



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume L

FIRST SESSION

Number 59

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Tuesday

May 31, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Before we begin, in the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Ailish Slaney, who is the subject of a Member's statement this afternoon. She is accompanied by her mother Cathy and her father Rodney.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also in the public gallery, I would like to welcome Elijah Gillam, his parents John and Sheri, and the Safianiuk family from Ukraine. They are also joining us this afternoon for a Member's statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: And also joining us today in the public gallery Skye Taylor, the executive director for the Association of Early Childhood Educators and she is also the subject of a Ministerial Statement this afternoon.

Welcome Skye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During Question Period, yesterday, the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture said I was – quote – a little misleading – unquote – when I asked questions about his decision to overrule the Fish Processing Licensing Board on licensing. The minister was not found to be out of order in using that phrase so perhaps I would not be out of order to use the same phrase to describe the information the minister provided in answering my questions yesterday.

The House of Commons Procedure and Practice 2009 said it would amount to contempt to be deliberately attempting to mislead the House and

by the same token refusing to answer a question or provide information or produce papers.

I don't want to say the minister has shown contempt, but I would like to give him the opportunity to produce the paper he cited to contradict the findings in a report of the board. The board wrote in their decision on April 12-14, 2022 that "Overall, the outlook on the snow crab fishery is positive in most areas during the next 4 years and beyond"

The minister wrote in his decision on May 2022 that "the outlook on the snow crab fishery is only projected to remain positive in most areas up to two to four years."

When I challenged the minister on this contradiction, the minister stated, "I wish I had that report at my fingertips. It's on my desk. I would gladly share that with the Member opposite, in which the DFO actually said the next two to four years, but one year being done now puts us down one to three years."

As the Speaker ruled on November 21, 2013, and on other occasions: "If you are reading from a document, you are responsible to table that document. That is the content that is extracted from that document, so you table that document"

If the minister refuses to accept the decision of the board because of a particular report or reports that he is citing, a report or said reports from which he quoted the figures two to four years and then one to three years, then I believe the rules of the House say it is incumbent on him to table the report or reports that he cited to back up his decision.

I ask that the minister be instructed to table the report or reports that he referenced.

Further to this, the minister used the word misleading when I said the board worked over a year on the report, but in fact the board does say this in their report.

I ask that the minister take the opportunity to acknowledge what the board actually wrote and withdraw the term misleading.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture for a response.

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much.

What a great opportunity to get up and respond to what was perceived yesterday as inaccurate information. In my hands today, I have the report of the 2HJ3KLNOP4R Snow Crab Fishery and Survey Summary, of which I have underlined – and this was on my desk yesterday – and it goes on to say: “There have been improvements in most Snow crab assessment divisions in recent years, which are likely to continue in the short-term.”

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

D. BRAGG: “The last four years have shown an overall trend towards warmer and potentially less favourable environmental conditions for future productivity and there are indications that abundance indices of pre-recruits (2-4 years until commercial size) may have peaked.”

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I heard the point of order; I want to hear the response.

D. BRAGG: So this is the actual report that would’ve been presented to the board by DFO, which is what I quoted from yesterday. I brought it into the House today. I’ll gladly table it. I only wish I had made 40 copies so everybody could have one.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: There’s no point of order there. It’s just a difference of interpretation.

Also, I’ll remind Members that point of orders have to be made at the point when they occur.

Thank you.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Terra Nova, Ferryland, Mount Pearl North, Bonavista and Burin - Grand Bank.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to thank and commend two very active community-based volunteers that have brought together a group of like-minded people pulling together to help others.

Alice White and John Gilbert are fondly known in my district and the surrounding areas as the people going around with a yellow dory attached to their car encouraging people to get on board to support the Salvation Army and food banks and to help load the dory.

They have been seen in various parking lots in the surrounding areas from Clarenville to Arnold’s Cove to Bloomfield, and with the increasing price of groceries and the demand at food banks we need to do our best to help people get on board.

They have recently added “on board” to their campaign. These collection bins, currently at 14 various locations and they are adding more daily in businesses, churches and community groups all because they saw a need to help others that are in need. The generosity of these volunteers, their time and community giving has been overwhelming.

Please rise with me in thanking John and Alice for their community initiative. As Anne Frank said best: “No one has ever become poor by giving.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O’DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize and congratulate a group from my district that organized a Strides for Melanoma walk this past Sunday to raise money for the Melanoma Network of Canada. This organization is an organization that depends on donors to allow it to continue to offer programs and services that are so important in educating and supporting patients and families living with melanoma and all types of skin cancers.

May is Melanoma Awareness Month and we all know that awareness and early detection is the key factor in cancer diagnoses. An event such as this is a great way to help promote and spread awareness of melanoma and other cancers. I was honoured to be able to attend such an important function, especially as you know that cancer has impacted each and every family in some way.

Speaker, I ask all Members in this House to join me in congratulating the organizers of Strides for Melanoma fundraiser on such a successful event.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Speaker, in 2010, Linda Ryan was diagnosed with breast cancer. While recovering from treatment, she established Pink Days in Bloom, a high-spirited awareness and fundraising initiative to bring together breast cancer survivors and newly diagnosed individuals.

The group started raising money in support of the Canadian Cancer Society. Pink Days is a movement grounded in the healing power of gardening, their connection to nature and to one another.

Linda has many volunteers helping her raise money for breast cancer research to enable cancer patients from across Newfoundland to travel to St. John's so that they can stay at Daffodil Place while recovering from treatments at no cost.

Linda has been recognized provincially, nationally and internationally, receiving many awards for her volunteer work; plus, the Canadian Cancer Society has given the Pink Days in Bloom its own logo.

The past year, she worked with the Cancer Society to knit socks in aid of Daffodil Place. Socks in the City was a hit, raising spirits and funds to support people fighting cancer during the challenging days of the pandemic.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to recognize Linda Ryan, and thank her for her community work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: It is a privilege, Speaker, to celebrate and publicly recognize the recent achievements of seven-year-old Elijah Gillam of Bonavista.

One rainy day in March, Elijah, with the assistance of his family, launched a hot chocolate fundraiser in support of the Ukrainian people. With the generosity of their community \$2,000 was raised and donated to the World Central Kitchen, helping thousands of displaced Ukrainians as a result of the war.

Elijah, who sings beautifully in church, taps maple trees in his spare time, starred on *Rock Solid Builds*, has yet another achievement to add to his list. Together with his parents, Sheri and Johnny – in attendance – they reached out to extend employment for a Ukrainian family in their Sunset Kitchen cabinet shop. With great fanfare and community support, the Safianiuk family of five will be moving to Bonavista tomorrow.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: It is through such great humanitarian acts, such as these, that we make our mark in the world. Proof was on Sunday past, when Elijah, along with 13 like-minded friends, operated a hot dog and lemonade sale for Ukraine – which I just recently heard netted \$1,300.

I ask Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the outstanding act of kindness of Elijah, his family and friends, and extend a warm welcome to the Safianiuk family to our wonderful province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, today I proudly rise in this hon. House of Assembly to recognize 15-year-old Ailish Slaney of St. Lawrence. The Janeway Children's Hospital has selected Ailish to be the outstanding philanthropist volunteer.

In 2014, when Ailish was seven years old, she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour, medulloblastoma. Her oncologist at the time said she had the attitude of: "Well, let's do this, we have to do what we have to do."

This attitude carries over to volunteerism and fundraising with the help of her family. In 2014, while battling surgery and months of treatment, Ailish started her fundraiser called the Ailish Pancake Breakfast. This effort basically turns her residence into a restaurant for the day and friends and family and the whole community all enjoy a great day celebrating with Ailish.

Ailish's goal is to continue her fundraising efforts for the Janeway. She has also added recycling and ticket sales, all while balancing school and athletic activities.

Ailish Slaney motivates not only her family, but an entire community. To date, Ailish has raised over \$73,000 for the Janeway –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: – and we thank her parents, Rodney and Cathy, and her sister, Abby, who couldn't be here today, for their support.

In 2020, Ailish rang the bell to recognize she was cancer-free. We thank Ailish who is here today with her family for giving all of us the strength and courage to preserve and to do our best to help others.

Thank you, Ailish.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: Speaker, I am pleased today to inform Members of this House of Assembly and residents of the province that Cenovus and the project partners have announced the restart of the West White Rose Project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: This is great news for Newfoundland and Labrador. This project will generate and maintain up to 1,500 more direct and indirect jobs during construction and create roughly 250 new permanent platform jobs. I'm pleased to reveal that employment at the Argentia site will ramp up immediately, and increase through next year.

Speaker, as we look to the future, we have to acknowledge the important role that oil and gas projects, like West White Rose, continue to play. Over its 14-year lifespan, this project is expected to generate nearly \$20 billion in gross domestic product, and over \$7 billion in labour income for the province.

The revised fiscal agreement will bring the province increased royalties if the price of oil is over \$65 US per barrel, with first oil expected in 2026.

As a government, we have a responsibility to the industry, to the province and to residents to plan for the future. Through this revised agreement, the province obtained a \$200-million royalty abandonment credit against decommissioning costs and \$100 million to establish a Green Transition Fund to support the energy transition and other renewable initiatives.

Speaker, we will continue to foster an environment that supports our economy by embracing renewable energy, while maximizing our low-carbon oil and gas advantage.

Restarting the West White Rose Project is a great decision, and I thank the project partners for their role in this agreement. Today is a great day for the province and those who work in the industry.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I'm extremely glad to hear that construction of the West White Rose will continue. There are many tradespeople in this province who have been waiting anxiously for this news and who are looking forward to getting back to work on these job sites in our province.

Today's announcement also means that work, which has not taken place in this province, will resume. With that being said, and with the Bay du Nord Project on the horizon, I must urge the Premier and the minister not to give away any Newfoundland and Labrador jobs. As much work as possible must be done in this province on the Bay du Nord Project, including construction, engineering, design and maintenance. It's not good enough for us to continue to let jobs leave this province while many tradespeople wait to go back to work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I'm glad to hear that the workers of this project can now have some clarity of their future. I hope that this government takes the future seriously and commits to a comprehensive just transition plan that will be ready for when these projects reach their end of life stages.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour today in the House of Assembly to recognize the week of May 29 to June 4 as Early Childhood Education Week.

This week acknowledges and celebrates the crucial role early childhood educators play in the lives of children in guiding their early learning and development through well-planned, play-based learning and exploration of the environment.

Our government, in partnership with the federal government, is implementing an Early Learning Action Plan that will significantly expand affordable, regulated child care in this province. At the same time, this plan will increase opportunities for career advancement for early childhood educators and will see the implementation of a wage grid that will see most early childhood educators receiving a wage increase starting in 2023, to better reflect the important work they do.

Last week, we announced more than 30 locations for a pilot prekindergarten early learning program that will open in 2022-23. The pilot will result in approximately 600 new regulated spaces in communities throughout the province, as well as significant career opportunities within the sector.

I would also like to extend congratulations to Nicole Hall of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, recipient of the second annual Joanne Juteau Early Childhood Education Scholarship as presented by the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Ms. Hall is graduating from the College of North Atlantic full-time ECE diploma program this spring with a 4.0 GPA, while volunteering at the college as a tutor, helping her peers reach their own success in the ECE program. Ms. Hall also

has experience in the field and hopes to open her own child care centre.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Ms. Hall, and thanking early learning and childhood educators for their dedication and commitment to providing essential support to families in Newfoundland and Labrador and encouraging others into this very special profession.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to recognize this week as Early Childhood Education Week. In doing so, I would like to thank the compassionate ECEs in our province and the work they do in caring for and educating our youngest residents. I especially recognize Ms. Hall on graduating the ECE diploma program with a 4.0 GPA. I wish her all the best as she endeavours to open up her own child care centre.

Speaker, the things you hear about the need for more early childhood educators in this province, this week is a great opportunity to bring attention to the profession and seek out ways to encourage more students to undertake the training that's required.

I encourage government to continue working on this initiative because we do have a shortage of spaces.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement and join him in recognizing Early Childhood Education Week, congratulating Ms. Hall on the winning of the Joanne Juteau Early

Childhood Education Scholarship and in recognizing the valuable work and role of early childhood educators, that they play in the lives of our children, our most precious resource, and their families.

Speaker, early childhood educators, the majority of whom are women and earn an average of \$30,000 a year, will continue to struggle to make ends meet through record inflation. 2023 is too long to wait; we ask that government look at implementing this wage scale earlier.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

On the heels of the minister overruling the Licensing Board and issuing more licences, companies have slowed or stopped buying crab altogether. The FFAW has warned this could be catastrophic for plant workers and harvesters.

Does the Premier agree with his minister's decision to overrule the Licensing Board?

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

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's a great question. Indeed, today, I had a conversation with the president of the FFAW, Keith Sullivan, as well as many owners of fish plants throughout this province. I also reached out to counterparts in Atlantic Canada. Right now, we are at a time in our industry where we have an abundance of crab supply. All cold storage are full and indications are that

production will be slowed to allow the market to catch up for it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

While there are ministers who are overruling agencies that are put in play to offset the process for making decisions, I would like to have the minister offset or overrule the PUB to help the people of this province with the price of gas.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, harvesters have already struggled with declining prices, skyrocketing operation costs and trip limits. The minister interfered by issuing more licences when no one is buying – the first time it has happened in our province’s history. Now our billion-dollar crab industry is at a standstill.

How will the Premier fix this mess?

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

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I think that maybe there is a little fear mongering on the go there. Our industry is as big as what it was last year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

D. BRAGG: We have an increase of 30 per cent overall within that industry. Price remains strong. It was negotiated down – I think it was \$6.19 from \$7.69. It is still strong. It is the strongest it has been in the last number of years and it is unfortunate the way the markets are.

The Members opposite keep talking about the cost of living. I guess this is a factor of the cost of living, that people are not buying high priced

quantities right now. We hope that the market recaptures itself and gets back to the right size and we get some sales on the go.

We have lots of producers and lots of buyers. One indication this morning was someone brought in 17 tractor-trailer loads of crab and sold –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister’s time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

We are not fear mongering. What we want is to ensure that there is a process here that is followed that ensures harvesters and plant workers are taken care of and there be a proactive approach here instead of a reactive approach, Speaker.

Last week, residents on the Labrador South Coast and the Labrador Straits saw their gas prices rise by 69 cents. Central Labrador and the North Coast will see similar spikes in the coming future. Residents of Labrador already pay exceptionally high food prices.

How does the Premier expect Labradorians to survive if they cannot afford fuel and food?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The *Petroleum Products Act*, I guess to the former question and this question, is a quasi-judicial body. They are kind of entrenched in law, unlike the Fish Processing Licensing Board, which is advisory in nature.

To address the question about Labrador and the price of gas, Speaker, I think that’s an excellent question. Two years there was a review of how

the gas pricing process in Labrador works. The theory, the spirit of the regulation and legislation is that when the tanker comes in, the price is set based on the price at that time, and that's how it manifests itself throughout the year.

My department has been working closely with the Public Utilities Board and the Department of Labrador Affairs, and I look forward to speaking about this again later today when we talk about gas prices again.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, we're hearing from hundreds of Labradorians who are saying that the impact right now is having a detrimental effect on their ability to put fuel in their vehicles, or their Ski-Doos or their boats, and also to have access to good, healthy food.

There are seniors who do not drive, who do not heat their homes with oil. The only thing the Liberals have given these seniors is an extra \$131 a year. That's a measly \$4.30 a month, not even enough to buy a box of tea bags. Seniors are being forgotten by this government.

Why does the Premier continue to do little for seniors who simply cannot afford to go to the grocery store anymore?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course, we recognize the stress and strain of our seniors. That's why one of the first measures that we did was increase their Supplement by 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker. We also realized that not every senior, as he correctly points out, heats their home with furnace oil. We appreciate that. That's why we're mitigating their rates of electricity heat by \$2,400 a year, Mr. Speaker.

We'll continue to look for creative ways to look after our seniors. We have one of the most robust plans across the country, and we will

continue to be dynamic and flexible and responsive should other needs arise, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

But we've also heard that it's not enough to help people, particularly seniors here, and there are more things that could be done here.

I've heard from a senior who likes to volunteer at a local food bank, who is now struggling to afford meat and vegetables. Now she's relying on the very food hamper she used to distribute.

Why is this Premier not doing more to keep seniors from needing to rely on food banks to eat healthy?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course, we're always looking at more ways to help people in this province. We have to recognize the fiscal restraints of the province, largely because of Muskrat Falls. No one wants to talk about it, but it is a reality that we have to deal with every single day. They don't want to deal with it. Unfortunately, we have to deal with it, on behalf of the people of the province.

I wish I had \$500 million year after year, in perpetuity, to help seniors in a more effective way, Mr. Speaker. Right now given the fiscal constraints of this province, we've offered them 10 per cent extra. We've offered them \$142 million of this five-stage package initially and now, hopefully today or tomorrow, we'll cut the gas tax in half even further.

This is a healthy plan, it's a robust plan and I would argue it's more than any other jurisdiction across this country has done per capita, and we will continue to look for more creative ways, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Obviously, your plan is failing, because seniors are struggling. So mission not accomplished, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, communities around the province continue to speak about the failed roads plan. Placentia and Bay Roberts are the latest to complain about zero investment from the province over the next two years.

Why does the minister continue to ignore the needs of these communities?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

In terms of the roads plan, I've said it before and I'll say it again that we believe this year we struck a real balance in terms of bridge replacement and improvements in our roadways. Unfortunately, I have a \$151-million budget. Believe it or not, it's still a tough task in terms of what need we have in our roadways in this province. It is a tough task, and I believe, as I said before, we have to replace bridges and we have to pave roads. We've struck a great balance for this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the deputy mayor of Placentia is speaking out about the lack of action, noting that the Argentia ferry will soon push thousands of tourists over our roads, which he says are filled with potholes and craters.

Is this the kind of welcome the Premier wants to give visitors during his Come Home Year?

