



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume L

SECOND SESSION

Number 113

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Monday

May 12, 2025

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!
Admit visitors.

Before we begin this afternoon, I'd like to welcome in the public gallery Mithun Mathew. Mithun is joining us this afternoon for a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members from Mount Pearl - Southlands, Mount Pearl North, Cape St. Francis, Exploits and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize Mr. Mike Torrville, a social studies teacher at O'Donel High School, for his dedication to providing valuable and creative hands-on experiences for students to learn our history and help keep our Newfoundland culture alive.

On Friday, March 28, I visited O'Donel High School and enjoyed a traditional Jiggs' dinner prepared by this Newfoundland studies class. This was an awesome initiative to introduce students to a timeless Newfoundland tradition and, of course, the meal was delicious.

Mr. Torrville said: "There is no better way to pass on a tasty Newfoundland tradition than to take students through the process."

Along with Mr. Torrville's class, interns from Memorial University and a great team of O'Donel staff and teachers helped serve up the delicious Jiggs' dinner.

From engaging in a demonstration by a master boat builder on how to use

traditional tools used in boat building, touring our local museums, enjoying a walking tour of old St. John's, to cooking up traditional Newfoundland dishes, Mr. Torrville is providing students with fun learning experiences and a wealth of historical knowledge.

Please join me in commending Mr. Mike Torrville for his ongoing efforts to preserve our Newfoundland history and culture through meaningful educational experiences.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Speaker, today I rise to recognize another successful young man who grew up in my District of Mount Pearl North. Justin Simms is a graduate of the Niagara film school and the director's program at the Canadian Film Centre.

Justin has made a career in the film industry, right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. His first feature film was *Down to the Dirt* which won the Best Atlantic Film Award. His second film, *Away from Everywhere* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016.

He also has documentary credits in *Hard Light* and *Hand.Line.Cod*. His most recent film is a documentary called *Sons* which addresses the issues of what it means to be a man.

He is very excited about his current project, which involves comedian Andy Jones. This will be out within the next year.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in saying congratulations to Justin Simms on his success and wish him all the best in his future career.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, on Sunday, April 27, the Town of Torbay hosted the Best of Torbay Awards Night 2025. I am pleased to share today, in this hon. House, the recipients of the following awards:

The Chief Mike McGrath Award: the elementary recipient, Jagger White; the junior high recipient, Maisy Pritchett; and senior high recipient, Patrick Moores.

The Young Entrepreneur Award, Heidi Luby; Volunteer of the Year, Ross Thornhill; Volunteer Group of the Year, 50+ group.

The Customer Commitment Award, Mary Brown's; Economic Impact Award, Elite Kitchens & Design; Senior of the Year, Mr. Fred Newell; New/Emerging Business Award, Kryptonian Ink.

The Ward Gosse Coach of the Year Award, Danielle Stamp; Business of the Year, Made to Move Physio + Wellness; and Lifetime Achievement Award, Ms. Madonna Galway.

Speaker, I extend my sincere appreciation to all individuals and businesses in the Town of Torbay for their dedication to community and thank them for their contributions that are felt not only in the Town of Torbay, but throughout the entire district.

I ask my colleagues of this 50th General Assembly to join me in congratulating the 2025 Best of Torbay awards recipients for their outstanding achievements in business, volunteerism and entrepreneurship.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, today I would like to recognize Mr. Trevor Mills of Botwood. Trevor has been a steadfast leader in the Botwood Lions Club, making a lasting impact. With a deep commitment to service, he has been recognized as a top president in multiple District N, which covers all of Atlantic Canada, a testament to his dedication and leadership.

In recognition of outstanding contribution to the Lions mission, Trevor received the Melvin Jones Fellowship award, one of the highest honours bestowed upon a member. Trevor was elected district governor of District N3 overseeing all Lions Clubs operations across the Western half of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Through his passion and dedication, Trevor remains a driving force in his Lions Club and his district, which is shaping a brighter future for communities across the province.

Speaker, I would like all Members of this House of Assembly to join me in recognizing Mr. Trevor Mills for his dedication, service and leadership.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, variety is the spice of life, and the essence of SpiceX Blackmarsh Superette. For owner Mithun Mathew, his passion for authentic Indian cuisine connects him with his roots, his mother's recipes and friends.

SpiceX fuses traditional homestyle Indian cuisine with local dishes. Everything from pizza, cod bites, Jiggs' dinner and chicken fingers to jeera rice, samosas, dragon chicken and even butter chicken poutine. Or buy ingredients to make your own Indian dish from scratch.

Mithun moved from India to Halifax in 2017 to study aircraft maintenance. He moved to Newfoundland and Labrador in 2019 to work full-time with PAL. However, he soon opened SpiceX on Empire Avenue and a Churchill Square food truck.

Business grew. Mithun acquired Blackmarsh Superette in 2024 and rebranded it. He retained staff, preserved local staples, and blended in the rich flavours of India.

Staff enjoy the variety of customers and food the most. One employee admitted she'd never eaten Indian cuisine before. Since SpiceX took over, however, she's tried nearly the entire menu and proudly recommends her flavourful favourites to regulars and newcomers alike.

Please join me in congratulating Mithun Mathew on his entrepreneurial spirit and for adding his own vibrant twist to a beloved local landmark.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today for the very first time as Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation on a sad note. Today, I would like us all to pay tribute to a favourite

son of Newfoundland and Labrador, acclaimed musician Mark Hiscock.

Mark was a founding member of the band Shanneyganock and was one of the finest and most celebrated button accordion players in this province, if not the entire country of Canada. Mark's untimely passing has left a gaping hole in our musical community – one that may never be filled.

Mr. Speaker, from the time he was a very young man, Mark was drawn to music. As his passion and artistry grew, so did his contributions to our province. He had a love for traditional Newfoundland and Labrador music and told the stories of this place and our people throughout his soulful voice and instrumental talents, and he did so with great ease. He has helped to preserve the heritage and culture of our province as we've seen generation after generation connect with his music. Last week, I saw with my own eyes, at the East Coast Music Awards, as many artists paid tribute to Mark's legacy, including his bandmates Shanneyganock who performed the opening act.

