



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume L

SECOND SESSION

Number 86

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Thursday

November 7, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Welcome to this House of Assembly. I would, first of all, like to recognize in the Speaker's gallery, Dan Gambin from Jersey side, Placentia. He is joined by his family and they are here today for a Member's statement.

Very much welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In the public gallery today, I would like to recognize Gail Weir, Jonathan Weir, Bridget Canning and Ron Joy. They are family and friends of the late Harvey Weir and are joining us this afternoon also for a Member's Statement.

Welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also for a Member's Statement I would like to welcome Zach Senior. He is here with his father, Richard; mom, Jennifer; brother, Ben; and other family members.

Welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I would also like to recognize Sherry Hillier, president of CUPE NL.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: And a couple of friends of mine, Brenda King and Jim Beehan.

Welcome to you all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we will hear from the hon. Members for the Districts of Stephenville - Port au Port, Terra Nova, St. John's Centre, Placentia West - Bellevue and Placentia - St. Mary's.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

In small rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, neighbours helping each other and working together on projects is a common occurrence.

On Saturday, September 7, 2024, the small community of Campbells Creek on the Port au Port Peninsula was the site where several families gathered to help harvest their chickens.

This venture began three years ago, when Gary MacDonald decided he was going to try his hand at raising some broiler chickens. It was an eight-week commitment but with the help of family, neighbours and friends, he knew it was doable. With the cost of heat lamps and a chicken coop, the chicks ended up not being the bargain price he hoped for, but the succulent birds and community enthusiasm made the endeavour worthwhile.

The following spring, Gary received several requests to raise extra birds for other community members with the agreement that the cost would be split equally. Fast-forward to today, this September, friends and neighbours gathered to lend a hand on harvest day. Everyone had a job and the process was rewarding for all.

There is no doubt the people of Campbells Creek, Gary's deceased father and grandparents included, are watching

proudly as young MacDonald is reviving the lifestyle of yesteryear.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Remembrance Day approaches, today I stand on behalf of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. To the soldiers, the sailors and the airmen who served before me, the ones I served with and those who continue to serve today from the bottom of all our hearts, we thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: The sacrifice that you and your families have made so that we can live with the peace and freedoms that we know today are immeasurable. The loss of life, the injuries and the continued mental anguish can never be repaid. What we can do is remember, our lives today are because of the sacrifices made in the past and the present.

As a former soldier, I always thought I understood everything associated with the sacrifices. It wasn't until I stood in the trenches of Beaumont-Hamel that I realized what our today is and that is because of the sacrifices of all of those who have come before us and those that have followed.

As Monday approaches, it gives me a great honour, not only to remember, but to say thank you. Thank you to my colleague from Baie Verte Peninsula, Mr. Lin Paddock – I know I'm not supposed to say his name, but I think it's appropriate here – for his esteemed career and sacrifice. Thank you to all the men and women who sacrificed and served so that we could have a better

life and enjoy the freedoms that we have today.

“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.”

SOME HON. MEMBERS: We will remember them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

I next call on the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Harvey Weir was an education pioneer, innovator and lifelong learner.

Harvey was born in Hickman's Harbour in 1942 and grew up in Clarendville. He entered Memorial University in 1958 on an Electoral District Scholarship. At 17, he became principal and Grade 6 to 10 teacher in Deep Bight's two-room school. He formed a school hockey team, two youth groups and organized Christmas concerts.

Physics and technology were not part of the school curriculum, but Harvey was reading about them from a young age. He returned to MUN, switched majors, began teaching physics at PWC in 1964 and joined Memorial's physics department in 1967.

Harvey used video-taped tutorials for distance education and conducted professional development through the 1970s and '80s for high school physics teachers.

When Industry Canada looked to connect schools to the Internet in the 1990s, Harvey stepped forward. As executive director of

STEM~Net, he led provincial schools into the information age and worked tirelessly to ensure rural schools were on equal footing with their urban counterparts.

In retirement, Harvey taught himself the button accordion, developed a website to teach others, offered free online lessons during Covid and was teaching until a month before his passing in January 2024 at 81.

Speaker, I ask the Members of this House to join me in congratulating the life's work of a lifelong learner, Harvey Weir.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today, I rise to acknowledge an act of heroism that occurred on the Burin Peninsula in the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

On October 23, a collision took place on the Red Harbour River West Bridge and 15-year-old Zachary Senior acted swiftly in saving the lives of himself, his brother Ben and his mother Jennifer, who are joining us today.

The family were returning to Parker's Cove after Ben's hockey practice in Marystown, where Zach is also a volunteer junior coach. As they approached the construction site on the bridge, they were struck head-on by an oncoming vehicle.

Their vehicle immediately became engulfed in flames and they soon realized that the doors were jammed due to the collision and they were trapped inside. Zach, without panic, kicked his door open, helped his mother to safety and then freed the rear

door to pull his brother out of the burning vehicle.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to please join me in acknowledging young Zachary Senior for his act of heroism and bravery. Zachary's quick actions prevented a tragic situation from occurring and all that was lost was burnt hockey gear and bookbags, which have been replaced.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Dan Gambin is an 83-year-old gentleman who operated a successful business in Jerseyville, Placentia. He is a musician and volunteer, who, despite being diagnosed with dementia about two years ago, is still playing and volunteering in his community.

As a young boy wanting to be a musician growing up in Clattice Harbour, Placentia Bay, he acquired his first instrument, the accordion, at the age of 10 by fishing and selling squid. He made his first guitar by using some of his own materials and sending away for strings and keys.

Dan has played a variety of instruments with several bands over the years, many times as a volunteer, with the most recent being the Best Kind band. This group was formed during COVID and has become a great support in helping Dan remember practices or gigs at churches, seniors' homes and other community events.

Dan volunteers his services and musical talent in numerous ways, including providing sound systems for Remembrance Day celebrations, cemetery masses and other community events.

Music has been and continues to be his passion and his music career shows no signs of slowing down.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Everyone.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Speaker, as we approach Remembrance Day, I rise in this hon. House to reflect on the sacrifices made by Newfoundland and Labrador veterans for the rights and freedoms, the democracy, that we enjoy today.

During the First World War, 12,000 men from the then Dominion of Newfoundland volunteered to help the war efforts. Women volunteered as nurses overseas, while others rallied the troops in support here at home.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, we lost a generation of young men during that war, brothers, fathers, friends, our sons who never came home. The bravery and grit they demonstrated were unmatched on the battle field and, as a result, the regiment was given the title "Royal" – the only military unit to receive this title during the First World War.

In May, we all had the pleasure and special moment of bringing the remains of a First World War Royal Newfoundland Regiment soldier home from the battlefields of Northern France. On July 1, we laid him to rest at the National War Memorial in St. John's in his new home. His tomb overlooks the St. John's Harbour where he and so many of his friends and other young men left with high spirits and bravery, determined to fight for king, for country and for freedom.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in a moment of silence to remember the sacrifices of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians during armed conflict.

At the going of the sun and in the mourning, we will remember them.

Lest We Forget and God Guard Thee, Newfoundland and Labrador.

(Moment of Silence.)

SPEAKER: Thank you all.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Remembrance Day is a solemn, yet important, occasion to honour the courageous efforts of the men and women who have served in our Armed Forces both past and present. We reflect on their bravery, selflessness and dedication. I especially wish to remember those who were injured or lost serving the Dominion of Newfoundland and our country of Canada.

As the Premier noted, we lost a generation during the First World War. The sacrifices of these brave men will be forever remembered by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who visit our Unknown Soldier overlooking St. John's Harbour. By observing this day, we acknowledge the cost of war and reaffirm our commitment to peace. It reminds us that the freedoms we enjoy today are not without price and encourages future generations to work toward a world where conflict is resolved through dialogue, not violence.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the members of the Royal Canadian Legion for their continued efforts towards making a difference in the lives of veterans and their

families and remembering the men and women who sacrificed for our country.

To my two colleagues here in the House of Assembly: Thank you for your service.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I recognize the hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

To remember and honour our veterans, the National Poppy Campaign slogan is Lest We Forget. In September, I had the honour of accompanying a provincial delegation to visit the caribou monument and battlefields of Gallipoli. Now, while it was a privilege to lay a wreath, the most poignant moment for me was standing at the grave of a 17-year-old Newfoundland soldier. That was the age of the students I taught at high school. That's when you realize, I guess, the enormity of the sacrifice.