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

E. LOVELESS: I would ask him the question: Where is he hiding his money tree? Because there is only so much that we can do with the financial envelope that I have. I understand the challenges of that deputy mayor, like other deputy mayors in parts of the province –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. LOVELESS: We're trying to be responsible with the financial envelope that we're given. We believe a good balance has been struck. We're investing in bridges, which is a very important piece of our roadways. And it will be in the years to come. It has to be done. There is investment there and investment in our roadways, and we struck a good balance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I would say that probably the money tree is lost in one of those P3s – about \$1.5 billion and counting and we know where that's going. And it might be behind door four. Maybe door four has the money tree. We're not really sure; there are a lot of doors. It's all smoke and mirrors, remember that. It's smoke and mirrors; that's what this government operates on.

Speaker, the Bay Roberts town council notes Route 70 is in deplorable condition – it's actually unsafe. Yet again, the minister has refused to listen to the community and take action.

Speaker, I take this question directly from their press release: How bad does it have to get, and how long will it be ignored?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad he asked that question, because the MHA who does a real good job for her district advocates very hard for that piece of highway.

And we met with the town, and I instructed to the town that we will be investing on that roadway. But we have preliminary work to do this year. We are investing this year for work to be done next year.

It's not announced in the roads plan because we haven't determined yet the extent of what we will do. So there will be investment in that road because of the advocacy and the great work done by the MHA.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week the Liberal government finally realized that the Minister of Finance does control the finances of the province and actually made a reduction in the gas tax, which we have been calling for since November.

So I ask the minister: Now that you control the taxes, will you eliminate the sugar tax?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I have to say it is very interesting that they are convoluting cost of living, lowering the gas tax and now not implementing a plan that will help make our province healthier. We have set a plan for this province to be one of the healthiest in the country by 2030. One of the ways that we are doing that is by the Physical Activity Tax Credit. We are also implementing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Do you want to waste your Question Period arguing back and forth? I'll allow you to do it.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: It is quite interesting to have the chirping in the House and from the other side, Mr. Speaker.

I will say that we will be moving forward with the sugar-sweetened beverage tax. This is one way in which we are bringing to the people's attention how important it is to reduce the sugar in their diet. This is about choice, Speaker. You can choose something with lower calories.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

S. COADY: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, if the minister was truly interested in healthy choices, she'd reduce the cost of healthy food and not increase the cost of living, which is exactly what is going to happen when we implement a sugar tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: So I ask the minister, once again: Would you introduce an amendment to push back this sugar tax implementation? Certainly the minister understands that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador do not need another tax.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: I wasn't aware that the Member opposite was an economist, Speaker.

I will say that the people have choice. They can choose a sugar-sweetened beverage; they will pay a slightly different rate for that. Then they can choose another beverage that has lower calories, that has no sugar, that would be better for their health outcomes.

Speaker, this is about choice of drink and we're suggesting to the people of this province to choose wisely. We will be imposing a tax on

sugar-sweetened beverages. It is logical; it is all about choices, Speaker.

So, no, I will say to the Member opposite, we will not be pushing back the implementation of that tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, this is just what the minister said. It's about introducing another tax; it's about taking \$5 million out of the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's not about healthy choices.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Yesterday, the minister justified leaving people in the cold when she said: We are going to wait until September when we know people will be filling their tanks getting ready for the fall. I've talked to many people who are trying to pay off their current oil bills.

I ask the minister: Will you please get those rebates out now so people can afford to pay off last year's bills?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

With regard to the sugar-sweetened beverage tax, the prelude to the question, I will say to the Member opposite that this is not about tax at all. We have taken the money that we will be collecting and we've increased, for example, monies that we're paying for the children's food programs in schools. We've taken that money and put it towards active living and active healthy living put towards seniors. We have reinvested that into our communities because we want a healthier environment, we want healthier opportunities for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

As the Member opposite knows, we will be coming into a fall where it will indeed get cold. We are getting information from the Canada

Revenue Agency so that we can produce those cheques. This is all driven by an application based, as well –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: That's not bad, Speaker, yesterday, they were playing baseball. Now they're playing hockey, stick handling around all the answers. Maybe they should end up in the penalty box.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, every day we see reckless driving on our highways and excessive speeding often recorded at 150 kilometres an hour or more. Way back in November 2019 amendments were made to the *Highway Traffic Act* to allow speed cameras as another tool of enforcement.

Why has the minister not done anything in three years to put these in action?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Speed cameras are an incredibly important policy instrument for me and this government. We are working on speed cameras. As you can imagine it's incredibly complex.

So there's the technology, then we have working with the municipalities. We have working with the RNC system; we have working with the OCIO system. So there are lots of things that we currently have an intergovernmental team working on. We're working very hard to get speed cameras in the hands of government and municipalities as soon as possible.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The same government bureaucracy that slows everything down.

Speaker, the minister loves committees and studying the issue, but precious little done in the way of action. Again, she has the legal authority to make highways safer for years, yet has failed to advance this important safety measure.

When is the minister going to stop making excuses?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It is currently fully legal for someone to have a speed camera. It is a legal instrument in our laws, Speaker. Right now, we're working on the technology implementation side. We need something that a municipality or a town – the Town of Paradise, the City of St. John's, the Town of Ferryland – that they can plug into and if they so choose on the streets of their towns and cities. We need to make sure that they talk to the RNC systems and the OCIO systems.

There are a lot of working pieces there and a lot of other things that the government is trying to figure out, but this is a very important piece to me. I have been driving it. I can't say when we're going to have it ready, but we're working as fast as we can.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: We look forward to that.

Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health said: "It is difficult when you have professionals who

are tired and frustrated and burnt out, airing their views in public."

I ask the minister: Will he continue to disrespect the doctors of this province or will he stand and apologize to Dr. House, as I am sure she can air her views without assuming that she is burnt out?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's a question of selective quotation, because immediately following that I acknowledge that these were difficult conversations and we needed to hear them.

It is the case that physicians are tired and frustrated. We've heard that. It is the situation that nurses and LPNs are tired and frustrated. We've listened to that.

As a result of those conversations, we have put in place initiatives: the family medicine initiative from last October; the nurses' think tank; we've met with NAPE on paramedics; we've had discussions with allied health professionals on respiratory therapists and perfusionists. These conversations are difficult but important. I said nothing that Dr. House had not said herself in public media.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Well, that's about the worst apology I've ever seen.

Let me tell the minister something, the doctors in my district work very hard; they do. Maybe if we supported them instead of chastising them for every time they speak about something, we might not be in this mess.

Speaker, the CEO of Central Health in an interview yesterday said that over the next few weeks they plan to work on retaining the

physicians that they do have in the region. Very important.

Does the minister think that branding physicians as – quote – difficult will push physicians out of the region or keep them there?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Again, a lecture in selective misquotation from my colleague opposite.

The conversations are difficult. The physicians have genuine feelings of fatigue and exhaustion. I sympathize with that; I've been there. We have put in place an ADM for recruitment and retention of all health professionals. We have approaches through conversations with nurses, with physicians about what it is we can do to make their working life easier and their work life balance suit them better.

These are important issues for us. We are putting money there. We're putting resources there and the results will manifest themselves in time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Emergency room closures in Central Newfoundland are causing severe disruptions at the Central Newfoundland Regional Health Centre in Grand Falls-Windsor with more patients needing emergency service, longer wait times and patients forced on stretchers in hallways.

How long will Central Health be practicing hallway medicine?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We're aware of the situation in our emergency rooms. We have, and we brought to this House, measures that we have in place to attempt both

short-, medium- and long-term fixes for this. There will be stabilization of the hubs in Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander. We put \$1.8 million into each of those this year in the budget that we've recently passed. We have committed an extra \$2 million for virtual ER support in Central Health. Central Health is actually pioneering the use of virtual ER services. These are short term.

Long term, I'm pleased to announce, that the entire family medicine seat program at Memorial is full and we are on track to make further enhancements to that program.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Well your short term is not working, Minister. It's time to get at the long-term one because they're still in the hallways.

Residents in Central region are concerned with the future of their health care. Many residents can't get access to the health hub, don't have a family doctor and are driven to emergency room for their basic medications.

I ask the minister: Why is government forcing people to go to overcrowded emergency rooms to access basic medications?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

Several elements packed up in that question, but, essentially, we have put in place short-term measures to deal with medication refills; 811 can do that for you. Pharmacists can refill prescriptions for stable patients with medications.

In terms of putting in place good, solid primary care, that is the foundation for Health Accord NL. We will be opening up Patient Connect NL to Central and Western regions of this province within the next few weeks to identify those people who need a primary care provider, just as we have done in Eastern Health. There is

capacity in the Eastern Health clinics and we look forward to people being able to register.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Residents from Chance Cove, Blaketown and even as far as Arnold's Cove are relying on the emergency room in Whitbourne, because there are simply not enough family doctors in the area.

How long will residents have to worry about not having access to a family doctor?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Indeed access to primary care is our primary focus currently. We have in place, through Eastern Health, Patient Connect NL, which I have referenced earlier. Those individuals should register for primary care through that portal. Currently we've had just north of 12,000 registrations. You will be prioritized on the basis of clinical need into how rapidly appointments are provided.

We continue to work to expand those services across Newfoundland and Labrador in line with what we believe the blueprint for the Health Accord NL plan will be. Look forward to providing further – my colleague over there looks as though he's ready for his next one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: The reason why I stood, Speaker, is because that was another non-answer. I asked about the specifics of Whitbourne clinic and you're talking about asking a senior to go to St. John's to see a doctor to get medications – come on.

With so many emergency room closures in the province, many residents are worried that the Whitbourne clinic will be next to close its doors. Without family physicians and without an emergency room clinic, where will residents of the area seek medical care?

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

J. HAGGIE: Again, Mr. Speaker, it seems that selective misquotation is the order of the day with my questions. The gentleman opposite misquotes me and misinterprets what I did say.

Patient Connect NL is a primary way of registering for primary care access in Eastern Health region. From the point of view of those physicians, Whitbourne clinic is experiencing – as other clinics have – some staffing challenges which Eastern Health are working with the local physicians to attempt to resolve, as well as local staff.

Our long-term and medium-term solutions lie on recruitment and retention of Newfoundland and Labrador people who go to medical school and do residency training here. That is in hand and will bear fruit.

SPEAKER: Order!

The minister's time is expired.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've raised this before; I'll do it again. Route 60 through my District of Topsail - Paradise has sections in deplorable condition. It is pitted with potholes, has erosion on the shoulders, and it presents safety issues for both drivers and pedestrians.

I ask the minister: What is the timeline to address this issue in Topsail?

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

B. PETTEN: Wrong colour there.

E. LOVELESS: That's a good question, and no, it's not the wrong colour, I'll say to the deputy, whatever his title is.

But in terms of Route 60 there are conversations to be had about that highway. I have driven it many times because I live nearby it. I have chatted with the Member as well in terms of the need there.

It is not just in the roads plan; it can be an upgraded maintenance plan, as far as I am concerned, so we are looking at that. It is not like we're neglecting it because, as he would say, it is a different colour. It doesn't matter, but the need is there and we recognize it and it is part of our planning in the department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Speaker, on Thursday, many patients from my district were told that they could not travel home until Monday, a four-day delay, because there was no room on the medical flight for them. This has become a chronic, ongoing problem which causes additional mental, financial and relationship stress for patients. It is only after pleading with the health authority that additional flights were added. This cannot continue to be the norm, Mr. Speaker.

So I ask the minister: Will he take action to ensure patients don't have the continued burden of these huge delays getting home?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The skedevac service, the regular medical flights to the North Coast, are managed and handled by Labrador-Grenfell Health. Certainly happy to take the Member opposite's concerns back to

them. My understanding is that they have built on their existing contract and increased the number of regular flights as it is. Should that not be sufficient then obviously there is a need to reassess that.

We would be happy to work with the Nunatsiavut Government, as well, who have a monetary interest in supporting that flight too. We have various channels and, again, I am happy to take that back to Labrador-Grenfell on behalf of the Member opposite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

In a current response to the PUB from NL Hydro, over the current application of power supply to Southern Labrador, the PUB has asked NL Hydro to engage external experts, as the project is over \$50 million. NL Hydro refuses to do so. This is Recommendation 1 from Muskrat Falls inquiry, Volume 1, page 61.

I ask the minister: Why hasn't this recommendation from the Muskrat Falls inquiry been implemented?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to hear somebody else in the House talking about Muskrat Falls besides us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: What I would say to the Member is that I am quite aware of the dialogue that is going on between Hydro and the PUB. I guess the first thing that I would say is that I am extremely happy to see a robust, active dialogue between Hydro and the PUB as it relates to reliability and stability of power in Southern Labrador. It is certainly a huge conversation going on.

What I would say, right now, is they are still, to my knowledge, working this back and forth.

There are a lot of concerns and there have been a lot of concerns expressed in the community as to the source of power. So they will continue to do that, but the fact that they are having open, transparent dialogue that is being seen in the public, I don't think that's a bad thing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Route 450 is a very important route for the whole south shore of the Bay of Islands. It is good for tourism, for people travelling back and forth to work. There is a major split in the road at Coppermine Brook. I know I have been dealing with the minister on it and he has been very gracious in working with this.

The people of the Humber - Bay of Islands would just like an update on that road because the road is in serious condition and one portion of the road is in serious condition. I followed up on a tourism bus and it was on two wheels the other day. I know the minister is working with his staff.

Can you just give us an update on that so I can pass it on to the residents of Humber - Bay of Islands – the short-term solution and the long-term solution?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An important question and, any time that safety is in question, we take it very seriously as a department. The Member is right. We did have conversations around that route – Route 450. I did have conversations with the staff this morning about it. While I don't have anything in terms of what will be done in the interim, we know that something needs to be done there to address that situation.

We are assessing it right now. Once I have the feedback from the department and engineers, I will be glad to have that conversation with the Member.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: I thank the minister for that.

The Liberal government made a commitment that the new acute-care hospital would have all of the services currently at the Western Memorial Regional Hospital. We know now that that commitment has been broken, with a loss of 75 union positions. The laundry services, with 75 jobs, has been eliminated from the new acute-care hospital despite assurances from your government during the election of 2021. There was a request for qualifications that closed in January 26, 2021, during the election. Then an RFP for services to be done privately.

Can the minister inform this House on the status of the RFP and the status of these 75 jobs in the Corner Brook area and if this tender has been awarded?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

When the original P3 was crafted, at a time when I believe the Member opposite sat in a different location in this House, it was agreed that non-clinical services would be removed, where possible, from the footprint of Corner Brook Acute Care Hospital on the grounds of economy and quality.

What has happened since then is that Western Health have gone out to an RFP to assess how best to provide laundry services. As a result of that RFP, they have gone back to the market for a consultant in the field of commercial laundry to provide them with further advice. That is the RFP that is currently out there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Sanding and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

D. BRAGG: Speaker, I guess this document will strike a nerve with Members on other side who seem intent on watering down employment in the fish plant industry. I, on the other hand, intend to support the people that currently work in that industry.

I table this document entitled the 2HJ3KLNOP4R Snow Crab Fishery and Survey Summary. This will support a question from Question Period yesterday in which I said something. It was made a point of order today to be contrary of what I said. This supports what I said yesterday, and I table this document.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Good catch, Speaker, thank you.

Many constituents in Newfoundland and Labrador have eye diseases and degeneration that requires surgical intervention to help maintain vision. One of the corrective procedures, corneal transplant surgery, is covered under the provincial Medical Care Plan. However, there is another less expensive and more effective medical procedure available within the province that is not covered under MCP that could save the province money and provide improved health outcomes for the residents of this province.

My petition: WHEREAS corneal cross-linking surgery is less expensive than corneal transplant surgery; and

WHEREAS corneal cross-linking surgery is currently available in St. John's, and

WHEREAS the corneal cross-linking surgery is a one-time surgery with lifelong effectiveness, instead of being repeated every 10 years as for the transplant surgery procedure; and

WHEREAS corneal cross-linking surgery has a shorter recovery time and does not require anti-rejection medication; and

WHEREAS corneal cross-linking surgery does not require donor tissue, reducing the wait time considerably.

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon this House of Assembly to urge the government to cover corneal cross-linking surgery under the provincial Medical Care Plan.

Speaker, this particular issue was brought to me by a resident; I've since heard from others that are battling and very frustrated with the situation. It's estimated that some one in 100,000 people in the country are estimated to suffer from this type of eye disease that would require this kind of procedure to address. That would represent, by the way, for everybody here, 520 of our residents in this province.

This procedure is covered in Quebec, and there are a variety of advantages to it. It does halt the progression of keratoconus; it prevents vision loss; it has been approved for young teens; it

avoids that very complicated transplant procedure; it enhances contact lens tolerance; delivers a much faster, more effective treatment – by the way, the procedure only takes 10 minutes to deal with – is suitable for thin corneas; serves as a safer treatment and, finally, Speaker, it provides maximum eye protection.

So, again, and to sum up, I'd like the government to have a look at this. Certainly this approach is less expensive, more effective and the citizens of the province are asking for it.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services for a reply.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

Sorry, I had to wave through the moving bodies.

The Member opposite's petition brings up a very interesting clinical issue; it is topical in my department, with the treatment of keratoconus. We have a small group of clinicians working on that at the moment and may be able to provide some future comment to the House.

So thank you for the petition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the following petition is one from the residents of Corner Brook and the present situation out there with the crematorium. As colleagues will do in the House, I politely agreed to present this petition on behalf of the people of Corner Brook. I consulted with my good friend the Member for Corner Brook, who is in support of this.

Currently, there are no regulations for crematoriums in Newfoundland and Labrador. All crematoriums in Newfoundland and Labrador are currently operating without

regulations, resulting in crematoriums being built as close as a few metres from neighbouring homes with no emission monitor. Toxic emissions contaminate the soil, air and water. The World Health Organization stresses that crematoriums should not be built near neighbourhoods where people live.

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador urgently needs to develop and enforce regulations for all crematoriums. Crematoriums are in fact incinerators and toxic emissions are very well documented even in the most modern equipment.

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 immediately place a moratorium on all new crematorium builds until there are regulations in place for all of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is signed by quite a number of people, Mr. Speaker.

I table this and I hope the government gives it some consideration.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons for this petition or the background to this petition is as follows:

Roads in our province are in various states of disrepair. Many rural communities are concerned that the deplorable road conditions will keep visitors and family away from Come Home Year celebrations. We are inviting the world to come to our province this summer, yet many rural roads are unfit to travel and many vehicles are damaged by huge potholes, unrepaired washouts and uneven shoulders. This is a real deterrent to tourists and families from out of province who wish to join in our celebrations this summer.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to increase the provincial roads program to address the need for repairs on many rural roadways in our province.