I think I can speak on behalf of all people of this province when I say our thoughts are with his wife, his family, his friends, and of course his close friends and bandmates in Shanneyganock.

Speaker, I respectfully ask that all Members of this hon. House join me in a moment of silence. May he rest in peace.

SPEAKER: I ask all Members to rise for a moment of silence.

(Moment of silence.)

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

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

The Official Opposition extends its sincere condolences on the passing of Mr. Mark Hiscock, a mainstay in the music industry of Newfoundland and Labrador. Our deepest sympathies go to his family, friends and his bandmates of Shanneyganock.

Mark was born and raised in Fort Amherst, a true ambassador for our province. A multi-instrumentalist and gifted performer, he became a beloved figure through his longstanding contributions to the traditional music scene.

His warm demeanor and mastery of the accordion resonated with audiences for decades. Especially during the time with Shanneyganock and through his solo work, including the heartfelt album, *The Old Fishing Schooner*.

Mark's love of music was evident from a young age, and he often drew inspiration from the rich cultural heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador. His songs reflected personal experiences and cherished memories and captured the spirit of our community.

As we remember Mark, we celebrate his vibrant legacy and the joy he brought to countless lives through his music.

Mark Hiscock, a true gentleman that will be sorely missed but his melodies will continue to inspire future generations.

Rest in peace, my friend.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

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

We also send our condolences to Mark Hiscock's family, his friends and his bandmates in Shanneyganock.

Newfoundland and Labrador has lost a great talent. His absence will be profoundly missed. Not only for his music, but also for his work to preserve our musical heritage. His work to pass on our musical traditions to the next generation will never be forgotten.

I echo the minister's words; may he rest in peace and thank you for his contribution to our heritage and our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, residents of Small Point, Adam's Cove, Blackhead and Broad Cove are returning to their communities to find devastation and homes burned to the ground. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the work of all first responders and volunteers for all their efforts during this difficult time.

In the fire evacuation in Labrador West and following Hurricane Fiona, residents were provided with emergency compensation payments.

I ask the Premier: Can these residents expect the same?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to rise today in this House as the Premier for Newfoundland and Labrador to thank everybody for their hard work over the last few days in that part of the province.

Of course, we've seen devastation with forest fires a lot more recently over the past year or so, and, unfortunately, we've seen it earlier in the season as well. I had a chance to speak to the mayor on Saturday, and I spoke to the fire chief as well on Saturday. I thanked them for all their hard work and their services they provided and advised them that the province will be there for them over the course of the next few days when they figure out the damage that has been done.

I know the Member for the area, the Minister of IET, has been out to that area as well. We'll continue to talk to them and make sure that we are there for them after they gather their thoughts and get together and see what they need in terms of help from us.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Now that the Premier has made almost everyone in his caucus a Cabinet minister, creating new departments with new mandates, I ask the Premier: Will you be amending the budget to reflect your new Cabinet structure?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Member opposite is right, I have organized the departments in government and, of course, I've done that to make sure that this government is there to serve

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I think what's important for us, as elected Members in this House of Assembly, is to deliver on priorities that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – what they tell us are their priorities. This is what the departments are reflecting.

For example, Families and Affordability, there's a new department and minister responsible to make sure that families feel that they have heard from their government Members. Of course, seniors are a very important issue in this province; there is now a minister responsible for seniors.

Those are the priorities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; that's the priorities of this government.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, unfortunately, we've heard this song many more times before. Lots of announcements, but the fact is that they're simply lengthening the names of departments in order to make it look like they're doing something different when the Estimates prove there's nothing new. That's the challenge we have here but let me keep going for a second about some other commitments.

In November of 2024, in response to questions on the shingles vaccine, the Premier said – quote – we'll continue to rely on experts rather than make decisions here because they've been raised in the House. On March 12, this year, he voted against a resolution to provide the shingle vaccines to all seniors.

So I ask the Premier: Why did it take a Liberal leadership to change your mind on the vaccines for shingles and will you provide full coverage in this budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The premise of the question was around budget and what's new in budget, and I'm very pleased to say there's a lot new in this budget. We've put a major focus on education. I think if the Member opposite was listening to educators in this province, he would have heard the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, educators, Memorial University, all of them stating how important those additional supports – we're going to hire over 400 new educators and teaching assistants –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Speaker, that is significant. There's more money for health care, for example. As you know, we've put a big focus on the Health Accord in ensuring it.

I would say to the Member opposite if he looked at what we're doing in the business community for industry and energy, it is significant.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

S. COADY: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, my question had nothing to do with that. My question had to do with providing the shingles vaccine to seniors of our province –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – which this Premier committed to doing.

So I simply ask the Premier: Will you honour your commitment, amend your budget and pay for the shingles vaccine for seniors?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I wasn't finished with the answer to my question. I mean, look at the amount of money that we're doing to grow our economy.

The premise of the question, the first part of that question, the preamble to the first question was all about there's nothing new in budget, merely having the opportunity to tell the people in this House and the people in this province, what's new in the budget: \$90 million to grow our oil and gas industry; \$10 million to grow our technology industry. There's \$10 million to support our restaurants.

Speaker, there's a tremendous amount of money in this budget, including money for vaccines for seniors for shingles, Speaker. That is included in this budget. There are tremendous tens of millions of dollars placed in this budget to support seniors and making sure they have the shingles vaccine.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, once again, we have to stand here and ask the Leader of the Liberal Party, who is now the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, who publicly stated that he was supporting a seniors' vaccine free for anyone over the age of 50 –

he now sits in the Premier's chair – will he not stand up in the House of Assembly and say yes, I intend to do that, and I will do it in this year's budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

It is indeed a pleasure to answer questions on behalf of the Department of Health and Community Services and on behalf of the Premier.

As we have heard over the course of the past few months, the shingles vaccine is something that's very important to seniors in this province and we've been able to build a plan that's reflective of providing that vaccine for individuals who are 65 to 70 and those who are immunocompromised.

That is the very first step in what is to be a plan that this Premier has identified as a priority for him, where we will provide this vaccine for all individuals who are identified as seniors, and we can continue to build on what has already been a good base plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador can really clearly understand that there is nothing new here. That a commitment made is not a commitment kept.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That a promise made is not a promise kept. That what you say on the campaign trail is not what you do when you

have a chance in the House of Assembly to actually stand up and do something about it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. WAKEHAM: So again, we have no answers.