Speaker, as we all wear poppies to commemorate the tragedies of armed conflict, the greatest honour we can give to the memories of those who made and paid that ultimate sacrifice is to stand strong in the pursuit of peace.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

The last phase of the Team Gushue Highway was identified as a key provincial infrastructure priority, involving the completion of a north-south arterial highway route in St. John's and Mount Pearl.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: It's a project that will provide significant benefits for years to come. That is why I was delighted to join our Premier in September to announce the awarding of a contract for \$30 million to Bursey Excavating and Development for its completion. Might I add, as well, someone who is part of the namesake of Team Gushue.

Once completed, this highway will provide an alternate and more efficient route for residents on the Southern Avalon to access key provincial services and infrastructure, including this province's largest health care facilities and post-secondary facilities. This project will alleviate traffic congestion, improve safety and enhance access to and from the cities of St. John's, Mount Pearl and the surrounding urban and rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, this highway represents more than just asphalt and concrete. It symbolizes our government's commitment to improving the quality of life for the people of the Southern Avalon and improving connectivity. First envisioned in the 1970s, its impact will be felt throughout the broader community, strengthening our economic foundation and providing benefits for residents, including safety.

I'm also delighted to inform this hon. House that construction on that multi-year project began a few weeks ago, with an anticipated completion date in the fall of 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. MCKENNA: I would like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

Actual improvements to this province's infrastructure are always welcomed by the PC caucus. However, the Team Gushue Highway has been announced on multiple occasions. It's beyond time to get it done.

We hope that this long-delayed project will finally see completion. While the minister pats himself on the back for the reannouncement and talks about highway safety, I urge the minister to look at brush cutting. There are simply too many roads in this province where branches are blocking signs, where moose can hide. Brush is posing a safety risk in too many places.

Thank you.

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'm glad to see the project is getting started. Many roads in rural Newfoundland and Labrador are in need of repairs, brush cutting and new signage. There are also many bridges in rural Newfoundland that are in need for repairs and replacement.

So we, in the NDP caucus, call upon government to get more rural roads repaired.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I recently spoke to a family on the West Coast whose mother suffered a stroke and survived. Instead of being offered rehab, the family was offered a bed in palliative care.

Speaker, I ask the Premier: Why is this mother being denied a chance?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

I wish that family nothing but the best and full recovery. I can't comment on the specifics of clinical care. I can say that I do trust the medical professionals across our province. They are some of the best, if not the best, in the entire world, the best educated, and I can tell you there is a significant amount of compassion by those trained medical professionals in the field.

I'm sorry that that family is going through that stress and strain. I encourage them to talk to the medical professionals that are looking after that particular patient.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, since April, the family has been denied rehab at the Miller Centre – since April. Yet, their mother has showed improvement because of the efforts of her elderly father and her family.

Again, I ask: Why are patients in rural Newfoundland and Labrador being denied help?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'm not familiar with the exact specifics of that particular case. I would be happy to talk to the patient and their family to have a better understanding of the particular issue.

I will say that medical professionals, and not politicians, do direct the care of individual cases. If there are particular specific issues that pertains to her care, we welcome the complaint if there is a complaint. We welcome feedback about the system. There are plenty of opportunities within the system to provide that but should they feel that they want to express it to me as a Premier, I would be happy to hear it as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, this family has written. They have written the minister. They have written the health care system. They've gone and tried and tried and tried. And to the Premier's comments, a neurologist in June recommended that she receive aggressive rehabilitation, yet she was still denied a transfer to the Miller Centre. The only specialist to ever physically examine her was also overruled.

Speaker, why is rehab in rural Newfoundland and Labrador being denied?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I can't comment on the clinical decision-making of that particular case, Mr. Speaker. If there is an issue, I'm happy to

have the department address it. But oftentimes, and I can tell you as a medical professional myself in the system, it involves medical professionals speaking to medical professionals about the particulars and the specifics of a clinical case as it pertains to the pathology and the potential for recovery.

I notice that the Member opposite initially said palliative care and then moved to rehab. That's a difficult dissonance to reconcile. But I would be happy to learn more about the specifics of the case.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, unfortunately, this is not one of. This has become a systemic issue in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Again, I have to point out that this family has reached out to health professionals; they've reached out to the minister's office. So this is the last stop. They've come to me and asked me to bring it to the House of Assembly.

That should not happen. I totally agree that we should not have to do that. The minister ought to know, the department ought to know, the health authority ought to know and we ought to be able to help people like this.

Speaker, a family waiting 10 months now for a hospital, after being written off by our health system. This lady deserves a chance.

I ask, why?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly empathetic towards the family and the stress and strain that this has caused to them. Again, clinicians direct clinical care, not politicians. That's the way the system should work.

But, that said, clinicians make mistakes sometimes as well, Mr. Speaker, and there is opportunity within the system for them to advance complaints. It's unfortunate that it has had to come to the House of Assembly for us to talk about specifics of a case that I'm not familiar with. But, as a clinician myself, I'm happy to discuss the particular details with that particular family.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, it should never have to come to the House of Assembly. This family, as I said, have been dealing with the health system in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the health system under this Liberal government is failing people in Newfoundland and Labrador, failing this mother.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the Town of Cape St. George has a medical clinic in the town with no doctor and no nurse practitioner. They have to take a two-hour return trip to Stephenville to either line up in emergency or pay to see a nurse practitioner.

I ask the Premier: Is this the future of health care in rural Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said when I was in this House previously this week, rural Newfoundland

and Labrador is a difficult place to recruit and retain physicians, but that doesn't mean that NLHS and the Department of Health isn't continually working on it. We work on it every single day, Speaker, trust me. The efforts and the amount of time spent talking about how to retain and recruit Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and people from all over the world to all communities throughout our province is a top priority.

We're working on it. We have incentives. They have worked. We are seeing an increase of physicians coming to Newfoundland and Labrador. More people are being approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons; more physicians are coming here; more nurses are coming here. It is starting to get better and rural Newfoundland is as, if not more, important than other parts of the province, like urban St. John's.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, a senior and his wife waited 2½ years for a family doctor. After only eight months, they were told the doctor was leaving the province – so much for retention. They've now been told that they have to go to the bottom of the wait-list.

Premier, is this the future of health care in rural Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The future of health care in Newfoundland and Labrador is laid out very clearly in Health Accord NL. I heard the Opposition

Leader this week say that he thinks it's a great document. What we would call it is a plan. We do have a plan for health care in Newfoundland and Labrador and it is starting to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Having said that, of course, we know there are individuals who don't have access to primary health care right now and it is important that we continue to work on that. I think the number that we talked about this week is 50,000 people are on Patient Connect.

That number has gone down over the past several months, Speaker, and I can assure you over the next month it will go down again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Execution of the Health Accord is the problem, Speaker. It's that execution. I correct the minister, too, according to the NLMA yesterday, released from a Narrative poll, 163,000 people don't have a family doctor in this province. I trust their numbers. They've reached out to people in this province.

Speaker, so much for recruitment and retention, even more bizarre is that he's not allowed to see a doctor in his local community but must travel out of town to a clinic down the road.

Again, does this make sense to the Premier?

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

J. HOGAN: So I apologize, I missed the end of that question, but I'll just continue to talk about access to primary health care in Newfoundland and Labrador. We did talk about a CIHI report that talked about almost 80 per cent of Newfoundlanders having access to primary health care and that report was from a couple of years ago, before the Health Accord was commissioned and before we put the Health Accord execution plan into place.

One person who doesn't have access to primary health care is one person too many. We acknowledge that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We are continuing to work on it. The numbers have gone down and they're going to continue to go down, Speaker.

Thank you.

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

You know, it's indirect comments, Speaker, that I wonder – so is the minister and the Premier – are you saying that the NLMA are lying, are misleading the public? Because I think that's offensive. They should be offended. I find it offensive that they would say that after the great work they do in so-called delivering health care in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: One hundred and sixty-three thousand people, I trust them. They want to see better. They want us to do better and we promise we will do better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, NL Health Services are now refusing to release the number of bodies in freezers in the parking garage at the Health Sciences Centre.

I ask the minister: How many bodies are in the parking garage at the Health Sciences Centre today?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe we can just take an opportunity to address the preamble and then the minister can, on the next question, perhaps address the body of the question.