I have presented this on several occasions on behalf of the people, but, right now, I guess, to go with this petition, I know that the roads plan is out, Speaker, but we are in desperate need of some maintenance. The brush cutting now – like, we’ll say, in Petite Forte, the moose are hanging out on the road. Moose never stay on the road. Caribou do because they lick the salt off the road but to have moose, now, hanging out on the road means they can’t even get through the brush. So there is something pretty serious there.

We have roads that haven’t been looked at since they got paved originally. But I will say this, the work that has been done and the workmanship of, not only our depots but our contractors and stuff like that – and I was remiss in not including our contractors last time – have done an excellent job. We just have to set them out to do the job, I guess.

But I appreciate it and look forward to the minister’s response in giving some attention to the maintenance going forward for the rest of the summer.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for a response.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you to the Member for his interest. As for brush cutting, we will be announcing brush-cutting projects in the next couple of months. As I told them yesterday, we will certainly be considering his area as we do other areas. So we will be giving his area due consideration.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is to call to reinstate the marine shipping and service between the Island portion of our province and Northern Labrador communities.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to return the marine shipping services between the Island portion of our province and our Northern Labrador communities of Rigolet, Makkovik, Postville, Hopedale, Natuashish and Nain.

This marine freight service was removed in the spring of 2019, resulting in freight having to be trucked to the port of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and then shipped to our northern communities. Since then, the additional shipping has directly impacted prices of food, building materials, vehicles, including trucks and off-road vehicles, household goods and many essential services for our communities.

Our Northern Labrador communities are totally isolated, without any road access, and marine transportation services are limited to just five summer months on average. With the cancellation of the direct marine freight service from the Island portion of our province to our communities, residents are witnessing exorbitant price increases of our basic needs impacting overall quality of life.

So, Speaker, this petition is really important. In June 2019, after I got elected, I was only elected for about a month. I called for a meeting with the Department of Transportation, the minister, the deputy minister and also the deputy minister of Labrador Affairs and Indigenous Affairs was there. One of the things that we couldn’t understand was why was this freight boat taken off. I was told, in that meeting, it was because the Trans-Labrador Highway was almost complete and there was a commitment that once the Trans-Labrador Highway was complete that the freight boat from the Island portion would be removed.

To me, Speaker, that was very confusing. That was confusing for anyone in my district because everybody knows when you go to North West River, which is the most northern point of Lake Melville region, and you look up towards my

district, there is no Trans-Labrador Highway. The only access we have is by air, which is very, very costly for freight and passenger travel or by marine, which is restricted to five months. So really, I think the fair thing for this government to do is return the marine shipping service.

Speaker, we don't actually mind where the port would be on the Island. Whether it is actually in the port of Lewisporte or actually in the port of Carbonear. Actually, Harbour Grace has a good port as well. In actual fact, we need this, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, and Labrador Affairs for response.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I just like to take a moment to respond to the hon. Member's comments when she talks about the need for the boat to go back to Lewisporte. Right here in my hand I have an email from a leader in her district that says some people might say the reinstatement of a ferry to and from Lewisporte to my community and the North Coast may be the answer. In all honesty, I would have to disagree. Then it goes on to talk about other things and moving forward.

I just want to say to the hon. Member, any time that she wants to meet with me my door is open. I'm happy to sit down and talk about the issues that matter, but we are hearing from people in Labrador saying the boat going back to Lewisporte is not the answer. People in Torngat are messaging saying they don't want the boat to go back to Lewisporte.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is as follows:

The list of number of people in need of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in the Central –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: The list for housing has increased significantly in the past few years. This leaves people in vulnerable situations, and many times individuals are outside in the cold and homeless while waiting for placement.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to repair and increase the number of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units in Central Newfoundland to meet present need throughout the region.

Speaker, in the past couple of years, I've been hearing more and more with regard to housing in Central Newfoundland. There are over 250 applications alone in Central-West. There's a rising need for housing in the Central region. People can't afford to get regular housing because of the cost of living and that sort of stuff. So we need to address those issues right off the cuff and need that done. I'm talking to people that are living out in the cold. I had one last winter – I believe I mentioned this before – was living in a shed. We had to find some placement for him. I've heard of others sleeping in tents.

They can't afford housing, Mr. Speaker, and there are no units. We'd like for that housing to be updated with regard to units and more housing created, if possible. So with this dire need of housing in Central Newfoundland, we'd like something to address that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, the following: Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m., today, Tuesday, May 31.

SPEAKER: It is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 12, second reading of Bill 64.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that Bill 64, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 64, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6." (Bill 64)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important bill.

Speaker, we've talked substantively in this House over the last number of months about balance, about ensuring that we are fiscally responsible, ensuring that we're helping people, ensuring that we are funding a lot of the programs that need to be funded in the province, that we are being responsible in our actions. I would say, Speaker, that we have done that. We have achieved that balance in budget 2022-2023. Not only on the fiscal side of things and some of the remarks coming from banks, bond-rating agencies, unions, community leaders, all were positive about the budget, Speaker.

I think it's important that we remember – and I can quote from the debate that was here in the House that these are difficult choice. They are difficult things that we have to do within any budget, and striking that right balance. The balance of investments in our economy, investments in our communities, investments in our people with being fiscally responsible and responsible to our children and our grandchildren to ensure that we leave them a legacy of strength.

I've spoken in this House about the goal that we all want. Every one of us in this House wants. We all want a stronger, smarter, self-sufficient, sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador.

So the debate around the budget wasn't as much about where our investments were going, and I think people understood and appreciated, actually, where our investments go. We've made a tremendous number of investments not only in our economy but also in our communities. We've also increased some funding and spread as much as we possibly could across this province of ensuring – for example, we increased the roads budget. We spoke a lot today about the roads budget and about how important that is to communities. I heard, and I know Members opposite heard how important it is to support community groups. So we were able to put an additional \$5 million towards that.

We know how important education is and I'm very proud that we were able to increase the number of children in our educational system. The first time in 50 years, Speaker. The first time since 1972 we have 1,000 new kids in school. We've made investments with the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, we made investments in terms of more guidance counselors, we made investments in reading specialists and we made investments in our educational system.

We also have made investments in health care. Almost \$400 million, Speaker, in the last couple of years. All at the same time of bringing down that deficit. And as I outlined in budget 2022-23, we have a really robust strategic plan for addressing and making sure we're being very financially responsible, but also making sure we're being very responsible to debt management.

I've talked about in this House, the triangle I call it, you know, one side fixing Muskrat Falls in terms of the finances of Muskrat Falls, making sure that we're really focused on financial management and making sure that we're focused on debt management. We were able to bring down our deficit.

Why is that important to the people of the province? We spend a billion dollars a year – one of our top expenditures in this province is on our cost of borrowing. It's not on paying down our debt. That's just on the cost of borrowing.

I think the people of the province understand that's not sustainable. We can't continue to drive debt; we're up to \$17 billion, we have to start bringing that down. Otherwise, the future wouldn't look as bright as it does right now. Again, I say, everyone in this House wants that stronger, smarter, self-sufficient and sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador. Not one person, I don't think, in this House, would say differently.

But it is about balance and it is about choice. So when we sat here on Budget Day and we announced \$142 million – \$142 million – and this is in addition to some of the other programming that we do, that we've been able to put in place. So that \$142 million are investments and monies going back to the people of the province. As I said on Budget Day,

and I'll say again, trying to put money back into people's pockets, rather than out of people's pockets.

We made some very strategic choices. I know that my colleague for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi was very focused on ensuring that we supported those most vulnerable. He wanted to make sure we supported seniors. So we announced programming to ensure that during these difficult times, globally – they are not Newfoundland and Labrador's challenges per se, they are global challenges, all across this country, all around the world. I quoted a couple of days ago, the deputy governor of the Bank of Canada, he talked about that this is a global problem. This not just in Canada, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador.

But how do we support people? How do we give back to people? So in working with my colleagues, we came up with a plan where we talked about we're going to do some short-term measures and some longer term measures. The short-term measures including things like we ensured that we increased the Income Supplement to help those most vulnerable, the lower income, making sure that they had some additional money in their pocket; the Seniors' Benefit. We gave a one-time stipend, a cheque, \$400 for all those on income support. We eliminated the tax on home insurance. We felt that was very broadly distributed across Newfoundland and Labrador. We also ensured that we cut in half the cost of registering a vehicle.

These are just some of the measures. These are the ones off the top of my head. We gave things like bus passes for seniors, and we did other things. That's all in addition to the over \$200 million that we spend per year in subsidizing and supporting those most vulnerable. That's in addition to the money that we spend in housing. That's in addition to some of the other expenditures that we have, but we felt it was very important that we put in place measures, because we understood the cost of living was challenging people. We understood that.

Coming out of a pandemic with supply issues and the global strife with the war in Ukraine and the rising fuel prices, we wanted to support.

Let me tell you what the price of fuel was the day this House met for the budget: \$1.85. The day we sat here in this House and read the budget it was \$1.85 regular gas price. We also know over the last number of weeks the gas prices have continued to increase. Why have they continued to increase, Speaker? Again, it's not a Newfoundland and Labrador centred problem. This is something that's happening globally and we're concerned. We're concerned about these rising fuel prices. We're concerned about the challenges they're creating for the people of the province.

So we dug a little deeper, we worked a little harder and we have been able to support – and that's what this bill is about today, lowering our gas tax.

Speaker, I'm going to get asked: Why didn't you lower it before? Well, let me address that, as I have in this House on multiple times.

We have provided \$142 million – the House is tired of me saying it I'm sure – back to the people of the province. We collect \$141.6 million in the provincial gas tax. So we turned the entire amount of it back to the people of the province in different ways.

I can tell you that hundreds of thousands of people in this province, hundreds of thousands of families in this province were impacted by the amount that we were able to lower home insurance or lower the registration on cars or provide the Income Supplement or provide bus passes or provide other supports that we're able to do. So hundreds of thousands of families have been helped.

We gave back, basically, the entire amount of the provincial gas tax. But lowering the gas tax was problematic because once we lowered that gas tax there was a possibility that the federal government would impose the carbon tax backstop.

Now, what is that? Basically, when Newfoundland and Labrador made a deal with the federal government to remove home heat, the oil heat, from carbon tax to ensure that carbon tax was not applied in the fishery, to ensure it wasn't applied in forestry, to ensure it wasn't applied in agriculture or in exploration,

we made sure that those were carved out. In doing so, we ensured that the money would stay in the province as well. But if we did too much with the price signal on the price of gasoline, the backstop could come in. Meaning the federal government could come in and impose carbon tax then on home heat. That's the last thing anyone in this House or anyone in this province would like to have to happen. We are in challenging times and we recognize we're in challenging times.

Now, in the last number of weeks, as we've seen the price of oil continue to rise, we have had multiple discussions with our federal colleagues. And as you know, the prime minister visited in the last couple of weeks and the Premier, in his good relationship with the federal government, in his ability to work with the federal government, has basically ensured that we can now lower the gas tax, because of the price of fuel, because of the challenges that that's presenting to the people of the province.

So, today, I have put before this House measures, ways in which we can lower the gas tax. We are lowering it by seven cents and that is an actual effect of just over eight cents because of the HST on that as well. That's the lowest provincial gas tax in the country next to Alberta. We all know in this House that Alberta, because of its \$500-million surplus – and bless them for having it. They have a surplus. I wish we did, too. Because of that surplus, they are able to remove their provincial gas tax until the price of oil comes down.

Now, we are the next lowest. In a province that has struggled financially – think about this: struggled financially. I can tell you, I have only been Finance Minister 18 months. I know I have done three budgets in those 18 months, but in those 18 months we have taken the deficit, which is more spending than you are earning, more money out of your pocket than coming into your pocket, \$1.8 billion in deficit, and we have taken that down, taken that down to this year, it will be \$350 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: She is doing a good job, Speaker.

S. COADY: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: But I will say to you, Speaker, and I appreciate my colleagues' support, this is a tough task, but it is about balance. It is about ensuring that we recognize that continuing to overspend is not in the best interest of this province. So we have been very, very diligent, very prudent, very responsible.

Now I will say –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

S. COADY: I am hearing chirping across the aisles, Speaker.

I will say that the deficit has been higher. The highest deficits and the highest revenues came under different administrations – the last administration.

So I will say we are trying to be very fiscally responsible and must be. No one in this House nor in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador wants our great-grandchildren and our grandchildren to pay for our mistakes. We don't want that to happen. So being responsible, being balanced is incredibly important.

Now, I listened intensely during the debates of the Budget Speech and I can say to the Speaker that what I heard was: Please spend more money – please spend more money. I have a list. I am a note taker and I made a list on pieces of paper of where the people opposite wanted to spend. They talked about more money for roads, which we have been able to provide. They talked about cellphone service, which we have been able to provide tens of millions of dollars towards improvement of connectivity. They talked about, you know, ensuring that we have good economic confidence. I can tell the Members opposite that – and I will, actually – our growth in our economy is good this year. But I had to be very fiscally responsible, too, and make sure that we are not burdening future generations.

We were able to provide \$142 million back to the people of the province. Now, because the price of fuels has reached 202.22 cents – remember, it was a 1.85 less than a couple of months ago. So basically a 40-cent increase over the last two months. We have been able to say, now, to the people of the province, we can reduce the gas tax – lowest in Canada.

We have also made a decision that we would provide a home heat, oil heat supplement this fall to those that heat their homes with oil. We will provide a supplement to those earning under \$100,000 family income, \$500, and for those above \$100,000 to \$150,000 it will be a diminishing – to the lowest amount will be \$200. We're going to provide that in September of this year.

We have to do an application process; we have to get the information from the Canada Revenue Agency and provide the cheques. So come September, we'll be able to provide that; I think it will be helpful to the people of the province. All of that added up to be another \$75 million. So now, we're up into the 220s. This is the most that anyone in Canada has provided back in the cost of living.

From the province that struggles financially, we have done the most. Speaker, I have said in this House, even though Members opposite like to plate me as somebody who's callous and – I think I wrote it down – not caring. I can tell the Members opposite, I can tell the people of the province, we are balancing and we are providing everything that we can back to the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Almost \$225 million – \$225 million. Now remember, we still have to borrow that money. We have a deficit of \$351 million. That's this year, provided all the things that I've talked about in budget remain the same.

Now, Speaker, before I get into other notes, I did want to give some good news on the economy. I had it here a moment ago, and I just want to reach and give some good things. You heard today of course about the good news from the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology

when he spoke about West White Rose restarting and I am very, very pleased to hear that. It was a very difficult time for the workers, the people of the province. I have to say it was very, very difficult when, due to COVID, Cenovus took the decision – or it was Husky at the time, took the decision to actually close the project and then had to reassess how to move forward, so I was very, very pleased today.

I can tell you that the restaurant – the food serving industry is back to 2019 levels. I can tell you that retail sales in this province are up again. I wish I had my piece of paper – and I am sure I'll find it as soon as I stop speaking – that would tell us the percentage, but I can tell you it is well above inflationary pressures. It is a real, true growth in retail sales. We are seeing a true growth in new urban housing starts. We are seeing a lot of movement in housing sales. So these are very positive signs in our economy.

We already know that in mining, for example, we're seeing true growth in terms of exploration and developments. I congratulate, again, Marathon for moving through their project and hopefully going to a mine very soon. I congratulate those that are doing incredible work all around this province, not just in the gold industry. We know rare earth minerals and iron ore is doing incredibly well. These are investments that are happening in our province and they are helping to grow our economy, grow our employment. Our employment is up this year as well.

I will say, Speaker, we're seeing good growth offshore Newfoundland and Labrador. We're seeing exploration this year and I wish them every success in their exploration.

So, Speaker, back to the bill at hand. This bill absolutely will lower the cost of the provincial sales tax. It goes from 14.5, now down to 7.5. Allow me to tell you what it is in Quebec: 19.2 – 19 per cent in Quebec. In Nova Scotia, it is 15.5 just to give you an example. We will be at 7.5. Our provincial gas tax is quite low and because of the strength in our economy, we're seeing additional revenues. And it's not through the HST, because I'm sure I'll hear that from my colleague opposite, when he says you're collecting more HST.

I've told the Member opposite that HST won't catch up for a number of years. We will collect \$66 million on provincial gas tax this year through HST. That is the amount that we collected last year; it remains normalized. Now, in a couple of years' time we may see a bump because of the price of gasoline, but this will lower the price of gasoline by eight cents.

So the bill itself says two things that I'm sure my colleague opposite will remind me. It says that this will take effect as quickly after Royal Assent, as we inform the Public Utilities Board and they are able to implement it. The second thing is there's a sunset clause of January 1, 2023. People will say why is there a sunset clause? Why can't you just keep your provincial gas tax low?

Again, Speaker, I say to you, it's about balance. We want to ensure that we are supporting people as we go through these very high cost of living times, the inflationary times. We will look at this again this fall. We will continue to consider how we might be able to support and help people. We will look at the price, obviously, of gasoline again this fall. But we must have a sunset clause on this, at this time. Otherwise, we would have to come back with another amendment to raise the price of the provincial gas tax back to where it is today or somewhere in that vicinity.

We're also sending a message to bond-rating agencies and banks, and we want to make sure that we are clear in our balance. Again, I go back to that word: balance. If we're going to consider this – and I reassure my Members opposite, they will hold me to account this fall; I know they will. I know they will. They'll ask me in this House, I'm sure when the House returns in a couple of months' time and if the price of fuel remains high, they'll be asking these questions. So we'll have that opportunity for the debate this fall, as to whether or not we will sunset on January 1.

But, right now, we're clearly signalling that we will sunset on January 1 and it's about budgetary balance. I know the Members opposite understand fiscal responsibility. I know Members opposite understand really strong financial responsibility, prudence. They understand that.

So understanding that we're coming back in the fall, understanding that we are offering temporary benefit to people because of the high price of fuel and understanding that things may change in the next six months. Then we'll consider, but right now it is January 1, 2023, this will sunset, okay.

