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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: I call from the Order Paper, Motion 3.

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means to consider a certain resolution and bill relating to the raising of loans by the province, Bill 73.

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

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

All those in favour, aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion 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 debating Bill 73 and the related resolution.

Resolution

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

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province a sum of money not exceeding \$2,800,000,000."

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you all for accommodating us today with the *Loan Act, 2024*.

Speaker, *Budget 2024* identified a borrowing requirement of \$2.8 billion for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, and, today, we are introducing the *Loan Act, 2024*.

Under the authority of the *Loan Act, 2024* and section 38 of the *Financial Administration Act*, we will raise by way of loans not exceeding the amount of \$2.8 billion. The *Loan Act, 2024* will continue in full force and effect until the \$2.8-billion limit is reached and is replaced by a subsequent loan act.

The last loan act was passed by the Legislature was the *Loan Act, 2023*, which provided long-term borrowing authority of up to \$1.5 billion, an additional \$700 million in long-term borrowing was provided throughout 2024, for a total borrowing authority of \$2.2 billion. This was to ensure adequate ability to meet the 2023-24 cash requirements and to ensure acceptable flexibility and liquidity of government's borrowing program.

As of March 31, 2024, the province had a long-term borrowing of \$2.1 billion for '23-'24. The *Financial Administration Act* authorizes new borrowings for the purpose of redeeming or retiring debt, making sinking fund contributions and for retiring unfunded pension liabilities. The *Loan Act, 2024* is required to provide specific long-term borrowing authority to meet the 2024-2025 budgetary requirements.

Of the \$2.8-billion borrowing for 2024-25, \$1.2 billion is for debt repayment coming due in '24-'25 and the first requirement in the first quarter of '25-'26. Chair, I will say that one of the reasons why we're doing advance borrowing for '25-'26 is to ensure effective liquidity. The '25-'26 borrowing requirements come due early in that fiscal year and we wanted to ensure early borrowing to ensure we have adequate liquidity. One of the things that the bond-rating agencies continue to look for in Newfoundland and Labrador, and of course around the world, is to ensure that we always have effective amounts of liquidity.

Borrowing for debt maturities coming due at the beginning of the following fiscal year ensures the province has sufficient liquidity to repay such obligations while the budget and loan bill for '25 is being debated and approved before the Legislature. The remaining \$1.6 billion in borrowing is required to fund such things as infrastructure expenditures and to make payments on the promissory notes of the province's pension plans.

Now, I just want to talk about infrastructure for a moment. This will include the capital amounts spending for things like infrastructure including roads, and this Legislature would be aware that in the last year we've assigned \$1.4 billion to have a very strong and robust roads program. We have infrastructure issues in the province, and we wanted to address them. I've heard that from just about everyone on the other side, when they speak about requirements in their districts, they talk about roads. So

we wanted to make sure that we have adequate funding to address their requirements for road spending, of course, health care spending and capital assets.

Some examples: \$11 million to advance the work on the new cardiovascular and stroke institute; replacing of St. Clare's Mercy Hospital and long-term care centre in Bay St. George – very important projects. I think Members in this House would agree that we need to replace aging infrastructure; we need to ensure that we have the health care systems for tomorrow as well.

Thirty-five million dollars for capital equipment improvements at other health facilities, including the new Family Care Teams, urgent care clinics and ambulatory clinics. We want to make sure we have it up to date and ensure that we have good capital equipment in each of those facilities; \$41 million for new schools in Cartwright, Kenmount Terrace, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Pelley's Island; close to \$300 million for upgrades of the provincial highways, including completion of the Team Gushue Highway and the twinning, of course, that is going on across the province; \$29 million for improvements to the fleet of ferries and wharves; and \$30 million to upgrade our fleet of highway equipment.

I want to talk a little bit about how we're transforming the province's finances as we work towards a stronger, smarter, self-sufficient and sustainable province. We're focused on a balanced budget. We've come a long way since 2020. I remember standing here – gosh, I can't believe it's my fifth budget – five years ago, we had a significant deficit, over a billion dollars. Of course, that was during a time of COVID and we've been able to work very, very diligently to bring that deficit down. This year, we'll have a very slight deficit of about \$152 million, which is approximately 1.5 per cent of our revenues, which when you speak to bond-rating agencies that's within balance. Next year, we will have a balanced

budget and then for every year in the foreseeable future.

So, Chair, I think it speaks as a testament to the hard work and effort of government to, not only make the investments, because you've seen in this budget, you've seen in last year's budget, you've seen in the budget the year before, major investments including an additional billion dollars to my colleague, the Minister of Health, a billion dollars a year we're spending – a billion dollars more now than we spent five years ago. If I go back to 2020, we're spending a billion dollars more a year in health than we were then and that's a significant investment.

We've also done things to help with the cost of living, such as we've reduced a lot of taxation. We've maintained our fees. We've made investments in the social determinants of health. So all those things are very, very important when we're looking at how do we ensure this balance between ensuring that we have balanced budgets and ensuring that we make the right investments for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think this government has really worked hard to strike that balance.

I will say, Chair, there have been some that were concerned when I introduced into this House balanced budget legislation and I said I'll prove it, that we can do it. I think that I've proven that we can make those critical, important investments but, at the same time, ensuring that we grow our economy and that we make the investments to ensure that people are supported in this province. So that balance is there.

I will also say that we've done things like contributed to a Future Fund. I know that Members opposite didn't support government when we introduced a Future Fund. I think they'll support us now because, of course, we've been able to make those investments to the Future Fund. They are significant investments that would

mean that this province will be on a better and stronger footing.

I'm just looking for my notice to how much we'll have in the next – allow me to tell you this. The Future Fund, by the end of this year, will have \$286 million in it. We're estimating another \$72.4-million contribution in this year. So that's an additional \$73 million. So I think that adds up to close on almost \$400 million that will have been accumulated.

Now, let me tell you, in the fiscal plan that we have, that I've introduced by way of this budget, in the fiscal plan, in the fiscal forecast, the contributions to the Future Fund will add up, in the next five years, to \$1.6 billion. That's discipline; that's financial discipline. I think that any government would say that's prudent and responsible. We take money that we earn on our non-renewable resources and we put that aside into a Future Fund.

Now some would say: Well, you're still borrowing so you shouldn't do that. But I would say to the Members present that we earn more than we pay. So we're earning – just so that you know – annualized, almost 7 per cent, I think it's 6.86 per cent. We pay about 4.5 per cent. So to the end of February, I think we've earned something like \$13 million on the Future Fund. So when I say \$1.6 million, that's just in contributions. That's not how much we'll earn by way of investments.

We've debated in this House changes to the sinking funds. We are able to take the sinking funds, as we are able to take our money from our Future Fund, and we invest it. We did make changes to the way we invest in this Legislature, allowing us to invest in something other than just government bonds. We're able to now do municipal bonds and blue-chip stocks. So by making that change to the way we invest, we're earning more money and that's good for the people of the province.

Think about this now: We'll have in that fund, in the Future Fund, some \$1.6 billion – billion dollars – in contributions, plus the interest earned. In the next 10 years, the only thing you can use that money for is to pay down debt. I think that's what we're speaking about today is how important it is that we do that.

So contributing to the Future Fund, we're ensuring now the sinking funds, when any new bond is issued, we're ensuring that there's an attached sinking fund. Why is that important? In times past, there weren't sinking funds. That's why we're rolling over debt. So we don't want lines of credit. We want to pay down our debt. It's like having a mortgage. You want to be able to be paying down your principal. So by attaching a sinking fund, yes, we borrow for that sinking fund, but we earn more money over time so that all accumulates and adds up, and that helps us to play the bonds at maturity. That is fiscally responsible.

I've already talked about the optimizing of the sinking fund performance. So thank you to the House of Assembly, I think we all voted unanimously in making that change. By making that change, we're able to optimize our sinking fund performance.

We're also lowering our cost of borrowing through opportunities such as the European borrowing program. Now we haven't entered into the European market as yet. We're still looking at it, but it's helping to ensure that we're getting the best rates possible when we issue our bonds. I can tell you, we have a strong bond program. Our bonds are selling out in record time and that is, I think, because we're out there, not only are we out there telling the market why investing in Newfoundland and Labrador is such a good investment, but we're also opening up other markets and that's making us stronger.

We're strengthening liquidity. That is one thing I know, we want to make sure we have all the cash reserves required. We've been

there when we haven't. We want to make sure we have the cash reserves available to meet our obligations; any time we need that money we have the cash reserves available to be able to fund our operations.

Being a business owner, myself, or a previous business owner, I could tell you, I always used to say that cash is king. So making sure that you had those liquidities is important and, of course, speaks to the bond-rating agencies as well. They're always making sure that we have a liquidity available.

We have, in the past, had struggles there. I can tell you there are people in this Legislature that remember when it was difficult for us to raise money on the markets. Right?

We want to have a strong borrowing program. We want to have strong sinking funds. We want to be able to pay down our debt. That's why the sinking funds, with the Future Fund, with a strengthened borrowing program, all add up to better fiscal management and, of course, we also fixed the inherited Muskrat Falls Project in terms of financing with a \$5.2-billion rate mitigation program that we worked out with the Government of Canada. So all of those things.

We're borrowing a tremendous amount of money, but I think I've explained to the House of Assembly how we're managing that. So not only are we being fiscally responsible in terms of making sure that we're coming down to having a balanced budget, not only are we making sure that we have a robust borrowing program that brings down our cost of borrowing, we have also ensured that we have a sinking fund program and we have also ensured that we have a Future Fund program.

I think all of that speaks to a very positive, fiscally responsible Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that's leading us to that stronger, smarter, self-

sufficient, sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador that I speak about regularly.

So, on that, I'll take my seat and listen to the debate and answer any questions that may be.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Chair.

It's a pleasure to get up, as I always say, in the House as the budget wraps down, this year's budget. I heard the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology say yesterday it was his 13th budget. I believe, when I did the calculation, this is my ninth, being in the House for it. So when I first came in, people used to say that, look, that's a lot. But now they're almost like, oh my. Anyway, enough said. When you're in your first one, you think you'll never imagine your ninth.

But it's always interesting. It's always an interesting debate. There are always lots of opportunities to speak about things that are important. There are not enough hours on that clock, we could all talk about issues that are important to the people of this province. It's what we do here in the House. Sometimes the banter can heat up and a lot of things can be said, but underneath all of that, underneath all of that emotion, there are a lot of people in this Chamber that care about the people. They represent and care about the people in this province. I would never say that – about 40 Members here, every one of us feel the same way. We just have a different way ...

I said one time to the Premier, actually, there a while back and we had this sidebar conversation. I said: You know, we're all alike, but we have a different plan than you have, and our job is to sell the people our plan. We think our plan is better than your plan, and it's up to the people of the province to make that decision, which plan

they like the best. How we get there is the result of it. How we get there, we got different ideas that will get there, but at the end of the day, we all have the same thing. The people of Newfoundland is at heart. It's our province.

A couple of years ago – well, last year, I guess it was. I always remember it and it's a moment that I'll never forget in the House, when MUN – and I'm waiting for them to reinstate the Ode. But, anyway, I think we may be getting closer. But I always remember the day in the House of Assembly – it was one of them moments that, I think, will stick with a lot of us forever. It's how we all stood together and we sang the Ode.

That just happened; there was no planning for it. I know I was speaking on it, very passionate about it, and the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board actually said: I feel like singing it. And I know she said let's sing it, and I know my colleague, Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation was on the same page and we all got up and sang it. Now, I never led the singing as I'll never profess to be a singer, but we have a few good singers there. The Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality is good; I know one of our Table Officers is good; the Member for Cape St. Francis; and I even had the Member for Ferryland one year, it was a little bit of a play, we had a bit of a trick, that he was leading us off. Anyway, it was all good, though.

But it just reaffirmed where we're to and what we're really all about, because, again, we have different mindsets. We have different ideas how to get there, but at the end of the day, again, we love this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and it is something that we hold near and dear and it is a privilege to be in this House. Not everyone gets that opportunity to stand in here and speak on things for your district, things that are important to the province,

things that you have strong beliefs in, things that you want to see improvements in; it is a pretty neat job, actually, to be able to get in to do that.

It is never lost on me. I think I saw that a lot when I stand, and I'll continue to say it because I think that's something that we sometimes miss. We get in here and we have that debate and a heated debate sometimes, back and forth, and I'm no different than the rest. I like to debate; I like to banter. I don't mind being challenged. Actually, the more I'm provoked, the more I'm challenged, sometimes that is my best moments.

I grew up and it was always said I was stubborn, dog on bone, and I think I have proven that in here over the years. Telling me I can't do something and I could do it – I've said here before and I'll say it this morning because it just coming to mind as I'm saying it.

My Grade 5 teacher told me one time – I ran into him, and he's passed on since. He had dementia; he was a lovely man. He told me a few years back, before I got elected to politics, actually – I'll always remember; he was my Grade 5 teacher – he was teaching us science about dark and light and whatever you could see and he said: You argued with me and argued with me, you could see in the dark. And I never gave up on that argument because, in my mind, I was convinced that in dark rooms I could still see stuff and I would not give in that I could see in the dark.

But there's one thing that he told me. I'm probably going back five years before he took sick, or longer, about 10 years now because time goes. He told me he never forgot it, but he always respected that no matter what, against all adversity of him telling me, the rest of the class were not in agreement, but he said you never waived and he said that's something that sort with him. Now, was I right? Obviously not, but at that time I was convinced and I stuck to my

– his words were: You were very convicted. He respected the part that I was convicted. I was wrong, but my conviction to this cause he respected that I never backed away.

I guess that comes down to who I am. I'm very determined and I don't sway easily. I think a lot of Members of this House can see that sometimes. Sometimes it can be to my demise, but there we go.

I just wanted to move on to some of the issues here. There are a couple of things I want to mention. Yesterday, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, we were having a pretty genuine Concurrence debate and there were lots of great issues. I know my colleague from Bonavista gave us a great education course on sealing and seals. I don't understand the fishery; I never professed – I come from an agricultural community. I've always appreciated the fishery, and trust me, I follow it like the regular Joe Q. Public, but I've never been totally invested in the fishery because I've never had to.

I've always learned, I listen to my colleagues, I listen to the Members of the House of Assembly talk about it. I listen and try to learn. So he gave us a great tutorial yesterday on the seal fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's pretty incredible, actually, when you listen to some of the facts and figures. I enjoy that stuff.

So we were going good. But then the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, who I have a good relationship with and I have a lot of respect for him, for some reason he got up and he through a bomb in the middle of everything in the latter parts of Concurrence and he starts going back to the budget day when we didn't come in here. And we were violating our Code of Conduct, wasn't it? Or our oath of allegiance, or ethics –

L. PARROTT: Integrity.

B. PETTEN: – integrity, you can add more. I can't remember all of those. I wish I had *Hansard* to try to remember. I never reacted; I sat there and I listened. I was like why are we ruining a good debate, we're talking about good things, lots of good issues here.

But I just wanted it to be on the record, though, to let the minister know that we never entered this Chamber that day because of safety concerns. We didn't feel safe. You go up to the side of the Confederation Building and see armed guards in riot gear lining the steps, police all around.

But the minister should realize, too, this is not the first rodeo for me. I emailed the Speaker on behalf of this caucus and told the Speaker we will not be attending the budget because we didn't feel safe, didn't feel it was a safe place to go, crossing any picket line. I respect any protest line and I will not go by them. That's something I do not only in the House of Assembly, any in my life.

I also told the Government House Leader that we would not be going to the budget. We were in communication and I just said we won't be attending. So there were no secrets here.

So for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to get on his soapbox at 5 yesterday evening, with 20 minutes left in Concurrence, and lecture us about us not showing up for the budget and how disgraceful it was, I take offence to because – fair enough, I'll banter in here with the best of them, but when you get up and what you're saying is factually not correct, it's wrong.

It incited three or four points of order because people felt equally frustrated by it. So what you get on with, we're talking about the budget, Chair. I know you might be looking about the relevance, but it's relevant because we were in a debate yesterday and

we were talking about issues important to the province, and for some unknown reason, out of nowhere, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure takes it upon himself to go back and talk about something he had no earthly knowledge of what really happened.

My family, my daughters and my wife, told me, they pleaded with me, don't you go near that protest line, don't go out around that building. That's –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. PETTEN: We went out there as a group, and there was a level of reluctance to do it, but we went out there as a group because we were asked to go out there. We were asked to comment, they wanted the leader to speak to the media. That's where they were set up. That wasn't our first choice. We went there and we were assured everything would be safe. We did our thing and we left.

My family didn't want me to go near that, and I don't blame them. Do you know what? My colleague, a veteran, who also said yesterday he was up in Oka in Quebec, in Montreal, and he witnessed first-hand what you do when things can go sideways. That's not a slight against the fishermen or the protestors; you've got to be handling these things carefully. We weren't in there the night before. We knew things were going to happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: We never came in here the night before. We had to go in the next morning with a police escort, and I did not feel comfortable going in with a police escort, nor did any of my colleagues.

We take our jobs very seriously, Chair, and something that no one on this side of the House of Assembly take for granted. We take our jobs very seriously. But for the minister to get in his place yesterday and

thinking he's going to be smart and thinking he's the new cop in town for the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, don't wash with this side of the House. It don't wash with me and I don't think it washed with anyone over here, and I think I can speak for everyone else on this side, it's totally nonsense.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: It's uncalled for, it's not appreciated, and the Member should be ashamed to get up in this House of Assembly and get on with that garbage.

I got that off my chest.

So, Chair, in my last few minutes, I just want to talk about carbon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Let's hear from the Member.

B. PETTEN: They liven up, Chair.

Anyway, I want to talk about carbon. They're awake today. It's good to see, because usually they're not awake this hour of the morning.

I want to talk about the carbon and the government's stance of trying to separate yourselves from the federal government. It's the Liberal way now to get away from the federal government; don't be attached to Trudeau; don't be attached to anything that's federal; carbon tax is bad; the federal Liberals are bad; everyone is bad; anything associated with the carbon tax is bad; you don't want to be near them.

It's affecting our daily lives and the public are not buying it. You're trying to sell it, the public are not buying it, because people do know, people don't forget that this Member – we had the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Minister of Environment,

the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, who else? There was more than that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

It's just getting a little bit difficult to hear the Member, let's listen to him now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Everybody's got the right to be heard and the right to speak, so let's give this man the right to be heard and speak.

B. PETTEN: That's right, Chair.

Thank you for your protection.

CHAIR: You got that all the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: The Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning by the sounds of things. He doesn't want to listen to me.

But I tell you, Chair, the point of the matter is, they will try to separate themselves from the carbon tax because it's bad and it's a proverbial anchor around the leg of any Liberal in this country now because of the carbon tax. Whether you're provincial or you're federal, it doesn't really matter to the public. I've seen that first-hand. You go knock on doors anywhere in this province, people will tell you the same story.

I know there are people in this House that think it's the best thing ever. But we're not seeing anything about climate change. We're seeing how you're trying to deal with climate change. It's a losing argument, the carbon tax will never fly in this province, no matter how much you try to separate it, it will never work. The ship has sailed. It's moved on.

But the thing that frustrates you is, you're constantly hearing Members opposite trying to say, it's a new day, I can't believe they're doing that to us. But if we turn back the clock three years ago, we stood in this House of Assembly – and I have to remind the public, again, who wants to listen – we stood in this House of Assembly and we pleaded with government to stand with us and vote against anything to do with carbon tax. Make the stand. When I said about courage; it's about courage. It's about doing what's right and I never seen any courage from that side of the House of Assembly on that issue and today we don't see it.

The cost of living is rising, seniors are struggling. You hear it, we hear it constantly. We learned this week on mental health and addictions, another issue that's outstanding. People are struggling in this province.

You can live in these rose-coloured glasses and everything is great. The Premier is on his road show all the time travelling the world, you know, pit stops here. I wonder sometimes if he thinks he's the second coming of Barack Obama, but time will tell about that because he's tripping all over the place speaking. It's quite amazing actually.

Now, rumour has it, there may be a job opening coming up in Ottawa up on Parliament Hill. I'm wondering, there are rumours that he's probably getting ready. There are a few little French courses on the go and speaking at the Empire Club yesterday and where else is he? It's all these speaking engagements and maybe that's where he's heading.

Chair, you might make a weird face on that, but a lot of people out there that are in the know are saying that, so maybe we're not all out to lunch on it.

Maybe he should spend some time here in his own province and deal with the issues here that need to be dealt with for Newfoundland and Labrador.

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: I now call the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Chair.

I would just like to paint a little picture, I guess. We'll go back to March, budget time, and I will openly say I wasn't here on the day of the budget. The Speaker knew we weren't going to come here and no problem with it.

Never have I exposed anyone on the other side, whether they were here or not here. I'll go as far as to say, since 2019, I haven't missed a day. I'll even go as far as to say in January or February of 2023, we had an emergency debate in here on ambulance drivers, and I came in here that day with one leg. Post-surgery, I came in here to debate an important issue on a set of crutches because this Chamber isn't accessible and a wheelchair couldn't get in here.

For a Member of this House to call people out and question their integrity about whether they're here or they're not here, and that Member doesn't even know how to stay awake when proceedings are going on, it's shameful – absolutely shameful.

The reality of this House is that what happened in those days leading up to the 21st was well-known to this government. We received emails that morning at 9:35 telling us we required an escort. We were to congregate together and we would require a police escort to come in through here.

All the while, the Liberal government was here having a pajama party, and that is the truth of it. You came in here in the middle of the night and then –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: It's the truth.

You were here with sleeping bags and pyjamas, and then on top of that –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: On top of that, for someone to question why people aren't coming in here when we were told that staff had to stay away.

CHAIR: I recognize the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Chair, point of order.

I take great exception, as a parliamentarian, I am required by law to be in this House when the House is open.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: When a Member can say I was here having a pajama party, I take great exception.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I remind the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair that as parliamentarians, we are here to represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the House was shut down two days prior to that. The House was shut down the day before.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

What I'm going to do is invite my colleagues to just have a little patience. We are going to make a ruling on the matter of the point of order from yesterday. I think that will help us, guide us in our debate going forward. Maybe I would ask you, maybe we'll focus on Bill 73. What do you think?

We'll just go forward with that, but we will rule on the matter that was raised yesterday and we will get back to you. Otherwise, I think we're just carrying on the debate around that point yesterday.

So could I ask us to focus on Bill 73.

Thank you.

L. PARROTT: So as we talk about debating of Bill 73 and other bills that have not come to the floor of the House of Assembly, I'll remind the Members across the way that during this session we were shut down for two days – two days because there was nothing to come to the floor, a Wednesday and a Thursday, the week before the break leading up to budget. Two days in which we could have debated lots of different legislation which probably won't come to the House this time around.

We have a responsibility, make no mistake about it, but on the day of budget – let's go back a few days prior to when the protestors were at the Petten Building. There were no RCMP officers; no RNC officers; there were no horses; equally as hostile. The moment it came here, that morning, they were here.

If people want to laugh about what happened that morning and say, oh you've got pictures and you weren't afraid to cross and this and that, maybe they should tell that to the fisherman who is lying at home with his hip broke. Maybe they should tell that to that family who don't have that income coming in this summer. It is not an issue to be laughed at, made fun of, or called out.

At the end of the day, everyone has a right to congregate, protest and do what they want to do. That is their right. Nobody crossed. There's a big difference between crossing a line and standing in front of a line, having conversation, trying to find out what was going on. All of that is an entirely different scenario.

What is not being said here is that the entire building was shut down, with the exception of people that were being told to get escorted in here. We did not get offered the exact same privileges and rights. We did not know it was going to happen. So here we are today, and for that to be brought up yesterday in the manner it was is just not above board.

CHAIR: Okay, I thank the Member and I ask you to please go back to Bill 73, as I just ruled –

L. PARROTT: I remind the Chair it is a money bill.

CHAIR: – we are going to deal with the matter of the point of order and we'll report back to the House.

We've had a lot of debate on that. I'd ask to try to steer to other topics.

Thank you.

Good points. We've got them. We'll come back to you.

L. PARROTT: So on March 21, as we were spending the money to have RNC in here on overtime, outside the building to protect the proceedings of the House, when we were in the middle of a budget, when we were looking for ways to protect the House and we know that we're in budget time and the importance of it, I question that. Why didn't it happen at the Petten Building? Why did it happen those two days? What was the sense of urgency on that day, given the fact that we had Interim Supply already passed? Those are questions, and those questions are pertinent to this budget. They're pertinent to the Loan Act.

At the end of every road, we make decisions. It's money, money spent on overtime for RNC officers, money spent on overtime for – it was obviously a huge cost to the government coffers, there's no question about it. I think once we go back

and look at that, we'll see exactly what it costed. Every single RNC officer on the Avalon Peninsula was here, every single one. Every one of them got called in.

