we've had.

Transport Canada's recent rule forcing travellers to exit their vehicles on provincial ferries is putting our travellers at a higher health risk, as proper social distancing is not possible. The Premier of British Columbia has stated that this is an unwelcome intrusion from Ottawa and has committed to reverse this policy.

I ask the Minister of Health: Will he commit to doing the same to keep our citizens safe?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**MR. BRAGG:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for his question. Some time ago I wrote the minister responsible for transportation, Transport Canada, to ask them to reverse the decision. At this time, they have not decided to reverse the decision.

We're advising everyone to practice social distancing where possible, wear their masks, and get on the ferry and off the ferry in a safe manner. Transport Canada had ruled it's safer for people to be in the lounge and in the ferries because they are a closed-deck capacity. Open-deck capacity ferries would be different, but these vessels we have in our province right now, the vast majority are closed-deck vessels. Should there be an emergency and evacuation, the safest place would be in the lounge so they could reach the muster station areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the minister is aware from travelling on these ferries, it's not possible to do safe distancing safely on these boats with social distancing because of the fact that the lounges themselves have been taken up by crew members. This is not a safe endeavour there. We also ask that you lobby your cousins in Ottawa to do the right thing when it comes to safety. We've done it on the travel ban here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the past five years, not one inch of pavement has been laid on Bell Island roads; barely a pothole has been filled. Portugal Cove - St. Philip's has one of the highest traffic volumes on trunk roads in the province; yet, roads like Bennetts Road, Old Broad Cove Road, Thorburn Road and others are in deplorable condition.

Will the minister commit to investing resources to make these roads safe in my district?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**MR. BRAGG:** Mr. Speaker, I didn't know when I could get the opportunity to respond to a question such as this. The hon. Member yesterday for Mount Pearl North referred to our provincial roads as over-paved. Not something that we support on this side, Mr. Speaker. He referred to those provincial roads as being over-paved.

The hon. Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island knows that there's an active tender right now in the process of being finalized for his district. We're committed to doing that work. The tender work will be done. The money is in the budget to do it. Sometime in the near future the hon. Member should be proud to be able to take a picture of a piece of equipment laying asphalt in his district, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** I will be, but the early tender process obviously hasn't worked, because we're into November now and very unlikely we will

get something laid for safety for our roads. I do welcome it, so do the people in my district, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**MR. BRAGG:** Was that a question?

Mr. Speaker, in the House last week, the hon. Member for Terra Nova got up and asked a question of why we put all the tenders out the one time. Today I'm asked why we're separating it. Which is it, Mr. Speaker? Which works best?

We try to get the work out in a timely manner to accommodate the people of this province, to do it the best way we can. Any time there's construction, there's never a good time, Mr. Speaker. It will always disrupt the service. The flow of traffic will always be disrupted. All I can say about any time we're doing work in this province: Look forward to the end result. I refer to it as something like making bread. I have flour all over the kitchen table, but when it comes out of the oven it is well worth the reward, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Yesterday, the minister stood in the House and spoke about the important role highway enforcement officers play in enhancing road safety in our province.

Can the minister explain why 10 of these positions are currently vacant?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll certainly take away and look at those 10 positions in particular. I know many of the highway enforcement officer roles are difficult. There's a unique skill set that's required and there are often roles that go unfulfilled. I do know that I believe there's an external competition in Stephenville opening up next week for a highway enforcement officer

position. So I encourage – if you know anyone, to encourage them to apply on the government website.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have to be aware that wintertime is coming and these tractor-trailers and every other vehicle that's on the highway should be checked out for safety inspections for sure. We should get on that right away. Especially with the amount of jobs that people are looking for, it should be easy to fill those positions.

Minister, how have these vacancies impacted road safety across the province and what impact will these vacancies continue to have as winter approaches?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

Safety of residents in our province, especially on the highways, is incredibly important. I'll be on the highway this year with my new little guy, so safety is incredibly important for everyone.

To my knowledge, there is no disruption to service for the highway enforcement officers. The highway enforcement officers take a very unique role to enforcement, in partnership with the RNC, and we do not believe that resident safety in the province is impacted by any vacant positions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, what priority is the department putting on filling these positions that they are so critical to ensuring public safety?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Like I mentioned before, highway enforcement officers are a unique skill set to hire. In many cases, we have roles that go unfulfilled. We do have a role in Stephenville that's opening to the public next week. I'd encourage anyone who believes they might be eligible, to apply, as well as any other jobs that are currently or will become available.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** What would this unique skill set be that we can't fill these positions?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I know it's a bit nuanced but the highway enforcement officers, I think there's a mix of technical – like ability with the vehicles. For example, they're the experts who can say whether or not a muffler has been modified, in consultation with the RNC. There's that technical and mechanical expertise, plus then the enforcement side.

I'd be happy to get the Member additional information on that.

Thank you very much.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**MR. TIBBS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the tourism industry creates a billion dollars in revenue and creates some 20,000 jobs.

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

**MR. TIBBS:** This year the industry lost 6,300 jobs, so I wouldn't clap too loud. Ninety per cent of operators have seen reduced revenue and 70 per cent would not be operating without assistance.

Will the minister commit to an enhanced tourism-focused support package as requested by Hospitality NL?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

**MR. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question of a very important industry to our province's future, as well as our past. I've worked very closely, and this government has worked very closely with Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, almost on a daily basis to work through issues that the operators have been having. We incorporated a Tourism and Hospitality Support Program, the biggest, single investment a government has ever made in the tourism industry in our province of \$25 million. We're working through that.

I think at this point we have 900 operators that have already received funding. We look forward to receiving even more. I encourage every hon. Member to encourage those tourism operators and hospitality operators to apply to that program. It gets the money out very, very quickly, and I look forward to having that out very, very quickly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**MR. TIBBS:** I thank the minister for telling us where we've gone, but we need to know where we're going.

Mr. Speaker, the vice chair of Hospitality NL says the industry is decimated.

What specific action will this minister take to help the tourism industry in this province to survive?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

**MR. DAVIS:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to repeat the Tourism and Hospitality Support Program, because that's one aspect. One of the other things we've done is work with our federal colleagues to enhance those programs that would be impacting those employees that would be affected, making sure those programs are extended.

We've been very successful on increasing the wage subsidy, as well as increasing the duration of that, which is going to be hugely beneficial to the tourism operators in this province. I understand their concern; I feel their concern. That's why I'm on the phone with them almost on a daily basis to try to best –

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

**MR. DAVIS:** If the hon. Member would stop heckling me, I'd be able to answer the question a little bit better.

From the standpoint where I sit, we're working very close with Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador and the operators and we're committed to this industry, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**MR. FORSEY:** Outfitters rely heavily on out-of-province hunters and many are telling me that their businesses have all been stopped. The outfitting industry brings a lot of revenue and employs a lot of people, particularly in rural areas of the province.

Premier: What action will your government take to help the struggling outfitter industry to survive?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

**MR. LOVELESS:** I thank the hon. Member for the question.

It is a question of concern, and the outfitting industry, like many industries, has certainly been affected by the global pandemic. We referenced even in our debate last night around that. I met with them yesterday. We had a good discussion around some of the options where we can help that industry, and I'm committed to doing my best to certainly help them in their time of need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we're two months into this current school year and the Minister of Education has already decided to cancel public exams for semesterized courses.

Will he now make the decision to cancel all public exams and do what teachers are telling me and level the playing field for all students?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have indicated publicly, as well as in this Legislature, that, yes, we did cancel public exams for January and we have a very open mind about the public exams for June. We haven't made a decision on that yet. We want to do what is in the absolute best interest of our students in the province. I've been speaking with officials in the department and we will have a decision on the June public exams very early in the new year.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When schools closed in March it disrupted learning for high school students and effectively brought many courses to an end. This created knowledge deficits, which places teachers and students under enormous pressure to make up this year.

I again ask the Minister of Education: Will he cancel public exams? Make that decision now for all students and allow high school teachers to focus on making up gaps in learning and on keeping students safe and on nurturing their emotional well-being.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This question is coming from the same Member that wanted us to have half a school year this year for students by having students go on a rotational basis: half the students one day, half the students the next.

Mr. Speaker, public exams is an important issue. We want to do what is in the absolute best interest of our children in school. As I said, we will have a decision on this very early in the new year, but I'm not going to rush to a decision such as having rotational classes without having it well thought out.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**MR. J. DINN:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not talking about rotational classes. This is a Member who supported rotational classes because of the lack of a plan by this government as a way of easing into the school year, instead of putting teachers and schools in such an untenable position.

I again ask the minister: What is preventing him from making the decision right now? Make a simple, straightforward decision in this unprecedented time that will not only remove

unnecessary stress from students, parents and teachers, but will save the department money as well.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I'm not sure why the Member is getting so upset. I know he's gone madly off in pursuit of problems and asking people to provide pictures of problems in schools. I haven't seen any of those yet, Mr. Speaker.

What I will say to the Member is we will make the decision in the best interest of the children. I'm not going to rush to a decision and regret it later. I'm not going to make a hasty decision and repent at leisure. We will make the best decision for the children this school year and it will be made very early in the new year.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**MR. J. DINN:** Mr. Speaker, I do what all good leaders and people who have an interest and experience in education, and seek out information, speak directly to people who are affected by decisions.

Mr. Speaker, primary and elementary teachers are struggling to bridge the grade-level gap from the amount of time lost last year; thus, making formal first-term reports challenging to prepare.

Will the Minister of Education use his authority to cancel formal term-one evaluations for primary and elementary students for this school year and allow primary and elementary teachers to use their professional judgment and to focus on outcomes and getting students where they need to be academically?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will take that question under advisement. Again, even with this topic, we will make a decision that is in the best interest of the

children. I do acknowledge that they've lost several months of school last year, which is why we didn't make the hasty decision that the Member opposite was demanding we make in having half of students go on Monday, the other half on Tuesday and following the first half on Wednesday; having the children lose another half a school year through that process.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad we didn't make that decision. We will make that decision, if and when necessary, based on COVID in the schools. We are not going to rush into hasty decisions at the Member's demand.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre, time for a quick question and a quick answer.

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If we weren't trying to make hasty decisions on this government side, we'd have none.

Formal first-term evaluations are coming up soon, when will that decision be made because that will save teachers an enormous amount of strain, worry and stress for their students and their families?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, I'll take the question under advisement, the recommendation by the Member under advisement. Mr. Speaker, I will speak with officials in the department as well as with the English School District and we will make a decision in the best interest of the students in this province.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

### Notices of Motion

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 29, 2020.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Whereas there is a growing urgency for brush cutting in several communities in the District of Harbour Main, specifically Conception Harbour and Roaches Line, Route 70. These roads are of high volume traffic, significant moose sightings. They pose a serious threat to motorist. Brush cutting maintenance on these roads must be carried out as soon as possible to ensure the safety of the people that use them daily.

We petition the hon. House of Assembly to call upon and urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately take the necessary steps of conducting and maintaining brush cutting operations on the Conception Bay Highway, specifically Conception Harbour and Roaches Line, Route 70, to ensure motorists' safety and to improve the sightlines for the driving public that use these roads each day.

Mr. Speaker, I have raised this petition two previous times in the House of Assembly in my short time as a Member of the House, which is approximately 16, 17 months. I rose in the



House with a petition on this same issue on December 5, 2019. I rose in the House of Assembly with this same petition on June 15, 2020.

I am disappointed beyond belief to report that although the former Minister of Transportation and Works gave assurances, at that time, that this important issue would be addressed for the people in this district, little has been done in all this time. In fact, the minister had previously stated in response to my petition on behalf of the people that I'm going to actually please the Member opposite, and that the work would actually be added to the contract.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that was December 5, 2019. December 16, 2019, I followed up with a letter to the minister. I asked for an expected time frame and I am sad to say that little has been done.

Let me say what has been done. As far as the work in Roaches Line, I've been advised by the residents there that only approximately one kilometre was completed and they had to stop because of snowfall. As far as Conception Harbour is concerned, no work at all was even started.

Now, given the safety concerns at play and the risk involved, this is very concerning to the people in Conception Harbour, and not only Conception Harbour and Roaches Line, but the people who pass through these communities.

Mr. Speaker, we need to know, the people in these areas need to know: Are these issues going to be addressed? Is the brush cutting going to take place? We know that there was a concern with this issue as far as a collision that had occurred in the Conception Bay area, specifically where the brush cutting needs to take place. There was difficulty with the sightlines for the driving public that use these roadways. Yet –

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

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** – this seems to be funny, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of laughter –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** – but it's not funny to the people in this district. It's a serious issue, Mr. Speaker. We're asking for a commitment. Once and for all, can you address this issue for the people who are affected, in Conception Harbour in particular?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**MR. BRAGG:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for her petition.

Anybody who drives this highway knows brush cutting is the most important thing. Next to fixing a pothole, brush cutting is, I would think, the next level to (inaudible).

I just sent a text over to my staff who assured me that I will deliver on the promises made by the former minister. Your tender goes out this week – so that everybody is hearing now, the tender for the Harbour Main District will go out this week. I will provide you with the exact locations, but this says we have the exact areas that the MHA wants. I can only tell you what I'm being told. The Member should be very proud of that.

I know it's a long time coming. I understand the frustration of anybody driving that road. I saw a moose accident a couple of weeks ago in the middle of the day when there was no brush by the side of the road, so I can imagine the frustration of driving where there's brush by the side of the road.

I'm happy to report, the promise made will be a promise kept from that minister to me, to you and your district. I will give you all the details, because it's going to be emailed to me shortly, so you can report it back. Another promise will be kept, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**MS. EVANS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm presenting this petition for fair electricity rates for Labrador Indigenous communities. I think it's my third or fourth time presenting it.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that fairer electricity rates be provided to Torngat Mountains residents in the Northern Labrador Indigenous communities of Nain, Natuashish, Hopedale, Makkovik, Postville and Rigolet.

The rates charged to the Northern Labrador residents –

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'm having trouble hearing the Member. The noise level in the House is too high.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**MS. EVANS:** The rates charged to Northern Labrador residents are cost prohibitive using electric heat and therefore rates are very cost prohibitive to adequately heating their homes. The rationale for this particular petition is to bring electricity rates more in line with what our neighbouring residents of Lake Melville region pay.

For the first 1,000 kilowatt hours, Torngat Mountain residents are charged the same rate as our neighbouring residents of Lake Melville region. However, above that ceiling of 1,000 kilowatt hours, Torngat Mountains' residents pay six times the rate of Lake Melville residents – six times the rate – jumping to 18.5 cents a kilowatt hour. The 1,000-kilowatt hour ceiling prevents many resident from being able to heat their homes with electric heat. Low-income families and households that don't have the proper manpower to haul wood are the greatest impacted.

Poorly heated houses often result in damage, creating expensive repairs for frozen pipes,

moisture damage and mould. Poorly heated houses also create social and mental health issues that can be long lasting. We strongly believe that changes to electricity rates need to be made for the Northern residents of Torngat Mountains.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to increase the lifeline block to 3,500 kilowatt hours when applying the Northern Strategic Plan subsidy to electric bills of Northern Labrador residents of the Torngat Mountains region.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is important because it impacts the quality of life for residents in my district. That's why they signed the petition and that's why I'm presenting it so much.

The first 1,000 kilowatt hours, we pay the same rate as Lake Melville, but after that it jumps up to the highest in the province: 18.5 cents a kilowatt hours. We can't use electric heat to heat our homes. Actually, we can't afford to. Even people – I'll take an example of people working in Voisey's Bay, they make a good income; they can't afford electric heat.

What's the alternative? Going out and getting wood. Long distances for people to drive and also gas. The price of gasoline on the North Coast – highest in the province: \$1.53 a litre with the price fees. Stove oil is \$100 more per drum in the winter than in the Lake Melville region.

I had a lot of stuff prepared, but one of the problems I'm dealing with in my district is people will say: If it's so problematic, why don't you move? I say: The thing about is we have problems because they're never addressed. This would greatly go towards helping address some of our costs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. CROCKER:** I call Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

**Orders of the Day**

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 13.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 22, 2020.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion has been moved and seconded.

It is the pleasure of the House –

**MR. CROCKER:** October 27, sorry, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The 27th.

The motion has been moved and seconded.