We certainly value the NLMA. In fact, I'm a member of the NLMA. I have great respect for the president of the NLMA. We discussed some issues yesterday and will continue to have meetings going forward, Mr. Speaker. The NLMA were involved in the Health Accord.

We both think the same thing, that if one person, one family in Newfoundland and Labrador doesn't have access to primary care, then that's one too many and we're endeavouring, together with the NLMA, to fix it.

So whether it's 160,000 or 120,000 or 80 per cent or 70 per cent, the fact of the matter is that we are endeavouring to make sure that everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador has access to primary health care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The problem the Premier needs to realize is the numbers are going up under his watch. It's gone from 10 per cent to 30 per cent. That's the key point and you are indirectly saying that the NLMA are not telling the truth. We believe them.

I'll ask the question again without full preamble: How many bodies are presently

in the parking garage at the Health Sciences Centre?

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

J. HOGAN: I just want to make sure that the facts are on the record here. Well, I've said it a few times already. The numbers for people who have access to primary care has gone down since this Premier has come into office.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: As for the question, I'm not sure the exact numbers and I'm not exactly sure I'm supposed to disclose them for privacy reasons, but there are, obviously, a number of bodies there. Some which are the responsibility of NLHS, some are with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner under his legislative provisions and some with the Office of the Public Trustee as he works with families to deal with the remains.

However, if the Member looks at the Order Paper, at Order 15, Bill 85, there is An Act to Amend the Provincial Health Authority Act and the Fatalities Investigation Act. The purpose of this act will be to deal with bodies that are there, that, really through a loophole, no one is able to deal with. So we are addressing the issue. It will be debated in this House over the next couple of weeks.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I will remind the minister once again his numbers are off. It went from 10 to 20 and now we're at 30 per cent. That's the number we're dealing with. That's the number we'll stick to and until the numbers start going in the other direction, down, we will maintain

criticism of this government for the health care delivery of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: I can do that math, Premier, don't worry about that.

Speaker, I'm not asking for names or any identifying information. These people deserve a respectful and proper burial, but government's answer is to buy more freezers and move the issue out of sight.

Again: How many people are in those freezers? It is a simple question for the minister.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

A simple answer, too, as I said, I can't disclose the number for privacy reasons, but there are –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I don't tolerate heckling at all.

Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HOGAN: There are authorities to deal with remains that are unclaimed or families who are unable to afford, and as we've discovered over the last year, there is a loophole, really, that there are bodies over there that can't be dealt with by the Chief Medical Examiner, by NLHS or by the Public Trustee. That is why we have a notice on the Order Paper, An Act to Amend the Provincial Health Authority Act and the

Fatalities Investigation Act, that will close that loophole.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, just to clarify to the House here, the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development announced the number was at 30 in July. I was at the media centre and he announced it was 30. We are looking for an update on that number. So the number was released at 30 and now all of a sudden it is a secret.

I'll simplify this really easy: After 10 months, why can't we offer these people a proper burial?

Simple question and it is the right thing to do, Minister – a proper burial.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

So believe it or not, I agree with the Member for Conception Bay South. We need to get these people a proper burial. Some of these bodies are under the authority of the Chief Medical Examiner, some are under the authority of the Public Trustee, who is dealing with family members and I don't know of the situation of why that body hasn't been taken from the morgue yet and buried. It might be a decision of the family. They might be working on information. They might want family members to come home to a funeral. I do not know the answer to that, Speaker.

However, since this issue has come up and extra bodies were there, we now know that we have to do something legislatively to

deal with that loophole. We are going to do it; it will be done in this session of the House. I understand from the conversation here today that everyone will agree to this and pass this piece of legislation in the next couple of weeks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

On June 19, a constituent of mine in the District of Bonavista suffered a medical emergency and collapsed. With him unresponsive, his wife called for an ambulance. Almost an hour passed and no ambulance responded – yes, almost a full hour.

Speaker, how could this happen?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, nobody should have to wait that length of time for an ambulance. I'm not here to defend a situation like that, but of course we are working on improving the ambulance system in this province.

I'm going to talk about our plan again, the Health Accord NL. One of the key components of that was integrating air and road ambulance in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We've done that with the road. So rather than have a patchwork of ambulances throughout the province, we now have one single system which is easier to manage, easier to rely on and easier to see where each ambulance is in the province. That is going to cut down wait times. The plan is working, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the plan is working. I'm not sure if the minister listened to the statement fully, but thankfully, this gentleman in question regained consciousness and, with the help of his family and neighbours, was okay. However, the area is obviously concerned that, in an emergency situation, the call for help was not responded.

I would like to ask the minister: Would it be appropriate to expect that a contingency for every situation would be in place today?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said, no one should have to wait that long for an ambulance. I didn't say it was okay.

We are working on the ambulance situation in this province. I've talked to people in the department, and they said this has been an issue for years and years and years and, finally, this government is the one who is doing something to make (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I have no –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Please proceed. I want to hear from the minister and the minister only. Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

We are working on it. Things are going to get better as we integrate this ambulance road and air system throughout the province. However, again, I'm happy to discuss these.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, this particular matter has been raised with the minister's department, who indicated that three of the four ambulances in the region were doing transfers during the period in question, leaving the residents vulnerable.

Again, I would ask the system that he has touted that is working well, would effective planning allow for contingencies in all circumstances and not have a person with an emergency call waiting an hour?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, as I said, no one should have to wait an hour for an ambulance. This is why we've created a single network throughout the province, air and road ambulance system.

This was the situation we were dealt with and this is the situation we're addressing. It will cut down on ambulance times. It will have ambulances available, either through the roads or through the air throughout the province so people can get the health care they deserve, and people can get the health care that's outlined in our plan, in Health Accord NL.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, the official answer my office got back was: It's just an unfortunate and unavoidable coincidence that they all happened to occur in a short time frame – meaning the ambulance is being deployed elsewhere.

Speaker, when we look at the emergency coverage for the residents of Bonavista, we all agree now from the questions that it needs to be reviewed.

The question would be asked: Can we expect an immediate review that would cover all contingencies for those living in rural Newfoundland?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'm happy to hear about specifics in the House of Assembly. I have no issue with people raising them; I just can't comment on them.

If the Member has reached out to my office and we have responded, I'm happy to look at that and go back, and talk about this specific situation, what occurred. We can review it to make sure it doesn't happen again. However, we don't need to review what we're doing; we know what we're doing. We are integrating road and air ambulance throughout the province so we don't have a patchwork of systems where people can't talk to each other, we don't know where one ambulance is at one time, we can't communicate with that ambulance. We will know that the closest ambulance will be able to go to an emergency because we have control over the whole network.

It doesn't need to be reviewed. We know what we want to do. We're going to do it. Things are getting better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday after raising questions in the House of Assembly, I received a call from the father of the CBS shooting victim, who provided some horrific and tragic details. He drove 15 to 20 minutes to find his son bleeding and in shock. He couldn't wait for the ambulance to arrive, and he loaded his son onto his own vehicle and drove to the Health Sciences Centre. Speaker, he's not sure if an ambulance actually arrived.

After raising this issue yesterday, can the minister now confirm whether an ambulance did arrive on scene?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, let me just say that I feel so terrible for that family. I've been in a situation when I had to take my very young son – who's still young, he's not even three years old yet – and needed an ambulance to take him to the hospital. He couldn't breathe.

Look, I understand that, and it's unacceptable if the health care is not available. However, I don't know if an ambulance arrived, because I don't know who this family is, and if I did, I wouldn't be able to speak about it in the House of Assembly.

If this family wants to contact me and tell me about their situation and complain about it and tell me that it wasn't good enough, I will talk to that family and I will meet with that family, and I will work with every single Newfoundlander and Labradorian to make sure it doesn't happen again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I can empathize with the minister on his son, and how tragic it is to try and get an ambulance and get service on this. In this particular situation, this gentlemen's son could have bled to death. Imagine getting a call, your son has been shot and you arrive on scene, and you find police but no paramedics.

Speaker, this is a shocking failure of the provincial ambulance service. I understood that a quick call could tell you if an ambulance was dispatched or not. Will the minister, in this particular instance, commit to a thorough review and release those findings to the public?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'll just repeat what I said.

If he wants to give me the specifics of this family, I am happy to meet with them to discuss the situation, and whatever we can do to make them feel better that we are looking at it, that we are working on specific situations like that, I will do that.

