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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Labour, that An Act to Amend the Labour Standards Act No. 2, Bill 101, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 101 be now read a third time.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

On third reading, I just wanted to once again reiterate that while in principle, I think the purpose of everything is good, but I don't think it goes far enough to actually achieve what the purpose of the amendment is.

Just one more time on the record, I just want to state that I think there's more that needs to be done on that front when it comes to sick notes and making sure we're protecting employees when it comes to being sick and that and employers still having the ability to demand sick notes of employees. It's still going to send people up to emerg. People are still going to be sitting up there hours – and in a case the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said, possibly days trying to get a sick note.

So I think it doesn't actually reiterate exactly what the purpose of it is. I think that government needs to re-evaluate what

they're trying to do here. I don't think this will achieve anything that they think it's going to achieve.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll just take a couple of seconds to respond to the Member. Just for clarity for this House, today, by law in this province, as the *Labour Standards Act* sits, an employer is required to give an employee seven days of unpaid sick leave. What we did yesterday with the amendment is basically just removing the requirement for them to go looking for sick notes for that.

But I thank the Member for his comments.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Now seeing no other speakers, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Labour Standards Act No. 2. (Bill 101)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Labour Standards Act No. 2," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 101)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 13.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Labour, that An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2, Bill 104, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 104, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2." (Bill 104)

SPEAKER: The hon. Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise in this hon. House today to bring forward amendments to the *Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act*. I would be remiss, Speaker, if I didn't at the beginning toss a huge bouquet to the Labrador Fishermen's Union Shrimp Company just coming off their biennial, their big meeting that they have ever second year – an incredible, incredible success story.

They keep the lights on in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair with their five or six processing facilities and taking care of the harvesters and they have offshore factory freezers, et cetera. In January, they will move ocean to plate and be marketing their own product. They started in 1978 and it's been a continual through some very challenging tumultuous times. It is an incredible success story that we love to tell.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, back to the piece of legislation that we're going to be debating here this morning. We all recognize that the fishing industry is a major economic driver in this province. One that requires stability and reliability. Unfortunately, Speaker, the past number of fishing seasons have certainly been met with frustration and upheaval, I think it's fair to say, with respect to some of the species.

Speaker, I've said it a number of times, already in my short time in Labour, where FICBA sits, nobody wants a repeat of what we have experienced the last couple of seasons. As a government, we have listened to concerns and we have taken action to address them.

Currently, the establishment of fish prices in this province is achieved either through a negotiated agreement between the harvesters and the processors or through binding arbitration provided by the Standing Fish Price Setting Panel.

These proposed amendments that we're bringing in today, Speaker, will see a return to a more traditional collective bargaining model, whereby the right to strike and lockout will be reinstated. While the right to strike and lockout will be reinstated, it's important that I note here that this legislation will provide for the parties to mutually agree to proceed to the Fish Price Setting Panel for a binding decision utilizing FOS or final offer selection process. This option is available to the parties any time during negotiation but ceases to exist once they are able to take a strike vote or a lockout.

Speaker, this government wants to build upon the efforts from last year and the proposed collective bargaining amendments do just that. The proposed changes will provide both parties with their right to strike and lockout, while also providing a mechanism for binding arbitration in

instances where both sides agree that it is the best option. Our government is committed to legislation that is fair to both harvesters and processors and that allows more flexibility.

I ask all Members of this hon. House, Speaker, to support these amendments, and I look forward to debate and to hearing what my colleagues in this House have to say as we move into second reading and, hopefully, eventually Committee today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to stand and engage in debate on the fishery in our province because, again, it's so important to us all. I think my hon. colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands had stated on a couple of occasions that he doesn't have a strong linkage with the fishery but, in Donovan's Industrial Park, it's sure the beneficiary of a lot of economic activity from the fishery.

I stand today representing the District of Bonavista. I've stated in this House on a couple of occasions before how prominent the fishery is for the District of Bonavista. But it's also very significant for the District of Terra Nova, which is a regional centre. You'll find most of the business enterprises would be in Clarendville. But if you check with most of these, they will say the impact from the fishery is huge.

So what makes us different than a lot of other areas in the province? Well, we have one of the largest processing plants in the province. OCI has a plant in Bonavista that employs in excess of 400 people in the plant. What's different between Bonavista and a lot of other locations is that all those workers, the 400-plus, come from the

peninsula. I say that I now know that there are five Ukrainian employees that are working that plant as well, but they are residents of that peninsula as well and their employment is through that OCI plant.

The economics of the plant is that it puts into our economy, in the District of Bonavista, in excess of \$300,000 a week on payroll when the plant is operating. Keep in mind, 400-plus workers depending on the fishery starting when it's supposed to, the snow crab, and it running its course. If something happens with the fishery, either supply of the snow crab, or a labour event, strike, we've got those 400 plant workers that are out of work. The \$300,000 into the economy of the District of Bonavista stops. It doesn't exist. So this is a significant matter for the District of Bonavista and my colleague, who would have a Beothic plant, which is another large one that I would think primarily workers from the area would work.

I want to officially stand now and congratulate the new president of the FFAW, Dwan Street.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: The first female president of the FFAW since their beginning.

For those who don't know, Dwan is from the District of Bonavista. Her parents lived in Spillars Cove, which is just adjacent to Bonavista, and that is where she grew up. I have a lot of faith in Dwan. I'm sure that if this agreement, what we're doing here, is going to be mutually worked upon, then she's a good candidate that will represent the fishers and the plant workers in the province extremely well. I have a lot of confidence that she will do well.

I think of the previous bill that we had, where now the Minister of Justice and Public Safety had brought that bill to the floor, maybe early last year, that was the price-setting panel, that we looked at it, and the makeup. We did our due diligence on

that bill. I know I contacted both parties, whether it be the ASP, the Association of Seafood Producers; the FFAW, and solicited feedback. Neither wished to see a change in the final offer selection. That's one year, neither wished to see a change.

The only issue they had, at the time, especially one of those entities, was that now they had to pay for their representative on the board, as opposed to the taxpayers paying for the representative on the board. We didn't bring that up. We never raised that at that debate, but I look back and say the final offer selection, they had no problem with it, other than that aspect.

But the significance of having a work stoppage in our fishery in relation to the snow crab is huge. Every opportunity has to be taken to avoid work action in the snow crab.

So the season opens around April in Newfoundland and Labrador. It runs to July; you lose one week at the start because of strife, or lack of agreement, it pushes it back one week, maybe sometimes out of July. And if anybody knows the snow crab industry, you know that there comes a point in time when you get to July, the quality of the product is now being questioned, it's now being looked into and it could be a concern.

So what I would say is the importance of getting this industry, the snow crab industry up and running in April is huge; huge for the harvesters that go out with the catch; huge for the plant workers, like the 400-plus in Bonavista plant that depend on that product being brought to shore and processed. That is how significant it is. If we push it into August, which we've done in the past couple of years, we find that the quality takes a hit. If Newfoundland and Labrador is producing crab that's pushed into August with soft shell and not as high a quality, that affects us all. It affects our GDP, it affects our economics, it affects all of us, even Mount Pearl - Southlands, Donovans

Industrial Park, we all take a hit. So the importance of making sure that the snow crab industry starts in April is contingent upon a good working arrangement between the FFAW and the Association of Seafood Producers – very important.

Do I now feel confident that we will have that agreement for snow crab? I do. I feel confident with the players now that I would hope that we're going to have that in April to avoid any kind of job action. If I stood here today and said that people ought not to have the right to strike, I'd be out of place. I need time to think about that statement, and that's why I'm not making it. But everyone, I think, ought to have a right to be able to protest. But I can't overstate the impact that if we had a shutdown in our fishing industry, what the price and what the cost is going to be for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The last work stoppage that we had where we were delayed, we had people whose EI benefits had run out – it had elapsed. I spoke about that in the House last year. People were struggling to make ends meet because their EI had elapsed. Then we ran into August where the crab was soft, the quality was bad.

So the season for the plant workers, which is the largest private sector group of employees in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, their shortened season with snow crab means that they are not going to get the hours in order for their EI. That is the reality. So however we make it happen, we need to make sure that our fishery and our snow crab harvest begins in April when it should.

Another thing I want to mention with the snow crab is that if it doesn't happen in April, then we'll find that it's pushed back. When it's pushed back, we'll find that we don't harvest our capelin at that point in time. Other species are affected because of the crab pushed back into another time frame where we harvest other species. It is

a sequence of significant hits to the economy, and that's where it would be.

We agree with free enterprise. Who would disagree with free enterprise? We know that there's got to be lots of discussions about how we frame it and what we do. There's a whole lot of work to be done. If I understand what the minister had said in her preamble, she had stated that the restrictions on the collective bargaining must be supported by both parties to continue – both parties.

I'm assuming the two parties would be the Association of Seafood Producers and it would be the FFAW. I think we're fine with that. Restrictions on collective bargaining must be supported by both parties. I said a short time ago, I think we've got a desire and the people in place to make it happen. I am optimistic that we can get it, to get it done.

One thing with free enterprise we look at, I just stated a short time ago the plant in Bonavista generates \$300,000-plus a week in payroll. Imagine if they don't have crab to process. I said it serves the Clarenville area, the District of Terra Nova as well. Just imagine if we have less crab to process. That can only happen in two ways. One is the season doesn't start. I should probably say three ways. If the season doesn't start on time and we don't capture that short window for extracting the snow crab.

Secondly, the species moves. Global warming, water warming and, all of a sudden, we find that the species has moved and we haven't got a quota that's sustainable with our processing sector. The third part, which we never had to think about before, was that fact now that we can ship it out of our province.

We don't need the 400-plus workers in the District of Bonavista who are all residents on the peninsula. We don't need them to process now because we just shipped out one million pounds last year. Maybe more this year. But every time we've got product

shipped out, we'll find that that affects our GDP. It will affect our economy because the \$300,000 a week in Bonavista is not being seen or materialized because the product is not being processed.

I know Tom Rideout mentioned about the importance of secondary processing and many voices have championed that since. It's important that when we frame free enterprise, we frame that it is the best for Newfoundland and Labrador. It's the best for the harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's the best for the plant workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. Check off all the boxes to make sure that free enterprise.

When I looked at free enterprise and when we talked about it before, we had people embark in our galleries, they came to the steps of Confederation Building and when they came, they were upset. The current government had no or very little engagement with the group when they first came – notice that. We were ridiculed for the budget and we opted not to come in and pass the masses that were on the parking lot. Not to rehash that, but that was something we stood for, because we know that these people and the industry were in a tough situation. We opted not to come in.

But time went on when there wasn't anything from government to reach out to these people. Then the meeting came, after the budget, and then that one short meeting produced a lot of what would be in the 10-point plan and what the provincial government rolled out. Free enterprise was born at that time, at that meeting.

We all said here that the meeting should have occurred before. Our leader stood and said why in the world have we not met with the hundreds and hundreds, the representatives that would represent the masses that would be on the steps? It didn't happen – it didn't happen. It only happened when the parking lot was pretty well full out there, after the budget, the meeting

happened and then they went home and we had a new direction.

But the framing of that new direction is correct, is what is important. How it's framed will set us on the right course. I know that there are many parts of the industry now that are wondering: where does free enterprise start; where does it end; what is the impact that would be on the 400-plus workers in the Bonavista plant; are they are part of this picture; is there any consideration of this largest labour group in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – private labour group – the inshore or the plant workers – close to 5,000 of them – is there consideration in the concept of free enterprise?

That is what we're looking for: the direction. I really thought, on the free enterprise, that sealing was going to be – because we talked about seals in this House for a significant number of times. We did on this side. We said look at the news releases and find out who has talked more about seals, the Opposition or government? Check it out and find out who has talked more. We know what their predation, what they eat from the harvesting product that we draw out of our oceans to meet our food supply.'

Check out the news releases. But free enterprise didn't apply for seals. Someone made that decision in free enterprise that we're not going to consider that. Even though they are considered by many to be the greatest predator of our marketable, financial-bearing product that we take out of the water for our economy, is the seals. What an opportunity, 2023, but it didn't happen.

I throw out another industry: the sea urchins. I think that the sea urchins is one that we talked about. No, no, no, not free enterprise with the sea urchins. Government is making a decision, and it's a very important one: what does the free enterprise stand for; what does mean; who's going to be impacted; where is it going to go?

So, yes, we're in favour of the free enterprise, but we know that there are only elements to make sure that the plant workers are looked after. We want to make sure that our economy turns, because we've said here numerous times that we believe that \$1.2 billion, \$1.3 billion is not enough for our fishery. There ought to be action planning to say that we need to see an increase in that. Someone will say, well, that's easier said than done. We know what seals consume. An effort from government to make sure that we catch our allocated quota I think would pay huge dividends for what product we take out of the ocean. We'll have more to take out of the ocean. I just think that we don't have to be a DFO scientist to realize that would be the case, but no action.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked about that since 2019, my first year in the House. But check the news releases, anybody watching today, check the news releases and find out what action we've taken on the seals. I think that would speak volumes. One news release says that we did attend Ottawa, the trade show on the fur institute. That's good, nothing wrong with attending that. But that's not the type of release that we're looking for. We're looking for action to make sure that we look after our ecosystem in Newfoundland and Labrador because we have a great resource, we have a great resource, but we need to know what the action plan would be, what we would have.

It came up last year where we talked about the department officials doing the inspections at plants. The minister could probably speak to that a little later. I had someone really reputable at a plant that I consulted with, great individual in a management role, he talked about when the officials come in they often don't see what the officials would report on the quality. We know last year we had the issue with a lot of crab being dumped.

This individual said, if I presented to you a live crab and a crab that recently died and I

showed you the meat, you wouldn't know the difference – you wouldn't know the difference. Remember now, there's a time frame on everything, but it can be harvested. That would be from the person in management and the person that was involved with the processing. They know their stuff. They're quality control, they know their stuff because they got a lot of skin in the game, is what some would say. The quality they produce has got to be paramount because if not, your quality drops, what happens to your markets?

So they've got a lot of interest in making sure of the quality, but with some of the officials that go out to do these inspections, there seems to be an issue with them taking an upper hand in that and sometimes there's very little collaboration within what work they go about to do. Whether we're talking about some one-offs, I don't know, but I know that the few people that I've spoken to in different plants had said that that was an issue, but I know that we've got to make sure of quality of product. Remember I said before quality is essential. If we're going to market something, quality is essential.

We give out licences and, remember, we need to increase our processing is what we've stated here. We need to make sure that harvesters can bring their product in and we've got processing capacity.

I know I'm biased to my plant in Bonavista. I mean, I'm ultra biased but I can't be because I got to think of every other plant. But we've got a plant with 400-plus employees that are all living on the peninsula, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with families to support and they're getting their income from the fishery, from the plant. How does that weigh with a plant that would bring in foreign workers to operate the full plant? Does there be any consideration of the difference between the two: a plant that has 400-plus local workers or a plant that has all foreign workers? Ought there be something in the way we

think of the fishery to say, boy, we're getting bigger bang from our buck from that plant with 400-plus employees that would be living and getting their income from the peninsula.

Now, I don't know if the government would see the merit in that, but it's not straightforward. You can't just willy-nilly say we're going to give out the licences without some thought and parameters as to how you give them out.

I would think the people in the District of Bonavista are worried that if the scientists are right, that in another two to three years we're going to see a decline in the crab that would be off our shores. We've got it here pretty good now, but they're saying in two to three years we're going to see a decline in crab.

We adjust our processing licences now to meet the demand now. It's not unrealistic for the people who work at the plant in Bonavista to say: What happens when the quota drops down? What happens when it falls down and we've got an excess in processing that we find that we can't get enough hours in the plant in Bonavista, the 400, in order to get EI for the winter? What happens in that case? Free enterprise, lack of planning.

When they came here, the harvesters, slow responding; the sealing industry, no action; look at the press releases, no action, silence.

The only thing I would say to you, we've got to trust that there's going to be action and thought and parameters given to what we've got listed and what we're embarked upon. I think a lot of us here we're confident in the harvesters, we're confident in plant workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, we just need to make sure that we're making the right regulations and policies from the government side to support them to the nth degree. That is what, I think, a lot of us have

concern about. We've got concern about that.

We know that once you create monopolies, that can be a problem. When we look at labour standards, I asked in the House in Estimates: Does the government know how many controlling agreements that would be out there with harvesters? Now, for those viewers watching at home, controlling agreements means that we've got a harvesters that's linked to a processor, being financed for their operations and they're illegal. They are illegal. They're not permitted.

So last year, we had one that became public. We had a gentleman from La Scie, Jimmy Lee Foss. It was public. CBC covered it.

He was in a controlling agreement. Basically, it ended from the processor side and this guy was left out in the cold. He lost his livelihood. We're not sure what happened to the processor side of that, and if it was illegal, we're not sure were there any penalties associated with it, I don't know. But I know that Jimmy Lee Foss in La Scie, his life was turned upside down and his livelihood was greatly impacted.

Some would have thought that maybe the government with the Loan Board would've come and said, hey, Jimmy, you were caught up in this collective agreement, maybe no fault of your own because you were approached. You were approached to take the money and get this enterprise and work it for your family. That ended. I thought the government may have reached out and said, listen, we'll help you through the Loan Board. You maintain your operation for your family. You got caught up in it. That didn't happen.

Jimmy Lee Foss today, he's out his livelihood. What he had, the sample of in a contractual agreement, the minister said it was private. But it's illegal. But if we got one harvester out there that's affected by that

illegal agreement, it may be nice to help that individual out. It may be nice to say we can help them out. I don't mean to give it to them. All we need is to be able to finance and allow him to go fish, do his thing, one less agreement, and that is what the Loan Board or the guarantee loans that we were giving out, that's what the genesis and the intention was, was to do that. That's where we were. But not much has happened in relation to that.

I stated before that, on the labour standards now, I think we've got a good feeling to know that between Dwan Street, and I guess the executive director of the Association of Seafood Producers, Jeff Loder, we've got a pretty good working arrangement as of now.

How do I know that? Well, I recently saw a Facebook post of the FFAW, and the FFAW seemed pretty promising when they said that they were in negotiations, talks and they were optimistic. I know that they're hoping that they will see benefit from that.

I'm thinking in future years, if the Marine Institute is correct, with the climate change that were going on, we're going to see an increase in the Northern cod in our waters. That's what the scientists are saying. That's what the Marine Institute states. We've got it coming that we're going to have that. Are we prepared for the processing of Northern cod, if what the scientists are saying are correct? Are we going to be able to pivot to be able to accommodate it and is that discussions that the government would be involved with the industry in? That would be fair question.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure there's going to be other people now who wish to speak on this bill. I'm going to take my seat. It is a topic that most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are involved in. It's important to our economy. Our party will stand behind those that would be in the industry. The harvesters, the plant workers, we need to make sure that we support them with good

legislation. We need to support them with good regulations, and that's what we would expect from good governance, good regulations. That is what we're hoping for and that is what our job as an Opposition, to challenge government to produce and that's what we hope to do in the days and months ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

What a privilege it is to stand here today to Bill 104, there's no doubt. This bill has the potential to change history, Mr. Speaker. It has the potential to create competition.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that shows that our government, through a long drawn-out process, we're approving that we support plant workers, harvesters and processors. We are listening, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Our Premier went around last year and he sat down with the harvesters. He had meetings. He heard what they were saying, Mr. Speaker. We governed. We are showing Newfoundland and Labrador that we can govern.

This bill, Bill 104, as I said, creates a potential for competition. I have been around the fishery my entire life, Mr. Speaker. My grandfather was a fisherman. My husband is a fisherman. My uncle was a fisherman and my cousin is a fisherman. My husband has fished for 38 seasons; 36 of them were crab. He has fished multiple species.

So this Bill 104 is about all species. It's about setting the clock. It's about changing history. It's about empowering our

harvesters, empowering the process, Mr. Speaker. It's about competition. It's about collective bargaining. It's not just about my constituents in 3Ps, 3LNO. It's about 2H, 2J, 3K, 3LNO, 3Ps, 3Pn and 4R. It's about everybody.

It's An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act. While I said, again, the bill does not speak to competition, it creates an atmosphere that enables our harvesters to get a fair market share of their product. That's key: fair market share. That is what our harvesters wanted. That is what our harvesters were trying to sing out and talk about. That is what our harvesters communicated to us, that they wanted a fair market share.

At the same time, we need more processing in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There's no doubt. Last year our government showed that they increased – there's a plant in my district, Placentia - St. Mary's, St. Mary's Bay Fisheries Inc. It started two years ago. They started at 2.5 million. They went to about five million and then at the end of the year last year they had capacity to process seven million pounds. There are some other small plants operating in the province that were added.

So we are slowly but surely adding more processors. As my colleague from Bonavista said, you just can't add processors all over the place. We understand that. We get that and we've proven that and we've shown that. We have shown that we are slowly increasing the capacity to process crab in this province. We've shown harvesters that we hear the capacity that they want for the competition and they want to be able to do it themselves. It's a business. Fishing is a business. The harvesters and the processors, they do want the capacity to arrive at a fair price themselves. This is what Bill 104 is talking about.

The change causes some competition among the processors and it has helped the

price of crab edge up. We did that last season. At the beginning of last season, I believe the price of crab started out somewhere around \$2.20 a pound and then, at the end of the season, the rumours on the wharf were that some of our harvesters were getting \$4 a pound for crab.

So from \$2.20 to \$4. So what happened? What changed? What changed was we increased some competition and that enabled the price to go up. We were listening to the harvesters.

I have to give a shout-out to Rough Water Traps in Fox Harbour; a small independent business and he's doing multiple species and he's doing processing and he's going to grow. I expect we should look out for him in the future, for this company, Rough Water Traps, because they're going to be a processor for the future and they're going to be a component in this competition.

Again, this bill, Bill 104, has the potential to set a foundation where a percentage of the market price is afforded to the harvester and a percentage afforded to the processor. That's key. It is putting the processor in place. That is what Bill 104 has the potential to do.

Why were our harvesters so frustrated last year? Why were they exhibiting such frustration about what was going on? There was some inequities, they felt, in the way they were debating the price and the way they were trying to arrive at a price and they were trying to articulate what they felt and what was going on with them.

They always experience deductions for things like barnacles, that's not unusual or for temperature change of the species, that has happened in the past, but they never had a price reduction for temperature change of the species. Last year, there was the potential to introduce a price deduction if you came in and they did a sample of, say, two pounds of crab and if the temperature was down on the species a little bit or up,

there was a potential to decrease the price and they were very frustrated about that.

Yes, when they arrive at the wharf, Mr. Speaker, with crab and they want to offload it and the processor doesn't have the human resources to offload it, or capacity – that was key, didn't have the capacity to take the crab that had arrived at the wharf. So if you don't have the capacity to take the crab, the crab has to wait. So when the crab waits, the temperature changes on the crab. If the temperature changes on the crab, the harvester has the potential to lose a lot of money.

So while you may think they're getting \$4 a pound for the crab, they're not because by the time the crab gets to the processor it could be down to \$3.50 or \$3.40, who knows. Everybody is individual. So the price is not the price and that is why they were so frustrated. That is why. But we listened, we spoke, the Premier met and this bill is here today, Bill 104 is here today in this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many thoughts going through my mind about this bill. I'm just trying to organize them all. I'm trying to speak for the harvester and the processor.

I have to just allude to St. Mary's Bay Inc. What a fabulous addition that has been to the District of Placentia - St. Mary's. I now have an employer in a corner of my district that was nearly dead. If you go to speak to any of my constituents down there, the numbers in the school were declining; CEEP, Community Enhancement Employment Project – all you've got to do is look to the past, to look to the numbers and the dollars and the amounts of CEEP that had to go into that section of my district to keep people. This year for the first time in history, Mr. Speaker, St. Mary's did not apply for a CEEP.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The first time in history. It speaks for itself. They have a processor. They're processing crab. They're hoping to process more species as we go forward. We have people that are employed and, yes, we did use temporary foreign employees in that plant, 50 per cent, what was needed, but every single person that was able to go to work in that plant and wanted to work in that plant was employed from Markland, Whitbourne, right to Trepassey, every single person.

No CEEP for the town of St. Mary's for 2024 – no CEEP.

P. TRIMPER: For the first time.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The first time in history. The first time that they have never had to apply for a CEEP. That's huge.

Mr. Speaker, before I sit down, I just want to say again that Bill 104 has the potential to create competition in the fishing industry. It was 18 or 20 years ago I believe we had that, so this particular bill now here on this floor – I'm sure everyone is going to support it – will go down in history. I can guarantee you this is going to change the course of history for the fish harvesters and the processors of Newfoundland and Labrador. This government is listening to those in the fishing industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

Like my colleague there from Bonavista, I want to congratulate Dwan Street on being the new president of FFAW.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Before I get into the real meat of what's going on here today and the debate that's taking place, I wanted to go back in history.

I'm a Fogo Islander, born and raised. I know the fishery, I know the transportation department down there, I know everything, just about, that there is to know in my district.

Well, let me take you back in time. Back in the 60s when the former premier, Premier Joey Smallwood, came out and told the fisherman: Pull up your boats and burn your boats, it's all over.

What did our forefathers do on Fogo Island? They stood ground.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: They stood ground. They formed what as called an Improvement Committee and they put their heads together and said we got to figure this out. We're not giving up on this. So in that process, which was known later as The Fogo Process, they formed what was called a Fogo Island Co-operative. They merged the plants. They knew we had to have bigger boats, we had to move farther offshore. They opened up a shipyard in a place called Shoal Bay. They built bigger boats, they took a different outlook on the fishery, they went farther out, they caught plenty of cod and from there we took off.

We have right now, on Fogo Island, three fish plants. We have a crab plant, we have a shrimp plant and we have what we call a multipurpose plant. To this day, right now, our plant workers on Fogo Island are at work every day – every day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: This is the kind of vision that we all have to have. We've got to be more open-minded and look farther ahead than we did in the past.