Now, Chair, I won't beleaguer that anymore, but I will say this, things can go wrong in those types of situations and because they didn't go wrong doesn't mean it was the right decision. I'll hark back to what my colleague from CBS just said about being able to see in the dark, because obviously we can't see in the dark, but on some days, on some occasions, there are people in this House that can't see in the light either. Don't ever forget that.

We are in the middle of a budget, and I always say to the Minister of Finance, what gets brought up sometimes is well, you didn't support, you didn't support. I don't have any problem saying that there are good things in this budget. We see it, we know it's here. Does it go far enough? I guess that's where the questions come from, from this side all the time.

When we talk about a housing crisis, a health care crisis, a financial crisis, a homelessness crisis, we have an operational crisis, we had a crisis in the fishery in March; at every turn, everywhere we go, it feels as if we're in a crisis.

It's kind of funny because one of the Members spoke the other day and said: Are we better off than we were nine years ago? I think he spoke very eloquently, had some different facts that said we were. But I think if you were to talk to the men and women that we represent in this province in every single riding, I think they'd give you a different answer.

I think if you ask them how they get by day-to-day and if they feel that they're better off than they were in '15, '16, '17, '18, '19, '20, '21, '22, or '23, I think you'd be hard pressed to find anyone to say: I feel we're better off. I think you'd hear them say: I don't know how I can afford to get groceries.

I can't afford to pay my power bill. I can't afford to drive. My children are at school, they're struggling because their education is lacking because of COVID and they have a learning deficit in math now because of two years they missed there. Health care is in shambles. My husband is sick, he can't get an MRI. All of those things come together and they wind up always just pounding down on the general public, no matter where you live in urban or rural Newfoundland, and it demonstrates that we're clearly not better off. We're clearly not better off.

Now we can argue about the finances and stuff. Our job in here is obviously to make sure that this province is in a good place financially and that we look after the people who put us here. But at some point, we need to understand that the people in this province are not being looked after. They're not being looked after.

When we look and we have bodies outside of hospitals because there's no room in the morgue and people can't afford to pay for funerals. When we have tent cities set up. You go to Labrador, the rate of suicide in Labrador and what's going on up there, it's just gone through the roof. We're no better off. We're definitely no better off. How do we get better off? That is a great question. I would say that not only this government but the next government has big challenges ahead of it.

But one of those challenges should be to recognize exactly where we are today and where we are today is in a far worse off place than we were nine years ago. It is an absolute fact. I would challenge the Finance Minister to go around and talk to the common person out there and see how they feel, because I will tell you, it's all we hear. I hear that from people who voted against me and voted for me. I don't just hear it from constituents.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: Yes, the overwhelming tone in the District of Terra Nova is that we're worse off. I'm not saying we haven't done good things, Minister, I'm not saying that. I'm not saying you haven't, we have. You guys have, absolutely, but what I am saying is the undertone with the average person in Newfoundland –

S. COADY: Society is changing.

L. PARROTT: Society is absolutely changing, there's no question about it and expectations are changing. But we need to change with that and I think that's what we're not good at.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Anyhow, on that note, that's all I'll have to say today.

I always like to get up and speak on the budget and the Loan Act, and it's a pleasure to be in the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: I now recognize the Minister of Industry –

AN HON. MEMBER: Energy and Technology.

CHAIR: – Energy and Technology, I apologize.

A. PARSONS: It's okay, Chair, I get it wrong two to three times myself, so it's good.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this today. I hadn't planned on it, but I did want to get up and contribute to this conversation. I don't think I'm going to take the 10 minutes, but maybe I will.

My colleague across the way, my critic for the department, who – we have numerous conversations – makes some points. Some of them, depending on how you look at

them, we could agree or disagree. But one of them I want to point out, because sometimes these conversations require context.

So the big point that sort of jarred me – and, in the last number of years, I don't usually get caught up too much in debates. Again, having sat on that other side – I've sat on that other side. Not everybody certainly in government has sat on the other side, but I've sat there and I know the work that goes into it, the mindset, hearing from constituents. Sometimes the reality is that having not been in government, my opinion changed when I got into government because I realized some of the things that I've been asking for, arguing for, making a point for were different when I got in.

The point I just heard very sharply was people talking about how things are worse than they were nine years ago. Now, just a couple of points I would make there. Just by saying nine years ago makes it a political point because you're trying to go back to when there was a change in government. Two points I would make to that, Sir.

One could theoretically make the argument they are worse than they were 14 years ago. I don't think it's necessarily a political thing. The reality we all deal with now – and governments in Nova Scotia, which are Progressive Conservative, are dealing with tent cities; they are dealing with health care issues. In fact, that government in Nova Scotia was elected to fix health care issues. I can tell you they still face health care issues. We got the NDP in BC, same thing. They're dealing with these as well.

So the point that I make, and maybe not to the other side, maybe just to people listening: We have to recognize – we're making this oh, it's worse than 2015. That's not a valid point. Now, one could make the point, are they worse than they were three years ago, four years ago, 12 years ago? One could argue in many ways, yes. Do you know why? Because we've dealt with the

biggest thing we've all dealt with, which was a pandemic. The point about the education, I agree. I had children that were not getting teaching. But I can guarantee you, you could've had any government of any stripe of any generation dealing with that and I think our children would face that same issue. That is my point.

The second thing that I come back to is that if we were to switch over and put my colleague in my chair and me over in my colleague's chair, I still would like to think that a lot of the issues we face would be the same because they're not created by us. They're created by economic turmoil abroad. They're created by movements right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: I'm willing to bet there are more protests happening now – what we're seeing in universities in the United States, we're seeing police going into places of higher learning and taking people out. I'm not going to get into my opinion on Gaza, Israel, it's not relevant here. But we're talking about the protesting. We're talking about Tent City.

AN HON. MEMBER: Trucker rally.

A. PARSONS: Yes, we had a convoy not long ago.

Do you know what? I will point out. We have faced Tent City type issues in Labrador well before I was ever in a government chair. Well before I was ever in a government chair, we faced Tent City issues, homelessness and stuff like that in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. We still face it.

It is a generational issue that we are facing and there is no solution. The minute that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General sends the police in – as is requested at times: Send the police in – you get criticized. If you reduce the police presence – criticized.

We need to decriminalize drugs. It has worked elsewhere. What is BC doing now? Changing the opinion on that. The reality is that these problems that we face, a lot of them are massive. They're massive and again, they're not just one government. They are certainly not a political stripe. We deal with them all and finding that right solution is difficult.

I come back to the point that I wanted to address – and it's funny because we're all doing this during the *Income Tax Act*, but it is an opportunity I had to respond to that. I challenge my colleagues across the way to say that if we switch the seats, these issues would all be gone, because that is not a true, real argument.

A lot of these issues we face here, I can tell you, I faced when I was in Opposition and I criticized. I criticized how we were housing prisoners. I criticized that. I got in here and I have a chance to fix it. I'd like to think we made improvements, but there's a heck of a lot of improvements still to be made.

When I was there, I tried to get the prison built. Do you know what got in the way? COVID. Try building a house now compared to what it was in 2019 building a house. Well, a prison is that, grown exponentially. We know there needs to be a new prison, but we can't force people to bid on that. We cannot force them, but the minute that you try to go back to the drawing board to get it right because we don't want to spend that on a sole source – how come you're not building the prison?

I would say it's difficult there. So the point I make is that I'd like to think that Members on this side, and Members on the other side, are trying to get to a better place. I recognize some of the difficult choices we make, I'd like to think that I am surrounded by colleagues that are making choices that have made certain things better.

It's hard sometimes to see that through the cloud of frustration that we feel with specific

issues. I can tell you, there are a lot of issues back then we didn't hear about because not everybody's grandmother had Facebook. My grandmother has Facebook. Before, she couldn't put it out there that she had a hard time to get her blood appointment; now she can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSON: There it is. That is true.

I've sat in this chair 13 years and the person before me was my father, and I can tell you, I bet you – and I know he agrees and I know colleagues that were sat in this House at that time would agree – the problems we face are more pronounced and evident than they were then because we're all able to communicate more clearly with each other, everybody, than there was then.

I've seen a difference since 2011. I've seen that difference. So I put that out there; we need to keep those things in mind. Yes, I'm not ever saying that there are not challenges. My God, we have put one of the largest investments in health care we've ever seen – ever. Do you know what? Next year, take us out, if there's another government here, they'll probably make a bigger one. I can guarantee that it will not change some of these issues that are systemic. It is so hard to fix.

But on that note, what I can tell you is that every night when I go home to sleep, I'd like to think that I sleep okay knowing that I'm making decisions that are trying to make it better and I am trying to leave something a bit better to my kids than what was left to me. That is something I think we all share.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I now recognize the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say, as somebody who is not with either of the parties, to my colleague who just spoke, the minister, that was probably the most down-to-earth, sensible thing I've heard spoken, perhaps on either side of the House, in a long time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. LANE: I'll give credit where credit is due.

AN HON. MEMBER: Give him a chance.

P. LANE: Yeah, give me a chance. Don't worry; it's not going to last too long.

But anyway, I just want to take my first 10 minutes to speak specifically to the bill in the sense that I understand it's a money bill and we can kind of talk about whatever we want, but I just want to focus in on the specifics of the loan itself.

I was listening to the Minister of Finance – and I'm going to preface my remark by saying that I do not mean this in a disrespectful way to the minister, I do not mean it as a disrespectful way to this government, but the whole process, to some degree, we've heard the expression, trying to put lipstick on a pig. I feel that way because we are in a tough financial situation and the minister, to her credit, and doing her job and so on, and the politics around it as well, trying to make it seem positive – as positive as she can. I understand that. There are good things in the budget.

I'm not being negative on everything in the budget. There are good things there. I understand we have to look out for people and the needs of people. My colleague from Terra Nova talked about are people better off now than they were and so on.

We know that there are always more and more needs and more and more demands for limited funds. But it is important to note

that in this budget we are borrowing \$2.8 billion – \$2.8 billion with a B. The minister has said that \$1.2 billion of that money is debt repayment.

So to put it, I guess, in layman's terms, would kind of be like, I'm assuming, if somebody had some credit card debt, for example, and other debt, high-interest debt, and they went to the bank and the bank said we're going to consolidate your credit cards and whatever. Then we're going to give you a loan to pay off that high-interest debt and now you're going to pay less money in interest to us on the bank loan than you would be paying there. So, basically, you're taking on debt to pay off debt at lower interest rates. My understanding is that would be the gist of the \$1.2 billion.

The \$1.6 billion, though, that's the one that concerns me the most, I guess. Because we're talking about balanced budget legislation. We're talking about the fact that this year, we have a projected deficit of \$152 million. So we're doing well. It's after going down year over year over year. That is a good thing. That is a positive thing and if we're going to achieve a balanced budget next year, that's a good thing. On the surface, that sounds like a great thing.

But if the way that we're achieving balanced budgets is by taking on new debt. For example, we're going to take another \$1.6 billion, the minister says, and we're going to spend it on roads because, as the minister said, everybody – well, you don't hear me speaking about road, I speak about Team Gushue, in fairness, I do, finishing Team Gushue, but Members over here, my colleagues, are always bringing up the conditions of roads in their districts and so on and there are Members on the government side who have the same issues. So I'm not suggesting that roads don't need to be fixed, don't need to be repaired, don't need to be replaced.

She talked about money that is being invested in health care and other initiatives

as well. We're going to build a new St. Clare's hospital and we're doing renovations, I think, to the Health Sciences or whatever the case might be. All these other facilities that – we're going to build four schools. She talked about one in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, one in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, one in Paradise – anyway, whatever it was. There were four schools she named.

Those are all important things, but the fact of the matter is, we're going to borrow \$1.6 billion to pay for all that. So it's a bit of a smoke and mirrors game, if you will, when on the one hand you say: Hey, look how great we're doing, we've only got a \$152-million deficit this year. We're going to have a balanced budget next year. At the same time, we're going to put the province further in debt because we're going to borrow \$2.8 billion this year – \$1.6 billion is going to pay for all these things that, arguably, we should be paying for out of the budget.

Arguably, if we have a budget and the budget is \$9 billion or whatever the amount is, arguably, if we were having a truly balanced budget situation, it was truly balanced, then we would be paying for schools, we'd be paying for health care staff and so on, we'd be paying for roads, we'd be paying for all that stuff and we'd be able to do that out of the \$9 billion, but we're not. We're saying we've got a balanced budget or almost a balanced budget this year, balanced budgets after that, but we're still borrowing for Capital and other things. We're still borrowing and adding to the provincial debt.

Now, I'm not being critical of the minister and I want to be very clear to the minister, I am not being critical of her or the government for that. I understand the fiscal circumstance we're in. I'm sure the minister would love it if we were in a situation where we could do exactly what I am saying: We've got enough revenue coming in that we don't have to borrow anymore for anything. No more borrowing. How

wonderful would that be? How wonderful it would be if we didn't have to be borrowing.

But the fact of the matter is, we are a small province and we have a huge provincial debt and it is taking away from our ability and a lot of money coming out of that to pay interest on debt and so on. It's hampering our ability to be able to pay for what we need, what the people in the province need, what the people in the province expect of the government.

I know that the demands are great, and even with all this money that's being spent, there are still needs and we can all point them out. I can stand up now, any Member of this House can stand up and say: You need to put more money into school resources, you need to put more money into mental health resources, you need to put more money into other infrastructure. Everybody can stand up and start listing out things: You need to cut taxes, we need more money for seniors, we need more money for recreation. The list is endless.

So I don't envy the minister, the government – any government for that matter – to have to deal with that fiscal circumstance that we have. But we can't ignore it and pretend it's not an issue because it is an issue. While we may agree or disagree on how the money is being spent in this budget, whether we think all the expenditures, all of the – quote, unquote – investments are good ones or bad ones or whether I think you should be spending money somewhere, I think you shouldn't be spending money somewhere else. We're all going to have our views and opinions on that.

But at the end of the day, we still find ourselves continuing to borrow more money and going further and further into debt. There's no easy answer to it. We could cut. Then, of course, the public would be in a major uproar if you started laying off people and cuts, and the Opposition would be over here and they'd be saying this is ridiculous,

you're cutting all these jobs and blah, blah, blah. I get it. It's not easy.

So the only other way, of course, is to increase revenues. Now I am hopeful – I'm hopeful in that regard, listening to the Minister of Energy the other day and talking about all the opportunity we have. I agree with him, we've got tons of opportunity. Hopefully, it's going to be a big opportunity come our way when it comes to our electricity and the Upper Churchill and, hopefully, Gull Island. Hopefully, with the wind energy projects, it's going to create lots of employment and taxation and money and we'll find ourselves in a better place.

I don't envy that there are challenges, but I think it's important we always keep our eye on the debt that continues to grow in this province.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time is over.

I'll now recognize the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you, Chair, for recognizing me.

I thank the Member opposite for his questions and his passion on this regard. I always appreciate listening to the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands when he talks because he is concerned about the financial situation of the province. I have worked very diligently to ensure that we have a better fiscal future.

But I want to address a couple of things that he remarked that I think will be helpful. I completely agree that we don't want to borrow as much money as we're borrowing. I am concerned about the net debt of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think that the Member opposite kind of went from the total public service debt and then went into the net debt, so there's a little bit

of a confusion there, but allow me just a few moments to kind of walk it through.

So in net debt, we are rising by about 0.6 of a billion dollars, so \$600 million. So we're going from, if memory serves, \$17.2 billion to \$17.8 billion this year. Now, Chair, one thing I would say to the Member opposite, I won't disagree with him on this, because I don't have a problem with borrowing money for infrastructure. The reason I say that is, and I'm going to relate it to our own homes and our own personal situation, I don't mind going out and borrowing money for my house, knowing that I have an asset.

So I go out and I borrow money, which I have, and I buy a house, which I pay off during the period of time and, at the end of the day, I have a good asset. Completely logical for most people in this House because most people in this House would have gone out and borrowed for a mortgage. Not many people have money in their back pocket to go buy a house, the same with the government.

You're going out there and you're buying a billion-dollar hospital. I think that's what the Corner Brook hospital costed, and I'm using relative terms. Let's say it was a billion dollars. Well, you're not sitting on a billion dollars in cash, but you know you have an asset here. You have a good asset. You're going to have an asset that's around, I'm going to say, 50 years. Sometimes we have them for a lot longer than that, if you look at some of our facilities, but a 50-year asset there.

So at the end of the day, you pay it down. I think that's the critical piece is: one, our cost of borrowing; two, your ability to pay. That's why I said when I stood up earlier how important it was for Newfoundland and Labrador to have sinking funds attached, because you don't want to roll over your debt. Sometimes it could be a higher debt. If we're rolling over debt now, you know you're paying more today than you would have been paying during the height of the

pandemic because the interest rates would have been lower.

So the two things that I consider when I'm looking at our financial situation is (a) our ability to pay, and the Member opposite is absolutely right. We have this year, in this year's budget, the highest revenue that Newfoundland and Labrador has ever enjoyed. Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the highest revenues per capita in the country. It's usually either ourselves or Alberta that's first.

Now can you imagine, that's how much revenue that we have as a province. So we have a robust economy, I'm hoping it will even be stronger. I know the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology and the Minister of Tourism and other economic ministers are working very hard to continue to grow our economy. So our ability to pay, I think is very, very important. But I don't have a problem borrowing for infrastructure, as long as it's within reason.

When I first bought my house, I didn't go out and buy a million-dollar home because I knew I couldn't afford a million-dollar home. I bought a home that I could afford. That's what we have to think about when we're borrowing, because in our debt as well – so deficit is comprised of our money within our debt, that's critically important to get our deficit down. I know the Member opposite is very supportive of making sure that we are within the range of balance. I appreciate his support on that because people like to spend money; it's hard when you have to make that balance. So that's one thing, making sure our deficit is down.

Two, also within our debt is our pension promissory notes; \$3.8 billion in pension promissory notes. Now we are getting our pensions under control, we still have some work to do in some areas, but overall the public service pension is now fully funded because of this promissory note and the Teachers' Pension Plan is now fully funded because of the promissory note. So we

have to make sure that we're funding our pensions because it is an obligation.

Then there's what I want to call the infrastructure. So we have to be careful what we're doing with infrastructure, but I say to the Member opposite, I think within reason we can borrow for infrastructure. What you're seeing is pretty much the same amount of money as we borrowed last year for infrastructure.

So we've got to continue to bring down our cost of borrowing, that's some of the things that I spoke about when I spoke earlier, we've got to continue to bring down our cost of borrowing, we have to borrow within reason and we have to make sure we have liquidity. So all those things, it's kind of a building block.

I will remind the House that we have had a bond-rating upgrade. I think that's very, very good for us as well. We have opened up our bonds to other potential investors, I think that's positive. All those things are building blocks.

But I certainly appreciate the Member opposite, his perspective on saying that it would be wonderful if we had the money to be able to pay for the construction. I will say to the Member opposite, I don't think we should be overly concerned, as long as our ability to pay is there and that we are not overdoing it. We don't build – for me – a million-dollar house when I could afford a \$500,000 or a \$400,000 or a \$300,000 house.

So we have to be responsible in what we're doing, we don't over borrow and that we have the ability to pay off our debt and making sure that we have sinking funds attached. This is why I was so strong on the Future Fund, Chair. As I said earlier, \$1.6 billion that will help us pay down our debt.

So I appreciate the Member opposite's support and I appreciate his words on the strengthening of our finances. We have to

make sure that we are focused on balanced budgets, we have to make sure that we have sinking funds, we have to make sure that we have the Future Fund to help us pay down the debt in the next number of years and we have to continue to grow our economy, all very strong points on how Newfoundland and Labrador becomes a stronger and sustainable province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

I now recognize the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

I want to mention to Scott Martin watching in Elliston that his Member is no economist. I might get up and stand up and talk about figures, but I'm not an economist. But I'm going to throw out a few things in the 10 minutes that I would have to speak on it.

The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands talks about the debt. He talks about the net debt. Most people like Scott Martin in Elliston, they can't distinguish and don't know a lot about whether we're talking about the net debt or the total debt. The minister just said in her address there: do not want to borrow and referenced concern. I would say a lot of people would be concerned about the debt that we would have and that is correct what the Member had stated.

The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure mentioned yesterday, and he was selective in what he said, about the things within the province and there are successes, what he stated – and we do it over here, too, we're selective sometimes in what we throw out and maybe what my address now might be is a lot of selected items. But the bottom line that he had stated yesterday, he said: The expenses are under control. Remember, I don't have *Hansard* to go by, just my notes that I wrote down: The expenses are under control.

Anybody out in Newfoundland and Labrador would look at, on a cash basis, income versus expenses; revenue versus expenses. If we continue to have a large gap between that, then that's a concern. That's a concern that many Newfoundlanders have.

Yesterday morning, I sat down with an economist. Remember, I'm not an economist, but I sat down with one. The economist had stated that it's a job to get a read on the budget document. That is from the economist: It's a job to get a read on the budget document.

The Member for Bonavista can't say what is the issue with the budget document, but when I went back to the office, I knew there was an article I read one time and it was by C.D. Howe Institute. They're rather an independent think tank. The last report says, *The ABCs of Fiscal Accountability: The Report Card for Canada's Senior Governments, 2023*. I will just read it. It rates the transparency of the budget document for Canadians to view and it ranks all the provinces and the federal government. It does a ranking on the transparency of the budget document.

Well, C.D. Howe gave us the worst rating in Canada, but we weren't alone because the federal government had the same mark. Every other province was higher. I would say, when we look at the budget document and we ask questions or we think about the transparency in the document, there is room for improvement, then CD Howe might say, yes. Or they do say in their 2023 report that, yes, there certainly is.

I recall the President of Treasury Board and Finance Minister stood up minutes ago and stated about borrowing for infrastructure as long as we've got the ability to pay. That's a fair comment: as long as we've got the ability to pay. Do we need to improve our infrastructure? One hundred per cent. But that thing about the ability to pay is something that many people would question

as to what we have or what truly is our ability to pay.

If we look at our net debt, the previous speaker from Mount Pearl - Southlands mentioned about the deficit and keep in mind that the deficit is projected at \$152 million this year. In last year's budget, it was stated that we were going to eliminate the deficit, but we added on \$400 million. That's probably for unforeseen circumstances or things that happen that might be on a global basis, that's all. But every year we look at, our debt is increasing.

When this government came in in '15-'16 I remember the first budget that they talked about they mentioned that we were oil dependent; we need to diversify. Correct; 100 per cent, we need to diversify. But when the first budget came in, they were very critical of the outgoing government, that they overinflated the price of oil. They put the price of oil up in the budget document to make sure that the revenue coming in was getting closer to what the expenses going out were. We did a forecast on it. I don't know exactly what that budget is, but the minister may be able to expand upon, but it was considerably below and thought not to overinflate.

We have our price per oil now budgeted at \$82. We can use the resources and the institutions that we came up with the \$82 figure. The only thing I know is that on VOXM news, a bond-rating agency mentions about the projected Brent oil price of \$82 per barrel appears optimistic in relation to current prices.

Now, that's only one. I'm just saying from the benchmark, what they had utilized. But here's what we have and these figures. In 2016-17, our net debt was a little over \$12 billion – I won't read it out. The total debt was very, very close to \$16 billion. Net debt, total debt – we're talking net debt. In 2021-22, our net debt was a little over \$16 billion. Our total debt was a little over \$24 billion. I'm sure the minister is going to raise the

issue as to what is attributed to that debt. That's coming, and that's fair enough. But in '24-'25, our net debt is a little over \$17.5 billion. Our total debt is \$33.5 billion.

Now if someone said that when we look at balance and concern for our debt, that's a fair comment. I think that's a fair comment what we would have.

So the minister often talks about balance, and she is correct. She is 100 per cent correct that we've got to seek the balance to make sure that what we do. The ever-increasing debt is a concern of what we would have.

I just want to slip this in. The Member for Burgeo - La Poile stood up and had a wonderful address. He stated about what difference it would be from one side or the other side if we changed seats. So when the next election is over, if you're over here and we're over there, what difference it would be because of the global economics. The only thing I would say, we would hope that we wouldn't have the highest amount of business bankruptcies in the country.

The drop of 3 per cent to 2.5 per cent, conceivably, would make a small difference in those small businesses. That is something that we would hope. The National Business Institute or group that would have rated us as being the worst when it comes to red tape and bureaucracy in the country – does that stymie business growth? I would say, yes, it does.

So were talking about operational issues that are different because how we run our House is on us. That doesn't matter about the global economy and the pressures we've got, but how we run our House is on us. If we're talking about operational issues, that is on us.