Speaker, I haven't read any of my notes that have been provided for me. I will have a quick flick just to make sure that I have not forgotten anything that I should have said.

I will say, Speaker, we've had a lot of barbs back and forth in the House about some of the transitional measures that we put in place on the electric vehicle rebates. I know the Members opposite, and I know the people of the province, recognize that as we transition – and we talk about transition quite a bit, moving towards a green economy – that people will start to buy electric vehicles. That's why we're putting in – and I commend the Minister of Environment and Climate Change – charging stations across this province.

I also will say that we've put in some transition measures of providing, for example, a rebate. There's electrical vehicle rebates and charging infrastructure money available. You can get money to assist you to buy an electric vehicle, to bring down the cost of your electric vehicle, because they're somewhat higher priced, but that is falling. But because people are starting to move, when you're now going to look for a new vehicle, you're likely to consider buying an electric vehicle and that's where we're going in our economy. That's where we're going, globally.

I will also say we are providing help for families to get their homes transitioned from oil to electricity. That's important for climate change, it's important for cost right now. But it is important for climate change, and we are blessed in this province with an abundance of renewable energy. We're thankful for it, about 98 per cent of the province right now, once Muskrat Falls comes on stream permanently, is renewable. So that's a very good sign.

Speaker, I'm going to pause there and thank Members in this House for their support. I will also say that these measures cost \$225 million,

Speaker. It's a tremendous amount of money in a province that has a deficit of \$351 million. But we're doing everything as responsibly, prudent and timely as possible to assist people.

I thank you. I petition the House to support this bill. Once this bill is passed, and I'm hoping everyone in this House supports this bill, and we have Royal Assent, we will be able to advise the Public Utilities Board and they will be able to lower the price of gasoline. I will say we will also be providing support for those heating their home with oil come the fall as well.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, there is lots that the minister had to say; some of it I agree with, some obviously I don't agree with. But first, before I get started, just for the minister's knowledge, my major in university was economics. So I just want to put that out there so she understands that I have a major in economics from Memorial University.

Now, you know, it's funny that we find ourselves standing here today talking about gas tax reduction and a rebate for people of the province. I've been calling for relief for the people of the province since November. It's not only me that has been calling for this relief. It's been all of my colleagues on this side of the House, the PC caucus and other Members on this side of the House. We've been talking about this since November and here we are, the 31st of May, we're seeing things.

What I fail to understand is the same items that the minister is talking about now could have been dealt with in the budget, could have been dealt with in April when the budget was brought down. But if it wasn't for the tenacity of the people on this side of the House, in pushing for change, it would never have happened. It was a force that was put on by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who said quite clearly to government that what you announced in your budget was just not enough.

After a period of time, the government acknowledged that. The Premier of the province acknowledged it, the Minister of Finance acknowledged it and we brought and came looking for additional measures.

It's interesting that in the revenue sources for the Province of Newfoundland, that tax – provincial tax sources – accounts for \$5.4 billion of our revenue. So it's very difficult for people to understand.

We all understand balance; we all understand the need for balance. But what really upsets the people of Newfoundland and Labrador is when their government chooses to spend money on things which they may consider to be extra; i.e., did we really need to give Labatt \$250,000 to upgrade their systems that they have, recognizing that it's a fund that the federal government had and contributed \$250,000.

But where does that money come from? It comes from taxpayers. Perhaps it comes from carbon tax. So take it out of the people's pockets and give it to a corporate giant like Labatt; that's very difficult for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to understand at a time when they can't afford to fill up their oil tanks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Talk about opening up a new office. They can provide all of the logic and rhetoric around why that was necessary, but at the end of the day it still accounts for another quarter of a million dollars. And again, the people of the province are simply asking: Was that really necessary at this particular point in time? Did we really need to do that? Because ultimately where does the \$250,000 come from? It comes from the pockets of the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is a problem.

When you decide to spend \$5 million on Rothschild to do an evaluation of our assets – and the last time, Speaker, that Rothschild were involved in a review of Newfoundland and Labrador, it was 1953 when then former Premier Joseph R. Smallwood went to London, England and sat in their boardroom and basically he gave them the rights to all of Labrador. That's where CF(L)Co and BRINCO came from originally, in

those discussions. We all know what happened at the end of the day.

Now, I've heard the minister in this session of the House talking about Rothschild as phase one, as if we're about to spend more money on another Rothschild report. Where does that money come from? It comes from the pockets of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. And it's a choice. It's a choice that has been made. But the real challenge for people of Newfoundland and Labrador is to try to understand if they have money to do this and they have money to do that, how does it help me when I try to feed my family? How does it help me when I travel back and forth?

This measure that the minister has introduced for effect immediately, once we pass this, will save taxpayers money. The minister, I think, projected it somewhere to be \$44 million. But she also has said that it will not impact the deficit. So this action will not impact the deficit. As a matter of fact I don't know if – and the minister or one of her officials can confirm this. A barrel of oil was budgeted in our budget at US \$86 a barrel. I don't know if it has traded that low since then. Today I think Brent crude is at \$130 a barrel. And in the minister's own budget, they talk about a difference of \$1 making somewhere around \$13 million or \$14 million difference when it goes up by a dollar or down by a dollar.

Since April 1, it has been well over \$86 US a barrel. That is a windfall of revenue. If production stays the same – I recognize that production has to stay the same – and with announcements like today, and hopefully more, production will continue to increase. Because, as we said earlier in this House, if we are going to transition from oil as a province, as a country, as a world then let us, in this province, transition away from imported oil first and maximize the production of our offshore oil resources and maximize the clean – (inaudible) more clean, never clean but more clean, carbon-friendly oil that we have off our shore.

So those are all good announcements today that we heard. But again, I go back to choices. The choice can be made. We have heard the minister

talk about sugar tax. You know, they have talked about sugar tax as if somehow or other imposing a tax – and the Premier of the province, by the way, he has called it behaviour modification. He has used that term more than once in this House: behaviour modification.

So we are going to try to influence people's behaviour by making them pay more. That, to me, is fundamentally flawed. Again, I would argue that if you want to help people shift from non-healthy choices to healthier choices, do something to reduce the cost on the healthier choices, not impose a tax. I still believe that the minister has an option to review that before September. I trust the minister will go back and take another look at it.

I think it is \$5 million, again, that doesn't need to come out of the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That is what this is all about. My first release in November 19, 2021. I just want to read it. I said at the time: "Living on a fixed income is challenging enough for our seniors, but time and time again the cost of living continues to increase, whether it's at the gas station or the grocery store. If the Liberal government does not act, difficult choices will have to be made in the households of our province. To stand by silently is not an option."

That was last November. So we know there have been numerous opportunities to change things and we know there has been numerous opportunities to make adjustments but we are here, now, May 31, and we're going to see some of those adjustments.

Again, I go back to politics should not be about politicians; it should be about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. When we stand up here, on this side of the House and talk about these issues, we're not talking simply about ourselves. We're talking about the people we represent – the people in our districts that we represent, who are legitimately struggling with these. I would suggest the Members opposite have the same concerns and the same people, because inflation and the cost of living doesn't have a border. It does not have a border; it doesn't end at a PC district or an independent

district or an NDP district. It is in Liberal districts just as much as it is in ours.

So it is very clear that this is a very high provincial issue. Every person you talk to, when you go back to your districts, will talk to you about two things: the cost of living and health care. Those are the things. I never thought that I would see the day when the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador would have to pay to get a prescription because they have to go see a nurse practitioner because they can't get in to see a family physician. And they have to pay \$35 to see a nurse practitioner. I never thought I would see that day, but it is here.

Yet, we procrastinate by saying, oh well; we haven't figured a way yet to pay nurse practitioners. If you haven't figured out a way to pay nurse practitioners, figure out a way to pay the people back their money that they've already spent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That is an easier way.

So, again, as I said, those of us on this side of the House in our PC caucus, we know who we stand for. We stand for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We'll continue to stand for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. And let me tell you who they are. We stood for the senior who could not fill their oil tanks to heat their homes. We stood for families who could not afford to put food on the table. We stood for the early childhood educator who could not afford to drive to work.

As the minister alluded to earlier, this is Early Childhood Educator Week and I couldn't agree with her more. We have to turn those from being jobs to being careers, and that is a path that the minister sounds like he's working towards.

We stood for the small business owner who struggled to make multiple trips to St. John's for supplies and wondered if they should close their doors. We stood for the public servants who have to commute over two hours a day, spending over \$400 per week in gas. We stood for the couple that has 40 per cent of their take-home pay going to pay for fuel just to get to work, having to choose which bills to get paid and

which not. We stood for a four-time cancer survivor who discontinued treatment because he couldn't afford it. We stood for the grandparents who could not afford to drive to Corner Brook to see their grandchildren.

We stood for the senior who already borrowed \$500 from friends to keep oil in his tank to try and stay warm but was too embarrassed to ask them for more money and did not qualify for any government programs. We stood for the family who stayed home on May 24 weekend because they couldn't afford the \$300 of gas just to tow their camper to Terra Nova. We stood for the woman scheduled for a medical procedure in St. John's, only to travel over 400 kilometres and be told that their appointment had been cancelled because there was no bed available and could not afford to travel back into St. John's for the rescheduled appointment.

We stood for the single mother with two small children who could not afford the multiple trips to the Dr. H. Bliss Murphy Cancer Centre because the price of gas exceeded the family budget. We stood for the businessperson who is paying her oil bill, living off canned food and has to cancel physio appointments because she can't afford to fill 'er up. We stood for the volunteer who, for the last few decades, has offered free drives to cancer treatments and has delivered food hampers to those in need and now is questioning whether the cost of fuel is too great to continue his service.

We stood with the people, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to stand with them, Speaker, and demand more from the government. We will not stop. We will be here for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador; we'll continue to be here for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I also want to touch briefly on the minister's sunset clause. The minister has said they need a sunset clause because if they didn't have a sunset clause they'd have to come back in the House and adjust the price, if the price of gas started to go really low, they'd have to come back to the House and adjust it down or up. So I would suggest, let's do that. Why do we need a sunset clause? Why do we need a clause that says on December 31 your gas will go up by

eight cents a litre, no matter where the price is, no matter what adjustments are made?

We are coming back to this House in October. We will get a fall fiscal update; we will have plenty of time to debate whether or not there needs to be an adjustment upwards or downwards to the eight cents a litre. And given what the minister has said, it's cost-neutral, why do we need a sunset clause? It is not going to increase the deficit and with the price of oil trading at \$34 per barrel higher today than it was in the budget –now we'll use a pattern on that, it probably won't trade as high as that forever – there has been a significant amount of windfall coming into that.

Again, I'm not sure why we need a sunset clause. I think the House is the place to decide that. The House is the place to debate that. That is where we should be talking about where we go and how we make these measures. That's why we come to the House of Assembly, to have open debate, to have open discussion, to go back and forth and to lay it out on the table and talk about the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So I would suggest that the sunset clause does not need to be there. There will be ample opportunity to come back in the fall and make any adjustments that need to be made. So let's not have that penalty on people.

Again, I can't sit down without pleading on the sugar tax. There is no need to put more taxes on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. They do not need that tax. It can be deferred. It could be postponed. If it's your will that you want to have behaviour modification on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, wait until next year to do it. Give the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador a break. They do not need their behaviour modified at this movement. Inflation has taken care of any modification of behaviour that is needed, because at over 6 per cent inflation the cost of all of those products has skyrocketed.

So people are making choices. They do not need government to impose a tax to help them make those choices. They do not need behaviour

modification. They need their government to be there for them, to continue to be there for them and to stand with them just as we have stood with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, just as we will continue to stand for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We will be there for the people of Newfoundland and continue to be there for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We're having sort of a reprise of the carbon tax debate in some ways. Years ago, with the Teachers' Association and the whole debate, Speaker, around the health plan, we used to say: You can have any plan you want, as long as you're willing to pay for it. I remember one teacher, when I was teaching up the shore, it came down to we were debating whether to increase premiums or to decrease benefits. I remember what he said to me because teachers are always looking at how do we save money; put money back in our pockets?

But his comment to me was this: Increase the premiums because you'll never miss the benefits until you need them. So it's better to have the benefits when you need them. So I'm thinking here it's the same thing. What is it that we want?

Many people who benefit from the gas tax are not the people I'm necessarily helping. They are the people who are in need of programs, not a break at the pumps. Because I look at what we need and who we need to help and who are the vulnerable and who are the people that call up to my office day in and day out.

I can tell you that in my district there are a significant number of people with a variety of issues – poverty is at the root of them; housing is at the root of them; mental health and addictions, at the root. If anything, I would say maybe it's time we start looking at how we can increase the

funding so that we can start helping those who are most vulnerable as well. Because in the end, here's the thing, we're going to pay for it, Speaker. We're going to pay for it in the visits to the hospital emergency room. We're going to pay for it in crime, in incarceration.

The fact is that, in the end, there's no such thing as it's a zero cost. It will cost us. For example, let's take a look at housing. It's only two weeks ago that a lady came to me with pictures of the emergency shelter she was assigned to. She had no place to stay. The mattress was stained. There was plywood up to the wall. There was no security; the locks were broken.

She left there. She's been sleeping in her car for the last two weeks. There's not enough affordable housing there. She is sleeping in her car; working at a hotel. But that's where she is for the last two weeks, because we don't have enough when it comes to, even what I would call, safe, affordable shelters – safe, affordable supportive housing.

I've got on this page here one, two, three, four, five seniors who are facing right now no-fault eviction. That's just today. That's just this week. They will have nowhere to live within a month. Where are we going to put them? I can tell you that each and every one of them, they're not relying on a car. They're relying on public transit, or they're walking.

Eight-seven: can't keep up with home care payments, medication; heart attack; no-fault eviction, too sick to pack and move and has an application in with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing with no options for an apartment.

Seventy-seven – another person – too sick to move, to find herself in another smoke-free building; has never smoked before but is suffering the effects of second-hand smoke. Another person, a senior, 82: multiple debilitating medical conditions; can't afford to live where he is right now; can't afford food.

Another senior, in his 70s: multiple illness, diabetic, you name it; not well enough to pack and move his belongings; cannot find an apartment; lives on OAS only; and eats at The Gathering Place.

Those are the calls I get. Now, I don't know, I'm assuming that other people get them as well, but at times, I've said it here, it's like a game of Whack-a-mole. Just when I think I've solved one problem, two or three more pop up. You just cannot keep ahead of them.

Now I've called here, so I'm not looking – if I thought for a minute that lowering the gas tax or anything else is going to solve these problems, no. But you know what? And I do believe this: Paying taxes is what I pay for the privilege of living in this country. Of having the medical services, of having roads, of having a hospital. I'm living in St. John's for that reason. I'm paying a lot more in terms of municipal taxes, as well. But that's what I pay for that privilege, to live here. To support the schools, to support the various organizations that I may not even avail of.

But in many ways, that's what it comes – we've got bigger problems here. We've got systemic problems that need to be addressed. If we want to help people, how do we go about making sure that they are mobile, that they can get around? Within the city, I can tell you: Metrobus. But let's call it something else: public transit, regional transportation.

Because there are people who will never own a car. Actually, there are people in my district, and I've got a number of them, a young professional with family, who says: I'm writing as a constituent. We're a professional couple, we have one car and we rely on a mix of public transit, walking, biking and cabs. Other professional couples are doing the same. I've had several, multiple emails from people making sure that there's funding provided for Metrobus. Not only within my district, but within the adjacent districts as well.

So how do we make it affordable for people to get around? Obviously that's what they need. How do we make it affordable so that people can live in a decent, respectful place? Where does the money need to be invested? Now I hear yes, we want to invest it in getting roads paved and so on and so forth, but I would argue right now we've got a bigger issue here. And I would suspect it's not just in St. John's but probably throughout the province. But certainly in St.

John's itself, in the centre of the city, housing is a huge issue.

I think, and the minister can certainly correct me on this one, but I'm pretty sure that the emergency shelters are full. That's no fault; that's just the way it is right now. We've got a problem and I would say that, for the most part, in speaking to the minister when I do bring a problem forward to the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, we can usually get things done.

But it's overwhelming. So to me, I'm looking here, if we want to – and I mentioned this last time. There is one gentleman we are helping. He is panhandling to buy diabetic strips. Think about that: to buy diabetic strips. Now, we usually think, well, someone is panhandling; what are they going to use if for? That is usually the judgment that comes with it. But no, he is using it to buy diabetic strips.

Most people who are on income support, I think the levels have to be looked at in terms of if we want to help people, the ones who are at the bottom. I challenge here anyone who can come up with a decent diet based on less than \$100 a week, which is what a lot of people are living on, especially if you are a single individual. That is what you have got to buy food and the other necessities.

In some cases if they fall in arrears, it is down to less than that. I challenge anyone to see how much \$100 will buy. It is not – and you might say, well, we can't afford it, we are doing the best we can – and maybe we are, but in the end I can tell you that there is going to be a cost to us. We are going to pay for it anyway. Either we are paying it for it, Speaker, in terms of the supports we give people or we are contributing, as we saw in the Health Accord, we are, basically, undermining those social determinants of health.

In some ways, I have heard the argument that putting money into the pockets of people and they will spend it in the economy – and I agree with that, but here is where we probably need to go too. One of the things we have called for is a living minimum wage. And how do we move towards that? Because I do believe one of the

proposals that we put forward is to increase it to \$15 an hour right now. Make sure that all small businesses have a total reprieve on the small business tax – probably at least what we are looking at in our proposal that we had made. I think it is – I stand to be corrected – \$17 million, if that is what it costs, but you look at it and it would probably put over \$3,000 in the pockets of each person who is on minimum wage if they are working 40 hours a week. That is money that is going to go right into the economy, if that is what we are after, if that is the motivation.

The people who call me, Speaker, are down to taking prescription medications, in many cases, for heart, blood pressure and other related issues, maybe every second or every third day. How do we help them? What's one of the consequences of not helping them, of not making it more affordable?

I think in many ways, if we want to look at helping people, let's take a look at some broad, bold ideas. Maybe it's time to get busy addressing the issue of pharmacare, either nationally or provincially. Let's start moving towards that. Let's make sure that maybe electricity rates that there's a rebate on electricity rates; not everyone uses oil, but everyone uses electricity.