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Radiation, Health and Safety Act, 2020, Bill 23, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded by the hon. minister that she shall introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting The Protection Of The Health Of Persons Exposed To Radiation

And Respecting The Safety Of Persons In Connection With The Operation And Use Of The Electrical And Mechanical Components Of Radiation Producing Equipment And Associated Apparatus, Bill 23, 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.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service Newfoundland and Labrador to introduce a bill, “An Act Respecting The Protection Of The Health Of Persons Exposed To Radiation And Respecting The Safety Of Persons In Connection With The Operation And Use Of The Electrical And Mechanical Components Of Radiation Producing Equipment And Associated Apparatus,” carried. (Bill 23)

**CLERK (Hawley George):** A bill, An Act Respecting The Protection Of The Health Of Persons Exposed To Radiation And Respecting The Safety Of Persons In Connection With The Operation And Use Of The Electrical And Mechanical Components Of Radiation Producing Equipment And Associated Apparatus. (Bill 23)

**MR. SPEAKER:** This bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

**MR. CROCKER:** Tomorrow.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 23 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 3, Concurrence Motion, report of the Government Services Committee.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is that the report of the Government Services Committee be concurred in.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

**MS. HALEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak about the work of the Government Services Committee.

As Chair of the Committee, it was a job made easy because of the seriousness and the professionalism of the other Committee Members. I want to say thank you to the Members of the Government Services Committee who put in so much time with the staff of various departments over the past few weeks as we went through Estimates of several departments and discussed throughout relevant policies of the departments in question.

Estimates Committee work gives all Members the opportunity to, not only meet staff of the various departments but also to learn the important work of the departments in question. Those women and men are so thoroughly versed in all aspects of work at their departments and their involvement in the Estimates process ensure that we, as MHAs, have the answers to our questions so we can make decisions in a very thoughtful manner, Mr. Speaker.

The procedure allows for a clear understanding of what is happening at the departmental level, so it's essential that all Members participate at the Committee level. Mr. Speaker, I assure you, with the Government Services Committee, we were all certainly engaged. There was certainly no appetite for rushing through the process and many questions put forward by the Committee Members were certainly answered thoroughly, Mr. Speaker.

Those Members who served with me on the Government Services Committee were: the Members for Ferryland; Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; Lake Melville; Placentia - St. Mary's; the Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows; the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi; the Member for Terra Nova; and, of course, I

proudly represent the good people of Burin - Grand Bank.

The Estimates we were tasked with examining pertained to: Finance; Consolidated Fund Services; the Public Service Commission; Transportation and Infrastructure; Public Procurement Agency; and Digital Government and Service NL. Certainly, a good cross-section of departments and agencies and a cross-section that allowed Committee Members insight into their workings, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say thank you to the staff of the various departments who also put in a lot of preparation and time into instituting government policy and taking measures to ensure the wise spending of the taxpayers' money is carried out.

We realize there is a lot of work and hours in the time during the run-up to the budget, often requiring time away from family. So we thank the departmental staff for the sacrifice they make in ensuring this province keeps moving forward. The budget is more than a document of numbers and statistics; it is a blueprint for the direction of the province for the coming fiscal year.

Thank you as well to the Table staff who are essential to the smooth operation of the Estimates Committee. The degree of knowledge and professionalism they demonstrate every single day is indeed commendable, Mr. Speaker. I also want to send a shout-out to the people at Hansard who recorded the Committee workings for posterity and public record. Some of our sessions went late into the evening and they patiently listened and recorded the proceedings while we learned of the direction government will be taking going forward. They are indeed an important part of the democratic process.

Mr. Speaker, I will take some time in highlighting the measures in the budget. It becomes obvious through the Estimates process that besides the findings of how the money is spent on behalf of the taxpayers and residents of this province, there are good things happening here in the departments as we chart our future.

There is no denying that we are in very difficult times as we are battling a global pandemic, while trying to keep our province moving in the right direction; however, we cannot be held

hostage by this pandemic. Mr. Speaker, we will all adjust our ways of doing things to ensure we remain safe while still getting on with business of running this province.

Transportation and Infrastructure is one department where residents of the province are acutely aware of what is happening, and next to Health and Community Services, I would say, Mr. Speaker, probably the most visible. Everyone depends on our transportation system and it is not surprising, of course, that this department does get a lot of attention.

This past year, work by the department has been extensive and varied with everything from road and bridgework to work on ensuring the safety of schoolchildren and residents within our province are kept safe. I know the installation of digital speed signs were put in place in school zones and new signage warnings of the dangers of distracted driving. A busy department, indeed, Mr. Speaker, and not one solely fixated on the transportation element.

The Infrastructure component is equally important as that department oversees the building of new government facilities, such as hospitals and schools, Mr. Speaker. I know in *Budget 2020* the Government Services Committee was informed that government had budgeted \$609 million towards provincial roads, as well as \$80 million towards health care facilities. The investment in new health facilities, whether the mental health facility in St. John's or the acute care hospital in Corner Brook, is critical to people right across this province.

The Committee found that these are essential needs of the residents of this province and will provide long-term benefits. I don't think will be saddened when this new mental health facility is completed, which will replace the present Waterford Hospital. This is a major, major step forward for the province and another acknowledgement that mental health is as critical as physical health to a person's well-being.

We have ongoing construction of new schools in Gander, Paradise, Bay Roberts and St. Alban's. The new Francophone school in St. John's area will be also a highlight, Mr. Speaker. It will be a

proud day when the doors of that facility will open.

Those new schools will allow children attending there not just a new roof over their heads, Mr. Speaker, but modern facilities to enrich the lives and educational experience of the children attending those schools. No doubt, it will make the teaching experience more satisfying for those tasked with working with our children. These investments in Education being carried out by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure are essential for the well-being and ongoing education of our children, as well as providing modern instructional facilities for our educators.

We were also pleased, Mr. Speaker, to see the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure took the time to pay respect to several people who have made a significant contribution to society by renaming bridges, especially after Innu Leaders in Labrador. We are a proud people and we will always remember those who have given so much for the betterment of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I am also pleased the contract has been let for the new mental health unit in Labrador, Mr. Speaker. This will be a modern, six-bed facility at the Labrador Health Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. It will feature private rooms for patients, as well as room for recreation and group therapy. It is certainly appropriate that an Indigenous health team is busy developing a plan for Indigenous land-based wellness programming. I understand they are also involved in the design of the new unit, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Trans-Labrador Highway. Not so long ago more than a dream but now nearing completion. The final leg of that highway between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Southern Labrador will soon be paved, with the contract to do so already awarded, Mr. Speaker. While that highway addresses basically an east-west transportation link for the Big Land, government is also looking at the possibility of a roadway to Northern Labrador; \$200,000 has been set aside for a feasibility study of such an undertaking of this project.

As I have already suggested, the work of this department is multi-dimensional, with roads being just one piece of a large pie, Mr. Speaker. The significance of the role of the department to the health and educational services we require cannot be overstated. It's not just the department, and the work of the employees there on behalf of the people of the province is fundamental to the everyday lives of each and every single one of us, Mr. Speaker. That became abundantly clear as we worked our way through the Estimates for the department.

As an MHA for a rural district, working with various ministers responsible for transportation has always been an important part of the work I do on behalf of my constituents, Mr. Speaker, the constituents of the beautiful District of Burin - Grand Bank. Given our climate, we will always have to deal with maintaining and repairing our roadways, especially at a time where climate change is impacting our coastal communities. As an MHA, I feel that I have been able to accomplish a lot in the time I have been here, but some of the most satisfying for me have been in the area of roadwork.

One of the first challenges with which I was presented was the constant flooding of an area in the Lamaline area commonly known as the Meadow, with flooding becoming more severe every single passing year, Mr. Speaker. I worked with the then minister of Transportation and Works and had a commitment within the first few weeks to have this work done and it was. It's proving to be successful.

I also got a commitment from the minister at the time to include the highway between Grand Bank and Fortune in the department's five-year Roads Plan. At the time there was a very dangerous turn on that section of road, Mr. Speaker, becoming more dangerous with each passing year as the heavy seas ate away at the embankment by which the highway passed. I'm also happy to say that work has been completed, Mr. Speaker, as has work on the highway between St. Lawrence and Lawn, a section of road that had not seen significant upgrades since being built. As well, stretches of the highway between Marystown and Grand Bank have seen significant work and the situation for the driving public has improved substantially.

There has been an acknowledgement by this government that it recognizes the Burin Peninsula is in the midst of an economic rebirth, Mr. Speaker. A good highway system is imperative in accommodating the needs of the area as we go forward.

I say thank you to the previous minister of Transportation and Works for the installation of a new highway camera near Terrenceville. Though not technically in my district, nonetheless it is a valuable tool for everyone travelling the Burin Peninsula, especially during the winter months. I have heard many, many positive comments from residents of my district since it's been installed, Mr. Speaker.

Has all the necessary roadwork been completed in the District of Burin - Grand Bank? Of course not. There are still projects that need to be undertaken. While I am the MHA for that district, I will continue to strongly advocate for its completion. That said, I want to thank the ministers with whom I have worked to have the aforementioned projects carried out. It certainly has positively impacted the residents and the constituents I represent, Mr. Speaker.

Among the highlights of the Department of Digital Government and Service NL, Mr. Speaker, government was asked to step up and make services more readily accessible to the residents of the province. We have made enormous strides in bringing government closer to those who use those same services in attempting to overcome the challenges of distance and availability of services.

Technology can be a great equalizer of the gap between rural and urban areas, especially as more reliable and faster Internet services become more readily available in rural areas. That said, the continued expansion of quality Internet will be something with which government will continue to work with service providers until province-wide coverage has been given. This will become increasingly important as more and more government services are provided online, Mr. Speaker.

The Committee learned through *Budget 2020* that since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, registration through MyGovNL has

grown by a significant percentage – some 1,400 per cent, in fact, Mr. Speaker.

The formation of the Department of Digital Government and Service NL has already made huge advances on the technology side, and I'm sure there's still much more to come. This fact ensures residents of the province have fingertip access that could only have been dreamed about some short 15 years ago, Mr. Speaker. The fact that we have done it right here should also reflect on the skill set we have developed in this province. We are embracing our technology sector, and this should serve as an incentive for those interested in that particular field. We can do it right here, and the Committee learned the focus will also be put there going forward. A renewed focus on technology and our role in it.

Mr. Speaker, not only has the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL made advances within her department, but she's here in the House with her son, Alexander. One of the highlights of our time in the House this year is certainly the little reminder of who we work with just a couple of seats over from me.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Finance Estimates were interesting, as we learned of the changes made to enhance governance such as changes to the Treasury Board and Finance. Government has given a clear definition to Treasury and Finance. I thank the Finance Minister for the experience of learning of these changes.

It has to be challenging work in the department – very challenging, Mr. Speaker – especially during the pandemic and the resulting downturn in the economy worldwide, but I believe we still have a bright future ahead – a very bright future. We are by nature a resilient people, and I have every confidence that resilience will get us through this period as well.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. House for this opportunity to bring forward these observations which relate to the work of the Government Services Committee. Having the opportunity to examine this work of the various departments and agencies under our scope of reference was certainly enlightening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to speak on behalf of my district, just to say thank you to all the people who put me here and representing the beautiful District of Ferryland. Since I came in here 17 or 18 months ago, I'm going to say it's a pleasure to be involved with government Service NL.

Since I came in here, I've been through three ministers. I'm sure the ministers on the other side looking at this department – so many bills since I came in. It is unbelievable how many bills are in this department, and I'm sure all three ministers in that department are saying it's a lot of work. I certainly appreciate the time they put into it. I appreciate that.

I served as a critic for this department, like I said, 17 months ago. The department is no longer called workplace health and safety. It's now called Digital Government and Service NL. It's even had a name change and three ministers since I got in here. I don't know if I'm the problem but it's certainly changed.

Even with those responsibilities, the department delivers a wide variety of services. When I first came in, my colleague to the left of me here said when you come in this department you get a birth certificate and you leave with a death certificate. That's what the department covers, so I thought it was a pretty wide variety of things it covers. I'll go down through some of the stuff in some of the departments, just some of the stuff it covers. In my short time here I learned, as the expression goes, everything from a needle to an anchor that you're getting permission to or get to speak on. There's so much legislation to deal with it all, it's incredible.

In that department in Service NL, or Digital Government – I'm going to keep saying Service NL, I'm sure I am because it's been 17 months at it so it's going to be hard to get away from it. It includes Motor Registration; it includes highway safety. Just to touch on highway safety; I've asked some questions today on highway

safety as well but one of the things that I did speak on long ago, and I thought when I brought it up it raised a few eyebrows over there, nothing bad, but just something that I think we could look at going in the future.

When I was in Portugal, probably a year ago now – it seems a long while ago – driving through a street, no schools, no intersection. You drive through a street and a light comes on, it stops you right where you are. We were three or four days there and every time we'd drive through a light would come on and go red. We're looking around saying, what is going on? I think it's something we could put in our school zones.

An example would be in my district in the Goulds where there's an elementary school. You're driving down a nice little street and the speed sort of gets up. The speed is 30 kilometres there, and it's pretty easy – and we've all done that – going through communities that you drive around Newfoundland, and you're driving around – you're going through a community and the next thing you're going 50 or 60 kilometres and the zone is 30.

In this instance, when I was in Portugal, the light would come on. Anytime you went 10 kilometres over the speed limit, a light would flash on and stop everything. You see a red light; you stop. Stop for 10 seconds, the light changes and goes green. There's nothing there, other than stopping anyone that's going fast. I thought it would be a great idea for a school zone, just to keep the people and the kids safe and all the traffic that goes through these zones.

I'm thinking here in the city itself that some of these streets where people are in a hurry and sometimes I worry about that. They're always in a hurry going somewhere, but when you're going through a school zone you have to be careful. I think if you had something like that, and I'm not sure what the cost is on it but if you had something there that if you went 10 kilometres over the speed limit, a light flashed on, you stopped for 10 seconds and away you go again. I just think it would be something that would be great in school zones. I think it's something the government should look at. I remember the minister the last time I brought this up, he looked at me and he was nodding his

head. I just think that maybe – again, I don't know the cost but it may be something you can look at.

Also in my area, in the school zones and in the community I live in, we have some speed zones. I did call our council in one of the communities I was in. You're driving in the community, the speed limit is 50, and in the nighttime you can really see it. You're driving, you're coming down the highway on a little stretch and you're going 70 kilometres an hour. The light flashes on, there's like a cop car there and you really slow down. You're really conscious of it. I think it's really important that you look at that.

Now, it's expensive for the communities. It cost \$7,000 or \$8,000, but it's safety and that's something they put there out of their own coffers, I'm going to say, in their community, but I thought it was a great idea.

I know that the department did put it in the school zones from the government. They did put it in a school zone where we are. Again, you come a hill, you go down over the hill, no problem to go 70. We have residents that complain about it, and rightly so, because you're coming to a school zone. There are some kids that have some disabilities in the area as well. It really brings you to a good slowdown, I have to say, with that flashing light, for sure.

I think it's a great initiative and the government should probably look at that, especially in school zones. It's from here, Newfoundland and Labrador, all over, wherever they can be. I'm sure some places probably don't need it, but I think in some of these school zones, and I know that a lot of Members – I'm just looking around at them – knowing where some of the school are that I'm familiar with, they could certainly use them in their area.

Another few divisions that are in there. There's Occupational Health and Safety, Vital Statistics, lotteries, residential tenancies, the registries of deeds and companies, consumer and financial affairs, the real estate and mortgage broker regulation. We went through that last year in detail and questioned some of the stuff. The legislation in some of this stuff is so outdated that it needed to be tweaked and needed to be looked at.



I thought we did some good work on that and didn't let it pass through just be sailing it through. We had some questions, what both sides thought on it. We did some good work on it, myself on this side and the Member for CBS. Also, the Queen's Printer and many more are also included in it.

The department is responsible for 175 pieces of legislation. I can tell you from experience, this means the critics get a lot of inquiries and also have a fair number of bills to address in the Legislature. I have a bill coming up tomorrow that's on radiation equipment. I had one on credit unions last week that the Member for Cape St. Francis filled in for me. Just to touch on that, I wasn't here last week to do Estimates, I was sick and the Member for Cape St. Francis filled in. I certainly appreciate him doing that. Thank you very much.

I'm sure that the minister over there, after a couple of months, certainly recognizes how important and how busy it is in just only two months. Looking at the legislation, I'm sure it's pretty tough for her.

I also have a variety of topics covered by the department that makes my job as critic very interesting and it means you're learning so much about the department. You're learning so much about highways and, I'm going to say, motor vehicle.

I came from a motor vehicle salesperson, I guess. Well, I started as a service consultant in a car dealership and then I went on to be a sales consultant. If anyone ever aspires to be a sales consultant, I think they should learn and live in the service department first, because once you take care of a customer and you take care of them in service, picking up their vehicles, dropping it off and getting the required work done, you have a customer for a lifetime, if you take care of them, and that's what it's all about.