However, I will say that when the road and air ambulance is integrated totally, we will have dynamic ability to send ambulances to situations that are emergent like this. This is the point of integrating the system throughout Newfoundland and Labrador so that we avoid tragic or potentially tragic situations like this in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Speaker, while the Premier was quick to offer help to those displaced by

the Driftwood Inn fire, parents and families I have spoken to have not heard a peep from the insurance company or government. Many have lost expensive personal effects, such as cell phones and Chromebooks, which students need for school.

When will these families receive help and not promises?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did have the opportunity to talk to the children and the teachers and the coaches involved after the Driftwood Inn fire. I understood that the department was working with them to help replace any lost items. If that's not the case, then certainly I am happy to follow up and ensure that that is the case.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Speaker, they haven't heard from anyone.

Many escaped the inferno with just the shirt on their backs, and while they are grateful for the emergency assistance offered the day of the fire, clothes, electronics and school property all need to be replaced.

Again, the Premier was quick to make promises, when will he take action?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I would thank the Member opposite for the opportunity to speak to those that were affected by that.

If there are any students in our school system right now that have difficulty with their devices, if there are devices that need to be replaced – Chromebooks or otherwise – that they need for their day-to-day operations in school, we will certainly work with those families and get those as soon as possible. So I do encourage those families to reach out directly to the Department of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It has been over two weeks since a tragic fire at the Driftwood Inn that claimed one life and, only for the heroic efforts of Melinda Sharpe, it could have been much, much worse.

Given the serious questions that have been raised about the building, has the minister received an interim report from the fire commissioner?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's an ongoing investigation, including the fire commissioner as well as the RCMP in this situation. I can't speak to specifics about that, but the second the report is received, it will be released.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know the importance of the report because obviously the report is going to ensure that it doesn't happen again in short time. It could've been a lot worse.

Speaker, parents and children we have spoken to say there was no fire suppression system, no warnings, no alarms that alerted sleeping hotel guests.

Can the minister table the last fire inspection of this specific hotel, please?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question, it's an important one.

Any commercial property in this province, the owner of that commercial property is responsible for the National Building Code of Canada and the National Fire Protection Association codes. All of those things are the responsibility of the owner of the property that is in question.

The fire commissioner is willing, more than willing, to work with any owner of a facility that has questions or concerns. But as a manager of a facility prior to politics, I can tell you that is a responsibility that lies on the manager of the facility and they should be ensuring that all the life safety equipment is up to code, tested and ensure that it's operational, because the public needs it.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Time for one more short question.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Very short, Speaker, thank you.

Given the minister's failure, what other inspections has his department failed to do?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While the Member chooses to go low, I'll remain high.

I don't micromanage the department. In terms of inspectors – and I'll address it at a later date in terms of the response from yesterday – what we've done, as a department, in terms of inspectors, we did a market adjustment, which is a recruitment and retention bonus. Right now, we have three filled positions. We're looking at other options to bring in more so we can deal with that backlog that he referenced yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, it shouldn't take two letters and an email from us to get the Department of Education to approve seven essential English as an additional language positions and funding approval for software needed by them to support their students, but that's exactly what it took.

I ask the minister: Why isn't she listening to the needs of teachers?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to respond.

When we have students that come into the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador they're assessed for their need for supports, then the resources are allocated based on what each individual student may need. So it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. We have time that's invested into ensuring that the resources that are distributed are most appropriate for the students and we'll continue to do that.

That's the process that has been unfolding thus far and it's been working successfully in our classrooms.

But right now, there's an increase of 26 units, compared to the allocation that was previously allocated last year and we'll continue to build on the supports for these students.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Speaker, I wrote these letters in October, two months into the school year because concerned EAL itinerant teachers contacted me. Department officials told them not to expect to do things the way they did prior to integration. There was no dedicated budget for software or the resources.

Will the minister simply admit that the only reason her department acted was out of damage control and to avoid embarrassment in the House of Assembly, and not out of concern for students or teachers?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

Right now, I'm pleased to report that we have 65 units allocated for resources based in our EAL spaces. So we're continuing to build on that. We have an additional seven positions approved and recruitment is ongoing for these.

I can't knit the teachers here; if I could, I would, but we're recruiting for those positions and hoping to be successful and have those resources in place as soon as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we were disappointed that our amendment for the paid sick days was not approved in the House seeing that it was out of scope for the amendment to the *Labour Standards Act*.

So now I ask the Premier: Will your government bring in legislation to bring in paid sick leave for workers of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. Any time we're looking at the minimum standards with respect to labour standards, we're going to continue to always be approachable with our colleagues with respect to the unions and the employers. We're going to continue to be reactive to the discussions that we have with those individuals and we'll always make those adjustments when we can find the commonality that works well for those things.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Speaker, today we have CUPE workers in the gallery who want action. Health care workers have been treated unfairly by this government. Government cherry-picked bonus for health care support service workers that keep our health care system together. Some of these workers don't even make a living wage.

I ask the Premier: When is this government going to treat every health care worker with the respect they deserve and give them the

wages that they deserve for the work they do in this province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

(Disturbance in the gallery.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'd like to remind our folks in the public gallery, please do not express any reaction.

Thank you.

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

S. COADY: I appreciate the question, Speaker, and I will say, on behalf of all of us here in the House of Assembly, that we want to thank the workers of the province –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: – the strong and dedicated public service that we do have. We know they work hard every single day.

I can advise the House that we have reached agreement with 30 collective agreements in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We certainly will continue to successfully negotiate with unions on an ongoing basis and are always open to having discussions with them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We're two months into the school year and well over two years since the integration of the NLESD into the Department of Education was announced and still there is no plan to resource English as an additional language or address the student support services and violence in the classroom.

Is this the lackadaisical and lazy approach to planning that our school communities can expect from the minister?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll reiterate what I had said previously in my response, that this current school year has 65 units allocated and have been filled for English as a second language or EAL teachers. That's based on a formula of data for enrolment as well as the needs that have been assessed of the students.

This is an increase of 26 units compared to the allocation for previous years. As I said, recently there was an additional seven positions that have been approved. We are currently recruiting for those positions and hope to have them filled in the near future.

If the Member opposite is aware of anybody who is qualified for those positions, then please bring the names forward and we'll get them hired right away.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The time for Oral Questions has ended.

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

A. PARSONS: I'm pleased to stand in the House today to table the 2023-2024 Annual Report for the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, in

accordance with section 29 of the *Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Newfoundland and Labrador Act*.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If I can, which I said I would do yesterday, in terms of response on the inspections and the backlog, recognizing that is not acceptable, I agree with that. But at the same time, what are we doing, when the Member opposite says: The government is not doing their job.

Well, it's not me that is doing those inspections. It's the hard-working people in the department who are doing that. So that's not fair to them. They work hard doing what they can with the resources that they have.

But we did go through a market adjustment on those particular positions. We do have three full-time positions. One is nearing completion in terms of certification and then will be employed. We are looking at other means that I will be enlightening this House in the near future on other options that we can do to go after that backlog.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to bring that to the floor, which I said I would do, to clarify my non-answer from yesterday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the background to this petition: The Department of Education promotes inclusive education as a cornerstone of educational policy in Newfoundland and Labrador, promising to accommodate all students equitably. In it is (i) insufficient support staff; (ii) inadequate classroom accommodations; (iii) lack of transparency and communication between school and home.

Mr. Speaker, I presented several –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm having difficulty hearing the Member.

Thank you.

Please continue.

E. JOYCE: Thank you.

I presented several petitions, so did my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, on this. I know the Leader of the Third Party has been heavily involved helping with the situation in Corner Brook mainly and all across the province. I understand that the minister is going to have a review to see how we could do this better for next year. I commend the minister for that.

I just want to also mention that I will be putting on their site the exceptionalities for students. What the minister said and gave me permission to do is that any students who do not have the number of student assistant hours that they feel they need, contact me, I'll present it to the minister and the minister will look at that. I just want to commend the minister for that personal step, because it is very important that the parents and the children be heard right now. Here it is now in November, but this here should be taken care of in September before the school even starts.

I just want to say to the minister that I'll put it on the site. Tuesday I'll have a list of parents and kids, children, who feel they should have extra hours or the reason why they haven't got the same amount as last year. So I'll hand it to the department and you can deal with the parents directly, with the schools and the Department of Education.