Let's eliminate poverty. In 1988 or 1989, I think it was, the Parliament of Canada unanimously passed a resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. It is 2022 and it's still with us.

I applaud the fact that part of the sugar tax money is going into helping groups that provide meals to schools, but do you know what? That's still a band-aid approach that still requires a change to the systemic problem that faces us.

We've got to do more. Maybe that's about looking at improving the rates, reviewing the income support rates, accelerating the move to a living minimum wage and to look at what the necessities are and what people need to live with it.

But I can tell you right now, the seniors I spoke to, the people who contacted me, what they haven't been looking for was a reduction in the gas tax. What they were looking for were the

supports to make sure that they can maintain a decent standard of living.

We need to address our housing. We need to address income support. We need to make sure that jobs are protected. That we have legislation that protects good union jobs. We need to make sure that a minimum wage is indeed a living wage.

But, Speaker, I'm not sure if cutting our way to that will achieve it because in the end – I'm going back to my colleague when I was teaching up the shore – given a choice between increasing premiums or cutting benefits and having a savings, his answer was very clearly: increase the premiums because it is the benefits that you will depend on.

So I look around here and I think what is it we want? I want good schools. I want good hospitals. I want a good transportation system. I want those, especially those who are vulnerable, looked after. Those that are homeless right now or are living in a car or couch surfing or in an unsafe shelter have a decent place in which to live that is safe, that is secure, that has the supports in place.

Expanding the early childhood education; spot on. Putting it into the schools; spot on. It is about time; it is about providing benefits to – it is about making sure that parents have the resources that they need. I have no issue with that. I think that is an investment.

It will not benefit me. It will not benefit me directly but I think it will benefit society at large. It will address a lot of the issues. So in many ways, if we want that, if we want those things, that means that is the price I pay. Because either I am paying for something like that or I am paying to put up more prisons. I'm not putting that in your direction, Minister. My point is that we have a choice; we're still paying it, let's not fool ourselves.

I think I may have mentioned this. I had the privilege, luxury of spending a night in the emergency room at St. Clare's and all I can tell you is that you get a deeper appreciation for the characters of downtown St. John's. But I would argue that many of them have other issues, whether it's addictions, mental health issues,

homelessness and so on and so forth. They end up there for a lot of reasons. If you were looking at the cost, they are costing. But is it not better that we look at ways of making sure that we look after the most vulnerable and we invest in that. We invest in people.

As I said, there are couples in my district and several have said do you know what? What they want to see is – they're looking for more bus transportation. That's what they're going to need, professional couples, to maintain their lifestyles.

So, Speaker, I think it comes down to priorities. I'm looking at taxes that help, and even with the sugar tax, my opposition to that is where the money goes. To me, if we're going to take that – I'll go back – not into let's say the health living or my participation in some sort of physical activity, but I think in many ways if we're going to better spend that let's put it into making food more affordable for those who couldn't afford it back in the fall. It's gotten worse since then.

To me, it's about where we spend it to, but, in many ways, if I want the services, I must be prepared to pay for them, even if I'm not one who is going to receive them. Because I think if we benefit everyone, I benefit myself in the process. But it's something that we raise up all boats, and raise it up for all people.

I'll finish with this last little fact that I brought up before, that raising the bottom level, the income level, the bottom 20 percentile to the next level actually saves the health system some 6.7 per cent. Think about what that means in Newfoundland terms: over \$200 million annually.

With that, Speaker, I finish.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure, I guess, it's bittersweet to get up and speak about this bill because several weeks back this bill probably wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't be here debating this bill only we,

as a caucus, united for a cause and it was to stand up for the people in the province that are struggling. There are a lot of people struggling in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: It was something that we, as a group, it wasn't one person, it was a group of people, felt there had to be some more measures put in place for people who are struggling during this cost-of-living crisis. A lot of seniors, a lot of low-income people, but a lot of working poor, too, Mr. Speaker.

So I know when we started debating carbon several weeks ago, it was brought in, it was kind of evolved and we were like, we didn't think it was adequately addressed in the budget. There were some measures, \$142 million, which we've heard. My colleague from Ferryland, I'm not sure where the count is to on that but it's a fairly high count on the number of times that we've been told \$142 million, and fair enough, no problem. I mean, government are proud of that and I'm not condemning that. We just felt it needed to go further and this is further. Is it far enough? No, but it's further. The key word is further. It's better than what it was, but not where we need to be.

So as we debated it and it evolved, we were told: we've done everything we can do. The Premier told us and the Minister of Finance told us we can't do anymore, we can't do anymore. Well, lo and behold, we did get more, which is good. I think it comes down to a case of – government knew when they presented their budget, based on the public outcry, there was – I guess when the budget was released and tabled, it was a level of relief because sometimes you don't know what to expect. We just went through the Greene report, we don't know if there are any aspects of that coming into play, and the reset.

So you're wondering are we going to get big cuts. You're on edge, but then you know you're dealing with a cost-of-living crisis that's affecting everyone. So then you're living in hope, too, that you're going to get something to help those people. Because when I say help those people, they're all in our districts, we deal with them every day, every one of us. So you're trying to find a balance.

Now, government did say when they presented their budget they felt that they found a balance. I guess, in a way, they probably did. There were times when I read the budget – and it was the first year after an election – it almost seemed like an election budget. That kind of stuck me oddly because government has made all the right statements sometimes on how to deal with this, and the Premier's task force and we've had the Rothschild report that we haven't seen yet. How to tackle this, how are going to get through this? How are we going to reinvent ourselves? I can't remember all the acronyms the Premier uses all the time. They sound great. Most of us don't understand what they mean, but they sound great.

Ultimately, what people are looking for, they're looking for help, but they're looking for people to listen to them. I keep saying, and it bears repeating: People want you to listen to their concerns. It's a very simple concept. Simplest concept in the world, Speaker. Pick up the phone, email them back, but don't just give them passing words. If you listen to them closely, the cries are there. You can't solve all the problems – and I don't expect government to solve everyone's problems.

But, ironically, since this announcement of the cost of living add-on, I guess, last Thursday, it's \$80 million I think we're looking at, there are still gaps in that. You talk to the public; people are still concerned. They're still not adequately addressing their issues. That home oil is part of a separate thing, but the home oil rebate or whatever they're giving in the fall. It's still a big group of people there that are struggling. Even though they're burning electricity, they're struggling.

It's the ones who received the Seniors' Benefit, they are the ones who should probably be included in that group. We have done a lot of speaking about it in our caucus and my colleagues asked the minister about it as well. Right now, you have home oil customers getting that rebate, but all people who qualify for that – if they don't burn oil, they don't get it. It's only people that burn oil in that group. They all should be included. That's where we stand. Then you're capturing that group.

You get to the fuel piece. So we spent the better part of two weeks – it's 11.5 cents or 11.05 cents carbon on gas. So you have taken off eight cents, which is fine. I'm not saying that's wrong. We would like more but that is the reality. Everyone would like more. But you are taking off a tax, yet we still – so really we are net down three cents after the debate on carbon, because we got eight off it, but we still have 11 and that never came from carbon. That came from provincial tax.

So are we better off? In a way, yes. But in a way, no, because the same people are still suffering because they have still got to go to the supermarket. They have still got to try to get the groceries. They have still got to try to live. There are lots of other costs in life.

And I know government sometimes – I suppose people expect – they are accused of trying to be everything to everybody and we get accused, sometimes, of asking government to do too much. And government themselves, sometimes, try to do more than they really should be doing.

But if you look at the cost of living as a whole, we are targeting fuel. We're targeting people who drive vehicles. We are targeting people that burn oil. There are people that are left out of both of those groups. People are struggling and they are not in those groups. Seniors that don't drive and they have electricity in their homes; they are getting that much, Mr. Speaker. Zero. And go around, there are lots of them, lots of them in our communities. I have lots in my communities and most every Member in this House does.

So, respectfully, in an effort to do good and address the cost of living, I am not going to say that it was terrible. I think we have clearly articulated that this is not enough.

How do we address that group? Do you not look at doing something for the people who are getting the Seniors' Benefit? Bump that up and give them a payout that is going to come in the fall. Do you not include that group? That would be a good step in the right direction.

A lady, a senior in my district made reference to the fact that she – this is about choices. She said electric vehicles will still wear down the road. They are giving rebates for electric vehicles. They are still going to cause damage on the pavement; still rubber tires on the vehicles. How do you make rubber? What about the battery? What about all the parts? Because they use a big battery that no one can afford to buy.

It's like 20 years down the road, we're going to look back and we're going to start saying where we were to 20 years ago when we started talking about climate change. I remember some of the conversations back then; it seems pretty amateur now. I think in 20 years' time, we're going to come to the point, like, this was pretty amateur, a lot of these things. But the point everyone is making is, as good as this may be, and the point I'm trying to make here, there's a lot of people gone through the cracks.

Government in their wisdom will stand up and take credit and feel that they are doing measures to help those people struggling, but I guess that's the question, probably, the Minister of Finance can address: What are you doing for those people that don't have a vehicle and don't burn oil? When they're living on \$1,700 or \$1,800 a month, because I say this and I said it and I'll say it again, and I use the example of beans, because I still can't believe that in our supermarkets it is \$7 for three cans of beans.

There's a senior from my district who I know quite well and he was down one day, recently – that's why I use this example, actually, I ran into him – and he was really frustrated with that cost. And it was only then I realized how much they actually were. He said, you know, I'm getting to the point I question can I afford to buy them.

Now, this person got a – I don't know what they got, they're doing all right, I think, they'll survive it, but that's where we're to. That's a senior that probably can manage. But that's just one example of the many costs of living that's not really been considered. Again, because you don't have a car or you burn oil, your life goes on as normal for you. There's no benefit.

If we do a calculation in our district of how many people are in that boat. A lot. Government,

sure, I give them a passing grade on doing something, but it's far from adequate.

I suppose I'd be remiss if I never made a little comment, I sit and listen again to my colleagues with the Third Party. They point out a lot of good things that's needed; a lot of required things in the province, a lot of needs of people: low income housing, guaranteed wage, minimum wage increase – 50 cents is not enough.

Now, again, that's not bad, it's a balance, because the minimum wage is going to increase, it's going to cause people, small business owners to struggle, too. That is an added cost on the businesses, who will probably add it into their products. Or in the restaurants, there's going to be extra cost on food and beverages in restaurants because they've got to pay staff extra. It ultimately comes back to the consumer, but for those people in that industry and those jobs, it's more money in their pocket. In turn, there's more money in government's pocket. It's the way the economy works.

But that 50-cent increase will ultimately affect the consumers in the province who can afford to go out and buy – and even if you can't, as I said, that will effect supermarkets as well because they're no different. Even though they're the big, bad supermarkets, they have deeper pockets than most, they'll still increase it like anyone else, and that's why their profit margins are probably something else we should be looking at, if there is any way of getting some control on that situation, because there is a lot of price gouging going on in this province. I think that no one says it enough, but all you have to do is go around. I think it's outrageous. I think COVID gave a licence to print money for a lot of business in this province, and supermarkets are probably leading the way.

My Third Party colleagues, they'll ask for all these things, and these things cost money. There's no shortage of money required to do those things. But we, on this side of the House, and I think most of government side has done a decent job of this one as well. We believe in the oil industry. We support the oil industry. We've always been major advocates for the oil industry, workers and the impacts on our economy. They didn't want us to go with Bay du

Nord. I guess West White Rose; they mightn't be pleased with that today. I am. We think it's great.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Yes, exactly.

But you listen and that's where I question some of the ideologies of some of these arguments. It doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker, to me. We'll get up and we'll debate legislation that the government are bringing in, but I think it's fair to bring up legislation that's being debated in this House by other Members of the House. It don't make sense; it's not credible. I don't think it's credible. It's not a credible argument.

I said this before, you know, and I always remember back in the day, someone used to take a big calculator and start punching in numbers every time Members from the Third Party get up talking about things they wanted. It was a big calculator; some people in this House would recall it. But that was meant to be fine, it was funny, it was joke, but it was bang on. That's what you're dealing with.

It's like this tug-of-war. We're advocating, if want more for seniors – and we do, but we also realize there has to be revenue to create that. Like my colleague, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, wanted to know where the money tree was. I think there are a couple of locations we can find that. But it doesn't grow on trees; you have to have a revenue base. The oil industry is one of the biggest revenue drivers in our province, let's face it. And my colleague from Bonavista does a great job advocating for the fishery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Hear, hear is right.

Now the Minister of Fisheries don't seem like he agrees with a lot of what he says, but any data that the Member for Bonavista throws in this House of Assembly is well researched, because he's researching better than anyone in this House. Take my word on that, Mr. Speaker. There might be someone as good, but there is no one researching any better than the data.

That's how we justify you pay for these initiatives. You have to pay for these initiatives. They don't come for free. So if you want to shut down the oil industry yet you want a big wish list of things, how do you get there? How do you get your road paved? How do you get affordable housing? I need affordable housing, but I am also an advocate for the oil industry. We're advocates for the fishing. We're advocates for agriculture. My colleague for Exploits, he's a big proponent on agriculture. I like agriculture because it is important to my district. We're not fishing communities. There is one seal out in Exploits last spring we found out. I got a few up in Conception Bay but we're not fishing. We're all about agriculture.

But, Speaker, respectfully, it is how you get the income. How are you going to get the funds to pay for these things? So we might be accused of a lot of things but, as Conservatives, I think we've done a good job fiscally on a lot of things. People can throw their criticism at us but – and we always like to talk about the economy. As the Minister of Finance may realize, we ask a lot of questions on the economy. Every single day in this House, there are questions coming out about the financing the economy. It is because we care about that. We care about how we get there, too. We care about people's cost – on the other side, what they have to pay, meaning the cost of living.

So it is a balance; we try to strike that balance on a daily basis in this House and, for the most part, I think we do a decent job. Are we perfect at it? No. But I think we do a decent job and that brings me back to when I started in, originally, was how we got here today. Because there is a real likelihood we probably wouldn't have been in this Legislature this week had we not stood united for people that are struggling in this province.

It is like you say, it is no one credit; it is a credit of a group united. Colleagues, independent Members, and even the Third Party stayed and debated this carbon – even though they were in agreement with it, we all stayed on one united front because ultimately we believed we were united and we were not willing to let that legislation go through unless there was some measures brought in to help people struggling.

Again, government, I'll say, they did okay. Could they have done better? Absolutely. At the end of the day, we cannot not support legislation that is going to reduce eight cents, obviously. But we think that some changes could be done to it, some improvements could be done and there are other things outside the legislation that we feel that can be done to improve the lives of those people that are struggling and those people are falling through the cracks.

We will continue to advocate on that, Speaker, every single day, every single opportunity we get. That's something that won't go away when this House closes. We'll continue on every day at that. We'll be back here in October, and guess what? We're going to continue on it when we get back here, too. This is our role and it's the expectation of what we'll do.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am glad to have an opportunity to speak to this Bill 64.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I just want to say I'm going to pick up a little bit on what my colleague was saying there. I think it's important for us all to realize that while we are going through a rough patch right now, and there's no doubt we are going through a rough patch as a province and there's no doubt our citizens are going through a rough patch, but the sky is not falling – the sky is not falling. And we have, I really do believe, a very, very bright future ahead of us. I really do.

I make no bones about it. I was thrilled to hear about the West White Rose today. I was thrilled when the announcement came down on Bay du Nord. Anything that we can to develop our resources, whether they be oil and gas, whether they be our minerals, and we're seeing Labrador is doing fantastic. Now we're seeing more and more discoveries happening here on the Island. Lots of opportunity there, no doubt, and even hydro. Despite what went on with Muskrat Falls

and the ballooning costs and perhaps misleading information that got us there and everything else, despite all that there's going to be a bright future for us in terms of hydro. I really believe there will.

Certainly with the Upper Churchill, combined with Muskrat Falls, combined with Gull Island, which I really believe is going to be developed. The minister may not be able to disclose anything at this point, but I think that there's something in the works; I really believe that. And there are other hydro projects – there are actually other rivers and that in Labrador and on the Island that could be at play as well.

And I think there's lots of opportunity for hydrogen and wind and so on, and I think we're going to see all that stuff forthcoming. So it's not all doom and gloom, and things will get better. We're going to see a lot of times these things work in cycles. You're in a bit of a downturn and I think there's an upturn not too far in the future. I think we will have more opportunity, if it's managed properly – that's the key point. If the resources are managed properly, if we are the key beneficiary of those resources, both from an employment perspective as well as secondary processing and obviously ensuring we're the primary beneficiaries in terms of royalties and everything else.

If it's managed properly I think there will be an opportunity to pay down much of that debt and get us on much better financial footing than what we are today. I really think that's there and it's going to happen. I really believe that.

So what do we do in the meantime? That's the question: What do we do right now? While I do understand and, as has been said here, there is a balancing act that much be achieved, and while I do understand that even though what was predicted in terms of a deficit has decreased, thanks to the price of oil going up and so on, that we're still looking at, I think, a \$300-million deficit this year. We always have to be mindful of that.

But the question is, in trying to tackle the deficit and trying to tackle the debt, you also have to balance that out with the needs of the actual people. It's fine for us to be on solid financial ground, but while that's good on the one hand,

you can't have the province on good financial ground but everyone who's living in the province is in poverty and really struggling to survive. You can't have that. We also have a responsibility to the Treasury but we also have, arguably, a larger responsibility to the people of the province, who elected us here by the way, who elected us to do what was in their best interest and to look out for their needs and address their concerns.

Right now, as I indicated, people are struggling. They're looking for some support where they can, from the government. I've said here in this House before; I recognize the fact this government cannot be held accountable and responsible for geopolitical events that are occurring in the world, that are driving the costs of oil and fuel and everything else. Along with that, of course, groceries and everything else comes on board once prices go up, everything seems to go up. Some of it, legitimately, as a gouge, I would suggest. People making hay, I guess as they say, when the sun shines, but on the backs of the average person more so than perhaps they should.

So we are going through this tough period of time. What can we do to help the people who need our help right now? That's the question. Depending on who you are, depending on your stage in life, how much income you have and so on, how well off you are financially and so on, different people are going to have different needs. There are some people who don't need any help. There are some people who can, even with the cost of living, while it pains us all, we can suck it up. We have the ability to pay that additional money at the pumps because we're making a good salary. Perhaps we're making a good salary and perhaps our spouse is making a good salary.