One little note that I would say is that health care continues to grow. We know that. We all know that health care would be our biggest ticket. But when we've got to service

our debt to the tune of \$1.2 billion, which is more than what the fishery brings in, which we think, under a good action plan, the fishery will bring in more to our province that will increase the revenue in, these are the things, I think, that would make a difference between our side. If we did have a chance to have a go at it, we think we would make a difference on the revenue side, control the expenses and, hopefully, reduce the debt.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I may take a couple of moments to talk about the Loan Act. I think it's really, really important and I'm excited to have the opportunity to stand up after some very good speakers. The MHA for Bonavista, I always listen to him intently to see what he has to say about the rural parts of the province that he's very much involved in and very much excited to speak about the people in his district that are watching each and every day. I am excited to say that every day he stands up, I'm looking forward to the next name that comes up, that comes to the table of the House of Assembly. I'm sure they appreciate that.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. DAVIS: I wasn't going to say that, the MHA for Terra Nova, but fair enough.

We are talking about the Loan Act. The MHA for Bonavista did talk about a couple of things that I'd like to highlight, myself. Being here in 2015, when we got elected in 2015, he did mention that oil revenues were the reason why the budget was wrong. I don't believe that to be the case at all. I believe that played a part in it, but when you do a budget in 2015, prior to us coming into office, and you tell the people of the

province that it's going to be a \$1.1-billion deficit – bad enough, fair enough. When we actually get in and get elected in November of that year and the Premier of the day goes down into the media centre and sits there and tells the people of the province the actual truth about what the bank balance is and how bad it was and how misguided, I guess, the budget forecasting was in general terms to a deficit of \$2.7 billion.

It's sickening, as a person that just got elected at the time, days before, to find out that's what the people – and I will say to the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, I felt hoodwinked, quite honestly, like you did with Muskrat Falls. I felt hoodwinked on the fact that we were told, and the people of this province were told, \$1.1 billion by the Progressive Conservatives in 2015. It was actually \$2.7 billion when we actually got into the books that day we got elected. I look at independents on the other side, they were both on this side of the House at the time, and both seeing the budget as it existed at that time.

So the challenging part for all of us on this side, at that point, was every government, when they turn, there are always issues. There definitely are. Most times there is no food in the kitchen cupboards when you come in. When we took office, they actually took the cupboards off the wall before they left.

So what I'm suggesting we really need to do is elevate the conversation to where it needs to be today. What are we going to do that's better for the people of the province? We're all trying, all 40 of us – 38 of us that are in this House, currently – are all trying to do our part to make it better for the constituents that we all represent.

I get the opportunity to represent the beautiful District of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville. I always say historic, it was created in 2015, so I'm quite excited about the historic aspect of my district. Not like some of the districts in this province, it was

created out of a population boom that's happening in St. John's. It was a great opportunity for the people in the province and the people of St. John's. We've got a significant amount of issues, not just in St. John's, right across our province, about things that we're talking about with respect to housing, things that we're talking about with respect to drug use, things that we're talking about with respect to health care. All of those things are not lost on any of us on this side of the House. That's why we've made the single biggest investment in health care, as a government, ever.

Since 1949, the single biggest investment in health care was made by this government in this House of Assembly and everybody in this House of Assembly should be proud of that. It's important. Now we want to ensure that that investment, we get the best outcomes for the people that we all represent. Each and every dollar that's invested, we want to make sure we get the best out of it. That's what we're going to continue to try to do with the Health Accord and other documents that we're working on and other issues and programs that we're going to be trying to do within the health authority.

That's one of the things that my residents always call me about with health care. They see some improvements; obviously, it's not fast enough. We want to move it as fast as we can, but it is a very big beast. Health care in Newfoundland and Labrador is a very big beast. It is hard to change on a dime, that's why the Health Accord is a 10-year document. Over the next number of years and months and weeks, you're going to see changes. Those changes are going to be, hopefully, moving in the positive direction for everybody that we represent.

The MHA for Bonavista did talk about small business. We did reduce the small business tax, which is a good point and I do thank him for highlighting that because that was a very good thing that we did. But in addition to that, we've also put a \$2-million

investment with the Employers' Council, as well as the Newfoundland and Labrador Board of Trade, to help administer small businesses with the transition from the increase that happened with minimum wage.

That's hard for our small businesses and we understood that. We looked at that. We looked at how we could do that. We did it last year. Now we did it a little bit outside of government with an agency like the Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council, in partnership with the Board of Trade. That's an important investment. I think the businesses that are going to be impacted and have the least ability to pay, for those increases, because of the small nature of their business – small business under 100 employees that have employed the minimum wage, I encourage you in the next couple of weeks, there will be an application that will be available through the Employers' Council to apply in your districts, let your business know, your small business to apply for that. Anywhere between \$2,500 and \$5,000 that will be coming in to help alleviate some of those costs and burdens, cost of living that would have happened because of the increase in minimum wage. That is two aspects and there are many others that would be involved in that for small business.

No new taxes is an important piece for me in my district. That was something that the residents wanted me to be fighting for them for. Reducing the gasoline tax, that's important, 8.05 cents a litre off, the second lowest in the country and very important for us to do that.

I know that as the Minister of Environment people on the other side will throw barbs sometimes and say I voted for carbon tax. That is true, I did. I'm not going to stand up here and deny that I voted for carbon tax. I did vote for the made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador approach that we did have. I fought very hard to keep it because I

thought the industries that we had exemptions for were important.

The federal government decided not to do that in our way. I've sent numerous letters and had numerous conversations with Minister Guilbeault on that very topic. He does not see it the way I see it or the way we see it and the way, I guess, you guys see it as well. That's something that I would hope the education from all of us, including me, would break him down a little more to do that.

We did get some successes with the exemption of home heating oil, which is an important exemption. We wanted more. The Newfoundland and Labrador approach was a better approach.

Without saying anything about carbon tax in general terms, we're hitting our targets in Newfoundland and Labrador. Based on 2030 targets, we're going to hit them, not because of carbon tax, because of the things we're doing on this side of the House as a government and as a people in the House of Assembly that we're supporting. That's why we're going to hit our target.

We have the *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act* that's very strong on industry and partnerships with industry ensuring we work with them and stakeholders, by the way. The shareholders of these industry organizations and industry players are forcing industry to do better and do it better from our greenhouse gas perspective.

I'm going to hopefully get an opportunity to speak a little bit more about that, but I couldn't let my friend, the MHA for Bonavista, get up without me having to come up and say a few words about some of the things that we've had the opportunity to do.

I'm hoping to get to talk a little bit more about the Oil to Electric Incentive Program, as well as the EV program over the next little bit, but we've seen a significant

increase in uptake in that. I know that we've made some changes in that program to allow low-income individuals to get more money, up to \$22,000. I encourage people to apply through the utilities. Thank you to the utilities for the great work they're doing in getting this program out to the masses as quick as we can.

There are some 40,000 homes that are on oil in this province. We need to transition all of them. It's going to be an important piece for us. It's going to be an important piece for them for two reasons: One, because it reduces our greenhouse gas emissions in this province, which is a great thing; and two, because of affordability issues. You can save anywhere between 50 and 60 per cent in your own personal home and your own personal expenses for energy and heat and things like that by making those changes. So it's good for your pocketbook; it's good for the environment.

That's where I'd like to end, Mr. Chair, and I hopefully will get the opportunity to stand up again and if the spirit moves me because of the MHA for Bonavista, I'll look to do that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

I'll now recognize the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Chair.

It's an honour to stand again in the House of Assembly on behalf of the constituents of the District of Harbour Main. I always want to thank them for having the faith and trust in me to represent their interest and needs in the House of Assembly.

It is important to speak about this bill. It's Bill 73, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province. So

we hear a lot of figures stated here, Chair, and I'm, by no means, an economist. So I try to understand as best as I can what is the most relevant and pertinent information we need to know when we're talking about this bill.

I guess the most important thing that I see from this bill is the fact that the projected borrowing for this year, for 2024, is \$2.8 billion. I think it's also important to recognize another figure, which is what the cost of servicing the debt is, which is \$1.2 billion. So I think those are the figures that I'm going to concentrate on in the rest of the 10 minutes that I have to speak.

I'm going to start, first of all, about talking about the responsibilities and the obligations of our government. No one ever said it was easy to govern. So we appreciate when we hear the realities spoken, for example, from the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology in debate earlier because he spoke about the realities, he spoke about how difficult it is to make decisions when it comes to governing and the challenges that any government will face in making those tough decisions.

I guess what's really important here is that we know that most Members of this hon. House of Assembly, when they make those tough decisions and they make the calls that they have to make when investing the money that is involved here, the billions of dollars that is involved, that they are doing that with the best intention. I don't think any of us would really dispute that. I think that needs to be recognized. It is difficult to govern, and there's no question about that.

With respect to the Minister of Finance earlier when she discussed the issue of the debt that our province faces, that there is concern, that she, as the Minister of Finance, is concerned about that debt. So that needs to be acknowledged. That is important for the people of the province to recognize. These decisions that are made are tough and cause a lot of concern for the

people that are in government that make them.

Having said that, though, when we look at the obligations of government, there are many moral obligations in serving the people that you represent, the people that have elected you. Caring for our seniors is a very important moral obligation and requires incredible investment. Educating our young people is such an important, significant responsibility and requires significant investment.

Tending to our sick and our frail in the province, that is a huge responsibility and requires incredible amounts of funding and investment to do that job properly. Keeping our people safe and protected in our society and in our community is, again, a huge responsibility and one that also requires significant financial investment.

Public infrastructure: We know that the investment that's already been mentioned, \$1.4 billion over five years, that's a huge investment by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and requires fairness and equitable allocation of those resources to people throughout the province. Of course, our growing economy, keeping that growing, that is also important.

Those are some of the more moral obligations, but one of the things that needs to be focused on is sound, financial management. When we look at that theme of sound, financial management, every government has a responsibility. They have a duty to ensure fiscal responsibility.

I would say that that responsibility, this government talks a lot about that responsibility, but I would argue they haven't lived up to it, Chair. They have not lived up to honouring that responsibility, and we hear about the Future Fund. They talk about the Future Fund and we're now borrowing money at a time of very high borrowing costs to put into a Future Fund, which can be argued is a fund that they can

spend at will. But this Future Fund is an example of borrowing at a time where there are very high borrowing costs. So it can be argued that this is questionable, this Future Fund.

When we look at the equalization piece, the province is back on equalization; we're a have-not province once again. Those are the facts that need to also be acknowledged when we're talking about the realities of our fiscal situation here in this province. When we look at wasted money, Chair, the travel nurses' fiasco, the sole-source contracts for travel nurses, first we learned it was \$35.6 million from April to August 2023, then it went to \$40.95 million from September to December 2023.

Now if we add on what they may have spent in the first three months, we're looking at approaching \$100 million, Chair. These are sole-source contracts. These are questionable. Are we giving good value for taxpayers' money, that has to be asked. This government, I would submit to you Chair, has a record of sole-sourcing very expensive and wasteful contracts, and that has to be acknowledged.

So we ask, when we look at *Budget 2024*, has the government done better in this budget? What have the members of the financial community had to say about this, about *Budget 2024*?

It's not a glowing report, Chair. It's not. The RBC said that it's disappointing to see the improving – there had been an improving trend, but it reversed. Under the fiscal plan laid out in *Budget 2024*, Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to hold the heaviest debt burden – the heaviest debt burden – in all of Canada. That is not a very good analysis or assessment of this budget, and we're hearing it from members of our financial community. The Canadian Taxpayers' Federation, the executive director Jay Goldberg said he is concerned that government is running a deficit again

this year, instead of balancing the books as it had planned.

That deficit, I'll remind everyone again, the projected borrowing is \$2.8 billion of taxpayers' money, Chair. So he asks the question: Does the government understand why the federation is so concerned about deficit financing? The answer should be obvious.

When we look at the Greater Corner Brook Board of Trade, Chair, another representative from our financial community has concerns about *Budget 2024* and about the spending and the allocation of spending and deficit. This is according to Keith Goulding in an interview with NTV from the Greater Corner Brook Board of Trade, he said: Right now, servicing that debt is probably one of the largest items in the budget so that needs to be addressed, as we need to work at keeping that debt down and reducing our debt so that we, as a province, can focus on investments.

Chair, I submit to you that the picture is not as rosy as it's portrayed. We need to be realistic and objective when we're looking at things. People want to hear the facts. They want to hear what's accurate. They don't want to hear rosy pictures that do not reflect reality. I think that our members in the financial community have cited their concerns about this budget and that should be acknowledged.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

I now recognize the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to stand and have a few words on some of this. I understand, because being on both sides, this side as

the Opposition and government side on several occasions, even back in Clyde Wells days when we thought the government was going to go bankrupt at the time, back in the '90s, it is a balancing act that we all have to try to find our way through.

I would argue, again, that some of the people that you hear say – and I heard the minister saying that we can build because we have an asset there and we don't mind borrowing for capital because we have an asset.

P. LANE: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

P. LANE: Who's going to buy the Team Gushue?

E. JOYCE: Who's going to buy the Team Gushue Highway?

But you can understand the infrastructure, I can understand it, but here's what I hear from people: If you're going to build infrastructure, you do it because you need it. You look at the school that was built up in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, that was never recommended. I'm just saying, Minister, this is the stuff that you hear.

All of a sudden, I want this, forget if you need it, forget if you can afford it, we're just going to do it. I tell you this is the kind of stuff that people, ordinary people, bring up because when it's in the media they said: Well, what did they do that for? They didn't need that.

When it came out in the media the school board writing and saying: Where did this come from? The deputy minister never replied to it because the problem with it is that it never went through the school board. If it was needed, it should go through the process, but when you just take it and say, okay – it's almost like Monopoly money. I want this. Okay. Then you add to the debt,

even though, do you really need it? The school board said we don't.

These are the kind of issues that are brought up. I'll tell you another issue that is brought up to me from the people who know about it. There are 17 Members in Cabinet. Here is Newfoundland and Labrador we got 17 people in Cabinet, and people recognize that.

P. LANE: It's almost half the House.

E. JOYCE: Almost half of the House is in Cabinet. You take out the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, there's almost half the House in Cabinet. People recognize that – people really recognize that.

So here we are saying on one end that we got to watch out for our dollars and telling people you can't have this part, you can't have that part, you can't do this; yet you put 17 people in Cabinet. There are divisions over there that was never ever a ministry – never.

P. LANE: Plus, the Premier's office.

E. JOYCE: The Premier's office out in Central.

In actual fact, Len Simms, I think, had a Premier's office in 1990. I went out and closed it down because it wasn't being used. I was actually working with Clyde Wells. I went out and we actually shut down the office.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: I'll say to the minister, I actually went out there and actually got rid of the furniture and shut it down then, yeah. That is a fact.

So is it being used? I'm not out there. I'm hearing that it's not being used a lot, but that's the kind of thing that a government does. That's the kind of situation, Mr. Chair, these sole sources.

I heard the Member for Burgeo - La Poile speak today about the issues, and they're faced on both sides. That is true. That is 100 per cent true, but here is what happened. All these issues were always there but they were never addressed for a number of years because they weren't the big, high-profile issues that may get some media attention. That is the issue that the government faced because these issues always were there. There's no doubt, I say to the Member for Burgeo - La Poile, they were here when we were in Opposition in 2011, some of these issues. They're going to be there, whoever forms the next government. But the problem with it is that for four or five years they let it get too big instead of dealing with it.

I'll give you an example. I brought up in this House several times about the housing in Corner Brook, no housing. I brought it up many times. And it's great that there are going to be 50 units built, that's great. But it's not enough. There are over 300 on the wait-list – there are over 300 on the wait-list.

So I understand, I say to the minister and the government, yes, these issues are going to be there, but we have to try to manage the issues. That is what people are bringing to my attention, is that if there is a major housing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Just a little too much chatter on the tea here. Let's just listen to the Member here.

Thank you.

E. JOYCE: I understand that the minister's over there agreeing with me on it. Just let

me finish, then you can stand up and just thank me for bringing up these issues. I understand that.

I just say to the Minister of Health, I don't know how true this is, but this is the kind of thing that gets out there. Once it gets out there, that's when people get upset.

Cataracts: Last year, it was committed they were going to have 500 cataract surgeries on a go-forward basis. From my understanding from people – and I don't know if it's true, the minister can answer this or not – that now they're gone back to 2019 levels. There's going to be another wait-list starting this year. Yet, there was a commitment made by government, 500 on a go-forward basis.

This is the kind of thing that you cause issues for people of the province that should never be caused, because then people lose confidence in government. No matter what government it was, if you make a commitment, you stick to it. If you can't stick to it, stand up and say why you can't do it.

But that's my understanding from patients in Corner Brook, is that right now they may be gone on a wait-list again, which we shouldn't have. It's saving the government money. There was a commitment made on a go-forward basis so there will never be a wait-list in Western Newfoundland for cataract surgeries. It's been done all across Canada, this form.

So I'll let the minister respond to that if he wants to later or to say the information that I'm receiving from the patients is not correct, I look forward to it, but that's what I've been told.

P. LANE: What are they doing on this end of her? Same thing?

E. JOYCE: Same thing on this end of her. I think, same thing, yeah. Same thing, they're moving them back.

One of the biggest things that I'm going to bring up is the roads. I said it before and I'll say it again, is that we need somehow to make sure our roads are safe. I know I'm harping on the minister on it, and I should because I'm doing it on behalf of the people. What I'm doing now, on a regular basis, I'm going to bring up concerns on the roads and what parts. The minister is well aware of it because there are at least 30 or 40 letters.

I say to the minister, this is something that I'm talking about: safety. I really am. I mean, I always gave you high praise, and I still do. I think you're a great guy; I really do. But when I've got to raise an issue on the roads, this is my job – this is my job. I will never attack you personally. I will never, if we are into a group, never say a word about it. This is my place here to bring up these issues, and I will do it. I've got a habit once I feel that I'm right on something, is that I'm going to bring it up on behalf of the constituents.

I know a few other ministers over there that I deal with. Some, you don't even hear from, but you know that the district is being treated like other districts. That's the way it should be. I understand the politics of it all. I'm going to bring up Crown Lands for a second. I say to the minister, Crown Lands is one issue that a lot of people are frustrated with. You can walk into Motor Registration now, get your car. You can walk up to Finance, pay your bill. But you still can't walk into Crown Lands.

I say to the minister, and I have numerous times, people still find it hard to get through to arrange an appointment. Everybody don't have a computer. If you went up to that door today in Corner Brook, and if someone got an issue with something, they can't just get someone down or go in to see someone to get it straightened up. They're told to go back, go online. If you haven't got a computer, you've got to find someone to arrange an appointment three or four weeks down the road. Maybe the question could be resolved within a minute, two minutes, the process – two or three minutes.

That is something that's a lot of frustration, I can tell you, Minister. If there's any way whatsoever that you could fix that, it would save a lot of anxiety by a lot of people around trying to get into Crown Lands to see someone. It could be as simple as: Is there anything else I need to do with this application? That is very frustrating to a lot of people, and I just bring it to your attention.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Now I'll recognize the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

I didn't mean to be disrespectful, standing while the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands was speaking because, in actual fact, I really enjoy what he said. I was listening intently to what he said and he made very good points. I think a lot of times, the chatter in the room, in the House of Assembly, gets so loud that we have difficulty hearing good points made.

Bill 73, for the people listening at home in my district, really, it's about authorizing the ability to borrow money. "... sums of money required for the Consolidated Revenue Fund to make good, in whole or in part, actual or estimated deficiencies," – deficiencies, that's gaps – "between provincial revenue and expenditures."

So this bill is very, very important. But also it gives us the ability on this side in the House of Assembly, the Opposition, to actually talk about whether or not we support this bill, borrowing more monies and how the government spends monies. That point's been made back and forth, and also it gives the Members the ability to talk a little bit about some of their concerns for their district, about what money should be spent on. Sometimes it can get a bit heated, Bill 73.

I just want to go back; I know there's a point of order, and I know the Speaker is going back and doing a ruling, but what was talked about yesterday, when the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi actually stood up and he talked about democracy. I was there listening, and I wrote down what he said. When he was talking about the fact that the Official Opposition and the Third Party and the independent Members weren't present, when the budget was being read out by the Finance Minister, we weren't sitting in the House of Assembly.

Now, in the point of order, the Member from Humber - Bay of Islands makes the point that you can't be doing that. You shouldn't be doing that. It's about integrity and respect and following the rules of the House of Assembly. But in actual fact, I just want to quote – because I wrote it down, and my handwriting – I was kind of upset so my hand was shaking – and the Member said: It was a direct assault on our parliamentary democracy, aided – and I think I wrote abetted – by the other side. The other side is us.

So basically, we contributed to an attack on parliamentary democracy. To me, that's a farce, and I'm really, really glad the point of order was raised. Because we come into the House of Assembly and what we try to do is try to look at what's needed in our districts, what's need for the province and we know about the greater good. I talk about a lot about the greater good.

But, in actual fact, to have it said to get a road, you have to have a big project, like a mine project or a big corporation, some economic generating entity. That's the only way you'll get a road. When you look in my district there is no road, but what do we have in our district? We have Voisey's Bay; there was no road built to facilitate and support Voisey's Bay. There were no power lines put in to support Voisey's Bay. And that was mentioned in the House of Assembly, about Voisey's Bay being on

diesel and the impacts that it has and the cost.

Nothing is coming to my district. I talk about the burden. I'm going to vote on this approval for the government to borrow money, and we talk about decade after decade spending money. In my district, we're not getting the bare minimum.

And where were we? I don't mind saying where I was. I watched the Minister of Finance, basically, read her Budget Speech. I was doing it virtually. I wasn't falling down on my duties as an MHA. I was looking for a little scrap of something for my district, to help with the things I have been raising through petitions and through Question Period.

I was looking for something to do to offset the Liberal decision to remove the freight service – the freight boat, as we call it – from the Island up to Northern Labrador. That freight service existed until they build a road into Goose Bay, joining the South Coast and Goose Bay, Lake Melville, over to Labrador West.

So when we look at authorizing the borrowing of money and I hear oh, you've got to have some kind of project like a mine or a large business; but, in actual fact, in my district, we already have that. People in Northern Labrador, we know where Voisey's Bay is. We know about the nickel and the copper and the milling that comes out of Voisey's Bay. We know that, in actual fact, there's been years when the revenue generated from Voisey's Bay was more than the offshore. So we know how much money that Voisey's Bay is contributing.

The only way that project could go ahead was with the co-operation and the support of the Innu Nation and Nunatsiavut Government because we had shut down that project during exploration, when they started construction and they started building roads without having the proper permits in place, without having the proper

commitment for environmental protection. So we talk about that. For me, it's really, really difficult.

Also, who was present? We respected the fishers. Do you know what I mean? A direct assault on democracy. But I got to tell you, I grew up in the fishery. I grew up in the small town of Makkovik. We had the fish plant and my nephews continue to fish with a longliner, shrimp, turbot, halibut – not, sorry, grenadier, all of these fish that we could harvest that wasn't cod, we continue to fish.

I got to tell you, when you go out on the sea, you actually take your life into your hands. It is a serious thing and every fisher knows that. Every person who has a loved one in the fishery knows that. We look at how the fishery is eroded decade after decade. What I saw as a young person growing up in high school, the way I summed it up was looking at it from Joey Smallwood onward, is that we were ashamed. We were ashamed of the fishermen. We wanted to be like Alberta with the cowboy boots and the big cars and the hats. We wanted to be something more, we thought. I saw it.

A fishermen: What does a fishermen do? He works hard all day. He's got calloused hands; he stinks of fish and he goes out in his boat to get the fish. Now we've progressed to longliners, but back in the day, the fishery was built on the small boats and we gave that away.

We've just got to look to Europe. We won't borrow money. We look to Europe and how they respect their fisherpeople, how they build economies and communities and has a lot of infrastructure that's funded by the fishery, the profit from the fishery. But what did we do? No, to get ahead, we undermined all that.

I have to tell you, I'm talking about fish plant workers. I went to work in the fish plant when I was 14 years old and I had so much respect for the men and women that I worked side by side with, especially the

older ones who had arthritis in their hands, standing on cement floors. So everybody who works in the fishery has my respect.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: And I tell you it's not a direct assault on parliamentary democracy.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member's time has expired.

Thank you very much.

I now recognize the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Chair.

It's certainly a pleasure to get up and represent the District of Ferryland and the people who elected me to come in here and I'll certainly do that.

I'll just touch on a couple of points that happened yesterday and since last week. I spoke to the Minister of Health last week and yesterday he claimed that it's being political by asking those questions. Last Thursday, I had those questions ready and I didn't ask them. I said if I can get this solved, I'm not going to ask these questions.