I thank the minister for that, for helping out the children and the parents themselves.

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 Northern Labrador residents are provided with access to timely and adequate mental health care.

Northern Labrador communities have long suffered the harmful impacts of government policies that have resulted in intergenerational trauma.

We witness the highest rates of suicide compared to the regions. Survivors of suicide often suffer serious adverse mental health issues.

We witness deteriorating physical wellness, such as diabetes and heart disease in many survivors of unresolved trauma. We witness increased children in care in our communities that are often tied to unresolved intergenerational trauma.

Now, Speaker, I talk a lot about access to timely and adequate health care. That includes mental health because we know about the stress and anxiety of patients who can't get out to their appointments but, just as importantly, can't get back. They've gone out for their hospital appointment, their treatment, their surgery and they're stuck in Goose Bay and that creates a lot of trauma. That creates a lot of anxiety because of the responsibilities they have at home.

They're losing pay from their work. They lost all their leave. Often, patients don't actually have somebody secured to look after their children, after their appointments, and they have to deal with that stress and anxiety. Getting out to your appointment is just one part of the solution. The solution is we have to be able to get our patients out to access timely, adequate health care and we have to make sure we get them home.

Speaker, this petition is signed by the residents in Hopedale. How many times do people from Hopedale call me, they're stuck. It's Thursday, they're not going to get home Friday and they're going to be stuck all weekend. You imagine the trauma; you imagine the stress of – and a lot of houses are heated by wood. Keeping that wood stove going creates a lot of responsibility.

The cost of electricity in Northern Labrador is over 19 cents a kilowatt hour. When people are using electric heat, people can't afford that. Access to health care addresses mental health issues and addresses the physical health issues. Somebody has got to step up and make sure we have enough seats on those planes, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is the equal treatment for health care workers. These are the reasons for the petition: While doctors and nurses are important, our medical system would fail without the support service workers that keep medical records updated, manage appointments, maintain computer systems and provide food and laundry services.

Government used to be the employer of choice, offering sufficient income to live comfortably. Now, support service workers are being forced to move back in with their parents or to utilize food banks in order to afford to live.

Government has undermined the solidarity of CUPE with their piecemeal approach to addressing wage stagnation. Most recently, government made a deal with PCAs, leaving the rest of the CUPE family behind. This is a reminder that when someone struggles, we all struggle and that we must lift each other up. It calls for equal treatment and promotes solidarity.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to treat every health care worker with the same respect and to raise the wages of every health care worker to be a living wage, so that those who manage our health are not just barely surviving.

Speaker, if you read the news release that was put out by CUPE today, you get a strong sense of the hurt that has been caused and contradicts what the Minister of Finance said recently about how important the workers are, because they are not feeling important.

Words are cheap, but they need to be backed up with actions – actual tangible actions. It is about respect, it is about

recognition and it is about acknowledgement for the value of the work they do.

I met a worker recently who works in the hospital system, but also works outside in a private care home to make ends meet. That is well more than 40 hours a week just to keep ahead of it all.

So we recently met with two unions representing health care professionals and what they told us is the exact same thing we hear time and time again from the peers in the system: respect your workers. For a long time, health care professionals feel that government, their employer, doesn't respect them.

I heard that from a health care worker who works in maintenance at an event this weekend at the Legion. Very clearly, it seems that government will give attention to those health care workers who are in the media and ignore everyone else.

And that's a shame because in any industry, it is the front-line workers who can tell you how to fix a lot of the problems they come up with because they have hands-on knowledge and experience to do so. We heard how much these front-line workers were respected in COVID. It is time to show that respect now in a tangible way.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. MCKENNA: Speaker, the residents of Carmanville and area lost their RCMP detachment a little over a year ago. In that time, residents have seen an increase in speeding, theft and other criminal activity. The closure has created a void in policing services for the residents of the area after years of service. The region is now served by Gander detachment, an hour away,

creating long response time and less visibility of a police presence.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to express their concerns over the lack of policing within the region and have the Carmanville detachment reinstated immediately.

Speaker, I have had meetings with the Town of Stoneville on this matter, the Town of Carmanville and the Town of Musgrave Harbour. That area entails right from Farewell right to Musgrave Harbour under the Carmanville detachment.

There is a lot of criminal activity taking place and, moreover, when we had the ferry crisis last spring, when the residents of Fogo Island and Change Islands had to leave their vehicles in Farewell, to learn the next morning their vehicles were damaged: wheels missing, converters cut off. Of course, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure was also a victim at the time. They pretty well demolished the ticket booth, cash register, whatever was there.

I set up a meeting with myself at the Town of Carmanville with the RCMP staff sergeant and sergeant. They informed us that most of the problem they're having is funding and resources. They went on to say that they could not cover this area from Gander, it's just too large of an area, too big of an area, to do any justice to those communities. They went on to say that the RCMP are paid less than the RNC of this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I next recognize the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

On April 5, 2022, the moratorium on wind development was lifted before the crucial step of creating and enacting proper legislation.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to institute an immediate delay on all renewable energy projects, including, but not limited to, wind and solar energy projects, pending the enactment of comprehensive legislation.

WHEREAS, renewable energy legislation should include, but not be limited to, the following provisions: Effective stakeholder engagement and consultation with the public throughout all stages of planning; regulatory human and natural environmental requirements, as well as decommissioning and restoration; equitable distribution of benefits for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; and compensation for negative impacts on communities and individuals.

WHEREUPON we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to institute an immediate delay on all renewable energy projects until enactment of the comprehensive legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I have over 3,000 names here on these petitions. These petitions were presented to me yesterday outside of the Confederation Building at a rally, signed by people throughout the province. I would say that the main proponents that have concerns about this would be people who would be living in the areas where the different projects are being proposed, whether that be in the Stephenville - Port au Port area, whether it be in the Placentia area, whether it be in, I think, the Botwood area and so on, anywhere where these wind projects have been proposed.

This does not impact myself, my district, the people of my district, I will say that upfront. If anything, there are people, I'm sure, from my district small business owners, who may see the benefit and spinoff certainly in the short term from some of these projects. I'm presenting this today, however, and I agreed to do so because I do believe, I'm a strong proponent, as I'm sure we all are, in of the concept of democracy.

These people just want to make sure that their concerns are registered in the people's House and that their concerns are heard. That is the main reason why I'm presenting it today.

I would say I can understand the concerns they have with the consultation process, as an example. The government, I'm sure, would argue that the environmental assessment process was pretty robust, and it was. I was brought in a box full of documents.

I think the concern that people would have, though, is that when you look at all these reports, it's fine to say we're going to consult with you and people give some feedback, then you produce all these documents, a lot of technical jargon, a lot of stuff that the average person is not going to understand. Then you say: Here you go, here's all this, read it and if you have any questions let us know, if you have any concerns let us know.

That's really the concern they have with it and they're just looking for more opportunity to be able to have some people with expertise on their behalf to be able to –

SPEAKER: The Member's time is expired.

Thank you.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I say thank you to the Member for bringing the petition, we discussed this. I'm very happy to have a chance to stand up here in the House of Assembly and respond. Certainly, I'm going to go through a few things, some of what the Member said and some of the things I've been seeing. Hopefully, with the leave of the other side, if I go a little bit long, I do think it's beneficial for some of what I have to say to be said here.

So what I would say to the Member and to anybody is, I certainly don't mind petitions, certainly don't mind debates, certainly don't mind questions. In fact, I sat on that side so I do have empathy. I know what it's like to sit there and bring issues forward and wonder if the government is listening. I get that, I get that completely and I have no problem with that.

I'll point out that there's nothing I can say or do that will fix every issue that's brought up by everybody, but we're certainly going to try to answer questions. Some of it, I will point out, is not from me, because, as a politician, there is already sometimes a dubiousness as to what I'm saying; it's partisan. But I work in a department that's surrounded by independent civil servants, non-partisan, many who were there before me, many that will be there after me. They don't have a political agenda. They don't have a bias. I believe in their goal to do what they think is a good and positive thing.

In fact, I will point out, sometimes people say: Well, you're not listening. You're not answering. There's a reason, I think, even my colleagues on the other side and colleagues here will say: Well, we do try. For instance, the Member opposite, I had an email here where he called my department to speak to one of the – I think it's the new renewable director – called him on October

4, got an email back that day with the questions answered.