Right now, with the out-migration of the younger people moving into the larger centres, higher education, bigger jobs, we needed to bring in some people to replace them, to give work in the fish plants. So they put their heads together again. Right now, we've got about 20 to 30 Filipinos working in our fish plants on Fogo Island, hard-working people.

Housing: There's a problem right throughout this province with housing. What did they do? They bought the hotel right there by the ferry terminal that was up for sale and they housed the Filipinos. To add to that, they provided transportation. They went and they bought a bus and are busing the plant workers to and from the plants. So this is the kind of vision we've got to have, if we're going to continue.

I was born in a fishing community and I've seen what happened and seen where we became today, I think we need to put our heads together a lot better than we're doing and have a further in-depth look into what's ahead of us.

With the industry on Fogo Island and, of course, throughout my district, as my colleague said, we have similarities when it comes to fishermen and plant workers and everything else, because in my district, we not only have three plants on Fogo Island; we have a plant in Stoneville, sea urchins, multipurpose, buy a bit of crab, a bit of lobster and what have you. We have a fish plant in Dover that employs over 200 people. We have a fish plant in Valleyfield, Beothic fisheries, that's employing over 400 people. We are putting hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars in the District of Fogo Island - Cape Freels into the economy of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Don't forget the fishery was what brought us here. The fishery is what's going to keep us here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Let me tell you something else. If the fishery fails, you're going to find it in urban areas bigger than what you think, because that's where the money is generated to in those areas. You take out the number of people that's attending universities and colleges from rural Newfoundland, it's putting a lot of dollars into this economy right here in the urban areas. So it's very important that you keep in mind that when we talk about the fishery, you've got to be talking about rural Newfoundland.

So with the situation on Fogo Island, it's not only improvements in the fishery that we want out there – and I'm going to stand by, like I said, every harvester and plant worker in my district throughout Fogo Island and Cape Freels because that is the backbone of our economy there and I'm going to stand with them and do whatever is best. I hope that with this bill here today, that you make the right decisions, the right policies and make the right choices because we are standing by our harvesters and our plant workers.

That's our job as MHAs, that's what we're voted in for and that's what I'm going to do because I take it right here. When I speak, it's right from here, because I know. I know the hardships that could be and I know how important this is to the economy of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: When I said it's another concern that I have, we live on an island. Fogo Island is an island, as well as Change Islands. We have a lot of fresh products that's shipped out from Fogo Island and shipped in to Fogo Island. Right now, we're doing hundreds of thousands of pounds of sea cucumbers. We need to make sure that we have a better transportation system in place.

We've got into a crisis last spring with our ferry system. We almost had to dump product, pretty close. We might have lost some. We had the same thing happen again a week ago, because we had four to five tractor-trailer loads of fresh sea cucumbers coming into our plants. What did the Transportation Department do? Pull out the ferry overnight, no consultation whatsoever, 24-hour notice. Gone – gone – left us with a small ferry that could only accommodate 18 vehicles and we with four to five tractor-trailer loads of fresh sea cucumbers coming into Fogo Island. Left us in a dilemma. We had to fight that.

We got a little resolve out of it right now. We don't have the two largest ferries in the province right now. We have three of the smallest, so we're barely getting by with it. That's something else that this government has to look at. I challenge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to wrap your head around that too because that's important to this economy, as well as to the economy of Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: I just want to go back to some of the things that my colleague spoke about when it comes to free enterprise. Yes, I agree with free enterprise, because that's what we have on Fogo Island. We have our own markets. We don't have to be governed by controllers. We formed our own co-operative and I think it was a good idea. I think it's what saved our District of Fogo Island and Change Islands.

So whatever decision you make here today, I hope it's good. I hope it's good for the harvesters, I hope it's good for the plant workers, because this is a very important bill. I hope that they have the right vision put into this that affects the whole province and brings the whole province together and make a stronger fishery, because we should not only have a billion-dollar industry, we should have a \$5-billion industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: I want to go back to processing. We should be doing more processing in this province, creating more employment. Ready to go to market when it comes out of the plants. That's where we're losing our dollars to. We're losing big dollars shipping out fresh product to other provinces.

We're facing climate change. It's like my colleague said, there's going to be an increase in cod. Well, we have proven this year with the lobster fishery. We have never seen a lobster fishery like it ever before in our lives. Millions and millions of dollars from the lobster industry this year. I know of some cases where one lobster fisherman with one licence shipped over 200 boxes, 100 pound per box and that's as high as \$8 to \$9 per pound.

So when we talk about late fishery for the start-up of the crab, and we all know the earlier we can get the crab in, the better quality of product that we have. So if we can't have our plants, our harvesters on the water in early April – because that's the key right there. Nobody wants to see what happened here last year. Nobody wants to go through that again, because we were close to a riot here because our government didn't come in and support the harvesters. They never had the support they should have had.

I'm hoping that your policies and this bill addresses all those issues and supports what the harvesters and the plant workers are looking for, for years.

With that, I'm going to say that I have to reiterate that how important the fishery is to the economy of this province. I can't help by saying that because that's what brought us here; that's what's keeping us here. You can talk about all the offshore oil and all these high-end dollars and the big money that's coming in the offshore, but that's going to stop one day.

We're talking about a renewable resource, and keep it in your mind that's a renewable resource. Not only the crab, everything out there is a renewable resource. When you start a late crab fishery, like the hon. Member for Bonavista said, that affects the other fisheries because it drags everything back. We lose millions of dollars on quality of product and the crab, sometimes, has to be left because time wasn't in it to bring it ashore.

Whatever policies you bring in today in regulation, I hope and I pray to God that it's for the best interests of the fishery of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I am from Labrador West; I was born in Labrador West. So when it comes to the fishery, I guess I don't know much of the first-hand of it, but when it comes to labour I do know that.

One of the important pieces is a group's constitutional right to take job action. The right to strike is enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of this country. As the justice said in a case there, the critical role in collective bargaining is why the right to strike is constitutionally protected under section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is the freedom of association.

It's important having that privilege to take job action and it's a fundamental and protected right of this country. Because it's a part of the bigger picture, which is the right to collective bargaining. In order for collective bargaining to be meaningful, labour should have the right to withdraw service. This is a fundamental part of not

only of our country, it's a fundamental part of the rights and freedoms of the people of this country. Having that ability and protecting that ability is important. That's why we see that.

To have that right of a labour organization, of a labour group is important. To give that back to a group is also a very meaningful and important thing, especially when they've asked for it.

To go on further, as other hon. Members have mentioned, the importance of the fishery and the importance of the workers and the importance of all workers within that thing, it's important that we have a meaningful and thought-out way of how we go forward. I agree with the Member for Fogo Island-Cape Freels that it has to be thought out, it has to be meaningful, it has to be good policy and good regulation behind the meaning of what you're doing. That also extends to meaningful and engaging consultation with different stakeholders that this bill affects.

So we're talking about the FFAW, the plant workers and the fishermen. Even having engagement with other stakeholders in the community and things like that to make sure what the process is and how it's going to play out is meaningful and engaged. We're not going to leave anyone behind. We're not going to negatively affect one group over another. We're going to make sure that everyone is on a fair and level playing field when going forward.

In particular, the FFAW has stated that they've had issues with previous processes. We, obviously, know; we've seen what happened last year, last spring, that the processes have to be laid out in a way that gives everyone a fair, equal opportunity and to make sure that the price setting, which for all intents and purposes is a bargaining process, that it is done in a way that is fair and equal and everyone has an opportunity for all the information that's available, and have the information to make a fair and

balanced bargaining process with setting prices.

This is something that has led to some disagreement under the current status, the changes – so this bill amends the Collective Bargaining Act to allow fish harvesters and processors to engage in cessation of business dealings and lockouts, will have to go to conciliation first and the appointed officers by the minister, and have 10 days to attempt to work out a deal between the parties.

If the report is tabled and no agreement is met, then there's a seven-day cooling period before a strike or lockout can occur, and still the parties have the right to send disputes to the panel at any point up until the seven-day period expires, if both agree to pursue the route; modify the process when referring to matters with Standing Fishing Price Setting panel; provide Parts V and VI of the *Labour Relations Act* apply to matters within the scope of the act; and replace references to the Trial Division with the Supreme Court.

There is a process now, and it seems to be laid out in a way, but we've got to make sure that it's fair, it's equitable, it's balanced, and make sure that all the associated regulation and everything that goes with this is meant to make sure that it does what I guess what all the parties are working for, but also strike that balance.

We've seen that the right to strike and the right that also other labour groups have, under their charter rights, and also having the idea of taking job action, but also having a plan and process to make sure it doesn't get to that point, make sure the processes put in place are designed in a way to give everyone the same opportunity and make sure those that are sitting on the Price Setting Panel, it's fair, it's balanced, and that they actually can be able to do their job and reach an agreement so we don't see job action.

That's the ultimate goal at the end of the day, is we want bargaining to not lead to that. We want a process that is there. But also to protect the worker's right to take job of action if they do choose so, if things are not going in a fair and equitable way.

We'll have questions in Committee on it. We want to make sure that stakeholders were engaged, make sure that their feedback and any concerns or anything like that they had was taken into consideration, and that their suggestions and opinions and that for the consultation process behind this legislation was taken down and to make sure both sides and everyone had the opportunity to be a part of this and to work together on a meaningful and key consideration for this bill. We do have some questions for the minister when that time comes.

But we want to make sure that this process and everything that we have is laid out in this piece of legislation and will do what is intended and make sure that, you know, once again, that all stakeholders were engaged, to make sure all stakeholders were consulted and to make sure that all parties are able to have the input and everything into the crafting of this because this is a very large change. It's also a very important change. Also to make sure that workers are protected and make sure that their rights and everything are also going to be protected when it goes through all this.

So I want to thank you for that, and with that, I'll take my seat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Gambin-Walsh): The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll be supporting Bill 104 as well. I do so because, from what I can gather, both parties who are part of this, who would be the subject of this legislation, seem to be in agreement, from what I can understand.

This is something they're asking for. If it's something that's going to help facilitate the process and ensure or at least help lead to a situation where our fishery is operating in a timely fashion when it should be operating and that there are mechanisms to hammer out any issues and concerns that would be in place, and to get the plants up and running and the fishers out at the optimal time. If this can help lead to this, and the FFAW are in agreement, then there's no reason why I would be against it, of course.

There is a provision here for, I guess, as has been said, strike lockout but also a provision for binding arbitration. I did hear my colleague from Bonavista – and I have to say that he's my local expert on the fishery, from my perspective at least when –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. LANE: I always listen intently when he speaks because he's a good speaker, number one, and it makes a lot of sense what he's saying. I don't know a lot about the fishery, to be honest with you. I try to learn as best I can but it's not something that impacts me directly. It certainly impacts my district indirectly for sure.

But he did talk about the Final Offer Selection and this is what both parties wanted. I was a little confused about that and I'll tell you why, maybe I'm mixing it up with something else. I'll ask it in Committee of the Whole, maybe someone will address it when they speak, but I thought part of the problem we had when we had the fishermen outside here protesting and so on was with this process whereby the union suggested a price and the processors suggested a price and then the committee, tribunal, whatever they were called, had to pick one or the other.

I thought part of the issue was the union were saying, why can't they cut it down the middle? In other words, if the union are saying the price should be – I'll just throw out some arbitrary figure – \$5 a pound and

the processors are saying no, it's only \$4 a pound, I thought the issue was that the tribunal had to pick \$4 or \$5. I thought the union at the time wanted them to give the ability for the arbitrator, the tribunal, to say, we'll cut it down the middle and make it \$4.50 or maybe \$4.20 or maybe \$4.80, but they didn't have to pick one or the other.

So when I hear that the Final Offer Selection is what they want, I thought that they kind of didn't want that. They wanted the ability to pick somewhere in the middle. You didn't have to go with the processor's price, you didn't have to go with the union's price, that the tribunal can say I'm going to pick something between the two, that they weren't forced to go high or go low. I thought that was the issue when the fishermen were out here. Maybe it's a different issue and someone can educate me, maybe the minister. I will ask about that in Committee of the Whole.

But there have been a few points that have come up about the fishery. Of course, the fishery, as we know, is important to us all, everybody in this province, regardless of what district you represent, as I say. Some districts are more directly impacted than others, but it impacts the GDP of the province and the economy of the province, which, in itself, is good for us all. When it comes to different regions of the province, there may be a processing plant in Bonavista that benefits 400 people, but as my colleague from Bonavista said, it also positively impacts the people in Clarendville that are working in the businesses that would service the fishery. Donovans Business Park being no different, there are a lot of businesses that benefit as well.

One of the things that our former colleague from, what was St. John's South and then turned to Waterford Valley, I think is what it's called, where the new Member just got elected, was that the greatest amount of fish actually landed in Newfoundland actually happens down at the Southside, which I

never realized at the time until the former Member brought that up.

So it does impact us all in a very positive way and we should be doing all we can do to nurture the industry and to put regulation, policy, legislation in place that's going to nurture that industry. This appears to be something that both sides want and everyone feels it'll be a benefit. So I will support it in that regard.

There were some things, though, that I did hear in speaking to some of the fishermen when there were outside here, because I did go out and talk to a lot of them, actually. The issue has been raised here about controlling agreements, illegal controlling agreements.

That's something that – well, it's illegal, for one thing. But if it's happening, it should be stopped. I heard from fishermen long before even then talking about that type of thing, where you're under the thumb of the processor. If there are regulations that tie into, if not this bill, related bills, then I would say to the government that is something that you need to get a handle on. You can't have enterprises that are under the thumb of any of these large processors.

I heard stories. I heard a story from one gentleman and he ran a fowl with one of the processors. I can't remember exactly what the issue was, if it was over the price or what the issue was, but there was an issue and he called the *Open Line* and he spoke to Paddy Daly to express his frustration with the processor in terms of how he felt he was being treated unfairly. He told me he received a call that night from said processor who said: Don't bother to bring any of your catch to me anymore. Our relationship is ended. He said: What am I going to do with my fish quota? He said ask Paddy Daly if he wants to buy it. That was the comment: Ask Paddy Daly if he wants to buy your fish.

I had another fisher and he was catching cod. He had an issue, because he had brought the fish in one day and it gets dropped off, I think, on the wharf but the processor was supposed to take it from the wharf and process it, but the processor, for whatever reason, maybe it was a legitimate reason, decided I'm not going to take this fish and he left it in a box on the wharf that day and that night. The next day, he came and took the fish. When he bought the fish he said: You're only getting paid for grade two or grade B or whatever it is. He said: This was grade A fish. Well, it's grade B fish now. He said: Well, that's not my fault. When I landed this on the wharf, and I guess whoever looks at it, the inspectors or whatever, it was grade A. It's grade B because you didn't bother to take it. No, you're only getting paid for grade B fish.

He complained about it on social media. He put it on Facebook what had happened and the next day, lo and behold, he's contacted by that processor: We're not taking your fish anymore. Same thing, same kind of scenario he indicated, and I don't know, these are sort of the intricacies that I don't really understand or have that knowledge in.

But the impression I was given in both cases is that it wasn't as simple as saying, well, if you won't take it, then I can give it to this person and they'll take it because there was some agreement or whatever in place that I don't know if it was an official agreement that no one else is allowed to take it because of the rules or if it was a case of processor A calls up processor B and says, listen, if he tries to bring the fish over to you, don't you take it. Because if you do that to me, the next time someone tries to do the reverse, I won't take theirs, you don't take his and we look after each other.

These are the types of things that have to be stopped. If these things are happening, I don't believe this person – and, certainly, I can tell you for sure the second person I know very well, a lot of us here know him.

He wasn't lying. I can tell you I don't think either one of them were.

If this is the kind of stuff that's happening, then somehow in regulation and policy or whatever, there has got to be ways to prevent that kind of abuse. Because that's what it is, it's abuse. I don't care what anyone says, it's abuse. But some sort of way to prevent it or at the very least some way to appeal it. Maybe some kind of an appeal board or something to hear both sides and then make a ruling and to hold people accountable for unfair labour practices or whatever the case might be but that kind of stuff got to stop.

The other point, which I thought was a very good point, that the Member for Bonavista raised – his head is getting bigger now as we're going – that I never thought of and there's a lot of stuff he raised when it comes to the fishery that I never thought of, I don't know about it, but it's an excellent point. When we're allocating fish quotas and so on – well, the feds allocate the quotas, I guess, the licensing to the fish plants to process and so on – what factors are we taking into account in terms of who gets the licences and how much fish they're allowed to process and so on?

It is an excellent point that if we got community A over here – and again, I'm going to use Bonavista because he was the one who brought it up. I think he said they got 400 plant workers and there's only so much quota to go around. Fish plant B who's somewhere else and maybe they have 200 workers or 300 workers and only half of them are Newfoundlanders and half of them, or all of them for that matter, are temporary foreign workers, should the quota be going to a plant that's not employing local Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

It's a good question. I think it's a very, very valid question because it's supposed to be our resource –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: You can laugh all you want. There's lots I could laugh about you I can tell you that, that's a fact. Anyway –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: Pardon? Yes, and if the shoe fits, wear it.

Anyway –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: No, you got that right, you'll never wear my shoes.

Anyway, I digress. It is a valid point in terms of where is the benefit of our resources going. I have nothing against, by the way, a temporary foreign worker or anybody coming here. If we can't fill positions and stuff, it's not about that. But it's about ensuring that the local benefit for our product stays here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There are other things I think about when I think about some of these processing plants and so on. We had situations, I've been told, I don't know, where there have been plants that have been bought over the years where some processor buys a plant only to shut it down. They buy it for the purpose of shutting it down, because they want to consolidate plants and so on. I understand that if anyone is going to open up a business, obviously, they're at it to make profit and it has to be profitable. Anybody with common sense understands that.

But given the fact that this is the people's resource, should we be allowing individuals and owners to be buying up multiple facilities only to shut half of them down and to transfer product from one part of the province to the other, simply to increase profits?

I kind of liken it to the airline industry prior to deregulation. This is part of the problem we have in the country now. When they

deregulated the airlines, prior to that, if you had the pleasure, the opportunity to operate an airline and be profitable – nothing wrong with that – you had to take some of the tougher routes. In other words, you're making a boodle of money over here, but part of the condition that you can make a pile of money on this very profitable area is that you have to put in some reasonable flights to these others areas that are not serviced as much. You might not be making much money. You might not be making any profit. You might be losing a little, but you're more than making up for it over here.

When deregulation came along in the airline industry, it was all profit driven. That's why you see places where it is like outrageous prices to go to Labrador and places like that because they got to make money and they have to be profitable. Because of the surge and so on, the prices are up. Whereas, before deregulation, there would be mechanisms in place, legislatively, to say you have to keep prices down here because you're still making a pile of money over here.

I could make that same argument for fish processing licences. When we hear about someone saying, well, I can remember a few years back when there was some kind of fish – it wasn't redfish. It was an odd kind of fish. Anyway, they had to ship it out unprocessed. It was out in Arnold 's Cove, I think, or somewhere. There was some kind of a fish. It wasn't cod, it wasn't redfish, it was a different kind and, remember, they sent it out of the province, totally unprocessed.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yellowtail.

P. LANE: Yellowtail. There you go. Yellowtail.

Arguably if you have a processor, and you can look at their bottom line, and they're making millions and millions of dollars off our resource – not their resource; our resource – why does every aspect of

everything they do have to be profit driven? Why can't you say, listen, if you're going to make a million dollars over here, maybe you're only going to make 100 grand over here, sorry b'y, in order to make the million here, you have to take on that? You can't pick and choose because it's not your resource. You don't own it. It's the people's resource.

So I just throw that out there in terms of consideration when we are allocating fish to come of these plants of our fish – not their fish, they don't own it – it cannot simply be about profit and more profit and more profit and coming up with ways to consolidate, cut back, cut back, cut back, consolidate, make more and more and more and more profits off our resources at the expense of the people.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we go back to the days that there's a plant in every community and that everyone's going to be losing money. No one's going to do that. But I wonder has the balance gone too far the other way? That's all I'm saying: Has the balance gone too far the other way where we're so consumed of taking that corporate model and placing that corporate model on our resource where everything is driven by shareholders and more profit and more profit and more profit to the detriment of the fishers and to the people that work in these plants?

That's all I'm just throwing out there, just as a discussion point. We can agree; we can agree to disagree, that's fine, but it is the people's resources.

Anyway, with that said, I will be supporting the bill.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's always an experience to follow the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands. The muscles of your inner core, your mid, just clench when the Member stands up and says: Now, I don't necessarily understand anything or much about the topic at hand, but then I'll speak for 20 minutes on the topic at hand. We're elevated by his remarks and we appreciate them. We all have a contribution to make. Some stars burn brighter after we hear from the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

So with that said, Madam Speaker, I want to address the core issue at hand, which is the eloquence and the precision being offered for the hope of a solution to what appeared to be an intractable problem, one without solution, where tempers and emotions and examination had lost all hope to a resolve. The voices that have spoken and spoken loudly in support and praise of the approach that is being taken by the government to an otherwise intractable problem, speaks to the eloquence, to the precision and to the fairness of the government's initiative.

Madam Speaker, who supports this plan? Who has been given options under this plan to support themselves? Who are those voices? It is the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union and its members, represented by its executive. It is the Association of Seafood Producers, represented by its executive director representing the interest of its members. But it is also – and this is what gives us great courage and resolve – it is the fishermen. Fishermen like John Efford and Jason Sullivan, who have said this plan is a good plan.

So with that said, the captain of capacity, the commander of corporate concentration control, the five-star general of free enterprise, thank you, hon. Member for granting me leave for such a title.

I will say to all involved, this has been an effort that has been successful; it has been an effort where the parties will now take the benefit of this foundation and they will be the resolve to come. Options are now available that did not previously exist or were not necessarily understood to exist.

Let us all remember that in 2006 and the passage of the *Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act* with the provisions for the panel and Final Offer Selection, it was a decision that was taken not by government, but by participants in the industry, to voluntarily put into abeyance what might otherwise be called a constitutional right to bargain collectively, and to exercise the right to withdraw business or services under a strike or lockout as part of the bargaining process.

It was the parties in 2006, the FFAW and ASP, who took that otherwise established constitutional Charter right and held it in abeyance for something which was believed to be a better approach at the time; a panel approach and Final Offer Selection that would be binding, the equivalent of binding arbitration on the parties. Perhaps over the course of time, over these just about 20 years, maybe there might have been the evolution of a belief that this was in perpetuity, that the surrender or the restriction, the self-imposed restriction was binding in perpetuity, the decision, the die had been cast, that they no longer held that right.

It was us that reminded that that right is sacrosanct and can be reclaimed with due and proper notice to rescind legislation and return to the right to strike or lockout. That is the essence of the free enterprise argument.

So with that said, the FFAW did indeed come forward with a notice to reinvoke the right to strike or to be locked out. Discussions were held and, as a result of those positive, productive discussions by members of the industry, along with

organizations that represented the industry, we now find ourselves with not just one elegant solution, but 10 elegant solutions. The 10-point plan advanced by this government has been absolutely, universally well received by harvesters.

Allow me to make special note of a person who I have come to deeply respect; known for many years, known by his legacy of the family he comes from. He says: Every bit of competition in this industry is helping retain and ensure the survival of coastal communities. So the wisdom lies within harvesters in this industry. It is the harvesters who support increased capacity. We have a government who is listening, we support this approach in its entirety. We support the government. We have a government who is listening. John Efford just sent me that message just moments ago.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: Another voice to this industry: The Liberal government added processing capacity in 2024 and that ended up bringing \$100 million extra dollars to our coastal communities through competition. Fishermen are excited that their businesses will have more buyers to help even the playing field and let true market price shine through. We need those millions of dollars in the pockets of thousands of harvesters, rather than in a handful of merchants. Well done, government, well done, a minister on our side. That comes from Jason Sullivan, inshore harvester.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: Madam Speaker, there is work to be done. We have set-up, we have established options to be exercised, what will go forth now upon passage of this legislation. It will be constructively held, as I would say, in a vault. The opportunity will remain in place for the parties to negotiate collective agreements that allow for a blended approach. The prior approach was

very specific, very prescriptive. It was FOS panel or FOS; it was collective bargaining and the only other opportunity beyond normal collective bargaining was a referral to the panel and to a Final Offer Selection process. There was no right to strike or lockout.

This is a trifold option process now. There will be discussions. There are already discussions that occurring between the FFAW and ASP right as we speak. Collaboration is occurring right now.

The FFAW and ASP report to us that those discussions are under way to see if, within the collective bargaining process, that certain species can indeed right to strike or lockout, while others have a formula-based approach. As was described, that will be taken as a decision by ASP and FFAW and they welcome that opportunity and have put so in writing.

With that said, if over the course of collective bargaining, of discussions and negotiations there is found to be no agreement, then the parties have the right to invoke a right to strike or lockout. Or, Madam Speaker, they also have the right to retain that which has existed, that which has been in place of the panel and Final Offer Selection for all species.

The point being the choice is now theirs. They are choosing to negotiate now to see if a resolve can be reached. They welcome that choice. They welcome that opportunity and are working earnestly to resolve all issues. While, at the same time, they welcome free enterprise. They welcome the fact that their constitutional charter right can indeed be reinstated through this legislation. They welcome that.

They welcome the fact that this legislation, by having a deferred commencement clause, gives them opportunity to resolve their own issues. No longer is this in the hands of government to dictate terms and to create resolution. This is now in the hands

of those who reach those hands out and demand that right, that power, that capacity to influence and affect their own futures. That power now rests in the hands of the FFAW and its members and within the hands of the processing sector and the communities where they live, that power is entrenched.

It is there for them to hold and to have and to exercise and that is the beauty, the precision, the eloquence and the fairness of this. They have the ability now to choose negotiations. They have the ability to choose strike or lockout. They have the ability to go and say the panel and Final Offer Selection is our best option. They have the ability now to say that. They have the ability to choose. The future is now in their hands where it belongs. That is the precision and eloquence of this approach.