It's painful in a sense; nobody likes it. Your dollar is not stretching as much as it did, and sure it has an impact on your finances, on everybody's, but you still don't have to worry about the fact, when I leave here if I need to fill up my vehicle, I don't have to worry about, oh my God, I wonder if I have enough money in my account to fill up my vehicle. I go to the gas station and I pay for it. I don't even know what's in the account, but I know there's money in the account.

A lot of us here and people who are making good salaries are in that boat. While we don't like having to pay more, we're able to. Then, of course, we have the people who are extremely wealthy and it really doesn't matter what happens; they're going to be fine anyway. Then at the other extreme, of course, we have a lot of the people that my colleague from St. John's Centre is referring to. I get it; that is a big issue for him. It should be a big issue for all of us. I don't mean to diminish it in that way, but it's a big issue for him because he would have, perhaps, on a percentage basis, more people in that situation than most districts. Definitely more than I would have, for sure.

So it's a bit of different perspective, I suppose, in the sense that he's getting these calls and these situations on the daily. Whereas I don't have any social housing in my district. I have co-op housing, but I don't have any social housing, per se. I would have some people, perhaps, who are on income support and perhaps they're living in someone basement apartment or whatever – I have some, but certainly nothing close what my colleague from St. John's Centre would have. So I do get some of those issues that he has, but certainly pales in comparison to what he is getting every day. I appreciate his perspective and I appreciate his passion. I really honestly do.

With that said – and I understand we have to help people there, but again, it's a bit of a balancing act as well because a lot of the people who I represent – now, some of them are doing quite well, but there are other people certainly in my district who are, what I will call, the lower middle class. They're working-class people, but they don't have the ability – like, they're sort of surviving from paycheque to paycheque. By the time they pay their mortgage, perhaps a modest one, and make their car payment, they pay their insurance, they pay their taxes to the City of Mount Pearl or whatever the case might be, and groceries, there's not a whole lot left. If they have kids, then naturally they want to have their kids in sports, whether it's hockey, soccer, baseball or whatever. We have all kinds of different sports in Mount Pearl, tons of it. And they're finding it a struggle. They're finding inflation is really affecting them.

Now, is it to the degree, as my colleague in St. John's Centre has, where there are people literally saying I can't afford to eat and I can't afford medication? No. But they are still struggling to survive. These people would tell you I'm the guy, or I'm the girl, who's getting up every morning and lacing up my boots, and I'm going to work. Some people are working two jobs, working whatever overtime they can get to pay those bills, to keep their kids in hockey. Why should they feel guilty – I'm not suggesting my colleague is saying that, by the way. That's not what I'm inferring at all. But why should they feel guilty about the fact that, my God, I went and I got myself an education and I got myself a half decent job, and I'm working my guts out day and night to pay all these bills and, heaven forbid, I have to put my child in hockey or in baseball.

They should not be deprived of that. Just because it's not what some would say an essential, as opposed to like eating, medication and so on – I understand it's not that same essential, but it's still part of living. Surely God if someone gets themselves an education and a job, it's not a whole lot to ask and expect that they should be able to live comfortably as opposed to survive.

Surviving is one thing; living comfortably is another thing. Arguably, someone who is working hard, got an education, got a good job, a decent job and they're working hard to support a family, they should be able to live a comfortable, reasonable lifestyle.

That doesn't mean they get to go to Florida every single year. It doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean they're going out to eat to The Keg every night, but surely goodness they should be able to afford, if they have a couple of kids or something, on a Saturday or something, to take them out to McDonald's or whatever the case might be. They should be able to afford to take them to a movie. They should be able to afford to have their kids in soccer or have their kids in hockey. If they're on a hockey team or a soccer team and they said we're going to go on a tournament or something now, we're going to Gander for the weekend, to the provincials, they shouldn't have to deprive their child with the fact I can't afford to take you to Gander to

participate in the provincials or the regionals or whatever, because we can't afford to do it.

Somebody here, yesterday I think, I can't remember, I think it was one of the Members in the Opposition talked about someone who had to take their child out of hockey because they could no longer afford to keep their child in hockey. They had to take that child out of hockey.

Just think about that for a second. As a parent, who's working hard every day and you have to say to your child, all your friends are playing hockey, I have to take you off the hockey team. You can't play hockey with your friends any more because I can't afford it.

What a horrible thing to have to – I can't think of anything – we could all think of worse I suppose, but to me that would be a horrific thing. If I, as a father, had to say to my child, I have to take you out of hockey or I have to take you out of dance or I have to take you out of gymnastics or whatever because I can't afford to have you there. All your friends are here, you can't be there anymore; we can't afford it. It's just a terrible feeling to have to do something like that.

I'm not arguing against – and I don't want to be seen – what my colleague from St. John's Centre is saying, because those people are struggling, I get it. I really do. Housing is an issue, health care is an issue, mental health and addictions is an issue, transportation, i.e. public transit is an issue, he is right. He is 1,000 per cent right. If you don't deal with people's issues, in terms of dealing with their addictions and their mental health and housing and all that stuff, and poverty, if you don't deal with that, you're going to deal with it anyway.

He is right, I agree with him, because you're going to deal with it through the health care system. You're going to deal with it through the department of social services. You're going to deal with it through the CYFS and child services. You're going to be dealing with it through the RNC, the RCMP and the HMP. That's reality. And the courts and the huge costs associated with all of those entities. So he's not wrong with what he's saying. I'm not knocking what he's saying, I agree with what he's saying.

But I'm trying to bring it back to the middle-class working person because that's the demographic that I generally represent in my district. I've had people come to me on numerous occasions and say: Paul, b'y, do you know what? I never qualified for anything. All I qualified for is payment. Every time there's something, more taxes, more taxes, more taxes. I pay for everything; I never get a break.

I go to work every day and all I'm doing, I look at my cheque – I've said this before – you look at your net pay and your gross pay and the net pay is actually gross, when you look at it, when you look at how much you lost on your cheque. You're saying here I am, going to work every day and I'm paying in all these taxes, but whenever there's a government program, I never get a break. I don't qualify for nothing.

I'm not going to qualify for any drug card. I'm not going to qualify for any NLHC home rebate programs or home heat programs. I'm not going to qualify for home repairs. I'm not going to qualify for none of it. I'm going to qualify to pay for all of it.

So I guess in that vein, when we look at this measure here to reduce the cost of gas, yes, there are people that are not going to benefit from giving a break at the pump. Just like there were people who didn't benefit from the \$142 million because they weren't a senior on OAS, CPP only, or they weren't on income support.

But guess what? A lot of my constituents, they will argue it's not enough. They will argue it's not enough because inflation is killing them, especially ones who are just living paycheque to paycheque, but at least it's something for them. At least it's something for the average working person. That's the bottom line.

And why shouldn't they get something, too? Why shouldn't they get a break, too? I'm not talking about the intent here; I'm not talking about giving breaks to millionaires here. Although, I suppose everyone is going to gain from this. But at least the average working Joe and Jane who gets up every day and laces up their boots and goes to work to support their family, at least they get a little break. They get something out of it, besides paying for

everything. From that perspective, obviously, I would support this measure.

Now, with that said, while this is being billed, portrayed, whatever way you want to look at it, as cutting the provincial HST in half, and I guess it is in terms of eight cents off – we're not really taking eight cents off. It's kind of a sleight of hand. Because we just put 2.5 cents on in terms of the carbon tax. So the net value is 5.5 cents; not eight cents, it's 5.5 cents.

Because that carbon tax, even though we might want to call it a federal tax – and there's no doubt the feds are responsible for having this tax, or forcing us to have this tax, but that 2.5 cents carbon tax, that we voted against, I might add – thank you to my colleagues in the Opposition for that – is going on and eight cents in provincial tax is coming off, which is a net benefit to the consumer of, not eight cents, 5.5 cents. That's what it is.

I don't know why, if the intent is to give people a real break and you're saying you're taking eight cents off, then, as far as I'm concerned, it shouldn't have been eight cents coming off, it should have been 10.5 cents coming off. You could have taken off the eight cents, cut that in half, and you could have eliminated the 2.5 that you just added on. That would have been even better for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to give them a bit better of a break.

I know other Members – I've got a few people reach out to me about that, saying, jeez, they're saying they're giving us eight cents and then they're going to tack on carbon tax. People see it as a bit of a bluff or a scam or whatever. That's some of the words they use, not me. I, personally, would like to see that 2.5 cents also come off. It's unfortunate it didn't.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

SPEAKER (Warr): Speaker recognizes the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

Always a pleasure to speak to any matter and, hopefully, reflect the needs of the people of the province and, most importantly, the constituents of the districts that each of us represent.

So just by way of background, I just want to remind everyone, we're dealing with Bill 64, and as we are in second reading, not in Committee, we're not dealing with the specifics of the bill, we're looking at the rationale for the bill.

By way of Explanatory Notes, as was provided by Legislative Counsel, this bill would amend the *Revenue Administration Act* to reduce the tax on certain grades of gasoline by seven cents per litre until the end of this year, December 31, 2022. That's what this bill does.

I would suggest the intent of the bill, consistent with the rationale, which so many of us have spoken to today – and by the way, throughout this session – I think I referred to this some time ago – each day during Question Period, I keep track of all the questions: who asked the question and what was the subject matter and I have been scoring this. It is quite interesting. Since we have reconvened a couple of months ago, well over 50 per cent of the questions raised by Opposition deal with the cost of living. It is everything from the price of gasoline to the struggles that the Leader of the NDP has spoken about; so many people who can't even afford a car, let alone have to go through the consideration of how do I put gasoline in that car that I can't afford to start with.

So this, no question, is a preoccupation of the people of this province and we need to be focused on that. My concern is – and thinking about the rationale – what exactly will this do to help us? I mean, politically, we're going to be able to say to the people of the province: The Legislature passed a bill, Bill 64, that saw a reduction of the provincial portion of the tax that's on that gasoline that we pay at the pumps. I want to talk about some of the background noise that is going on and just how this, frankly, is just a blip in the big world that we're dealing with. So many colleagues, including my buddy here for Mount Pearl - Southlands, talking about world events and how they're shaping what we're feeling.

I just had an interesting conversation with the Member for Labrador West. He's a bit younger than I am, that's for sure, and he has a bit more aptitude for all those things to do with software and so on. He is showing me this really

interesting app. It is called trading commodities. It is a trading commodities app and he was just showing me how you can go on there and look at the price of gasoline as it is happening right now on the world. So in the last hour that we have been talking, looking at it, it has been moving a little bit from \$4.09 to \$4.1 US dollars per gallon. It is moving around there.

Why this is relevant is because just six months ago – actually, just four months ago, before the war started in Ukraine, guess what the price was on this trading app? Half. The price of gasoline has doubled on the world markets. We're here again arguing over seven cents per litre. Yeah, I get it. Yeah, I know it's going to provide some relief, but folks, there are a lot bigger pressures going on than this seven cents. The price of gasoline has doubled since February. The last time we saw prices – frankly, we haven't seen prices like this, but the last time they were high was some 10 years ago, when, according to my colleague from Labrador West, in looking at the app, he said it was about \$3.34 US per gallon; we're now at \$4.1. We are setting some interesting records here, and things are happening well beyond the strength, power and authority of this Legislature to deal with. That's what I want to talk about.

There's an interesting article yesterday. For those of us who track the news items, it was a bit of an explanation of what the Public Utilities Board does, doesn't do, how it works, and how it's called to help regulate the price of gasoline in this province. As I've stated, the District of Lake Melville is bracing because, in the next few days, a tanker will arrive with fuel that's from outside markets, and that fuel is going to be a lot more than what we've been paying. We've been enjoying a freeze, through the freeze of the winter, but now with that new tanker we're going to be exposed to it, and people are bracing.

The inquiries have been coming into myself and it's been interesting: When is this ship rising? When will Bill 64 be passed? When will it go to the third reading, Royal Assent? When will we sign off? When will that call be made to the PUB to adjust it? So my point is that it's probably going to happen, or certainly could happen. If we look at the last four months, we'll pass this bill perhaps this week. There'll be a

call made to the Public Utilities Board; they'll drop that, that seven cents, plus the HST that we're dealing with. Well, guess what? We're just as likely to see, in the same day, a jump of 10 cents or more –

S. CROCKER: Guaranteed.

P. TRIMPER: Guaranteed, he says, and I completely agree with the Government House Leader because, in the last three months, the Public Utilities Board has made 26 changes to the price of gasoline, that we pick up at the pumps – 26 changes. That includes 14, what are called, extraordinary changes. These are changes that are not made on the regular – for those of us who understand, the MHAs, we are provided a confidential briefing or note the day before. It is an embargoed document and explains to us what's going to happen to the price of gas in the district we represent.

The PUB has had to intervene, as I said, 14 times. So this is an intervention of sorts, this seven cents, plus HST, that we're all working hard on and so on. In the meantime, the world is just moving it all over the place. I find myself – while I get it and I see the political savvy in doing this, I'm really concerned for who this is not helping –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. TRIMPER: I believe I just heard my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands said some words like, I suppose everyone is going to gain. Well, in fact, so many folks won't gain from this. And we really have to think about that and I can tell you I am in a district in Labrador and all of my colleagues and I feel those from Western Newfoundland, we all have this – let's just talk about health care and the cost and the Medical Transportation Assistance Program that we are often railing away on and pointing out the flaws to and so on, looking for additional financial support to help.

I have constituents who can't even afford the differential in the government support, sometimes that is \$1,000 up front prepay airfare. Well, that extra \$400, \$500, \$600 and additional

costs and so on, they have got to figure out how to do that themselves. So you know what happens? Those folks that I believe this bill is intended for, I am very sorry to tell you, I know people who have cancelled their appointments for a cancer checkup. They have cancelled their appointments for cardiac care. They have cancelled their appointments for all matter of surgery here in St. John's or Corner Brook. That is where the services are, but we can't even get them there.

So I don't see this helping those, frankly, who I am very worried about. Sunday afternoon – I needed to do it – it was a very difficult situation but I went to a family who are grieving. They had just lost a loved one who was on a wait-list for some 17 days for cardiac care. On the 18th day, the family was advised an air ambulance is coming. She had a heart attack and died before she could get out of Labrador to get here.

Yes, it is seven cents. Yes, we will provide that to folks but that represents the foregoing of some, according to the briefing I received, \$44 million in revenue. I look at the questions today. I think there were three or four questions from the Official Opposition dealing with roads in their districts that weren't addressed. The minister responded and I think he said he had a budget of \$151 million. Just think what \$44 million more could do to his budget alone. It's 25 per cent more paving, bridge repair capability. I can tell you, in Labrador, we could have another aircraft and crew on standby.

We only have air ambulance support right now for half time. So many of the times I'm having to make – our region is having to feel the loss of a loved one because we couldn't get him out here in time. And I tell you, that is sobering. It is really, really difficult.

Again, I'm going to take some time, because I feel – and while I did clap today when the minister announced the breakthrough with Cenovus, and I welcome it, because here's a project that had been parked, it's one that's in the queue, and I'll hold my nose and support it, but I still have all of my different issues and arguments around our continued reliance on oil.

We seem to want to go use oil to help us get off oil, and I can't wait until we really start to make serious progress. We did not do that today, but I recognize we need that transition time; we'll get there.

But, folks, I've got to tell you, windfall profit tax legislation is a way that we can immediately put cash in the pocket. Not just somebody who's at a gas pump trying to put gas in there, and we're going to help those folks; I'm talking about the people on low income, even the middle income, and putting money directly to – whether or not they own a car, they need cash for health care and a whole bunch of other things; early childhood education, we need daycare support.

Cenovus, I've got to talk about them, again. Last year, they declared a profit of \$220 million in the first quarter. This year, they just declared a profit of \$1.6 billion. This morning we heard they're going to go ahead with the West White Rose Project. What an interesting coincidence. That \$2.95 billion – I'm sorry, I've just jumped over – so Cenovus is proceeding. Well, great. I wish they'd been there some of the tougher times, as opposed to this amazing lucrative opportunity for anybody in the oil and gas sector.

I also have been speaking about Suncor, another important player in our offshore oil and gas industry. They just declared they tripled their profits. Last year, \$821 million; \$2.95 billion this quarter. And we stood here; I stood here with my colleagues last year, and allocated some \$505 million of additional support for them to go ahead with the Terra Nova Project – wow.

We are trapped in this province by what is politically expedient. I feel that if we are really seriously going to help the people who most need the help and really need a hand up, not a handout, we've really got to start thinking longer term, start thinking a little bit further out there.

Guess what? We already have. Canada is already applying windfall profit tax legislation to guess who? The banks. We're doing it now. I just need to find my numbers – but we now and over the next five years, the proposal – not the proposal, but Canada has passed legislation that's going to be securing some – I'm going to

use “about” because I don't have my exact numbers in front of me, Speaker. It's approximately, within the five years, the anticipated profit the banks are enjoying right now because of the support they received during COVID times, the federal government, the Government of Canada has said we're now coming after you to help us get through the recovery. The banks have enjoyed these windfall profits, so it's going to represent some \$4.1 billion, there about, in windfall profit tax that the federal government will be receiving from our national banks.

I have calculated that if we had this legislation – remember we cannot apply it as a subnational, as a province; Newfoundland and Labrador cannot do this, but the Liberals can go to Ottawa and talk to the prime minister. The Official Opposition can certainly go to their national leaders and the Third Party can do the same. Even the independents can speak to this, urging Ottawa to take a look at this situation.

We are all in this struggle because of certain commodities are going through the roof. The folks that are running those commodities have control over what's happening with them and so on, they are enjoying amazing profits.

What are they doing with those profits, by the way? Suncor just declared a 12 per cent increase in its dividend to its shareholders. I've got a litany of quotes here that Anna Hutchings, who works with me, I had her dig up from some of the oil and gas players. I have to say, even the president of Cenovus, Alex Pourbaix, is talking about the need for additional funding, if they're going to take on some of the serious mitigation efforts around carbon sequestration, reduction of emissions. They're looking for government's support to make action towards this green economy to try to get us to net zero, yet enjoying amazing profits.