I'm the least political fellow in here, in my mind, I'm the least political person, because I tell you, I don't want to make it political, but when you get up here and – I put those questions off and I didn't want to ask those. I didn't want to ask him last week. If I could solve that problem and we can get it solved, if you could solve it, I'd be happy with that, really happy.

So then we go through the weekend, I'm getting emails and there's no nurse practitioner in the area. What would you do if you were in my position as an MHA in my district? I have to ask those questions. It's not political. I have to ask them, that's what they're asking me to do. That's my job.

To claim it to be political. No, I certainly didn't appreciate that. That's not the way it was. I held those questions off, and you didn't know that. As the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology said, there are facts around it. I just wanted to put that out there because that's the way it was.

Last week, I said, no hold off on those questions. If this minister can fix this, then I'd appreciate that and I wouldn't ask, but then when it's not fixed on Monday and we're still working on Tuesday. These people are after me and I have to ask these questions, that's my job. So that's where it is and I wanted to put that out there, just so that the minister would know that.

I do appreciate that we're still working on it and we'll hopefully get to solve it, but that's where it's to. I just wanted to put that point out there. Every issue in here is probably the same way. So I just wanted to put that out there, that's where it's to. I called our chief of staff and I held those questions because I thought we'd get it fixed by the weekend because people are waiting. They need to get that service and that's my job to do that. So I'm going to do that until I'm finished. That's just the way it is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Again, the Minister of Transportation gets up and speaks, and I know the Chair had said we're not going to speak on it, but I was out there and didn't cross those lines as well. I had a niece and nephew out on the line and I tell them, I said: B'y, don't go getting yourself in trouble out on that line, don't go getting arrested. That's going to show up for the rest of your life. You got a right to protest, you got a right to do it, we got a right.

I had a lot of people from my district out there, I have to represent them as well, it's both sides. So for you to get up and say that we should come in here. Yes, I know what my job is and I'm going to show up every day that I get here, but we have things we

got to do. Being political is coming in announcing the budget and calling Division in the House when there was no one else there. That, to me, is political.

To me, I'm looking at that saying: B'y, really, we got to do that? Why have we got to go there and do that? That, to me, is totally wrong to get up and call Division. Anyway, I'm not going to harp on it anymore. I didn't come in here to harp on that, but there are surrounding circumstances that I want to put out there of why we do it.

We sat there that day wondering if we're going to come in here or wondering if we're going to go out there by the protest line. I got people out there, like I said, relatives out there and it's important that I'm representing those people. I have a job to do and that's what we decided was best. So to come in here and criticize us for not coming in, I think is wrong on the minister as well. I just wanted to put that out there.

I will compliment a couple of ministers here as well. I have been, again, dealing with the Department of Health and dealing with the gentlemen from Industry – let me get it right here.

AN HON. MEMBER: Energy and Technology.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Industry, Energy and Technology, yeah.

I called him about a person that was in my district that burns wood in his household. He had an oil furnace but over the years – he's 79 or 80 years old and he couldn't afford to buy oil. He was obviously cutting wood. I know people that gave him some wood to help him through. He is 79, 80 years old and he couldn't afford to buy the oil, or he elected not to if he could burn wood.

Now, when this oil to electric comes along, you got to have receipts showing that you burned so many litres per year over the last couple of years. I spoke to the minister, and

I give him full credit, we worked it through – it's not done yet, but the gentleman is now going to get what he wanted to get, which would be the oil to electric and be able to get the mini split or the heat pump or whatever he is going to try to get in his household.

The minister worked with us with that. That's what our job is, to represent our district and we do that, and he did a good job. I don't mind saying that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

AN HON. MEMBER: The Environment Minister.

L. O'DRISCOLL: The Environment Minister it was, yes. So, you know, he did a good job.

Again, I'll speak to the Minister of Transportation, I'm not going to use all my time today, but we met, as I said before, in the depo. We've done some good stuff in our district, we certainly appreciate it, whether it be guardrails, the road signs are going up, some ditching. I continue to reach out to the superintendent in my district, which I have a good rapport with, and they really do a good job. They've cleaned up the area as well.

As the Member for Burgeo - La Poile had said, we do have massive issues in our province. There's no question about it. Yes, there are good things in this budget and, yes, we'd like to see some more and there's only so much money to go around. We understand all that.

We do hear it on the ground from the people, again, with oil that people only got oil; can they afford to change over? No, probably not. It's going to cost them \$10,000 to \$15,000. If they can't afford to put oil in their furnace, how can they afford to change over their house to put electrical units in it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: It's not easy. So that's what we hear.

Again, he helped out on another issue last year that a lady would be able to get a loan and able to repay it. But they made those changes, so you've got to work with people on that. I would say, in general for me, most times I call most of the ministers, whether it be COVID and there were cheques that needed to be issued or re-issued, we got lots of great help. There's no doubt about it. We do have those things that we certainly speak to the ministers and, you know, they do the best they can.

Sometimes when you call and they don't message you back or don't call you, we wouldn't be calling if it wasn't – I'm not saying a dire need but something that needs to happen in the next week or two, and that's the stuff that we really, really need to be on. Now, we're messaging you; all we asked is put us on to the right person that we can help speed this up. That's what we're trying to do. That's our job and you do it very well – most people do, but other people they just don't answer these questions. We need to get these people – like when you send an email and it gets forwarded to someone else, that's not the way the job should be. In my opinion, you should answer back and do the best you can to get that answer.

I will touch on a couple of the other things in the district. There are lots of good things going on, as I said, before – lots of good things. We've got a new trail that's opening up in the district as well. It's been open since last year and they did a great job, and I compliment all the people there as well. They went out and done something that they shouldn't have done at one point, but we got that ironed out and we got the trail going. It's going to add a great economic benefit to the people in the Ferryland District, for sure.

Also, speaking to the minister last week, student jobs will be soon coming out or we will be soon getting notice on student jobs and, hopefully, there's more money to be able to get more students employed. We all try to stretch them out as far as we can. I think, last year, it was 16,000 and it's after coming down since I started five years ago.

I am hoping it will come out this week, that these students will be able to start doing interviews or the groups will be able to start doing interviews for these kids to have summer employment. You've got to remember when these kids are working in the summertime, they spend their money back into the economy. They definitely do. Most times, that's their money and they spend it. It helps everybody. So the more students we can have working in the summertime – and I'm sure every person in here, every MHA, is getting calls for summer students. They add to the economy by leaps and bounds, it's unbelievable.

I would like to touch on – this is my last issue. I was at a funeral yesterday and we have a gentleman in Witless Bay that died, Mikie Cahill, he's called. Some of the stuff I heard at his wake and at the funeral, what he added to the community was unbelievable. He would go out fishing and be giving fish away to the elders in the community that people never knew what he was doing. He just did that on his own accord.

He organized the Kinsmen. I think he helped organize the arena. He was a great gentleman in the Town of Witless Bay and added so much to the community and loved to see everybody do better. So I'd like to pass on my condolences to his family.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate it.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I now recognize the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: The minister is going to take a minute –

CHAIR: No, that's okay.

J. DWYER: Are you sure?

CHAIR: Yes.

J. DWYER: I wasn't expecting to go. Only because I was called, I stood. I wasn't standing; you stood before me. Okay, sorry about that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the acknowledgement on behalf of the people of Placentia West - Bellevue because, the same as any other part of the province, there are issues in our district, no different than any other part of the province. But again, I will say to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that it's not easy for your department to come up with a budget; we know that. Like I said, there are some things in the budget that we do agree with. There are some things that we necessarily would like to see some improvements.

The one thing I want to touch on right away is housing. That is a big issue and it's causing so many other systemic issues on the Burin Peninsula and in my district. When it comes to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and we talk about the oil to electric rebates and all that kind of stuff, it's incumbent on us to make sure that we see a fulsome picture of the whole story.

The one thing that I'd like to know is how many of our Newfoundland and Labrador Housing assets have transitioned from oil to electric, if that's indeed where we're going. I mean if we want to change the economy, I would argue that we should change from oil to gas, because then you need to get new equipment as well. Gas is something we have in good reserve.

If we're transitioning people from oil to electric, I want people out there to understand that right now the reason why we're being asked to go from oil to electric is because of the carbon tax and how astronomically we've kind of put a black eye on the oil industry. So that's the reason why we're being asked to go from oil to electric.

What's going to happen, when we get people transitioned over to all this electricity and we haven't added anything else to the grid, just from an economic standpoint, doesn't that mean that electricity rates are going to go up because of supply and demand? That's just common sense.

I don't understand, why would you make one industry so dirty and make another industry so clean, but then crap on the crowd over here because we brought Muskrat Falls on to the fold in order to make a greener economy toward the country of Canada. So I think that we're doing our share per capita, as we always have in the country of Canada since 1949, in our 75th year.

So when we look at that, that's one side of it is this oil to electric, which I don't totally disagree with. As long as we're going to put some more electricity on the grid, then that might be a plausible answer. But one thing we do know is that we do have gas reserves that are significant. There are actually more gas reserves than there are oil reserves, and we see the revenue that we're making from oil. So why wouldn't we help our economy by finding ways to explore and capture the gas that we have? I think that LNG is something that we should really be looking into because it is a good way to transition as opposed to using a light switch to turn off one economy and start a green economy.

Like I said, with that being said, housing is one of the bigger issues, but it's also about the staff shortages, especially for the Burin Peninsula. When you have two people – and God love them, I'm sure they work hard

every day because I can't see them not having a full schedule every day when they have to take care from English Harbour East right to Point May on the Burin Peninsula, which probably encompasses – I can't speak for the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, but for my area, I think that the biggest issue right now and the most systemic issue right now is finding people a place to live. We have a very massive wait-list, but the problem is about turning over assets and getting new people into the assets that we already have.

So if we could take care of that first, maybe then we can talk about building new assets to house our people, because we know we have an aging demographic.

I believe right now the average age on the Burin Peninsula is about 55 years old, which is not going down any time soon, but we have to look at these different issues. As our demographic ages, we know that they're going to be expecting to attach to our health care system to stay healthy and get the help that they need, whether these are things that come up or they're hereditary or whatever. But it's incumbent on us as the government looking after the public coffers to make sure that these people are taken care of.

So when we talk about adding a billion dollars, which is a big number, and it's hard to talk in lay terms when you're talking billions of dollars, but we just turned around and we said we're working on the social determinants of health, but are we improving our health care system by spending the amount of money that we are on Teladoc?

At the end of the day, the last time I checked, people in my district are not able to utilize this service for the simple fact they have no Wi-Fi service and no cell service. So I think we've got to stop putting the cart before the horse and stop talking about the metro area and the rural area in the same light, because they need two different

umbrellas. Because while it's not raining as hard in St. John's, it might not need as big of an umbrella, but rural Newfoundland needs a massive umbrella, for the simple fact that it's hurting.

It's our fishery, everything that we're doing right now is not improving our economy; it's taking away more money from the pockets of the people that we represent. When we talk about seniors and we turn around and we index them to 5 per cent, and already the inflation rate is at 5.2 per cent, we've done nothing for them.

The other side of that is that if they don't have accessibility to Teladoc, if they don't have accessibility to a general practitioner and they don't have a family doctor, then how is health care better today than it was yesterday? It just doesn't make sense to me. We have less in the system but more demand. Again, no different than the oil to electric, what's going to happen when supply doesn't meet demand? It goes into a crisis.

That's the problem, is that we're not recognizing this well ahead of the time that it takes to do it. So, to me, the biggest thing that we can take care of here now, in our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the wonderful people that we all represent, is that we really need to nail down this Wi-Fi and cell service.

We turn around and Digital Government and Service NL are turning around and everything is online. You get your licence online and you get your hunting licence online or you renew your plates or what have you. Everything is done online.

Not everybody was trained to be online, for starters, but if you don't have the capability to get online, why would you train yourself to be online? We're not doing enough for our seniors in that respect. We need to show the respect and give them the education and give them the opportunity to succeed.

So it comes down to us all working together. It's about making sure that people have access to health care, because when we have MRIs that are two and three years out and we're spending a billion dollars and borrowing \$2.6 billion, then how is that not a priority? Because if we had one out in Corner Brook, the amount of money that the people out on the West Coast would save, not having to travel to St. John's, would more than pay for that machine and the staff to run it.

So I think what we need to do is stop putting the cart before the horse, stop looking for the pat on the back, because if you don't look for the pat on the back, they come en masse. But if you look for the pat on the back, you're only going to get one or two from the like-minded people that are thinking the same way you are.

So what I'm trying to say is that we have to look at the province as a unit, but then also understand that the same umbrella doesn't go on the urban lens as it does on the rural lens and on behalf of the people of Placentia West - Bellevue, I'd like to see some changes.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

I now recognize the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Thank you very much and I thank the Members throughout the House for the robust debate we've had this morning.

I always listen with intent. I tend to take notes. So I'm going to refer back in my 10 minutes to some of the commentary that has been made.

To the Member opposite, I listened to a lot of people say there are many, many needs

in their district so it's perplexing as to why they're not voting in favour of this budget. Here we are putting additional resources, putting additional monies towards housing, towards infrastructure, towards transportation, towards health, in particular, yet we don't have the support from them on this budget.

So allow me to address some of the things that have been raised this morning. I listened and I thought it was interesting that the federal carbon tax was raised. This is a tax that the federal government is responsible for, yet it was raised. But allow me to put it in a Newfoundland and Labrador context.

Throughout the Progressive Conservative term in government, the cost of provincial gas tax in this province, on individuals, 16.5 cents. Today, Newfoundland and Labrador, under the Liberal government, 7.5 cents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: So if you want to make some comparisons, that is a stark comparison.

I listened with intent from one of the Opposition when they raised concern over the price of oil, saying, oh, you know, there's concern being raised in the community that the price of oil in the budget is too high. Allow me to say, we use 11 different forecasters, not me in my chair making up a number. We use 11 different forecasters.

So in the budget it's \$82 per barrel; today, it's \$85; yesterday, it was \$88. All I can say is we use 11 different forecasters, sometimes it goes higher, sometimes it goes lower; we use the best information we have. I think it's reasonable, based on the fact that it's been higher than \$82 a barrel, but we don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. We don't know if it'll change. That's why we do a fall fiscal update because changes do occur. Changes not only occur

in the price of oil, they also occur in production.

I understand the Member Opposite raised the issue of a balanced budget and how important it is to get to a balanced budget. I completely agree. It is essential we get to balanced budgets. That's why we put forward balanced budget legislation, but allow me to say that the Progressive Conservative Opposition are not voting in favour. They have said that. They don't agree with the balanced budget legislation. Maybe I have the answers to why.

In the four years preceding a change in government, the Progressive Conservative government ran up more deficits than the entire nine years that the Liberals have been in government – the entire nine years. More in four than we have done in nine. So I guess that gives you the answers to why they're not supportive of balanced budget.

Allow me to continue. The Member Opposite raised the C. D. Howe Institute and how we're not ranked with regards to transparency. First of all, the report I believe he referenced, references the '21-'22 budget. Allow me to say, we have made changes. We've moved the budget date, which gives us two points, by the way, on that scale, from April to March. That's one of the scales that they measure. So we've moved our budget date, April to March. We've done March budgets in the last two years.

Number two: This year we improved with a new format. We've introduced what's called Statements and Schedules with a preamble to help the public understand the documentation. So I'll say to the Member opposite, yes, we're making improvements. We want people to understand.

He mentioned about red tape. I'm sure if he looked in this year's budget documentation at all, he saw a new initiative with regard to red tape. We've put in a new accountability framework; we've put in navigators. All of it

will help to reduce red tape. Something that we're concerned about.

Another Member opposite argued incorrectly on a number of points. Allow me to address them. Equalization: Quite derisive on the fact that we're now receiving equalization. Well, I say to the Member opposite, hey, I'll take \$200 million from the federal government any day – any day – because it helps us to fund the hospitals, the schools, the roads that we need in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Secondly, it was a slight change in formula. It was a technical amendment. It wasn't like we fell into it. We have record revenues – record revenues – in this province. But because of a slight change in the formula, we were able to receive a couple of hundred million dollars. It's a positive thing for Newfoundland and Labrador that we are receiving some extra moneys to help us on the large road that we have to ensuring that we have the services and the infrastructure that we need.

The Member opposite said – and she stated it was a fact. Well, I'll give you the fact. She said that we could access the Future Fund. That is completely incorrect – completely incorrect.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: If she reviewed the legislation that we put through this House of Assembly that they did not support, she would've noted that you cannot access it for anything, other than to pay down debt for the next 10 years. That's legislated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Allow me to bring up, she raised reaction to the budget. So I'm going to use a bond-rating agency. I'm going to

quote from a bond-rating agency. We've just been upgraded – first time in, oh, well over a decade.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Morningstar DBRS – and here's a quote: Last year, we upgraded the province's rating, and that allows for some room to be able to take on additional debt. We feel the province has made continued fiscal progress that now allows for some room in the current credit rating to withstand any weaknesses in fiscal performance – unquote.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Now I want to get to my final point, because I only have a few minutes. But this one is kind of staggering. We've been talking about total debt. We've been talking about debt this morning. Well, allow me to say that the total public service debt in this province – 40 per cent of the total public service debt in this province is attributed to Muskrat Falls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. COADY: Allow me to quote from the *Muskrat Falls: A Misguided Project*.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. COADY: The hon. Richard LeBlanc, Commissioner, when he said – and I'm going to quote – this is about the Progressive Conservative Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and he said –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Let's listen to the minister.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. COADY: "... had predetermined the Project would proceed. In so acting" – again he was referring to the Progressive Conservative Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – "GNL failed in its duty to ensure that the best interests of the province's residents were safeguarded."

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: I would stack the performance of our government against any performance of any government in this country, especially over previous governments in this province, to say that we are on the right track, Chair. I think that we must continue to ensure that we are fiscally responsible, and I think that I have made a case today to show that in debate – what we are doing to address debt, what we are doing to address the deficit, how we are being financially prudently responsible.

I'll take my seat on that note.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report progress.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report progress.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

P. TRIMPER: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of Whole on Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee ask leave to sit again?

J. HOGAN: Presently.

SPEAKER: Presently.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again presently, by leave.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that this House do now recess.

SPEAKER: This House do stand in recess until 2 p.m.

I remind Members of the Management Commission that we have a meeting up in the boardroom now.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Good afternoon, everyone.

First of all, in the public gallery today, I'd like to welcome Nathan Windsor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Nathan is here with his parents Steven and Jana, his brother, Joel, and his sister, Taylor. Nathan is being recognized this afternoon in a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also in the public gallery today, visiting for a Member's statement, welcome to Suzanne Hawco from the Conception Harbour Recreation Committee.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I would like to rule on a point of order raised by the Member for Topsail - Paradise on April 24 in accordance with Standing Order 49. The Member for Topsail - Paradise stated that the Minister of Education, in response to a question posed during Question Period, used unparliamentary language when she referred to him as being disingenuous.

The matter was taken under advisement at that time. I have now had the opportunity to review *Hansard*, and I note that the minister,

in responding to the Member's question, stated the following: "I absolutely did not say that the parents were disingenuous. I said that the Member was."

In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker considers the tone, the manner and the intention of the Member speaking. The Speaker also considers the person to whom the words were directed, the degree of provocation and whether or not the remarks caused disorder in the House.

In determining the language is unparliamentary, there have also been distinctions made between circumstances where the language was used in a collective or generic sense, or whether the language was directed towards a particular individual.

I note that the term disingenuous calls into question a person's sincerity and honesty. As the term was directed at the Member and as the language was used in the individual sense, it is clearly unparliamentary.

I therefore rule that the minister's language was unparliamentary and I call upon the Minister of Education to unequivocally withdraw her comments.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I respect your ruling and the effort that you're making to restore decorum to this House of Assembly. I certainly wish to be part of that solution, so I emphatically withdraw my statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Conception Bay South, Bonavista, Torngat Mountains, Harbour Main and Ferryland.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I'd like to extend congratulations to Brandon Joy of Conception Bay South. Brandon was the only hockey player from this province to be selected on the Canadian National Blind Hockey Team. He was instrumental with Team Canada winning the gold medal in competing against the USA in April.

Brandon's story is inspiring. At the age of 3, he was diagnosed with a rare eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa. His vision slowly deteriorated, and he became legally blind at the age of 13.

Brandon loved the game of hockey and played in the minor hockey system until he outgrew the league. The CNIB knew his passion for the game and put Brandon and his dad Steve in touch with the Canadian Blind Hockey Association, where they travelled to Vancouver to attend a blind hockey summer camp.

After returning home, Steve Joy started the visually impaired hockey program called the Newfoundland Eyelanders. In March, Brandon's dream became reality as he was selected on the 2024 Team Canada roster.

Brandon is passionate about blind hockey and is optimistic for the future in accessible sports for visually impaired individuals in our province.

Congratulations, Brandon, on winning the gold medal. Your hard work has paid off and I wish you continued success in the future.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, April 27, the Town of Port Rexton and surrounding area lost one of its most recognized and celebrated volunteers, Melvin Kelley.

Melvin came to Port Rexton as a teacher at Bishop White all-grade school in 1966 and became principal in 1973 until his retirement in 1996.

He was in the Port Rexton Lions Club for 47 years and held every position in the club at one time or another. Melvin was the founder of the Lions Club food bank, which for decades has assisted the residents in Port Rexton and area.

Melvin was an active participant in the Anglican Church of Trinity East, served on the Port Rexton fire department for over 20 years, many of which as their chief and was an accomplished accordion player bringing much enjoyment over the years to the residents and visitors of the area. He was certainly a pillar of the Trinity Bight area. The Lions Club motto is We Serve and Melvin Kelley indeed excelled in this area.

I ask Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the legacy of Melvin Kelley in his dedication, commitment and service to the residents of Port Rexton and area.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I pay tribute to Shanon Holwell, a tremendous athlete and inspiring role model from Nain, Nunatsiavut. Shanon's passion for sports began in Grade 7.

Looking back you could tell that becoming the best athlete that he could be was what motivated him. He loved volleyball, hockey,

actually all the sports in the regional sports tournaments, fall and winter.

During high school, he and his Huskies team repeatedly advanced to regional and provincial events, travelling throughout the province. COVID put a damper on things; Shanon rose above it. He received many awards in sportNL, NL Volleyball and school sports: gold, silver, bronze medals, MVPs.

Shanon forged a path for himself in life: athleticism, healthy lifestyle and maintaining his grades; graduating high school, taking his volleyball to college, or was it the other way around?

Shanon chose Holland College and made the Hurricane's varsity volleyball team. Successfully completing his first year open-academic studies, Shanon is now graduating with a heritage retrofit carpentry diploma.

Shanon's dream is to help and coach other young volleyball players to reach their goals.

Shanon, others are already following in your footsteps. Please keep reaching for the stars. Your family supports you 100 per cent.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: It's an honour to shine a light on the Conception Harbour Recreation Committee in the District of Harbour Main.

Last weekend, Recreation NL presented this committee with the prestigious award of Volunteer Group of the Year.

In a 10-year span, the Conception Harbour Recreation Committee's achievements are

many, including fundraising over \$300,000 to improve the town's recreational facilities, partnering to offer affordable children's programs, hosting tree lighting and Christmas socials, distributing food hampers, and for seniors specifically, paint nights, line dance classes, meals and bus tours, and of course the infamous annual Conception Harbour garden party in August.

These dedicated volunteers are full of humility and prefer to credit their success to all the community-minded residents in the Town of Conception Harbour who help them organize and carry out their many successful initiatives.

In fact, their motto, Together is Better, exemplifies their commitment to partnerships, relationship building and teamwork. Their leadership, resilience and adaptability is what helps them overcome significant challenges and lead their town into prosperity.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the incredible seven: Suzanne Hawco, Jay Curran, David Connors, Yvette Lewis, Jerry Lewis, Julie Menecola and Leon Ryan. A small but mighty team indeed.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I stand today to congratulate Nathan Windsor, a nine-year-old boy from Bay Bulls. He's a typical little boy in most ways: energetic, tough, funny and charming.

Nathan also has Down's syndrome and a congenital heart disease. This distinguishes him in some ways from his peers. He has some challenges, but most of his

distinctions are beautiful. He's very friendly, loving and affectionate.

By the time Nathan was 10 weeks old, he had undergone three major surgeries, including open heart surgery in Toronto. He was thriving and loving life. In December 2021, Nathan was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. This type of cancer involves three years of chemotherapy treatment.