My colleague from Exploits, called me one day and said: Look, I'm hearing from some constituents. Just last week, we had that Zoom call with the constituents and we talked to them. Good questions, tough questions and again these were people who are not generally supportive, but their questions were good.

The Member for Bay of Islands has come to me a number of times. I'm trying to think now, let me see, the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, in fact, we've had multiple conversations. Members on my side, in fact, today, at the beginning during Members' statements, I got an email from an outfitter, I can't remember which district, it's in Central, wrote him back and say: Thank you for your letter, I'm going to read it, going to make sure that the staff read and we'll get back to you.

Again, a lot of this, there are fair, valid questions and concerns. This is something that is new to us. This is something that is important and nobody wants to rush through it. In this province, sadly, we have had megaprojects over the last number of decades that didn't go the way we wanted to. People want to avoid that. I get it, nobody wants to be associated with that.

But at times what is difficult is to counter sometimes the misinformation that is disseminated. It is hard to counter the accusations that are made that in some cases are more personal than they are anything else. That is difficult.

I have to tell you, I'm not going to bother sometimes when somebody sends me an email and says: Oh, you're just a sellout. Well, no, I'm sorry, I'm not going to respond. But if you send me an email and say: I'm wondering about your decommissioning plan. You're going to get a response. It's a good valid question.

In fact, I actually have a copy here of a leaflet that, I think, actually, was disseminated over the last couple of days. We have people that are interested in it. In fact, my colleague, the other Mount Pearl Member, passed it to me and I took the time to go through it. If I have, again, leave of the other side, I can talk about some of the things that we're dealing with there.

So it says here and I'll just refer it, when you say in your second sentence without any caveat to it: If these projects proceed as planned, people are going to get sick. I don't agree with that. What I can say to anybody is that for any project in this province, wind, hydrogen, mining, offshore, fracking, you name it, right now, they go through an environmental assessment process and that is an independent regulator – independent from me. I have no input, no interaction. In fact, it's science based and many times I actually deal with developers, especially on mining, sometimes I deal with developers saying: Man, your regulatory process is killing us. We're trying to get there. We're trying to spend the money. I'm like: Well, that's it. You have to go through this process. These people will, too. In fact, one has gone through the environmental assessment process. The rest are not through it.

I sometimes can get ahead of myself and what I would say is that no one, at this point, owns Crown land; nobody has been given Crown land. The only thing that people have been given is the right to be the exclusive builder of a project on Crown land, if you satisfy all the conditions, including a comprehensive environmental assessment. That is necessary and must happen and, again, I have no input. I don't know what goes on. I don't talk to these people and that's the way it should be.

Yes, I am supportive. Yes, I want to see it happen here. Yes, I want to feed global demand for the product we have here, but if it doesn't pass the environmental muster, the same was as any other resource

development, there it is, I cannot help you with that; you need to satisfy that.

Going down here now. Again, I've got a bunch of notes here because I wanted counters some of the things I am saying, and these are being said, put out there to the average Joe, sees it, reads it, they might think this is the truth. They might think this is gospel. They might think this is fact and a lot of it's not. I'm sorry.

Projects cannot proceed without a release from EA. There it is and then the comment is: A miniscule profit due to the very poor financial deals. Well, I'll say I put out a fiscal framework a number of months back and, by the way, that and every other document since the Renewable Energy Plan we launched in December 2021, it's all there on the website. It's all easily accessible from anybody, anywhere. As I've said before many times, my grandmother's got her iPad, if she wants to access this, she has the ability to access it. She doesn't need to go get the plethora of documents, she can sit down and go through it right now.

Now, we'll go down here. Again, this is all from this thing: The height of the turbines. Now, there's a reason sometimes, Speaker, why you don't engage in debate, because when you're trying to have your word, they don't want to hear the answer and that frustrates me. In fact, I will point out, I went to Corner Brook over a year ago. I went to do a speech to the Chamber of Commerce. I did the speech and as I walked out, I see a crowd of people approaching me, a crowd of people, coming from the courthouse and then I realized what it was. Let's just say that wasn't a friendly conversation. Let's just say people weren't asking me friendly questions. What I heard was cursing at me and then trying to block my car and then trying to not let me get out. So, again, that's not what I call a pleasant debate.

When I speak to the Member for Exploits, he can talk to his constituents and they can

say: Man, at least it was a conversation with a give and take and a question and answer.

Now, again, right here it says: There's no legislation, there are not even any guidelines in place addressing height so the company has full discretion. A couple of things, I think, that are relevant to point out. Projects cannot proceed without a release from EA – full stop.

Right now, I'm proud to say to this House, you will see renewable energy legislation in this House in the coming weeks that will deal with every different development and stage from start to finish into project planning, project operations, decommissioning, rehabilitation, the full gamut will be there. It will be discussed in this House. It will be debated in this House. It will be questioned in this House. We'll have Committee, the same process that we have on anything else. We need to do that. It's going to come.

Again, those are valid questions because we do have a history in this province of where, especially in mining developments, companies came in, developed, left a mess and who's on the hook? All of us as taxpayers. We are not going to have that – full stop. The taxpayer is not going to be on the hook for this. A company will have to do it, they'll have to do a report. The report will have to be accepted and they will have to have the cheque in the bank before you can start, before you get a licence, before you can do anything. So that, hopefully, is a concern that is addressed.

Again, we're talking about windmills not being – again, I apologize, Speaker, but I have leave from the other side.

SPEAKER: I just want to confirm. Do we have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Okay.

A. PARSONS: I think what I'm talking about is of public interest and I'd like to keep talking if that's possible, because I tell you what, I've heard from a lot of Members on both sides and I do think it's relevant and important so I appreciate you're allowing me to do this.

SPEAKER: Please proceed.

A. PARSONS: Again, no land has been awarded. People there talk about it's not going to be safe to live in these project areas.

I just had a meeting on Monday with the ambassador from Denmark, they've been doing wind for 30 years. I'm pretty sure he didn't tell me about any widespread sickness that is permeating that area or any of the other areas in Europe where they are far ahead.

In fact, we had 28 delegations here this week from all around the world, 28 different ambassadors or consulates or countries here, many of them wanting to talk about this and realizing that they have serious energy issues and we have an opportunity to help them. But, again, I come back to the part about sickness in questions, it has to go through an environmental assessment. It has to have a number of experts look at this.

Who in their right mind, of any stripe, is going to want to do something that you knowingly make people sick? None of my friends on the other side, nobody on this side; nobody is going to do that. Again, there's an independent group that will look at this.

Again, offshore wind is the single biggest threat to our marine ecosystem. I mean, that's a matter of question. Personally, that is an issue. There's an EA process. In fact, we have not even – actually, it says right here: Placentia and Fortune Bay are slated for offshore turbines. We haven't even introduced the legislation that will allow for

that to happen. That's not even in the House. There is nothing slated.

Yes, people have been talking about the West Coast. They've been talking about the East Coast. They've been talking about the South Coast for offshore wind for decades. I know when I was in Opposition, I've had those conversations out there in the Leader of the Opposition's area. They were talking about offshore possibilities years ago, but nothing has ever been done. So what I'm saying is that is not true.

Right now, there's legislation that's been passed at the federal level. It's been passed in Nova Scotia. At some point, it will come here and it will be looked at here, but right now there is nothing slated for the offshore. There's nothing allowed for the offshore. We have to put legislation in before that can happen.

I didn't even mention, maybe the biggest threat is climate change, which is one of the other reasons we're trying to help in this issue.

Now, they talk about the cost: it's 50 cents per 1,000 litres of water. Now, when you put that in your big, bold print, yeah, it sounds rough, sounds bad, sounds like we're giving away a resource for zero return, but three things I would point out. One, that is just one part of a Crown land lease fee: wind electricity tax, water use fee, water royalty, the same as we do for any other project.

The second thing is that this is actually less water than is used in current mining projects in this province. It's less water than is already being used in projects that everybody supports. So, again, we have to get context. We have to get facts. In fact, somebody told me that the City of St. John's actually loses more water. They had to do improvements to Elizabeth Avenue because the amount of water they lost every day was more than the water we are talking about here. So I need to put these facts out. I

need to continue to answer the questions and I'll continue to do so.

But sometimes people wonder – and, again, I will point out any email that comes in, if there's an email where they're actually asking a question and looking for a response, we will respond. In fact, we've had numerous people that have written, gotten answers; written, gotten answers. I'm not talking two questions, I'm talking about a two-page email, 35 questions of significant density. We will answer those the best we can.