So with that said, Madam Speaker, I feel as though, I am certain as though, the course of voices who will be supporting this legislation will not just be the ASP and the FFAW, it will be every Member of this House supporting the approach the government has laid down.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, as the son of a fisherman, as the grandson of a fishing captain and schooner builder, coming from a district where the fishing industry and aquaculture is truly important, I think I can offer some overview of where we are, not just on this bill, but for the fishing industry as a whole.

So let me start first by going back to the preamble. That preamble indicated that our fishery was merely an economic driver. Let me correct everyone here. Our fishery is the most important industry in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Our fishery could be so much more, as was highlighted by the MHA for Bonavista. It could be so much more if the government was truly behind it. Actions speak louder than rhetoric.

Let me give some examples: A mackerel fishery where there was no push back to the federal Liberals, a mackerel fishery that is worth \$300 million to this province, multiply that by three for an economic impact, we're looking at close to a \$1-billion impact – silence from the government.

We're now in a situation, again as was highlighted by the MHA for Bonavista, where we have a growing opportunity for TAC for northern cod and that has been reiterated to me in talking to fish harvesters – and I encourage every Member of the House to go out and talk to fish harvesters, not just for a photo op, but to actually listen to them.

A fish harvester will tell you that there's an opportunity here for an increased TAC, and that increased TAC will provide an opportunity for a true economic multiplier across the province. We must ensure, with that TAC, that the primary beneficiary of it is the inshore fish harvester, because that is about the sustainability of rural Newfoundland.

Now, again, we come back, and as it was highlighted by the Member for Fogo - Cape Freels, the fishery can be sustainable. But we have an issue in our fishery, as was highlighted by the MHA for Bonavista, and that is pinniped predation. For those of you who are not aware, pinniped means seals.

The government side cut the funding to CSA, the Canadian Sealers Association, that was Newfoundland based at \$100,000 cut. Their source of support was wiped out. Again, actions and support from the government means everything if we are to grow our fishery. The impact of seal predation over this decade of darkness, both federal and provincial, has been

significant. The seal population has never been as high as it is right now.

That is impacting the livelihood of really all fish harvesters. As was highlighted by the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, it has an impact right across the province. We have to do something about seal predation, pinnipeds. There is also an opportunity in our fishery, as we have been highlighting, and as the MHA for Bonavista highlighted, and that is expanding our fishery. Our fishery can be much bigger than what it is, if we look at leveraging underutilized species. Again, there doesn't seem to be a lot of interest in government in doing that.

Now, the other point that was highlighted in the preamble was building on efforts from last year. I wasn't in the House at that time so I was watching a lot of that from TV and from news media. One of the things that appalled me in watching that was the use of the RNC Mounted Unit. We had to be very careful to let collective bargaining run its process and not interfere with it. There's still a young gentleman – I call him young because he is still involved in the fishery or hopes to get back to the fishery – who was seriously injured during the use of the RNC Mounted Unit. Hopefully, government compensation can be forthcoming to him for it.

The other thing that I noted with that dispute, the heated dispute from last spring, is it took two years to reverse a board decision – not a board decision but a government decision to not increase the processing capacity. The board has made a recommendation to government two years previous. Government basically shut it down and then what happens? We have a significant dispute outside of this Legislature. That board was based on a review based on science and consultation. I hope the government hoists that in, that the entire industry needs to be consulted going forward.

The MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's indicates that this bill will revolutionize the industry. This is like a pharmacist giving a patient some Cēpacol to placate them for a little while while the greater health issues are being addressed. That's where we are right now with our fishery, this is a small step but there are significant issues that need to be addressed.

You know, it's too bad with regards to the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, who laughed at the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, yet the Member correctly highlighted that the fishery impact is not just limited to a small rural fishing community, it impacts every community in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: In fact, a sizable majority of the landings are here in St. John's, your own district, Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands. It's the indirect impact with regard to what happens in our fishery, indirect impact in that supply chain and it is that we need to protect as well.

You also correctly highlighted that we are not there with free enterprise. I talked to a lot of fish harvesters this summer right across the province and a number of them right across the province called me. Again, what is said on a piece of paper with regard to free enterprise is not what's happening in practice. They're still being told when to fish, where to fish, how much to fish, how they can fish, when they can land. It is putting people's lives and livelihoods at risk and that has happened, not just across crab, but also across northern cod as well. Those are significant frustrations across fish harvesters.

We also have an opportunity, as was highlighted with regard to the Member for Bonavista, to do more with regard to our sealing industry. You know, the former Member of this House and former MP John Efford said: seals are not eating turnips.

That is correct and we collectively have to address seal predation. We also have to collectively look at how we develop markets for the seal industry. There's an opportunity here to expand the sealing market. We even have a company right now in my own district that's looking for a processing licence to do the same.

So do we have free enterprise? I think that's a question that the government needs to do some soul searching on.

Again, like I said, this is a small step. This is yet a necessary step, but we have much bigger issues in our fishery to address and they have to be addressed, not by small steps, not just by baby steps, now is the time for us collectively to start taking major steps to improve both the capacity of our fishery, the secondary processing of our fishery and with regard to the underutilized species in our fishery. It can go, from what the MHA for Bonavista has highlighted, from about \$1.2 billion to probably \$2 billion or \$3 billion. Add in a multiplier on that and we have a major economic force for the province.

So we're here now, like I said, with a small step and I think most of us agree that it is a necessary step. But I would hope that the government would work with us in actually tackling some of the significant issues in our industry. We're getting roadblocks, not just from the other side here, but also from Ottawa as well. Our fishery is an opportunity to grow. Let's start tackling the major issues now.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to get a chance to get up and speak on the fishery, for sure.

It's a big part of my district, absolutely, starting in Petty Harbour and going all the way, right up to St. Shott's. It's certainly a great opportunity to get up and speak. It's certainly not a photo op, Mr. Speaker, in my district for sure.

We would not be in this mess today if you didn't give it away to Royal Greenland. That's where it all started, when you were the minister. When you were the minister, this is where this started. The fishermen are not happy until this day when you gave it away to Royal Greenland. So don't start on me over here today, I can tell you that, about photo ops

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. O'DRISCOLL: So I'll talk about the district. I'll talk about Petty Harbour. It started in Petty Harbour. There's a fishery down there as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. O'DRISCOLL: There are lots of fishermen down there. When they were out here on the steps last year, we were out there supporting them. They didn't go out and support them. They were forced to go support them at the end of it, when it all happened. That's when it happened. We were out there supporting them when it started and by the time it was all done, they had to get them in here so they could get them to support it, because they didn't do it when it first started, I can tell you that.

So it started in the fishery. When it started, we were in Bay Bulls. I grew up in the fishery. If there's anybody in here, I certainly grew up in the fishery. I'm not a fisherman, but I grew up in the fishery. I grew up going down and cutting out cod tongues. My mother worked in the fish plant, my father was a fisherman, my brothers worked in the

fishery. We all worked in it and it's an important, vital part of all the Ferryland district, I can tell you that – vital part.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: It was a vital part of when we grew up, I can tell you that, a vital part.

In 1981, when the fishery was on strike, I was fishing with my father. I was 15; I wasn't get paid to go fishing. I had to get called up out of bed to go out and help him as a fisherperson, and I wasn't a fisherman. But I was out every day and they went on strike, and they were on strike for more than a month. They sold all their fish. They brought it in, they gutted, they salted it and then when they dried it, we brought it out to the Saltfish Corporation down on Southside Road.

So I can tell you, if anybody is involved in the fishery – and I'm not a fisherman, but I can tell anybody in here about the fishery and where it goes. I can tell you that, no doubt about it.

It gets me worked up when we start talking about it, to be truthful, I have to tell you. It really does. I mean, in 1992 when the fishery closed, it affected our family, for sure. It was on my birthday on July 2, '66, and I said that numerous times in here when it happened and we were all in the basement of our house watching the announcement, in shock, to be truthful.

So now the fishery – and I'll jump back when I do – is open to a commercial fishery. In 1992, anybody in this building could go get a fish if they wanted – anybody. So the commercial fishery opened again, everybody can't go get a fish. They can go get them on certain days. They should be

able to go get it the same as they could before in 1992. Why couldn't they? They should be able to go out and get a fish.

Now they have to go certain days. For 10 days in September, the fishery was open. Ten days it was open; two days they could get out and fish on this end. There was no one over there who fought for those people to be able to get out and get their fish, because they wait until the end of the year when they get the fish that they're more solid in a fall fish. It's a better fish than it is in the summer. But they didn't fight for that either for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The fishery, when it shut down in 1992, there were 3,000 people in Trepassey. There are 385 there now. So that's a big difference in the community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's very difficult to hear the Member speaking.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: So I'll go through some of the communities as I go along.

Witless Bay has a fish plant. They do crab processing for a certain period of the year. Talking about the economy, it certainly helps the economy. They rent houses off residents in the communities. There are people who come in from around the bay and all over the place to come in. They go to the grocery stores. I've seen them walking up the road in Bay Bulls. There's a house over there that seven or eight people come from around the bay to come over and get their hours to be able to qualify for EI. So there's all kind of stuff that happened.

In Cape Broyle, there's a crab plant there as well, and they do sea cucumber. In Aquaforte, there's another fish plant there

as well that they have foreign workers there and they have locals. When you go up there in the summer, they have campers that are parked in the back of the parking lot by the fish plant that are coming from around the bay.

They take their campers and park there and sleep in their campers, obviously, when they're finished work in the plant. They don't drive home for three or four hours. They bring their campers over there and they stay for the summer, so it's a big part of our economy. I would certainly like to see this and we don't want the mess that's happening here for the last 10 years with this fishery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: And I'll leave it at this: When the Member for Corner Brook said, great, it's out of the government's hands, we're delighted because for the last 10 years you made nothing only a mess.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I wasn't going to get up and speak but I feel compelled to get up and speak because I want to let it be known to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador has always stood for the fishers of our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We were there on the steps when the harvesters showed up. We didn't call in the RNC and a police unit with horses to push them away. We will welcome them with open arms and we will continue to work with the people that lead and use and need our fishing industry in this province

because, as my hon. colleagues have said, this is the backbone of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: And let us not forget that the fishing industry is a renewable megaproject. It is a renewable megaproject that brings in new money every single year and I think all of us are tasked with the idea of how do we grow that from \$1 billion to \$2 billion.

We all want that for our communities. We all need that for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. There is no disputing that by anyone in this House, but at the end of the day, you've got to be able to put it forward. The last few budgets we've seen put forward by the Liberal government opposite had very little to say about the fishery, a few lines, but we have stood here in this House continuously and have stood here for decades and talked about the need for joint management of our fishery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We will continue to stand here and demand joint management of our fishery. We will demand it from Ottawa. We will continue to fight it until we get joint management of our fishery, and we will be there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: So let's make sure that everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador gets that message, Speaker. Hears that message.

I'm glad to hear the Members opposite support us. I'm glad to hear the Members opposite stand up and support us when we've talked about joint management for years in this House and now we have an opportunity, because at the end of the day, with all due respect to everyone in this House, it is not about us. With all due

respect, it's not about us. It's about the people who are working in the industry. Everything else aside, that's what's important.

Let me tell you a little story if I can. It was about a time when the crab harvesters weren't on the water and I ran into a small convenience store owner. I went into his shop and he said, today, 5,000 lunch tins didn't get filled, and what he was talking was fish plant workers who were not working. His little convenience store always had a portion of those workers who would come in and get their snacks for their lunch boxes, whether it be a can of Coke or a Pepsi or a bag of chips.

But that's how the fishery impacts so many industries, so many people. So there are lots of big industries but there are lots of small industries and communities that depend on it. All of us want to see changes and good changes brought in, good legislation brought in that protects the people that make their living from this great industry of ours in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and all over Newfoundland and Labrador.

We will always stand here and stand up and support and cheer for the fishing industry of Newfoundland and Labrador. Let's work to get joint management, because that's what we ought to have in our province, and we will continuously stand up for the people that risk their lives every single day and go out on those waters to catch that fish.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to say good job, actually, to our leader. He is very passionate and speaks

highly of our position on this side of how we support the fishery unequivocally.

Bill 104 is An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2. What we're looking for in this legislation, obviously, is fairness for all people in the industry, from harvesters and processors, but also to the wharfingers and the fish plant workers. These are a very vital part of our industry. We need to attract more people in those parts of the industry.

It's always an honour to speak on behalf of the people of Placentia West - Bellevue where we have a lot of enterprises and we have several fish plants. One I want to point out, in particular, that has been an industry standard and a real industry changer is the one of –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's been very difficult; the speaker is here right in front of me and I can barely hear him.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: I have to thank you for your protection because it wasn't nothing directed at me, but the youngsters are playing today.

Anyway, I will say that Icewater Seafoods in Arnold's Cove has been a very impressive thing to support going throughout my district because it is so important to the region. It's not just the refinery or Bull Arm or anything like that, we also have Royal Greenland in Southern Harbour. But what happens in Arnold's Cove is that it processes cod only; 99.8 per cent of every cod that comes through the door at Icewater Seafoods is processed. That's 0.2 per cent waste. That's unbelievable. It's an industry game changer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: They made a \$10-million investment. There are about 1,000 people in Arnold's Cove, so that's \$10,000 they invested into their company to keep it going, to stay in the fishing industry for every man, woman and child that it affects in the immediate town that they're operating in.

I want to make a shoutout to Alberto Wareham. He's the owner and operator now, but he's the eight generation. His son, Ryan, that's coming behind him is a very smart, intelligent young man. I think he's going to be a game changer as well in making sure of the advancement of the industry. So like I said, a great shoutout to the Warehams for putting in the effort. We really appreciate it.

Speaker, not only for the Warehams to be in the industry that long; they also have workers there. There are fish plant workers in Arnold's Cove that have been with the Warehams for over 50 years. Now that's dedication to the fishery, not just to the Warehams, but that's the relationship that they've had. I've been at a couple of ceremonies already where we celebrated people 50 years working for the Warehams since they landed in Arnold's Cove.

These plant workers are very dedicated. It is a game-changing plant and I encourage anybody in the province, if you want to see state-of-the-art fish processing, you go to Icewater Seafoods in Arnold's Cove.

I won't be long, I won't take 20 minutes, certainly, but I have a young couple – actually, I'll give a shoutout to Taylor and Kelsey Hollett, they just got married this past summer – in their 20s, grew up in the fishing industry. Kelsey is actually the last –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm making a shoutout to Taylor and Kelsey Hollett. They're in the fishing industry as well but they're not able to break into it as easily as we would like. The point I'm trying to make is that we don't want to lose the fishery because we have nobody coming behind in further generations because of difficult roadblocks that they have to overcome to get into the fishing industry and carry on their parents' enterprise.

But with Kelsey and Taylor, Taylor is one smart cookie, I can tell you right now. Kelsey runs the business; Taylor's the technologist. They have Hollett's Marine Service in Arnold's Cove, they service all the latest technology that's on the boats from fish finders to GPS, everything. The problem with it is, right now, he has too small of a shop. He's just on the side of Foodland. He came to me looking to expand.

I can't get ACOA, I can't get government, I can't get anybody to give this young fella help. I can't get anybody to give us some assistance in getting this business an ability to expand. Because they have such great things to do, it would save the enterprises that are in the area from having to go to Mount Pearl - Southlands to get their parts or to have to get a technologist to go down aboard their boat, that's only across the road from them. We need that kind of support for young people that want to part of the industry.

Taylor's parents, Merv and Lajuan, are enterprise owners, so Taylor grew up on the boat with his father, but he needs 75 per cent of his income. So we want him to shut down his service industry, he can't take over his father's enterprise because he's not doing 75 per cent of his income, we can't get him some expansion, so what are we doing for the young people that want to break into the industry or want to continue on that family tradition? That's what I'm looking at.

The other thing is that the availability of competition is what helps drive price. The biggest game changer is going to be competition. That's what this legislation is going to do is open up the free enterprise because that's what the industry has asked for. That's what we need to do, listen to the boots on the ground, not the ivory tower decision in Ottawa that's telling us to give up on the fishery and start growing seagrass, because I don't know who put that person in place, but that person needs to move on.

The trickle-down effect, this is the greatest renewable industry in the country, let alone this province. That will tell you how important it is to this province, but we need to be stewards of it.

The Atlantic Accord is in place and it should be implemented when it comes to our fishery to give us joint management so we understand that we actually have a say in how our fishery is run. This is what this legislation is giving us an opportunity to do with binding arbitration, but we need the same thing between the province and Ottawa. That's what we need more than anything.

Like we said, this might be a stopgap measure or it might be a short-term resolution because of what happened last year, but we need to think more long term when it comes to our fishery because it is the greatest renewable resource that we have. If we're going to be sustained here in Newfoundland and Labrador, the fishery needs to stay as one of the most important resources that we have. It's as simple as that.

So for young people entering the fishery, we need to assist them in getting it done. We don't want to lose these family traditions because the thing is, the young people that want to break in are traditionally a fishing family. We're not going to attract people from, probably, Mount Pearl - Southlands or

from the larger centres to go into the fisheries. It's not what they're interested in.

In rural Newfoundland, they are interested in it but we're driving them away. We're taking away the opportunity for them to stay interested. It's the trickle-down effect that we don't get to appreciate our own because we're getting dictated to by Ottawa.

To me, if we turn around and we take away that 75 per cent, we have a look and we negotiate what would be fair and understanding; I think it should be 33 per cent to be quite honest. But if 33 per cent can't be met, then that's fine, we're talking about income. We don't get people to shut down industries or go on other jobs so that they can sustain their family while they're trying to get the 33 per cent income and their education at the same time. So we need that to be straightened out.

Like I said, the free enterprise is what we need and really we need to think about the whole picture and to go back to what the legislation is going to do. It's also going to help the harvesters, the processors, the plant workers and the wharfingers.

To me, if we don't focus on the fishery and understand how important the fishery is, not only to St. John's, but to the whole economy of the province, to each and every district and each and every town, because, as the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's said, you've got a community that's not applying now for the CEEP.

What I noticed, after she made that comment, was that the towns that are applying for CEEP in my district all had their fish plants closed. What we have in those towns, now, are enterprises and people trying to self sustain the fishery without a great lot of support.

On that note, Speaker, I'm going to take my place, but I just want to say that we certainly need to support the fishing industry and

make sure that we're doing it for the right reasons.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister Responsible for Labour speaks now, we'll close debate.

The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: My goodness, Speaker, there's a lot of passion around about the fishery, I'll tell you that.

There was quite a number of speakers here today – no surprise – and I do want to thank them. Everybody wanted to talk about the great impacts of the fishery in their community, in their district and even those who didn't have plants or harvesters, they certainly are feeling the positive impacts of the fishery.

There are a few little points that I want to make very, very quickly in the interest of time, and I was going to say, I, too, like many that spoke, grew up in a fishing family in a fishing community and now representing a fishing district. Many in my family involved, not only as harvesters and processors, but my family owned the last privately owned fish plant. It closed in 1992, so lots of history there.

Where we're going, I want to reiterate, basically with the strike or the lockout, is we are providing, giving, listening and responding and giving the parties what they have asked for in terms of wanting the right to strike or lockout, but also providing off-ramps.

I would be remiss if I did not go back and mention there was a lot of reference in the dialogue back and forth about where were you in the last two years and we were outside and we stood with fish harvesters. I

would be remiss if I didn't mention my colleague, Minister Bragg. We went out and he addressed the crowd. He did that two years ago. The next Fisheries minister, Minister Loveless, he went out and he did that. But if you want to get into negotiation and listening to the fishermen, you can't do that standing in front of a large crowd. For the record, I want to say we did that. Besides that, we had multiple, multiple, multiple meetings.

Speaker, I just want to reference and thank the people who spoke. It was the Member for Bonavista that shared some comments and talked about the economic driver in the fishery. The Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, I think, gave a real state-of-the-union address. Lots of passion there and involved in the fishery right from her family and represents a fishing district. The Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels talked about the value of the fishery to his area. The Member for Labrador West, not a lot of fishing activity happening there, but certainly, he's very connected with his partner from Southern Labrador.

The Member for Corner Brook, and, Speaker, I want to say how much I appreciate the work that myself and the Fisheries Minister have been able to do; ongoing dialogue with both FFAW, with the Atlantic Seafood Producers. Last week in Southern Labrador we had dialogue, we started this week with both FFAW and ASP sitting in front of us, and I appreciate the work we've been doing together. The FICBA happens to fall under Labour, it's me, but we're also working closely together because it is a fishing matter.

I want to thank the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay; he did talk a lot about we need to do more of this, more of that. I was waiting for a solution, had my earpiece in, I didn't hear anything. I'm quite happy with the direction as a government that we are going in and working with the parties.

Because what we are doing, Speaker, just to be clear, is we're providing parties with options. They can conclude a collective agreement on their own; they can conclude an agreement through the conciliation process; or they can choose by mutual agreement to go to the panel. If none of that works, they will have the option to strike or lockout.

What we're doing really there is giving them what many other groups already have. Just about finished here, I want to thank the Member for Ferryland, the Leader of the Opposition – I find it funny, because I didn't even know where the cameras were in this place, for a lot of years. But they don't speak to you, they speak to the camera. I guess there's a video clip coming. And I want to thank the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

Speaker, in my clue-up, clearly we all place a lot of value on this renewable resource, and certainly we appreciate the processors and the harvesters, and I like a lot of talk about the balance here, of supporting both the processors and the harvesters –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. DEMPSTER: – we have to always consider two of them.

I think I'm going to sit down, and hopefully we're going to move to Committee. I didn't say it when I opened, but I do look forward to working with this province's first-ever female president of FFAW. I said to her on Monday, I joined an all-male team in 2013, and I'm always really pleased and delighted when we see women sitting in seats that historically they have never sat. I'm looking forward to continuing to build a positive relationship with the president of FFAW, President Street, and also place a lot of value on the relationship I'm building with the Atlantic Seafood Producers.

Thank you, everyone, for your contribution. I look forward to taking questions in debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Are the Members ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 104 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2. (Bill 104)

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

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

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 104)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Labour, that

this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 104.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 104.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against?

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Trimper): Order, please!

We are now considering in the Committee of the Whole, Bill 104, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2." (Bill 104)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

We've had a conciliation board to the bill, the amendment. What guarantee do we have that those appointed to the conciliation board will be knowledgeable in the fisheries?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: I was a little bit distracted there, Speaker, just coming off my –

CHAIR: Will I repeat the question?

L. DEMPSTER: Yes.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: What guarantee do we have that those appointed to the conciliation board will be knowledgeable about the fisheries?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: Are you talking about the Fish Price Setting Panel?

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: You've added a conciliation board that's part of the process here that either party can determine that they wish to go to, but I'm just wondering about the makeup of the conciliation board as to their knowledge of what the fisheries would be and whether there is any thought given to the composition of that committee.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: Sorry, just moving parts.

They certainly will have expertise in the area of processors, in the area of harvesters. I misunderstood first. I thought you were talking about the Price Setting Panel where ASP gets to appoint one and the FFAW gets to appoint one and then there's an arbitrator. We will ensure that they have expertise in the area of processing and the fishery.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: In your closing commentary, you thanked the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture for the ongoing dialogue with the FFAW and ASP. Can you quantify that? How much dialogue have you had with those two entities over this bill? How much?

I know you did, because I know I read it in a Facebook post of the FFAW. So I'm just wondering how much dialogue you had.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: You said with regard to this bill, so the actual contents of the bill you can't speak to until you're in second reading. However, we are moving in this direction because it is what they have asked for.

I think, in September, we had our first contact in terms of the FFAW. On the 31st of October, myself, the Fisheries Minister and the Premier we met for three hours with the FFAW, the full Inshore Council was there, and it was a cross with the Fish Price Setting Panel. There are 13 species, so it was a broad conversation about the fact that the Fish Price Setting Panel is working for most of the species, if we look back through the years.

Then last week up in Labrador, at the Labrador Fishermen's Union Shrimp Company biennial, the president of the FFAW was there and the executive director of ASP was there. They both spoke at that event and we had conversation. Then, on Monday, each of those parties sat down with myself and my colleague, the Fisheries Minister, and each party had a number of people with them.

So all of this direction, where we are going, they have been asking for the right to strike or lockout. But, also, I call it a bit of a hybrid model, and that's my words, not theirs. At the end of the day, sometimes bargaining can be or an agreement can be reached

more quickly, I think, if you're able to have the option to exert that economic pressure, let's say.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: On that Facebook post that the FFAW had, just let me read the final part, just to get your commentary on it. Both parties also agreed to defer – and both parties would be the FFAW and the ASP – defer any legislation changes to the *Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act* regarding the strike-lockout process, and government has agreed that nothing will move forward until both parties have an agreement.

Am I assuming that this bill that we're going to pass through the House now will not get Royal Assent, that we're going to wait to see until those parties mutually work it out?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you for the question.

Back to the conciliation process, I just want to say that it was correct. I had needed to get assurance that those members will be selected by both parties.

About the bill and what we're doing here today, we have been moving forward in lockstep with the parties, saying we have heard that this is what you want. We began drafting legislation in response to what they want.

However, we have heard from them. They each represent groups, as you would know, and they answer to members. So they have asked for time to consult with their members and then they will come back and say a yay or a nay. They may say, yes, we like everything here; the members are all on board. Or they may say, actually, we're going to move forward this year with what is in place.

So to prepare, in advance of this is our last week in the House, we will pass this today, hopefully. It sounds like everyone is in support. But what is proposed here will not come into effect until it receives Royal Assent. We will not move forward to receive Royal Assent until we have heard back from both parties. We made that clear with them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: I call the attention of the House that our *Standing Orders* require that at 12:30 we are to stop for a recess. However, if the will of the House is to continue and we have leave, we can continue.