That's what government does. Government provides services and if you can treat the people the way they're supposed to be treated, obviously you got them for a lifetime. If you can treat them the way they should be treated, then we try to stay clear of getting stuff in the gutter. We try to treat people with the utmost respect. That's what we need on our front lines.

If you ever work on a front line and serving customers – so you have people that are in motor vehicle – and it's like I said, it's such a wide variety. I'm trying to sit here and think of all the departments where you go in and you actually meet people that – it's a tough job.

Dealing with the public is a tough job. They got stuff on their mind when they're coming in: their families, their car payments, their mortgages and everything else that goes with it – daycare and their kids in school and doctor appointments. The person on the front line that you get greeted by is the most important for you to start your day off right. When you go to some of these car dealerships, it's not only the one I worked at, if you go there you really understand that dealing with the public is a pretty tough job. I think it's the second highest, if I'm not mistaken, stressful job out there, besides air traffic controllers.

If you ever go into a car dealership you have to keep them in your mind. I mean, I got the advantage, I worked there, so I can go in there and give them a hard time and move on. But when you go in there, you have to remember, it's a stressful job. They got to try to get the vehicles in, they got to try to get them ready, try to get them out and then they got to ask to get them paid for, which every time somebody brings in a vehicle, most times you never want to pay for anything other than your maintenance. There's stuff that got to be charged and they got the unenviable task of having to ask you for money. That's not easy, so I sort of pity them in that way.

Also, just some other things in my district I wanted to touch on, one was a rotational worker that I got an email from and it just hits home a little bit, I guess. We all got this issue. Every single person in this Legislature got this issue for sure.

He writes me an email and, obviously, I'm not going to use his name, he said: I'm writing this letter to explain my situation to see if anyone can do something. I'm a rotational worker; I work in Malaysia on an oil rig. Since the pandemic came in, I've seen my family for seven days. As an example, he left home on May 11. He did three weeks in quarantine in Malaysia before going to the rig where he did another five weeks or more, until he got home in July, and

did two more weeks quarantine when he got home. He spent seven days with his family before he had to travel back to Malaysia to quarantine and start all over again.

I know the rules are there for a reason and we respect that, but sometimes you have to look at it. These families, along with all – I'm sure they're glad they have a job at this point in time, but you really do have to put into consideration their marriages and how all that affects the family and they get to see them. They come home and they can only look at them through a window for 14 days and in seven days time they're gone back. It's pretty tough.

I know that Dr. Fitzgerald has a job to do. It's a tough rule, but I think that we can – I listened to the gentleman this morning on the radio talking about rotational workers. If they could have rapid testing and do five to seven days, well, that gives them some extra time that they're not getting right now. You sort of have to look at that, and we as people in here have to put ourselves in their shoes and what they're going through. Sometimes we take calls but we neglect to do that and think about that. That's one of the ones that I wanted to bring up.

Just speaking on the locked-in pensions, which was another question that I had yesterday and spoke on it before, I don't want to belabour the point but these people are in dire straits. Their cars could be repossessed and lose their house.

I know that the rule says that in dying circumstances or you're nearing death, but nearing death is no good when everything is gone. They need it now and we have to respect that, I think, as MHAs here. I think that the government side really should push through that legislation and try to get it ready, and government officials get it ready so that we can act upon it, and hopefully help these people out and get them through some struggling times because they are going through struggling times.

Some other stuff that I'd like to touch on, another one would be – and I heard the minister speaking over there so I'll touch on a couple of them as well. She mentioned bridges. In an area where I am, I have a bridge, Mutton Bay Bridge in Trepassey. I know it's on the list; it looks like it's going to be done.

If you haven't seen it – hopefully you don't ever cross it because it's a bridge that's in desperate need. It really needs to be done. I'm glad to see that they're onside to get it done. The previous MHA before me, I'm sure, was advocating for that. The people of the area in Trepassey certainly need it. Again, I'm getting a lot of calls this week on the conditions of the road in the area as well, so we need to pay attention.

There's a letter here. It says: I'm sending you this note to complain and question about the condition of the main roads on each side of Trepassey, especially the barrens from Trepassey to Peter's River.

I had a discussion with another MHA across the House yesterday on it, and we argued over who's responsible for it and who gets the blame, I guess, if it's not done. She said: We're retired, so we travel to St. John's on a weekly basis for doctor's appointments. Many people have done damage to their vehicles travelling the roads. I personally watched the highway crews come and patch 10 bad holes and leave three or four behind.

It's not easy, and I see another minister over there nodding his head. We've seen it happen. Sometimes they run out of asphalt or for some other reason they can't go, or they don't have enough people to stay there or whatever the case, but we have to pay attention to this stuff. If we do the small things like that, that will make our jobs much easier and that stuff will go away.

I'm sure something else is going to come up, but we really have to take care of the people. If they call you, you call them back and say we'll see what we can do. If we can get that done, then that goes off your radar and you move on to your next issue. Hopefully, there is none, but I know there will always be something, but you move on and get it done.

We just let it dwindle and go and go and don't get any answers, and then we have irate people. You have to deal with it; I have to deal with it. Sometimes I think some of these problems can be done and handled. I know it's not easy. You have departments and equipment and there are big areas to cover, but I'm thinking if you get the little problems out of the way, you can deal with the big ones. That's the way I look at it. If

you can get rid of some of these small problems, then you can move on to some other stuff. That's where I'll leave with that.

When you did your Estimates, Digital Government and Service NL – with the Committee itself, there's Transportation and Infrastructure, the Public Procurement Agency, Finance, the Public Service Commission and also Consolidated Fund Services. These are all the ones under Government Services. It's a big area for sure. I listened yesterday for six hours on all the other concurrence. There are a lot of issues for sure. We'd certainly like to get some of these problems – like I say, I'd like to get them put to bed so we can move on to some bigger things.

One other thing before I finish. All of us, I'm sure, do it; but I'd like to put it on the record to thank my CA who keeps me out of trouble. That's a big job, I'm sure. She does a great job answering people back and taking care of everything that needs to be done. I'd certainly like to thank her for that.

That's it. Thank you very much.

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

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just enjoyed listening to the Member for Ferryland. He was quite interesting. Actually, as I was listening to him, he gave me several things of which to talk about today. One I love, Mr. Speaker, every time I have an opportunity to speak about my district, but I always do also have a habit of quickly running out of time.

Sometimes my colleagues say it's hard to fill 20 minutes. I go back to the early years when I started here in 2013. I remember one day sitting over there and I said, at that time, to MHA Jim Bennett: Time goes some fast when you're up. We would stand then. It was pre-COVID. He said: No, 20 minutes goes fast when you're wound up and you're always wound up.

Perhaps I was back in those days when I think about my district, and I reflect on it all the time

on my drive. When I fly in to Blanc Sablon, most folks who have a rural district, it requires hundreds of kilometres to get from one end to the other. We do spend a lot of time on the road alone, Mr. Speaker, as you would know, serving our constituents.

Often, when I cross over into L'Anse au Clair and I'm heading north to my hometown in Charlottetown, I'm quite fully preoccupied with the different drive that I take now than the drive that I used to take in these early years. I would stand in Opposition and I would hammer out the petitions. I'd come back on Mondays after being in my district in the Labrador Straits driving through terrible road conditions, almost 40-year-old pavement.

Then I would leave Red Bay and in the fall and in the spring, which ironically was when the House was sitting, that was when the road would be the worst. I would be on gravel road. It was absolutely terrible. I would fly in to my district, Mr. Speaker, and it wasn't uncommon to be surrounded by people protesting, maybe 150 people – I have those memories – because they were fed up.

Now, when I go, thanks to the progress, thanks to the investments of this government, the picture is a very, very different one. We have so much to be thankful for. We've made tremendous progress. We're not where we need to be yet; we're going to continue to build on that.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we go out and we make an announcement, we're going to put cell coverage in six communities. There will always be a community that says what about us. I share a quote that my grandmother often said: Never let perfect be the enemy of the good. We have to start somewhere and we build on that. That's what we've been doing.

Mr. Speaker, I've said it here before, I never aspired to be where I was – never. I moved back. I was just moved away long enough to do some post-secondary. I moved home, started a young family and lived in a little community. I didn't really have the luxury to say: I wonder when someone's going to put a playground up there for the children. So you got involved. My husband got involved in recreation. I got

involved in municipal and literacy. We look back now and we could almost say the rest is history.

Then, Mr. Speaker, I guess 14 years sitting as a community rep on the school council, day after day, year after year lobbying for a new school for the community. Then, the whole ceiling caved in while I was at a Combined Councils meetings, actually, in Goose Bay. A bunch of people reached out; we started a real intense lobby that spring for a new school. Shortly after that, an opportunity opened up in a by-election and here I am.

One of the things I always say is the only thing constant around me has been change. I think about the all-male team that I joined in 2013, the different players around me that were always changing; when I think about the different views that I have as an MHA in this Legislature.

I had the opportunity to serve for a couple of years in Opposition. I remember a Member of government on my first or second day that I was in the House said, you're very, very fortunate as an MHA to get the privilege to serve in Opposition. I thought that was kind of a funny comment at the time. I understand now what he meant. It gave me some time to learn, to get established. Later, we would form government. I would share a view that you're sharing today, Mr. Speaker. I would get to be, to date – depending now, my colleague from I want to say –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Harbour Grace.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Harbour Grace, thank you.

Depending how long she serves, to date I am only the second female Deputy Speaker and the longest serving. Once she gets 20 months, then she will surpass me. I had that view. Then, in 2017 I was afforded the privilege to sit at the Cabinet table and now I have that view. There's lots of experience.

When I look back to the Opposition days and the Estimates process, I think the first time our chief of staff said you have to get ready for Estimates, I was wondering what that was. Later, I would now be a minister in a department and bring in my officials and we would go through the

Estimates process. Very, very important, Mr. Speaker.

No matter who the government is, sometimes government will say to Opposition or Opposition will accuse government of looking back: Why are you looking back? It's important that we look back, just to have some learnings, Mr. Speaker, from the past. There's no doubt about it, there's a reason why our windshield is bigger than our rear-view mirror. We are moving forward and the main focus is on moving forward, but we have to glance back and we have to learn.

I represent a beautiful part of this province, Labrador, a big, vast land. It's a tremendous privilege to be the minister for Labrador. I sometimes feel the weight of responsibility that comes with that, but also there's an excitement and there's an energy around the tremendous, untapped potential that's in Labrador.

Just yesterday morning, myself and the Premier, the Premier did a keynote address to Expo Labrador and I had the opportunity to join him in Q & A. I have to give a shout out to the Labrador North Chamber of Commerce who've been doing phenomenal work around bringing businesses together, whether within this province or across the country, with showcasing what Labrador has to offer, showcasing the business opportunities at events like Expo, at events like Northern Exposure.

This year times are very different, as we hear almost on a daily basis, so kudos to them. They have taken their conference online, and we had an opportunity to participate virtually, Mr. Speaker. Also, the Premier in his address had the opportunity to share some of the ways that Labrador is benefiting from our government's commitment to grow the economy in areas like tourism, agriculture, forestry; lots of good things happening. The big one being mining, Mr. Speaker.

There are lots of questions in this House around offshore. We're a heavy, resource-based, offshore-dependent province, and COVID-19 have changed the absolute world. It's changed things globally.

When we look to mining, I'm very proud to live in an area where mining contributes so much to the GDP of this province, to the provincial Treasury, to people that work, not just in Labrador but, Mr. Speaker, every weekend when I'm on a plane coming from Goose Bay, like this past weekend, and lots of workers getting off the plane in Deer Lake; lots of workers getting off the plane in St. John's. We're going to continue to build on that.

One of the questions yesterday was what's our plan? I went back to July '19 when I had the privilege to be in Labrador City and participate in – I believe the investment was around \$6 million for an industrial line that was for Tata. We now see Tata, their plant is fully operational, fully commissioned, 300 jobs, 150 contractors; 450 jobs, Mr. Speaker. IOC, I just sat down with the chamber there a few weeks ago and I think they told me they hired 150 new jobs during COVID. So there are things to be optimistic about.

I had started down this road with a focus to talk about my district. When I take that drive – and you know how different it is from what it used to be. I would stand up in this House – Clyde Jackman used to sit where the Deputy Premier is sitting now, sometimes he would shake his head when I would talk about leaving my home town to head back to the House. My husband would say stick to the high roads when you're driving to Goose Bay. Folks here might not have known what he meant, but I was trenching through such terrible conditions, that's what you had to do. It was mucky and when it froze, you had to stick to the high roads.

Mr. Speaker, what we see now with investments from this government since 2017, 300 kilometres of new pavement; 100 kilometres in just 2019. We saw 56 kilometres on the Goose Bay end with Johnson's – fell just a little shy of the 80k for this year. They have assured me that they will be back and they expect to get about 100 kilometres done next season, modestly speaking. They have 150 to do, and perhaps they will do more than the 100.

Mr. Speaker, we were in L'Anse au Clair last week, last Saturday, I believe. We had a wonderful day there celebrating the grand opening of a beautiful community centre that

that community will get lots of work from; a new fire truck that was parked beside that.

The first principle of economics really – I haven't really studied economics, just a little – is that money should be allocated based on need. I represent a district where that was not always the case, Mr. Speaker. Prior to the Liberal Party forming government in 2013, we had 12 years of what I would say in the wilderness, at a time when this province was very, very rich and wealthy. We had all of these issues. Now, I can leave and drive through community after community. I can see new community centres going up, I see new fire trucks. Not luxuries, things that were needed.

Just this past Friday, I had the opportunity to join some Nalcor folks from the Fire & Security Division in Churchill Falls. We flew in to Black Tickle and we donated to Black Tickle an emergency water pump, a 250-gallon-a-minute water pump, and 400 feet of hose. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, it's heartwarming to listen to an individual from that community on the radio this morning say they lost a house to a fire there in February. They just had to stand and helplessly watch as that home burned. There was a family pet that lost their life in that fire and, fortunately, the individuals got out. They're very thankful that this small donation was able to be made to the community.

Sometimes when government is in the very difficult fiscal situation that they're in right now, it doesn't always mean that we have the funds or we have to go to departments and look. Sometimes we're able to achieve the goals and helping communities meet what their needs are by partnership. That's what happened on Saturday.

Also, this past weekend, I had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Ashlee Cunsolo. She is the director right now of the School of Arctic and Sub-Arctic Studies; wonderful amazing things happening there around higher learning.

She shared many stories of individuals that may have felt that they attempted post-secondary and that they failed, and the assurance that we need to give them that you did not fail, but a system failed you. Now, discussions are happening around if the Innu wants a social work program;

why can't that happen right there in Labrador in Happy Valley. If the Innu want another nursing program; why can't that happen right there in Happy Valley.

A lot of things to be excited about as we see this academic unit that is right now in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. There is a vision working with many partners that the academic unit will transfer to a Labrador college and that there will be synergies across with other campuses in the North looking to Yukon and looking to Nunavut. So lots of exciting things happening there, Madam Speaker.

The Member for Ferryland was talking about his time as a salesperson and the importance of keeping your customers happy. That's not really unlike what we do, Madam Speaker. As MHAs, we work for our constituents. Right now, my fill-in CA is currently working in my office; I have a new lady. She said to me when I was in the district last week: I had no idea that your office was such a busy office. I had no idea so many people reached out.

Yes, Madam Speaker, I know that your office is a very, very busy district office as well. I talked earlier here about the changes that I've seen around me over the last 7½ years. That's why it's essential that all of us as MHAs, that our first loyalty be to our district. They are the people that hire us. It's not exactly fun often on election night waiting to see if a few thousand people that gave you the job interview is going to hire you, but some of us have been through it a number of times and we must not forget the people that put us here. One of my former colleagues, Sammy Slade, often would refer to this place as the people's House. That is true. It's the people's House; it is the people's purse.

I want to give a shout-out to Aggie Cabot who is right now working in my constituency office, while my long time, who's been at my side since day one, Michelle Normore-Ryland is taking a well-deserved break. She's off with her grandchild somewhere on the Island. It's a very busy office.

Madam Speaker, when you're a rural MHA, and some of my other colleagues in this House will appreciate this, when you don't have government services in these communities,

when you don't have cell coverage in all the communities, when you have transportation issues, when you're dealing with helicopters, planes and ferries, folks will always be reaching out to you. I often say to people, if I see a busy person, I say: Take care for yourself. Someone the other day said, what are you saying? Like, take your advice because you're not using it. Well, perhaps, Madam Speaker, I could find a better balance.