Nathan was six years old when diagnosed. During treatment, he had multiple hospital admissions. On April 24, 27 months after diagnosis, he was finally able to ring the bell at the Janeway.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Nathan is full of love and light. Nathan is an inspiration since the day he was born. He's excited to get back to enjoying the things he loves and just being a kid.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all colleagues in this House to join me in congratulating Nathan Windsor and wish him good health in the future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Speaker, I rise in this Honourable House today to recognize May 5 to 11 as Municipal Awareness Week in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Today in our province we have 270 incorporated municipalities who play a vital role in improving the overall well-being of residents by maintaining operations and

providing important services throughout communities.

Speaker, on Friday, I will be joining Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and municipal leaders at the annual Municipal Symposium, Unlocking Excellence, which is taking place in the scenic District of Gander.

I applaud all mayors, councillors and staff for their ongoing commitment to enriching the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Their devotion to strengthening communities is truly unwavering.

As a government, we acknowledge that municipalities are facing challenges and *Budget 2024* includes key funding initiatives to help address those challenges: \$50 million over five years to support water and waste water projects; more than \$160 million for Municipal Operating Grants, Special Assistance Grants, Community Enhancement Employment Program, and Canada Community Building Fund; \$400,000 increase for municipal training; and \$400,000 increase for municipal fire departments to support their response to incidents outside their municipal boundary.

I look forward to continuing to work together with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and municipal leaders throughout the province on our shared goal to build more sustainable and vibrant communities. I also encourage all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to celebrate the work and leadership of the municipal sector in our province during Municipal Awareness Week.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement today.

We, in the Official Opposition, want to take this opportunity to recognize Municipal Awareness Week. Municipal Awareness Week is important because it highlights the crucial role the municipalities, their councils and staff play in our province. It is a time to celebrate their hard work and dedication to the public service.

Municipal Awareness Week also highlights the reminder to government officials that while we celebrate municipalities throughout our province, we must also recognize the challenges that they do in fact face.

Government must continue to work with municipalities in addressing their issues that affect our residents each day, whether it be housing and mental crisis or providing additional resources for volunteer fire departments. Municipal politics have a significant impact on the daily lives of residents. A collaboration between government and municipalities is essential to ensure communities receive the support they need to thrive.

Thank you to all municipal councillors and staff for all your hard work and dedication.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

I want to take this opportunity from the Third Party caucus here to thank councillors, mayors and their support teams and staff that they have that do all the hard work in running municipalities.

Government announced increases that were substandard to municipalities in this budget. While cities, towns and LSDs struggle to meet their obligations to residents it is due to insufficient resources and financing and other supports. Meanwhile, they face increasing challenges stemming from a lack of housing, infrastructure, maintenance and climate change adaptation.

Therefore, we call upon government to be a partner, to find more mechanisms for funding to municipalities and to find more training initiatives for smaller councils. Be a leader in change; help these municipalities.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister for Education.

K. HOWELL: Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to highlight our government's efforts to improve access to early learning and child care in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. HOWELL: These efforts have been recognized in a recent report by the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, which ranks Newfoundland and Labrador fourth in the country amongst all provinces and territories when comparing governance, funding, access, the early learning environment and accountability.

Our government has been listening and responding to the needs of families, service providers and the early learning workforce.

We have implemented recruitment and retention initiatives for early childhood educators; we have provided incentives and funding to increase the number of early learning and child care spaces; and we are continuing to ensure that regulated child care is high-quality, affordable and inclusive.

Speaker, there are currently 9,100 early learning and child care spaces operating at \$10-a-day or less in this province, and a further 2,200 spaces are in various stages of development that should be available in the next month to six months.

Budget 2024 has allocated close to \$200 million to early learning and child care. We will continue to work with partners throughout the province so that all families are able to access the early learning and child care services that they need.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

I've said many times in this House, our greatest resource are our children and our youth and in order for them to flourish, we must offer the proper programs and services. I have heard from many families who continue to face challenges with access to child care. Only this morning, I met with three mothers who have painted a very sad picture of their personal struggles to obtain child care.

While it is great to present numbers and figures, a true measure of the availability of proper child care can only be through discussion with those with lived experiences. Spaces are only good enough if there are enough ECEs available. Many mothers throughout our province continue to sacrifice careers due to lack of child care options.

We need to ensure that families have access to affordable, high-quality care that allows them to fully participate in the workforce and contribute to our economy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Speaker, our province is still overwhelmingly a child care desert and many families still struggle to find affordable child care. We're struggling to retain early childhood educators because government does not listen to them.

So we call on government to provide early childhood educators with pensions, health and other benefits to make the profession more attractive to perspective students and to increase retention.

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.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the mayor of Gander says it has been two years that they've been trying to get this Liberal government to come forward with the resources they need to create a housing shelter from a former church that they purchased, over 15,000 square feet, ideal location. Gander has done its part to address homelessness in the region, but the government is not stepping up.

I ask the Premier: Why is this Liberal government dragging its heels?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question and an opportunity to address it to the House.

We have been in step with the community partners out there. My understanding on the timeline of this, prior to my arrival in this portfolio, is that the town purchased the church and then put out a request for proposals on what they wanted to do.

One of the groups that came forward was the hub, the group that wants to put in a supportive living shelter there. So what we did was we offered to pay the architects review. They did that. We've offered to pay for a project manager who will go in and determine exactly what that will look like in the community. We have been communicating with and I have met with the mayor and the hub group, that's the group behind this project. I've met with them. I've toured the site. We are acting, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, maybe the minister ought to pick up the phone and call the mayor of Gander because that's not the story that's being told.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Half a million dollars the Town of Gander spent on this facility. The media reached out to the minister and asked him about this issue, all they got back was an email saying they're working with the local MHA on it – two years and they're still working on it.

How much longer will it take to get this project on the go?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

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

I've been involved with 59 Elizabeth Drive now for 2½ years. It was originally purchased with the intention that perhaps one of the local faith groups might purchase that. When that fell through, the housing issue had risen to the fore. I have worked with the mayor and Pastor Beers and the Gander and Area Community Advisory Board. Progress has been made.

I spoke to the mayor on the package as recently as Monday because it's not just about the church, because that will take at least 18 months to get sorted out. In the meantime, we have 16 new shelter beds open in Gander already and another property ready for purchase with operating funds –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: – ready to go within the next two months.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Again, Speaker, obviously the mayor of Gander must be misinformed because he certainly doesn't see it that way when he talks about this project.

It's amazing how they can spend \$21 million plus, plus, plus on a hotel in the City of St. John's, sole-source, no problem at all, have it done in a matter of a couple of months and here we are talking about an issue that's been on the books for more than two years.

Again, I simply ask: When will this building be opened?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, we are working with the proponents. Within the first three weeks, I think, since I took over this portfolio, I met with the mayor and some of the councillors, as I mentioned. I also went to the site and toured it. I spoke to them in detail about this.

We are also working behind the scenes, as the MHA for the area just mentioned, he contacted the mayor on Monday. As a matter of fact, we're talking about another project with them. It's in the works and hopefully going to be announced in just a little while, as soon as we can sign-off.

We're also waiting for the town to rezone that property so that we can look at what cost is involved in not only renovating the building, because we have been told it's extensive, but also the operation of it afterwards, Mr. Speaker.

So what we're going to do with them is continue to work with both sides, the hub and the town, to make sure that this is done properly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I guess if there was a hotel coming forward from a Liberal friend it would be already done by now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the mayor of Gander and other stakeholders have called for the cancellation of the integrated ambulance services RFP because of concerns with the delivery of services in rural Newfoundland and now the community of Gander.

Does the minister agree?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Gander was never considered a base, Mr. Speaker. Under this RFP, we had technical advisors advise government on the RFP that went out to provide the best service to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

While Gander was never a base, it isn't a base under this RFP, but this RFP does allow it to become a base over the course of time.

With the new proponent, Mr. Speaker, one of the requirements is for them to evaluate the services in the province, the location of services and determine the best site for services. While Gander was never a base, it may become one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, there is no doubt that changes are needed in our ambulance services in our province, we all agree with that. This RFP was a real opportunity to review ambulance services, both air and road, but what's gone on is the RFP itself said that two of those locations had to be maintained. It listed those locations out in the RFP.

So, again, why not open it up and allow the new proponent, whoever is successful, to actually look at it and review it in whole as opposed to predetermining where locations are?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the Member opposite just asked for it to be in Gander.

Mr. Speaker, two years of consultation developed the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Accord. The Health Accord recommended the base in St. John's and in Goose Bay, Mr. Speaker. The technical advisors recommended maintaining the base in St. John's and in Goose Bay, but to evaluate and to measure and to look at the greatest need based on the operations.

That is what will happen and over the course of time, if it is determined that a base needs to be in a different location, Mr. Speaker, the proponent will do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I argue again that the RFP should not have dictated to the new proponent where it should be. That should have been left open. That's what didn't happen here.

Speaker, let me quote the mayor of Gander in response to this RFP. He said: It betrays the mentality that anything worth doing in our province should be done in St. John's if you want it done right. The mayor doesn't buy this, we don't buy it and neither do the people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the minister: Do you?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, two years of consultation, the recommendation of the Health Accord, we followed. The technical advisors who recommended at the outset that we needed locations for these bases as they are already in St. John's and Goose Bay, no change. Gander was never a base; they are currently in St. John's and Goose Bay.

The proponent will be responsible for evaluating and putting the best service in place, based on the uptake, based on operations, based on efficiencies. If it is determined, based on their evaluation and reporting back that it should be Gander, guess where it will go?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Based on everything else, they plan on taking jobs out of rural Newfoundland and Labrador once again and moving them into the city. Just talk to the mayor – just talk to the mayor – and the communities about it.

Speaker, we have been told that a contract has been awarded for eight years, with two six-year extensions, for the hangar at the St. John's airport to a company headquartered outside this province for one dollar.

I ask the minister: Is this correct?

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to respond.

I'm aware of what the Leader of the Opposition is asking of, and one of the things I'm doing is reviewing all our leases of all our facilities. If changes have to be made, we will certainly do that.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, since focusing our Question Period on Monday around the topic of

mental health and addictions, our office has been flooded with stories of countless Newfoundlanders and Labradorians struggling through a broken system.

Minister, we're being told that psychiatric units at St. Clare's, the Health Sciences and the Janeway are turning people away.

Minister, are they closed?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, that is not the case. Are there human resource challenges? Yes. Are there human resource challenges in Nova Scotia, PEI, Manitoba, Ontario? Yes, Mr. Speaker.

If we could hire the health professionals to have those fully staffed today, we would absolutely do that. We have a recruitment office in place dedicated to doing that, and as we are able to hire the health professionals, those services will be increased.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm concerned with the people in Newfoundland and Labrador and those who need those services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: So I guess he's telling us they're closed because we're lacking people over there. So, in essence, they're closed because they can't staff them, which is really shameful when you look at the mental health and addictions in this province.

Speaker, last weekend, a parent presented with their child to the Janeway with

bandaged wrists from his suicide attempt. He was sent home and told to see their GP. This is not an issue for your family doctor; it's an issue for the psychiatric professional.

Minister, how is this acceptable?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure anybody on this side said it's acceptable, Mr. Speaker. What we are saying, Mr. Speaker, is that we have increased mental health and addiction supports in this province over the past five years. We'll continue to do that. Prior to *Towards Recovery* in 2016, there were three ACT teams in the province. Today, we have 15 FACT and ACT teams.

We had one Mobile Crisis Response unit, Mr. Speaker, in St. John's. As the Opposition would try to paint, we don't do anything outside. We have Mobile Crisis Response Teams; now eight of them. We've announced another seven in this year's budget – all in rural Newfoundland. Doorways: There were no locations prior to *Towards Recovery*. Now there are 85. Opioid dependency treatment: There were two locations, one in Eastern Newfoundland, one in Western. Now we have them in all regions. The list goes on and on and on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, simple question.

Minister, what recommendations and what assistance can you provide to that family here and now? All that stuff's fine. What can you assure them right now?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, what we would tell anybody is that professional health advice is provided by the attending physician and the health professionals. I'm not about to try and provide professional advice.

We are looking to recruit additional psychiatrists, psychologists, Mr. Speaker. We can't speak to any particular case in this Legislature, as the Member knows. But we'd be happy to look into what happened there with the health authority to determine what happened.

But let's look at Bridge the gapp. Five years ago, Mr. Speaker, we had 1,500 users a year. Now we have over 100,000 visitors annually because of increases put forward. Peer support: There were four or five supporters. Now there are over 60.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Warm Line, 450 calls a year; now there are over 10,000 annually. We are putting resources in. Do we need to do more? Absolutely.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, that's cold comfort to those families. That's cold comfort to the families that are reaching out to us. Those families that reach out to us – I can't be more human about this – they're desperate. They're pleading for us to help. They're pleading for us to ask the minister and ask the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: We're not creating this. This was brought to our doorstep.

To list off programs like that, respectfully, Minister, they're not working. These people would not be coming to our doors if that was working – simple.

AN HON. MEMBER: Or seeing increases.

B. PETTEN: Wouldn't be seeing increases either, exactly.

Speaker, parents are pleading for help. After witnessing the devastating loss of a loved one, a young person was unable to seek the treatment they needed. They now have become labelled as a frequent flyer, having overdosed 13 times. This is never a follow-up for him.

Minister, why are stories of gaps in our mental health care system so common? These programs are obviously not working, Minister.

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, as the Member knows, we can't speak to specific cases in this province or in this Legislature. But we can look into any case that he brings forward to our office, if he wishes to do that.

Mr. Speaker, what I can say is there's money in this year's budget for a child and youth family care model, CAYAC, as it's otherwise known, to take down the silos within government departments and to consolidated services and supports for children and youth in this province.

If we look at mental health and what we've done, mental health and addictions, 811 HealthLine for crisis and mental health addictions, it didn't exist prior to five years ago for mental health and addictions calls. Now we get 15,000 calls annually because of the supports we've put in place.

If you look at specific child and youth mental health services, Mr. Speaker, it was only in eastern and western –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, it's incredible. The minister will stand in their place and list off the programs and these people are suffering. I mean, anyone listening and watching this must be totally disgusted, because it's a broken system, Minister.

You'd do better off telling the people of this province it's broken and you're trying to fix it, not listing off what you've accomplished. That's the problem.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Patients demonstrating a clear need for help with alcoholism are being discharged from the Waterford with AA pamphlets. People with addictions issues wanting to get help in this province face wait times and confusion. This discourages those who are seeking help.

Minister, timely treatment is critical. Why is the system failing these people? That's what we're asking.

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If these situations are happening, Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate for those families. Again, the Member knows we can't speak of specific cases in this Legislature. I don't have that authority or the ability or the permission to do so. The Privacy Commissioner would call me to task if I did.

Mr. Speaker, we are sympathetic to any cases like that. Day after day after day, they will stand and say we're doing nothing for

mental health and addictions; when we start listing off what we have done, we're unsympathetic.

Mr. Speaker, we are sympathetic to these individuals. We have an alcohol addictions plan that we've unveiled about a year and a half ago that is starting to take shape, that is going to provide services to the people of the province.

Are we doing enough? No. We need to do more, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that. We will continue to do more. We're going to continue to build on the work of *Towards Recovery*.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: One final comeback to all that, Speaker, the minister is copied on a lot of these emails that I've received and our leader has received. He's well aware of a lot of these issues we're talking about. So it's fine to stand there in the 25 minute we have in Question Period and say he's unaware of specific situations. He's copied on the majority of these emails and his officials are.

He owes it to those people, to the people of this province who are struggling. You need to answer those emails, Minister. They need your support right now, you're the Minister of Health.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any email that's received in my department, officials will look at it, will look into the circumstances, will provide advice to me and a response will be provided. Mr. Speaker, there's no email that goes unanswered.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I'd suggest the minister call one of those help lines, some of those calls go unanswered, I can guarantee you. I hear about it all the time.

Speaker, Craig Avery and Clarence Hynes are living a nightmare after discovering they were switched at birth in 1962.

Speaker, while both men are appreciative of their adoptive lives, no one can replace the loss and suffering these men have endured since accidentally discovering the horrible truth.

Will the Premier apologize to these men for the negligence they've endured under a government-run health care facility?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is a legal case underway regarding this right now. As the Member knows, we're not able to speak when there's a legal case going forward.

We have, Mr. Speaker, said that what has happened with these particular situations decades ago is very unfortunate. There are processes put in place today to help ensure that that never happens again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: He might not be able to speak but they're able to act, and we've just seen that with Mr. Whalen here.

Speaker, these men are past the statute of limitations to pursue legal action. Other

provinces have done the right thing and ordered formal apologies and compensation. The Premier of Manitoba recently apologized to two individuals in his province on the floor of the Legislature.

Why do Mr. Avery and Mr. Hynes deserve any less?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I delivered a public apology here with regard to one case, but, of course, one case has worked its way through the courts. Of course, as the Member knows, we can't comment on specific cases that are ongoing and certainly as Attorney General I can't do that, but we do look at that and if anyone – lawyers for those individuals want to discuss settlements or proposals, I'm sure that individuals in the Department of Justice will look at it as it works its way through the court.

There is a public *Apology Act* and we do consider that when we look at any settlement proposals and discussions. I'm sure that can be dealt with in the courts as appropriate.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, nine years they've been asking this government for that, they shouldn't be asking. They should not have to ask; government should offer it up without being prompted. They know it's been on CBC, it's been all over.

Due to the passage of time before learning the truth, these men never knew their biological parents. In fact, one of them told me the first time he met his mom and dad

was at the cemetery as he stood over their headstones.

Speaker, this is a haunting image. Yet, these men have not been offered counselling or any mental health supports from government. Government is finally going to address Mr. Whalen's situation.

Why can't they do the same for these individuals?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'll take the specific case away again. I'm not going to talk about a case here in the House or publicly at all about a case that's before the courts. But I will take this away and I'll discuss with officials in the department to see what the status is, and happy to report back to the Member if he has authorization to speak outside of the House about this matter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, government has closed the Rocky Brook Bridge causing a massive hurdle to those living on the other side. Recently, an individual in need of an ambulance had to be carried across to get emergency medical care. Residents of the area have been pleading to meet with the minister, but their requests have been ignored up until last week.

I'm asking: When will the minister meet with them and address their concerns?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to know that that lady is fine, and safety is always paramount. That bridge is currently closed because of safety issues.

I did meet with – over the phone, before Christmas – an individual that is among that group that's concerned about that bridge. But as I said, I think yesterday or the day before, we're trying to find a solution here. Because to replace that bridge is expensive and it's taxpayers' dollars that I have to consider here, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to work with the group. I said I would meet with them. I will meet with them. I said I will be at the table if both sides are willing to come to a solution that both sides can be happy with. That's what I'm trying to do. I commit to the meeting and I will be there for that meeting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

Minister, they've done their homework and they've come up with proposals. So I look forward to the meeting, too, I'd like to join it. They deserve to have some responsibility there.

The Buchans Highway is a busy road, as a result of the significant economic activity in the area, whether it be logging or whether it be mining. It is the lifeline to grow within the industry. Unfortunately, the road is in terrible shape, Minister.

Minister, how do you expect economic growth to continue in the region when companies are forced to use such deplorable roads, that including the residents that live up there? We're just wondering, Minister, is the Buchans Highway going to get anything in the next couple of years or this year?

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to respond.

We are obviously continuing, even though we've tabled this year's Roads Plan, we are already starting the process of looking out for next year and subsequent years, particularly roads that in such a situation or that are damaged that we can move them up in priority. So I'm looking at that for several districts. We'll certainly consider that as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Speaker, with the introduction of wind energy to the province, members of the public would like to see updates on the progress of environmental assessments.

Will the government provide transparency with the environmental assessment?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm at a bit of a loss with the question. I get the premise, I guess, but we have a legislatively governed environmental assessment process that every industry goes through in this province, not unlike what was just gone through by World Energy and every other wind proponent coming in is going to go through that same process, same vigorous process where there's public consultation.

There will be 25 federal and provincial departments and agencies that will feed into that process. That process has been tested and true. I stand by that. I think people in

this Legislature stand behind that and the public should stand behind that, based on the fact that they have full public engagement on that process.

There are proponents that, if you see in the last one, some 60 release conditions for that particular wind project with probably close to 100 licences and permits that would be required to move forward on that project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Speaker, mistakes of the past shouldn't haunt the future. Government has said there will be decommissioning fees for these wind energy projects.

How will these decommissioning fees be applied?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The mistakes of the past, yes, I'm going to try my best not to mention the elephant in the room or the big concrete thing in the room. What I will say is that the Member makes a good point, that's the reason why we have a legislatively governed environmental assessment process. That's exactly why we go through that process and it's a vigorous process that every industry goes through, regardless, if it's mining, hydroelectric or, in this case, wind hydrogen project.

So that's what we're going to continue to do. We're going to continue to focus on that. It's going to be a key piece in renewal in rural Newfoundland. We understand that. We look at that from an environmental standpoint with my hat and I know the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology looks at it from the economic standpoint.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we are concerned that congregate-living shelters sometimes with seven beds to a room or more are not appropriate for persons living with a disability.

We have a constituent, a senior, with a physical disability and other health conditions who has been looking for permanent housing since 2019 and has lived in a number of shelters.

Does the minister know how many people living with disabilities are on the NLHC wait-list and how long they've been on it?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of that number off-hand, but I will get it from my officials and report back to the Member opposite with those numbers.

But I can tell you that it is a priority for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation that, as we build, anything that is built now has a component of fully accessible housing units as well. With respect to shelters, of course that is going to be part of our review, which is ongoing, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

If it was a priority, the minister would know it.

Speaker, this senior refuses to go to large shelters because he is afraid for his safety. He has been threatened to have his belongings stolen by other shelter

members; he has had to sleep on mattresses that have dried blood and urine on them. He does not use drugs but has a medical condition that requires him to use a machine to help him breathe.

I ask the minister: What is he and his department doing to help people with disabilities access safe and stable housing?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member opposite again for the question.

It is a priority for us. With regard to this specific case, I'm happy to meet with the Member opposite afterwards. I'm not going to speak to a specific person's situation here on the floor of the House of Assembly, but I will gladly spend time with him after the Question Period has expired and we can discuss it and we'll explore options. I'm happy to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I'm not asking about this particular individual. I know my constituency assistant has been dealing with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing for quite a while to get this solved.

Speaker, people who call our office have been waiting on the NLHC wait-list for accessible housing, in some cases, up to three years. With 2,800 persons on the wait-list, only persons with exceptional needs are receiving housing. People are looking for housing for many reasons. The list is long and there are no available housing units.

Can the minister give an update on the housing being built since, as we know, that

at least one proposal in the minister's own district was turned down by town council?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I've actually just gotten the information that the Member opposite had asked for. I'd asked my officials, through my phone, to find that out. I stand to be corrected on this, but I think it's 26 people who are waiting for accessible units in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is focusing on housing in such a way that it is now a stand-alone portfolio. We've doubled our budget. We understand that there is an issue related to housing in Newfoundland and Labrador, but it's one that is not just exclusive to this province, it's across Canada and around the world, as we know.

We are focusing on housing in such a way to help people in Newfoundland and Labrador find safe, accessible and affordable housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the biggest issue, next to health care, in Humber-Bay of Islands is road conditions and the lack of roadwork, ditching, brush cutting. All of which are safety concerns.

I have sent to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure invoices of damage caused to vehicles due to conditions of the roads.

I ask the minister: Will you have your staff review the rankings, and I am sure there are safety concerns that should be addressed to ensure that these roads are safe?

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond.

In terms of the issue the Member raised, in terms of safety of our highways and secondary roads, that is certainly priority number one. When we assess our roads for work as part of our Roads Plan, that is certainly one of the key factors we consider. We also consider the traffic on that road, access to services and the like.

In terms of ongoing maintenance, that is something now we will be going into the summer season – we'll be accelerating our summer maintenance program to address some of the issues that the Member has raised and we'll continue to stay focused. The superintendent for the region is in close contact with the Member as well to address his specific concerns.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I am rising today concerning the *Limitations Act*. The federal government filed an application for summary trial and summary judgment to dismiss the claims. They're relying on the *Limitations Act*. Mr. Jack Whalen is not well and the added stress does harm to his recovery.

I ask the minister: Will you commit to have the *Limitations Act* brought to the House of Assembly during this session? Will you commit to this?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for his question and thank everyone on the other side of the House for advocating for this issue.

Of course, I'm not going to comment on a case that's before the courts right now; nor can I comment about the effect that any amendments to any act will have on any case, but what I can say is that the *Limitations Act* amendment is now on the Order Paper. I know during Estimates, I was asked the priority for the corrections act, which was already on the Order Paper and which we'll be doing second reading on today.