I will promise everybody if you send me an email, like I get just about every second day – I think some of the Members on both sides get them from some people telling us: I don't know how you sleep at night and this and that. That's fine, too, but I'm not going to waste my time responding to that.

I will say – and this is just my personal opinion on this and this is the last point I make, and I appreciate everybody's patience with me today. I will point out one last thing that, sort of, I don't think fits into the conversation. When the second page – and here we are today, we got a statement from my colleague across the way, a veteran. There's a statement from the Premier on Remembrance Day. Everything we've seen here in this province in the last year celebrating veterans, celebrating our history, when you try to put a picture of a veteran in from World War I and compare that to what you're doing, I find that distasteful.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: I don't agree with that. Stick to the facts of this situation. Yes, it's a new industry; it is new to us. Yes, there are questions to be asked, yes, there are answers to be provided and there's a long time to go. But let's stick to that, because when we make it personal, when we make it into something that is not, that's not helping the situation.

On that note, thank you, everybody. Thank you for the petition. Every single day that you get up or anybody else gets up with a petition, I'll certainly try my best to stand up, debate the facts and talk about the facts, because it's better for us all.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

Just for those watching, an unusual circumstance, but with the consent of the House, we were able to do what we just did. So thank you, Minister. Thanks to those who brought the petition. Thanks to the Member.

I now call on the Member for Ferryland with his petition.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Cellphone coverage from the Goulds to St. Shotts is continuing to deteriorate. The coverage has gone to no coverage in some areas where there was previously coverage available.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, urge the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to request upgrades or repairs to existing towers and equipment to enhance and improve the quality of cellular service in the region.

Speaker, I've done this a few times over, but I just thought I'd bring it out again. When I drive through the district – and it's not only my district; I spoke to the minister on this the last time I did the petition, that every district has problems with cellphone coverage –

(Disturbance in the gallery.)

SPEAKER: Excuse me, please.

I would ask the members who are displaying any kind of position, you're going to have to leave or sit down. I will clear the galleries.

I ask the Member for Ferryland to continue.

Thank you.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

When driving the district, I definitely have issues with cellphone coverage. It starts when I leave here in St. John's and drive as far as Bay Bulls Big Pond, 15 minutes away, cellphone coverage is gone. Drive in Middle Pond Hollow – what we call Middle Pond Hollow is Middle Pond – and we lose it there as well. You can be talking to a person and say I'm going to lose you now. I'll call you when I get to the better area which is a minute away. Other areas through Bay Bulls, I leave Tors Cove, when I go from Tors Cove to Cape Broyle, no cellphone coverage. I leave from Aquaforte to Fermeuse, no cellphone coverage.

So my point to that is that everybody in this province has got cellphones – kids included. Most kids have got cellphones. The issue that I've got is that we pay so much for these cellphones – \$100 per phone, I would think, based on a package. There are people in families that have got – I spoke to a lady today. They pay over \$500 for cellphones in their family. We know we've got to have them, or we think we've got to have them. But the problem is we're paying for this service that we're not getting in return. We need more cellphone towers. No doubt about it, we need more cellphone towers, but we have lost our service over the last few years and people in every district will tell you that their cellphone coverage has gone down.

What can we do, as the Opposition, to help the government get after these companies that we pay big money to for cellphone

coverage and we're not getting what we pay for? That is the big issue in everybody's district. I think it's something that we've got to look at. If there are numbers we can call or names we can call, they always say, well, you've got to present a good case for it and all that, but we're tired of hearing that. We're paying and getting worse service than we had two or three years ago.

So I just wanted to bring that forward and I see a lot of Members shaking their head because we all know we've got that issue.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology for a response, please.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's not often I say this, but I actually agree with the Member opposite and the fact is that I don't know how many years I've been around this or before, but I agree. The cell service, for whatever reason, this summer, everywhere – not in one district – has degraded. It has degraded. I've been driving this province for 13 years and I saw new dead spots this summer that I had never seen before.

Now, there are a couple of things. Usually, some issues are easy to fix because it's solely within our jurisdiction. Unfortunately, this one isn't. It's federally regulated. We're dealing with private industry, but that doesn't mean, obviously, as a province we don't have a role, and we've tried.

As you know, we're trying to fund. We're trying to do new things. The costs are exponential. What I would say is this, look, I've got a meeting with Bell. I have meetings with providers, but I think it's going to take a wider attempt and a group attempt to deal with this issue because, quite frankly, it's

not good enough. These companies are not doing good enough and it's not acceptable. We have to find the way to make them live up to that.

I think a lot of that, we've got to help customers make sure that their complaints are heard. Are we in a provincial position financially to put all these towers up? I don't know. That's a tough one. We found key solutions to new areas like Burgeo highway where, I don't know if it's ever going to get covered, maybe we can look at Wi-Fi repeaters.

In your case, you're mentioning specific, sort of, shorter roads where you can't do that, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't have service. So what I would say to the Member is I agree with you. Happy to chat, happy to find ways to work together because it's not good enough for any of us, so I appreciate the petition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 2.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day, Motion 2.

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 Respecting the Management of Law Enforcement Articles, Uniforms, Vehicle Markings and Vehicle Equipment, Bill 94, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, Bill 94, An Act Respecting the Management of Law Enforcement Articles, Uniforms, Vehicle Markings and Vehicle Equipment.

Is it the pleasure of the House to have this bill read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

It's carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to introduce a bill, "An Act Respecting the Management of Law Enforcement Articles, Uniforms, Vehicle Markings and Vehicle Equipment." (Bill 94)

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act Respecting the Management of Law Enforcement Articles, Uniforms, Vehicle Markings and Vehicle Equipment. (Bill 94)

SPEAKER: When shall the bill be read a second time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 94 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 18.

S. COADY: Eighteen – nineteen.

J. HOGAN: Which one do you want to do?

S. COADY: Eighteen – sorry, 19.

J. HOGAN: Nineteen.

SPEAKER: Let the record show it's 19.

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that Bill 89, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, No. 5 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, No. 5." (Bill 89)

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Today we're introducing amendments to the *Revenue Administration Act*. Amendments are proposed to prevent the unintended tax consequences on the Canadian Dental Care Plan. The insurance companies tax, which is in the *Revenue Administration Act*, currently, if we do not do an amendment, would levy a tax of 5 per cent on planned benefits on the third party plan administrator, which is Sunlife.

These amendments will prevent this from happening. We don't want the unintended consequences of taxing the Dental Care Plan, which is a national social program intended for low-income and seniors to have dental coverage. The Canadian Dental Care Plan is one of the country's largest social programs and it is expected to make the cost of dental care more affordable for up to nine million Canadians.

Speaker, the Canadian Dental Care Plan was announced by the federal government in its 2023 budget and it provides dental coverage for uninsured Canadians with annual family income of less than \$90,000. I understand that over 52,000

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are already approved applicants. The plan is being used by residents of our province for dental services such as cleaning, routine dental work and dentures.

This change will have no impact, of course. The change we are making to the *Revenue Administration Act* will have no impact on residents who are using the program. Dentists who are billing the program will see no change in their process either.

The Canadian Dental Care Plan complements the Newfoundland and Labrador dental programs already in place for residents, including the Children's Dental Health Program which provides universal access to eligible dental services for children 12 years of age and under.

As well, the Canadian Dental Care Plan will serve a large portion of seniors with incomes less than \$90,000 who do not qualify for coverage under the province's Adult Dental Program, which is income tested.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is undertaking to improve the health of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and to become one of the healthiest provinces in Canada by 2031.

Through Health Accord NL, we've been leaders in Canada in actioning a plan to improve how and where residents access care and addressing the social determinants of health that are linked to our overall well-being.

In *Budget 2024* we had a record in high investment in health care, which totals now \$4.1 billion, which further highlights our commitment to improving access to care. Amendments being made to the *Revenue Administration Act* today are an example of how we are ensuring our tax system works for those operating in our health care system.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now recognize the Member for –

L. PADDOCK: Baie Verte - Green Bay.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

Baie Verte - Green Bay.

Habits are challenging for me sometimes.