One of the things that's important to me and that I pride myself on is I always try and be available to my constituents. Many folks will know that if they're calling me 11 o'clock on Saturday night, I'm answering the phone; if they're calling me 7 o'clock on Sunday morning, I'm answering the phone. I'm not telling people in this House to do that, but that's pretty much how I have operated. It's a busy district but we've made progress by working together. We're going to continue to do that, Madam Speaker.

I want to give a shout-out to the leadership in the communities that I serve. I went home on the 15th of March for a couple of days on a Sunday with a piece of carry-on luggage, and I wasn't back here until some time in May when the House resumed. During this time in Labrador, a small population spread over a large landmass, no ICU beds. We have ventilators and things there now, Madam Speaker, but there was a lot of uncertainty in this community.

To put it into perspective, Madam Speaker, it's easy for people to say: Oh, just follow the Public Health measures. Why are they so worried? But when you visit places like I have in North River near Cartwright and you walk through a cemetery and you see as many as five family names on one tombstone, you realize that's what the Spanish flu did to Labrador years ago when you see a husband and a wife and a son and a daughter all died within short time frames. Those elderly people that we represent, that we serve, there was a reason why they were concerned about this virus. As they tuned into briefings each day they would hear there are many things we don't know about this virus. We're still learning. They were concerned.

Communication is paramount. Whatever you're going through in life it's absolutely essential, from relationships in the home to with your

colleagues, to community. I want to commend the leadership, because right out of the gate in March we held weekly calls with the leadership in the community. There was a call on Saturday mornings that took place with the former minister responsible for Labrador Affairs, and on Tuesdays the four Labrador MHAs and the MP. The leadership in the communities, the mayors, the AngajukKâk, we got on a call. They raised their concerns and we did our best, Madam Speaker, to address them. That is how we got through this.

Madam Speaker, that brings me back in my closing moments to *Budget 2020* that my colleague, the Deputy Premier brought in to the House: *Today. Tomorrow. Together*. As we find ourselves in this really unprecedented time, every day there's discussion in this House about individuals that have lost jobs due to plummeting oil prices. We hear too often about mental health concerns.

Like our current Premier of the day often says, Madam Speaker, there's no us and them, there is we. We are in this together. We are a small province of 526,000 people and I believe that the people don't want politics at this time. They want us to work together. They want to know that our focus is on keeping them safe.

I want to thank the Deputy Premier for bringing down a great budget. She closed the budget with a quote: "We cannot change the past but we can shape the bright future that our province and its people deserve."

I just want to close on a note of optimism. The Premier talked about his storied journey to get where he is. In many ways he feels like he's just at the base camp of the mountain and there's a mountain ahead of us, but, Madam Speaker, we're going to go up that mountain together. The encouraging thing is we're going to come down the other side and we're going to be all right because we're resilient people here in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are many things still to be hopeful about.

Thank you.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER (P. Parsons):** Thank you.

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

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'll just rise again and have a few words on this. First of all, I want to – something that happened, I got a letter today from the Speaker. I appealed a decision on an expense account for \$185 and it got approved today.

I just want to explain to people that it was for the Special Olympians in Corner Brook who had an event – they couldn't have the event because they couldn't stop the Special Olympians from clapping and hugging and things like that. What they did, they decided to go door to door. They asked me to go along with them, and I did. It was refused, and on principle I appealed that decision and the decision was done today. So I will be making a donation to the Special Olympics of \$185. It wasn't on the money, it was on the principle; thinking I was going to buy votes with Special Olympics and knowing very well. The Members that voted for it and understood it, thank you very much for that because it is standing up for it.

One of the Members stated a bit of advice that I should check. Just to let that Member know that the products were bought. They were planning on having a little function but because of the restrictions they couldn't have it. They decided not to have their function. So I just wanted to put that on the record. I want to thank the Members who supported it. I spoke to the Leader of the Third Party and explained it, and she's very supportive of that now.

That was on principle for Special Olympians. I spoke to the president very much and he was very upset that people didn't understand that. So I just want to say that was done. When you stand on principle, which I have, Madam Speaker, on that, I will continue to do so for the underprivileged and I make no apologies whatsoever for it.

I'm going to speak on the Government Services part, Madam Speaker. I just spoke on Service NL, and I know the Member for Ferryland was bringing this up on a regular basis about the LIRA fund. I'm going back probably two or three years now when I was doing some work on

it also to have that loosened up for a lot of people in dire circumstances. There has been a lot of work done on it. There has been a lot of work done on it, I can assure you that. I got moved out of Service NL back to Municipal Affairs and Environment at the time. I was doing both then, but just took over that. So it was very close.

There were some of the unions that were saying, no, no we want to ensure that the fund is there for when they retire. Also, who I was dealing with a lot were some of the retirees from the City of Corner Brook. Just to give an example, when they had \$200,000 or \$300,000 in their pension fund and for some reason it was done well before – the maximum they could take out of their pension fund, I'm going on memory, is 6 per cent a year, period. They even asked to increase it to 13 per cent, so at least they can – if you take out 6 per cent of \$220,000, Madam Speaker, and if you get 4 or 5 per cent interest on it, you'll never use the fund.

A lot of people that transferred funds out work with the government. It's their money. The LIRA fund is actually what the people who are working paid into the fund. This is coming from the City of Corner Brook workers and people and government employees. I agree with the Member for Ferryland, who's been very strong on this, that it's the people's own money. This idea that it may crash because of the pension fund; part of this LIRA fund, it's very little of this government pension plan; very little, Madam Speaker. I just hope that will be looked at and that, hopefully, we can get that done.

The only way right now that you can tap into the LIRA fund is – I hate to say this – you have to show somehow that you have a terminal disease or that you passed away. That's the only way to tap into your own money that you have.

Again, for the people that are going through these tough times right now, I just agree with the Member for Ferryland and the government. I'm confident that the government Members are also receiving calls on it and that we can work together to expedite this here in this House because that is what we're here for, to try to help the people in times of need. This is one of the times of need that we can definitely put that

through, Mr. Speaker – Madam Speaker, I'm sorry. I'll get it.

It's a time of need and this is a great time for all of us that we can definitely help out with the people in need through this pandemic. We trust that the government will work on this. I'm sure you're going to have unanimous consent in this House to help this through. I'll be one supporting it because I've been working with that. Even after I left Service NL, I've been writing and trying to get it done. I know a lot of employees of the City of Corner Brook and others have that major concern and major issue.

I'll just give people a good example: You're working with the City of Corner Brook; you're retired; you want to do your roof. You can't get enough money out of the LIRA fund to do your roof, to do renovations to your house. It's your money. It's your money. It's what you paid in to the fund. I'm hoping to get that done very soon. I support the government on doing that.

I mentioned earlier Transportation and Infrastructure, and I know I mentioned it earlier in a speech, I say to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure that he has a huge department, whichever minister goes into that department, it's a huge, huge department. I don't know what the logic is or the rationale.

Whoever took the infrastructure from municipal affairs and put it in to make that department larger, I just don't feel – and it's just my opinion on dealing with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and dealing with a lot of rural districts and a lot of rural communities. They understand how much that department should have stayed with Environment, Climate Change and Municipalities now.

The Infrastructure division, I feel, is a bit of a downgrade to the department and to the municipalities. It's not that the minister is not from a rural district and it's not that he can't do the job, but it's just the department is so big, a lot of the municipal affairs issues are in that Climate Change Department right now.

I just feel, before it's too late, I think they should look at it and bring it back, because right now if you're going to put an application in for a capital works or Canada build fund, it has to go to the



Department of Climate Change, Mr. Speaker. They have to do an assessment, send it over to municipal affairs, get it approved and send it back to see if they can come up with their share of the funding to do the evaluation. The other thing about it is – and this is nothing on the minister, because no matter who is in that department, I know the former minister the same thing, they put the extra work on them.

What would take a priority? I'll just ask this, throw this out because a lot of us have rural districts. What would take a priority? Would a small infrastructure project in Ming's Bight take a priority over a main road in St. John's or Corner Brook?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I remind the Member to direct his comments to the Chair, please.

**MR. JOYCE:** Pardon me?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I remind the Member to direct his comments to the Chair, please.

**MR. JOYCE:** I thought I was, sorry.

I'm just saying Ming's Bight and I could use Lark Harbour and York Harbour, any different town or community in the area, the priority list would go down because the major infrastructure is what would take it. Again, it's in no way in the world any reflection on any minister in either department, because I think both of them work hard at it and they will do a great job at it, but I just have to bring that up. If someone could explain the rationale.

I know three or four years ago that was tried and we put a stop to it because that's who is going to suffer, is the smaller towns across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The ones, for example, that would need an engineer to come down and have a look at something. Now, what's going to take the priority?

That's just my opinion from dealing with it. That's my opinion speaking to the smaller towns. Now, for a small town, you have to deal with three different departments right now – three different departments. So if you have infrastructure, you deal with Transportation and Infrastructure. If you have firefighting equipment or a fire truck, now you deal with the

Department of Justice. Then if you have some other issues with a municipality, you deal with it with a third department.

So if you want to talk about issues for smaller towns; that is one. I just ask if someone can explain the rationale or someone can explain to me why that's done. I would definitely look for the rationale to help out on that, to satisfy my own mind.

Madam Speaker, I also know the Department of Finance is part of this Government Services. Again, I understand the role that the minister has and the government has and the difficulties that they do have. So we're all faced with it, and I see the Opposition again, they're doing their job today asking on certain aspects of the economy and then government has to come up with an answer: What are you going to do with the funds? Then when the critic for Finance is asking the government: How are you going to get it under control? This is normal. Just to let people know, this is normal. When I was in Opposition, we were asking questions on finances. The critic for Finance would stand up and say: Well, how are you going to manage all this? So this is normal.

This is how Opposition works and I understand it. I understand it totally, that's how government works. I understand it totally. We as legislators have to try and find a balance. We have to try to find a balance on this here with the finances, because we can't keep kicking it down the road. If we keep kicking it down the road, we're not going to get it solved. There's just no way in the world to get it solved.

Again, there are a lot of people around here that have been around, a lot of people who've been involved with finances outside, before they got in the Legislature, and they can definitely help out. They can definitely add some input to all this.

I'll go back to the District of Humber - Bay of Islands, which is Corner Brook also and some of the great work that's being done. As I mentioned, I hear certain Members here talking about the fishery. It's very prevalent in the Humber - Bay of Islands area, especially in the Curling south shore and north shore areas. Just

the spinoffs from the fishery and the amount of work that's done by the fisheries is amazing.

The new minister is there now and I know they get co-operation with the department all throughout and that you speak to the people, that there is a good relationship between the business and the department. I'm sure that's going to continue. I just have to recognize that they do create a lot of employment in the Humber - Bay of Islands area.

Also, I'll bring it up again because last night I got a few calls about the cellphone coverage. There are a lot of people, I feel, that are going to, next year, start making plans for the south shore of the Bay of Islands in tourism because of cellphone coverage. A lot of people in the questionnaire they received from people outside: Do you have cellphone coverage? A lot of people who want to go and spend a week in some nice community away, they still want to be able to talk to people if an emergency comes up, and if you don't have that.

Last night alone, I spoke to four or five people who mentioned that it was great that there's going to be cellphone coverage coming in the very near future. I look forward to that. I look forward to making the first call. I hope the minister can find time to come out and make the first call on the cellphone coverage, because for that part of the area, waiting so long, working on it.

I remember back in 2011, Bell Aliant came out then. There was a guy from Halifax, I can't remember his name, but he was so frank with the people at the time, that it was cost prohibitive. He was so frank and said, look, here's the reason why we can't get it done. A lot of people at the time were upset. A lot of people were upset at the time, but I guarantee you one thing, there was no one in that meeting at the time that this person came down from Bell Aliant – Mark Duggan would know his name – that would say they didn't respect his honesty. From there, you build on it.

The former minister started on the cellphone coverage, Mr. Speaker, and it came from that. I remember back, I think it was three years ago, that the minister at the time and the Member now went and brought it up to start the cellphone

coverage. That was great at the time, because then we could see some kind of path forward that people can get it.

This is a problem in a lot of towns. A lot of towns throughout rural Newfoundland and Labrador now will get cell coverage because – I think it was a million dollars that was put in? Yeah, it was a million dollars that was put in and leveraged the business part of it and leveraged also the community function. York Harbour and Lark Harbour, I think, I'm going on memory, has \$35,000 to put into it.

That was an initiative that was created by the – what's the district? I keep forgetting the district? Northern Peninsula.

**MR. LANE:** The Straits - White Bay.

**MR. JOYCE:** The Straits - White Bay. I always has White Bay, but it's The Straits - White Bay. That is the Member that started that. I wasn't sure which one. The Straits - White Bay who started that.

**MR. LANE:** St. Barbe (inaudible) briefly.

**MR. JOYCE:** St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows at the time it was brought forward, and I'm going on memory, I think it was 14 areas that were being done. Now we can build on that; we can definitely build on that.

Also, we look at the infrastructure throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, and I understand we all have to work with Infrastructure because we all get concerns. We all have issues, especially in rural parts. We all have concerns. I, again, am pleased that there was a lot of work done. I thank the town councils in all the areas that we were working on to ensure that they support us and support the government in getting a lot of work done.

Water and sewer is another big one. There are a lot of towns here that need upgrades for water and sewer and I know a lot of towns also that don't have water and sewer. Lark Harbour is one in this district, but it's not because of any government. The PC government was in, the Liberal government was in, but at the time the residents didn't want to have it. This is not a knock on any government not taking care of a

rural municipality. It's that municipalities didn't feel they wanted it at the time but now it's progressing. Out in Lark Harbour, York Harbour they're going to have a massive project ready for next year.

When you go on the north shore, I look at the great work done in Meadows, especially with the rink and the ball field in Gillams. We talk many times here about physical activity, and you look at two little small towns – I look at Scott Blanchard and Linda, and his organization in Gillams. They started out back in 2011. They wanted a ball field built because the north shore was always great in softball. Templeton had a great team, both men and women at softball, at the high school.

They wanted one built in Meadows, and they went out and dug the holes and it was 16 feet of mud. So they said the only thing left is to build one in Gillams. The recreation in Gillams started and now they have a field that's regulation size across the province. They even had a provincial tournament there last year.

In the summertime up there, any time of the day there are 70 or 80 kids on the softball field. Everybody wants to have a game of softball. If you want to talk about recreation, that is one example of the great work that the Recreation Committee in Gillams has done.

If you look in Meadows, Jamie Brake and the Recreation Committee built that arena over there. They got government funding, federal and provincial, and the town put a lot of money into it. They have ball hockey programs in the summertime with over 70 kids. Wintertime, they have so much demand that they have a schedule set up. That's how much demand they have for that outdoor rink for the work they did.

I go down to Cox's Cove and the recreation committee keeping up the stadium. They keep physical activity for the kids. That's the great work that's done in rural Newfoundland and Labrador with the help of government, federal and provincial, the town councils, and I would be remiss if I didn't bring up the great volunteers, who I'm sure are not just in Humber - Bay of Islands, but in every district here that takes care of the youth in their area.

I see my time is up. I thank you for the opportunity for having a few words.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

**MR. BRAGG:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and it's a great opportunity to speak today to talk about the Government Services Committee.

We just went through Estimates a couple of weeks ago. I had the opportunity to sit on this side taking the questions, on the other side as well in the Committee listening to the questions. It's a great opportunity for people to find out about how our departments work, where we spend our money. I think the questions were well answered. Well questioned, well answered and well received overall. So it's a great opportunity to speak again, Madam Speaker, about my department today.

Before I start, almost everybody, and I guess this is one for the Minister of Health. I would remind everybody, this is a great opportunity to make an appointment to get your flu shot. I was lucky enough on the weekend that my daughter got a flu shot for me. I'm not going to lie to anybody, I'm not a lover of needles. The pictures on the Facebook page doesn't really show the end result of after the needle went in.

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

**MR. BRAGG:** Yeah, I'm a bit of a sook. You can torment me. I'm a bit of a sook when it comes to a needle, but it's painless. It's well worth the time that it takes, make your appointment, get out and get your flu needle.

On that, Madam Speaker, I can move on into my department. My department is a big department. The hon. Member for Humber - Bay of Islands just mentioned about the large department – it is a large department. It's a big department. It incorporates the municipal infrastructure, as well as our highways, our roads, our marine services, our provincial airports, buildings design, tendering and contracts. We manage the 511 and

we also have the highway traffic cameras. But through all that, it's not a department that you're going to spend much time twiddling your thumbs wondering what's next, because there's always something next. It's a challenge that I look forward to, to be honest.