So in terms of legislative priorities for the Department of Justice and Public Safety, this is the number one priority.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

In our province, during the recreational cod fishery, individuals with a disability are permitted to have another person catch their daily limit of groundfish. First-time

applicants must complete the persons disability form, have it signed by a doctor and they do not have to enter the boat, nor watch the catch from a distance. For these same individuals who wish to moose hunt, they must be within 800 metres at all times from their designated hunter.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to align the moose hunting regulations with those of the recreational cod fishery, making it respectful, reasonable and fair.

I've presented this before, Mr. Speaker. We know that many of those people living with disabilities in Newfoundland, in particular rural Newfoundland, are living below the poverty line. The federal government has done their part by allowing them to get a medical clearance form that would allow a designated fisher to catch the fish for them, and that is a good thing.

All we're asking here is that the same would be done with the moose hunting licence. We're not asking for the queue to be circumvented or for it to be enhanced in any way. But when they follow the order and the process, those with a disability, they don't have to be subjected to these regulations: to have to be within sight and 800 metres.

I'm not sure if we're trying to promote shooting moose from the side of a road, which I think is illegal, and if it is, it's not a wise thing to be doing in the first place. But this one is very restrictive. So we're asking the minister to have a look at it.

I'm not totally well versed with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, but I know that the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* stands on two principles: the freedom of expression and the right to equality. I would think the latter, the right to equality, ought to be upheld or would be a reference point here to allow those with a disability to make sure that they don't have

to be subjected to those cruel and unusual regulations.

So I would ask the minister to look into that. I think he'd be doing a wonderful thing for all those people with a disability who want to provide food on their table and they're struggling to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that Northern Labrador residents are provided with access to timely and adequate health care.

Frequently, patients are prevented from getting to their medical appointments, treatments at outside provincial health authority hospitals in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, St. Anthony, Corner Brook and St. John's because they can't get on the medical flight. There are not enough seats on the flight.

Patients who manage to get out to their appointments often face long delays trying to return home to their communities. This creates mental, financial, family and work stresses in addition to the physical burden of their illness.

Patients often can't get timely appointments to see a nurse at their community clinic. This can be a critical delay for stroke, cardiac, cancer and other medical situations. We also ask that a standard be established for appointments, especially when dealing with fill-in nurses who are not familiar with the community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The level of chatter is getting too loud; I can't hear the Member speaking.

L. EVANS: They can't get timely appointments to see a nurse at their community clinic. This can be a critical delay for stroke, cardiac, cancer and other medical situations. We ask for a standard to be established for appointments, especially when dealing with fill-in nurses who are not familiar with the patients or the community and the processes.

Makkovik patients do not have access to a doctor compared to other communities where doctors visit throughout the year.

Speaker, this is a revision of my petition I've been presenting now for a couple of years on timely and adequate access to medical care. In actual fact, a lot of my patients have been harmed by delays of being able to get their proper treatment and the delays are they can't get out to their appointments, their chemo, their MRIs, their diagnosis, to see a doctor or to get treatment. That's actually happening here in Newfoundland and Labrador, in Northern Labrador. That's happening in my communities.

Actually, people have asked me is there any way we can get rid of that doctor who is supposed to be looking after Makkovik because that doctor never shows up, never comes to our community. I think the doctor has been there twice since I got elected.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's really difficult to hear the Member speaking. I ask Members to keep the conversation down a bit, please.

L. EVANS: What I'm talking about is access to care. In Makkovik, the doctor doesn't come to the community. The doctor is supposed to come every so many months.

We have people now who've passed away from diseases and people are questioning whether or not, if the doctor was there, would it have been caught in time. People are saying we need to get rid of this doctor, Lela. We need a doctor that's willing to come to our community the same way the other doctor who is designated to go to Postville, to Nain or to Hopedale.

At the end of the day, we have to have access to timely and adequate medical care.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 7

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Deputy Premier that An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, Bill 35, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 35, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000." (Bill 35)

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank my colleagues.

It's my pleasure to stand here today as part of the budget deliberations, part of the

changes that we're making because of *Budget 2024-25*. It's hard to almost say that, isn't it? We're in 2024-2025, almost halfway through the decade again.

Today, we are introducing amendments to the *Income Tax Act, 2000*, effective January 1, 2024, the small-business corporate income tax rate is being reduced from 3 per cent to 2.5 per cent on the first \$500,000 of active business income.

This reduction is announced in *Budget 2024* and will result in lower taxes for approximately 6,200 small businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador, which we all recognize are very important to our communities and the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The proposed reduction in the small-business corporate income tax rate received very positive response. Once *Budget 2024* was announced, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said they were "pleased the Newfoundland and Labrador government has listened to small businesses and provided some much-needed cost relief in Budget 2024-25 by reducing the small business tax rate"

I'm going to quote from Beatrix Azeez who said: "We are glad government listened to the priorities of our members in this budget and look forward to working with government to make the lives of small business owners a little easier through these investments."

I'm going to spell that person's last name, it's A-Z-E-E-Z. That's for Hansard.

Jay Goldberg of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said: Cutting Newfoundland and Labrador's small business tax rate is good news for small business owners and taxpayers throughout the province. This relief, coupled with the continuation of the Furey government's gas tax cut, shows a real commitment to lowering costs for taxpayers.

That is a quote from Jay Goldberg of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

More generally speaking, the St. John's Board of Trade and the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce talked about supports for business in the budget. The St. John's Board of Trade's, AnnMarie Boudreau – and I'll spell her last name, B-O-U-D-R-E-A-U; that's for Hansard – said: This budget marks a commitment to enhancing competitiveness, supporting businesses through investments in red tape reduction and promising no new taxes, tax increases, or fee increases.

The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, Rhonda Tulk-Lane – quote – the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has made it clear that the province is seeking to become more competitive and is open for business. The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce strongly commends the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for taking steps to reduce the cost of doing business and remains ready to partner with the government to continue improving the business climate of Newfoundland and Labrador – unquote.

Now there are other measures in *Budget 2024* to support business and economic development, including \$500,000 for business navigators to work with businesses to help make it easier to navigate government policies and improve business processing by addressing red tape. There is approximately \$35 million to support economic development initiatives including research and development commercialization, investment attraction, regional development and business growth activities.

There's \$7 million for connectivity initiatives – and I've heard that in the House, how important that is including broadband and cellular as part of our overall \$25-million commitment, and there are no new taxes, tax increases or fee increases.

Since 2020, in the last number of years – Speaker, it's hard to believe that this is my fifth budget. But since 2020, we have implemented many tax measures to support businesses, and others include increasing the maximum annual cap for the Film and Video Tax Credit, to the joy of the Minister of Tourism, from \$4 million to \$5 million, effective January 1, 2021. That's growing our film and video industry. Extending the Interactive Digital and Media Craft Credit to December of this year.

A new 20 per cent Green Technology Tax Credit for companies that invest in equipment for energy conservation and clean energy generation, use fuels from waste, and make efficient use of fossil fuels. That was effective April 7, 2022. A new 10 per cent Manufacturing and Processing Investment Tax Credit; that was effective since 2022. A new 40 per cent All-Spend Film and Video Tax Credit with a maximum credit of \$10 million annually per project. This is all new since 2020.

Increased exemption threshold for HAPSET, from \$1.3 million to \$2 million. That was effective last year. Temporary, of course, the gas tax rate decrease for gasoline and diesel by seven cents per litre, over eight cents when you include the HST, effective June 1, 2022, and then extended again for this year.

Speaker, small businesses in our province will be happy to hear we are expecting one of the highest rates of economic growth forecast for 2024 among provinces – one of the highest rates of economic growth. If those that have not had the opportunity yet to look at or read the economic document, as part of the budget documents, I implore them to read it. It gives you an awful lot of information. I know the Member for Bonavista decries often that in the Budget Speech there's not a lot of attention given to various industries. I can tell you, if he reads *The Economy* document, there's certainly a lot of attention given in those documents.

Total employment is forecast to increase – increase – this year by almost a percentage point. The unemployment rate is expected to remain on par with our lowest record at 10 per cent in 2024. That's the lowest record that we have of recorded unemployment rate.

Household income is expected to increase by 4.9 per cent in 2024. Retail sales is forecast to increase by 2.8 per cent in 2024. Let me tell you, Speaker, because I think it's really interesting, because I have these statistics here in front of me, I'm going to go back to 2019, because pre-COVID and now post-COVID, if I look at retail sales pre-COVID, they were \$559.2 million. Do you know what they are expected to be this year? Speaker, \$804 million, that's significant growth.

Population – and I want to congratulate again the minister responsible, Minister Byrne has done an admirable job in helping to grow our population – projected to rise by 0.8 per cent in 2024, continuing on the strong growth seen in 2023. I will say, I think we've met our targets two or three years ahead of schedule.

Capital investment is expected to increase by 3 per cent to \$9.6 billion in 2024. Inflation is forecast to be 2.6 per cent in 2024. Speaker, as you know that's continuing to lower. February last year over February this year, it was at 2 per cent. We know that the Bank of Canada continues to be focused on this, as are we, in helping to make sure our inflationary rate decreases.

We're expecting interest rates to start declining, hopefully, by summer. Maybe it might be late summer, but we are hearing some good signals from the Bank of Canada and I think that's going to be very important for our economy.

Speaker, we're really transforming our province. That is the theme of this year's budget. We're transforming health, we're transforming our economy, we're

transforming our province. We want it to be stronger, smarter, self-sufficient and sustainable. I think we're well on our way; we continue to take action.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't take as much time as the minister had to. This is a good bill and we support it for sure. Any time you can help out 6,200 companies in the province, you understand what it's going to do.

So this goes back to January 1, retroactive once it comes into play. It affects companies with over \$500,000 income. So when you look at the small businesses around the province and how it's been struggling due to some of the things the minister just said, when we talk about the inflationary pressures and the –

AN HON. MEMBER: COVID.

L. PARROTT: Yeah, COVID, inflationary pressures, obviously, interest rates and all of those things, I can guarantee you there are very few small businesses in the province who haven't looked at this with open arms and they're very welcomed to it.

But, I mean, some of the initiatives that we have put in place, government has put in place, has hurt business and sometimes we don't talk about that. But if you talk to the people who manufacture sugary drinks, they'll tell you that they think that this is having an affect on them, with very little consultation. So while we're depleting this, I'd love to see some legislation come to the floor that eliminates the sugar tax. That would be a good step for the people in the province, too.

This bill, obviously, when it goes through, like I said, it will help everyone in a sense

that the 6,200 businesses will get the break. On top of that, the individuals that work there will probably have more secure employment, I guess, because we know it will help these companies become more successful.

So I've got some questions when we get to Committee, but I will say we support this bill and it's a good initiative. I applaud the minister for bringing it forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I won't take much time either. I want to say that we do agree, there needs to be some tax changes for small businesses. We agree that lowering the tax – actually, when we were doing our campaign when we were talking about bringing the range up to \$15 an hour, we actually talked about how we're eliminating the small business tax as a balance act for that.

So bringing this down is great. We'd like to see some more changes around how we define small business and to help probably put in some more ways to help different levels of small business and how many they employ and how much economic output they do. So we do agree with this and we will be supporting it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll be supporting Bill 35 as well. I'm not going to belabour the point, I guess, but at the end of the day, we all know how important small business is to our economy

and much more so, I would suggest, than the big operations and megaprojects and everything else that comes along, because a lot of times they're here and then they're gone.

Quite often small business owners are local people. They're going to keep their money in the community. They're going to reinvest in the community and all the profits that they make, generally, end up back in the community and, of course, they employ a lot of people. They employ a lot of people throughout all the province, both rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador.

So anything that we can do to try to make them successful or keep them successful or make them more successful so they can hire more people and invest more in the community, then I think that's a wise investment. I consider it an investment because I think the break that they get here, all the money is going to end up back into the economy and back into the coffers of government in some shape or form anyway.

So it is almost like you're giving them a little break now, but we will ultimately end up getting that money back. Hopefully, we'll get even more money back, because it's going to be encouraging more people to start businesses, it's going to encourage businesses, hopefully, to expand and diversify and I see it as a good thing.

I've had people in the business community say to me that initiatives like this are the things they want to see, things like this, the business tax, payroll tax and all that kind of stuff. They said, Paul, government money would be much better spent if they took this kind of initiative with small business versus some of these big grants that you see governments, federal and provincial, when they come out with the grant programs for, a lot of times, big businesses.

I've seen them over the years, we've all seen them, maybe they might be from an environmental point of view or economic

point of view or whatever. A lot of times you see these special projects and you see some of these companies that are larger, very successful, multi-million-dollar-type companies that are applying and getting grants. They're getting taxpayers' money when they can afford it.

You can't blame them I suppose. If you had a business and the government is going to write you a cheque and say, here look, here's a cheque for a couple of hundred thousand dollars or here's a cheque for a million or a couple of million or whatever, whether it be provincial or federal, no business in their right mind is going to say, no, b'y, we don't want that. They're going to take it.

They're going to take every cent they can get, naturally, but at the end of the day, do they really need it – do they really need it? These programs, we call them investments – and I understand the rationale behind some of them, but sometimes when you look at some of the people who take government up on their offer, and I'll just throw out one example and this is going to be a federal example, but it's still an example because it happens provincially as well.

I look at Loblaw as an example when they got federal green funds to put in energy efficient coolers in the stores, as if Galen Weston needed more taxpayers' money to put coolers in his stores. Multi-billionaires and here we are just shovelling and feeding them taxpayers' dollars for initiatives that they can darn well afford to pay for on their own.

I think we would be much better served federally, and provincially as well, if we tried to get out of the business, as much as we can, of giving away taxpayers' money on big grants and stuff to bigger organizations; instead, invest the money in small business with little things like this that will make a big difference and actually create sustainability amongst our small business.

The big businesses and the big corporations, they got enough money. They don't need our taxpayers' money. They'll take it – they'll take it, but they don't need it.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers if the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board speaks now, we will close debate.

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, and I thank everyone for their support in this House.

I think we all agree that supporting small businesses throughout Newfoundland and Labrador is the right course. This will, of course, decrease the revenues of government by about \$5 million but I think it's important because, as the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands just said, that does get recirculated into our economy.

I thank Members opposite. I thank the Members of the House for their support of this initiative and I thank the business community for bringing it forward. I mentioned the Board of Trade, I mentioned the taxpayers' association, all of them consult with government, of course, leading into the year and make appeals for what they would like to see in budget, and I thank them for their efforts.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 35 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000. (Bill 35)

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

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

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 35)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: I call from the Order Paper, Order 15.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier that An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act, Bill 71, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 71, An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend the Correctional Services Act." (Bill 71)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to speak to Bill 71, An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act.

Speaker, the amendments put forth in this bill are intended to modernize and strengthen portions of the act and set us on a clear path towards finally proclaiming the act into force in the very near future.

I will provide a little history of where we are, where we came from and how we got here today. The original *Correctional Services Act* was drafted to align with the recommendations made in the 2008 *Decades of Darkness* report which was a review of the prison system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When the legislation was passed, the Members of this House who supported it surely believed that the correctional system in this province could be improved. Speaker, the amendments we are putting forward today embody that same spirit, while going even further toward improving our correctional system.

The proposed changes resulted from a comprehensive review of reports of our correctional system, taking practices already occurring in corrections and enshrining these in legislation; a review of best practices in Canadian corrections and meeting between Justice and Public Safety officials and the many stakeholders and partners who have an interest in improving the system; and lowering recidivism among inmates and offenders.

As a result, I believe these amendments will modernize our approach to corrections and will improve the well-being of staff and inmates, and this will align us with corrections best practices across Canada,

Proposed changes include adding and updating definitions to the act to modernize and clarify essential terms. For example, the definition of visitor, health care professional,

health care facility, illicit drug, bail supervision, strip search, authorized person, intimate partner violence intervention court and department have been added.

The definition of “Aboriginal” has been updated to “Indigenous” and “offender” changed to “inmate” in provisions that only refer to the incarcerated. Gender-neutral language and gender-inclusivity has been incorporated throughout the act.

Amendments also propose changes to modernize policies and operational processes. These include: enabling the assistant deputy minister responsible for corrections to exercise the powers and duties of the director, if there is not director in place, enabling the minister to perform the duties and functions of the chief superintendent if the chief superintendent is unavailable; clarifying that offenders are required to obey community supervision conditions and inmates are required to obey correctional facility rules; requiring superintendents have the experience and education necessary to understand unique challenges of female and gender-diverse individuals; the addition of a principle that policies, programs and practices will be responsive to the particular needs of women, gender-diverse individuals, Indigenous peoples and other groups of offenders who have special requirements; clarifying of notification requirements to victims or Victim Services, upon request; clarifying that an adult probation officer may procure and report information to the court in relation to persons charged as well as convicted of an offence; and clarifying that adult probation is responsible for the bail supervision program.

Further amendments proposed that relate to conduct with a correctional facility include: clarifying that a security-risk assessment is completed upon admission to a facility, and that a plan is prepared for the inmate that promotes accountability; providing the Lieutenant-Governor in Council authority to make regulations prescribing the conduct of

staff members and respecting of investigations conducted under the act; requiring that inmates be informed as soon as possible when their communication has been restricted; clarifying that an offender may only be required to submit to a drug test by an adult probation officer if the court imposes the bodily substance condition; streamlining disposal processes for items seized and forfeited; and increasing penalties for contraband and trespass.

Regarding equitable access to health care, beyond the definition in terms I've already discussed, the amendments propose adding provisions with respect to inmate transfers to medical facilities, and a principle of equitable access to health care for inmates and requiring that the director consult with health care professionals or other qualified persons to provide programming specific to the needs of offenders.

Speaker, I can report to the House that the Office of the Privacy Commissioner was provided with the relevant proposed amendments in advance of tabling this bill today. We did receive some comments back from the office of the OIPC and I can say that any comments and concerns that were in that written correspondence, that email I received, or was received by the department, will be addressed in the regulations.

As I clue up my remarks, I'll return to the issue of the regulations in proclaiming the *Correctional Services Act*. I'm sure Members opposite are wondering beyond the scope of the amendments that I proposed, when the new disciplinary process that is part of the act will come into force. The new inmate disciplinary process is under development as part of the regulations.

I won't speak directly to those regulations today, but I can tell you that the process is being modelled based on an independent adjudicator process, one that takes the onus

of management to oversee inmate discipline and move it under an independent process.

Development of all of the regulations associated with the act are very near completion and I look forward to a day in the very near future when this act and the regulations will be proclaimed in full force. The work on this act and the regulations are just the first step in ensuring transparency and accountability are entrenched in our correctional services throughout the province.

Before I take my seat, I want to thank management and correctional officers who work every day in facilities throughout our province. These people work in very challenging conditions and I'm very grateful for their contributions to helping improve society. I also want to thank volunteers, advocates, local groups and agencies who work in the correction systems in this province every day and bring such value to our system.

On that note, Speaker, I look forward to the progression of this bill and I do ask for the support of all hon. Members of this House in passing the bill.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to speak to this bill, Bill 71. I can say from what I've heard and what I've read, we will be supporting the amendment as it is proposed.

I will make a few brief comments with respect to the bill itself. From what I see, the amendments are in spirit very positive in terms of enshrining modernized language and terms in the legislation, following best

practices in other jurisdiction; modernizing our approach with language changes is vital and it's important.

I could repeat all of the changes that the minister has mentioned, but really it goes without saying that we are in agreement for having clear language and definitions which are accurate and precise and modern, whether it's definition of visitors or health care professionals or bail supervision. Obviously, that needs to be in place and if it hasn't been in place, as it appears that it hasn't, it certainly needs to be enshrined in any modern legislation.

So for those reasons, we would certainly support all of those clarifications, modernization of terms and language, whether it's clarifying things with respect to what the requirements of offenders are in obeying community service conditions, those requirements are obviously necessary to be understood; therefore, they need to be stated and explicit in any legislation. It appears that this amendment will do things like that, stating that, for example, inmates are required to obey correctional facility rules. Obviously, that goes without saying, that that's necessary, that offenders and anyone in those institutions have to obey the institutions rules. Now this will be enshrined in the legislation.

Whether it's talking about authority, for example, of – I think there was provision of the authority of the superintendent to designate and delegate the duties of the superintendent to a staff person. That, obviously, is something that needs to be in place on an operational basis so that when the superintendent is not present, that the superintendent, she or he, is able to delegate their duties to a staff person. Those are common sense changes that obviously we would have no issue with.

With respect to principles, additions of principles, for example, policies, programs and practices, will be responsible to the particular needs of women and gender-

diverse individuals, Indigenous peoples and other groups of offenders with special requirements. Obviously, that needs to be enshrined in any modern legislation. So we would have no problem with that either.

I can go down through all of the things or the items that the minister has mentioned and, of course, those provisions are necessary in the legislation. So we have no problem with that. The spirit of these amendments are positive and necessary and ought to be in any effective, good piece of legislation in our province.

Now, I do want to make a few comments, however, with respect to the remarks that the minister made with respect to the internal disciplinary process that we have been long awaiting for to be in place at these institutions, whether they be HMP or any of the other correctional institutions in our province. I'm very pleased to see and to hear the minister say that there will be an independent adjudicator process. That is absolutely a necessary and vital piece of any effective internal disciplinary process.

We know, Speaker, that the present process, internal disciplinary process, for example, in the HMP has been criticized for being called a kangaroo court. I'm talking about the internal jail court that exists within the HMP, where we have senior prison staff, captains, lieutenants that ultimately hand out sentences. The fact that they may determine inmates' guilt and the process has been questioned by many, many advocates in our criminal justice system as to whether this is a fair process at the HMP.

We've heard stories of the same prison staff officials, a senior staff official, chairing a meeting, a hearing for an inmate, and then at another hearing, being a witness, also, giving testimony at another hearing. These are concerns that when we have the trier of fact, having these conflicting roles, that has brought many, many concerns.

Why is that a concern? Well, it's the opposite of due process, Speaker. It's the opposite of fair procedure. We've heard stories that there are no lawyers present when these tribunals or these hearings take place. So there almost appears that there could be a presumption of guilt right from the onset. So, obviously, we cannot have this continue on and on. This has been many years that we've been waiting for changes here.

This, hopefully, is the first step, as the minister said, in clarifying the language and modernizing it, but the real substance that needs to be addressed here is with respect to the independent oversight of the disciplinary process in the HMP. We've heard that other reforms have occurred in other jurisdictions, so we know that these kinds of independent adjudicators exist. We even know other jurisdictions, Speaker, have their own investigator that makes decisions by the internal court, then they make recommendations on to the director of Corrections. So this is in other provinces in our country.

So, obviously, we're very concerned, we're very anxious, and the minister rightfully acknowledged that we want to know when will this new disciplinary oversight process take place? When can we hear it? I know that it's being worked on and developed in regulations. It's under development, the minister said. But we're all very anxious, and the reason is, Speaker, because it involves the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms should apply in all custodial settings. So we really need to bring basic procedural fairness in our province when it comes to the HMP.

Look at when there are inmates, for example, who have low literacy or cognitive impairment and then don't have a lawyer present when they're having decisions made about whether their time is going to be docked or they're going to be put in solitary confinement or whatever the case

may be. We need to ensure that there is basic procedural fairness when it comes to those important decisions.

Many of the inmates may not even understand the process, because they don't have a lawyer present and yet they may suffer and may lose privileges that they don't understand. So obviously it goes without saying, there has to be some fair process here. There has to be due process. There has to be fair procedure and the right to legal representation.

I'll look forward to seeing and hearing when the regulations come out what will be stated about that. If there is a right to appeal, who will that appeal be to. If it is an independent adjudicator, as has been stated, that is welcome. And the reason for that is if there is bias by decision-makers, then obviously it is not going to be a fair process.

We're looking forward to hearing about the regulations. We need to know what the timeline is. This is very important to justice, to accessing justice and, as stated, anyone that is in any kind of custodial setting, as the HMP, do deserve to have basic procedural fairness in accordance with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

On that note, I'll conclude my remarks, but with respect to this specific amendment, we see it in principle, it is good. The spirit of the amendment is positive, but we want to see substance and we want to see the development of the regulations as soon as possible so that this present, unfair disciplinary process that exists in our correctional institutions, specifically in the HMP, comes to an end.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm going to speak on Bill 71, the amendment to the *Correctional Services Act*. I share a lot of the concerns from my colleague for Harbour Main. I echo her concerns when she talked about procedural fairness and substance, and also the fact that the regulations need to be completed. I share my colleague's concerns, and it's so important for us to talk a little bit about the amendment.

This is actually an amendment because the first *Correctional Services Act* was passed by the House in 2011. It was passed in 2011. The original act was intended to replace the *Prisons Act* of 1969 and the *Adult Corrections Act* from 1975. The reason why I say it was meant to replace is because the *Correctional Services Act* that was passed in 2011 was never proclaimed. It wasn't a tool that it was intended to do, which was help corrections. Help the inmates that went into the correctional system.