So let me try another one. The sugar tax was brought in by this Liberal government to modify behaviour and reduce consumption. It hasn't worked.

I ask the Premier: Will you commit to the elimination of the sugar tax?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

We will deliver vaccines to everybody over the age of 50 for shingles.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: As I said, affordability is a very important issue to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and I've already written a letter to the Finance Minister to ask her to repeal the sugar tax to deal with affordability issues in the province.

So those are commitments, Speaker, and we will do what we are committed to doing, because that's what's important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I'm glad to hear that the Premier is finally going to get rid of the sugar tax. All of us in Newfoundland and Labrador, finally, finally –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Of course, we'll make sure that it actually happens. We'll be there to follow it.

But, Speaker, I simply ask the Premier again: When it comes to the shingles vaccine, which is so important, when will it be free for all the seniors over the age of 50?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said in my last answer, this is a process that will take some time to unfold. There are a number of individuals in this province who already qualify for the vaccination. And we'll continue to build on that plan as we can expand it. Then, in time, introduce it to all seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I don't think it takes a lot of time; it just takes a commitment. And that's what we need, a commitment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the Comfort Inn is in the Premier's own district and it's expected to cost \$13 million annually, and by the time the three-year lease is up, it is somewhere close to \$40 million.

We've heard now that they're in negotiations to actually extend the contract.

So I ask the Premier: Is this true?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

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

I want to congratulate the new Leader of the Liberal Party and our Premier –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: – a formidable foe and a wonderful colleague.

In terms of Horizons at 106, that program continues. There is no change at this point, and we are not in negotiations on any extension or renewal at this point.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I guess there's no plan for that as well.

An LPN in Central Newfoundland who temporarily stopped working while her child was in pre-school is now seeking to rejoin the nursing workforce in a casual position to start. She was advised that only retired LPNs and students can work casual.

Minister, is this correct?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I would remind the Members of this House of Assembly that every effort is made to make sure that anybody who wants to work in Newfoundland and Labrador in any of our health care professions, we are interested, we want to hear from them and if the Member opposite has a specific name that he's referencing, we would be happy to look into that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: This is a trend, Speaker. This is not the first time we bring in personal stories and that's a great way for government sometimes to deflect it, but that's not the answer. These people are going through the process. My next question will lead into where it's gone.

This same nurse has since obtained employment as a travel nurse, while casual nurse positions continue to be advertised in her own area.

Why is it that this local nurse can work as a travel nurse at a higher cost to the province but NLHS will not hire her as a casual employee? This is factual, Minister.

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I don't know the specifics of this individual or their case, but I would ask the Member opposite to present that information to me and the department and we can certainly reach out to see what type of employment there may be or what issue might have come up.

I will remind Members that we have done a tremendous amount of work to reduce the reliance on travel nurses here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and there are times when travel nurses are going to be required. I know that specifically in my district that if we did not have that resource, then we might have to cancel some services, and that's not something that we feel is appropriate as a government and we want to continue to provide services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So in times when travel nursing is the only option, we will have to avail of it but make every effort to move away from that reliance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

We've been hearing that forever. This is a broken system when I have to stand up in the House of Assembly and bring up personal stories and the minister is going to look into it. Imagine how many days in the House of Assembly we would have to bring up everyone's story – because this is not uncommon. Too bad we're not there more often, maybe we could bring in more stories.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Residents in Lewisporte are hearing rumours of a shift to virtual care, while seniors are being forced to travel to Gander just to see a doctor.

Minister, where is the urgent care centre for Lewisporte?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I would remind the Member opposite that he continues to bring up specific cases that he is aware we cannot address on the floor of the House of Assembly. So maybe if he brought those offline and used his time in the House to bring forward more important issues, then we could have actual debate about those issues.

Right now, I would remind the Members of this House and the Member opposite that we are continuing to work on resourcing rural health care centres –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

K. HOWELL: – and I know that Lewisporte is one that has gotten some conversation over the last number of days. The reliance on virtual care has been important in some areas, and again, it's not the holy grail that we wish to operate by, but it is a viable option that works for some people. But in the event that it's not the most appropriate avenue, we'll continue to find appropriate human resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to remind the minister, these are important issues, and I will continue to advocate for people of this province and bring those issues into this House of Assembly every day of the week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: The minister might discredit that they're not important. They're very important to those people, and they're very important to us, Speaker.

How can the Liberal government justify its silence while primary health care services in Lewisporte erode? Physician vacancies mounting, after-hours clinics disappearing and not even a location secured for the so-called Family Care Team announced over a year ago.

How can you explain that to people, Minister?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

First, I would like to address my previous comment. I did not mean that these issues were not important, so I retract that comment. But I do want to say that there's a

time and place for those discussions, and because of privacy complications, we can't discuss that in a public forum.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

K. HOWELL: So if the Member opposite has issues, then they can definitely bring them to the department.

In terms of the HR plan and how that unfolds, we are working on our recruitment and retention efforts. We have recruited 140-plus physicians. We've recruited 1,100 registered nurses over the last number of years, and we're continuing to find ways to fill vacancies that exist in some of our more difficult-to-fill positions.

That's a plan that has been enacted as part of the Health Accord, and we'll continue to build on that work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

The priority of the Liberal government is non-resident travellers.

I ask the minister: Why did your government leave Labrador out of their provincial subsidized air travel loop? Not only are Labrador residents being discriminated against, but you have extended your discrimination to our tourists as well.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I realize that this is a very important issue to the people in Labrador. I've heard about it throughout the leadership campaign over the last little while about affordability. When I was in Labrador, in Happy Valley-Goose

Bay and Lab West as well, they brought it up affordability issues, which is not just limited to, of course, air access and transportation.

I will be reaching out to people in Labrador to have conversations about how we can improve affordability and access issues over the next coming days. I'm very much looking forward to those conversations and working with people in Labrador (inaudible)

—

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, we've raised the issue of travel costs for Labradorians for years. I've been advocating since 2019.