My first challenge, and one of my top notes here, I was sworn into office – it may have been the 19th of August, and two days later we had a ferry strike. The hon. Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island can attest to this. When you have a disruption in the ferry service and you have 2,000 to 3,000 people in your district that are affected by this, you talk about services. You imagine going from a service where you could get on the ferry at 7 in the morning and get off at 7 in the evening, to a ferry service where you went across in the morning and came back in the evening. It made such a difference to the people. People were upset, but they were very understanding. They respected the captains' right to strike. They respected the right to follow the rules and protocols. During all that, don't forget, we were dealing with the COVID in which people couldn't freely go around. They had to stay in their vehicle.

Then we go from the strike, which I think lasted close on eight weeks, Madam Speaker, which was eight weeks that the people of Fogo Island, Change Islands, Bell Island, St. Brendan's, Long Island and Ramea felt that pain, to tomorrow or the next day, it's going to snow and you're going to hear people get all upset because the snow wasn't cleared; we didn't get it off the road as fast as it fell.

I'm just going to ask people, you have to have patience. Take your time. There's really no rush. What's the old saying? There's not a minute gone out of tomorrow yet. So don't be all upset because you have to slow down behind a snow plow this year. Don't be all upset because the ferry service is a little behind schedule. You know the old saying, what is it? Time and tide waits for no man. That maybe true, but you have to wait for this service.

I'm a big part in this department; we provide a great service. We'll be the ones that'll be on the highways from 5 o'clock in the morning – some areas we have 24-hour snow clearing, Madam Speaker, 24-hour snow clearing. The same as we

did in the past from Rocky Harbour to Stephenville, 24-hour snow clearing. Then we got from Grand Falls to Gander, 24-hour snow clearing; from Clarenville into the city area; and it goes out to Route 75, Carbonear way – can someone help me with that? I forget the name of that.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Veterans' Memorial.

**MR. BRAGG:** Veterans' Memorial, 24-hour snow clearing. It's the things that we do.

If you ever get the opportunity to meet the people that work in my department, rather than be critical, be congratulatory. Throw them an olive branch, buy them a coffee; give them a little gift. Just say thank you because those men and women that we have that service our roads and service our ferries and service our air ambulance, provide a vital service that too many times people take for granted.

Too many times people are so critical. Where's the plow? How come this is not done? How come that's not done? These people are very responsible people that we have. Some of them worked with us for years; some of them maybe this is their first winter on the snow plow. You have to have a little patience. I give more to the snow plows because I spent 30 years dealing in an industry that we did snow clearing. It may have been a small community but I often think they have the same type of people in the same type of rush and the same type of hurry every single day of the week. So just have a little patience, we'll get it done, and we'll make the roads safe. Drive to the conditions at all times, Madam Speaker.

The highways is the biggest thing because the highways go – except for the Member for Torngat who may be able to correct me, I'm not sure if we have a snow plow operator in Torngat, maybe a municipal one but I know there's certainly not a road going in there.

I do know the Trans-Labrador Highway, I had a chance to drive that this summer, Madam Speaker, and the work that's going on there. Lots of times we say a bridge is slowing us down or roadwork is slowing us down. When it's done, we see the results, the safe roads that we generate that are in this province. That is

from 1949 right until today and will continue right on through, I guess until the end of time, until Newfoundland is no longer Newfoundland. It's the opportunity to get out, you should get out and visit the province and see what we have in our areas.

This year, we're putting 62 new plows on the highway. That's good news throughout this province. We're going to replace some aging fleet in this province. We're putting 62 new plows throughout this province. Some Members are putting their hand up: Can I have one? I'm not sure. Go trick-or-treating; maybe you might get a candy. I'm not sure we can give you a plow over there.

The thing is, it's 62 throughout, I can only guess, I'm going to say of 62, we probably have 662 plows throughout the province. The most we do on the Island portion of the province are done by our own workers. There's about 90 per cent contracted out in the Big Land, in Labrador. We're there; we're committed. Our stocks are in place. Today, I started getting my first report on equipment availability. I know we're there.

I know there are questions going to come at me in the coming weeks, days, months – the media – about where's the plow, didn't see the plow. We have a thing called the Plow Tracker. You can track any plow anywhere in this province and see the last couple or three hours where the plow went to. If you're going to get out, we have the highway cameras. The highway cameras – you can refer to our webpage – we're dotted throughout this province; most of our major routes, we have covered with highway cameras.

I guess I'm spending a lot of time on the highway because it's where a lot of questions are going to come from. It's where the questions come from in the House, from potholes to brush cutting. The hon. Member for Harbour Main mentioned brush cutting today. One moose accident because brush is not cut is too many, but we don't have the ability to clear it all at the same time. We have to have a formula in which we follow through and keep going. I'm thinking, brush cutting, every six, seven years you need to redo what you had done.

But if you had the opportunity to drive the Trans-Canada Highway, brush cutting is

probably the best now along the Trans-Canada as you've ever seen it in your life. This summer I drove from one end of the province to the other and I can't think of anywhere where brush cutting now has become a real danger close to the roads. In some cases, it's growing up, so it's a big part of what we do and it's ongoing all the time.

The other thing we do, Madam Speaker, is our buildings, our schools, our hospitals, our public buildings – Confederation Building, Government House. There are so many buildings in this province. We have a staff of somewhere around 1,600 to 1,800 people that work in the department. We have a big staff. There's a bigger staff now because – again, I go back to the plow operators – you get people that are called back for the winter operation, Madam Speaker.

It's a great opportunity to – like I said before, take a chance. If you get up in this House to speak, speak about the operators in your district, the people. I look at some of our Members from the centre of the city, you may not have highway operators, but you will use these people if you travel outside the city. Thank your municipal workers because these are the people that are getting you around and get out the fire trucks and ambulance when you need it in an emergency.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm going to move from the highways. I shifted a little bit, I talked about the ferries.

Let's talk about air ambulances for a moment. We have a fleet of air ambulances that we maintain in this province. Now, the Department of Health will decide where these flights are located and where the crews come from but our responsibility, Madam Speaker, is that these air ambulances are ready and able to meet the needs of anybody where there's an emergency in this province. That's a big responsibility, and I thank the people who do these air ambulances and the pilots and the staff that go about it.

Then we have our water bomber fleet. Everybody might think the water bomber fleet is all with the forestry and forest fires. They will be the ones who will tell us where they need to be dispatched, when they need to be dispatched,

but we are the department that keeps these flights in the air when they need to be; well maintained and positioned where they need to be given the time of the year. I'm thinking right now most of these are probably tucked away in a hangar waiting for the spring season to start. That's another big part of what we do, Madam Speaker.

The other side of this is not only the transportation side, it's the infrastructure. The Member opposite talked about municipal infrastructure. I spent 29 years in a municipality talking about municipal infrastructure, dealing with the towns across the province. I spent, I think it was six or eight years on the Municipal Administrators Association.

We should talk about infrastructure, there we're talking about water and sewer, the basics – clean and safe drinking water. You would have heard me in my last portfolio talking about boil water advisories and how on any given day there are close on 200 boil water advisories in this province, Madam Speaker. We alone, as a government, cannot fix the 200. We need a commitment from the people in the towns that are there.

We need the applications to come in. Applications are open right now for ICIP and MCW. ICIP is our funding and MCW is our capital works funding. Towns need to get their applications in. I think it's open until the 14th of November. I'm looking for some assistance from –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** The 13th.

**MR. BRAGG:** The 13th, I'm sorry. The 13th of November, applications are open for.

Last week when I checked, the number of applications for this year were so much lower than last year. We only had, I think it was about 40 applications. Last year we had over 300. For everybody here who is sitting in this House as an MHA, I encourage you to reach out to your municipalities, your local service districts, ask them if they're interested in applying and encourage them to get their application in before the 13th of November. Because if they don't get their application in, Madam Speaker, we can't help address their needs.

There's a pot of money there that we're going to allocate again this year. The number eludes me right now, but I think it was \$60 million, maybe, went out last year to municipalities in this province. That was only our share, then there's the federal share and the municipal share.

It gets up close to \$100 million worth of work that happens in this province for municipalities. It may be a ball field, it may be, like I said, an upgrade to water treatment, roads – roads are very important. Most people don't see the water and sewer. They don't see the lift stations. They don't see anything that's below the surface.

The vast majority of the money that's spent in your municipalities goes beneath the surface. It's the infrastructure that's needed to collect and give the water and sewer. You collect the sewer and you give the water to the residents and provide the firefighting needs with hydrants. So that's very basic, but it's a lot of need.

You'd be surprised at the number of municipalities and local service districts and unincorporated areas out there right now that are still on well and septic. Now, I'm not down on well and septic at all, because if you have a safe, clean drinking water source, excellent, but a lot of people don't have that.

I know a place out on Fogo Island, there's a little point, Hewitt's Point, that you wonder why a gull would pitch there, but we did years ago. The same as Greenspond, it is solid rock. It's blast. You do not need a shovel on Hewitt's Point, you need dynamite. Those people need clean drinking water, and right now there's an application in. So I thank the town for that, because it needs to be done. There are probably 30 houses on that point. Again, when they settled there years ago, the main reason is you didn't have to walk too far from your fishing boat to get to your house.

The challenge today is figuring out how to weave a waterline out through these houses, because many of them have drilled wells in which, and you guessed it, what they would have gotten is salt water. Salt water, of course, is not even good to brush your teeth in. You can't wash your clothes in it. It's okay to flush the toilet and maybe get a shower, but not good on any given day, let's just put it that way. If you

ever fell in salt water, you know what it is. So these people need safe and clean drinking water, and the Town of Fogo has taken the initiative to fulfill that need.

When I think about Fogo, again, their infrastructure now is a new town hall. Their current building, like many of the towns in this province, would've been built on a JCP project from years ago, which was so much built this year, so much next year and then the few years after that. There have been some beautiful buildings built, but many of these buildings were built 40, 50 years ago and need to be replaced.

That's what we can do in our department. We can help each individual MHA here enhance their district. I don't think there's any district here – and I'll look around this room and someone could challenge me – that is not qualified for Capital Works funding for the last couple of years that is much needed for their towns.

I'm just thinking off the top of my head. If you drive through almost anywhere; Corner Brook last year, a new aqua centre. Then there was – I'm just throwing stuff out – the hospital in Springdale that we got done. That's right. I'm forgetting the hospitals and long-term care facilities.

A new hospital in Springdale, replacing one of the oldest cottage hospitals. I'm actually the Member that's proud of the oldest cottage hospital now, Brookfield; Dr. Y. K. Jeon it's been dubbed. It's the oldest cottage hospital in the province. I challenge anybody here to find one older, but I've been told that's the oldest cottage hospital. In Springdale we updated the older hospital. I had the opportunity to tour the new hospital, and toured it with the people that are going to use it and they're so excited about that.

Long-term care facilities; a brand new one opened up in Corner Brook. If there was ever a place you can't wait to get into – and I hope we all live old enough that we can enjoy one of these facilities. State of the art, there's nothing else to call it. I visited the one in Gander. The old one, Bonnews Lodge out my way, there are two people in a small room not big enough to put two puppy dogs in, but we have two people

in these rooms. The new hospital has beautiful rooms.

The lift, you have a lot of people getting into this who hurt their backs and that sort of thing. The lifts in the hospital are amazing. You take someone out in the sling, put them down in their chair and get them where you can wheel them in. You don't have to lift them back out to get their bath or their shower. That is what we need. That's the commitment we need.

I guess the other thing – and people would see it if you drive Prince Philip Parkway right now – they're starting the new parking garage, which is going to be part of the new mental health facility. Taking the Waterford out of this area, taking the stigma away from mental health is something that everybody in this House should be proud of because every one of us are a part of seeing that a reality. We all sit around this Table. I may sit on the government side and you may sit in Opposition, but we are all a part of the people who sit in this great House who will make mental health care better for the people of this province, and not only the people of the province.

Last week, or two weeks ago, I was lucky enough to go into Labrador. We had a sod-turning event in Labrador; a new wing going on the hospital up there. Six beds might not sound like much, but if you're six families that had your loved one here in St. John's or out in Corner Brook, now you're in Labrador and you're lucky enough to have some in Goose Bay as a facility that can take six members, and family can go to.

I see, Madam Speaker, my time is running out and I had so much to do. I guess our department has so much to give. I'll close on this note, as I started, thank the men and women who serve this province in the capacity they do to keep our roads safe, they keep our airlines flying, keep our airports going. Madam Speaker, do you know what? If we never get a chance to say – I'm out of time.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's always an honour to stand in this House and talk. I had the honour of taking part in two different sets of Estimates and watching some others and listening in, specifically, on Transportation and Infrastructure and Finance.

First off, I would be remiss if I didn't thank everyone who works in those departments for all the hard work that they did in order to get this budget in place and the work associated with Estimates.

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

**MR. PARROTT:** Certainly, given COVID times it made their jobs much harder and much more stressful, I guess, with a transition in government.

Madam Speaker, in my district, we have all the same problems as every district in Newfoundland. I think about roads and I think about the TCH and rural roads. It's okay to say that we've put down a lot, but we got a long ways to go.

One of the best examples I can give is the Town of Terra Nova. We've been working hard with the minister and his department to try and get some pavement to the point where we went down and actually supplied the coordinates on a map for the sections of pavement that we thought should be replaced. The response we got from the department was: We can't pave but we will tear up the existing pavement and maintain it as a dirt road. Now, I got to tell you, if that's where we're heading in this province, we're in an awful bad spot. We've got students that come up out of there to go to school in Glovertown Academy, we've got people who commute to work and we got people who commute for groceries and other requirements.

The unfortunate part about a lot of rural Newfoundland is that, based on populations, some of these communities don't necessarily meet the standards. The other thing we don't look at – and a good example is St. Brendan's and Terra Nova is another good example – while

some of these communities may only have 90 people there in the wintertime. In the summertime, there are 250, 300 or 400 people even, they become communities and they pay taxes and they do all of the things that everyone else does. The reality of it is that their safety ought to be as important in the summer as it is in the winter. So I would urge the department to have a stronger look at how they maintain some of these roads and what the plan is going forward.

In Question Period, the minister made a comment about the award of contracts. Nobody ever suggested that the early bid process was a bad thing. What is suggested is that the management of how these bids are put out needs to be looked at. The example I'll give you is that if you have one company who is the low bidder – and I would argue that the safety of the commuting public is what should be most important. So our highways ought to be safe. I would argue that they don't replace highways because they're safe and because they're in good condition. They're replaced because they need replacement and the people who drive on them are in jeopardy. If that's the case, then the scoring shouldn't be simply based on price.

If we get a glut of work by one contractor who can't fulfill his obligation – and a good example of that is the Trans-Labrador Highway. We can't afford to have a year delay on a highway. It's great that the Trans-Labrador Highway is getting done. As a Newfoundlander and Labradorian who was born in Labrador, I love Labrador and I think it's great that we have a highway going through there, but the delays are unacceptable, to be quite frank.

If you look at the smaller communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, they feel the same way. Understanding the class of roads, the Class 1, 2 and 3, the people that live in these communities, they're in jeopardy when they drive out over some of these roads. Believe me when I say, they're in jeopardy.

We spend an exorbitant amount of money doing work overs. We put cold patch down in the middle of the summer – which I would argue doesn't happen anywhere else in North America – because hot patch isn't available. It's further than 50 kilometres away was the answer I was



given. Well, I can tell you, we're probably better off driving 50 kilometres and getting hot patch to fix these holes, than we are fixing them with cold patch. Because if we fix them once and we fix them right, we won't have to go back three times during a summer because of washouts for Class A that isn't holding up.

That all boils down to management and safety, that's the reality of it. The delays in these contracts for roads getting done, as the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island said this morning, quite frankly, it's unacceptable. At the end of the day, there are plenty of paving companies here, and the work needs to happen. The excuses such as no liquid asphalt is just totally unacceptable. We have multiple liquid asphalt plants on the Island, all of which have the capability of doing polymer. It's strictly the choice of the contractor whether or not to utilize them. We have never, this summer, run out of liquid asphalt, contrary to what the government would make you believe.

Our ferry systems, and the minister alluded to the fact that when he came in, he came in to a ferry strike and it was a tough situation. The ferries, obviously, affects people on this Island in ways that most of us don't understand, but, again, the ferry systems can probably be managed a little better.

When you look at a tourism standpoint and there's no additional runs in the summer or peak season and they maintain the same amount of runs in the winter, it just doesn't make sense. People are trying to get back and forth for work. They're trying to get back and forth for goods and services. The addition of ferry runs in the summer just makes good sense from a tourism standpoint and it is obviously an industry that we need to expand.

We talk about mechanics and I asked some questions on mechanics. We're currently 25 mechanics short in the province.