So, in actual fact, what we're doing now is looking at an amendment. Looking at the original *Correctional Services Act* that was passed in 2011, that act was shaped by a comprehensive review of the prison system in the province in 2008, back then. It was entitled *Decades of Darkness*. I think it's important to say that: It was entitled *Decades of Darkness: Moving Towards the Light*. That report had quite a few recommendations. The terminology used in legislation should be changed to reflect a more rehabilitative approach. What did we find in the Auditor General's report on *Adult Custody & Community Corrections*?

Rehabilitative approach – the failings for when somebody was convicted of committing a crime and went into the system, we saw through this report the failings for rehabilitation. What we know about society now is that when somebody commits a crime, harms another person, when they go in to be incarcerated, it's so important for them to know the harm they've done and to be rehabilitated so that when

they're released, they will not be a burden to society, they will not commit more crimes, that they will actually be a contributing person in society.

That benefits not only the inmate, who, when released, will not reoffend and not have to go back into custody, have their life derailed again, it helps society as a whole. So I'm talking about delays. I share the Member for Harbour Main's concern about making sure that things are done right this time. This time around, I share your concerns.

Decades of Darkness: Moving Towards the Light – 2008, Speaker. So the terminology of legislation should be updated.

Modification should include areas to ensure the rights of inmates are respected. What did we see in the Auditor General's report? What did I witness myself? What did I witness as the MHA for Torngat Mountains? I've witnessed, basically, inmates' rights not being respected.

I had a mother going home to die, riddled with pain from cancer. To the point where we had to get another escort out to help her from St. John's up to her home community so she could die. She had a son in Labrador corrections, Speaker. This is relevant to this bill. She had a son in corrections and she wanted to see him. She wanted to say goodbye to him. She wanted to give him words of support and encouragement.

I knew her, and all they had to do was bring him up from the correctional centre up to the airport. They couldn't do that. They wouldn't do that. Even with the MHA, even with leaders in the communities writing saying that this would help, that didn't happen.

That's just one example. In actual fact, after she died, he didn't get to see her. He couldn't go home to her funeral, so there was no processing of the loss. There are many things and there's more extreme disrespect for inmates' rights than the example I gave. But that's one thing that stays with me.

Anyway, the legislation was shaped by this review. The 2011 legislation was shaped by this review from 2008. The last recommendation I'll mention is regulation should be thoroughly revised and then approved by the province – Cabinet – to include modern language. Now, remember what the Member for Harbour Main was talking about: modern language, a grievance process for inmates, search and seizure of contraband, the use of force and other topics.

The thing about it is, there's no real grievance process in the act. We never even seen the light of day of the regulations; however, what happened was the act wasn't proclaimed. So now we're actually looking at this amendment. So we're going to debate this amendment and we're going to pass it and then we're going to actually hope that the regulations are fully developed and implemented before we can feel comfortable knowing that people in custody are getting good rehabilitation, they're getting training, they're getting education and, in actual fact, they're being supported.

Because a lot of inmates that end up in custody who have committed crimes are people who are struggling themselves and they resort to crime because they may not be able to access income. They may have some addictions or maybe they're going through chronic stress. Those are things that we're all facing, we're all dealing with. So it's so important for us to ensure that we do things right and that's what we're saying, Me and the Member for Harbour Main, we're here, we're talking about this amendment and it's so, so important.

Now the act was never proclaimed. I talk a lot about when the Liberals took power in 2015. When the Liberals took power in 2015, they blamed the Conservatives for not drafting the regulations. That's what they did in 2015. Did we ever see the light of day of those regulations? Did we ever see the light of day of this act? No. So, in actual fact, I

say to government, you can't continue to blame the previous government for your failings after nine years. So it's good now, nine years later, we're going to see something.

Also, I call attention to minor amendments were made to the act in 2017 and 2018, that was an opportunity then to proclaim it, that never happened. In 2019, the Liberals introduced the last set of amendments to the act, just prior to the provincial election. In 2019, the last set of amendments, they were supposed to update the language before proclaiming the act and regulations, however, the act is still not proclaimed.

Speaker, I'm going to take advantage of my time. I'm not going to repeat things. I'm not going to repeat what the minister said, the positive things, because I am supporting this. My caucus supports this amendment, but I'm really going to make my point, because there are people from my district that goes into custody and before I became an MHA, before I knew exactly how things worked, I always believed that when they went into custody, when they went away, whether it's to corrections or out to St. John's or to the Mainland, that they would actually have access to rehabilitation and that they would actually get help, supports, so that when they were released that they wouldn't reoffend. That they wouldn't do harm. That would help them be better people and feel better about themselves and support their families and the community, society as a whole.

I tell you, I'm still shocked about this, because what I realize right now is more times than not, when somebody goes into custody and incarcerated, that's just like a holding cell, because the supports are not there, risk assessments are not done. You know what I mean, the supports that they're supposed to get to rehabilitate are not there.

I'm not a lawyer. I don't to pretend to be somebody who's knowledgeable about the law, but I know about human rights and I

know about government. I know the responsibility of government; therefore, I'm going to have my say today, Speaker.

The delay in enacting the modern adult corrections legislation is a key issue flagged in the Auditor General's report. She noted the gravity of the problem by not enacting the legislation. I'm going to quote from here. I'm going to read it right out: "By not enacting the modernized legislation, the department is attempting to manage adult offenders based on outdated concepts that are not in line with industry best practices." I come from the world of industry, mining, construction and, I tell you, if we weren't following industry best practices, we won't last very long.

I'm going to continue on now quoting her: "Without up to date and complete policies, it is difficult to manage rehabilitation programming for adult offenders, support public safety ..." – that's us. That's out there, public safety, that's everybody in the province. We should be concerned about what she says.

I'll continue on: "... support public safety, or support offenders' successful reintegration into the community. Gaps in policies may lead to inappropriate rehabilitation responses, with rehabilitation programming provided that could increase offenders' risk to reoffend" – could increase offenders' risk to reoffend – "inappropriate supervision, impaired service delivery, reduced accountability, and documentation inconsistencies."

I know about the documentation inconsistencies. I read through her report and it's alarming. It's scary. It's scary because of what I believed, what we believed. We believed rehabilitation was there.

I continue on: "Strong policies contribute to better outcomes, improved transparency, and help build staff knowledge and accountability." That's on page 12.

Speaker, to me, it's so important to get this legislation, get it passed and make sure we have the supporting regulations so that we can actually start helping our communities by helping people who go into custody, who are convicted of crimes against society. But to make sure that when they are released, when they serve their time, they paid their dues, that they are better people in terms of being rehabilitated so that they don't reoffend, that they can become contributing members of society again.

Overall, this bill repeals the amendments to the act of 2019 and rolls a number of the amendments into this bill. It's positive. The new changes proposed in this bill fall under several key themes. I'm not going to go through them all because I'll be duplicating some of the things that were said here earlier. Clarification of terms and modernizing language is a positive thing, and I heard the Member for Harbour Main mention that. Gender and Indigenous sensitivities, that's so important – that's so important.

But I'm actually going to take the time, Speaker, because I got time, I'm going to take the time because there are several bullets here under gender and Indigenous sensitivities that's important to me. Of course, incorporating the gender-neutral language, that's a positive thing; replaces the term Aboriginal with Indigenous. These are important things. How we talk in society is a reflection of what we feel. It's so important to be gender-neutral so that women and men and everybody in our population now can be treated fairly. We know that. We know that there is not just male or female anymore that we have to take into consideration.

I will go to my next point. The superintendent of a correctional facility that houses gender-diverse individuals must have knowledge, skill, experience and education to appreciate and understand the unique challenges that inmates face. So if we have gender-diverse people in the

system, we have to ensure that the people supervising them, that has authority over them, actually are knowledgeable of their circumstance. It is very, very important.

Another point I'll make, too, is regarding the new legislation: changes the term "same sex" with "preferred gender identity" with relation to requests for inmates, staff and visitors to be strip searched by an authorized persons. That is important.

There is also clarification of roles and responsibility. It is very, very important, but I'm not going to go into those details. Enshrinement of procedures in legislation – I think that was mentioned in here as well. That was mentioned by the Auditor General but, in actual fact, it is so important. I was kind of surprised that there were procedures out there that wasn't tied to legislation, especially when we're dealing with corrections.

Clarifies that a plan prepared for an inmate should promote accountability and support their rehabilitation and integration into society. We can't stress that enough; that's one of the reasons why I'm supporting this amendment.

States that the assessment of an inmate after entering a correctional facility is a security and risk assessment. The assessment that needs to be done when an inmate enters the correctional facility is a security and a risk assessment. The failures of the risk assessments that was noted in the Auditor General report is frightening. I mean, when you hear words like most weren't done and those that were done, a lot of them were incomplete.

Anyway, Speaker, my time is running down. I've run through most of the things that I wanted to talk about. I am going to have questions and requests for clarification when we go to Committee, but actually, I'm just going through now – I think the rest of it, I can cover in Committee.

With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, will be supporting Bill 71, An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act. I'm not going to get into all the details of the changes. That's already been done now two or three times, but there's nothing there that I have any issue with, I'll put it that way. And I'll just, sort of, say ditto to what my colleagues have said about those changes. Modernizing legislation is always a good thing.

To pick up what my colleague just said, it is concerning that it's taken this long to get here with this. I understand how it happens. I can understand how it would happen because whether it be this piece of legislation or whether it be the HMP itself, I think that there's a sense out there with a lot of people – I can tell you that a lot of the people that I might talk to on any given day when these issues come up, the attitude of many people is, they're criminals. Bread and water is good enough. You do the crime, do your time. That's the attitude of a lot of people.

I think that's why successive governments over the years, why the HMP, as an example, was we're going to look at the HMP and it didn't happen. Someone else is going to look at it and now we're looking at a site, and we're going to get a plan and we're going to do a study. It goes on and on and on and on and on, year after year, administration after administration.

The reality of it is that with the exception of, I'll call them, advocates, because we do have advocates out there in the community, when you're going around in your district, door to door, in election time or at the coffee shop or at Sobeys, whatever, your

constituents are coming to you and they're looking for – we need a new recreational centre, we need our roads done, we need a new school, I need a family doctor –

AN HON. MEMBER: Sounds familiar.

P. LANE: Right? My colleague said it sounds familiar, and that's the reality.

How many times have you been out and about, and somebody came up – the Minister of Justice might be a little different, perhaps, because he is the Minister of Justice. But how many constituents have approached you at Sobeys, or up at Tim Hortons and said, when are we getting that penitentiary built? Or when are we going to get that corrections act replaced to help offenders? You don't hear it. Generally speaking, you don't hear it.

The only concerns I have gotten over the years would be from, perhaps, a constituent or two who worked at HMP or had a family member who worked at HMP, and the concern was more about working conditions as opposed to offender conditions.

That's why, I think, it has taken so long. We've had the *Decades of Darkness* report. I was here for that one. I can remember the former minister of Justice talking about that. We had the Jesso report, that was another one. I don't know if anyone remembers it was the Jesso report that came after the *Decades of Darkness* report. It was good work but basically just a rehash of issues that had already been looked at in *Decades of Darkness*. Now, of course, we have the Auditor General's report.

While it's sad in some ways and maybe not so surprising in other ways, the fact that we are finally moving ahead with it, I see as a positive thing. I'll give credit to this administration and to this Minister of Justice for bringing this forward. At least we're moving in a forward position.

I understand that, as I've said, it's not going to be a huge priority for, necessarily, the average person out there, but I think the thing that we all have to be cognizant of – and that's why we're elected to not just looking at making changes, improvements and stuff on the things that are the most popular and the desires of everybody all the time. There are things in society that need to be done as well, even though they might not be as politically sexy, so to speak, as a new school or new recreation centre or a new swimming pool or whatever. Corrections are an important part of society, nonetheless.

I think we all understand here in this House the importance of this and the fact that when we have an offender and that offender goes into custody, we want that individual coming out better than when he or she went in, and they're not going away.

Every now and then it has come up at the coffee shop. You know, you're talking to a bunch of the guys there and it might come up, and I've often said: B'ys, like it or not, they're not going away. These people are not going away. When they're incarcerated – and we're not always going to be successful, but we either try to make them better citizens, to teach them new skills, perhaps change some attitudes, perhaps deal with an addiction if that's the issue, education, whatever that might be – are we not better off trying to make that individual a better citizen when they come out than when they went in? Because, ultimately, they are coming out at some point in time. Life is not life in Canada like it is in the US, I don't think. So for the most part, whether it be in five years, 10 years or 25 years, whatever the case might be, they're all coming out at some point in time.

So having a facility – which we badly need – and having legislation to govern the running of that facility and of that service and so on, and having modern legislation, having inclusive legislation, having legislation that deals with issues like being gender neutral

and so on, all that is important. That's why I support this particular piece of legislation.

I would say – and the former minister of Justice has talked about this in the past, and I'm sure the current minister would agree. I think that there is being an effort made – and we need to continue to do that – to try to separate people who need to go to a medical facility versus be incarcerated. Certainly in the past – I'm not sure if it's still happening; probably is, to some degree, but we've had a history of putting people in jail and locking them up when, really, they've had mental health issues. They weren't necessarily criminals – knowingly being criminals, per se. They had mental health issues.

What they need is a doctor, what they need is a hospital, what they need is treatment, perhaps medication; they don't need incarceration. Incarceration is not going to do anything to cure somebody's mental health if that's what's caused him to go there.

So it's important that we separate the mental health aspect from the incarceration, and make sure that people with mental health issues are seeing doctors, not wardens. And if people have addictions and that's what's leading to them breaking the law, then obviously there has to be appropriate programs, both inside and outside of the penitentiary or whatever facility that they're incarcerated in, to deal with those addictions.

Certainly another big piece of all this is when they finally get out – and they will get out – when they get back out into the community, it's important that we have all of the facility – not facilities, but the programs and services available to them to deal with whatever issues they have, to help them get a job, to help them have a safe shelter, to deal with any mental health issues, addiction issues, whatever supervision they might need so that they do not reoffend and go back into the system once again and

continue with this revolving door. So that's another big piece.

With that said, I just want to go to the piece that my two colleagues really concentrated on the most, and that was the requirement now to have an independent oversight of the disciplinary process. I'm sure we've all heard stories over the years of things that went on or allegedly went on at Her Majesty's and other facilities. Whether somebody can be rehabilitated or whether they are a career criminal who will never be rehabilitated – and there are probably people that fit in that category as well. They just don't want to be and you can give them all the programs you want, they're not going to change. But there are some people that will change and can change with support. We need to make sure we have these programs for them, more so than those who are not going to change no matter what you do.

But even for those who are your career criminals and have no intention of changing their ways no matter what, they're still human beings and, like it or not, they're still entitled to due process. They are still entitled to be treated fairly. We've heard stories where that has not necessarily been the case for people who are incarcerated.

I would definitely support this independent process where one person – where a warden, as an example – cannot be judge, jury and executioner, so to speak, be a witness, as well as being the one handing down some random sentence and so on. It's crazy that that could even be happening. It's like something you'd see in a movie or something, *The Shawshank Redemption* or some movie like that, perhaps, or *Brubaker* or something.

But if that's happening, if that kind of thing is happening, it definitely shouldn't. So I definitely support this independent process, making sure that people get their due process, that they're treated fairly, that they're entitled to legal representation, that

they have that legal representation to have someone to ensure that it's not mental health issues at play and if it is, to deal with that as a health issue as opposed to a non-compliance issue and so on.

I think that's a good thing. I think that's the road we definitely need to go down, but I would say to you that this kind of likeness, to me, likens me to the Procurement Act, a little bit. Now, you're saying what's the Procurement Act got to do with An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act? Why I liken it to the Procurement Act is that I had a lot of concerns – a lot of Members over here had concerns – about the Procurement Act because all the details of how everything was going to go was left to the regulations.

Therefore, it's kind of, like, vote for this and then we'll put the regulations and place and don't worry, b'ys, we'll do the right thing. This is the principles with things we want to do and we're going to do, and leave it to us and trust us and so on. I don't say that as a slight against the government or against the minister; I really don't. I think he's an ethical guy. I believe that; I really do. We don't necessarily see eye to eye all the time on everything, but I think he's an ethical fellow.

So it's not about him having bad judgment or not following through or whatever; I don't believe that to be the case. But it's just the principle of the thing once again, where probably the most concrete thing that I would speak of, that my colleague speaks of, that the Member for Harbour Main spoke of, was this whole independent process for disciplinary measures, which is such an important piece to all of this and the most important piece in here will be left to regulations and we have no idea. We have no idea what those regulations are going to entail.

When my colleague from Harbour Main talks about if you're going to have one of these disciplinary hearings – she's a lawyer; I'm not, so I'm not up on all aspects. She's

saying, for example, the person should have a lawyer present. I thought that's what she said: They should have a lawyer. As a layperson, that would make sense to me. Now, whether that's required for all these things or not, I don't know but it would make sense to me.

When these regulations are written, as an example, will the regulations say that that person is entitled to have legal representation with them at the time? Will it be written there? I would hope it would be written there. It would make sense to me it would be written there. Obviously, the Member for Harbour Main, who's a lawyer, feels it should be written there, but we can't see it because it's not written yet.

So my only concern is, I suppose, like the Procurement Act and other things in the past, we're asked to vote on a piece of legislation – and I do vote in favour of this legislation because I feel that it's a good thing. I feel that this disciplinary process, the concept, the overall picture of this disciplinary process, being independent, I support that.

But then if regulations don't get put in place or they are put in place and there are some bad pieces to that regulation for example and people say, my God, this is terrible what we're doing here – you should have consulted with a lawyer. You should have consulted with this one, this group, that group, whatever. Then someone turns around and says, well, Paul Lane, b'y, you voted for it. You supported it. You stood up in the House. You supported this legislation.

That's always the concern I have: You supported it. I support it in principle but I cannot confirm when I cast my vote, I'm now handing it over to the government, to the minister to say, I support the spirit and intent of what you're doing, what's written here but, at the end of the day, if those regulations are not good regulations I've still got to, kind of, wear it, to some degree, even though I never, ever got to see it.

That's why I think that when we have legislation like this, especially important things like this, that the regulations should be created ahead of time and should have been reviewed by Members of the House so that we knew for sure exactly what it is we're voting for. At the end of the day, if you change it after the fact, we can't help that but at least we know, going in, what the details are going to be all about. Right now, we don't.

With that said, that is the system that we have. It's an imperfect system, but it's a lot better system than they have in a lot of places around this globe. I'll take this system and I will support this legislation but I do want to put it on the record, once again, as I did with the Procurement Act and some other pieces of legislation, that there is a flaw in the system when we are voting on things and important aspects of it are left to regulations which we never get to see until after the fact, never debated in this House of Assembly and left to the government and with a trust us, we'll get it right and we've just got to, with a wink and a prayer and fingers crossed hopefully it all works out.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Justice and Public Safety speaks now he will close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I very much appreciate the contribution of my colleagues in the House: the Member for Harbour Main, the Member for Torngat Mountains, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

I certainly think that the bill will serve the public interest in this province by helping to create a modern correctional facility.

So I'll take my seat now and look forward to when this bill does go to Committee in the future.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 71 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, "An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act." (Bill 71)

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

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

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 71)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider a resolution relating to the raising of loans by the province, Bill 73.

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 Bill 73.

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.

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 reviewing Bill 73, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province.

Resolution

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

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province a sum of money not exceeding \$2,800,000,000."

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Chair.

It's a pleasure, certainly, to get up here and talk about the Loan Act, a bill that will give us funds for some of our projects and infrastructure in our province; but, first of all, I would like to correct something that I did say yesterday.

I'm sure the Minister of FFA would be glad to hear me say this. I said there was no secondary processing in Central Newfoundland in areas 10, 11 and 12. There is secondary processing in Forest Management District 6 in Central Newfoundland, but unfortunately, in areas 10, 11 and 12 is where Forest Management Districts 2 and 6 get all their timber from. I just wanted to make a correction on that, but that's the way it works.

There is one program, actually that has been in the news, and I just would like to talk about it. It's the Employment Assistance Program under the Labour Market now, under the transfer agreements, but it is administered through the province. It is a great program for individuals with disabilities and under the autism spectrum, of course, to find employment.

To see cuts in that program for those people to get employment – they are certainly productive members of society. They just need some boost of going out in society and getting work and programs to avail of those work situations. They are very eager to work, they're very productive and it puts them in better mental stability, just being in society, in programs, especially doing work and being productive and active in the communities and into the workforce that they do.

That's a program that needs attention and we'd like to see a little bit more attention put on that because those training people, for those disability workers, they need some more help in those programs. It's a wonderful program and if they don't get that program, if we start losing those workers, they're just going to fall through the cracks. They're going to fall through the cracks and

they're going to go on social programs that we have when they're already productive to society. It's bad to see that happening.

Education supports, again, in the district, I did talk about this before and I would like to just touch on it again. I did talk about a single parent in my district with an autistic child. The child is five years old. She went to put her in school this year but without the supports to be able to introduce her into the K-to-12 system, then that child missed a year of school because the programs are not there to be able to place this child into the school system. That is very unfortunate that we don't have the resource base to be able to attend to those children going into the school programs. We have to teach them early, get them involved in school young and they can be productive.

So we certainly need more emphasis put on those programs. Those children will grow up to be good products of our society, but they need help from government, from the education system, in those issues. That is something we certainly have to pay attention to.

Roads, again, in the district – I'll just bring up the roads. I know some of that money, the minister did mention, would be going into roads, infrastructure and that sort of thing. I know the roads in my district – and I brought it up before – roads in the 40-to-60-kilometre zones, very poor conditions. So I'd like to see some more money put towards that, especially in those lower kilometre zones of 40 to 60, to keep people safe on our highways and keep damages from happening to vehicles.

In the budget, there was some money still allotted for the Premier's office. I'll bring up the Premier's office again in Central Newfoundland. If we wanted supports for that child – I don't care where you spend the money to; it is \$1 million a term there. I don't care where you spend the money to; I'd like to see it go towards that child to get

assistance in the school program. I really would. It certainly could go there.

It could go towards the Employee Assistance Program to keep somebody employed. I know you want it spent all over the place – you could look at me and say oh, you want to spend there, you want to spend it there, you want to spend it there. Pick somewhere and spend it. Just pick somewhere and spend it instead of where it's going.

The Premier wanted an office in there. He already had five Liberal MHAs in the Central Newfoundland area. I don't know why he'd want another office in there when he already had five Liberal MHAs in the area. And those five districts were Fogo Island - Cape Freels, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, Lewisporte - Twillingate and Gander. Now the Premier's office worked that well for him that Fogo Island - Cape Freels is no longer there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: You know, that's gone. There's another one up for grabs now, Baie Verte - Green Bay. The five Liberal districts in the Premier's office, right now they're down to three that they're still holding. So I don't know how well the Premier's office is working out there. I don't know.

Anyway, that's happens to the Premier's office. When people look at how you're spending that money –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. FORSEY: Chair, I can see that they all want to get up. They're agreeing with me. They all want to get up and talk about it. I can see that. So if we'll give them a chance now in a few minutes, they certainly can, especially the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune because he's under those five districts apparently.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: So he might want to get up and tell us how it works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

We have a very important bill here. Let's get back to that, Bill 73.

P. FORSEY: So when you look at spending the money – anyway, let's talk about it. Let's talk about the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Bill 73, let's go.

P. FORSEY: They want to talk about that much I can't even hear myself, honest to God.

Anyway, when you're looking at spending money, Chair, that's what the people see out in those districts. They see, like, the travel nurses, that's what they hear – they hear the money that is spent on the travel nurses, wasting money there. They see the money that's wasted on the Premier's –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: There is some wastage there. There was some wastage. I know we needed some help. I know that but the Premier's office –

CHAIR: Address your remarks to the Chair I ask the Member for Exploits, please.

P. FORSEY: The Premier's office is a waste of money.

They see that; they know it's there. They see money going out everywhere else, but they're not going back into those programs. That's what people see. That's where the problem lies.

That Premier's office, you could use some of that funds and use towards where it's going, not in the Premier's office.

Thank you, Chair. Again, I'm sure the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune will get up and tell us how good the Premier's office is working in Central Newfoundland, especially in those districts. Now they're down to three, so we'll see where it goes from there. So that's where it happens.

With that, Chair, I just wanted to get up and make some points on that, of where the cost is. I just wanted to get up and make some points. So when you're talking about spending those monies –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. FORSEY: Again, Chair, they can't wait to get up.

So I'll tell you what. I'll take my seat. Let the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune get up and tell us all how good the Premier's office is out there, how good it's working for him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: I'm sure we'll see more good work coming eventually.

AN HON. MEMBER: Stay tuned.