Residents of Labrador are paying thousands of dollars for essential travel to St. John's. Travel costs are simply unaffordable. In June, a round-trip cost to St. John's for a resident in Nain or anywhere on the North Coast will cost one person over \$2,000. It's shameful.

None of the \$15 million supports essential air travel in Labrador, so why are tourists on the Island more important to this Liberal government than the residents of Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to remind the hon. Member that it's not \$15 million, that's for the whole provincial marketing program. I do agree with the Member that this is a real issue in Labrador, affordability. Last year was a difficult year on the access side, when often flights were being cancelled and we didn't have a plane. That has gotten better, but affordability is a big issue.

We're not new to the game on this. Speaker, just over the last few months, I have met with federal ministers, written federal ministers. I submitted to the Competition Bureau. I went before the standing committee and I'm really pleased to hear that the new Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador has agreed that he's going to meet with folks like GBAC, he's going to meet with the Chambers and I believe, Speaker, that we will find a path forward that will help us get to a better place in Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: It is \$15 million including marketing, but for essential travel to Labrador you don't need a market because we want to fly. We need to be able to fly. It's essential travel.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: It's not just Labrador that the Liberals have left behind. St. Anthony is excluded as well. Even a former Liberal Tourism minister has publicly urged the government to add both St. Anthony and Labrador to this loop for direct access to St. John's and Deer Lake.

So will the Liberal government finally admit that leaving Labrador out was a mistake?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm not going to speak for the Minister of TCAR around the piece of work that was done on the Island. I am focused on Labrador and helping the people of Labrador get to a better place.

We recognize that we live far from services, a small population over a large land mass. Speaker, on the affordability note, that is why important programs like medical transportation that came under Labrador Affairs in budget '23, we have more than doubled the budget for medical transportation in the last three budgets.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's essential travel.

L. DEMPSTER: It is essential travel.

We recognize that the Northern Peninsula is also in a difficult situation here. That is why, Speaker, when we put in place the voucher program of 100 per cent of the first \$1,000, we expanded and went back to the old Labrador-Grenfell zone and included the Northern Peninsula in that piece.

We have increased the school sport subsidies –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

Yes or no – will the minister create a disability advocate for persons with disabilities?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

It's an absolute pleasure to rise here in the House of Assembly for the first time as the minister. I appreciate the question. We've

got a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador that identify as having a disability.

Justice Robert Fowler, in a review, looked through and said that the Office of the Seniors' Advocate should also include people with disabilities. So that's something going forward when we look at how we do the advocacy groups, we'll look at how that folds into it.

So I'm looking forward to speaking with stakeholders, Speaker, and getting up to speed on this. I'm about three days into this. I look forward to it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, that review was completed in 2023 – 21 months ago. This government has had it in their possession, yet there's no movement, no action.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: In recent Estimates meetings, the minister said – quote – we need to give priority to an advocate for persons with disabilities. He also said – and this is his quote – I've been trying to move this file along as a quick as I can.

If the minister was trying to create an advocate for persons with disabilities, why have we not seen any action on this issue?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

I appreciate the question. It is one that's very important to the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador, certainly people with disabilities. As I said, brand new into this role. I wasn't at that Estimates. I look forward to getting up to speed on this, and it's something we can certainly talk about later.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, there needs to be speed on this; that is true. The 2021 mandate letter directed the minister to establish an advocate for persons with disabilities. That was a decision that was made four years ago, to create an advocate, so why is there still no advocate?

We need to know when the timeline for that disability advocate is. When will it happen?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I'm looking forward to getting up to speed on this, talking with stakeholders, talking with other organizations and staff.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. KORAB: It's a very important issue, Speaker, and it's one that needs to be addressed, we need to look at. So I'm committed to doing that, and that's what we'll do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

Just move around the ministers so we don't get an answer, that's what it seems like.

Last November, the minister did not know how many elevators had expired inspection certificates, and now we learn today, 65 per cent of inspections across the province still haven't been completed.

How can the minister justify leaving thousands of people using uninspected elevators every single day?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Modernization and Service Delivery.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

In the Estimates this morning, that did come up, but one of the public servants, Speaker, did talk about how elevator inspections work. Every year, the organization or the building or the building manager has to get a certificate.

Currently, Speaker, we have three full-time elevator inspectors, so I just want to thank those public servants for their hard work across Newfoundland and Labrador. We are working on a system whereby contractors or companies can engage with a private contractor to get that yearly elevator inspection done, Speaker.

We do, Speaker –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Happy to discuss this further.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess 65 per cent is not alarming? So somebody should be asking that question, why they're not done. Okay, we're waiting on inspections, then hire more people to get them done. I mean that's obvious.

These elevators are used in schools, shopping centres and hospitals every single day. Thousands of people are using hundreds of unsafe elevators.

When is the minister going to take action to ensure public safety?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Modernization and Service Delivery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: Speaker, I do feel it important to clarify for anyone watching that the characterization of the elevator inspections is completely inaccurate. There are regular, routine inspections required, and we are changing the system so that people who operate elevators can have a private contractor, one of the elevator experts, do that inspection.

Speaker, our department, we prioritize, we have a risk-based approach to prioritize the elevators that our team inspects. Any elevator at risk is inspected, Speaker. Any elevator installed for the first time, Speaker. Any elevator that's been fixed and placed back on the market is prioritized, Speaker.

At the moment, we are doing a good job of inspecting elevators in terms of the priority and where the biggest risk is.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's getting hard to hear Members speak.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Sixty-five per cent is still a bad number – still a bad number. If it's not done, they just take down the inspections out of the elevators and put them in a security office. That's not acceptable.

Now that engineering drawings for the new breakwater on the lower coast in Trepassey are complete, can the minister confirm when the project will be tendered and will it be in time to prevent another costly winter for the Town of Trepassey?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: To the question from the hon. Member, my understanding is that is very close. I believe it's in the vicinity of \$900,000 of work that's going to be done, and that'll be happening very soon in terms of awarding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, in February 2024, the former premier appointed the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island as minister for a newly established separate Department of Housing to elevate the debate of Cabinet and give housing even closer attention.