L. PADDOCK: Oh, yes.

SPEAKER: It's good to see you there, Sir.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, the insurance company's tax, as a part of this amendment to the *Revenue Administration Act*, is paid by the insurance companies on premiums collected in this province. It is paid by the insurance companies, not by the consumers themselves. That clarity is important and we must continue to clarify, whether in the *Revenue Administration Act* or the *Financial Administration Act*, that delineation between companies and residents, taxpayers.

In the 1990s, this legislation was tightened because of a loophole that allowed insurance companies to reorganize their plans to avoid paying the tax. That is important that we always tighten up any of our financial accountability acts to avoid that. '

Because of this 1990s change, without any change now, the legislation, how it is currently written, would require the tax to be levied on the federal dental plan. As we know, the federal dental plan is a social benefit and social benefits are generally not taxed.

Really, if we had our way on this side, we would take that non-taxing to a further degree with some of the areas where further taxation need to be ceased. Therefore, the amendment specifies that the Canadian

dental plan is not subject to the tax and we do agree with that, that it shouldn't be subject to the tax.

So my question then for the Minister of Finance with all of this, is looking at, we're now in November, going on eight months through the fiscal year, what budgetary forecasts was made at the start of the year for the insurance companies tax?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Just for clarity, we also support this amendment to the *Revenue Administration Act*, seeing as it will protect the Canadian Dental Care Plan. A great plan that was successfully put through by the federal NDP and it is a great social benefit to many seniors in this province. We also agree that this social program should not be taxed and that the accountability be there to make sure that they don't tax a social good like that.

I do have some questions for Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Any further speakers to the bill?

If the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board speaks now she will close debate on second reading on Bill 89.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I thank the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay and the Member for Labrador West, I look forward to their questions.

Just to address the one question that has been put forward: No, there was no budget appropriation or nothing in the forecast related to this. We knew this was coming.

As my colleague for Labrador West did indicate, we certainly don't want to tax a social program. If we did levy this tax, it would decrease the amount of money available and we want to make sure that the maximum amounts are available.

So I'm going to take my seat, Speaker. I look forward to debate in Committee and look forward to discussing this further.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 89 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: Against.

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 5. (Bill 89)

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 Revenue Administration Act No. 5," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 89)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 18.

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that Bill 88, An Act to Repeal the Municipal Financing Corporation Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Repeal the Municipal Financing Corporation Act." (Bill 88)

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Today, this act will repeal the *Municipal Financing Corporation Act*. This is a culmination of many years, I think, going back even to 2005-2006, the work of the windup of the operations. This will enable the provincial government to complete the windup of operations of the Newfoundland and Labrador Municipal Financing Corporation. This corporation was established in 1964 to consolidate the long-term borrowing of municipalities and reinvest the proceeds in municipal projects.

Over the last 60 years, the mandate and role of the corporation has evolved, as have the borrowing practices and needs of municipalities. The corporation is now at a point where this is no longer required.

I do note, Speaker, something interesting, I did read a note from the Auditor General when she was looking at this particular corporation that it was certainly time to wind it up. Even on the advice of Auditor General, we certainly want to start looking at the continuous improvement and ensuring that this corporation is wound up.

Municipalities finance their capital programs through the financial institutions and the provincial government funds municipal projects via grants through the budgetary process.

Over the past two budgets, the provincial government added \$6 million to the base funding of Municipal Operating Grants, bringing the total annual budget to \$28 million. This represents a two-year increase of nearly 30 per cent. In addition, a significant portion of funding for capital projects is now provided through Transportation and Infrastructure's municipal infrastructure program. *Budget 2024* provided almost \$173 million in grants for municipal infrastructure projects.

The board of directors is in favour of winding up the operations of the Newfoundland and Labrador Municipal Financing Corporation. As I said, this process began in 2005-2006. The Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs has worked closely with the corporation since 2009-2010 in negotiating repayment arrangements with communities owing loan payments to the corporation. At this point, there are only two outstanding accounts, both of which have repayment arrangements made with the department.

Speaker, the provincial government is committed to continuous improvement and modernization of its policies and practices. Winding up the Newfoundland and Labrador Municipal Financing Corporation will reduce the number of government entities and enable the provincial government to continue working with municipalities on modern methods of funding.

With that, Speaker, I'll certainly take my seat and look forward to any questions.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I thank the minister and the department for coming up with legislation and it seems to be about the right time to streamline this as well.

To see the money that's being put into municipalities and the two-year increase, it's important to municipalities, especially we're four years past COVID but we still see some effects and whatnot. We know that municipalities definitely hurt over COVID. We want to make sure that we're there for them as much as we can and support them as much as we can as well.

A little bit of background to the legislation itself: The Newfoundland and Labrador Municipal Financing Corporation was established to consolidate the long-term borrowing programs of all municipalities into one central Crown agency. The proceeds of these borrowings were then used to provide long-term financing to meet the capital requirements of municipalities themselves.

The day-to-day affairs were managed by employees of the Department of Finance. It was decided several years ago, like the minister said and alluded to, that the corporation would no longer be used as a method of financing projects. It was deemed that the corporation was unnecessary due to municipalities being able to fund their own projects using financial institutions like banks and whatnot. Municipalities are able to get grants, funding from the province.

Like I say, Speaker, it's very important that we support our municipalities as much as we can. The people that run our municipalities work closely with the government as well, which is good to see. Moving forward, like I say, we want to make sure that everything is there. I mean, we will have questions in Committee, but we would like to know, obviously when the time comes, where that \$6 million is going to go, what's going to happen to that in due time or exactly how much is it.

We know municipalities need money obviously, and they need as much as they can get. It only helps the province in general. When the municipalities are strong, the province is much stronger. We have a list of items here. I know in Grand Falls-Windsor, we have a paid fire department where they have a stipend or whatever, but they have up to 39 or 40 members. With their trucks, it's a lot of equipment to engage with.

We have also municipal enforcement officers out there; animal control; infrastructure is a big thing within municipalities; roads, clean drinking water and waste water are very, very important – as we know, some municipalities are still struggling to get that online for themselves – garbage and sanitation; sports and recreation; events and festivals, maintenance – there are so many things that municipalities are on the hook for and they need as much support as they can possibly get, and I know that we on this side of the House will support the municipalities as much as they need moving into the future.

So it is a good piece of legislation. We look forward to supporting it when the time comes, and I just want to thank MNL for their conference coming up. I wish everybody a great time as we get out there and hear from lots of municipalities and their concerns, what's going good, what's going bad, where we can make improvements. I wish everybody a safe weekend at their MNL conference coming up this weekend.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now call on the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to reiterate that this entity isn't interesting on paper. It's been around for a long time and, like I said, it hasn't actually operated in its capacity since '06. Even the Auditor General, her office has recommended to also wind up this corporation.

It's interesting how the creation of the corporation was to help disburse funds and loans and stuff to municipalities and now we're in a modern age where a lot of municipalities do have infrastructure deficits. They need replacement of equipment, they need to modernize, build new and a lot of work got to be done. It's an opportunity to reflect, after winding this up, on how to get money into the hands of municipalities and that would be a great exercise in itself to benefit the municipalities at a local level.

They always say municipalities are the most tangible piece of government because you live it every day you live in your municipality. Everything they do around you, your water and everything like that, it's right there. It's the most direct piece of government we have. It's a great extra thing that, as we wind this up, maybe we reflect on how we get more money in municipalities hands and help them improve the burden they have, infrastructure deficits and stuff like that; but other than this, winding up this corporation, we obviously support that.

I reiterate what my colleague from Falls-Windsor - Buchans said about MNL and the great conference coming up in Gander. I wish them a great conference as well.

I thank the minister.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

If the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board speaks now,

she will close the debate on second reading.

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It seems like we're all in consensus here.

Thank you to the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and to the Member for Labrador West for their interventions in this conversation. As I've said, municipalities are incredibly important – incredibly important – to Newfoundland and Labrador. That is why we've increased their operating grant budget to \$28 million. So it's a significant amount of money, almost a 30 per cent increase. That's why we have \$173 million available in grants for municipal infrastructure projects. Very, very important utilization of funds within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I will answer the one question I did get. The \$6 million that is currently available will go to general revenue as per normal and, of course, then that will be used as part of those funds that we need to have available.

With that, I'll take my seat and allow for any questions during the Committee stage.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 88 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.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Repeal the Municipal Financing Corporation Act. (Bill 88)

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

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

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Repeal the Municipal Financing Corporation Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 88)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, November 12, at 1330 hours.

Thank you very much.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned
until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.