P. FORSEY: As the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, stay tuned.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you for all that. That was wonderful.

I call on the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

We're looking at Bill 73, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province. Obviously, it's to look at the services that we provide people and the

citizens of our province. Many of the issues that I've addressed have to do with the well-being of people because I do think if we invest in the well-being of people, then we make for a healthier province and a healthier economy as well.

Education, it has been often said that it's the profession by which all of the professions are made possible. Yet, we know – and speaking to one mother just before I came down, when it comes to the level of supports for inclusive education for her son, they compared to where she came from, from another province, are not up to standards. Not because for lack of professional qualifications but just from the sheer lack of resources.

Right now, in a school, if you have student assistants, they're assigned based on need. But if a child comes into the system who has greater needs, they're predominantly assigned the resources, Chair. Which means that children who have access or should have access to a student assistant or to the extra help are now pushed to the bottom. I guess you'd call it like a cascade model, but it's not necessarily addressing the needs of the children who need it. Then there are the children who may not have any diagnosed exceptionalities but who could use that one-on-one help.

So when we're looking at where we put money, I do think that if you put the resources there, you're probably negating some of the costs down the road, whether in health or in the criminal justice system, you name it.

We've had, according to the Immigration, Population Growth and Skills Estimates Committee, 686 Ukrainian children enter the school system; 634 within the metro area. That's welcome but I can tell you that, 10 years ago, I was meeting with department officials at that time for supports for children from Syria, to deal with the trauma, the learning gaps and so on and so forth. In talking to fellow educators – and I look at

my colleague across the House, my colleague, too, from Bonavista – that's basically a school. That's a school population that have entered into the system here.

In many ways, the issues I've had with this is about the lack of planning. In terms of when we're initiating a policy, I would like to see what is it we're going to need and be ready for it. No different than when I decided to build something in the back garden. Okay, what else? What groundwork do I need to do first?

I've been focused on health as well. It's interesting, we talk about some of the challenges here and how to address the shortages of health professionals but, in speaking to doctors, especially with Code 127, it's a simple thing. Code 127 basically allows a family physician to access or to provide extra time and charge for the extra time to spend with a patient who might have complex health needs. Think about it. If you've ever gone into a doctor's office – those of you who still have doctors – you have the sign there no more than three issues per visit. Now, 127 then allows the doctor to spend that extra time with patients who might have complex needs instead of rushing them out the door.

Usually if a person might have anxiety, they might also have blood pressure issues, might also have diabetes issues. So they're all tied together. It sounds like a pretty good way to address the needs until you look at and talk to a few doctors about the audit that comes from MCP. When they put the claims in, they're denied by MCP. I don't know about anyone else in this room, but I would say in a province where we have an aging population, the complexity of our health needs are going to increase.

On one hand, we want family physicians to treat and give our seniors, especially, the appropriate care but, on the other hand, an organization like MCP is penalizing them for doing so. It's interesting, I was speaking, in

my neighbourhood, to a daughter of one of my neighbours who is planning to go into medicine. I said: Oh, why not go into family medicine? We need family doctors. We need family physicians. Her response was: I don't know if I want to be working all those hours for nothing and, basically, going in debt. Now, think about that, how that has gone. The messaging that she is hearing that the workload is unmanageable and their remuneration is pittance.

In many ways here – I don't know, when it comes to MCP, if there's a way of having a review done of that organization. I understand that there's legal action being taken against them by the association about this but if you're saying to a doctor who may do home visits, who may spend the extra time, we are denying this, it sends a very clear message of discouragement to that professional. A simple fix, in many ways, would probably indicate to our family physicians that their work is indeed valued.

I will say this, and I guess the other one has to do with poverty. Hugh Segal, in his book, *Bootstraps Need Boots*, it's great to talk about how we need to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. But if you don't have boots, what's the use of trying to pull your boots up? Well, he talks about the pathologies of poverty. Poverty, in the end, is caused simply by a lack of money. That's what it comes down to and everything else that comes after it – we see people in the street, we hear these stories of people who are injecting in the street, using under the stairways and so on and so forth and we see that as somehow, well, there you go. Those people on income support and so on and so forth, and we make those comments.

But I would say that there are probably just as many people who are earning six-figure salaries that are just as addicted. The thing is, though, we don't see them out in the street because they have a place to which they can go.

I do believe – and I'll end with this, since we're talking about loans – why I've pushed and why we've pushed in this party for a basic income, it's about making sure that people have that threshold of income below which they cannot fall.

In our basic income meeting this morning, I was making a point. I said, it's interesting – and I'll speak to the three teachers in this room – we all had pensions and it didn't stop us from, well, we'll try something else. It didn't discourage us from taking on another job or working more, but I'd like to believe that what it did give us, when you have a base of income, it gives you that freedom to take chances, to try something else, to go back and upgrade your education, to stay at home and look after a sick relative, to tend to a child.

I think, in many ways, that's a key step. That and the initiatives – and I'll say this to the minister – when it comes to the income support measures that were taken, it's about lifting people out of poverty and eliminating these pathologies of poverty.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: I now call on the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to have a few words on this again, and I go back to a few things I've mentioned earlier today, and of course, health care and the roads and a few other issues that the people ask me to bring up on a regular basis because it's their major concerns.

As the minister said today in Question Period when asked, he said he's going to keep an eye and stay on top of it. I asked the minister to review the recommendations by the department because I'm pretty

confident, more than confident, that there are recommendations there to do some work in the Route 450 and 440. I am more than confident.

The minister always says there is more money coming, and I agree there is. It's a five-year plan, I think it is, five- or six-year road plan. But if there's an opportunity to improve the road system before the five- or six-year plan and move the money up to make it safe, is it logical that you would do it? If any department here had an emergency and, for safety reasons, you had the money in the fiscal forecast, wouldn't it make sense to fix the safety?

As I said to the minister today, I'm just hoping if you speak to the officials to – because you can't have unsafe roads. You just can't have it. The minister said today it goes on the amount of traffic; it goes on what industry is there. Well, that Route 450 gets more traffic in a day than one or two projects that were approved last year that gets in a month – in a day, one day. Hundreds, hundreds and hundreds of cars go up but still can't get nothing done.

I ask the minister: Is it because I'm an independent? I ask the minister that. I ask the minister: Will you table the rankings that are coordinated with that to see what was approved? Like, this is serious. I'm starting to send invoices to the minister for damage to the cars. It's not their fault; the roads should've been fixed. The department was aware of it. I even got a note: Oh, sorry. We missed them last week. We'll go back this week and do them now. It's serious. When people start damaging their cars because work is not done, it's pretty sad. Everybody in the department knows it got to be done; it just won't get done.

I'm going to say to the Premier: You are the Premier of the province. You are the Premier. You know this is happening. You know, and I'm just not letting it go because what's going to happen one of these days –

AN HON. MEMBER: He agrees with you.

E. JOYCE: Oh, the Premier agrees with me.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's nodding his head.

E. JOYCE: I seen the Premier there agreeing with me.

The situation is that someone is going to get hurt. Please God, it won't, but someone's going to get hurt. It's almost to the point where you work with the government to get things done, you work with the government to give them the opportunity to do what's right, you work with them and give them the details, you're with the staff who's begging you to keep up the fight for it and you just can't get it done.

The only reason I can come up with is because I'm an independent, honestly. I hate to say that, but I really feel that. I really truly, truly, honestly believe that. When you get \$29.4 million in the Premier's district and then in the District of Humber - Bay of Islands, for a full year, \$200,000 all in levelling, paving, taking out those bags of cold patch. They call it cold patch and filling it in, that's it.

That's the only reason I could see it. It's not on what the recommendations are. It's not on the traffic on the road. It's definitely not on the conditions of the road. That's the only thing I can come up with. If government really feels that they're going to try to force or bribe the people of Humber - Bay of Islands, that if you don't do something, we're not going to fix your roads, what a way to run a government – what a way to run a government.

I heard the Minister of Finance up here a couple of times here today, more than once: Well, you won't vote for this because look what's in the budget. Take a drive down on Route 450 and you'll find out why I'm not going to vote for the budget. You go right ahead and you come back here and if you

were honest, which I know you are, but if you went through Route 450 you would say, Eddie, I can understand what you're talking about. You will say, I understand what you're talking about.

So if you expect me to stand up here and vote for a budget when cataracts are not taken care of. In the hospital, the radiation unit is not going to be open. The roads are deplorable, especially on Route 450 – deplorable and then you can't get it done. Housing: I know there were 50 units put up there; right now, there are 300 on the wait-list. Fifty units is good, but you just can't say oh, look, what we did when there's another 250 who need social housing. And you want me to vote for the budget?

Then when we look at the government itself, 17 people in Cabinet – 17 people. More than most provinces in Canada – 17 in Cabinet. You almost use, now, we have to keep people happy so let's take another division, let's split up this department, split it up to give it another Cabinet position – and people are bringing it up to me.

If the Minister of Finance don't think people are worried about the deficit, they are. I always hear this idea, well, we got an asset. Well, who's going to buy the Team Gushue Highway? It got to be done. Who's going to buy some of those schools we're putting up with so many schools around the province right now as we speak that are empty? How come no one is buying them?

P. LANE: How much did we get for St. Michael's?

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

P. LANE: How much did we get for St. Michael's down there?

E. JOYCE: Yeah, how much did we get for St. Michael's?

So when people ask are you going to vote for the budget, in good conscience, I would

love to be able to support the government. But when I look at some of the things that have happened and is going to happen, I personally cannot vote for the budget. I can't. When you get a commitment that seniors now had the wait-list from the cataracts done and now you find out what was committed last year, the 500 extra is just not there now, and you want to say trust me?

I hope it's going to be done. I'm hoping the government's going to have a change in tune and get it done, what they committed to have done. So I won't be out talking about meeting with seniors and talking about the ones that have to wait, lose their driver's licence. They're going to lose their driver's licence and then they have their quality of life down. They can't go out because they can't see. They can't read. They can't watch tv. Why? Explain to me why. No one can explain it to me. And you want me to vote for the budget? It's pretty hard – it's pretty hard.

In probably the last chance I'm going to have to speak on the budget today, I'm going to clarify something here today and it's about the Leader of the Opposition. It was always brought up here – and I tell you why I'm doing this because I know what it's like when people make statements about you that's not true on a regular basis. When he was the CEO of Labrador-Grenfell, the three people who are saying that you tried to cut the nurses weren't in Cabinet. They weren't there. They were not there. What happened, we went out to the health authorities, we said give us your recommendations, the top, medium and bottom. That's what happened. I was there.

So what came in was recommendations. We made the decisions. This idea of saying that this is what they did, went out and cut it, it's just not true – it's just not true.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I'm doing that because the three people that you hear saying it was not in Cabinet at the time to see what came up.

I'm not saying that I'm here with the PC Party, but I know what happens. There are only two things, I guarantee you: That I'm going to die – and it was said in here – that I'm going to die as an independent. I can guarantee you that. You have no worries about that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: Because I know how that can take over a person and then people question your integrity on it, because I've been through it – I've been through it. Not as much as that, but I've been through it. So any time I hear statements made about people in this House and they don't realize that it's going to affect the family, affect the people that they're in, it do – it do.

I was waiting to do it and I was hoping that it would stop, but it hasn't stop. So I want to put it on the record now that those statements that the former leader stood up there –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: You weren't in Cabinet, I'll say to the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair. You weren't in Cabinet at the time. You didn't see it; you weren't in Cabinet.

But I can tell you that was the process. We did it for all health authorities and then we did it for all other departments, the best case, worst case and the medium. That's what we had to make a decision on because of the budget at the time.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Any further speakers?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to take my last 10 minutes. Well, it don't have to be my last, but I think it will be, to speak on the budget. My colleague already mentioned this but I, too, just wanted to basically raise the same thing that after I spoke there, I think, the first time today about the overall finances of the province and the minister talked about borrowing is okay for capital because you have the asset and everything. I understand where she's coming from but, at the end of the day, we're still adding to the debt, and you can't really compare it mortgage on a house.

I pay on a house and, eventually, I own my house. Eventually I could, in theory, sell my house and then I have that cash; I get my money back. The reality of it is that when we put money on roads and so on, we're not going to sell the roads. So we're not getting any cash back for it. As a matter of fact, even like we look at a lot of the buildings, schools and so on, I think about St. Michael's it's called down there on Bennett Avenue and what did we get for that? We got pittance really for it. I think there was asbestos in that is what they were telling us.

Anyway, it's really not the same comparator. I'll just again reiterate the point that, as I try to do every year and that was my only point in bringing it up, is that we have to be cognizant of the overall finances of the province. We can never lose sight of that, even though we're all getting pressures from our constituents on a regular basis we need more money for this and that and something else. There's no doubt that there are services lacking but you got to pay for it, and we all have to be mindful of our growing debt.

The other point I just want to raise, and that's around the Future Fund. I appreciate

what the minister is trying to do there but I'm just, again, speaking on behalf of people that I know and some people who have reached out to me about it, just to get the other side of it out at least. Some people have a concern about the Future Fund in the sense that, once again, if we were in a situation – and you could almost liken it to your own personal finances. If on payday you got your paycheque and you decided, okay, I have to make my car payment and I have to pay my mortgage, I have to get groceries and whatever else I've got to do and after you do all that, if you're lucky – a lot of people have zero expendable income. There are some people, of course, who have got to go to food banks and so on. But if you're one of the people who are fortunate enough to have some expendable income, some discretionary money left over, then some people, not all people do it – people spend it as fast as they're making it, but some people will say I'm going to put the money away for the future, a rainy-day fund, if you will.

There are people that have rainy-day funds. There are people that have holiday funds. We have a little vacation fund, so to speak. We'll put away a bit of money and that's for vacation.

That's kind of like, I'll say, the Future Fund in a sense. It's great to do but if in order for me to put money into my rainy-day fund or my vacation fund, I had to go and borrow money from the bank in order to put that money in there, people would say that doesn't make sense. You're borrowing money over here just so that you can take it and put it in your sock drawer, so to speak,

I think a lot of people would look at it and say that really doesn't make any sense. The minister talked about – I think she said that in 10 years – I am not putting words in her mouth. I thought she said in 10 years, we'd have approximately \$1.6 billion. I think that's what she said.

Interestingly enough, when you take away the \$1.2 billion of this year's borrowing for debt repayment, there was \$1.6 billion that we're borrowing now for infrastructure. I'm not saying we don't need the infrastructure. What I'm saying is we're borrowing \$1.6 billion for infrastructure and then we're putting money away and, in 10 years, hopefully, we will have \$1.6 billion saved up.

I understand the concept of saving for a rainy day and a lot of people would say, if we could ever get to a point where we had truly balanced budgets, with no borrowing, and then we were to take a portion of the money and poke it away, then that would be a good idea. That would make sense. But when the only way you can achieve that Future Fund is by having to borrow money over here, a lot of people would argue it really doesn't make sense.

I know the minister said that we might have to pay a borrowing cost here but then, on the investment side, we're going to make more money. So we might be a little bit better off. We may or we may –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: What?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: Yeah, if that was the case, we'll just borrow. Yeah, I get it.

I'm not trying to be critical for the sake of being critical. I'm just pointing it out, to put everything on the table and all the facts on the floor, that this is a concern that people have raised with me. It is a concern that people have raised with me. You can agree with it or disagree with it; I definitely see the point. I hope that we can get to a point where we can truly put money aside without having to borrow in order to do it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm only down to 3½ minutes here, so I'm not going to belabour things I've talked about before. But I do want to

bring up one issue. I had an individual reach out to me last fall and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

P. LANE: I had an individual reach out to me last fall, Chair, and he was an employee. He was with the Wildlife Division, and he had some pretty serious concerns. He was telling me, like last fall for example, they have all these wildlife officers that would be going out and checking for poachers and stuff. They have also expanded and they do wood-cutting permits. It's not just wildlife anymore; they've combined some stuff.

But anyway, they had those officers and what I was told by this employee – a long-time employee, but he said there was a lot of people not happy and thinking about moving on because here on the Avalon area, as an example – I can't remember the numbers off the top of my head, but I'm just going to say there is a group of officers and they only had two trucks, I think he said, between them because all the other trucks, there was no vehicle replacement policy over the years. So all the trucks were either broken down or gone. They had like two trucks, maybe three. I think it was two, though, for like 10 people.

So basically what it came down to was you could stay in the office, basically, and do nothing, or four of you can all jump in the one truck together and instead of where you would only need one wildlife officer out checking for poachers or whatever, maybe even if you had two, four of you can all go together in the one truck and just make a day of it together. Or we'll let some of you come in and work a night shift and you can come in the nighttime and drive around in the truck in the nighttime in order to get your time in or whatever.

AN HON. MEMBER: Call Uber.

P. LANE: Yeah.

They told me, at the time, there was a couple of trainees that come, I think it was from Holland College, maybe where they do the wildlife officer training course or something. He said here you had these people here to get on-the-job training and they were getting zero on-the-job training. They could not get out into the field because they had no vehicles.

Also, the quads and stuff were all broken down and not working and not replaced, and the same thing with snowmobiles and everything else. Basically, he said, the equipment had all gone to crap. As a result, you're paying all these salaries for people who are supposed to be doing this job, and they want to do the job and they're able to do the job, and they don't have the equipment to do the job.

So I did reach out to the minister at the time and he just said I'll look into it, type of thing. It was the last I heard of it. But, at the end of the day, I'm just wondering – because I didn't see any major funding here in this budget under wildlife – is there any kind of a plan to make sure that these officers have the equipment they need, the trucks, the trikes, the quads, the Ski-Doos, whatever, so they can do their job properly?

I'll sit down with that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

I now call on the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

It's a pleasure to speak here today on this. When we talk about the Loan Act and raising funds for the province, we're borrowing up to a significant amount of

money and I can't help but think of what's going on in my district when it comes to recruitment and retention for the public service, teachers, doctors, everything. You name a profession that's in the public service that's in Labrador West, there's a vacancy for a considerable amount of time.

I only have one sheriff's officer for the court over there. I have no full-time occupational health and safety officers. They all come in on rotation, flies in and out, because they couldn't get anyone to actually move into the region and stay there. So now they get drawn in from different offices and come in to do the work.

That's a big thing for a place like Labrador West with a significant industrial base. We don't have a full-time officer there, because they just can't recruit and retain anybody into the region. We look over at IET, I think they got some people to finally interview for a position but we've been out an economic development officer since 2019-2020, that position was vacant for. That's a significant position there for a region that's growing and moving forward, we don't have anyone in that role.

There are a lot of empty offices, not because they're closed, they're closed because there's nobody there to fill those roles. Municipal highway enforcement, that's another one that always seems to have a vacancy. You look at TI, Transportation and Infrastructure, there were roles there for a while and that's finally got filled in the past year. But it was someone who retired from the mine who saw the posting. So we're not getting anyone new up there either.

We look at it and go: Well, what is it? The biggest thing that I seem to be finding when I talk to these people is obviously the lack of affordable house and the lack of that. These positions, obviously, they don't pay enough to buy a \$400,000 house, because that's the going rate for a house in Labrador West. So these positions, obviously they can't go

and purchase a \$400,000 house, and there are zero vacancies when it comes to rentals.

So, once again, I'm here talking about again the lack of affordable housing in the region. A region that is growing and is planning on continuing growing and growing. But obviously, we have no real plan or partnership with the province to help the municipalities actually expand their footprint, which they need to do. There is an opportunity for job vacancies. I just talk about the public service because we're talking about loans and funds for the province to operate, well, obviously it's the public service.

If you want to step outside of that, every single business is looking for somebody. We see postings day in, day out for people in Labrador West to come in and do all kinds of sorts of jobs. We're looking for engineers, we're looking for health and safety people, we're looking for labourers and we're looking for all kinds of people for all different kinds of trades. But they can't come to the region because no one has \$400,000 in their back pocket just starting out in the trades.

This is where we're seeing a lack of partnership from the province to the municipalities to help them with their infrastructure deficit and their housing deficit. Yes, I understand that when it comes to social housing, we have some work there. There's some stuff done, but that don't fit the whole scenario, the whole situation, what we're looking for when it comes to providing for the things.

We don't have enough people in Labrador West to operate Labrador West. That's not even talking about the mining side of it; it's the social side of it as well. We're short social workers. I know in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing they constantly are looking for maintenance people and office people to do the work there. There is a significant shortage there as well. That's

why a lot of the units that went the way they did because you could never fill the roles to keep the units maintained, and it caused a serious problem.

Unless either the pay for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing goes significantly up so a carpenter with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing can buy a \$400,000 house, or the province could actually do some work with the municipalities and with groups to actually kind of expand the footprint of the two municipalities to allow that we can actually put up houses that are affordable to individuals and to make sure we can fill that balance and bring back the balance.

Currently, as it is, when it comes to Labrador, we are out of balance. The scales have gone the other way. We can't keep going down this path. We can't keep causing a sense of discouragement that Labrador West is not a viable option for someone starting up their career in the trades, in social work, in health care or the public service.

We have to bring the scales back to level so that people can actually afford to buy a house or afford to rent a place and make it a community again that it once was. We can't continue to perpetuate this vision of Lab West as too expensive or too out of touch or out of reach.

We talk about helping out and helping a region, we're asking once again that the province try to become a partner in how we can help move this forward. We have opportunity. We have the product. We have the minerals. We have all that fun stuff, but we don't have any sense of partnership from the provincial government when it comes to actually doing these things.

I have to say we just want to be treated the same way as everywhere else in the province. We just want to be in sync with the rest of the province, but we're not. It's discouraging, you see, when residents from Labrador West who hear about the family,

I'd love to come to Lab West, I'd love to come up there, but I can't find a house. I can't find an apartment. You know, I had this job offer, but it's not working out. I can't find an apartment.

Then they come down and they drive across the Island and see all these other municipalities having no issue with housing development and moving forward and all that. And they go back. It's so discouraging to see and we're up here, we're outpacing – us and two other places in the province have one of the youngest median age. We have some of the highest per capita birth rates in the province. We have lots of kids. Just look at the child care wait-list. There are over 300 kids on wait-list for child care.

We're helping with the population growth of this province. No problem with that. I think our median age is 42 right now. We're a fairly young region. We're one of the most physically active regions in the entire province.

We're doing what we are doing. We're showing the way. We're showing the path but at the same time we can't spread it around because there's nothing to buy. A young family – as of today if someone took a job in Lab West right today, unless the company actually owns –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

It's getting a little tough to hear the Member for Lake – Labrador West.

Thank you.

J. BROWN: No, I'm your neighbour. I'm not the same as you.

Right now, in Labrador West, a young family starting out, if they took a job today and they moved into Labrador West, they cannot move there. There is not a single apartment to rent and every single house on the

market right now is over the \$300,000 range. So a young family, someone just out of trades school or just out of nursing school or anything like that, they cannot move to Labrador West. There is nothing there for them to buy or rent.

So how is it that we can fill these empty gaps, these empty roles and talk about all this stuff. That's probably one of the biggest reasons why we can't even get a collaborative care clinic off the ground is because there's nobody able to take any of the jobs because there's nowhere for them to live.

We continue to perpetuate that and there's no real partnership from this province to actually help these two municipalities address that. There's no incentive for them. We've had developers and stuff come up and they just say, do you know what? If I'm going to build a house here, I'm going to have to sell it for half a million dollars. The towns say, we'll do what we can, but our hands are tied. We have land, lots of land, it's Labrador. It's kind of funny, the amount of developable land for the Town of Wabush would actually double the size of the region overnight for how much land they have left to develop. It's the cost and the infrastructure.

I'll bring it up again, there used to be a commercial for Mary Brown's back in the day and the advertised price they always had at the bottom: A little more in Labrador. Well, guess what? That goes for construction companies too and developers.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

Seeing no further speakers.

Shall the resolution carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The resolution is carried.

On motion, resolution carried.

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Clause 1 is carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 6 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 6 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Clauses 2 thorough 6 is carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 6 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, the enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province.

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The long title carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 73 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 73.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 73.

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.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

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

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report that the Committee have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

When shall the report be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that the resolution be now read a first time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province a sum of money not exceeding \$2,800,000,000."

On motion, resolution read a first time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that the resolution be now read a second time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province a sum of money not exceeding \$2,800,000,000."

On motion, resolution read a second time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province, Bill 73, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province, Bill 73, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province," carried. (Bill 73)

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province. (Bill 73)

On motion, Bill 73 read a first time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that Bill 73 be now read a second time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province. (Bill 73)

On motion, Bill 73 read a second time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that Bill 73 be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 73 be read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province. (Bill 73)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Authorize the Raising of Money by Way of Loan by the Province," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 73)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, that An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act, Bill 75, be now read a third time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act. (Bill 75)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 75)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: The motion is that we do adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.