I ask the Premier: Are we to assume that by reversing that separate status –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: – he is signalling that homelessness and affordable housing are no longer priorities for this government?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

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

It's unfortunate the way the Member ended up with his question. Housing and homelessness is a priority of this government and will continue to be so. Obviously, we have a new federal government who's also identified housing as a key priority. So we will be working very closely over the weeks and months and years ahead to make sure we address to the full extent the housing and homelessness challenges in this province.

We're currently building new homes. We are currently expanding our shelters and supportive housing programs. We will continue to make sure housing and homelessness are a priority for this government for years to come.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, a little over a year ago, the Premier's newly appointed Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing criminalized homelessness by forcibly evicting unhoused individuals from the grounds of the Colonial Building and making it illegal to set up tents

on the government property. There was no plan to make sure that the residents out of Tent City had a place to live.

So I ask the Premier: Why should the people in this province have confidence that this minister will now act any differently?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

J. ABBOTT: Again, Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

I mean, you can reduce events of last year in terms of the tent encampments here in the city. I believe the work we did with the community to address those issues stood the test of time.

Tent encampments are not a solution to homelessness. There is no reason why we should have or do have tent encampments in this province. And I, as minister, will make sure to the degree that is humanly possible that there will be none.

Now, what does that require? It requires investment in housing, it requires investment in supportive housing, and that is exactly what we are doing. We will continue to do that.

For the Member to say that that's our focus in terms of tent encampments (inaudible) absolutely not.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Just to be clear, I object to tent encampments too, and the lack of a plan by this government.

Speaker, a recent ATIPP shows the number of non-profit shelters has increased from 521 in 2019 to 1,134 in 2025, and the number of private shelters from 243 to 362. In that same time frame, spending on shelters tripled from just over \$4 million to almost \$15 million.

I ask the minister: What is his plan to get people into deeply affordable homes and reduce spending on shelters to pre-2019 levels?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

J. ABBOTT: Again, Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

Of course, quoting certain facts doesn't necessarily tell, obviously, the full story. I think we can all appreciate, through the COVID period and subsequently, the housing and homelessness situation in this province, in this country and in North America, changed significantly.

I think we are in a very good place here in Newfoundland and Labrador in grasping the issues, addressing them head-on and making sure we got the right programs and services in place. The Minister of Finance has continued to provide funding to the Housing Corporation, and for housing programs to address the issues that the Member has identified, and we will continue to do that.

We are bringing down those numbers, and we will continue to do so. We have reduced our wait-list at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation and we will continue to do that as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

To summarize, we have a government that criminalized homelessness, overspent leasing of the airport inn from their friends, increased shelter spending by millions, refuses to implement rent control on large financialized landlords to deal with skyrocketing rents, misinformed the public on the amount of houses built and have now deleted the housing department.

I ask the Premier: When will you get serious about dealing with the housing crisis?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, again, thank you for the opportunity.

Again, the way that the Member has characterized what government has been doing, I think, is totally less than inaccurate. It's really definitely misleading, and to say we're criminalizing homelessness is totally, really, off the charts. That is something we are not doing, we will not do and, obviously, should not do.

Housing is a right and we are making sure that we can meet the needs of individuals where they are. We've expanded the Gathering Place and making sure we have supportive housing there. We have Horizons at 106, which is a transitional housing, which is what the community asked for and that's what we put in place. We have supportive housing in Gander; that's what the community has asked for. We are looking at other –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

J. DINN: Point of order, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Point of order.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: I think the minister, in referring to my comments, said that I was misleading.

Now, I think you've ruled on this numerous times that that is indeed unparliamentary. So I would ask, then, that the Member withdraw that word.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: I didn't clearly hear the word being said, but I will review it and review *Hansard* and report back to the House.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

**Presenting Reports by Standing and
Select Committees**

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, pursuant to the motion of referral of April 9, 2025, in accordance with Standing Order 72, the Social Services Committee met on five occasions: April 9, 2025; April 11, 2025; April 14, 2025; April 16, 2025; and May 5, 2025.

The Social Services Committee have considered the matters to them referred pursuant to Standing Order 75(2) and directed me to report that they have passed without amendment the Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development; the Department of Education; the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Justice and Public Safety; the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs; and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

Further, the Committee recommends that the report be concurred in.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Further reports by Standing and Select Committees?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Speaker, pursuant to the motion of referral of April 9, 2025, and in accordance with Standing Order 72, the Government Services Committee met on five occasions: April 10, 2025; April 14, 2025; April 15, 2025; April 17, 2025; and May 12, 2025.

The Government Services Committee has considered the matters to them referred and pursuant to Standing Order 75(2) have directed me to report that they have passed without amendments the Estimates of the Consolidated Funds Services; Digital Government and Service NL; Department of Finance; Department of Labrador Affairs; the Public Procurement Agency; the Public Service Commission; and the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Further, the Committee recommends the report be concurred in.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Pursuant to the motion of referral on April 9, 2025, and in accordance with Standing Order 72, the Resource Committee met on five occasions in 2025 on the following dates: April 10, 11, 15, 17 and on May 5.

The Resource Committee have considered the matters to them referred and pursuant to Standing Order 75(2) have directed me to report that they have passed without amendment the Estimates of the following:

Department of Environment and Climate Change; Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture; Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills; Department of Industry, Energy and Technology; and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

Further, the Committee recommends that the report be concurred in.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Are there any further presenting reports by Standing and Select Committees?

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I give notice of the following private Member's motion, which will be seconded by the Member for Bay of Islands:

WHEREAS Labrador is an integral part of the province; and

WHEREAS geography dictates that Labradorians must rely on air travel for many non-tourist reasons such as education, bereavement leave, visiting sick loved ones or medical treatment that is not covered under the Medical Transportation Assistance Program; and

WHEREAS the cost of travel to and from Labrador is prohibitively expensive; and

WHEREAS the cost of living in Labrador is already higher than the rest of the province and these extra travel fees create an additional burden on people's household budgets; and

WHEREAS the differential in travel costs for people on the Island and in Labrador puts the latter at a disadvantage, and

WHEREAS Labrador is a strong economic driver of this province and justice therefore demands that Labradorians should not experience any added economic hardship solely on the basis of geography;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House calls on the government to work with Indigenous partners, businesses and the federal government to implement a plan to reduce costs and increases the accessibility of air travel to, from, and within Labrador.