So is there leave to continue?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Labour, that the Committee rise and report progress.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Did I get a seconder, Sir?

J. HOGAN: The Minister Responsible for Labour.

CHAIR: Okay.

So it's moved and seconded that this Committee do rise and report and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and asked me to report progress and ask leave to sit again regarding Bill 104, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargain Act No. 2.

Thank you.

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

When shall the report be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee ask leave to sit again?

J. HOGAN: Presently.

SPEAKER: Presently.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I moved, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now recess.

SPEAKER: This House do stand in recess until 2 this afternoon.

I remind Members of the Management Committee we have a short meeting up in the Committee room.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin, in the public gallery I'd like to welcome Doris Hudson of Pouch Cove. Doris is joining us this afternoon for a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome a new Page here with us today, Emma Harris. Emma is completing her Bachelor of Arts degree at Memorial University, with a major in psychology and a minor in law and public policy.

Welcome, Emma.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome young Orion who's joining us this afternoon, sitting with his mom, the Minister of Education.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for Torngat Mountains, Waterford Valley, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Bonavista and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Marjorie Flowers, née Andersen, born and raised in Makkovik, Nunatsiavut, moved to Hopedale in 1996 to start a life with the love of her life, Brian. Sadly, Brian passed away 23 years later, but Marjorie continues to live the positive and productive life that they both planned.

Marjorie began as a chapel servant in the Moravian church but stepped up to take on the responsibility as lay minister. She, along with other dedicated members, keep the church going, holding regular services, marrying, baptizing and laying their parishioners to rest. All with the message of hope, love and resilience.

Her convictions formed young. Marjorie, along with her siblings, had to go away to residential school; the dorm we used to call it. Marjorie shares her experiences, educating others to the truth, so our history will not be forgotten.

She served the people of Hopedale for 19½ years with the Labrador Inuit Health Commission and, later, Nunatsiavut's Health and Social Development before running for AngajukKâk.

She has been elected by the people three times to lead Hopedale and represent them in the Nunatsiavut House of Assembly. Marjorie works hard every day to improve Hopedale and in the House of Assembly her voice is respected greatly.

Please join me in congratulating Marjorie on her contribution.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

Community food pantries play a transformative role in ensuring food security, fostering compassion and strengthening neighbourhoods. In both Shea Heights and Southside Road, the Little Free Pantry initiative embodies this spirit by providing accessible, no-barrier support to those in need.

The Little Free Pantry operates on a simple yet powerful principle of neighbours helping neighbours. Stocked by community members and local supporters, these small but mighty pantries offer essential food items, toiletries and other necessities to individuals and families who may be experiencing challenges. Their discreet, 24/7 accessibility ensures anyone can benefit, free of external judgment or stigma, creating a safe, welcoming space for all.

In addition to addressing immediate needs, the Little Free Pantry fosters a culture of giving and mutual support. By encouraging residents to take what they need, and give what they can, these pantries nurture a sense of community, connection and responsibility. The impact of these Little Free Pantries in Shea Heights and Southside Road extends far beyond the items on their shelves. They symbolize hope, dignity and shared humanity. They remind us that collective action can create meaningful change, and ensure no one in our external community is left behind.

Please join me in congratulating the Little Free Pantries.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, with renewed board leadership and an energized focus, it is time to formally salute the Green Bay Chamber of Commerce.

Last week, the new chamber even held a fall gala, and the CEO of Mary Brown's, Greg Roberts, who honed his entrepreneurial skills in the local area, provided encouragement to the varied Green Bay entrepreneurs.

Formerly just a chamber for the Town of Springdale, they lived the ebb and flow across all business sectors. Spring forward to now, and they are a regional Chamber of Commerce that serves 20 communities and every business in the Green Bay area. Today, there is notable optimism for what the next few years will offer, especially across the mining, fishing, forestry, agriculture and tourism sectors.

Eager to grow, the chamber is pursuing opportunities toward some of the areas untapped potential, like with mining and tourism. Of specific tourism note, most Green Bay communities have invested in world-class hiking trails, and one of those trails even retraces a portion of our provincial Beothuk heritage.

I invite all MHAs from the 50th Assembly to further engage the chamber in person at upcoming events, and to truly applaud them for becoming a regional entity.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

On Saturday, November 23, 2024, the King's Cove and Area Volunteer Fire Department celebrated their 50th anniversary – 50 years of supporting efforts to assure public safety of the residents of King's Cove, Knights Cove, Stock Cove, Open Hall, Red Cliff, Tickle Cove, Duntara and Keels.

Tom Maddox, from King's Cove, was an educator at St. Mark's All Grade School, who was one of the founding members back in 1974 and remains still active within the fire department today. The other retired founding members are Eugene Batterton and John Batterton. Together with others, they started the department that has certainly proven to have longevity of service.

The King's Cove and area fire department is a great example of regionalization and co-operation, providing services to an entire region off Route 235 in Bonavista Bay. The 23 members of these communities make up this regional fire department, and it remains as the founding members have envisioned, fire safety for the entire region.

I ask the Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in recognizing those founding members of the King's Cove and area fire department and their regional approach in providing this life-saving service to these Bonavista Bay communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, last Wednesday, I had the opportunity to recognize 17 outstanding individuals from my district at the 75th Anniversary of Confederation Medal, honouring those who have made significant contributions to their communities and to their province.

These well-deserving individuals have dedicated many years of their time and talents for the benefit of others, acts of kindness that are essential to a connected community. The list of recipients are as follows: From the Town of Bauline, Carol King, Dianne LeGrow and Bill and Sharon O'Toole; from the Town of Flatrock, Marion McCarthy, Joe Tilley and Madonna

Wilkinson; from Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove, Gerry Boland, Patrick O'Rourke and Bruce Templeton; from the Town of Pouch Cove, Kevin Connors, Sam Connors, Doris Hudson and Gary and Rose Nichols; and from the Town of Torbay, Mary Lacey, Mike McGrath, Kevin Sharpe and Ralph Tapper.

Speaker, these individuals play a vital role in shaping their communities by volunteering with their church, serving a municipal council, coaching school sports, active in the performing arts, historians, volunteer firefighters, makers of educational video documentaries, veterans, Lions Club, keepers of traditional music and supporting our seniors.

Speaker, if I might add, Mrs. Doris Hudson played the organ in her church, Memorial United in Pouch Cove, for 75 years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to all these individuals for their various contributions to community and province. Their work and advocacy has been vital throughout my district, all the while not looking for any recognition.

Please join me in thanking these people for their significant contributions.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, the provincial government Seniors of Distinction awards celebrate the contributions, achievements

and diversity of older persons and seniors in the province.

Seniors and older adults are making a strong impact on their communities every day.

On October 1, I had the pleasure of announcing the 2024 Seniors of Distinction as part of marking National Seniors Day and the United Nations International Day of Older Persons, and today I am pleased to again recognize these nine remarkable individuals.

This year's award recipients include Leo Churchill Bonnell, Sharon Brown, Harold Druken (awarded posthumously), Carl Parsons, Robert Charles Parsons, Joyce Leah Rogers, Linda Ryan and Kaberi Sarma-Debnath. Our ninth recipient of the Seniors of Distinction Award was Alvin Cluett who sadly passed away on October 19.

Alvin and the other individuals I have mentioned exemplify an ethic of service to others.

Thank you all for your time and energy, as you are leaders in your communities and are truly inspiring.

Speaker, I invite all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to join me in congratulating the 2024 Seniors of Distinction.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, the PC caucus congratulates these nine exceptional recipients, each

embodying the spirit of the province and its resilience and inherent duty to serve.

Their selfless contributions and commitment to the welfare of others is truly highly commendable. A large congratulations goes out from us to all nine recipients and we pass along our condolences to the family of Mr. Cluett.

I would, however, be remiss if I did not highlight the failures of this Liberal government in ensuring that our province's seniors may live without fear of undue medical hardships, unaffordable food and housing and a lack of services. Despite promising a targeted seniors' production reduction strategy more than a year ago, little action has been seen and, undoubtedly, the number of seniors in poverty are increasing.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

We also congratulate the nine recipients of this prestigious award and thank them for their contributions to our province.

We also call on government to do more to help seniors, as most of them struggle through the affordability crisis on fixed incomes. Please invest more in accessible, appropriate and affordable housing and, once again, we ask that government index the Seniors' Benefit to inflation and re-evaluate the desperately low income cut-offs for other programs that seniors depend on.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to celebrate the positive impact on well-being initiatives across our province.

In September, we were proud to declare Newfoundland and Labrador as Canada's first Well-Being Province.

Our government is making record investments in health care with well-being at the forefront of government policy and decision-making to improve health outcomes.

Through an all-of-government approach and collaboration across communities and municipalities, we have taken significant strides to improve the social determinants of health, which include such things as housing, child care, financial security, education and equity.

As a partner in this work, the Department of Health and Community Services is already seeing improvements by: implementing the province's first Public Health Framework and Health-in-All-Policies approach to ensure policies and initiatives have a beneficial or neutral impact on the determinants of health; introduction of collaborative, team-based health care with a focus on prevention, early intervention and well-being; creating age-friendly and dementia-friendly communities with a targeted Seniors Health and Well-Being Plan, helping seniors to age well in place with dignity; allocating child care spaces for health care practitioners; and constructing a new Mental Health and Addictions Centre which has achieved substantial completion and will contribute to further expanding

mental health and addictions services in the province.

Speaker, we know there is more work to be done and we remain committed to continue working with all our partners to improve the health and well-being of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank the hon. minister for an advance copy of his statement. Today's statement just shows how out of touch the Liberal government are with realities facing residents in this province. While the Premier, again, loves the photo ops and none more than the self-proclaimed, well-being province, it is based in a fantasy land devoid of any reality.

Speaker, the 163,000 people without a family doctor are not celebrating their well-being. The record numbers of children using food banks are not celebrating their well-being. Working-class people who are choosing between paying their rent or turning on the heat are not celebrating their well-being.

There are 3,000 people on low-income housing wait-lists not celebrating their well-being. The residents waiting three years for an MRI are not celebrating their well-being. The single mother who can't access child care to return to work is not celebrating their well-being. Seniors who cannot afford to eat properly and are splitting their pills are not celebrating their well-being.

So rather than declaring an ego boost, perhaps the government can declare a health human resource strategy and poverty

reduction plan to treat our families and seniors with dignity and respect.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

I will tell you that Rhonda Whalen and the residents at Keane Place are not seeing the benefit of these initiative at all. There still remains significant gaps and people continue to struggle.

To improve well-being, please invest more in the social determinants of health, particularly basic income, affordable housing, an indexing of the Seniors' Benefits, Income Supplement and income support to inflation.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Last night, over 200 people attended a public town hall in Mount Pearl following a recent attack that has shaken their community and shocked the province. The wife of the Mount Pearl assault victim noted last night, she arrived at the crime scene before police.

Speaker, I ask the Premier: Is this a result of the Liberal government's failure to properly staff our police force?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, let me completely sympathize and empathize with the family that had to go through that criminal act. Certainly nobody in this province wants to have anyone experience that type of behaviour.

I will say that we have recognized that public safety and justice is paramount to the foundation of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's why we took the extra effort to invest extra money not only in budget, but the Minister of Justice and Public Safety also announced, in this sitting, additional resources to support communities. Whether that's in a joint task force or whether that's an increase in correctional officers, whether that's increasing RNC officers with new positions, new Crown Attorneys.

This is a system's approach to ensure that the justice system is not only protected but is – I'll continue answering next time. I'm out of time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, last night the president of the NLTA stated: Children are taking weapons to school to protect themselves.

I ask the Premier: Does he still stand by his Safe and Caring Schools policy?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

We've done significant work in the Department of Education to build our Safe and Caring Schools policy but like any policy that we have, it continues to grow and evolve. We look at that routinely and it's something that is actually on our desk right now to be reviewed, but we've also taken additional steps.

I now chair the coalition for safe schools which includes several departments all across government, because we recognize that the solution to this problem isn't simply going to be solved in a classroom, it's going to take a multi-departmental approach. It's going to be the responsibility of government, of communities, of families, of parents, of teachers, of students, of schools, of all of us here in Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that our province is safe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, this most recent attack happened in front of an elementary school in Mount Pearl, Morris Academy.

Has the Premier ordered a school safety audit in light of the attack?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: As I said, Speaker, yesterday when I answered, we do have several things in place right now that we're looking at. One of which is our pilot program for teaching and learning assistants, who will be on the front lines. They'll be meeting students as they go throughout their day. They'll be evaluating the interactions in the schools and intervening, where possible.

We've had great feedback from the schools that have had these teaching and learning assistants instituted and we've actually just been able to double the number that we're going to be able to put in our classrooms.

So I say to the Members opposite if you have issues in your schools, then please bring them to my attention and we'll be sure to look at the needs of the teaching and learning assistants that can be placed out as we evaluate where these new resources are going.

In the interim, we also have additional resources for our guidance counsellors. We've reduced the number from 1-500; the ratio is now 1-333.

SPEAKER: The minister's time as expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, there are lots of things being talked about but clearly, it's not working – it's not working.

Speaker, last year, the province was shocked when a youth was attacked with an axe on the front doorstep at PWC.

Is there anything in place today, right now, to stop this from happening again?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Member opposite references a very unfortunate incident in our schools – it was the most serious that we've had and those are the ones that often make the news. Unfortunately, we do have an increase in violent incidents in our school, but the experience of violence is different for everybody.

So we cannot compare what happens on a day-to-day basis to some of the most major incidents. That's why the approach that we're taking has to be multifaceted. We can't have a one-size-fits-all approach. We're going into the schools. We're going

into our classrooms. We're speaking to our students and our teachers to see what solutions might be possible. But, as I said, this is not something that the Department of Education or the government can solve themselves. It is going to have to be an approach of communities, families, parents –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, as I have said, this is about the children going to our schools. This is about their parents. This is about the teachers that are in the schools. It's important to make sure that, while a cookie-cutter approach may not be appropriate, it is appropriate that we have measures in place in every single school in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to protect the safety of our children and all the people that work in those schools.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the police officers call the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, catch and release. Young offenders are routinely caught, charged and quickly released and then charged later in the day after committing another crime – twice in the same day, catch and release.

Speaker, I ask the Premier: Will you admit the revolving-door justice system is not addressing youth violence?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question and it's something we're very committed to on this side of the House. You'll see from

the last three weeks, alone, we've committed some \$43 million in the justice continuum, which is an important piece.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: As I say to the hon. Member for Terra Nova; it takes time to work that system out. These crimes are happening in our communities. They're happening right across this country. We're dealing with that as an FTP across our country in that way. That's why we're making those investments. That's why we see it as a full continuum of the justice system.

That's why it's so important that you hit, not only increasing police officers, creating joint task force operations both with the RNC and the RCMP and also more and more important than that is making sure that those investments are balanced right across the spectrum to ensure that those individuals –

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

After 10 years with the Liberal government, something is seriously wrong with public safety in Newfoundland and Labrador today. People no longer feel safe, not at school, not on the streets or even in their own houses. People deserve to feel safe in their communities, homes, schools and businesses.

Again, I ask the Premier: Why has your government allowed public safety to turn into a crisis?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, let me thank the hard-working women and men on the front lines of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: They are committed to the safety of every citizen in the province. We know that we can support them and we continue to support them. There were 10 new positions in *Budget 2024*. We're continuing to support their human resources with 25 new correctional officers, 18 new Crown attorneys, 14 new deputy sheriffs, 19 new officers within the Joint Task Force and, as the minister said, just in the last few weeks announced an additional \$44 million to support the hard-working women and men on the front lines and we'll continue to do so for the safety of all our citizens, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Why is it taking so long? Do we have to deal with a crisis in our criminal system to get the Premier up and list off all his accomplishments? By the way, they're not working yet, as was evidenced last night. The stories we heard in Mount Pearl last night, Speaker, are pretty appalling.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: The Premier and minister said several times yesterday that they met with the CEO, who had also met with the surgeons in Carbonear. Earlier this morning, I spoke to a surgeon who said the group has not heard from anyone, from the CEO nor the Liberal government, until 2 p.m. today. As we were in the House of Assembly, the email come in at 2 p.m.

today, they want to sit down and meet with them.

So yesterday when I was told that you had already met with surgeons in Carbonear, where was that? That was said in the House yesterday, so can you provide some clarity on it, Premier, you or the minister?

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll address the preamble from the hon. Member for CBS. I think it's really, really important that we are tackling public safety. It's not an issue that we've taken lightly. As soon as I moved into that portfolio, and the minister prior to me, we've seen the things that needed to be done. We've made those investments; we're going to continue to make those investments. There is still more to come. There's going to be a significant amount of officers on the beat, as they say, both in the RNC as well as the RCMP.

They're very happy with it. They're constantly in contact with us, both detachments, the RNC and the RCMP are in our office all the time, looking for resources, working with us to find better ways to do policing in our province. That's why we established the Policing Transformation Working Group that's doing fantastic work across this province, working with our communities and we'll continue to do so, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Now I'm going to move from the soapbox to Carbonear.

Minister, can you clarify your comments yesterday that you met with the CEO who also met with the doctors of Carbonear, when no one knew nothing about it?

The Minister for Labrador Affairs is pointing to you, Speaker, so I'm supposed to speak to you. I hope you hold the same true when they speak, they better speak to you.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: I'll call the Chair.

B. PETTEN: Just reminding you.

SPEAKER: I'm the Speaker, I'll take the Chair.

B. PETTEN: Yeah, I know.

SPEAKER: I don't need to be told.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

What I can say is that there was a letter received at the department yesterday. I think it was dated November 15, I'm not sure why it took so long. I don't think it was delivered through Canada Post, but for whatever reason, it showed up yesterday. As the Member said, we reached out, the department reached out this afternoon to set up a meeting. They want to meet to talk about issues.

As I said, with any issue that comes forward with regard to health care and community service in this province, my door is always open. I'm emailing and phoning people constantly, and this group is exactly the same. We're happy to talk to them about any issues that we have and we'll certainly make our best efforts to rectify and work with them on that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday, the Premier and the minister repeated several times that the CEO had met with the surgeons and they were meeting with the CEO. None of that is factual, Speaker. That is the issue; none of that is factual. Sure, he's going to go on a go-forward basis. They answered several of my questions on this issue yesterday and that was their answer. We've checked *Hansard*, that's what they said.

I think the doctors in Carbonear deserve an answer, we deserve an answer and the people in this province deserve clarity on that question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All I can say is that when we met with the CEO of the health authority, she told us she spoke with doctors in Carbonear who expressed concern with respect to the hospital in Carbonear and the culture in Carbonear. If there is a particular doctor or a particular group of doctors who didn't feel like their voice was heard or weren't at that venue, my door is always open and I'm happy to speak to them.

But all I can say is the CEO of the health authority expressed to me that she had met with a group of physicians who had concerns in Carbonear.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I'll leave it at that. I think that speaks volumes and everyone who was listening can hear what we were told yesterday wasn't actually factual. I'll go to the next question.

Surgery in Carbonear is in crisis and now, today, we've been told that over 20 LPNs at the Carbonear General and long-term care have been laid off; a very poor Christmas gift, I might add, 20-plus jobs are being eliminated.

Speaker, can the minister tell us how many jobs are being cut at the Carbonear General Hospital?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, this government is not cutting health care. As I've said numerous times in the last few weeks in this House of Assembly, the budget for health care has increased year over year to deliver health care to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We have incentives in place to recruit health care practitioners to Newfoundland and Labrador and to retain health care practitioners in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are continuing to do that, we are continuing to work on Health Accord NL and we will keep doing so.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, my question to the minister is: Can you confirm that those 20 positions have been eliminated?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'm not aware of any positions being eliminated. But certainly if

that's the case, we will look at it. That is not the position of this government; that's not the policy of this government.

As I said, there's a reason that funding has increased year over year for the health care budget, it's to make sure that all the health care practitioners that we need, whether it's nurses, hospital workers, doctors, other allied health professionals, are in the system. That's what we need the money for and that's what the funding is for.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, over 20 nurses were laid off in Carbonear, some of them from the class of 2023. They describe burnout, gaps in service and heavy workload, yet their jobs are being eliminated. The same issues as the five surgeons who are ready to quit.

Why is the minister slashing front-line health care at the Carbonear General Hospital?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I can tell you that I, as minister, have never made any directive to eliminate any single position in health care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: And we won't. If that's what's being told here today, then I will certainly take that away and look into it. But not one letter, not one email, not a phone call has even come close to talking about anything about removing staff, removing individuals or removing funding from the health care system. It's the opposite.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Minister, we're talking about LPNs.

Speaker, why are we continuing to use travel nurses at \$300 per hour when we are issuing layoffs and slashing positions for nurses and LPNs who want to work in the region? Why won't the minister hire local?

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, again as I said in this House, NLHS – and we agree with their plan to eliminate or to at least reduce travel nurses, agency nurses to pre-pandemic levels.

The numbers have gone down since the high-water mark I believe of last year, maybe October of 2023, I can't recall exactly the date. But the reliance on agency nurses has gone down and it continues to go down. The plan is to keep it going down, as I said, until we get to pre-pandemic levels.

In the meantime, we need nurses to deliver health care in Newfoundland and Labrador, including to areas like CBS and Terra Nova.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, a young father in my district was estranged, separated from his two-year-old son when mom left the district in October of 2023, just prior to Christmas. After three attempts to secure a legal aid

lawyer to maintain connection with his son, today he is no further ahead.

I ask the minister: Is this acceptable?

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

B. DAVIS: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: I greatly appreciate the quick response because that is what I figured. But I have been in contact with the minister and he is well aware of this particular case and how this family is hurting. For the family, they are wondering how the system can allow this child to be estranged, separated for this length of time from his dad and family.

I ask the minister: Can the minister provide an update on what is being done to secure access to this child?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. Member knows – and he has said that he has contacted me on this case and that is true, but I am not going to divulge any information about a case in front of the courts and any of those situations. He's well aware of that.

I can speak to him after this, for sure. We can work on any solution we can possibly have. That's what we're doing in the Department of Justice and Public Safety to any issue that comes forward. I will continue to do that for all my colleagues on both sides of the House each and every time they ask.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

This past weekend we had another near miss in Grand Falls-Windsor, of a vehicle coming eastbound in the westbound lane of a divided highway. Over three years ago, we had a fatality accident where two people were killed.

Three years I've been asking for some sort of engineer expert to come out and check this out and ask why it's happening. It's the second time in the past three weeks it's happened.

I ask the minister today: Can you please have your department hire on some engineers or some experts so this doesn't happen, not just to my constituents, but this is a throughway for everybody across Newfoundland and Labrador? I don't want to see anything happen to anybody's families. Minister, can you please do something about this today?

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for the question. We had chatted about this earlier this week and texted back and forth, prior to this week talking about it. I did pass this on to our officials. We are looking into it and I have committed to him that we will, in fact, send somebody to take a look at that situation, as I told him by text the other day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, is government in possession of the Policing Transformation Working Group report?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is no report for the Policing Transformation Working Group, other than the report that was released publicly for Happy Valley-Goose Bay, which was a direction that they did. The Policing Transformation Working Group is doing their work right across this province. They're very nimble. They're meeting with stakeholders, meeting with both police forces and making recommendations and changes at the time when they see them, that we can make them as nimble as we possibly can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, we need accountability. It's been over a year now since November of 2023 when the Policing Transformation Working Group was created. They've been making recommendations. They've been providing advice to the government and the public have a right to see the results of their work.

So I ask the minister again: Will you make public the results of any recommendations or any work that this group has done?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can point to 43 million examples of what we have done over the last three weeks with respect to the Policing Transformation Working Group.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: The RCMP change that we made directly in Goose Bay, the RCMP

changes that we've made in other detachments – there's a bill on the Order Paper right now dealing directly with recommendations that comes from the Policing Transformation Working Group.

I continue to say that they're doing fantastic work. They're a great people. Thank you very much. I hope you get a question soon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's been nearly a year since the government communicated that the prefeasibility study for the road to the North Coast communities in Northern Labrador is complete.

Will the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure let us know when the report will be made available to the public?

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

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

The prefeasibility study has been completed. We have returned it to Indigenous groups in Labrador for their review and when they get back and consult with us, we will release it at that point in time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, that's the same answer I got eight months ago. Why is it taking so long?

This report is about the lives of the people in the communities – the lives of the people.

The people in the communities need to see the report, Speaker.

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, as I've mentioned just in my prior answer, the prefeasibility study is completed. We had returned it to the three Indigenous groups in Labrador for their review. When we get their recommendations back, it will be released to the public. They have it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, for every litre of gas, residents of Newfoundland and Labrador are paying 56 cents in taxes. On a 60-litre tank, that is \$33 in tax.

Will the Liberal Premier force people to pay more next year by reintroducing the full gas tax?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Member opposite knows, this government has given back, now, \$750 million to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Speaker, \$750 million back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to help with affordability. We were pleased a couple of years ago to introduce over an eight-cent per litre reduction in the price of gasoline.

As the Member opposite fully realizes, that is a budgetary question and budget will be in the spring of 2025.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, the carbon tax will increase by 19 cents on April 1.

I ask the Premier again: Will you permanently cut the gas tax?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

The very reason why, in the preamble, the Member opposite talked about the carbon tax is the reason this Premier – and I'm very pleased to support the Premier as he said to Ottawa, as we've all said to Ottawa, now is not the time to increase the carbon tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: We have affordability challenges in our country and we have been very strong, and I salute the Premier for having been very strong with the federal government on this very issue. We do have concerns.

This government has reduced the tax significantly on gasoline. We've taken it out of the provincial coffers. As I've said, \$750 million returned to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We're going to continue to make every effort to support the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, at a meeting on October 21, the resident of the Lower Coast in Trepassey were promised that the breakwater would be repaired with a more permanent fix at no cost to the taxpayers of Trepassey.