I've calculated that if windfall tax legislation was in place consistent with what the Americans are dealing with today in Congress, it's happening, it would generate, for Hibernia alone, today, we could be having coming into our coffers \$2.3 million US dollars a day, just from Hibernia. West White Rose, additional dollars. The Bay du Nord Project, again, additional monies.

What you do is you calculate what is the price that they've enjoyed and the profits they made over the previous five years before COVID times and then they're applying it now to the current price of oil, which, I'm not sure right now, is probably \$114 to \$120, it's in that range. So this is not a cost on production, it's an opportunity to share the profits.

Again, I go back to the rationale for this bill. It's really, let's face it, the Opposition, we're all sitting over here and we have in our questions consistently 50 per cent of our time, we are talking about the cost of living. What can we do to help those people? If we really are serious, we will take money from those who are standing to gain most from this most unfortunate circumstances where the world is again in serious war and embroiled in a conflict and issues about supply that are causing the commodities that we have access to go through the roof. As I said, the price of gasoline has doubled in four months and we're here dealing with seven cents.

I think I've made my point, Speaker. I thank you very much for the opportunity.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I recognize the hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's indeed an honour to stand in this House again as we get to the final stages of debating the 2022-23 budget. And while the budget itself has been debated in past, there are certain pieces of legislation that are part and parcel of being able to put the whole package together so that any programs and services can be funded and that, hopefully, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador can see some of the benefits as part of that process.

I want to go on record first by saying I will be supporting what's being put forward here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: It's a partial relief. We understand, and I'll be totally honest and upfront here, that budgets are not easy for anybody to do. And I've

said it a number of times here. I've been around dozens of them and dozens of them over the years. Some are very easy to do because the money is just there and it happens we're in good times. Other ones are very challenging. When there isn't money, you've got to make some really harsh decisions. I know this one wasn't an easy one. I give credit to the minister and her staff and the bureaucrats, who, themselves, had to try to find ways to be as frugal as possible, do an evaluation on which services and programs need to be the priorities and try to come up with a balance.

I will say, I'm not adverse to the budget, but I do think priorities could've been put in certain ways. We had a debate about that just in this spring sitting. We asked over 300 questions around cost of living, the direct impact on people. We've had a multitude of debates around certain pieces of legislation and the impact. We may not always agree, but I do think we agree we would like for society and the citizens here to have as much as we can offer. The debate that we have had on this side – or the adversative debate, I should say, has been about not feeling that the prioritized process works 100 per cent in the best interest of the people in Newfoundland and Labrador. And that is a difference of opinion. I get it.

We are going to say, here is what we think a priority should be in a program. Somebody else is going to say something else should be here. We do challenge certain things. I will say I am perhaps one of the few who will publicly say: I am not in favour of the carbon tax in any way, shape or form. Am I in favour of protecting the environment? One hundred per cent. Am I in favour of working and even forcing industries to do a better job when it comes to emissions? One hundred per cent.

Am I in favour of educating our citizens, of using technology to improve minimizing emissions and having a better understanding of how we protect our environment? One hundred per cent. Am I in favour of finding those environmentally friendly industries that we can use to ensure our economy moves forward? One hundred per cent.

Am I in favour of using the industries we have here to generate revenues, so not only can we take care of the citizens here and their needs, particularly, keep them healthy and safe and engaged, but that we can generate enough revenue so that we can transition to other ways of keeping our environment safe and clean? One hundred per cent on all of those things.

I don't think the carbon tax is what would have been the benefit to that. But, with that being said, I do not fault the Liberal administration in Newfoundland and Labrador for that. They were forced into it based on a different understanding from a federal perspective, and I get that. I understand that. And I know if I was in the chair on the opposite side, there would be decisions that I, our Cabinet and our caucus would have to make around how we make that balance work there.

But I will say that on record now, the carbon tax, to me, is not going to achieve anything near what people would hope. I think there are other ways of doing that, other incentives that could be done, other ways to force the hand of those who are the polluters and other ways of educating our society to make sure that they not only do the right thing but so does the next generation and future generations there.

The sugar tax, again, I put that in the same category as the carbon tax. I do not see what the intended outcome that was probably thought up in, you know, full-fledged thoughtfulness that this would be a positive and it would help keep people safe and healthy – I don't see the outcome being there. Again, it becomes an issue around revenues coming out of people's pockets, the most vulnerable. I think there are other ways of doing it.

We have seen it in industries here where they have used their technology to minimize the amount of sugar that needs to be in certain products so that it keeps people safe. I think an issue around education would have been more important here. But I do not see the real benefit, from a health point of view, other than the most vulnerable and those in the lower income who still have to sustain that will have a challenge

here and it will be more money come out of their pocket.

Do we like the fact that there are discussions around the minimum wage? Of course, but the issue has been for us on this side, and we've said it for years, it would have been more equitable and more beneficial to low-income workers and those working at minimum wage if we changed that tax regime so that they could get to keep more in their pocket. That wouldn't then drive up potential cost because as an employer, an employer has to pass on any additional cost when it comes to salary bases. If the salary base for low income just moves the low-income threshold to another level –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Can I bring the volume down, please?

Thank you.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That doesn't change anything as part of that process. So we are not dismissing that the increase in minimum wage doesn't benefit to some degree, but there are other ways that it could have been dealt with that wouldn't stimulate something negative for all of society, which includes the lower income individuals. So there are thought processes here, when you look at it from an economy of scale, that might have been more beneficial.

When we also look at some of the other things that have been implemented here in this budget. The electric car supplement: We would love to see that in five years, when we're ready to do it, when economically we can afford it. When, if we're spending that money right now, there are other avenues that would have been a priority for us, in this part of the administration, and from what we've heard from the general public, without a doubt. Do I think we need incentives down the road to encourage people to move off fossil fuels? Sure we do, without a doubt. But timing is everything and when you're in a financial crisis for the people of this province,

you need to ensure that you're giving back to the people when they need it.

The same thing with the transition from changing your heating source from oil to electric. That would be great but, at the end of the day, right now is not the time that people can afford to do it. They don't have that disposable income because they're already challenged with stuff that they have no control over and, in some cases, even government has no control over: international monetary funds, international costing for fuels and all the other things. So we accept that as part of that.

What we have encouraged over here – and I'm happy to say, the open debate has got us to point where there have been some new additional incentives. Not that the \$142 million that was announced in the budget isn't going to help people out there, and we appreciate that and no doubt the taxpayers do. But it didn't go far enough as the economy kept getting worse and worse and worse.

So the new incentives that we're here now talking about, the around eight cents that will come off gas, hopefully tomorrow, is a positive. Challenges we have though – and home heat rebates that will come the fall are good. But we have a number of people who heat their home with wood, who are all on fixed incomes. While you might think, well, fuels go like this, wood didn't. It does, because wood has to get to market. It has to get to market, based on what? Trucks that are using fuels that have to pass on that costing.

We are encouraging – and I know, Minister, there are still a few months here; if there's some way that those who heat their homes, who are on a fixed income and meet the thresholds could be considered as part of this process. There may not be a big number, but I will tell you, I've heard from dozens – and that's just in my small little area of my district and I would think in rural, remote areas that are even more reliant on it, that I think we need to be cognizant of that. Because it is a costing to them that they have no way of absorbing that additional cost.

So there are things like that that we've had good dialogue; I thought we had good debate. I thought, on this side of the House, we gave a

multitude of good suggestions, and that's coming from all levels here. But I do also acknowledge the fact that I would think the Liberals are hearing the same things we are, and are cognizant of trying to find the best balance here to ensure that people are helped.

Does it go far enough? Probably not, from our perspective. Where do you balance what you borrow to what you can afford to pay? I am a believer, you know, sometimes you have to bite the bullet now, knowing – and I'll talk to my colleagues and mention it, my colleague from Mount Pearl-Southlands said the same thing – there is a bright future in Newfoundland and Labrador; I have no illusion about that. The announcements of today acknowledge that. Our fishing industry, our tourism industry, our IT industry, our aerospace industry, our aquaculture industry, our mining industry but, particularly, our oil and gas industry are very vibrant industries here.

We can't dismiss either one of them; we can't not invest in them, and we can't not make sure that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are the beneficiaries of the benefits of those resources here. We need to let people know we're open for business, but we're open for business in a partnership where we also benefit here. And there are no more giveaways. Giveaways are not on – I'm not pointing a finger – it's about Newfoundland and Labrador owns its own resources; the people here built those resources and their skill set to be able to do that. We need to make sure that they are the beneficiaries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: So I will end on one note, that the oil and gas industry will be around for the next number of decades. Let's make it work for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Let's use the resources to transition into a healthy environment, and environment that industries can develop here, and that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are proud of.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you for that, we look forward to supporting this bill and moving Newfoundland and Labrador to the next level.

Thank you, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board speaks now, she will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker, for the opportunity to close debate. I thank all those that participated in this debate, and it was particularly refreshing to hear the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, say that they would be supporting this bill. I think it's an important bill because it contains additional measures to help those in our communities.

There were a couple of things said during debate that I'd like to make a few remarks on. I won't take very much time. I do appreciate the Leader of the Opposition pointing out that indeed our economy is resilient and has been doing quite well. The oil and gas industry, I spoke of the mining industry, we're having a good tourism year with Come Home Year, and I thank the minister for all his efforts in that regard, but our economic indicators, for example, Speaker, are up year to date over 4 per cent.

Our retail sales are up year to date, 7.1 per cent. Our home sales are up 7.9 per cent. Urban housing starts, believe it or not, over 69 per cent. The number is still low, Speaker, so I'll say that. We're seeing some growth in our economy and some strength in our economy, but, as I said in the Budget Speech, we are resilient Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and hopefully we will continue to see that continued growth and drive in our economy.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the technology sector, which is really doing extremely well. I'm so proud of the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador has a booming technology sector including the ocean technology sector.

A couple of things came up during the debate that I would like to make some remarks on. One of the things that I heard Members opposite talk about was how many people is this affecting in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the measures that we have taken? As I said in my

introductory speech, we started with \$142 million. I can tell you that for the Seniors' Benefit, there is about 50,000 seniors that receive that in the province. It's a tremendous number. For the Income Supplement there's 162,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that receive the Income Supplement. The income support clients that received an extra stipend this spring, there are about 20,000 people that received that. And we know that there are about 219,000 homes in the province, I believe, so we know that those that have insurance, of course, would have benefited from the reduction in the retail sales tax on insurance.

When I think about those families that will be receiving the oil heat supplement this fall, there are about approximately 30,000 people. This is application based so we'll know more definitively as the applications come in, but we're estimating approximately 30,000 people who have oil heat that will be receiving the benefit.

We know that we have 375,000 vehicles in the province, not all of those, of course, are attached to a licence because some people have multiple cars. But with 375,000 vehicles, you can guesstimate that the majority of people would have a licence with those. So all of those receive benefits. So a tremendous impact.

Now we're driving another benefit to the people of the province through this act today. This is Bill 64 that we're debating, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 6. These changes, of course, are relatively straightforward changes to the act in sections 1 and 2 that would allow us to lower the price of gasoline and diesel in the province. The price of gasoline we're lowering to be the lowest, next to Alberta, gas tax in the country. It would be reduced by 50 per cent, or seven cents. And, of course, when you add on the HST impact on that it's about an eight cents reduction. So a tremendous impact, in my opinion.

Now, some people in the House had talked about the carbon tax today. There was some misinformation yesterday so I want to clear this up. I've had people come to me and say there's going to be an 11-cent increase in carbon. That is not true, that's not the case. There has been, over time, that amount of tax laid, but the 2.2

cents has been added as of the 1st of May. So it's already on the price of your fuel, and it's 2.2 cents. So you won't see that, even though the bill was passed yesterday, it was retroactive to the 1st of May.

Now, I did hear the Member opposite for Conception Bay East - Bell Island talk about the financial concerns of the province. I'm glad to hear a recognition in this House that we are in financially challenging times for the province as well. As I've said, we've been able to lower the deficit and we are continuing to lower that deficit. But in this particular budget, we focused very heavily on ensuring that we were able to provide back supports on cost of living.

As the Member opposite also said, you're seeing kind of an increase. It's not the economy, and I know what the Member meant, the cost of living has gotten worse and worse. That was the intent of what he meant, the cost of living has gotten worse and worse. As I said earlier, on Budget Day, the price of fuel was \$1.85. Today, it's \$2.22 I think for regular gas.

So we're seeing this and therefore we have again stepped forward and said we have to help the people of the province. I think everybody in this House now has said that they will be supporting this reduction because we are challenged – I'll say that – in this province when it comes to our finances. We think about our finances, obviously, every day, we're trying to be prudent and responsible. We're also messaging of course to the banks and the bond-rating agencies every day in what we do and we want to make sure we maintain and even improve our bond rating.

I recognize the Member for Conception Bay South who said that sometimes governments try and do more than they should, and that is the case. We try and do more than we sometimes can, because we recognize that the people of the province are challenged in these very difficult times. That's why we've provided, now, over \$222 million in benefits back to the people of the province.

We can't solve all the problems, as the Member for Conception Bay South has indicated. We can't. But we're going to try hard and I think with the co-operation of this House, and I'm

glad to hear the Members opposite will be supporting this bill.

I will also say, I have listened intently during, not just the budget debate but again today when my colleague for Stephenville - Port au Port talked about some of the choices that we've made. He talked about some of the things that we perhaps didn't need to spend money on. As he was talking about it, I added it up, and it was about \$5.75 million. So just under \$6 million. On a \$9.4 billion budget, \$6 million is only a small amount that we may be able to invest elsewhere. I say to the Member opposite, I appreciate the suggestions on the six, but we'd have to go beyond that. I want everyone to put on their thinking caps on how we can do spending differently.

Now I did listen, as I said, and I heard the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port talk about how the Opposition stood for seniors and stood for public servants. I think that's our job every single day that all of us stand for. But I can say on this side of the House we're fighting for people every day. We're fighting for not just families, not just seniors, but our future.

We have to recognize in this province that there are sometimes difficult choices and sometimes we're trying to make the best balance we can in budgets. We're very, very pleased that we've been able to provide \$222 million in supports for the people of the province and we're going to continue to try and do the best we can, continue to fight for the people of the province, we're going to do that.

We want to have a great province. We want to have, as I've said, many, many times now in this House, a stronger, smarter, self-sufficient and sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador. I know everyone in this House and everyone in the province wants the same, that's what we're all fighting for.

Thank you for the support on Bill 64 and for the continued responses, the continued focus, the continued efforts to ensure that we address the cost of living in the province, make the right decisions for the people of the province while making sure that we are focused on families and future generations. I appreciate it.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 64 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against?

The motion is passed.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6. (Bill 64)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House?

S. COADY: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 64)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 64.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve

itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against?

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Trimper): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 64, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6." (Bill 64)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Chair, I would like to move an amendment.

I move that clause 1 of Bill 64, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 6, be amended in the proposed subsection 51(2) by deleting the words "on or before December 31, 2022" and by substituting the words "before such a time that a resolution is passed in the House of Assembly."

CHAIR: I thank the Member for the amendment.

We will now recess to review the amendment to see if it is in order.

Thank you.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready? Do you have your teams here?

The Committee has reviewed the amendment and found that it is not in order. It introduces a new idea and a new mechanism.

Does the Member wish to continue speaking?

T. WAKEHAM: Yes.

CHAIR: Okay, I recognize the hon. Member for the District of Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Now that the amendment is cancelled, I have to go to three pages.

I have a couple of questions, Chair. The first one I have is how was the reduction of seven cents per litre determined? Why not more?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

An important question. I have multitudes of copies of *Hansard* here where I listened intently, as I said, to Members opposite who called for removal of the Newfoundland and Labrador refinery increase. And, of course, that is up to the Public Utilities Board. But, again, that five cents was the call. And I noted on multiple days when you had asked for that.

Quite frankly, it is a matter of looking at how much we could afford, how much was responsible for us to afford, how much it allowed us that room, I guess, to the Member opposite. I know how keen the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port was to have some kind of supplement or, as he liked to call it, a rebate, go back to the people of the province. So we looked at what we could possibly do, in addition to the \$142 million we had already.

So it is a matter of balance. Again, I remind the Member opposite that this would be the lowest

provincial gas tax in the country, next to Alberta, who has eliminated theirs temporarily. Again, please note that Alberta's is temporary, too, and tied to the oil prices.

So it's the rationale of again being responsible, fiscally prudent, measuring all the balances that we have to have, ensuring we kept into consideration how much we needed to have again for the fall to be able to help support people who heat their homes with oil.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: I thank the minister for the answer.

We also heard a lot, of course, about the inability to reduce the gas tax out of fear that the federal government would apply the federal carbon backstop. Is that no longer a concern? Have you got correspondence from the federal government saying they would implement the backstop?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you.

The Member opposite would recall that when the carbon tax was initially introduced, we made an arrangement with the federal government, during the imposition of the carbon tax – and again it's a federal government initiative to help address climate change – that we, in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, were exempt for certain things: fisheries, forestry, agriculture, exploration. Very important economic drivers in our province and we had arranged with the federal government not to have carbon tax imposed on that. More importantly, not to have carbon tax imposed on homes that were heated with oil.

As part of the overall structure in the country of the carbon tax, those provinces that did not implement carbon taxes, the federal government came in and they implemented their own carbon tax. So if the province didn't do it, then the federal government was going to do it. By being able and proactive, we were able to carve out these particular items.

Now, we were very concerned if we lowered the gas tax, because we had heard it from the federal government, that could have implications around the carbon tax and they could come in and impose a backstop. The Premier, of course, spoke with his national colleagues, he spoke again most recently with the prime minister, and in relation to the rising cost of living, the federal government, in discussions, has indicated that they will not come in and impose a backstop based on these extraordinary circumstances. So we feel very comfortable that we could lower the gas tax, based on that information.

So, again, it's a strong relationship that the Premier and the prime minister has, the discussions with them, the understanding.

As I said earlier, we've changed from – I think it was \$1.85 I said on Budget Day to over \$2.20 today. We were concerned about the continuing rise in the cost of living and wanted to lower that gas tax, especially as we know this is continuing for the time being based on global circumstances.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the minister for the answer.