This will be the motion that will be debated on Wednesday.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Are there any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Assembly as follows:

WHEREAS section 7 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* provides that upon nomination by the House of Assembly, the Clerk of the House of Assembly shall be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council by Commission under the Great Seal.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Kim Hawley George, KC, be nominated for immediate appointment as Clerk of the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The breakwater on the Lower Coast in Trepassey is in urgent need of repair. This breakwater is necessary to protect the one and only access road to the lower coast.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to complete the necessary repairs and install a more durable and sustainable breakwater.

Speaker, I've certainly spoken on this a number of times and had a question in Question Period as well. We met with the former minister back in October. So what do we have, six, seven months ago? The town hasn't heard a word since – not a word.

They got an email the other day – what's today? Today is Monday. I'm going to say Thursday they got an email to say okay, here is the design that they're doing. No talk with the town – they're not engineers – trying to let the town know what's happening up there. They haven't had any person speak to them since October.

The breakwater has been gone since February the previous year, and it's just not acceptable. They were supposed to go up and do temporary repairs up in Trepassey over the winter before the winter started. When we spoke in October, they were

supposed to go up and do some temporary repairs as we spoke and nothing has been done. Not a rock turned over, nothing.

And when I met with the Town of Trepassey – where do they stand? They have to go every time there's a storm – it's not winter now, okay, not a very great day out. But if you get a storm surge up there again, and it doesn't have to be a great storm surge, rocks are coming out over the road. They have to go down and clean it off. They have to hire equipment to do it.

I had asked previously when the government was there if they could use the depot that's in the town to go down with the loader and push the rocks back, but no, they couldn't do that. So the town is responsible, a small town, for this infrastructure. They had to put it up there. They put out a tender to say what went wrong with it. They got that back. Now they have it out on tender again, and I think the minister said today that it was a \$900,000 project, which is fine, but it would be nice to be able to see the proof in the pudding to explain to the town what they're doing and if they have any questions or concerns with it, but that hasn't happened to my knowledge.

So I'm asking the minister to give us a full update on what they are doing and when the breakwater is expected to start.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, residents of the Exploits District are concerned with the lack of police representation in the district. A review in 2019 suggested two additional officers for the region. That didn't happen; it was ignored.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide funding to ensure adequate policing in the Central area.

Speaker, I've brought this to the attention of the House before. Lack of policing in the Exploits District, throughout the Central area, it's certainly noticed amongst the residents. I get calls lots of times, and I'm talking to people about the safety they feel in their own homes. Lots of people home now are even scared. Seniors are even scared now in their own homes. Crime is on the rise. If they call for police activity, they're just wondering if they'll show up, when they'll show up, or if they'll show up at all, because of the lack of policing in the district.

Now, with the big geographic area that we have in the Central area and the Exploits District, that area, yes, they do the best they can with the resources they have, and they act promptly and efficiently as they can. But that's not always the case when somebody needs access to police at that time. Because when they call they're afraid, lots of times, by the time the police get to the area that they're supposed to be, the crime has already happened, probably the thieves or whatever are already gone so that there's nothing found.

We certainly need some more attention put on policing in the Central area. We certainly need more officers. We need an adequate supply of resources so that the safety of the general public in the Exploits District is brought up to standards and people in the Exploits District feel more comfortable and safe in their own home.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, seconded by the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, Concurrence on the Resource Committee.

SPEAKER: First speaker?

The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Immigration and Growth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, to all Members of the hon. House.

I want to rise on this occasion, Concurrence in our budget, because it is one of the most spectacular budgets that I have witnessed in the 11 years that we have been here, in terms of the investments in things that are required for Newfoundland and Labrador's solid growth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: My Department of Jobs, Immigration and Growth have been greatly impacted to the positive in these investments, but I also want to acknowledge, at this point in time, some of the work that I was able to achieve with an incredible team of professionals, people who are dedicated in the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

It is now being led by the second ever female Minister of Fisheries in Newfoundland and Labrador. I look at the team within our fisheries community. The president of the Association for Seafood Producers is now a competition, capable woman. The president of the FFAW, a competent, credible and incredibly passionate woman taking the helm of that

job and now a woman doing the job as Minister of Fisheries, it shows that this industry is really embracing the future and embracing the fact that women have an incredible capacity to lead, to show progress and are being respected by the leaders of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, my appreciation goes out to all of the professional team at Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture. This is a small group of people, but a mighty, mighty team that has had such a positive impact on the entire province. It's their leadership that has inspired me.

As I think of this department and its impact on rural Newfoundland and Labrador, there's not a community or a region in this province that is not guided, led and listened to by the team at the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture. But that goes right to the doorstep of Confederation Building, when I think of O'Brien Farm, when I think of Mount Scio Farm, when I think of Goulds, when I think of all of the agriculture activity that occurs in this province, when I think of all the fisheries activity right down at St. John's Harbour, when I think of all of the different activities that occur from an investment point of view, from forestry, this is truly a department and a group of industries that impacts the entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

But with that said, and I look back at the tenure and the accomplishments of the last while, when I look at what's happened within the – and I'll start within the Department of Agriculture, the Agriculture branch which includes Crown Lands. For the very first time in five decades, 50 years that a transformative exercise has occurred in looking at the way we administer, the way we promote and the way we provide resolve for good title to Crown lands in our province has taken a fundamental, positive change that has not been seen in five decades,

since the *Lands Act* was first proclaimed on January 1, 1977.

I look at those changes, everything from providing a pathway for good title to primary residential properties; for providing a shortened, streamlined, easier approach for section 36: adverse possession, squatters' right claim; for providing a basis for an appeal. For those who do not feel that the evidence has been properly heard on section 36 claims, there is now an independent appeal process that will be put in place. When I look at certificates of dispossession, making sure that large areas of clearly disposed land, disposed from the Crown, in communities throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there is now a pathway for that clarity. We also look at the fact that the administration process for regular, normal Crown lands applications and administration is now streamlined. That has been a positive, positive change.

So the five keys principles or pillars of Crown lands reform are well under way and I want to thank the team and all the input for making that happen. In my opinion, it's probably the story of all stories of 2024.