**MR. BRAGG:** Eighteen.

**MR. PARROTT:** We hired seven yesterday, apparently; 25 mechanics short.

The problem with our mechanics with Transportation and Infrastructure is not that

they're not out there. We hire these people at \$25, give or take, and they max out at \$27. Hydro hires the same mechanic for \$39 an hour, so you have to think about where they're going to go. We're hiring people, we're training them. They're getting a little bit of experience and they're going off to another department within government, which makes no sense. It doesn't put us in a situation where we can retain people. There are simple fixes to stuff like that.

We talk about infrastructure and the amount of buildings that we've built. We've asked questions on the mental health facility, and I'll still say, the mental health facility, as an example, there was a bid that came in and we're not clear on all the answers, \$40 million less and built a year quicker. The first thing that jumps out at me is the year quicker because we are in a mental health crisis, make no mistake about it. As good as we may or may not have done with mental health for initial visits, for follow-up visits and acute care, I don't think that we're doing very well. This building could certainly be used a year sooner, there's no question.

Then we look at the \$40 million, and \$40 million could build another school or the infrastructure get fixed. The things that it could do would be astronomical, certainly in COVID times, after we bottomed out on the purse and we're out of money.

I sat here one day, and it's kind of funny, the minister looked across and he yelled out the company's from Spain, the company's from Spain. He said that because he knows where I stand on Newfoundland first.

**MR. BRAGG:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

**MR. BRAGG:** I challenge the Member to find in *Hansard* where I said the company's from Spain. I challenge the Member to do it. It's wrong. It's misleading and it's wrong.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** I'll retract the statement, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** Somebody from the opposite side chanted that the company was from Spain. Are you okay with it? I didn't indicate it was the minister, to be quite frank. Anyhow, all of that aside, there is a bit of a geography lesson to be learned here because the main contractor for the building is from Australia. The difference between Spain and Australia is quite a distance, but I'll remind the government that neither of those countries are in Canada.

The mental health facility to me is something that should be important to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The simple fact that it could have been done a year quicker is the most important point of that whole scenario; \$40 million is substantial; it could've done a lot. But one year sooner, when people are in distress, is a huge deal. Make no mistake about it.

We talk about all kinds of different things with public procurement and Newfoundland first –

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

**MR. PARROTT:** Madam Speaker, I can't hear anything here.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Continue.

**MR. PARROTT:** Let's go to public procurement, Newfoundland first. We've heard lots on that and we've seen the Premier stand up out in Corner Brook and rave about 85 per cent. We've seen the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure's mathematics, from 95 down to 90 mysteriously over a two-week period, which was an answer that would just put him in a place that made him sound good. The bottom line is if there's one person from away working here when work could be done by a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, that's one too many.

As I've said in the past, if you talk to somebody from Newfoundland who is unemployed, in a situation where somebody from away is working, that individual is having a hard time

putting food on his table. Period. Cut and dry. There's no other alternative to it.

We should be trying to find a way not to buy water from Ottawa, not to buy soap from China. Those are simple things. If we can do things here, there's a lot of hand soap and water bottled in Newfoundland and we should be looking at it. It's a path forward and it helps us all out. If we put Newfoundlanders and Labradorians first, then this government will succeed. It's time that we do that.

The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse aux Clair made a statement about the Premier saying we're at base camp. I strongly disagree. We're not at base camp. Again, something I've said in the House in the past is that anyone can climb a mountain. Mountains don't determine who you are. I would say that we're in the deepest valley that this province has ever been in and base camp is quite a ways away. We need to find a way to navigate our way through this valley and get to base camp and then decide whether or not we're going to climb the mountain. But we're not at base camp, we're in trouble; we're in a bad spot.

You listen to people talk about diversification. The other night I sat down and I was thinking: What do we have here, economically? The reality of it is we have a fishery, we have forestry, we have agriculture, we have farming, we have mining, we have offshore oil and gas, we have a refinery, a pulp and paper mill, renewable energy, an advanced tech sector, a tourism sector, all things – and I probably left quite a few out – which make us pretty diverse. What we don't have for a lot of those is secondary processing. So the reality of it is this is a province that has it all, but what I see is it's a government that hasn't done anything with it. We need to start focusing on looking after the businesses we have, versus looking for other ways to diversify right now.

I'll go back to Transportation and Infrastructure, and we talk about water bombers and air ambulance and stuff. When we look at air ambulance, we have an air ambulance system that is obviously supported by 103 Search and Rescue for the coast of Labrador and other rural areas. We probably have a need to start looking at landing strips and the ability to land in remote

areas. We have Nain with an inability to land at night and other coastal areas in Labrador. So while we do have an air ambulance system, it does not service all of Newfoundland and Labrador. It leaves a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador at a very strong disadvantage.

We currently have one water bomber out of service and the reality of that bomber ever coming back into service is pretty limited, I would think, which is obviously a government decision. I would suggest that the water bomber goes to the College of the North Atlantic in Gander and we see what they can do with it, if it's from a cost-savings standpoint.

The minister talked about the ICIP and the multi-year capital works and clean water. Clean water, I would agree with him, is a very, very important part of every community in this province and it needs to be a focus for this government. It needs to be a focus for the communities and there needs to be a way to make that work.

Another big thing that I would like to talk about is the LIRA. We have families that are in jeopardy. We've heard a couple of Members talked about these locked-in pensions and their inability to access them. Right now, there are people not knowing where they're going to get money for their next mortgage payment and they don't know where they're going to get money for groceries.

These locked-in pensions aren't something they want to access. Nobody wants to jeopardize their future, but people need to get access to that. I understand that there has to be rules and regulations surrounding how they get access to that, the amount that they get access to. I understand that the actuaries have concerns about the amount of money taken out, and I would suggest that actuaries can probably give you a pretty solid number with projections to say how much money can be accessed safely from each one these pensions.

These pensions are federally and provincially regulated and the reality of it is they know how fluid they are and how much money can come out of them. I really think that it's important that we do it now and not later. Government really

needs to step up and try to get some legislation passed between now and Christmas so people have access to this.

The reality of this is now you can access them through death, and we may never know that somebody died because they didn't have access to money. But you got to understand that mental health is affected by people's financial means and if people cannot access their funds that they have in their own bank accounts, obviously in desperate times, things happen. The mental health crisis that this province faces right now is growing exponentially, I would argue. It's never been so big. So now is the time to try and help these people.

I apologize; I'm a little bit all over the place.

Service NL talked about digital government a little earlier, the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, and the number that was thrown around here was a 1,400 per cent increase since COVID. While that number is impressive and it is great and I think that we need to move forward digitally, people also need to understand that this was something that was forced upon people. It wasn't taken well by everybody and there are a lot of people who were left out.

Our office was inundated with phone calls from people who had no access to Internet. They couldn't get appointments at motor vehicle registration and other places. They couldn't renew their MCP cards. They struggled with it. We got a long way to go before people can actually access all of these services right across the Island.

While I think it's important that we implement these types of services, we also need to understand that not everybody can afford computers and Internet, or not everybody has Internet. It's a very important thing to consider.

I would just like to talk a little tiny bit about my district. In my District of Terra Nova, like I said earlier –

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PARROTT:** – we go through all the same issues as everyone with roads and we've worked well with some of the ministers over there and things have gotten fixed, by all means. But not everything and not everything can be addressed based on money and everything.

The one thing I will say is that the thought that there's a 24-hour snow clearing service in Newfoundland and Labrador is just silliness. It doesn't happen. I had a school in my district last year that was closed for 21 days and one kilometre away from the other side of the school where the bus went in the opposite direction, they missed 12 days and it was a direct result of snow clearing.

When the snowplows don't go out on the road until 6 o'clock in the morning or 5 o'clock in the morning, it's reactive and not proactive. Highways are cleared much quicker when you're proactive versus reactive. I understand it is cost savings, but at the end of the day safety and education has to be a part of that equation.

Madam Speaker, every MHA that gets involved in this wants to do whatever they can for their district, and I'm no different than anyone here. At the end of the day, when we all came in, in 2019, we were left with a Five-Year Provincial Roads Plan. Some districts saw no work to be done and some had a lot to be done.

I would suggest that rural Newfoundland now needs to be the focus. I've seen a substantial amount of blacktop on the TCH, but if you look at some of these Class 2 roads and Class 3 roads, there needs to be a great deal of attention. It needs to happen sooner than later. We have promises of roads being fixed and culverts being replaced for 15 months now and it hasn't happened, not to mention a bridge in Clarenville that nobody wants to take responsibility for.

Oddly enough, the current Justice Minister, the previous minister of Transportation and Works, had indicated to me at one point after there was a legal question asked that there was going to be some movement on this. Just before he switched portfolios I received an email saying that their stand was their stand, there was no movement and there was no legal opinion coming. I would argue that if a municipality poses a legal

question, then government has an obligation to answer that. In this case, they didn't.

We have a bridge that is the pipeline to the Bonavista Peninsula. There are 80,000, 85,000 vehicles a day that goes over it. It is not a municipal bridge. While government would argue it is, it is not. There were two transfer documents, neither mentioned the bridge. One cut off at the end of Clarenville, about 500 metres before you get to the bridge; the other cut off at the intersection of Balbo Drive, again, about 300 metres from the bridge and the bridge is in the middle. The bridge is down to one lane and in major disrepair for four years now. Government vehicles cross over that bridge every day and the government doesn't want to do anything about it. It's time for somebody to step up and have a look at it.

Madam Speaker, I'd just like to thank all the people in my district for their support. At the end of the day, I wouldn't be here without them. I will say, I think we can do a much better job. It is time for government to start putting the people first.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a true pleasure to sit and speak to the budget. Madam Speaker, I would like to say how honoured I am to represent the District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. It is a vibrant and dynamic neighbourhood made up of a wide range of individuals. St. John's East - Quidi Vidi has extreme wealth. You walk through tree-lined streets with pools in the yard, and that is absolutely wonderful to watch and that helps communities, but at the same time St. John's East - Quidi Vidi has abject poverty with people living on those tree-lined streets begging for change.

Within St. John's East - Quidi Vidi you can eat at restaurants from Ethiopian to Chinese, to Korean to Greek, to Indian to North American. In St. John's East - Quidi Vidi you can earn a

degree. You can learn a trade at the Anna Templeton Centre. You can buy clothes that is created by designers featured in France's Fashion Week. St. John's East - Quidi Vidi is a hub that represents a lot of wonderful things happening throughout our province.

St. John's East - Quidi Vidi also has its share of problems. Madam Speaker, just recently I was chatting with some folks who run the community store next door to my home and the lady was checking the beer bottles that were being returned from the folks in our neighbourhood. I said, are you checking those beer bottles for cigarette butts? That's a shame you have to go through and get the cigarette butts out and get the beer caps out. She said no, I'm not looking for that. I'm looking for needles.

This person was looking for needles being disposed of in beer bottles being returned. That is a very sad representation of that neighbourhood, Mr. Speaker, because that's not something we've seen in days gone by. We were concerned about, oh, somebody put a dirty cigarette butt in and we can't recycle that.

Right now, we are talking about a public health issue. That means that individuals who are using these needles are not getting some services they require but they're also putting the individuals who are working for minimum wage in these convenience stores in jeopardy. I think that's a sad reflection on where our society is right now. It suggests to me that perhaps we need to consider how we are allocating a lot of our money and some of the decisions that we are making.

Mr. Speaker, you have probably seen time and time and time again, and, in fact, almost on a daily basis now, my neighbourhoods are on lockdown or my neighbourhoods have police tape around them or my neighbourhoods have police wandering around looking for the people who have perpetrated assaults on individuals. Mr. Speaker, far too often I hear reports of shots fired and neighbourhoods on lockdown. That tells me there's far more going on than we are not having enough roads paved.

Mr. Speaker, my role here is to not only look at St. John's East - Quidi Vidi but to look at the budget in its entirety and try to piece together a

comprehensive overview of many of these other pieces. Certainly, many of us can speak to a lot of these individual pieces and we have enormous expertise in our particular fields of study and our particular areas of interest, but, Mr. Speaker, too often I hear of silos being created and decision-making in one department that's going to have rather extreme effects on other government departments.

I'm going to, over the course of the next 15 minutes, weave together some of those concerns that I see. I'm going to speak a little bit to the macro but also a little bit to the micro of economics.

Before I get there, Mr. Speaker, too often I hear people throw casually around: The economics of something doesn't make sense. I take a little bit of offence to that, but the reason I do so is because the definition of economics is often misconstrued or misunderstood. The definition of economics is simply the study of the allocation of scarce resources to satisfy unlimited wants and needs. Mr. Speaker, I think that this is exactly what we are facing in this House of Assembly and every time we develop a budget. Economics is, in fact, the study of choice. That choice, of course, and those choices that we make are very clearly defined by our priorities and our motivation.

Mr. Speaker, far too often I hear the motivation of budget building to be more of get dollars off the books or make sure that the budget balances. Economics is about far more than that. That talks a lot about money and balancing government policies and a little bit about monetary policy, but there's a movement in economics that goes beyond that. It measures things like well-being and society and how people interact and live with one another. I'd like to talk a little bit about that as I make my way through some of these discussions. For now, let's start with the terms of reference and statement of work for the Premier's Economic Recovery Team.

My first point here, as I look through this, I was rather grateful that the Economic Recovery Team has acknowledged some of the key issues facing us, but in a point of irony I note that none of the individuals on the Economic Recovery

Team are actual economists. So I see that as a little gap, perhaps, in its compilation.

I would like to point out, and I quote: "... the Province has added over \$6.3 billion to its net debt in the past 6 years." In spite of the sound bites and keywords that are often thrown about, we've added \$6.3 billion to our net debt. So our finances have not, essentially, been getting better.

I'll also point out – and this is something that I've spoke about time and time and time again. It says: "Over the past 13 years, the Province has become overly dependent on oil revenues. This reality spells revenue volatility."

Well, Mr. Speaker, a funny story. The first time I called the Auditor General to talk a little bit about some of the things in some of his reports, I jokingly said: Hey, big fan, read all your books. Unfortunately, I'm a very small subsection of the population in that I read and enjoy reading the Auditor General's reports because there's a raft of information there that I will point out, if one was to read the mandate of the Premier's Economic Recovery Team, part 1, a through e, are all activities of the Auditor General. So it would be really good to see, instead of a redundancy there, perhaps just a reference to the Auditor General and some of that individual's recommendations.

In fact, time and time and time again the three measures that the Auditor General uses are vulnerability, flexibility and sustainability. So over the past 13 years, as referenced in this term of statement of work, we have not addressed that vulnerability. In fact, when we talk about vulnerability, vulnerability simply means the extent to which our province is going to be subjected to factors beyond our control.

There are three key factors: one of which is the price of oil, which we have no control over. The next one is the value of the Canadian dollar. Again, we have no control over it. That is influenced by the Bank of Canada, but largely influenced by global economic transactions. Then the third thing is the interest rate, and that is defined by the Bank of Canada. We have no control over that as a provincial parliament.

So we have not done anything to address our vulnerability. That is, of course, very disconcerting. It will be nice to see if perhaps the Economic Recovery Team can offer some suggestions to get around that.

Flexibility and sustainability, I will not go on about that because we have a very limited time here, but our budget is not very flexible because we have committed to enormous outlays of expenditures without any real tangible approach to how we can adjust those had our revenues changed, as we are facing right now with the second huge drop in oil prices in recent memory. That tells us that our economy and our budgets are not particularly sustainable. Another factor that the Auditor General routinely mentions.

Mr. Speaker the other point about a budget is that a budget is a point in time document. It simply looks at what is the current economic situation and says this is how our revenues and expenditures will look for one particular year. The problem is that we are on a continuum of spending, and that continuum of spending transcends all year. So the decisions we make today will have, quite possibly, tremendous effects in future years. Those effects sometimes are a little intangible because we look and say, well, perhaps we want to divest from oil in 2050.

In 2050, I'll be 80, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not quite sure what my cognitive function will be and I may or may not care if we've divested from oil at that point, but I can guarantee you that my nieces and nephews do. I can guarantee you the babies that are born today will be very concerned with how divested from oil we are and what our climate looks like tomorrow.

When we talk about making decisions at a point in time, we often ignore the long-term consequences of many of our short-term decisions. For example, as I go back to the Statement of Work from the Premier's Economic Recovery Team, I note there is nothing that is protected or nothing that is going to be held sacrosanct. As the Premier has said, everything is on the table. That causes me great pains because I have seen some of the devastating effects of past decision.