Can the minister update the people of Trepassey on when this work will be done?

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

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

We did meet with them. We did make a commitment to look at this very closely. It's not an easy fix. It is one that's going to take some time in order to make sure what we do is going to be a permanent solution for the residents to maintain the safety of that area of Trepassey.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL basically threw up his hands and admitted there was nothing he could do to help the residents of Keane Place with their elevator.

The *Accessibility Act* passed in 2021 would allow government to publish accessibility standards and apply fines to non-compliant landlords through the regulations.

I ask the minister: Have the accessibility standards and regulations been written and, if not, why not?

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

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, the question is crafted a little bit different but the same from yesterday. In terms of that work that needs to be done, our department will be responsible, but we can't inspect work that's not completed. Plus, there's also a level of support for the tenants that can go to the Residential Tenancies office to actually complain to that office in terms of the work

not being done by the owner of the apartment building.

I'm not the owner, but if the work gets done, we'll be there to inspect it so those seniors can be taken care of.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, residential tenancies is broken, but I would assume from that answer, then, that there have been no standards or regulations written because that was the question. The answer is no.

Speaker, according to the just-released St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness, the average rent in St. John's metro area has increased from \$903, an average now, in 2022, to \$1,077 in '23.

Seniors at some Northview REIT properties – I've seen the notices – have just been notified that their rent will increase by \$150 a month – a month.

I ask the Premier: Will his government introduce rent and vacancy controls on large, financialized landlord and stop the predation on tenants?

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

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

He's talking about rent control and rent freeze. He thinks it's the answer but it's not the answer. There's a responsibility here.

He gets on his feet every day to talk about housing and more housing, more housing. Well, there's investment required for that and we have a responsibility as a government to – there are the renters, there are the landlords and the investors, we have to be careful in terms of discouraging

investment into housing, which is what we want. So we have to strike a balance. That's the balance we're trying to find and we'll respect that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Mr. Speaker, the past couple of days in this hon. House, I've presented petitions requesting more RNC patrol units for the Northeast Avalon.

In response, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety has been listing off investments already made in the past, including a Joint Task Force on drugs and resources for the RNC and RCMP, which are all acknowledged and appreciated. He also speaks of recruitment efforts, which is great if it results in a net gain versus simply replacing upcoming retirees.

Without regurgitating the same response, can the minister provide a direct answer to a specific direct question: Will he commit through the budget 2025-2026 process to allocate additional funding to the RNC to be specifically directed to having additional patrol units on the road 24-7 throughout communities on the Northeast Avalon?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome the Member to the parade that we've had for Public Safety over the last three or four weeks. This is the first time he has asked me a question and I understand fully his community; the concerns they have in their community. I fully understand. That's why we had the chief of police there, the deputy chief of police, the assistant deputy minister and I was trying to get there myself but duties in this House of Assembly required me to be here.

But one of those things that's really, really important is we understand that resourcing is very, very important, both for the RNC and the RCMP. One of those things is we've committed, over the last three years, 30 new additional RNC officers. There are going to be an additional 19 officers that will be done, based on the Policing Transformation Working Group and crime trends that will be directed within the Northeast Avalon. I'm sure they –

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: I still never heard whether or not that would result in a net gain, which is really the reality that we need to know.

Mr. Speaker, one of the frustrations being felt by people in our community, including the police I might add, is the lack of accountability currently within the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Catch and release appears to be the order of the day and there seems to be little to no deterrence contained within the existing legislation to prevent recidivism.

I ask the minister: Will he commit to initiate discussions with his other provincial counterparts throughout the country to lobby the federal government for a review of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* with the view of increased deterrence and accountability for repeat and violent offenders?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those discussions are happening on a daily basis with our counterparts across this country. Both myself and the Attorney General attended an FTP meeting on the west coast of the country. One of those

topics was how we can help in the criminal justice system, both the youth as well as the adults in that system.

As I said many times before, there's a continuum. You have to make investments on the front end, which are the police and resources that way, then there are additional resources that we put in as a government with respect to Crown attorneys, with respect to individuals with sheriff's officers, corrections officers. It's a full continuum that'll be there.

We've made investments in the judicial system with respect to additional judges over the last couple of years. Budget 2025-2026 is on the way, coming in the spring, we're going to have more investments then, I'm sure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: I appreciate it, thank you very much, Speaker.

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling two Orders-in-Council relating to funding precommitment for fiscal years '25-'26 to '28-'29.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Are there any 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 Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

My office received an ATIPP request on November 21, and I'd like to provide an answer to that and provide some colour and information for the general public about that request because I think it's very important.

So the request was: I'm requesting the total number of citizens moved to Newfoundland and Labrador from the UK, among the 900 referenced by the minister in the House on November 19, 2024.

I think that's a very important question, so I just want to provide some context as to the process of recruitment.

By the time someone expresses interest, we talk to them and then we give them a job offer. Once they get a job offer, it's three months to a year before they actually arrive here. So we nominate them after –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Point of order.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, respectfully, that wasn't a question that had to be answered in the House. That's just grandstanding here to give a political response to an ATIPP issue to an embarrassing situation with the soccer team in the UK, which we all know is a farce. She's using this opportunity to stand here in the House and provide it under the guise of questions that were asked and not answered.

That was not asked in this House; that was an ATIPP request that needs to be dealt with through the ATIPP process in government. This is not the place.

AN HON. MEMBER: Especially after what happened yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I do concur that it was not a question brought forward in the House, it was a question brought forward to the department.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, brush cutting on various routes of the Baie Verte Peninsula is now mission critical. Routes 410, 413 and 419 have been neglected for years. It is commonplace to see brush now touching the pavement in many places.

This area is known for an active moose population, which poses a hazard for the driving public due to moose-vehicle collisions. School buses use these routes to transport our children to the various schools in the area and it's the primary access across the peninsula with fairly high volumes of truck traffic for the mining and fishing industries.

Speaker, all of what they're asking for with this petition is a brush-cutting program – an immediate brush-cutting program. Speaker, this petition with nearly 200 signatures was signed in less than an hour at Robin's in Baie Verte. If I had stayed there for a day, it would have been into the thousands. That area truly feels as if they are the forgotten and neglected peninsula of our province.

Why should we focus on that area? As I highlighted, this is about transporting our next generation, those kids, to school in a safe manner. It is about every resident on the Baie Verte Peninsula. They deserve to be able to travel those roads in a safe manner.

It is also about significant GDP for this province across fishing, mining and forestry. It is time that that peninsula be given back a little as well. Most importantly, Speaker, it is about doing the right thing for that peninsula.

Thank you.

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member opposite for the petition and for the commentary related to that.

I've spent a fair bit of time in that area of the province in the last couple of years, and I'm somewhat familiar with it. Not as much as he is, of course, because he is from the area.

Our commitment as a government to all districts of Newfoundland and Labrador is to provide the safest possible way for people to get around. In our budget this year, that we're currently in, we committed over \$13.5 million in roadwork to that district alone, because we understand the importance of the economic input that it has to the GDP of Newfoundland and Labrador.

With respect to brush cutting, we took a \$2-million budget last year and we doubled it to \$4 million. We added another \$3 million that we have for the twinning of the highways across Newfoundland, and an area down by Port aux Basques, through Central Newfoundland and the eastern area, as well as in Port aux Basques.

So we are well aware. I'm happy to look at the areas as well. The minister knows that if he writes or emails or texts me, I will get back to him.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Whereas there has not been any regular maintenance over the last 10 years for roadwork, including brush cutting and ditching, shouldering and asphalt replacement throughout the District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

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 formulate a maintenance plan to deal with the road maintenance issues throughout the District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

What I'm saying is that it's not that there hasn't been any work done. There has been some work done. It's working with the minister and previous ministers, as I have a very vast district with five depots. The issue that we run into really a lot of times is we've got two depots that are shut down in the summertime and I find that those are the two areas that are really more neglected than anything.

The one in Terrenceville or Grand Le Pierre, we'll say, these are the people that are actually signing on to this petition today. We've got brush. You can increase the budget to \$10 million. If you're not going to do the brush that needs to be done, then it doesn't matter to the people of English Harbour East. They didn't see any budget for brush cutting this year.

It's a sin to say, but in some of these branches that are in my district, especially going down to Fairhaven, there's an actual

depot on the road to Fairhaven; probably one of the worst roads in Canada. There's no doubt about it, from washouts on the sides to deteriorating side roads. I was in one of the communities and they said, in England, they drive on the left-hand side of the road and here in Newfoundland, we drive on what's left of the road.

Unfortunately, we need a bit more. There has been a lot of activity. The minister, in his last response, alluded to the twinning of the highway. I will say, good job to the contractor on that because a lot of that is happening in my district because my district goes from seven kilometres outside of Whitbourne right to Marystown. I will have the lion's share of the part that's done here on the East Coast and, like I said, it's going to take a lot of money.

What I'm asking is that we work better to not shutting down depots in the summertime or we work hardier with the group that we have in order to get more work done with the equipment that we have instead of having the stretch from the Burin - Grand Bank District into the District of Placentia West - Bellevue which then also reaches into the Terra Nova District and then reaches in to the Whitbourne district.

So I would ask that we get a plan for Placentia West - Bellevue and then that way I can work with the towns to let them know what's coming and what to expect but what to also be applying for, for their Municipal Capital Works.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member opposite for the words and, especially, I wanted to point out the fact that he acknowledged the hard-working women and men who work at the depots across

Newfoundland and Labrador in very adverse conditions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: I might add, as well, that they're going to be working right through the Christmas season to make sure that our roads are clear of ice and snow and they have to continue while many of us will be able to enjoy some time off. They do not get time off throughout the year.

As I have said to the Member opposite, in many times that we've chatted, either in person or by text or by email, I'm happy to look at whatever he has in mind for his district. I have said this to the House as well, not just Members on this side but others, if they have a plan for the coming year, we spent about \$285 million last year on roadwork. I'll reiterate, again, for this answer. We doubled our brush cutting budget from \$2 million to \$4 million this year. We added the additional \$3 million, which his district will benefit from as a result of the twinning of highways, again, to make it safer for people to travel across Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm happy to work with the Member opposite.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank the Labrador crowd.

F. HUTTON: I would like to thank those in Labrador as well. I've been instructed by my colleague.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: Order, please!

This being Wednesday at 3 o'clock, I call upon the hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to bring forward his private Member's resolution.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

This is the private Member's resolution for debate today, Wednesday, December 4, moved by the MHA for Stephenville - Port au Port and seconded by the MHA for Bonavista.

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors in this province have the lowest incomes in Canada; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has stated that the cost of living for seniors has increased by 22 per cent; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has outlined that despite the NL Seniors' Benefit being raised by 15 per cent, in reality the purchasing power of seniors have fallen behind by 7 per cent; and

WHEREAS the most recent status update from the Seniors Advocate demonstrates that the recommendation to annually index the NL Seniors' Benefit has not been implemented; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate compassionately and correctly states that one-third of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador cannot afford necessities, with many cutting pills in half or not eating nutritious food; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors are getting poorer annually while costs continue to rise;

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to increase the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent for a maximum benefit of \$1,819 effective January 2025 and further commit to annual increases indexed to inflation.

Speaker, that is a pretty straightforward PMR. I think that when we listen to what the Seniors' Advocate has been saying now for a number of years, it is clear that seniors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador have been falling behind, and despite the

increase that was provided, they are still behind. That's why we believe here, on this side of the House as the PC Party, that seniors in our province need this increase, and they need to have their benefits indexed to inflation.

When I look at these WHEREASes, at each individual one and it says, "**WHEREAS** the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors in this province have the lowest incomes in Canada," that's not something that any of us in this House of Assembly should be proud of. That's not something that we can ignore, and we have heard too many examples, too many stories – all of us have heard those stories about the challenges that seniors in our province are having to face.

So many more seniors showing up at food banks. The issues around having to split their medications. All of these are real people, real seniors out there who are struggling to make ends meet. We know the cost of living has gone up significantly in this province of ours and it has significantly impacted seniors as well as many others.

So it is time that we take a stand. That's exactly what the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador are going to do. We're going to stand with the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We're going to commit to making sure that they no longer have the lowest incomes in Canada. We're also going to commit that we're going to index that benefit to inflation because that's not only something that needs to be done; it's the right thing to do. We should have done it.

We shouldn't be here talking about the seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador having the lowest incomes in Canada. That is something that for too long has been ignored and it's time to set it right. It's an opportunity that we have right now for all of

us to recognize the tremendous contribution that seniors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador have made over the years.

We've heard lots of Members' statements, we've heard lots of accolades, we've presented lots of medals, we've talked about all of these things, but, at the end of the day, what we're looking for here is the dignity to be able to afford to live in your own home. The dignity to be able to stay safely in your own home, which is also something we've talked about earlier today, the whole safety issue in our communities. But that is the opportunity here. So we're urging the government to turn around and to raise the Seniors' Benefit and to index it to inflation.

There are also lots of other things we ought to be doing and have not done yet. Something that I'm prepared to commit to and I think the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, we all believe in, that is the fact that seniors should not have to pay to see a nurse practitioner, nor should anyone else.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We have raised questions again. When you think about the cost of that, that's additional monies that have to come out of the pocket of a senior citizen, who already have the lowest incomes in Canada, to pay to see a primary care provider.

Now that's not good enough. I don't want to argue about whether or not or who should pay or how it should be paid, all I know is that people on fixed incomes, people on seniors' incomes are having to pay to see a primary care provider. They're doing that because they have to. That's what's important here.

So when it comes down to how we reimburse the nurse practitioner or how we reimburse the patient, let's not allow that to

get in the way. We understand nurse practitioners have the potential to practise in all kinds of different ways, but some choose to do it this way and are offering a service and seniors in our province are taking advantage of it. But, again, they're going and every time they go, depending upon where you go in this province, the rates vary. It could be \$35 a visit, it could be \$75, it could be \$100 a visit. Whether it's \$1 a visit, it's \$1 too much. We ought to be able to come up and find a way to make sure that nobody in our province has to pay to see a primary care provider.

So that's all part of this whole plan that we roll out here when we talk about seniors and how we want to increase this benefit for them.

We all know the cost of housing. Heating our homes have gone up tremendously in Newfoundland and Labrador. We could talk about all the factors around that. The bottom line is costs have gone up and seniors are feeling the pinch. We've had lots of different programs announced, many of which are one-time programs.

So what we're talking about is turning around now and saying: We started it, but it hasn't finished and it needs to be increased by another 20 per cent and brought up to \$1,819. But the important piece is we have to commit to annual increases indexed to inflation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That is key and that is something that needs to be done.

I also think of another key element related to health care, and it's not just the ability to turn around and pay for your medications or afford to be able to pay for your medications, it's to be able to afford to travel for health care and health benefits, when you have to travel outside your region to see a specialist or for a medical appointment.

We on this side of the House, the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, are committed to reimburse the people of the province 100 per cent for their medical transportation. That should not be something anyone should have to worry about, whether or not they can afford to travel to a medical appointment or for cancer care or anything else. That is something that, as a province, we have to make that a priority and we will make that a priority because that, again, is something that's a direct cost.

But I think the intent of this PMR is for all of us to recognize the significant contributions that seniors have made to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador; to recognize that seniors in our province have the lowest incomes in Canada, so let's not have that as a statistic after this.

Let's turn it around and find a way to go from being the lowest incomes in Canada to turning it around and saying we're going to increase the maximum benefit by 20 per cent and we're going to further commit to the annual increases indexed to inflation, because that's exactly what the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve. So let's make it happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

I certainly appreciate the Member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, bringing forward this PMR. I think everyone in this House recognizes the value, the contributions of our seniors and no one wants to see any senior struggling. There's not one person in this House that would like to see that.

I know over the last number of years that I've been Minister of Finance and doing budgets, we've been able to – thanks to the

hard work of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – commit additional monies. I'd like to take a moment just to talk about some of those additional things because sometimes people don't know of the programs and services and all the additional supports that are available to them. So I'm just going to take a minute; I only have 10 minutes in total, so it won't take long.

Speaker, the Member opposite did speak about the 15 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit. I think that's very important: 49,000 seniors in this province avail of that Seniors' Benefit. I can tell you that's over 70 – seven, zero – million dollars a year, \$70 million. To be able to have that increased by 15 per cent was significant and we're not done yet, I'll say that.

I also say that we've been able to increase the Income Supplement. Many seniors, in addition to the Seniors' Benefit, receive the Income Supplement. That's \$85 million a year. We were able to increase that by 15 per cent.

We also have introduced a number of new programs and services, I'll just name some of them. We've put in an additional \$10 million this year in a well-being program for low-income seniors that are living at home, supports such as snow clearing and grocery delivery. We've increased the investment for home repairs and modifications for seniors so they can stay in their homes. That's where I'd like to be, Speaker.

I can tell you that we've also done a financial benefit to caregivers of clients who are seniors and with complex needs living at home. We've enhanced immune response influenza vaccine. I've heard that spoken about many times in this House, how important that is and how we need to do more. Financial assistance for food and heating for seniors in coastal Labrador. I know that many of them are looking for that \$500.

We've also expanded the 211 navigation services for seniors and Indigenous folks. We've also increased the bus pass. We've expanded the bus pass to include seniors who receive the GIS. We have an Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Communities Program. I'm saying all these things that we are doing because sometimes people don't realize.

But seniors are also benefiting from the fact that we've lowered our gas tax. I talked a little earlier today, in response to a question, about \$750 million we've been able to put back in the people's pockets, and I think that's important. I think that's very important for the people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and Members of this House of Assembly who called for affordability measures, that we've been able to do that.

Has it been challenging? No doubt. We have a very, very tight budget and I know that Members opposite recognize that. So being able to do that in the last number of years has been incredibly important. Things like taking the tax off home insurance. If a senior is living in their own home, not having to pay a 15 per cent tax on their home insurance was incredibly important to them.

These are all pocket issues and when the Member opposite – and I know he's sincere in his petition today and in his private Member's resolution today – when he speaks of these issues, he's being sincere. He wants to help seniors in the province, as do we all – as do we all. I do wish the Members opposite had voted in favour of some of these incentives and supports that we were able to bring forward. Unfortunately, they were not. But I know that they are sincere today, and I'm sincere, my colleagues sitting in this House are sincere today, that we want to support seniors.

Speaker, there are several challenges with the resolution, and I think I have a solution that I'm going to propose. I think it's a

friendly amendment that I will propose. In the resolution today, it talks about giving the benefit immediately. So I will say that give a maximum benefit of \$1,800 effective January of 2025, that's outside of the budgetary cycle. I know the Members opposite realize this. It is outside the budgetary process.

We don't have the monies to be able to do that because it wasn't in the budget cycle. We did put new money in this year's budget, \$10 million more money in this year's budget, plus all the other programs and all the other affordability measures.

Speaker, what I would suggest, and I consider it a friendly amendment, but I will put it forward as an amendment, that we change the BE IT RESOLVED to this, and I'll read it into the record, and then I'll have a chance to speak to it:

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to further increase the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit in the next budget and commit to annual increases indexed to inflation.

The Member opposite spoke very strongly about making sure it was indexed to inflation; I think that he would be supportive of making sure that you can increase the Seniors' Benefit in the next budget and index it to inflation.

I consider it a friendly amendment, but I'll propose that to the House, because otherwise it's going to be challenging to be able to make this happen – I still have three minutes – in this particular session only because it wasn't budgeted.

I know the Members opposite really fully understand that as you go through a budget –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

(Inaudible.)

S. COADY: I'm hearing –

SPEAKER: Go ahead.

S. COADY: Okay.

As we move forward, we certainly are committing to increase it in next year's budget, and to index it to inflation. That is the change in the resolution.

Why is this important, Speaker?

SPEAKER: Can you put a seconder here?

S. COADY: Oh, I will, sorry. I'll read this officially in a second.

Why is this important, Speaker?

It's important because it actually says that this House would be supportive of indexing it to inflation. It also is important because it actually said that this House is supportive, and I'm in a budgetary process now, Speaker. We're already consulting on the budget for 2025 – I can't believe that it will be my sixth budget – we're already taking ideas, suggestions, looking at the compilation of the budget, how we can make things work.

We're really trying to make sure that we're focused on strong financial management, really focused on making sure that we are supportive of the people of the province. I had a question today in Question Period about continuing the affordability measures. All those fit into the balance of what we're trying to achieve here. But I think – and this is why I call it friendly – it would be important that this House speak as one voice and say: Increase the Seniors' Benefit in the next budget and index it to inflation.

Speaker, I will do this officially as I know I must, and I only have a minute, 45 seconds. I move, seconded by the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, that the private Member's resolution currently before the House be amended by: In the BE IT RESOLVED

clause, inserting the word "further" immediately after the words "urge the government to" – and the Member opposite did speak to that – deleting the words "by 20% for a maximum benefit of \$1,819 effective January 2025 and further" – outside a budget cycle – and replacing it with the words "in the next budget and."

The amended BE IT RESOLVED clause would then read as the following: BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to further increase the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit in the next budget and commit to annual increases indexed to inflation."

I think it's powerful. I think it's strong. I think it speaks to what we all want in this House. Speaker, I've given you a broad brush of some of the things that we've been able to do: the new investments, the stronger investments that we've been providing to seniors, the focus on well-being. I hope Members opposite take this in the spirit and intent with which I'm presenting it and I look forward to the debate.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The proposed amendment was passed in in advance and we did do an advance ruling after we reviewed it, and it is found to be in order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: You have 23 more seconds if you choose to use it or not.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I appreciate the advance ruling. The reason why I was able to get it to you in advance is I certainly didn't want to take time away from our debate. We have a timed debate today and I wanted to make sure we have as much time as possible. I know how important this issue is to the Members

opposite, so that's why I did the advance ruling, and I thank you for it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

I know that there's a couple watching this afternoon, not from the District of Bonavista, but from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave who corresponded I think with the government, with myself on many occasions, about the indexing of the Seniors' Benefit.

I think the minister will acknowledge that we did present that many years ago, and I was going to start off, because I didn't know the amendment that she was producing, which is a good amendment and I say that without our caucus having met. I didn't know the amendment was coming, but hey, that is what we were looking for.

My colleague from Exploits was wondering how much the increase would be. That's to be seen, but the fact that it's indexed is a good thing.

We presented the petition asking for this in excess of two times in the House, what we've asked, but I remember that the minister who just spoke before me had said that she was going to consider it and she mentioned in her March 13, 2023, address, I quote: I will say to the Member opposite it is something that we could consider as part of the budget and could consider as we move forward. I will indicate, however, that this is designed so that as your income goes up, you may not require the level of support.

I would think that the couple from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave communicated their displeasure with that. It's almost like there was no acknowledgement of the hardship that was out there with the people. That is what she had communicated. So if we

haven't moved the threshold for Newfoundland seniors' income, or the supplement, for the base of what we've got, and we haven't moved it since 2016, that is a lot of our problem. So when we say we're going to index it, the threshold at which we make eligibility has got to move.

I'll be asking the minister when she has a follow-up session when she stands: Are we going to move that threshold up higher to capture more seniors that would be in need? We've got the lowest in the country now, I understand, but are we going to move that threshold up so that we're going to catch more seniors?

I don't have a lot of time, but another thing I want to say is, if you went online and looked at how the government used the calculator you'll know that the threshold is low. Remember, there's been no change in that threshold since 2016, but they treat couples and singles the same in the calculator. It's the same treatment. The viewers that are watching today in anticipation of this are saying, sometimes you've got double the expenses as a couple: hearing aids, if you have glasses, transportation to medical appointments, times two and the expenses sometimes exceed one.

Housing could be the exception, but on the other expenses, we've got couples. So if the formula treats couples the same as individuals, that's something that I would hope the minister would look into as well because consider that there would be more expenses with the couple than what it would if they were both individuals claiming.

I want to move on to a couple in the short time that I've got left. I never got a chance to present a petition, and this fits with the seniors' well-being. There was a petition that was asking about oral health. We know how important oral health is for residents in the province, those aging. If they had to lose their teeth and they had to get dentures, that's very important for their well-being, but

the Medical Transportation Assistance Program does not consider dentures.

I would like for the minister to consider that in the upcoming budget and I think Brenda Lodge in Catalina would appreciate that; a retired social worker who has worked with a lot of seniors in the district for years. She was saying this is unfair and she is aware of people who find it difficult to have to travel for dentures off the peninsula or to the top of the peninsula and no reimbursement. So that's another consideration.

Another thing the residents in my district would ask is, the Minister of Health and Community Services states that the plan for health care is working. We want people to age in place in their homes. We all want that. Forty of us in the House want them to age well in their homes. But the people are coming to my constituency office saying that their income is not being increased, but their copay, what they've got to pay, is going up. Some of the increases in the copay, what the client has got to pay for the home care support, is gone up with no increase. That is something that would need to be looked into.

Why is it that the copay, the client, has got to pay for their home care is increasing without any increase in their household income? That's something that I'd like to throw out.

Another suggestion for the government while they plan the budget is those in our population, seniors, and access to the shingles vaccine. I know for certain that many of the residents in the District of Bonavista, the seniors, can't afford the vaccine. I know of some that contracted shingles in my district, like Ms. R. D. in Bonavista, the shingles didn't leave her. There's pain medication that she has and now they're trying to find solutions to give pain relief. So that's something again we can consider.

The last thing I want to mention, I'm not sure if the minister had heard, Fraser Piccott was on *Issues & Answers* in October. October was registered disability savings plan month. Some of the stuff he stated on *Issues & Answers*, which I had recorded at that time, I thought was something that our government ought to be taking more seriously.

What he had stated was a Stats Canada report that we have 62,400 estimated that would be eligible for a disability tax credit from the federal government. You've got to have a disability tax credit in order to avail of what the government put forth, the registered disability savings plan. If we have thousands of people out there that have not got their disability tax credit, they can't avail of the registered disability savings plan. If you go in and use the calculator, you would find that is a big loss for their retirement.