Also within the branch of Agriculture is a renewed focus on growing our own food, food self-sufficiency, looking at strategic, targeted ways to be able to do that; but always with a view of supporting incumbent farmers but encouraging new farmers, new entrants into agriculture. Everything from looking at beef cattle production, increasing our beef cattle production, increasing production of varieties, untapped or undiscovered varieties for Newfoundland and Labrador.

But the gem, the true gem in the crown of agriculture in our province, to my mind, will always be Wooddale and the centre for research and development in forestry and agriculture at Wooddale. This is an amazing facility, with an amazing group of professionals and team, that are putting

together a program which is unseen anywhere in the entire country, which is our transplant program.

We are producing four million vegetable transplants for distribution to commercial farmers throughout the entire province. We're working with them to use this template, to use this as a pilot project whereby they actually grown their own, increase their own transplant productions while we continue on with maintaining a strong transplant production operation in Wooddale so that we are always thinking of that growth.

Mr. Speaker, when I think of the transformative efforts within forestry, many will call forestry activity in Newfoundland and Labrador a mature, sunset industry. That is far from the truth. We're looking at diversification. We're looking at using our wood fibre not only for its traditional sources in paper and in lumber, but also using it for bioenergy, for alternative projects, everything from stronger and better production of consumer products in Newfoundland and Labrador but also making sure that our waste, we're being more efficient with all of that. All of this comes with support from *Budget 2025*.

So when I look at agriculture, I look at Crown Lands, I look at forestry, I look at all of the new initiatives that are coming forward, then I'm left with certain pride and satisfaction with the 2025 fishery of this year and the positive start to the 2025 crab fishery.

We saw a lot of uncertainty, a lot of concern, a lot of discontent in 2024. We were able to work with our harvesters, work with the entire industry to create stability, to create certainty and to get boats out on the water in 2025. That is something that I'm very, very proud of. Using elements of the 10-point plan, increasing competitiveness, putting constraints on corporate concentration and adapting to and embracing free enterprise has been the key

and that is integral, intertwined into our 10-point plan.

We've actually gone even beyond the 10-point plan, as many Members will be aware that we introduced a special program, a special processing pathway for additional processing licences in the crab industry. Never been attempted before, to my recollection, since limited entry or processing licences were put in place, where we brought forward an opportunity, a pathway, that where a group of harvesters who represent 4.5 million pounds of crab quota collectively amongst the group of harvesters, where they bring forward a business plan that informs that their proposal will likely succeed, where they come forward with a business arrangement amongst themselves which is cooperative, which works in partnership with all of its members, they will be granted a primary crab processing licence.

Why do we do that? To even the table. To even the side to of that equation. Where crab harvesters have access to their own quota, who want to be involved to become more vertically integrated into their own business, who could possibly put up a reasonably minded objection to having that occur. Because, I will say this, I think we're all very aware that it's happening on the processor side where the processors have arrangements which provide a certain guiding hand to processors through financial arrangements.

They have that ability to guide harvesting enterprises and have certain levels of control over harvesting enterprises. Well, through HELP, through our Harvester Enterprise Loan Program to harvesters, we are turning the tide on that relationship, creating a greater, a more effective way to create independence. Now, with this additional pathway for a primary processing licence granted to a collective of harvesters who come together in an incorporated body, an incorporated interest, they now create

greater independence for their own opportunities.

We're going even farther than that, Mr. Speaker. I just recently announced a program whereby those processors who do not have a primary crab processing licence, who have been involved in value-added crab processing for some time, who have shown their commitment to increasing jobs and value from our fishery, instead of having to go through a middle buyer of the processor, they will now be granted a primary processing licence to the amount to the level that they are creating value added from that crab.

That simply makes sense as well, because if we're going to say we want to encourage not only secondary processing but value-added processing, which creates more jobs from an already pre-established amount of resource – we're creating more jobs using the resources that we have – well then, that makes good sense.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say, hats off to all of the professional team at Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture for guiding me, for providing support, for providing support to this government. I will say this and I'll say this unconditionally and without any, any, any quibble, we're now guided by the best Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture in a woman of Labrador, a daughter of Labrador, who has now really taken the helm and making sure that the progress that has been started will be even far surpassed in the future and in the coming days, weeks, months and years ahead. So congratulations to the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

As minister responsible for the Public Procurement Agency, I entered that job at a particularly – that's normally been rather quiet agency in that it's professionally run, rules based, providing incredible professional services. I was responsible for that ministry at a time when tariffs, US tariffs and Chinese tariffs, rose to the fore.

Unanticipated but yet there, and the Public Procurement Agency was there to work with stakeholders to not only use existing provisions within the *Public Procurement Act*, but also to create new pathways, new opportunities, new ways, administrative ways, to ensure that we buy local and local first where we provide preference to local suppliers, and whereby we create competitiveness, and industry and economic opportunities for us here at home.

So in my former role as the minister responsible for the Public Procurement Agency, I also want to say to everyone within that team, thank you for your hard work, your dedication, but also for the insight and forethought for those who designed the *Public Procurement Act* some years ago to be able to positively respond to the unanticipated challenge of 2025. The act was drafted and presented on the floor of this House by this government some years ago and provided us with all of the necessary tools to be able to make the necessary pivots to be able to respond to what has been a totally unprecedented and totally unexpected and unanticipated chain of events with tariffs coming from what was formerly our greatest trading partner and our most trusted ally.

As Prime Minister Mark Carney recently said, as a result of these tariffs, and the threats of them, we will never, ever, ever, ever be able to look with complacency to our relationship with the United States, and as it formerly existed, our trade, political and security relationship with the United States is over. With that said, we'll continue to do business with the United States, but on our terms, promoting our interests, and that's one of the reasons why, Mr. Speaker, I was very delighted to promote, in that process, a greater trade diversification initiative both in forestry and in fisheries to be able to make sure that we look at new markets across the board.

So with that said, we've done an incredible amount of work. More to do. I want to say a

special thank you, as well, to all of the harvesters who I've developed a long-tenured relationship with of friendship, but in particular I want to point out to Mr. John Efford, who's no stranger to Members of this House but, also, who's name echoes large throughout this House. The son of the former Fisheries minister, who has always provided great counsel and great leadership to us. His son today, John Efford Junior, is doing exactly that, and I want to say thank you to John Efford Junior for all of his counsel.