For example, and this is something that is concerning for, of course, the New Democratic

caucus. We understand the reputation of Dame Greene, and she has not been known for privatizing public services. Well, that does get dollars off the books which goes to the motivation for making decisions about budgets. If our decisions about budgets are get dollars off the books, then it's easy to privatize things like, for example, our cleaning services.

Here's a really tangible example of that. I remember a time when the cleaning services were privatized. Once upon a time, everyone who cleaned our bathrooms and vacuumed our floors and washed our kitchens to help us do our job here in the House of Assembly were unionized and had access to a pension plan and got wage increases associated with the increases negotiated by their union. They had health care, and they knew they were going to have a pension plan.

Fast forward to today, Mr. Speaker, and I will tell you that several of the cleaners here have come to me, begging me to try and ensure that the little bit of money they got from being an essential employee during COVID, when they were most exposed to potential dangers – they were begging me to get that money so they could go to the dentist. I have folks who work here in this building who I have to help get public housing for.

That tells me the decision to privatize our cleaning services definitely got money off the books, but on the other side of it we see people who are living in poverty, people who have to come begging to find a place to live, people who can't afford basic health care. That is a burden on us right now and that is a burden on them right now. That tells me those short-term decisions are making very negative long-term consequences that we must deal with right now.

We need to think a little bit more fulsomely and with a little bit more lead time and with a little bit more of consideration of what will happen in the future before we make rash decisions today. Again, I go back to there is no reference to anything being sacrosanct in the Economic Recovery Team's mandate. That should make us all very concerned for what our society is going to look like five years down the road or ten years down the road, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the other things that are happening in our economy right now; for a while we had our joint COVID response committee. I was getting pretty regular updates on mental health support usage, and the rates of those usages skyrocketed. New programs have been implemented, which is fantastic, but that tells me we have a problem in our society that is being largely unaddressed.

Mr. Speaker, just today I spoke to an individual who runs a food bank, who said they got 20 calls per week pre-COVID and, in fact, pre-end of CERB. Now they are getting 50 calls a day. That tells me the social safety net, for which we are all responsible, has failed and we need to do something about that right now.

(Disturbance.)

**MS. COFFIN:** Perhaps we should also answer the phone.

Mr. Speaker, another thing I have heard, speaking to a one-off from a fire captain. They're going to two suicide calls a day, or a shift; two suicide calls a day. That's a reflection of the desperation in this society, of the loss of hope, of the loss of job prospects. That makes me cry. That hurts my soul. These are the things that we need to address.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through this budget, I'm trying to weave a few of these pieces together now. We go back to our silo, we make decisions in our silos. We know that our children are obese. I'm going to flick over to an Auditor General's report here. The Auditor General's report on Healthy Eating in Schools, well, it shows that Newfoundland and Labrador has about 37 per cent of our youth are overweight or obese.

I'll quote from the Auditor General's report: "Childhood obesity is a precursor to adult health risks such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the highest rates of chronic disease of all Canadian provinces." This is something that will land on the Minister of Health's desk soon enough; however, right now, it's sitting on the Minister of Education's desk. We need both of those ministers to be talking together to ensure the short-term decisions that we make, perhaps investing in healthier food for

schools, will make better health outcomes so that the Health Minister is not going to be dealing with an even larger crisis in chronic disease down the road.

Mr. Speaker, it is vital that we have someone who's taking responsibility for ensuring the dynamic integration of policies across departments.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to touch very, very briefly on Transportation and Infrastructure. We all enjoy a road, a bridge or a nice little bit of pavement and fresh pavement is really lovely to drive quickly on; however, because we are making decisions that will get debt off our books, we are making decisions to invest in P3s. These public-private partnerships are designed to hide debt. It takes the initial cost of building something off government's books so, look, our debt isn't so bad; however, it means that we have to pay out a stream of income into the future. Quite often, that stream of income into the future has an escalation associated with it, quite often tied to the cost of living.

What we see are the people who are building these buildings for us, we promise to pay them maybe 3 per cent per year, if that's what our consumer price index says. So we have this ongoing and escalating payout that's happening, but on the flip side of it, those cleaners that we privatized back in the '90s do not get a cost of living. They only get minimum wage and they get increases in minimum wage when the minimum wage goes up. Sometimes that goes up irregularly and sometimes that goes up at a fraction of the consumer price index. We're giving huge amounts of money away to corporations and we are not taking care of the individuals who have elected us here.

There is a distortion in our decisions, Mr. Speaker, and we need to comprehensively address this. I only regret I only had 20 minutes to do it. I have pages upon pages more to speak about and I'll look for the opportunity to share that with everyone.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**MS. EVANS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every time I start I say I'm probably not going to use up my time and then I end up rushing towards the end. I was also told to start on a positive note and try not to digress down.

Just looking at a positive note, one of the things that was included in the budget was the pre-feasibility for the road to the North Coast, \$200,000. That's a very positive thing and I thank this government. Sometimes, as an MHA on the other side, you have to take what I'm saying, personally. I know sometimes it may feel like an attack, but when I'm voicing the concerns for my district and my constituents, I'm not really trying to attack anyone, I'm just trying to draw attention to the gaps. In all honesty, I don't feel overly positive.

Getting back to why I ran just about a year and a half ago, I ran naively because of the cancellation of the Lewisporte freight ferry. I naively thought that was the biggest problem we were facing on the North Coast. When I got into politics and I started to realize how things worked, I realized, no. The loss of the freight ferry from Lewisporte that was really critical to keeping our food costs and our building material costs down to a reasonable level – not cheap, a reasonable level – that was just basically a symptom – the cancellation. For years, there's been an erosion of services for the North Coast. That's why I get upset. I sometimes get upset – upset covers a lot of emotions, like anger.

When I looked at the big situation, I said, okay, if the Lewisporte ferry is just a symptom and I'm looking at the budgets now – the budget last year and the budget this year – so why was the ferry removed? It was removed to save money. I went to the minister of Transportation, the former one, and I was in talks with the deputy minister of Transportation and the ADM and I was told that we are not carrying the cost of the Lewisporte freight boat anymore because now the roads are built. It was a replacement of service.

As the Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs and Indigenous Affairs and



Reconciliation pointed out, in her district she has a road connection and there are the last few kilometres of pavement. Also, there's a road going over to Lab West, my fellow MHA there for Lab West. The roads are put in and Goose Bay is the hub.

I know it's a proud thing to talk about finalizing the Trans-Labrador Highway and we're almost finished completion of the Trans-Labrador Highway, but I have to tell you, it's alienating, it's frustrating. It makes me mad; it makes me upset. I feel sorry for my people in my district. They're minimized, marginalized by that, because the message that's being sent is: You are not a part of Newfoundland and Labrador.

If the Trans-Labrador Highway is going to be complete, the completion of the paving, then do you know something? We should probably look at becoming a territory or be affiliated with the northern Arctic Indigenous communities, because that's the message that's being sent to my district, my people.

I remember when I was running, the former MHA, who's my cousin, was talking about that. I got so angry and the people in my district get so angry. I think a lot of times it's out of ignorance. When people talk about things, they intend to alienate my six Indigenous communities. I don't think they intend to offend them, but the truth of the matter is, it is. Because if we're not a part of the Trans-Labrador Highway and we're not a part of the completion, then what are we, honestly? Are we just a resource to prop up Northern Peninsula communities by funding them, by having them foster our children that's been taken away through CSSD, honestly?

Do you know something? That's not my words; that's words of people in my district. Successful, effective, professional people who say that to me. That's one of the arguments made to me. It's crazy. What does a road mean to us if the freight board from the Island that helped us maintain some resemblance of food security was able to get our building materials into the North Coast? Well, if that's taken away from us because the roads are built, than I say the obvious commitment of this province is to get us a road.

Talking about food security, last winter the food on the North Coast was really expensive. The shipping costs have gone up four to six times, but do you know something? In my notes here I have one, two, three – I have four question marks by that, because in actual fact the food has increased greatly. I passed around a picture of food costs on the North Coast this winter, and the one thing that resonates with people is pork chops. Everybody knows how expensive pork chops are or how cheap pork chops can be. It's a staple for low-income families, in actual fact, who can't afford beef and those type of commodities. Looking at that, \$28.

It's not even about the cost of the food or the building materials, what's happening now on the North Coast because of the huge costs and the logistics of getting materials to the North Coast, there's not many building materials left that's actually sold even during the summer. If somebody wants to put a porch on their house, they have to go through the huge cost of ordering and getting it shipped in. There's no paint in the stores; very few stores now carry paint, and even things like nails. So it's creating a problem for us.

Last summer with the new ferry, a person that I knew, actually her husband, was wanting a boat. It was his dream boat; he was working on rotation at Voisey's Bay. As an incentive for him to keep going away, they were going to buy this really nice boat with a nice motor. Anyway, last year they went and got it.

Normally, they would just get it delivered to Lewisporte, put on the boat and up. In actual fact, when they bought the boat they were going to ship it. It would cost \$3,500 to get it to the dock in Goose Bay. Any savings they might have had of buying the boat was gone. Also, they couldn't get that boat in Labrador anyway. What they did, they actually bought a used pickup truck. They drove the boat up to Goose Bay and then they sold the truck. That was the way they recovered their costs. That was basically their solution, but not everybody can do that.

When you hear me talking – I was being interviewed one day and I said pick a topic and I'll tell you how we're vulnerable, I'll tell you how we're being marginalized. For example, last

year, when we were talking about the costs, the former minister of Transportation – I don't mean to be picking on him too much – was out doing the scrum. He said they're going to save so much money because the cost of shipping a snowmobile from Lewisporte costs about \$120. Now, I'm a bit loose with the numbers but it was around \$120, what he said. If you ship it from Goose Bay you save \$40.

Do you know what I did? I went out to the scrum and I said you may actually save some money, you save \$80 in shipping, but when you buy the machine on the Island, you save a minimum of \$1,420 off the top. That actually could be more like probably \$2,000, \$3,000. So what's \$80 shipping? That's nothing. That goes with everything – building materials.

Like I said, I'm trying to be positive here and I'm trying to be grateful; \$200,000 is really, really good. That's really good to be put towards a pre-feasibility study, but it's still a pre-feasibility study. When you look at pre-feasibility studies, they don't really mean anything unless the feasibility study accompanies them and then the actual construction happens.

Let me draw attention to the Nain airport. People could die right now. We've been waiting years to get night landing lights on the runway in Nain. When you have a medevac, if it's in Nain, hopefully the weather will be good so you can actually get the patient out in a critical manner. We've had people die on the coast because they couldn't get out in time.

Just looking at that now, they have the feasibility study. So I was wondering, what's the hang up now? What's the plan? Do you know something? This province has the hang up. This province is not approving or not supporting the feasibility study for the Nain airstrip. The federal government is committed to it. They've even offered to increase their cost-share ratio. Now, we can't even get to the feasibility study and it's going to take years, actually, for the airstrip to be built. What I say for my district is if somebody needs to be medevaced and it can't be done in a timely fashion because you can't actually get the medevac in, you might actually – if it's after dark, who's responsible for that?

The one thing I also like to point out about the feasibility study is let's look at the dollars now. I sit here in the House and I hear repeated over and over and will read in *Hansard*, the former minister of Transportation – because I'm dealing with transportation issues, that's the only reason why I'm picking on the former minister of Transportation. Once I get to the other ones, I'll pick on you, too.

I heard, and we can go back in *Hansard*, we'll say the former minister spent \$9 million for paving in his district. And he's not contesting it, so it's probably more than \$9 million. The thing about it is if you can spend that money on paving in one district, you can afford to put up some money for a feasibility study so that people don't die in Nain while they're waiting to be medevaced out. A heart attack, a stroke, a snowmobile accident, a fire, these are all things that rely on medevac.

COVID-19, well, how wonderful are we doing? Just because the virus is not in our communities. Look at my district, the health care. The thing about it is if somebody gets sick – and another thing that really bothered me is I was told by the CEO of Labrador-Grenfell well, we have a plan. I said, what's your plan? She said, we'll medevac them to Goose Bay. It's only in Nain that they have two ventilators. The rest of the North Coast communities have no ventilators. If we get somebody that really gets a bad infection, the thing about it is there are no ventilators.

Now, the capacity of the clinics is one to two people. So if you have a family of seven, a family of five, maybe a few more relatives, you could have 10 to 15 to 20 to 30 people sick, so what are you doing to do with them? The CEO said we'll medevac them to Goose Bay.

The Minister Responsible of Labrador Affairs was talking about how we were all getting together as MHAs. We were doing good; all our Labrador MHAs: the Member for Labrador West, the Member for Lake Melville and the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, we were there with the MP, we even used to have the premier on sometimes. We're all there talking and discussing COVID and then we had a guest speaker from Labrador-Grenfell. Do you know what they said the solution was because Labrador didn't have an ICU? If somebody gets

critically sick they're going to medevac them to St. Anthony or to St. John's.

So my people are allowed to get sick, sick, sick, sick, then they're going to medevac them. If the weather is good, we can get them out. If it's not dark in Nain, we can get them out. We're going to medevac them to Goose Bay. They're going to try to stabilize them in Goose Bay, which takes time, then if they can, depending on the time of getting the actual medical services available, we're going to medevac them on further. So do you know who's going to die?

Time actually will result in people dying if COVID hits the North Coast, because, in actual fact, we go back to when the roads were being put in, the Trans-Labrador Highway to join all of Labrador, we weren't included. Why weren't we included? Why weren't we included? We got Voisey's Bay; we got millions of dollars we're contributing. Voisey's Bay needed that road, but the problem was we were just six Indigenous communities, and the thing about it is we trusted the government to help us. At the end of the day, that trust is gone – that trust is gone. The Joey days are over in the North Coast. The Joey days are gone. It's very, very important for people to realize that.

Now, let's talk a little bit about medical. I already mentioned COVID. Do you know what happens in my district? I'm talking about the budget. We had to actually fly people on a skedevac. A skedevac is when you have to go for your cancer treatments or you're sick and you think you got cancer and the doctor thinks you got cancer. You get on a plane on the North Coast and you fly to Goose Bay and then you might have to fly somewhere else. That's called a medevac.

Do you want to know something? Patients are prioritized and the bottom of the line are people who need physio. If you had your knee replaced or your hip replaced or you fell down and you beat up your body and you need physio to actually get back on track so you can work, so you can have a productive life, you're at the bottom of the barrel to get on that flight and you normally don't get on that flight.

We have people who have eye appointments. They're the second ones cancelled. They're the

bottom of the barrel. Eye health – didn't we learn anything? Don't we know anything about eye health? Eye health is important for your vision, very, very important. But do you know something? You're on the bottom of the barrel. Dental – what about dental health? Dental hygiene can be tied to your heart conditions. It can be tied to a lot of different things.

Those three things – actually I'm going to get messages pretty soon, I left my phone home, but these three things are low priority.

I'm going to use an example now of how hard it is to get dental treatment on the North Coast. If I asked this question in the House people would stand up and say a dentist does actually travel into Labrador, does travel up to the North Coast, every so many months, but do you want to know something? If you live in any of the communities it's very difficult to get a dental appointment.

The Minister of Finance for the Nunatsiavut Government was telling me when I was up in Nain, he's over a year trying to get a dental appointment. Do you know how he got his dental appointment? He went to Postville, our smallest community to meet with the First Minister and the dentist was actually – he was able to get through his appointments. He didn't have very many appointments that day and he fit the Minister of Finance in. He said: Do you know something? I'm going to find out the next time that dentist is travelling into Postville, I'm going to try and make an appointment, that's how difficult it is.

You can't get an appointment in Goose Bay. Now, what happens if the weather is bad? I already told you how difficult it is. If the weather is bad and you have an appointment, it might be for an MRI. It might be for – I don't know what the – it may be actually for chemo, but the problem is, when the weather is bad your appointment is cancelled. A lot of these people then go back on the wait-list for another three months, another four months. It's only the chemo people that actually are moved up.

I've lost relatives. My sister-in-law passed away in August a couple of years ago. She had a lot of problems. She was complaining, she was misdiagnosed, misdiagnosed. In February of one

year, she finally got properly diagnosed. She had ovarian cancer, family history. How do you miss that? That was Easter and in August we buried her.

The problem is missed appointments are unacceptable. You guys here are panicking about COVID, oh my goodness, it's setting back our medical appointments, our diagnoses, our treatment; people might die. Well, do you know something? On the North Coast, people have died and people are continuing to die. People are continuing to be undiagnosed with cancer; people are actually being mistreated. I have to say, when you go in, it depends on which doctor you get, too. That does make a big difference.