I'm not sure that we have promoted it enough as MHAs, as a government, to try to get to 100 per cent. Because the provincial government, the \$1,200 they're going to contribute, if it's linked with the federal government, they put in three times that amount. So when you look at someone with a registered disability and as they age and after a 10- to 20-year period, they've got some good additional tax-free money that's coming in from this registered disability.

I'm assuming in my district I have close to 2,000 people out there that could avail of it that are not. I know that's my responsibility, but it's also the government's responsibility to make an effort to make sure that we're going to get 100 per cent of those who have eligibility and are screened by CRA as being considered for the disability tax credit, that they can open up the RDSP. I think that has got to be a concerted effort.

So if we've got thousands out there who are not availing of that, that is a missed opportunity for those that would have disabilities in our population, many of which are seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today.

As a government, we have strong focus on seniors and older adults to help ensure that they remain healthy, active, engaged citizens that can live in their own communities, which are age-friendly and dementia-friendly. This requires a targeted intervention to ensure that seniors age well and in the right place.

There are just a couple of the things that the Member for Bonavista mentioned. He mentioned the thresholds. Of course, thresholds are very important to us. We can tell you that there's an ongoing review of thresholds now, especially when it relates to seniors. We are taking a close look at that and it's something that we'll hopefully have in the coming months. It really needs to be looked at very seriously because there are people that are just very close, almost within \$100, over the threshold and we certainly want to look at that and adjust the thresholds. They haven't been adjusted for some while.

Our targeted interventions, as part of our Poverty Reduction Plan, our government has committed to a plan to address the health and well-being needs of all seniors in our province. Earlier this year, our government announced a comprehensive Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan, with the goal to help seniors maintain health, well-being, dignity and independence. I am so pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this today.

Supported by an investment of over \$47 million, this plan focuses on three major areas: improving seniors' well-being and supporting healthy aging; establishing

centres of excellence in aging; and strengthening the integration and service delivery across the care continuum. This includes \$10 million as part of *Budget 2024*, focused on well-being initiatives under the Seniors' Health and Well-Being plan announced this summer.

Speaker, over the last 12 months, I've travelled around the province and met with many seniors in dozens of communities. As a matter of fact, it's been the highlight of the year really, just to sit down, mostly in a setting that is very relaxed and just to talk to seniors about the issues that they're facing, what matters most to them, and what we can do as a government to support them.

One topic that comes up in our discussion is the cost of living. But our government is committed to helping seniors with the cost of living. As part of our Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan, we announced additional funding for existing programs to support seniors in repairing and modifying their homes. The Provincial Home Repair Program helps eligible residents to complete needed repairs including basic heating, electrical, plumbing and other repairs like siding and windows and so on.

This program, Mr. Speaker, is certainly something that seniors are taking advantage of in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Home Modification Program provides forgivable grants for repayable loans and grants for individuals, for seniors, to complete accessibility modifications such as ramp installation, roll-in or walk-in showers, widened doorway and so on.

Funding for these programs has been increased by \$2.5 million, allowing it to serve more seniors throughout this great province. The Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan supplements work already in place by government and in my department. We support seniors' social engagement through the age-friendly Newfoundland and Labrador program for seniors, Social

Inclusion Initiative and the Newfoundland and Labrador Community Transportation Program.

Mr. Speaker, the Community Transportation Program continues to support communities in addressing barriers to communication. One only needs to look to Labrador City as one good example, at Clarenville with CREST busing out there. It's heartening, Mr. Speaker, to see communities taking an active role in expanding community options that will improve quality of life and well-being of the residents.

Mr. Speaker, we give capital money for communities to buy buses; in a lot of cases, communities are getting together, they're partnering with their councils and other organizations and they're making this work. We also provide funding for communities to do feasibility studies on these programs. So it is working; it's something that we're very proud of and it's something that we hope we'll see more of next year.

My department is also leading the development of an intergenerational program guide. Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to have a look at that this week. Just a draft copy, it's not ready yet, completely ready, but I can tell you it's great. What it will do is bring other organizations, like youth groups and so on, into intergenerational activities with seniors.

I think that one only needs to look as far as the CYNs that are in the province. When we meet with CYNs, we promote intergenerational activities. All you need to do is check social media and you'll see events in various communities throughout the province that also include our youth.

The Aging Well at Home Grant that we're able to cover the costs of services such as snow clearing, lawn mowing, grocery delivery, that's working. Big uptake, people are very happy with it. A new Caregiver Benefit will provide \$400 a month for eligible caregivers who provide significant unpaid

assistance to seniors with complex care needs as determined by a clinical assessment.

A supplement of \$500 annually for food and heating that will help support seniors in coastal Labrador communities. This approach to well-being is helping to address the social determinants of health as we aim to improve access to supports. The Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan also includes creating age-friendly, dementia-friendly communities where policies, services and physical spaces are universally designed.

This year, our government launched a new Dementia-Friendly Communities website and media campaign to help increase awareness and foster more dementia-inclusive communities; Centres of Excellence on Aging, including senior-friendly emergency departments and acute care of elderly units and increased access to geriatric care across the health system.

Our government, Mr. Speaker, is strengthening integration and service delivery through the Aging with Dignity agreement supported by the Government of Canada. This supports actions to improve care at home, palliative and end-of-life care, care for people living with dementia, quality of care provided in long-term care homes, personal care homes and through community services.

As well, the Dementia Care Action Plan launched last year continues to promote healthy aging to reduce the risk of developing dementia, enhance dementia care training and dementia-friendly training for businesses and support inclusive programming.

In addition to this, our Poverty Reduction Plan includes a targeted basic income pilot for people aged 60 to 64 who are both in receipt of income support and support from Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services. This brings people's income in

line with federal benefits they will receive at 65 years old.

We are also supporting inclusion – I see I'm running out of time, I'll try to get to this – \$400,000 to the Alzheimer Society of Newfoundland and Labrador to support dementia-inclusive communities; \$200,000 to continue the Seniors' Social Inclusion Initiative, which offers funding to eligible seniors; \$95,000 for Age-Friendly Newfoundland And Labrador Communities Program; \$343,000 for SeniorsNL annually for information and referral services.

Mr. Speaker, through a holistic approach to well-being, our government is helping address the social determinants of health. Improving access to supports and services for seniors to age with dignity is a critical part of this approach.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I am honoured to stand today in the House of Assembly to speak on this private Member's resolution which had been introduced by the Official Opposition and it is about seniors and what is goes to is the fact that this government has not been listening to seniors.

They have been in government for 10 years, and when I hear the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and, then, I hear the Minister of CSSD talking about the different things that they have done to try to assist seniors, I say this: It is not enough. It does not go far enough by a long shot. Let me tell you why I say that, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I say that because I'm hearing that from my constituents in the District of Harbour Main; I'm hearing it from seniors who call our office and tell us about the experiences that they are having trying to struggle and survive in our communities and in our towns.

I look at the realities. When we see the financial challenges of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador today, they are real. I can say this also, Speaker, they feel ignored and they feel overlooked by this government. Yes, we hear about some initiatives that have taken place, some ad hoc initiatives that the government has put in place but, as I stated, it is not enough.

Let me say why it is not enough. It is not enough because we know, as it states in this resolution, that seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador – I am ashamed to say this – have the lowest incomes in Canada, in our entire country, Speaker. How can we accept that? How can we be okay with that? We cannot be. This government has that responsibility to address that issue, but we're not seeing that.

When we hear from the Seniors' Advocate who has been very compassionate and very clear about the realities that seniors are facing, that the cost of living for seniors has increased. It's gone up by 22 per cent, Speaker. This is happening here in Newfoundland and Labrador. These are our seniors that are facing these hardships. When we hear that seniors are getting poorer, annually, every year.

This government has been in place for 10 years, Speaker. Every year the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors are getting poorer, annually, while the costs continue to rise. Yet, when we listen to government talk about these so-called initiatives, it's really hard to take, it really is. Because we are hearing from our constituents, we're hearing from our seniors.

I'm going to tell you just a couple of cases. I'm going to tell you what seniors in the District of Harbour Main are saying. But they're at the point now where they've given up, they've really given up. They're so disillusioned and disheartened. They don't feel like the government is listening.

I have a couple that live in one of my towns, 70 years and 74 years of age. They lost their functioning water source, Speaker. They made an application to the Provincial Home Repair Program. They were turned down. Why? Because they had a combined income of only \$38,000 – \$38,000 from the two of them, that's not very much. But the threshold is \$32,500. But they can't afford to fix this themselves. They do not have the income, they're on a fixed income.

They've been offered a repayable loan. They can't do that. They cannot afford a repayable loan. So what does that mean? That means that they would have to pay back the money to secure what? A water source, their water source. What is that? A basic necessity.

Yet, I hear the minister just spoke talking about the Well-Being Plan and I've heard the Minister of Health talk about this Well-Being Plan. Well, guess what? There's not a lot of well-being going on in our seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: But let me say, when they talk about their Well-Being Plan, that it encompasses the physical, mental, social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to a person's health. These factors, they're called the social determinants of health and they include things like access to safe housing, good food and clean water.

Well, guess what? My constituents, they have not got a functioning water source and they're seniors. Is this how we treat our

seniors? Do they not deserve better than that, Speaker?

I have another senior. He's alone. He has an annual income of approximately \$22,000 and he's constantly calling us trying to get hampers from food banks to eat.

This is not an exaggeration when we hear that the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors are getting poorer. They are getting poorer. They have to go to food banks. Yet, when we talk about these great initiatives that the government is implementing, you would think that this is not happening, but this is real. This is real and it's happening in all of our districts throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When I look at other things like the fact that the Seniors' Advocate has identified that a third of our seniors, over 30 per cent, are struggling. They cannot afford and they're not able to buy food. That's 30 per cent of our seniors. How can we be okay with that? It's not okay. They're cutting their pills, their medications in half. What does the Seniors' Advocate say about that? She warned the government that keeping seniors underfed without their medication will make them even sicker.

Then when we look at housing insecurity. The Seniors' Advocate has talked about housing insecurity and homelessness and she said that it's a growing concern for seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador. She's heard directly from seniors and from community organizations about seniors we have in our towns and communities who are experiencing homelessness. They have no homes for the first time in their lives or they are significantly at high risk of becoming homeless due to the rising cost of living.

We've also heard from seniors who are struggling to find affordable, safe housing and long wait-lists to be considered for a rental subsidy, but when we listen to the government talk about the Well-Being Plan, oh well, that's okay because well-being

encompasses physical, mental, social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to a person's health and it includes such things as good food, access to safe housing.

Well, we're hearing from the Seniors' Advocate that that's not reality. That is not the reality in our province today. That is not what our seniors are experiencing. So there needs to be a serious wake-up call with our government to acknowledge this. They've been in 10 years. They've been in long enough. How did we get to where we are today? That is the question I want to ask.

Seniors, yes, we know that there have been seniors who are struggling. We know that we have asked as part of the solution – that is why we brought forth this private Member's resolution today – to implore government to index Seniors' Benefit. That has been the position of the Opposition, the position of the Progressive Conservatives of Newfoundland and Labrador, to index Seniors' Benefit to inflation, to help them keep pace with rising costs and to help them maintain a decent standard of living.

Speaker, we are committed. The position of the Opposition Party of Newfoundland and Labrador is we are committed to helping our seniors live their later years independently, happily, comfortably and with dignity. That has not been happening.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: We will have a housing strategy which will ensure our seniors are a priority and they will be able to access safe homes. They will not be suffering like they are now with housing insecurity and homelessness. We will address that current housing crisis as well because we know that our seniors, as are all of our individuals in our province, deserve to have access to safe homes.

So on that point, I see I'm running out of time, Speaker, but it is with great conviction

that I stand here today. We cannot afford to continue to ignore our seniors. When I hear that initiatives are coming forward at this late hour now by the Minister of Finance, it's hard to take.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this debate on the private Member's resolution.

I know in developing the resolution, the Leader of the Opposition relied heavily on the Seniors' Advocate and the work that she has done and is doing. I certainly commend her for her work, and the previous Advocates. They are taking their role quite seriously, engaging with the seniors' community, whether it's special interest groups, individuals or other agencies to make sure we here in the House and the citizens as a whole get a good understanding of the issues and challenges facing the seniors' community, of which I am proud to say, I am one.

There are a few here, I'm sure, but since I got in trouble saying who is and who isn't in the House at any point in time, I'm sure I'd get in trouble if I started picking out who is a senior and who is not at this stage. Anyway, it's just for the record.

So in her recent report on her office's recommendations over the recent reports, she has put forth to the public and to government 37 recommendations. We're really getting back to the point the Member for Harbour Main said, the government is not listening and it's not concerned; it's not acting on issues affecting seniors. Well, I want to point out that of those 37

recommendations, we have implemented 21. We have partially implemented another 11 and there are five at this stage not implemented, but we are working on those.

So I just wanted to put that on the record because I think it is fair to say, if you're going to quote and rely on what the Advocate is saying and building your resolution, then let's make sure we all have the full picture.

Now, with respect to the one recommendation that relates to the Department of Housing and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, the Advocate supports an expanded and enhanced Home Repair Program. As minister, I concur.

So what are we doing in the meantime while we doing a review and looking out how we can expand that program? In budget '23-'24, we implemented and increased the budget. As we did in this past year, we added another \$2.5 million. So we are, right now, in the process of, on an annual basis, supporting roughly 1,300 households, of which 75 per cent are for seniors.

Again, it's a very specific program that really does support seniors. It speaks to what the Members spoke to in the example she used. We do have these financial thresholds that do act as a barrier for some households and that's one of the areas we're focused on in terms of reviewing and in modernizing and improving the program. We certainly want to make sure we can support as many families and as many seniors as we can.

The other point I wanted to add in terms of what we are doing at the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in terms of supporting seniors. Right now, in terms of our rental properties, we have 5,600 across the province; 23 per cent are for seniors.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. ABBOTT: Some do and some will and some should, so I agree.

In terms of partner-managed community housing, we work with community groups who operate and run seniors' apartments across the province – a very successful program. Of the program, I think we've got roughly 1,200 units and 77 per cent are for seniors.

We have a rent supplement program and 55 per cent of that program is dedicated and allocated for seniors. We have the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Benefit; 75 per cent of that program goes for seniors.

Again, we said we have the Home Repair Program; 93 per cent of that program goes to support seniors. We have the Home Modification Program; 88 per cent of that program goes to support seniors. We have the Home Energy Savings Program; 93 per cent of that program goes to support seniors. We have the Affordable Rental Housing Program that we have in place and we are expanding, and 45 per cent of that program is going for seniors.

Speaker, I just wanted to – again, just for the record – show that while we're dealing with this larger policy issue around seniors' supplement and benefits and how we can support and expand that, we are making sure seniors are supported.

Now, in terms of doing our work, obviously we're not doing this alone. We do rely on the Seniors' Advocate for the work she does and her office. We're engaged with Seniors NL on a regular basis. I have meetings in current portfolios and previous portfolios to make sure we hear from them as to what they believe are the issues of most concern to seniors and how we can support those.

There's no doubt, and I agree with the Opposition and the Third Party and anybody else who's speaking on this, that incomes are a critical element that seniors are wanting to be assured that they have sufficient money to run their households, that they can get their groceries, they can

pay their rent and/or heat, and obviously other factors.

So income has become important and we have been increasing that, along with the federal government, but more needs to be done. We work with Connections for Seniors, and they were subject to a Member's statement yesterday. Again, we're working with them. A very progressive organization, based here in St. John's, but it's looking to expand their reach and their services across the province. We are engaged in how we can support them in supporting their work across the province.

They were a beneficiary of our recent call for affordable housing. They are going to look at expanding housing for seniors in the city. They are setting up a shelter specifically for seniors and doing other work and transportation included.

We have the 50-plus clubs across the province, which are definitely a great weather vane if you want to know what's happening in the community for seniors, talk to the 50-plus club and you're going to literally get it from the horse's mouth what is important to them, where they see the communities needing to support them, where they need the federal and provincial governments to support them. So that's an important reach in by us in government and I'm sure others do as well.

Speaker, the important thing here is, I think, raising the issue in a public forum about seniors. They are a rising demographic. They are certainly those who pay attention. If anybody pays attention to what is happening here in the House, it will be seniors in this province. They are an electoral force, obviously, to be reckoned with, so that's not lost on me in my district, or I'm sure for all our MHAs here. We need to make sure we pay attention to what the seniors are seeking and asking for in terms of support. It is fair to say it is a reasonable ask of their government to be supportive that they can stay and live in their homes,

live in their communities and that they don't have to be fearful of not being able to support that financially.

I know in talking to what the Minister of Finance had to say and my colleague the Minister of CSSD, we are very active in making sure we can respond to the seniors' needs. I think this is a discussion here this afternoon and the amendment to the initial resolution speaks to the government's commitment to make sure we address the income issues and challenges to seniors on a go-forward basis. We'll obviously be deliberating on that over the next number of months as we prepare for the budget and look for this in the long term.

A quick fix isn't necessarily the right thing to do today, but we need to consider all options, make sure we put them through the appropriate analysis and then come back to this House with a very specific proposal on how we can support seniors.

Speaker, I want to thank the Opposition for bringing forward the resolution, but I believe the amendment speaks to the government's commitment, in the spirit of that resolution, to support seniors that we believe is important for the well-being of the province and for all of us here in this House.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER (Gambin-Walsh): The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, I feel a great duty to rise and provide support to this private Member's resolution because when I look around really for the 40 of us that are in this House, we're here because of those that came before us, our seniors. We owe it to them to make their senior years as comfortable and as enjoyable as possible. I think that we have a lot to learn from other areas, from other regions that are investing in their seniors. Some view it, particularly across Northern Canada, as elders. They're treated with a great deal of respect. We

have to do that to really make the lives of every senior in our province as enjoyable for their golden years.

Now I want to highlight support for this PMR by highlighting the story of a couple of seniors from my district. I've had the opportunity to talk to a lot of seniors across my district and across the province over – well, since being elected, but before that across the last number of years.

Let me give you the first story. This lady is a widow and she has lived her life by the slogan: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. I saw that when I walked into her home, she offered me a tea bun and that tea bun was in a faded Brookfield Ice Cream container. She has a small car and she uses that small car for going to appointment, getting groceries, the mail, et cetera. Her environmental footprint is pretty small.

She used to have a savings account, a small savings account but that savings account now, over the last decade, has been completely depleted. Not because of taking jaunts to Toronto to see a concert, not because of taking a trip down south for a vacation, her savings account has been depleted because of just trying to survive day to day. She has been driven into poverty. In fact, when I spoke to her a couple of months ago, she had given up her home insurance to pay for the shingles vaccine. That is very sad because the shingles vaccine is something that we, as a province, should be paying for every senior.

The Minister of Finance highlights that the rebate on property insurance is a cost-of-living factor. Well, 15 per cent of zero is zero. It is not having an impact on many of our seniors. It's probably having an impact on a lot of millionaires in St. John's, but not on the seniors across our province.

She needs a break now, not in April when the budget will be approved. She needs help now navigating winter because the cost on her home heating and groceries are

continuing to rise. It's important that we help her and put a crutch under her now.

She called me last week when I was out in the district during constituency week and she talked to me about the latest tax break. She said: I don't drink beer, I don't drink wine, I don't consume junk food, I can barely get by now on what's coming in for groceries, how is this helping me? I looked at her and I said: It is not. We have to do better for her and so many like her across the province.

The second case I would like to highlight is a couple living in a small community. Again, like the widow I noted beforehand, very community-minded, volunteers. They're ideal residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. They came to me in late August looking for options from government to replace a few windows. So I looked at the Provincial Home Repair Program with them. Unfortunately, Speaker, they were \$237 outside the threshold limit. A threshold limit that has not changed within a decade.

Just think of it, if we had invested that \$5,000 in them, that money would have stayed in that small community. It would have been an economic multiplier in that small community. Moreover, we would have supported what the previous seniors' representative said, that we have to keep seniors in their homes for as long as possible.

Now, where could we come up with \$5,000? I'll give you a couple of examples. Because every dollar we spend, every dollar government spends is an opportunity cost. It's an opportunity cost if you spend it on that or somewhere else. For example, the \$171,000 on the UK soccer team, that could have helped 34 seniors. Go to the M5 contract for \$8 million, it could have helped hundreds of seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Every dollar that the government commits to is about an opportunity cost.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about the Premier's office (inaudible)?

L. PADDOCK: Exactly.

Every dollar that the government commits to is about an opportunity cost on where it could have been spent better and where it could be spent with a higher priority. We have to make seniors one of the highest priority of this House of Assembly.

As we go along and look for options, if we don't look to keep seniors in their homes as long as possible, then we're going to be left with a situation that we're going to have to build more long-term care homes, an additional cost on government.

There's an opportunity in front of us to invest in our seniors now. They deserve it and they deserve it right across the province. On that, I kindly ask the government to consider not just with regard to sometime in April, but let's look at options of helping our seniors navigate winter now.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm rising to support the amendment and the motion, as amended. I think we've heard, very clearly, lately, of the challenges of the cost of living for everybody in this province. I think it would be appropriate, at this point, to point out that my colleague, the Minister of Finance, has made significant leaps and bounds during the budget process over the course of her last several budgets.

I'm not going to rake up old history, but we had some significant challenges with balance of payments. People in the community probably don't really register that as anything that affects their lives, but it does because if we are in a financial hole, then borrowing money is an issue. The cost of borrowing and how much we can borrow are also issues and, over her tenure in the Department of Finance, she has done wonders with debt management. We've restructured our debt.

Debt, in actual fact, is the second largest expenditure on our budget, even now. It comes a distant second to Health and probably is in the same order, maybe slightly less, than Transportation and Infrastructure but is more than Education.

That is no mean feat because every dollar we don't have to spend servicing debt – and we can all argue and do from time to time about why that debt is as big as it is and what various millstones, financially, we had to carry. That's true of any government. It does not matter what stripe sits on this side; that debt is there and it's going to have to be managed carefully.

I just want to take a few minutes just at the beginning of this to shout out some kudos to my colleague the Minister of Finance for actually doing a very good job at restoring our credit rating. Because that credit rating, again, people in the street think it doesn't really matter, but in actual fact it does. Our better credit rating means cheaper debt which means lower amounts spent on debt servicing, which means more money that is potentially available for other things.

So what have we been doing for seniors? Well, if you look at the past two or three budgets, you will see that a significant amount of money has been plowed back, not just for seniors but it is affecting seniors. We have significant payments there for rate mitigation to make sure electricity costs don't go up – the basics of life.

There is a big debate about the cost of groceries and the like. The facts of the case are that that is a national issue and it's subject to market forces that we cannot influence, certainly at a Newfoundland and Labrador level. At a national level, there are some levers, but again, it is market-driven. Unless we go into the wholesale grocery business, as a province, we're not going to be able to manipulate that directly.

But in terms of short term, there are tax holidays. The federal government announced it. Within an hour or so, we've matched it, and there is the HST/GST holiday that everyone talks about. That's a short-term measure, but that measure alone is going to cost this province \$60 million for two months – \$60 million.

That is just slightly under half of the amount that we've spent in the Department of Health in my first year as minister on the NLPDP. That money has disappeared; it's gone. It's going back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That is a short-term help, it's a concrete strategy and it's there now.

Again, in terms of reducing the cost of living for, as it were, everyday citizens, we've sacrificed a significant tax revenue from gas and, in doing so, we have gone some way to offset the cost of gasoline. We can't do anything about the federal government and the carbon tax. We've told them it's daft, we've told them it makes no sense, we've told them it doesn't work in this province at the moment and they have not done a thing. We have no lever to move them off that hill.

So what we've done is we've taken money out of the public purse and left it in the purse of the ordinary citizens. That is a challenge because whilst it helps the ordinary citizens, if you've got to run snowplows in winter to keep the roads open, if you've got to run health care or you're trying to recruit teachers, you don't have that money at hand to use. So there

are opportunity costs with each of these things.

The biggest part now is an accumulative \$700 million that has gone back into the pockets of principally seniors, but also other members of the public. We have altered the Seniors' Benefit. We have increased those. There are home heating rebates. There are oil-to-electric plans for those seniors who live in their home. Home support hours have been increased. The cost of labour since COVID has gone up and through the budget, through the Department of Health, that cost has been met as best as we can from a financial point of view to provide those hours of care to keep seniors in their own homes longer.

Because, as the Member opposite pointed out yesterday, on the one hand they want to know if you're going to build 600 more long-term care beds and on the other hand they say, what are you doing to keep seniors in their home. The answer is: we're doing both. In the initial three or four years of our mandate, 2016 through '19-'20, we have significantly increased the number of long-term care beds with facilities that are state-of-the-art.

Are they enough? By themselves, no, but some of the measures in health have actually seen residents of long-term care repatriated into the community, to lower levels of care with support, much to the joy of those individuals and their families.

So this motion, as amended, would commit us to looking at raising the Seniors' Benefit further as part of the budget. Again, we have short-term measures. This is something that would roll out from April and would likely be backdated, I would have thought, knowing Treasury Board, to April, even if the budget didn't pass by the first of April, and also to indexing.

We've heard about indexing, we've wanted to do indexing for a long time, but we have to save on the expenses or save on the

debt cost to allow us to move that money from one place to another. It doesn't grow on trees. CIBC are not going to give it to us because we're nice people and we've got a lot of needy folk. We've got to make a case to do that and, quite frankly, the Minister of Finance has done an extremely good job at managing the debt.

So I would be delighted to support the amendment and support the amended motion. I think, as a Member of Treasury Board, I would look forward to having those discussions and receiving any other input, be it from Members opposite or from my own constituents, who are quite happy to send me notes and knock on the door and visit.

With that, I won't prolong this and I'll take my seat.