Why was the December 31, 2022, date determined as the end date? Why not return to this House and debate the tax rates when the price of gas falls?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: For a couple of reasons to be quite honest with you. This gives us six months, and I can say to you quite sincerely the 11 different forecasters at the time of budget had indicated price of oil would be \$86 a barrel. We now know it's much higher than that. We know the price of fuel is much higher. We know what's happening in the Ukraine, but we don't know what's going to happen in six months' time, whether those things reverse themselves.

There were indications that the cost of living would actually decrease and the inflationary rate would decrease this fall. Whether that happens or not, I think it depends on global circumstances, not anything in Newfoundland and Labrador. So we chose the six-month mark.

As I indicated earlier, we will consider what we could do this fall. We have to be very fiscally responsible and prudent. I know the Member opposite would want us to be. We all recognize the financial situation the province is in, so we had to be very responsible. We wanted to send the right message, not only to the people of the province, but also to our banks and bond-rating agencies, that we are being fiscally responsible here and making sure that anything that we do can be undone, should circumstances change.

So we will obviously consider as we move forward whether or not we can continue to have the lowest gas tax in the country. But I plead with the Member opposite, I know you recognize the financial situation of the province, I know you do, so understanding that having a sunset clause in this legislation gives us, I think, a prudent, responsible measure and we'll consider it further in the fall.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister. I certainly understand the fiscal position of the province and again the fact of the sunset clause was simply that the House will open again in the fall. We'll have a fiscal update and that would give an opportunity to have made adjustments to it at that time, if necessary. So we look forward to continued success in our revenue and more money coming back to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I wanted to ask the minister what forecasts does the department have about the market consumer price of gasoline and diesel. Do you have any forecasts that your department have been working on?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you.

The forecast right now, I can say that the price of oil – I can't say on gas because, of course, global circumstances are driving the price of gas, depending on whether or not the war in Ukraine continues. We know what the European Union has done yesterday, of course, with continuing sanctions, so that's very volatile.

We know the price of oil now, there has been a change, and we're seeing the price of oil staying very, very high. I can't give it to you today, as to what the forecast will be for the price of gasoline, because it's changing and so volatile at this point in time. We will update again in the fall.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Chair.

Again, how much additional provincial sales tax revenue is the province forecasting because the pump price is so high?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: I'm sorry, I didn't –

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Are there any additional provincial sales tax revenue, HST – is the province forecasting any increase?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you.

On HST, it takes a number of years for that to flow through the systems, of course. It is administered by the federal government through the CRA – I'll use that acronym – so it does take a number of years. In our budget forecast, it's still \$66 million that we collect on HST. I think it is \$66 million on HST from gas; I'll ask my officials to give me an indication if that is incorrect.

But I will say that we're not anticipating any big change in HST this year. As I've already said to you, we've lowered the gas tax and utilized the gas tax revenues on other avenues, so depending this fall on revenues and sources of revenues, we may have to come in and do a special warrant if required as well. I know the Member opposite understands that that could be a possibility depending on how the flow of funds to the provincial government go.

But I can say HST; we're anticipating it to be the same as we had last year, based on forecast.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: My last question, Chair.

Again, I thank the minister for the answer.

The minister has said that the tax reduction will not impact the deficit, so I'm wondering what kind of evidence do you have that you would make that kind of statement.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: I also remind the Member that if consumption goes down, our taxation goes down. So we may actually end up with less from the HST, depending on how consumption goes, and I know people are being very responsible about consumption as well. I will also say that the provincial gas tax is cents per litre, so it depends on that consumption. I'm going to turn to the Member and say, what was the question again?

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Chair.

The question was around the fact that the minister had said that the tax reduction will not impact the deficit, and I was wondering what supporting evidence she had for that.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: I said it may not impact the deficit, and here's why. We've talked about it in this House. The price of oil per barrel in the budget was \$86 per barrel. It is, we know, much higher than that. It's somewhere in the 120s today. So we know for every one dollar more, it's \$13 million. So just even on the last three months, we know we've taken in extra revenues.

That could change. It could easily change. We don't know for the year at this point and we'll have a further update in the fall, but we do know at this point in time we will take in additional revenues in royalty just based on that price of oil alone. That's why I said I don't think it will have impact on our deficit, because we'll take in more revenues from that. But it may not; we may not have enough in any of the budgetary lines, the Estimate lines, to be able to fund some of this programming so I'm cognizant of that. We're working through that, as we speak actually.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Chair, my final comment is that we will continue to hope that the price of oil stays high, above the \$86, and if it continues to trend that way, we look forward to a fall fiscal update that will see additional revenues or additional rebates available for people certainly going into the heating season.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: I will say to the Member opposite, and as I spoke to you before, we may need a certain appropriation for some of these fundings because we may not have an appropriation available. So that's why I said the possibility of a special warrant this fall. But I will say to the Member opposite, we have to be very cognizant obviously of our deficit. Everything that we do impacts that deficit. Any money that we give back, we want to have that deficit as low as possible because it's costing, not just us today – and I've said this in the House. The cost of borrowing is a billion dollars; every year we're spending a billion dollars just on cost of borrowing. It's on future generations because, of course, then we accumulate the debt.

So yes, we're looking at hopefully additional revenues this year. That's why we've been able to give back as much as we've been able to give back, but please also be cognizant of the fact that we are carrying a deficit, and we want to be responsible to today's generation as also the future generations.

CHAIR: I now recognize the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Seeing as how the last amendment was considered out of order because it introduced a different mechanism, I'm going to introduce an amendment of my own, which I believe keeps the same mechanism, it just changes the date.

So I'll say, Mr. Chair, that I don't necessarily understand why we're stopping at December 31; our budgets and so on usually run the fiscal year, until March 31. I understand things can change, but given what's going on in the world today, I honestly don't see that happening. If it were to change, there's nothing to stop the government when we come back in the fall to make an amendment at that time.

With that said, I move that clause 1 of Bill 64, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 6, be amended in the proposed section 51(2) as follows: By deleting the words "on or before December 31, 2022" and substituting the words "on or before March 31, 2023."

Seconded by the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

CHAIR: The Committee will recess to consider the said amendment.

Thank you.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

House Leaders are you ready? Yes.

The Committee has reviewed the proposed amendment and finds it to be in order. Power of the independents.

P. LANE: I knew it was going to be in order because the big give away was that I saw all the government Members coming in to vote it down.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: I can assure the Member there was no leaking from the discussions.

They just recognize the brilliance of the man who delivered the amendment.

I recognize the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you.

It is quite predictable, unfortunately.

Anyway, all I can say, Mr. Chair, is to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and certainly to the people who I represent, this is just another, I guess, attempt on behalf of Members of the Opposition; I know my colleagues in the Official Opposition, NDP, we've been doing everything we can to try to alleviate some of the challenges that our constituents are facing and indeed the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I don't see the sense of going to December 31; everything here basically runs the fiscal year to March 31. As I said before, when we go back in the fall, if, at that time, everything has changed, and I really don't believe it is going to be changed, but if it is, then at that point in time there is nothing stopping the government from coming in and reversing it at that time.

Or here is worse case scenario for you; imagine if things actually improved for people and they still got a little bit of a break on tax; we actually helped them out a bit more. Can you imagine if we actually helped people a little bit more?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: Absolutely, a few extra dollars in their pockets. So, with that said, that's all I have to say about it. I tried, and I know they're all going to vote it down anyway.

Anyway, thank you for your time.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

It's sometimes a challenge when you have to be really prudent and fiscally responsible, and you have to have the comfort, I guess, of understanding that there are consequences to everything that we do here and, as Minister of Finance, I have to look at those consequences.

As I said earlier, we felt this was both a prudent and responsible period of time. We don't know the outcome of the war in the Ukraine; we do know what the 11 different forecasters have said about the price of oil this year. We don't know about the impact of the war in Ukraine. This sunsets as of the end of the year, it's a full six months. To go this additional three months, that the Member opposite is asking for, is an additional \$20 million-plus. I'm going off roughly just extrapolating some numbers here.

We have to be very responsible in our fiscal considerations here. I'm saying to the Members opposite, look, we're signalling to the people of the province and to the bond-rating agencies and to the banks that we can do this until this period of time and maintain our fiscal discipline. We'll make some considerations in the fall, depending on where we're sitting, globally, as well as in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what we're going to have to do is be fiscally responsible and understand the consequences of any fiscal action that we take.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Any further speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, shall the amendment carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: I'm looking for somebody to call Division before I say something.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

CHAIR: Okay, the Opposition Members are calling Division.

Okay, thank you.

House Leaders please call in your Members, if you have anyone.

Division

CHAIR: Order, please!

Regarding the amendment, all those in favour of the amendment, please rise.

CLERK: David Brazil, Barry Petten, Paul Dinn, Craig Parry, Tony Wakeham, Chris Tibbs, Loyola O'Driscoll, Lloyd Parrott, Joedy Wall, Pleaman Forsey, Jeff Dwyer, James Dinn, Jordan Brown, Paul Lane.

CHAIR: All those against the amendment, please rise.

CLERK: Andrew Furey, Steve Crocker, Lisa Dempster, John Haggie, Gerry Byrne, Tom Osborne, Siobhan Coady, Pam Parsons, Sarah Stoodley, John Hogan, Bernard Davis, Derrick Bragg, John Abbott, Brian Warr, Elvis Loveless, Krista Lynn Howell, Paul Pike, Scott Reid, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Lucy Stoyles.

Chair, the ayes: 14; the nays: 20.

CHAIR: The amendment has been defeated.

Looking for speakers now to speak to the main bill in Committee.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl-Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Chair.

I certainly thank my colleagues for the support for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Chair, in addition to this issue, there's another issue which I have and it relates to the bill that I didn't support, and neither did my colleagues here on this side of the House, and that was the carbon tax, the 2.2 cents on carbon tax.

Mr. Chair, what we're seeing here is a bit of a sleight of hand. I know other Members, I actually heard from a few people today already, who are not too happy with the fact that they were under the impression they were going to get a break, that eight cents. Now to find out, yeah, you're getting eight, but we're taking away 2.2 cents so you're really not getting an eight-cent break at the pump at all. Really, the carbon tax, while it gets disguised as a federal tax, the bottom line is it goes into provincial coffers. That's the reality.

With that said, if government truly wants to give people that eight cents break at the pumps, as it said it did, then I think we should add that 2.2 cents onto this bill to give that 2.2 cents back to the people.

With that said, I'm going to move, Mr. Chair, that clause 1 of Bill 64, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 6, be amended in the proposed subsection 51(2) as follows: (a) by deleting the figure and words "\$0.095 per litre" and substituting the figure and words "\$0.073 per litre"; and (b) by deleting the figure and words "0.075 per litre" and substituting the figure and words "\$0.053 per litre."

So effectively what we're doing is we're taking the 2.2 cents carbon tax and we're subtracting that from what's being proposed so that consumers get the full eight cents off at the pumps.

CHAIR: I thank the Member.

The Committee will now recess to consider the said and proposed amendment.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

House Leaders, are you all ready?

Oh, I'm missing the Clerk. I feel pretty lonely without the Clerk.

As the amendment represents a decrease, it is in order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate that. Mr. Chair, there is not much chance it is going to go through but, at the end of the day, because you look at all of these numbers here and you read them out, it sounds a bit confusing. But again, just for the purposes of, I guess, the House, Hansard, those who may be listening, what is being proposed here, basically, is that under this bill, the government is proposing that we would remove seven cents off the provincial gas tax.

At the same time that they are taking seven cents off the gas tax, when you add the HST to that, that works out to more like eight cents. So for people to have heard eight cents is coming off the price of gas, that's why. Because they are going to take seven cents off the provincial tax, and then the effect of the HST makes it around eight cents off a litre of gasoline.

But at the same time that they are doing that, we just approved – they just approved, I should say. We didn't over here; we voted against it. But they approved a carbon tax of an additional 2.2 cents a litre. So if you had eight cents that you are giving back but then you are going to take back another 2.2, really you are down to 5.8 cents a litre is the actual benefit and not eight cents.

What I have done in this amendment is I have, basically, taken that 2.2 cents that the government is taking in carbon tax and put it

back to the people so that the people are getting the actual eight cents. That is what is being proposed here. At the end of the day, instead of a 5.8-cent a litre break, it would mean an eight-cent a litre which is what government actually announced. That is what they actually announced. That is what people thought the intent was, until they heard about the carbon tax and now realize, no, I am not even getting eight cents.

So if the government were to approve my amendment, we would actually get the eight cents, not 5.8 cents. That is what I am proposing. Again, I see we have a full house across there now so, obviously, they are all ready to vote that down – vote down giving the people a better break.

Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

I don't want to repeat myself but I will say, again, we have to be very cognizant of our financial situation in the province. We have to recognize that the carbon tax is a separate issue altogether. I will come back to the carbon tax. We have said in this province we will – and even this is difficult – lower our provincial gas tax by seven cents which will make it the lowest in the country, next to Alberta. So I will say that this would really make sure that we are doing the best that we can for the people of the province.

I will remind the Member opposite that the 2.2 cents of the carbon tax was put on gasoline back on May 1. That was when it came into effect. So when people go to the pumps and when the Public Utilities Board does make this decrease, it would be in the eight-cent range. So that decrease, when it comes, when we have Royal Assent and then everything goes through, you will see the eight cents at the pump.

I will say, again, a combination of being financially responsible – the impact of the Member opposite, it would be somewhere in the \$15-million range. So I'll say that. Secondly, these are two separate issues. One, the carbon tax is a federally mandate, federally required tax, and we don't have the controls that he thinks we do on that one. On the gasoline tax, we'll be the lowest next to Alberta, in the country.

My third big point is, of course, the fact that there expenses that would be incurred here. I say to the Member opposite, we have done \$222 million worth of, what I'm going to call, cost-of-living supports to the people of the province at this point, even though we're borrowing money.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Look, I appreciate what the Member is saying there, but again, I just want to clarify for the record, because she keeps saying about a federal tax that we can't control. I understand there's an agreement with the federal government. There would be a carbon tax imposed upon us. We came upon our own made-in-Newfoundland solution, so to speak, what it was billed as anyway.

I understand the feds are making us put carbon tax on fuel; we all understand that. But the point that is getting sort of lost and convoluted in all this is that while you may have to put the 2.2 cents on here, the money is not going to the feds; it's going to the provincial coffers. So you can put 2.2 cents on over on this side and you can take 2.2 cents off on the other side.

That's what this amendment is doing; it's saying that one is going to cancel out the other. So people get their eight cents and they're not paying the 2.2 cents in carbon tax, which nobody in this House supported to begin with. That's the purpose of putting in this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Any further speakers to the proposed amendment?

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: I tell you, we're probably split on it here, but I'll tell you my issue with this is that in some ways what we're trying to do is get around the carbon tax. We've been very clear where we stand on this, okay.

I'll tell you the issue with it is we're going to be facing more drastic costs down the road with climate change. If you think that two cents is costly; it is going to be way more costly down the road. I can guarantee it; it's coming. I would say it is already affecting us, Chair, in terms of if you look at your insurance premiums. I can guarantee you that people who are paying on their insurance premiums, whether it is home or auto; they're already seeing them go up.

But the other part of it is this: we're willing to support, certainly, the decrease here and even if we need to review it in the fall of the year. But I have an issue with this that somehow we are trying to get around the carbon tax. That is the message that we're sending because I'm hearing quite clearly that we all believe that climate change is a reality; we all believe in the effects.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's not true of everybody.

J. DINN: Pardon me?

CHAIR: Order, please!

Let the Member speak.

J. DINN: We believe in it, but, at some point, we've got to be willing to pay for it. That is the issue here, for me. It's great to recognize that smoking is bad for you but if you then go out and say let's double up our smoking by two packs a day, that is not recognizing the problem.

So all I am saying here is that, yes, I will support the motion as it stands until December. Let's review it then, at that point, if we have to and let's see where we stand, and no problem. But I will tell you that right now, somehow this sort of

approach of trying to get around the carbon tax is troubling to me for all the reasons I have laid out.

We have called for a just transition plan. We know that in the Member for Torngat Mountains's District, they're already facing the drastic impact of climate change.

But I will tell you that the more we start reducing revenue – I've still got people in my district who are going to need services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

J. DINN: They can't afford a car; they can't afford to eat; they can't afford a place to live. So somewhere along the line, the more we cut back, I can tell you, it comes down to what services we want. That is where it is for me, simply put.

I understand where this is coming from but I struggle with it. I will not be able to support the amendment, but I will certainly support the main motion.

CHAIR: Any further speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, shall the amendment carry?

All those in favour of the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

CHAIR: Division has been called.

Let's ring the bells just for a second.

House Leaders ready?

Division

CHAIR: Order, please.

All those in favour of the amendment, please rise.

CLERK: David Brazil, Barry Petten, Paul Dinn, Craig Pardy, Tony Wakeham, Chris Tibbs, Loyola O'Driscoll, Lloyd Parrott, Joedy Wall, Pleaman Forsey, Jeff Dwyer, Paul Lane.

CHAIR: All those against the amendment, please rise.

CLERK: Steve Crocker, Lisa Dempster, John Haggie, Gerry Byrne, Tom Osborne, Siobhan Coady, Pam Parsons, Sarah Stoodley, John Hogan, Bernard Davis, Derrick Bragg, John Abbott, Brian Warr, Elvis Loveless, Krista Lynn Howell, Paul Pike, Scott Reid, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Lucy Stoyles, James Dinn, Jordan Brown, Lela Evans.

Chair, the ayes: 12; the nays: 22.

CHAIR: Order, please!

Let's have a little tranquility.

Thank you.

I am pleased to advise the House that the amendment has been defeated.

Are there any further speakers to the main bill, Bill 64?

Seeing none, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The enacting clause is carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The title is carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move, seconded by the Member for St. John's Centre, that the Committee rise and report Bill 64.

CHAIR: It has been moved and seconded –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: I'm just making sure I have willing seconder, I do.

It has been moved and seconded that the Committee rise and report Bill 64 carried without amendment.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Off I go, thank you.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

P. TRIMPER: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole reports that they have considered the matters to them referred and have carried Bill 64 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Deputy Chair of Committee of Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 64 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

S. CROCKER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

S. CROCKER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Topsail - Paradise, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

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