It's not all what I wanted to talk about, but I think I made my point. This budget is important, but, at the end of the day, if our problems are not addressed over the last 20, 30 years, we are having problems and we need to be treated fairly. So when I get up there and I'm talking to you and it sounds like I'm attacking you, I'm not attacking you, I'm attacking this government, including this side as well. Because, at the end of the day, systemic racism is alive and well; institutional racism is alive and well. The problem is it's able to foster because of the lack of knowledge. When people don't impart the right knowledge, it continues to grow. What happens is six Indigenous communities on the North Coast are getting further and further behind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I apologize for the delay.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak to Estimates again today. I have a couple of specific items that would fall under this set of Estimates that I did want to bring up. First of all, I just want to sort of comment on some of the points, or the general point that was being made by my colleague from – the Leader of the NDP.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**MR. LANE:** Yeah, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, there you go, when she was speaking about the whole idea of everything being on the table and her concern for everything being on the table. I think she was quoting the Premier when he talked about everything was on the table.

I understand the concerns that she has, but I guess it's all a matter of perspective and how you look at it. I would be concerned the other way if everything wasn't on the table, because I believe that everything does belong on the table.

When we say everything is on the table, I think you need to clarify what that means, because we can look at everything on the table, meaning everything is on the table subject to being cut. That's one way you could look at it, but I just look at it from the perspective of everything being on the table to be examined which may mean cut, may mean enhanced, may mean status quo.

I don't have any problem with the whole concept of putting everything on the table from the perspective of examining everything; examining what we're doing, how we're doing it, what are the outcomes we need to achieve, are we achieving those outcomes and is there a way we can achieve those outcomes. If we're not achieving them, how do we. If we are, can we do it better, can we do it faster, can we do it more efficiently and can we do it more cost effectively. That's kind of how I look at it.

I understand, as I said here yesterday, I get it. Everybody has needs. There are very legitimate needs. I listened to my colleague from Torngat and very passionate about her district. I commend her for it. I think she's a wonderful Member, by the way, I really do. She speaks very eloquently and she speaks to the issues in her district. I have a lot of respect for her.

Every district has needs and every district has wants, but we have to put these conversations – once again, I just want to say it for the record, we have to keep in the back of our minds \$15-plus-billion deficit, borrowing over \$2 billion, I think \$3 billion this year. We already borrowed almost \$2 billion, didn't we? Now we're going

to borrow another billion. That's \$3 billion this year.

We talked about 2022 was going to be when we had a break-even, if you will, on the budget. Now that's thrown out the window. That's not even considering Muskrat Falls, the rate mitigation and everything associated to that, plus all the impacts of COVID-19 and of our economy which has tanked in many areas and the price of oil and everything else. We have to continue to think about these things as we go through this process.

Yes, everything has to be on the table – I agree 100 per cent – for review. Hopefully, along the way we're going to improve a lot of things. Hopefully, we're going to find better ways of doing things with better outcomes. At the end of the day, when we're talking about services, people require services. As long as they are receiving the services they require, how they receive those services, how we deliver those services, that really should be what it's about. What is it the people need versus what people want? That's another discussion, but what is it that people absolutely need and what is the best way to deliver on those needs, bearing in mind our fiscal capacity to deal with these things.

I really do look forward to the report that's going to be done by this task force. It's on economic diversification but it's also on looking at the fiscal situation. I hope it's more successful – I have to throw this in here – than LEAP, because I never heard anything about that after and so on. We've seen these things. We've heard about the Cabinet Committee on Jobs. I don't recall seeing any results or reports coming there. I am looking forward to this particular report to see what becomes of it.

I'm sure there are going to be things that are going to challenge every Member in this House. I'm sure there are. I'm hopeful there are going to be some really good suggestions as well, but I'm sure there are going to be controversial ones as well. I just hope that everybody collectively is willing to go down the road of trying to right this ship. It's not going to be easy and it's not going to be popular in all quarters. There's going to be some pain that's going to have to be shared across the province, in every district, including

mine. I think we all need to get our heads around that.

Anyway, under this particular heading, one of the things that falls under this is Public Procurement Agency. I want to take a few minutes just to talk about that because I can remember when we had the new *Public Procurement Act*, which was brought into the House of Assembly, I don't know, three years ago maybe. I'm just guessing, around two, three years ago.

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

**MR. LANE:** 2017, there you go. I'm told it's 2017, so that's not bad. That's when it was brought in.

I can remember at the time we were all in support of a new *Public Procurement Act*. It was passed unanimously. I also remember at the time the concern that I think Members on the Opposition side – I think we all shared these. It wasn't just me, but it was the NDP and it was the PC Members as well. We had concerns over the fact that it was so broad brushed. It was such a broad piece of legislation and it was severely lacking in details. Of course, all the details would be dealt with in the regulations.

Now, that's not something this government did that's any different, I suppose, than other governments have done in the past. Again, we talk about how things have always been done, and I talked about that when I brought up the issue around us examining agencies, boards and commissions. We don't do it because we never have. It's not the way it's done. I'm saying, it should be the way it's done. We should consider doing it differently.

Well, when you look at this piece of legislation – this was a very, very significant piece of legislation. Again, you put it in context, this piece of legislation –

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at this piece of legislation, the *Public Procurement Act*, this was legislation and is legislation that governs the expenditure of billions of dollars – literally, billions of dollars.

In the same context, when we think about we're scrutinizing the budget and how come you spent a few hundred dollars extra on office supplies, and it's all good to ask these questions, but just think about it. It's a piece of legislation that governs the expenditure of billions of taxpayers' dollars through public procurement and so on. At the time, the concern we had was that everything was left to the regulations. As Members of this House would know, the public may not be up on it – I certainly wasn't up on it until I became a Member of this House – but the regulations are put in place by the minister and I guess approved by the Cabinet before it happens.

We approve the general policy, the act, the general piece of legislation, but all the details of how it would work are left to the minister and the government to put in whatever they want. There's no consultation at that point with any other Members of the House of Assembly. There's no review by us. At some point in time the regulations just come to be. No one notifies us: the new regulations are out, have a look at them. That doesn't happen. At some point in time you go and you look it up maybe and you say, look we have new regulations. It has been done.

In the case of the *Public Procurement Act*, there were no details. I know some of the issues that were raised – and I know I raised it and I know other Members did – was the idea about trying to create more opportunities for local business and local entrepreneurs to be able to bid on and hopefully receive contracts, or if there were opportunities for sole-sourcing and so on that we would have sort of a local-first kind of policy.

It was something that we asked in the act at the time. The government said no, that would be left to the regulations. That's certainly something that we're going to be – that's an important issue and so on.

Now, I don't think it's been addressed in the regulations based on – and I don't have the regulations in front of me, admittedly, but

talking to different people in the business community and people in my district and Donovans and other areas, there's definitely a sense that there's no local preference policy that's there or is being really adhered to.

Now, I would give credit to the former minister of Finance, before he became Minister of Education, he made an announcement where he made some changes to the regulations and it raised the cap, I believe. It was raising the cap for which you did not require a tender. So, in other words, there was more opportunity for smaller purchases and so on where you could do the three-quote thing or even sole-sourced stuff that could give more flexibility for local business to get the contract or for us to buy products from them and so on.

That was a good thing, I'm not knocking that and I applauded him for it at the time. I believe I called in to *Open Line* and publicly acknowledged it and congratulated the government on doing it, because if they do good things then I have no problem saying they're doing good things. The opposite is true as well.

Some of the other things that aren't being done that really need to be done, as far as I'm concerned, is, I know there's an issue, for example, when we talk about contracts and workers coming from the outside and so on. So we need to make sure we button this up to try to get these local benefits agreements in contracts and so on, on the large projects.

I've also heard from contractors who would say, well, the government puts in a great big giant bid package on something and we're not big enough to bid on it. It's just too big for us. If they broke it down into sections, then we could bid on part of it. So if you had a facility and so on, break it down into component parts so that the smaller companies could bid on some of those component parts.

Now, someone is going to say, well, if we do that it might cost us a bit more money. It's cheaper on the government and on the taxpayer to get it all put together into one. Just like they're saying it's cheaper on the government when we do these buying groups, that we buy stuff as the Atlantic provinces, we purchase something together. By putting our purchasing

power together, we're going to save some money on purchases by having all the Atlantic provinces buy a particular product and us to be a part of it.

I understand that it could save some money. I'm not arguing that, but I really believe that there has to be an analysis done to look at this stuff because, yeah, you might save some money on a tender, you might save some money on a contract, you might save some money on a purchase, but are you factoring in what the value is when a local company gets that work?

When you look at the people that are being hired, these are employing our own local people. Those local people are spending their paycheques in our own economy. The owners of those local companies are buying their supplies locally. They're spending their profits in our own province and they're being taxed in our own province, as opposed to seeing the taxes and the salaries and everything else going to the Mainland and benefiting some other province's economy. There's a real financial benefit to that that I don't think is being factored into these decisions.

If we can put in policies to stop this bundling, at least consider stopping bundling, where it makes sense, and breaking down projects into smaller component parts, where it makes sense, to give local companies an advantage to get the work and keep the money in Newfoundland and employ our own and pay taxes in our own province, then I think that's something that needs to be done. I encourage the government to do it.

I would also say when it comes to small items, sole sourcing, like one of my colleagues pointed out this hand sanitizer. I noticed this the other day myself, actually, I was going to bring it up and I didn't. Anyway, I can't even read where it's from here now, but I know it's not from Newfoundland.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** China.

**MR. LANE:** China, is it? Okay. It's from China, okay.

Now, the point is that we got a local company, it was in the news. I think it's the distillery place in Bay Roberts area. Is that who it was?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** The government is making it now.

**MR. LANE:** Well, I know the NLC is making it. Yes, the government is making it. I know that. But in addition to that there was a place, I think it was the one out in Bay Roberts area, the distillery, spirits place, they made rum and stuff, and they were making hand sanitizer, as an example.

This probably might not be part of a tender, but we need to get the mindset in the government employees. Every government employee who's going to purchase anything from a pencil to a coffee, whatever it's going to be, buy it off the local guy. That should be first and foremost. Don't even think about buying sanitizer from Walmart that came from China when we have a local company that's making hand sanitizer.

If it costs an extra few cents more, who cares? It's keeping a company open; it's keeping people employed. They're spending the money in Newfoundland and they're spending their taxes here. The guy who owns Walmart is a billionaire down in the States, Walton family or whatever they are. What are we supporting them for? I can't believe it when you think about it. We're supporting this crowd.

If we need sandwiches or something, go to the local deli. Don't go to Costco somewhere buying sandwich trays. Buy it from the local. It might seem small and maybe frivolous, but it all adds up and it's all employing local Newfoundlanders. It's keeping money in our own province.

I can guarantee you, you're not going to get anything down to Costco that's any better than what they make down to the Georgestown Bakery. I can guarantee you that. If you're having your meetings with your coffee and your bagels and whatever; fantastic stuff. Support local.

There was a movement made by the former minister, now Minister of Education – as I said in the beginning – who made some changes, but

I think more needs to be done under the Procurement Act to support local.

I only have a couple of minutes left, but under the Transportation –

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

**MR. LANE:** I know you're disappointed.

Under Transportation and Infrastructure, I don't have a lot to do with that department, quite frankly, because of the district I represent. I have six ramps, basically, an in ramp and an out ramp in Mount Pearl and Southlands. That's it. So the only issues I have generally are if there's a pothole in the ramp or the ramp isn't cleared or something like that. Sometimes people will call me about Pitts Memorial and Team Gushue because people in my district are using those roads and so on. If there's a pothole, they'll call about that, too.

I don't have a lot and I don't ask much of that department, but I will say that from an infrastructure point of view – and I'm not asking for money now because given where we are, financially, again, I can't go asking for pie in the sky at this stage in the game. But there is going to be some federal stimulus money, I believe, that's going to have to come at some point in time that's going to be looking for shovel-ready projects, so I will put in a plug here. There are a couple of roads and pieces of infrastructure I will put a plug in for in my area. I'm not making apologies for that. It's what I'm here for.

Team Gushue Highway needs to be finished. We were told before, it was just delayed a year because there was an issue with the agricultural land and so on. I went to Estimates and I found out, no, b'y, that's not really the case. There is no money. The money had ran out. The federal program – the pot is empty and there is no new pot. We need that federal money to get that finished.

That doesn't just impact my district, it impacts – actually, the Member from the Southern Shore, Ferryland, I'd say 60 to 70 per cent of what's going down that road, that's where they're headed, out that way. That needs to be done.

The other one, of course, which I'm glad is on the radar, and it's not an immediate need because Galway has slowed down, but we do need that overpass or underpass there by the Irving on the TCH to get people into and out of Galway, people that are heading west. Right now, if you're in the east end and you want to go to Costco, you have to go all the way to Paddys Pond and go over the overpass and come back the other way, or you have to go through Mount Pearl and Southlands. They need to have that piece of infrastructure in place. I certainly hope when there's a shovel-ready project, that's on the list as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we have about five or six minutes left to speak to the Government Services Committee. Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to represent the District of Placentia - St. Mary's and speak here today. I've been sitting in this House now for almost five years. I've sat in the front row, I've sat in the middle row and now I'm up here in the back row and I'm sure the –

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

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Yes, the door. That's right, I sat over here too.

I'm sure the Member for Ferryland can agree with me, without a doubt, this is the best seat in the House. The reason why it's the best seat is because you sit up here and you get to watch everything that goes on in the House of Assembly, you get to hear everything that goes on in the House of Assembly and you really get to think up here in this seat. When I worked as a nurse I used to use my time commuting back and forth to think. Now I use my time up here in this seat to think.

I'm listening to the Members opposite, I'm listening to my colleagues and the independent Member and I'm thinking to myself – I just turned to the Member here to the right – and I said to myself, you know what, it's not all doom



and gloom in this province, people. It really, truly is not. I understand we do have difficulty, there are some problems, but it is not all doom and gloom. There are a lot of positive things, and this government has done a lot of positive things in five years. A lot has been accomplished just this year, despite the challenges that all of us Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are facing and have faced.

We are lucky to be living in Newfoundland and Labrador. I have a daughter who lives in Louisiana. She was out of her house 12 times since March. That's it. We can come and go about with our masks on and we practice the COVID principles and safety. We're pretty safe here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have to thank our team who has kept us safe also. We're lucky to be living in Newfoundland and Labrador and it is not all doom and gloom.

Our public sector workers have worked really hard. They work hard every day to positively impact the lives of our residents. For example, from November of 2017 to March of 2020, I saw first-hand how hard a very small group of public sector workers in Service NL, which is now Digital Government and Service NL, and WorkplaceNL helped me take 23 pieces of legislation through this House of Assembly.

The hours of work that go into a piece of legislation is no easy task and it is often underestimated. It's not that simple when you say put a piece of legislation through the House. I know building accessibility, for example, we've been working on that one for three or four years. It's difficult, and some of this legislation is thick. It's a lot of pages, it's a lot of legislation.

Public safety has been a top priority for this government and, as such, the *Highway Traffic Act* is constantly open in this House of Assembly. It's open because we need to review it and to improve and enhance the safety of our residents here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I know we work daily with stakeholders. This government does work with the public. We work with people who have first-hand experience out in the community. Day in, day out we are working with the public. For example, our RCMP and our RNC officers helped us put some of that legislation with the *Highway Traffic Act*

through this House of Assembly. We used their expertise to bring it forward, Mr. Speaker.

The enhancements to the *Highway Traffic Act* align with numerous changes, and they have been modified over the last several years. I'm going to list a few, just to remind everybody in this House what we've been doing: increased fines and tougher penalties for a number of offences such as impaired driving; amendments regarding excessive speeding, street racing, stunting and move over provisions; a new offence for driving without due care and attention; and the introduction of a one-metre rule for cyclists and pedestrians. We've done that in this House of Assembly.

One group that's very near and dear to my heart, and they are from my district, is the STAND for Hannah foundation. Hannah's friends and family started the STAND for Hannah foundation, an acronym for Standing Together Against Negligent Driving. The group's aim is to educate the public on the dangers of reckless driving and lobby for legislative changes. They have successfully done that.

On July 7, 2016, Hannah Thorne, who was 18 years old at the time, was killed when a driver involved in a street race slammed into her vehicle and into her grandmother's car. Her grandmother was hospitalized. I know Hannah's mom and dad personally, Gail and Levi Thorne, and the changes that we brought forward in this House of Assembly, that this government brought forward to enhance road safety, means a significant amount to that family and to many other families in this province who have been affected by negligent driving.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member's time has expired.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that the report of the Government Services Committee be concurred in.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, Report of Government Services Estimates Committee, carried.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now recess until 6:30 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that this House does now recess until 6:30 p.m.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.