Thank you.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always an honour to rise and speak on behalf of the people of Placentia West - Bellevue, but in this case our seniors in Placentia West - Bellevue, which I'm very close with.

Before I start, I guess I want to make a shout-out to Mrs. Parsons. She resides at the Hilltop Manor, it's her birthday today. I won't say her age, she wouldn't appreciate that, I don't think. Also, Mr. Lockyer is at the Hilltop Manor today and he's celebrating his 99th birthday today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: So happy birthday to Mrs. Parsons and Mr. Lockyer.

I want to start out by talking about the people that are actually directors outside this House of Assembly that are also

working toward seniors. One of the biggest that I want to acknowledge is the new executive for our 50+ Federation here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Linda Oldford has been taken on as president. The first vice-president is Amy Farrell. She's actually from the District of Placentia West - Bellevue. The second VP is Noreen Careen. The secretary is Rose Wilson Atkinson and the treasurer is Kevin Thorne, who is also from Placentia West - Bellevue.

These are tremendous people, they're volunteers, but what they're doing for seniors and elevating seniors to understanding what's available to them is really tremendous. They put out a newsletter every month and they're very active. What they do now is that every second year, the 50+ Federation hosts their annual convention in Marystown. I've attended several times and it's very well attended from right across the province. They also have some really good keynote speakers and they bring forward some really keen issues.

Another one that's a big help for seniors here in the province, obviously, is our Seniors' Advocate. I was the shadow Cabinet minister for CSSD for a while and we were the ones on this side that really pushed to get the Seniors' Advocate replaced, because we understood how important it was for that voice and that policy office to be in place for the seniors of our province. So I do make a big shout-out to our Seniors' Advocate, Susan Walsh, who I support tremendously.

We also got a new SeniorsNL CEO, Kimberly Leonard. She's actually from Southern Harbour in my district as well, originally.

Like I said, I want to make a shout-out to these people because we're all working together. I've had many meetings with all these people and the thing is, the communication is open and it's honest. We don't always agree, but they know that I

support their initiatives and I will certainly bring it forward for them.

I'm not going to take the full 10 minutes but I do want to comment on a couple of things that were said here today. I want the government, I guess, to realize that you can't stand up and say you're increasing the amount that's going into health care every year, year on year on year and then when the Seniors' Advocate recommends the shingles vaccination – because it's a serious situation for seniors because one in three seniors will get shingles – one in three.

So I think that needs to permeate with the room here for the simple fact that that's not something we can gloss over. That's something that we really need to look at funding and making sure that this is preventative maintenance. So if government wants to be proactive, they will implement this ASAP and make sure that seniors are getting their shingles vaccine.

The next one is that we're talking about age well at home. We all agree with that as well and we want that for our seniors as well. The only issue with it is – and I hope it's a coincidence, as my colleague from Bonavista alluded to about the increased amount that you have to pay now for your home care, that all started happening right after the new collective agreement was signed with home care workers.

So I just want to make sure that we're all on the same page and the whole province is seeing what's happening here.

When we talk about thresholds, that's what's taking away the dignity from people. When we look at thresholds at being \$32,500, that doesn't go far enough whatsoever.

So we want to make sure that we're letting them live at home with dignity, give them an attachment to the Newfoundland Home Repair Program and let's not look at our

seniors as an electoral force; let's look at them as somebody that deserves our attention.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to speak briefly on this motion. I'm down to my last five minutes, unfortunately.

The Leader of the Official Opposition for Stephenville - Port au Port brought forward this motion. This motion is about helping the seniors. Right now, we see huge increases in cost of living. We see huge pressures being put on everybody in the province but seniors are greatly impacted because of their fixed income. They're on a fixed pension and we see inflation and we see costs go up. Everything is going up.

So, for us, we really want to make sure that the seniors are not left behind because it's not fair. Seniors have worked their lives, they've contributed to our society, they helped with families and supports and things like that so we want to make sure they're being looked after.

This motion is for Seniors' Benefit to be increased by 20 per cent and, also, to have annual increases indexed to inflation.

Now, Speaker, I talk about seniors being on a fixed income and the cost of living increasing and seniors being squeezed. This is from Food First NL. So why is this motion so important? Why are seniors so important and why is it important for us to ensure the seniors are not left behind?

In the Food First NL report on *Rethinking Food Charity in Newfoundland and Labrador: Results, Reflections, and*

Recommendations 2022-23, it talks about what food insecurity looks like, because a lot of our seniors are basically having to juggle their bills. Whether they're going to buy food, whether they're going to actually pay their heat bill, whether they're going to be able to actually afford to take the bus, whether they're going to be able to afford the necessities of life.

The focus group here talks about: Food insecurity damages mental health and well-being. What does that mean? If seniors are being impacted by food insecurity, this is what's happening: "Increased stress and rates of depression." Do our seniors deserve that? This motion is about trying to address that. "Increased social isolation and feelings of hopelessness." This is what food insecurity does to our seniors. Do they deserve that? No, that's what this motion is about.

"Low ambition and lack of concentration." Do our seniors deserve to be impacted by food insecurity because they don't have enough money to be able to go to the grocery stores and affording food? That's what food insecurity is about. "Reduced mental health in general." Do our seniors deserve that? No. "Inability for a person to perform at full potential because they are unable to fulfill their basic needs." No.

But also, food insecurity is about the lack of nutrition and the lack of nutrition actually contributes to illness and disabilities. In actual fact, do our seniors deserve that? No. This motion is about putting a little bit of money back into the seniors' pockets so they can afford food.

I also want to just speak briefly about my district because the increases we see are significantly more than the rest of the province and with Food First NL, on this page where they do a Land Acknowledgement, they say, Where This Work Sits: "In Canada, including Newfoundland and Labrador, Indigenous people face a hugely elevated risk of food

insecurity. This is a direct consequence of centuries of colonial policies that have intentionally and violently undermined Indigenous food systems and networks of community support."

So for our Indigenous seniors, that's an extra layer of harm that's being imposed on them. I'm just referencing government documentation. In government documentation here, I'm quoting, and down at the bottom is the logo for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Nutritious Food Basket.

In Labrador, costs for a family of four, so if we have two seniors looking after two children – because that happens a lot in my district. A lot of times it's the Elders who step up sometimes when we do have issues with families. For a family of four, the cost of food is \$2,000.36. That's \$706 more than the average. So where does that extra money come from if you're on a fixed pension?

Speaker, there are many issues. The other thing I want to just briefly mention here is the Minister of Finance came up and put in an amendment and it was ruled in order. The amendment talked about actually delaying this resolution, delaying the increase to the Seniors' Benefit until the next budget.

Speaker, the hardship for seniors is they're on a fixed income. So what happens if we wait until the next budget, if we put in the delay? We look at the month of January, the month of February, March, April. That's winter months. That's cold months.

Even in St. John's where the climate is mild, compared to Labrador, seniors struggle to heat their homes, to heat their apartments. So, Speaker, delaying it by an extra four months because it will probably be in April before the budget is actually passed and enacted, those extra four months of delay is

going to create serious harm to the seniors who are looking for a little bit of a benefit.

Now, I remember last year when we were listening to the budget, the Minister of Finance talked about the increases to the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit. But the reality was put forward in black and white in the Seniors' Advocate's report. Her report was called *What Golden Years?*

That was basically showing that seniors, who are supposed to be living their golden years, are struggling and that's why a report from the Seniors' Advocate is called *What Golden Years?* The Seniors' Advocate said yes, in July 2022, there was an increase to the Seniors' Benefit by 10 per cent, but that was after six years of no increases. Nothing to help the seniors in terms of the Seniors' Benefit, no increases.

So it was a 10 per cent increase in 2022, but at the time, 32 per cent of seniors were actually saying that they were struggling to afford the necessities of life.

This motion from the Official Opposition, put forward by the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, is about trying to actually help the seniors. And then we talked about in the budget, in 2023, there was another 5 per cent increase, and that sounds really, really good. But after six years of no increases, Speaker, this 15 per cent increase over two years, yes, it's going to help seniors, but really the Seniors' Advocate put it in black and white: These percent increases amounted to \$200 in the run of a year.

Speaker, that's not going to help a senior in my district be able to afford the oil to heat their house for a week. That's what the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, our leader, talked about. A lot of these things that we're hearing about that sounds so good, they're one-offs – they are one-offs. They talk about seniors on the North Coast and South Coast of Labrador being able to get this \$500 cheque – a one-off.

It sounds like we're getting something that the rest of the province is not, but that one \$500 cheque is basically going to be able to heat your house for maybe two weeks. And now you're looking at delaying this increase, this motion. It's ruled in order, and the government sits in a majority government, we're probably going to lose the intent here. They're going to delay it until what, April? And we're looking at winter months, January, February, March, April, Speaker.

So what, we've got to sit and thank this government for a \$500 cheque? I tell you something right now, anything we get in Northern Labrador I'll thank but when you look at rural Newfoundland and Labrador, the seniors are struggling. When you look at downtown St. John's, the seniors are struggling, because their incomes are fixed, and we see these huge increases.

Speaker, at the end of the day, over on this side, we're trying to do something to help the seniors now. The Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port said: Seniors need help now. I went out in the hallway and asked him about this amendment, and he said this amendment sounds good, but we're going to put another four months – winter months – on the backs of the seniors. We're not going to give them the increase until later? That's shameful.

The independent Member agrees with me because at the end of the day now, if they can come up and match very quickly a tax relief for everybody in the province, they have it in their wherewithal to actually pass this resolution.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We will certainly support the PMR, as amended, although I will tell you this, the original wording was much stronger, 20 per cent with a clear definition amount on what is needed. It sets a clear amount of \$1,819 effective January 2025.

My fear with the amendment is it doesn't say how much that increase is. I can guarantee you it won't be up to 20 per cent and it won't be over 20 per cent, it will be far less.

We used to call such language in contracts weasel words because it gave the government the opportunity to weasel out of a commitment. In that we see this would have definitely strengthened it and actually offer some real relief.

Now, I've heard here too from the comments on the other side about this would allow the seniors dignity and to be able to stay safely in their homes. I would agree, but there's a lot more because several weeks ago we brought in a PMR about HST, removing the HST, Speaker, off home heating, all forms. At that time, the Minister of Finance was deeply confused because it didn't sound like an NDP motion, because we were benefiting those who were well off. Yet, only a short while ago, I was deeply confused when the same Minister of Finance couldn't say enough glowing about the federal HST, the holiday for two months, which would do very much the same thing.

In that flash, I guess, \$60 million just like that, no problem. Election time is near and I guess the only explanation other than election is that the minister was visited by three ghosts of Christmas past, present and future and somehow had an epiphany.

Now I will tell you, our PMR would have helped people on fixed incomes. It would have helped seniors, in particular, especially seniors. I know from End Homelessness St.

John's, the community plan to end homelessness by 2024-2028, it talks about the census. In 2021, in St. John's, 19 per cent of the population were 65-plus in St. John's. Now I'm talking about St. John's, but we can extrapolate to other regions of the province where the aging population is probably greater as well. They were about 39 per cent of the rental market as well.

Now of 12,000 households, 24 per cent in St. John's are led by seniors. Yet, there are only 1,931 units of non-market housing for seniors, and I emphasize non-market as well. The biggest increase in St. John's population is the 65-plus cohort. There are about 6,700 seniors projected by 2033. So we have a significant aging population, but also a significant affordability issue that's coming our way and why this PMR would have been so vital in addressing some of the issues.

Now the government can speak about programs and housing modifications, but I can tell you the seniors that have called us, seniors who are getting by with sometimes about \$32,000 or \$32,500, just a hundred dollars or thousand dollars over that is not what I call luxury living. But guess what? When it comes to doing the home modifications or things that they don't repair there, they are above the threshold. In fact, talking to some officials, it comes down to most people getting it have much lower incomes.

So right off the bat, one of the things that many seniors will say to us, whether it's in St. John's or other districts, is that they don't qualify. So it's great to have programs, but if a lot of people are not qualifying, we're not helping them.

The well-being grant, I will tell you this, and I can think of one lady in my district, the \$400 was not going to help her. She would have consumed that, Speaker, in a requirement to have Ensure or Boost, a dietary supplement in the first month, but for the

rest of the year, she's pretty well on her own.

So we talk about measures, and I guess we're looking at long-term measures as well, is what we really need. Income is just one part of it. So you can raise the income, Speaker, you can raise the threshold here, but unless you're putting other measures into it, then we're not keeping up because I can tell you that it's about money, it's about housing, it's about health care, affordability of prescription medications, because housing is another significant factor. Public transportation for seniors who are unable to drive or who've lost their licence or have given up their licence.

I want to go back to REITs or Real Estate Investment Trust, and I've brought this up a few times. I just want to report in this document again: New housing builds have not kept pace with demand, especially rental housing and social housing. Further, affordable rental housing is depleting. Across Canada, large financial firms called Real Estate Investment Trusts have bought up rental housing stock and now nearly 20 percent of purpose-built multi-family units. The for-profit business model leads these landlords to cut costs and increase rents.

That's the business model of a REIT. They will buy up the properties cheap and they will raise the rents. I've seen that in my own district with the seniors I referenced today, \$150 a month. We may talk about stifling investment, but, I'm sorry, that's the very kind of investment I would want to stifle because it's predatory.

The seniors in the Northview will tell me that this is the option of last resort. After this, if they can't afford anything else, they're out, homeless. That's what they're afraid of which is why I've argued to put some restraints on these large financial landlords. By the way, the REITs, the money is going right out the province to begin with. That's the other factor.

So if anything else you can increase the benefits but if you're going to have large, financialized landlords here increasing the rent significantly, you will never keep up. There's got to be something to control that predatory nature. Now they will tell you that it has to do with inflationary pressures and market. Market basically means more people are looking so we can jack the price up. Inflation is supposed to be going down, yet this is the rationale: \$150 a month, about \$1,800 a year, that's what that means for a senior.

J. DINN: I'll go to a town hall meeting that we had a few weeks ago in my district, one retired citizen said 10 years ago, \$43,000 was a decent retirement income, but inflationary costs have eaten it away.

This comes down to if we want to look at investment, because I understand the budgetary constraints, but I will tell you I think investing in care, keeping seniors at home and having them in a decent place is going to save health costs.

The CMAJ, the Canadian Medical Association Journal, makes it clear that people who are experiencing homelessness, Speaker, will –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

J. DINN: – experience more geriatric syndromes. So I will say this: Investing in seniors so that they can afford the heat, so that they can afford to put food on the table, so that they don't have to split pills or go without their medication, in the long term is an investment and it is going to save the province a significant amount of money. Trips to the emergency department, you name it.

So a lot of the issues – and we can't help but support this resolution because it's so NDP in its nature that really, we've got no choice but to. So anything that's going to have a long-term effect on people, we'll support.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to pick up a part where my own colleague picked up, but more focus on what's going on in Labrador West. One of the things I believe a couple of the government-side Members have also talked about was home care and aging at home.

Well, it's impossible in Lab West. We do not have home care workers; there's no home-care agency in Lab West. Unless you find an individual who wants to work for minimum wage in Labrador West, we have a very hard time. So aging in place is actually out of the question for seniors in Labrador West. It has become a serious problem, because it is forcing people who want to continue to live in Labrador West to move to communities that either they haven't lived in for 40 or 50 years or move to communities they've never lived in at all.

When it's one of those things about well-being and stuff, well it's actually negatively impacting the well-being of seniors in Labrador West. Another part of that too is that we've run out of long-term care beds; when the small, little wing that was put onto the hospital in 2016 – there is only a very small amount of beds there. That's another thing too, we don't have enough long-term care beds as well, as the community continues to age and grow.

We are, I guess, the baby community of the province; we were only incorporated in

1961. We're going through a very interesting time in our history as people choose to continue to stay and retire and live in the community. A great example, my father and my mother. Both of them have chosen not to leave Labrador West, and continue to stay there because they have grandchildren in Labrador West, unlike my grandfather who decided to retire to the Gander area.

So this is the changing dynamic of the region, but at the same time we have no home care workers, we only have a very limited number of long-term care beds, and a lot of the programming and stuff that other parts of this province, when it comes to senior's housing and things like that, enjoy, we don't have. We've been asking for it for a number of years now. We make small incremental gains but at the end of the day it's still having a very negative impact on the well-being of seniors in Labrador West.

This is where the interest and conundrum of it all goes is we are just asking to be brought up to the same standard as the rest of the province. We just want to be on par with other communities in the province, but we're having a lot of challenges getting to that point. You know, we have no home care agency, so aging in place is not really a possibility. We don't have any long-term care beds, so that's not a possibility. In between the care and between Level 2 and 3 care, we don't have any private care homes in Labrador West.

At the end of the day, the option for seniors is either hope that you stay healthy and can take care of yourself in your own home or leave. Those are the two options the residents of Labrador West face when it comes to aging in place and care.

I know we've had discussions with different ministers over time about different levels of care and about seniors' housing and stuff but right now, at this point, it is incremental gains to a problem that's moving very fast in the region.

So we talk about seniors aging in place and stuff like that and their well-being, well, this is a big part of it we are lacking. Then also we look at seniors in Labrador West who are moving into rental units hoping that, well, if I move into a rental unit, I can sell my home and I can't live in this but, at least, that way my sidewalk is looked after or the painting and all that stuff is looked after.

Now they're finding out, very quickly, like my hon. colleague here, that these REITs that buy up all the property and then take the rent and ship it out of the province – this is investment, actually, leaving the province – they don't really care about seniors and rent has moved up very quickly and now they're in a point where my income doesn't match the rent and many of them are now turning to rent supplements, if they qualify. Many of them actually don't qualify for rent supplements and so they are finding out very quickly they are putting themselves in another thing because there's no place for the well-being of seniors when it comes to aging in place or anything like that. It is a void that has been in our community.

So we talk about well-being, we talk about these different things and I want to make sure that part of this is that there are communities that are being left behind and some of them that are being left behind are a bit larger than others just because of the type of demographic and stuff that happened over time. Labrador West is slowly evolving into this similar demographic of the rest of the province but because we were a mining community, you're up there, that shouldn't have been a reason why these investments and stuff are not available to us or that special consideration is made to us to bring us up to the same standard as the rest of the province. That's the only thing we're asking is to be brought up to the same standard.

So I don't want to take up the rest of the time. I just wanted to put that out there that there are communities being left behind and government should really take a serious

look at how to bring us up to the standard as the rest of province and the things that the rest of the province and the seniors of the rest of the province enjoy, but my seniors don't.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, I call upon the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to close debate.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I stand and I want to thank everybody for their comments today and the discussion around the issue with seniors in our province. I was glad to hear a commitment about indexing, but I was saddened to hear that the PMR was amended and that the immediate impact of helping seniors in our province and providing them with a 20 per cent increase will be deferred according to the amendment.

So I will not support the amendment. Because by simply pushing this down the road again, we continue to say that it's okay for our seniors to have the lowest incomes in Canada. We should not be proud of the fact that our seniors have the lowest incomes in Canada.

The Seniors' Advocate has spoken on this on a number of occasions, talked about the need to turn around and increase the Seniors' Benefit. And we've pushed it down the road.

But what I will continue to say is that seniors in our province deserve better. We should be trying to do everything we can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, it is heartbreaking that many seniors are so poor they divide

their medicine, ignore their prescribed diets and skip appointments. That is the reality that seniors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are facing right now.

This would have given that opportunity. It was a defined amount, it was a percentage, 20 per cent, and it was a defined amount. So it clearly would have a significant impact beginning in January of 2025.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That was the whole idea behind this, to say enough is enough, we don't want seniors to have the lowest income in Canada anymore, we want this to be done immediately. That's what this PMR is all about. That's what needs to be done. That's what ought to be done.

I want to say for everyone listening that seniors are a priority for the PC Party and we care about them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We take their financial struggles very seriously. That is why we put forward this PMR today, to recognize that. To recognize the contributions that seniors have made in our province and to make sure that our seniors can live with dignity in their own homes, can afford the quality of life that they deserve and can continue to have that same quality of life.

We will ensure that what a senior can buy today, they can buy tomorrow, because that's what this is all about. Let's keep our seniors whole. Let's do that by turning around and starting with this amendment, let's increase their benefits by 20 per cent on January 1 and let's index their benefits to inflation, because those are two simple steps that we could take, that the government could take immediately, to help seniors of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In addition to that, those of us on this side of the House, the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, we're not going to stop there. We're going to do a complete – and increase all income thresholds to allow more families and individuals to qualify for all of the programs and services that government currently offers them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That needs to happen, too.

These are programs that need to be done, ought to be done, but today was about the seniors of our province and their need to have –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. WAKEHAM: – their concerns addressed.

So for the last two minutes, let me read back in my PMR that I stood here two hours ago and introduced to this House of Assembly. I will read it again.

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors in this province have the lowest incomes in Canada; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has stated that the cost of living for seniors has increased by 22 per cent; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has outlined that despite the NL Seniors' Benefit being raised by 15 per cent, in reality the purchasing power of seniors has fallen behind by 7 per cent; and

WHEREAS the most recent status update from the Seniors' Advocate demonstrates that the recommendation to annually index the NL Seniors' Benefit has not been implemented; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate compassionately and correctly states that

one-third of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador cannot afford necessities, with many cutting pills in half or not eating nutritious food; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors are getting poorer annually while costs continue to rise.

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to increase the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent for a maximum benefit of \$1,819 effective January 2025 and further commit to annual increases indexed to inflation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I can't it any plainer than that and I simply say let's get it done because we intend to do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is the House ready for the question?

We'll be first voting on the amendment.

All those in favour of the amendment, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

SPEAKER: Amendment carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

SPEAKER: We'll now be voting on the amended resolution.

All those in favour of the amended resolution, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Labour, that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2, Bill 104.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 104.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Trimper): Order, please!

We are back in Committee of the Whole reviewing Bill 104, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2." (Bill 104)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

One question: When opening up the act, were there any other considerations for any changes made at this time?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

As I said earlier today, myself and my colleague, the Fisheries Minister, there have been some ongoing discussions with FFAW and ASP, with the two parties. We don't want a repeat of the last couple of years and they don't either.

The Member can add more if I'm not giving a fulsome answer, but from my knowledge and understanding and involvement, they asked to be able to go back to the right to strike.

We have 13 species under the Price Setting Panel; it seems to work for most. When we met with them the end of October that was the feedback we got, it seems to work for most.

I do want to be clear on a couple of things. I was reflecting on this lunchtime and I wasn't sure if I was clear when I closed up second reading, but the agreement that we have with the two parties right now is an agreement with the process that we have put in place. So where we go after this bill receives Royal Assent today, it's not going to come into force until we actually hear back from both parties.

I just wanted to clarify that and I think the Fisheries Minister would have addressed, in the nine-point plan, the other issues that were raised by them, but in terms of this, that's fulsome.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

What was the rationale for doing a seven-day period here? Does this differ from any other legislation under the Labour Relations or anything like that? What was the thought process for seven days?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: We wanted to go with a little bit of an expedited process given the seasonality nature of the fishery.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: My final question: When doing the fines, what led to set the fines at a maximum of \$100 and \$500, respectfully? Does that seem like a sufficient amount for deterrent against unlawful acts?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: He said how did we determine the amount of fines?

G. BYRNE: Fines?

L. DEMPSTER: Yes, fines.

G. BYRNE: That's the Labour Board.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

L. DEMPSTER: Sorry, it is a little bit noisy here.

We did that in conjunction and in alignment with the Labour Relations Board.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers in Committee of the Whole, shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

Carried.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

On motion, title carried.

Motion carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 104 carried without amendment?

On motion, clause 1 carried.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 19 inclusive.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 19 inclusive carry?

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

All those in favour, 'aye.'

Carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 19 carried.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

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

I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Labour, that this Committee rise and report Bill 104 carried without amendment.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

CHAIR: It has been moved and seconded that this Committee of the Whole do now rise and report that Bill 104 has been carried without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

On motion, enacting clause carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2. (Bill 104)

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

Carried.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

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

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to report that the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and directed me to report Bill 104, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2, has been carried without amendment.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed that Bill 104 be carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time presently, by leave.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Having made progress on Bill 104, I ask leave that An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2, Bill 104, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: Does the Member have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Labour, that An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2, Bill 104, be now read a third time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2. (Bill 104)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 104)

SPEAKER: We will now move in closing remarks by Members, followed by the Lieutenant Governor who will be joining us a little later.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Official Opposition, we have spent the last 14 days putting attention to issues that matter to the people of the province. We know that because they brought these issues to us, to our caucus. Important issues, I might add, like the access to health care, the cost-of-living challenges, especially for seniors, transparency of decisions and many other concerns. We will continue to advocate for people and help them get the help they need, no matter where they live in our province.

Speaker, we will never, never get tired of listening to their concerns –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – and finding solutions to their concerns. We believe that we can do better, we must do better and we will do better. That's why we sit in this House of Assembly. We must never forget who put us here to be their voice, and that is the people in our districts all over Newfoundland and Labrador.

First, I want to start by thanking my own District of Stephenville - Port au Port who have given me the honour and privilege of representing them in the House of Assembly now since 2019. I take that responsibility very seriously.

Second, I want to turn and thank you to my entire caucus who are committed people who fight hard every day for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Thank you for your continued support and I am so proud of our growing team.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: To my own family and to the families of caucus, we would never be able to do this job without your continued support. So to my family, thank you so much for, again, allowing me to do this great job that I so much enjoy.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of all of my caucus Members when I say to their families, thank you for allowing them to be part of our team and to do the great work they do on behalf of the people in the districts that they represent in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: To our constituency assistants and CAs for keeping the district offices running while the MHAs are in the House. We all know the value of our constituency assistants. I don't have to tell anybody about how these MVPs – because every single one of them is an MVP – keep us going.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: And they do not stop. They work tirelessly and effortlessly on behalf of people in all of our districts.

Our staff, of course, in our Opposition office, we could not function without a dedicated and committed staff and, again, a staff who knows no clock, who are ready and willing to serve and look after and investigate and research and get answers on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, whenever they are called upon. So to all of our staff in our Opposition office, I want to say thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: To the Speaker of the House who has the inevitable job of trying to keep us in line and to do that on a continuous basis and sometimes challenging, sometimes good, congratulations on the job that you do on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador as well.

To the Table Officers, the Pages and the individuals that work in the Speaker's and Clerk's Office, again, thank you for all you do to keep this House of Assembly going

every single day and even when we're not in session, all of the work that happens behind the scenes in making sure that everything is ready and willing to go.

To Hansard and Broadcast, of course, for streaming these broadcasts, and we all know the tremendous support and the number of people that tune in every day to watch the House of Assembly broadcast, especially in the District of Bonavista.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: I think some of those are well known in the District of Bonavista.

The Legislative Library and, of course, to our Commissionaires and security, again, all of whom who make this place work. This is about a team and a great team that we have around here in the House of Assembly that support all of us. There are 40 of us, but we have a huge team that support us. Again, to all of that team, thank you so much for everything you do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Now I would like to address the people of the province briefly. I would like to say to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as we get ready for Christmas, Christmas is that most special time of year for families and friends in our province and around the world. It's a time to come together with those most important to us and to count our blessings as we reflect upon the Christmas message of joy, peace, love and hope.

There's nothing quite like the magical feeling of the holidays and traditions like cutting down your own Christmas tree, baking cookies with the grandkids or donating to a charity always have a way to warm our hearts.

The holidays are also a time for giving. The saying it's better to give than to receive always comes to full life at Christmas. And

nowhere in the world – nowhere – will you find a more giving and caring people than Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: While Christmas is a joyous season for most of us, let us not forget that it can be lonely for others. I offer a heartfelt thank you to those who give so much to people who are struggling. A small gesture of kindness goes a long way. So let's always be there for them and help them experience the true meaning of Christmas.

Whatever traditions you enjoy this season, may your home be filled with peace and joy, your heart with love and your life with laughter. Let us pledge to carry the spirit of the holidays with us every day and always find ways to bring joy to others and make our province a better place.

On behalf of the Official Opposition of Newfoundland and Labrador and my family, I wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a healthy and happy new year.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's been an interesting session. Certainly, I think this is the first November 11 ceremony that we celebrated with the Unknown Soldier. I have to commend the Premier and all those involved in bringing that person home.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: It was a significant commemoration. That, I think, has been one of the key points of this year, certainly for me and for the Legion in my district.

For us – and I could probably go on ad nauseum – it comes down to housing affordability and health. We've been focused on a lot of those issues certainly with regard to these issues because they're central to people's well-being and overall health as well.

We cannot, I guess, but focus on them, Speaker. We've had a lot of discussion around affordability, but, in many ways, we still look at, from our point of view, that it's not just one action but there are at least three pillars that we focus on. In my district – and I know from my colleague's district in Labrador West, it may have more money in some ways than mine, but people are still struggling with affordability issues, with housing issues and, in many cases, health. Health issues in my district probably to do with affordability of medication, having access to a doctor.

I listened to my colleague and a large hurdle in this district and others, I would suggest, has to do with the transportation to get medical care. I take it for granted. There's a hospital in my district. We have two in this area and, for the most part, I know that if anything happens, it's a short ride to them and I've got a pretty good chance, anyone, to get the help they need.

For housing also within the city, there significant other services that are available. I think, for us, if we want to address a lot of the underlying issues, it's about making sure people are adequately housed, that they can put food on the table, that they have their health taken care of.

I know there's been a lot of talk about violence. I was asked about it out in the scrum. I will say this: We're putting \$44 million into policing – and I'm not saying that there shouldn't be enforcement but I do really believe fundamentally that when we address the underlying causes, whether it's poverty and you name it, but poverty essentially, we take care of that. That's an investment in people.

It's not by accident that, in the last few years, we seen a rise in intimate partner violence and other issues around this, and I would say it's because of the fact that people are getting desperate. I think we still need to also keep in mind and firmly focus on those social determinants of health. The Health Accord was more than just about fixing the health care system; it was about fixing the societal issues that create the problems that we face, and that's something that we'll keep fighting for.

I will say this: It's been a privilege, still – and it's almost going on six years now. I started this with my brother, helping him run in Paradise, and I remember asking him at the time –

AN HON. MEMBER: Any regrets?

J. DINN: Hey, those kinds of conversations happen at a family dinner, maybe.

But I do remember at the time – because he was a councillor with Paradise – I said: Paul, you really want to become an MHA? You're going to have a lot more problems than just in the council. I remember him saying to me that at least if I'm an MHA, you've got resources behind you to help the people. Lo and behold, a year and half later, I'm next to him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: I don't know how to explain that one.

Anyway, I do want to, first of all, extend best wishes and thanks to the colleagues in the House of Assembly, to the Premier, to the Leader of the Official Opposition, to our independents and to all MHAs. If nothing else, the debate is always good; sometimes I even learn things. I may not always agree with it, but I will learn things.

To the Speaker – and Speaker, I share a special kinship with you because, as a teacher – and I would say that my other two

colleagues who are teachers – we all know about classroom control and so on and so forth. At times I sit here, and I don't envy you, especially when you've got to try to remember names as well. Not one of my strongest suits as a teacher. But I'll give you credit, it's a bit like herding cats at times, I'm sure.

To the Pages, for the constant supply of water, for the cheerful smile, for picking up the documents, for bringing things to us. I know it's probably hard to sit there at times and listen to the debate, and maybe wonder okay, how does what I learn apply to this, but thank you for your service.

To the Table Officers, who, along with the Speaker, help keep this place organized. To the Sergeant-at-Arms, who we have a front row seat here to his expertise in walking up and down replacing the mace, and the fact that I went to school with him, that doesn't spare him any abuse, but he takes it in stride and a good sense of humour.

To the Commissionaires, and to the security people who keep us safe, we come in here and we take it for granted that our safety is secure. Yet, I was listening to the news last night, CBC, and about the rise in hateful language and abuse and personal attacks on politicians. Regardless of what decisions we make, the fact is that it's troubling to see that. So far, I haven't seen it as such in this province, nor experienced it. But at the same time, we always need to keep in mind that regardless of the difference, there's a level of discourse. Fight hard on the issues, but at the same time, that we're all doing a job here, and not necessarily an easy job.

To Hansard and to the Broadcast Centre, thank you for the record-keeping that you do and for making sure, if nothing else, for the accountability, for posterity and so on and so forth. I will say to the media as well that certainly they're a key part of the democratic process because they're the ones that will hold us to account, ask the questions and get the message out. But, for the most part,

they are there to make sure that we are all held accountable.

I'll move to our caucus staff. While it's a privilege to serve in this House of Assembly as the Member for St. John's Centre and as Leader of the Third Party with my colleague, Jordan, that I will say that it's a privilege to be working with the caucus and have such great people behind me. I will tell you my colleague from Labrador West is a fount of knowledge. He's got a mind like a steel trap in many ways and more information that I think I've forgotten or never learned to begin with. I don't know where he gets it, but he comes off as very trustworthy and so I've got no choice but to believe him. He provides the youthful balance to the now senior citizen in this partnership here.

I do want to mention our staff, and with leave, Speaker: Amanda, Tori, Jean, Scott, Steven and Stephanie. I have a small but mighty caucus, but they are the ones who take care of the communications, running the office, making sure we have the supplies we need, making sure we have the resources we need, the information, and more importantly, the discussion and sometimes talking you down off a ledge.

To my constituency assistants, Elizabeth and Leanne, I will tell you this, especially when the House is open, without them, I don't know if we could maintain the contact we should with our constituents but they're the workhorses. One hundred and fifty-seven cases I know of that are open in my district and it's my CA, and I would suggest the CAs around us, that are doing the bulk of the work. So sometimes when people say to me thank you, Mr. Dinn, for your help. I'll say: Listen, that's all my CA; she went ahead and did that.

To our constituents, I want to certainly thank them for their support and for their critique when I needed it; for bringing their problems to me, I would say, entrusting me with their problems. It's hard to say at times that I may not be able to help them, but for the most

part, they come and I think the fact is they just sometimes want a person to hear their story. But it's the constituents who I depend on for support. Whether they voted for me or not, the fact is I represent them and they all have a say in how and what I say and the issues I put forward.

Also, within my district, I think of the organizations now that are getting ready for Christmas: the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, preparing Christmas hampers; Bridges to Hope; The Salvation Army; the Ches Penney Centre of Hope; and I'll say, because while they are not the answer to addressing poverty, they help alleviate it in times of crisis.

I cannot help but say this: It is bothersome when a mall decides to ban an organization such as The Salvation Army from collecting on their premises. While there may be a religious affiliation there, but the fact is that they help. I can attest the fact that they help all people, regardless of beliefs, to at least make sure that they've got a Christmas hamper and food and clothing and sometimes toys for Christmas. They do good work and, at this time, we need all hands that we can to look after each other, and they look after each other.

The people of the province, as well, because I do get calls from people from across the province and certainly, it's an opportunity to hear the conversations. Sometimes I bring it to my colleagues, if it's their constituent, but it's an opportunity to hear their perspectives and I want to thank them for that.

I especially want to thank my family, my wife, my children and their partners, their husbands, and my grandchildren, two of which are with my wife today. No matter how bad the day is, there's nothing like getting home and at least meeting the grandchildren. I look at the Members who brought their children in today; I tell you, it's probably what gives you the strength to go on.

Merry Christmas to everyone. Happy holidays. Celebrate this Christmas and this season however you choose, whatever your beliefs are. The key thing is to keep safe, enjoy the time, spend it with family and friends. For those in this House who have to travel quite a bit and have to be away from home, I think it's more important. I get to drive home in 10 minutes or less, but for those who have to be here when the House is open and probably not get to see their family, I know it's got to be a significant stress. To everyone, Merry Christmas, happy holidays and, if I may be indulged, I'll read the last bit from *A Christmas Carol*.

And it was always said of Scrooge "that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!"

Merry Christmas and have a Happy New Year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Following Charles Dickens is going to be tough.

The fall sitting of the House of Assembly tends to be an incredibly busy time. There's lots of legislation to work through and everyone in this hon. House, regardless of political stripe, endeavours to work hard for their constituency and hard for the best interest of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Once again, I am immensely proud of this team; of the work that we do for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and all that we have been able to accomplish together.

Our province is a beautiful and unique place, a vibrant place, a home to the best people in the world. I can tell you I am sure I

share the feelings of privilege and honour with everyone in this House to represent them. It is certainly a privilege to represent the people of my constituency of the beautiful District of Humber - Gros Morne.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: Thanks for Humber - Gros Morne.

My hon. colleagues in this House are indeed dedicated and passionate and while it may fuel the debate, there is no doubt that the fuel in the tank is the best interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, regardless of stripe.

I want to sincerely thank everybody in this House for their commitment. Their commitment to their constituency, their commitment to the energy and passion of the debate and their commitment to the betterment of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, it's our duty to tackle the challenges facing our province and to strive to make the lives of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians better. We remain steadfast in our commitment to do just that. This fall, we announced Newfoundland and Labrador as the first well-being province in Canada. By placing well-being at the forefront of all policies and decision-making, we will improve health outcomes for all residents, supporting our goal of becoming one of Canada's healthiest provinces by 2031.

Speaker, our recruitment and retention strategy to attract health care professionals is working and continues to be a priority for everyone. Since April 2023, we have recruited 147 doctors and more than 830 nurses, and we have connected more than 60,000 residents with Family Care Teams across the province. Speaker, that number connected to Family Care Teams, just three years ago, was zero.

This summer, we announced a Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan. This \$10 million will focus on improving seniors' well-being and supporting healthy aging, establishing Centres of Excellence in Aging and strengthening integration and service delivery across the care continuum.

In addition to these significant initiatives, we completed the construction of the new Adult Health and Addiction Centre.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: We became the first province to sign up for the national food program, resulting in 4,100 school kids getting healthy meals in schools this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: We replaced more than 300 self-contained breathing apparatus units for volunteer fire departments throughout the province. We increased access to early learning and child care, with more than 11,000 spaces operating at \$10 a day and more in development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: We increased funding to enhance policing services including RNC, RCMP Joint Task Force and additional police officers; announced additional investments to enhance our justice system that supports more correctional officers, Crown attorneys and deputy sheriffs; announced the establishment of a world-class Atlantic Wildfire Centre in Central Newfoundland and have worked collaboratively with our partners to take initiatives to support a modern, successful, free enterprise-driven fishery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: Speaker, we understand that the cost of living and affordability continues to hamper and hurt and cause anxiety amongst our citizens and we've supported

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with more than \$700 million in affordability measures, including lowering the provincial tax on gas.

In addition, we have made positive legislative changes to address many other concerns, including changes to sick note requirements, which will alleviate the administrative burden for health care professionals and minimize unnecessary use of an emergency department; proposed amendments to the *Labour Standards Act* to include additional unpaid job protected leave for long-term illnesses, long-term injury and organ donation. Changes to the administration of Crown lands will quicken regular applications while supporting long-term possession of the land homes are built on – well done.

L. DEMPSTER: Mr. Good Deeds.

A. FUREY: Mr. Good Deeds indeed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: Managing unclaimed remains is necessary and changing it to ensure that it is done in a respectful and dignified manner once all other options have been exhausted. Changes to the *Animal Health and Protection Act* will help ensure highest possible standards for animal welfare.

Speaker, these are just some of the examples of the good work being done by everyone here in this House. And we're not finished yet. Behind every piece of legislation, behind every policy initiative are a lot of hard-working, dedicated staff in the departments making some ideas a reality. Our dedicated public servants are the best in the country and provide important services and programs to all Newfoundland and Labrador every single day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: I sincerely thank them for their efforts and recognize them for their

incredible dedication and accomplishments to date.

Thank you as well to the Clerk and the staff in the Clerk's office, the Legislative Library, the Broadcast team, the Table Officers, Hansard and the Sergeant-at-Arms.

To our Commissionaires and security guards for their work here at the Confederation Building and government offices, thank you. Day in, any hour, you guys are here. Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: Speaker, I also want to thank you and recognize you and your office for the incredible work that you do, not just at maintaining decorum, but ensuring that the legislative agenda advances accordingly. Thank you.

Thanks also to our dedicated political staff who support our caucus and the entire team, as well as those working with you to support your decision-making on the opposite side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I've said it before, while it may be us who are elected, it is a family who serves. So to each and every one of you, please take time to spend with your families and, please, let me do the distinct honour of thanking mine who are here in the gallery today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: The late nights, the endless phone calls, the travelling around the province, the cancelled birthday celebrations, the cancelled Christmas concerts, the cancelled graduation ceremonies, the list goes on and on. I know I am not alone in that endeavour. So to every family member, thank you.

As we close this session of the House of Assembly and look forward to the holiday season, I can't help but also reflect on what

an incredible year we have had. One of the distinct highlights of my life happened this year and it was a great honour and responsibility of having our unknown son, our unknown First World War Newfoundland soldier reinter in a tomb at the National War Memorial in St. John's.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: The people of this province showed up for our son. They showed up in this year, 2024, to recognize the sacrifice that he made. I know I share this with the Member on the opposite side, but those moments, accepting his remains in France and finally laying him to rest at home, will stay with me and I hope this House forever. Thank you, again, from the bottom of my heart to all those that had a hand in making that historic, that final, peaceful resting journey possible.

So from my family to yours, I want to wish you a very Merry Christmas, much peace and happiness may you enjoy during these celebrations of this season and I hope we all have an opportunity to pause and reflect on the importance, not just of our jobs, not just of our constituency, but indeed this special place that we call home in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may God guard thee, Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I guess there's not much for me to say but, ditto. I think everything has been said, but I will take a couple of minutes to first of all say some thank yous.

As we finish up the fall session, it takes a great pleasure of me to take a few moments to recognize the people that make sure the smooth operation of this Legislature happens. I've commonly said we only have

a small team but we have a mighty team, and I'm very thankful for the team I have.

I'd like to start by thanking the support staff of the House of Assembly, the ones that do the work behind the scenes, the Corporate and Member Services, the Legislative Library and our Information Management team, Hansard and Broadcast.

I am pleased to say that as we're breaking now over the Christmas season and we return back to the spring session, we will be upgrading our systems. They'll be working very hard to make sure that the equipment is all installed and prepared and working properly. Hopefully, that will make their lives a little bit easier because most of our equipment here is very dated so we're looking forward to those upgrades.

I would also like to take a second to acknowledge the valuable, dedicated and committed work of our statutory Officers and their staff in each of those offices. They do some fantastic work for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and I commend them for that.

Thank you to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and their staff for the work they do in making sure that this building, even though it's our Legislative building, it still falls under the envelope of Transportation and Infrastructure. Any time that we have any issues or want anything done, they're always there quick to respond and help us where they can, so thank you.

To my staff, Sabrina Barnes in the Clerk's office, I just wanted to say a big thank you for making sure that everything runs smoothly. Sabrina is the one making sure that all the documents are prepared and brought forward, and the agendas are prepared so that the Pages can get it out on the tables each day.

In the Chamber, I would like to, first of all, thank our Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Robert Escott.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I know he finds it very hard to come to work every day and it's hard to see him smile or laugh, and believe it or not, he even likes a lunch from time to time, three or four sandwiches, break time and things like that. Robert, thank you very much for all the work you do.

To our Pages here and the ones that are not with us right now, a big thank you for all the work you do. Portia will be finishing with us after this evening as she just recently graduated.

Thank you, Portia.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Best of luck in all your future endeavours.

We have another girl that just joined us today, Emma. So, Emma, welcome and thank you for your service.

To the Commissionaires, the RCMP and the RNC that are up in our gallery, the ones that are here every single day when we're in session to make sure that every Member is protected and have the security that we need to do our jobs. We all live in a very volatile society right now, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the great work you guys do. We greatly appreciate it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: To my Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chair of Committees, thank you very much, especially this year. I had to miss a little bit of time at the advance and thank you, you did a fantastic job. I was following it. It might have been 3 or 4 in the morning where I was to, watching it, but I did follow it

and I thank you for the work you do. I am sure all Members appreciate what you did.

To my Table Officers: Clerk, Kim Hawley George; Law Clerk, Gerrie Smith; as well as Bobbi Russell, Kim Hammond, Mark Jerrett and Evan Beazley. Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The advice, direction and support that you provide to me on a daily basis, it's very heartwarming. I'm thankful, you are so professional in the work you do. I would not be able to do my job and many other Members would not be able to do their job without the work you do. I greatly appreciate it and I thank you.

To my constituency assistant Pam Foss and also my EA Kala Noel, as one of the Members mentioned, when we're in session we rely so heavily on our CAs back in our districts, and I have to say Pamela has only been with me a little less than two years, she's been doing a fantastic job. Like one of the Members mentioned before, when I'm back in my district now sometimes I pick up the phone and answer a call and I'll answer it MHA Derek, and they'll ask, can I speak to your assistant please? It speaks volumes to the quality of work they're doing and we would not be able to do the job that we're able to do, representing the people in our district, without their support.

Two events that I just wanted to highlight a little bit that I, as Speaker, took on this year and that was the mace tour that we went on in June when the last House session closed. We took 12 days to travel throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to bring the mace to schools and other community groups, to talk about democracy, to talk about the role of MHAs, to talk about the role of Speaker and democracy overall. I've got to say it was a fantastic event, one that I'll truly always remember, just being able to talk to our youth in a classroom setting but also in a gymnasium setting to give them the opportunity to ask questions.

Many of the people have never seen the mace before, unfortunately; many of them do not have the opportunity to travel to the city to take part in our Legislature, so I thought it was a great idea and our staff was very supportive of it, to take the mace out and to take democracy out on the road. We will continue to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Then just last week, we hosted the first Teachers Institute here in the Confederation Building and the Colonial Building, 25 educators from across Newfoundland and Labrador came in. I know some Members did take the opportunity to visit here while the Teachers Institute was on. I have to say it was a phenomenal event. I did take a lot of time myself to talk with the teachers and probably interrupt the staff sometimes when they were doing their presentations to answer some questions. I have to say, it was so well received and hopefully we'll find budgetary money to do both of these events in the next year, the mace tour and the Teachers Institute.

I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation in making that event. Thank you to all the staff that helped in any way to make that such a success that it was.

To the leaders and the Members, as a Member said, it can be challenging sitting in the Chair at times and he compared it to a teacher. My background is recreation, so I compare it to a referee on the ice or on the court. It can be challenging, but I understand that every Member in this House of Assembly is very passionate about what they do and how they represent the people of their districts, but also the people of the province and try to find the balance of respectful debate, but also keeping the decorum in the House. I do thank you for your co-operation, each and every one of you. Like I said, it has been

challenging but also has been very rewarding.

As previously mentioned, none of us would be able to do these jobs without the support of our families, and I would just like to thank my wife Tina and my family for their support. It's been nine years, a little over a week ago, that many of us got elected here and it comes with a lot of sacrifices, being away from home so long, being on the road so much. I think we're all very thankful for the support that we do get from our family.

So as we close for the Christmas season, I just want to wish everyone also a very Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous new year. As everyone is travelling to their districts, please be safe and take time to enjoy it with your family and friends.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: We are going to have maybe another 15 or 20 minutes before the Lieutenant Governor –

J. HOGAN: Less than that.

SPEAKER: Less?

J. HOGAN: She's on her way.

SPEAKER: Okay, she's on her way. Good.

AN HON. MEMBER: Let's have another Question Period.

SPEAKER: What's that? We'll open up the floor for debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: After the LG does Royal Assent on the bills, we will close with our tradition, as I have done since I became Speaker, with singing of the Odes. So rather than Members leave, we would rather if you just

stayed around for a few minutes, if you can, and we'll take a short recess.

This House stands in recess.

Recess

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Speaker, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador has arrived.

SPEAKER: Admit Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise.

(The Speaker leaves the Chair.)

(Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor takes the Chair.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: It is the wish of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor that all present be seated.

SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the General Assembly of the province has at its present session passed certain bills, to which, in the name of and on behalf of the General Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

CLERK: A bill, "An Act Respecting the Amalgamation of Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro-Electric Corporation and Nalcor Energy." (Bill 33)

A bill, "An Act Respecting Health Research Ethics." (Bill 64)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Animal Health and Protection Act." (Bill 65)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Lands Act No. 2." (Bill 68)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Medical Act, 2011 and the Psychologists Act, 2005." (Bill 80)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Labour Standards Act." (Bill 82)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Medical Act, 2011 No. 2." (Bill 83)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Registered Nurses Act, 2008." (Bill 84)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Provincial Health Authority Act and the Fatalities Investigations Act." (Bill 85)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act." (Bill 86)

A bill, "An Act Respecting Licensed Practical Nurses, Registered Nurses, Registered Psychiatric Nurses and Nurse Practitioners." (Bill 87)

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

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

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Family Relief Act." (Bill 91)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Engineers and Geoscientists Act, 2008." (Bill 92)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Urban and Rural Planning Act, 2000 and the City of St. John's Municipal Taxation Act." (Bill 93)

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

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Public Safety Act." (Bill 95)

A bill, "An Act to Repeal the Financial Services Appeal Board Act and to Amend Various Acts of the Province to Eliminate Appeals to the Financial Services Appeal Board." (Bill 96)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Family Violence Protection Act." (Bill 97)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Arts Council Act." (Bill 98)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Labour Standards Act No. 2." (Bill 101)

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act No. 2." (Bill 104)

HER HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (Joan Marie Aylward, ONL): In His Majesty's name, I assent to these bills.

If I may, I'd just like to take a few moments to thank you for your work this session – obviously, a lot of work completed by the number of bills – and to say to you that your work is very important. I think that it's very important for all of us to remember that. We are here as representatives of the people from all over this province. I think we appreciate this democracy and this whole process more than ever in the days that we see around us. So I want to thank you for that hard work.

I also want to wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a peaceful Christmas as you go back to your districts.

You're probably wondering what I'm doing in this. We have a Christmas tree lighting today at Government House. The lighting is at 6 o'clock and it's quite lovely. We're expecting a very special visitor – no offence to any of you – who is going to arrive there in a couple of minutes to see the children and the families. So it's a pretty special time down there today. But nice to see so many families, local families, new families, new-to-the-province families.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

HER HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (Joan Marie Aylward, ONL): So thank you, again. Safe travels home,

and a very Merry Christmas to you and all your family.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise.

(Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor leaves the Chamber. The Speaker returns to the Chair.)

SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Before we adjourn, sticking with tradition, I'm going to call upon the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality to lead us, first of all, into the "Ode to Labrador," followed by the "Ode to Newfoundland."

P. PARSONS: Let's all stand.

I'll call on my colleagues, of course, from Labrador to help lead the "Ode to Labrador"

Dear land of mountains, woods and snow,
Labrador, our Labrador
God's noble gift to us we know,
Labrador, our Labrador.

Thy proud resources waiting still,
Their splendid task will soon fulfill,
Obedient to thy Maker's will,
Labrador, our Labrador.

We love to climb thy mountains steep,
Labrador, our Labrador.
And paddle on thy waters deep,
Labrador, our Labrador.

Our snowshoes scar thy trackless plains,
We seek no city streets nor lanes,
We are thy sons while life remains,
Labrador, our Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: When sun rays crown thy
pine clad hills,
And summer spreads her hand,
When silvern voices tune thy rills,

We love thee, smiling land.

We love thee, we love thee,
We love thee smiling land.

As loved our fathers, so we love,
Where once they stood, we stand;
Their prayer we raise to Heaven above,
God guard thee, Newfoundland.

God guard thee, God guard thee,
God guard thee, Newfoundland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Please be seated.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: This is my Christmas present to myself.

I move, seconded by the Premier, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m., March 3, 2025.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Monday, March 3, at 1:30 p.m.