I also want to say to Dwan Street, to Jason Sullivan, to Jason Spingle and to all of the inshore council, to all of the members of the FFAW, keep up the fight. Keep up the great work and always keep your eye on the ball as you've always done. The fishery is changing. We need thoughtful, insightful focus to be able to make sure that it changes to the best interests of our communities, our industry and the people who gain their livelihood from our fisheries. As I always say, if the fishermen aren't working, nobody is working in our fishery. I'm always focused on that.

With that said, now with the new Department of Jobs, Immigration and Growth, I'm particularly excited to take on this challenge. For me, it means back to a familiar spot but with a better direction and a renewed focus from our new Premier, who really is focusing on all the opportunities that are available to us; focusing on strategic initiatives in immigration, focusing on strategic initiatives in jobs and growth opportunities, looking at the training opportunities of today and tomorrow.

When I look at all of the things that are happening in the technology sector, the information technology sector, the energy sector, I felt somewhat almost overwhelmed by the opportunities that are there before us, but I also stand and stand firm with the notion that core to our province is also our trades. Our apprentices, our apprenticeship programs, our journeypersons, our trades

are the ones who have built the foundations to our province in all sectors of our economy, whether it be in construction, mining or energy.

Across the board, I really will be putting a fine focus and strategic view to getting even greater, stronger access to trades training, trades apprenticeship and trades results; because, when you look at what is before us, not only in terms of some of our huge energy projects from new opportunities that were relatively unheard of just a few short years ago, such as wind and hydrogen and ammonia, but projects that have been before us for a long time but unable to be unearthed, unable to be untapped, unable to be unshackled.

When you look at our Churchill Falls opportunity, time for investment in trades is here and now is the time to plan for it. When I look at mines and critical minerals, the future is nothing but up, up, up, and that's where this government is going. We're responding to the opportunities that are before us, forecasting where they are but acting immediately to get the job done.

When I look at Immigration, I want to salute the Member for Mount Scio who has been steadfast in supporting all aspects of our immigration program throughout the last number of months and years of her tenure as Member of this House. We cracked an incredible glass ceiling when, for the first time in literally decades since the 1970s, the population of Newfoundland and Labrador started to grow from previous years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: A time when new, young children and the enrolment in our K-to-12 system actually increased year over year because of more kids in our communities. At a time when new jobs were being filled with skills that came from outside of our province, skills that were not able to necessarily be filled right now from within our province, joined by an incredible training

system to develop those skills in our province.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

G. BYRNE: Oh no. Say it's not so.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a great honour to stand in this House and represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue. In concurrence, my role in the Official Opposition is the shadow Cabinet minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. That will be the topic of my discussion today.

First of all, I'd like to thank the people of the public service that work in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, in that, their efforts are not going unnoticed. With the new ideas, with having Celebrate NL and things like that, it gives us an opportunity to really market our province in a positive way if we go about it the right way. I really do believe that the \$1.2 billion that is currently realized in the tourism sector can easily go to \$3 billion given the fact that we have such a unique product and as long as we get it out there in the right fashion, I think that the increase is pretty much a guarantee.

This past week we had the East Coast Music Awards. I was fortunate enough to attend on behalf of the Official Opposition and make some real good connections. To listen to the people that are in these awards shows that are organizing, that are pulling it off and I will commend them because the experience, I guess, at the gala on Thursday night was pretty spectacular. It was a showcase really, of what Newfoundland and Labrador has to offer, and there were a lot of our artists that won awards.

I was so proud of them and, like I said, the performances were second to none, but the guts that Shanneyganock showed to open the show was truly unbelievable. It just shows the resilience and the fortitude that we have as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. My hats go off to them as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you.

I also attended, within the last couple of months, the conference for Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, and boy, I tell you, it's eye opening every year to realize the tremendous product that we're putting out there and the innovation and stuff that people are coming up with. That's where, I guess as the shadow Cabinet minister, I push the department a little bit to make sure that we're not leaving any stones unturned and no opportunities left untapped.

So to me, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador did have a big part really, in the ECMAs. That was the first part of my subject, and it's nice to see that the accommodations and everything, it's the community is the driving force. We have a great product to offer when it comes to lodging and food and amenities that people can avail of.

So it's important, again, to make sure that we're putting our best foot forward, we're marketing our province in the right way and we're tapping into the talent that is here, because I don't think that it's really a sector that needs to have any ivory tower decisions. They need to have support from government and the Official Opposition.

But, in saying that, we can really market our product quite well and the people, artisans, everything, the music, the culture, our heritage alone speaks for itself. We've been here for over 500 years. As the minister prior to me spoke a lot about the fishery, that's really what we were built on, was the

fishery. But as we diversify, tourism, culture, arts and recreation is something that we can really build on.

I don't think tourism will ever come to a fruition. We have to keep bringing ideas forward, because nobody has the silver bullet of how everything works or anything. But if we get all the experts together and we work together, then I think that's the whole point, is that we can make it that much more of a better product and a more viable product that people love to come see and come to partake in.

So, like I said, the products speak for themselves. We have from world-renown chefs to very highly sought after accommodations, and when they get here, they're certainly looking to understand our culture and how we do things. The Rooms itself is a tremendous opportunity for anybody that's coming to our province. The Sealers museum also is worth a visit. There are so many different implementations of opportunities for us to – I don't like using the word exploit because that brings a negative connotation, but to avail of and to tap into and make sure that we're giving it every opportunity to succeed, because of the support that we offer.

We can talk about the East Coast Music Awards, the Junos. We can talk about Hospitality Newfoundland. We can talk about all the entities of our province and what we have to offer, and be very, very proud. Because it's significant, compared to the rest of the world, of what we have to offer with such a small population. The talent here in Newfoundland and Labrador is second to none. I can say that first-hand for the simple fact that when I go to other areas of the world, I always want to make sure that I'm taking in aspects of their heritage and their culture. That's the kind of stuff that everybody needs to do. And we bring that stuff back and accentuate those positives and see how we can improve our industry through that.

But one of the biggest issues for the tourism industry is obviously getting people here. It's about the air travel; it's about Marine Atlantic. Those two things are more costly than anywhere else in the country and I think that it's time, really, for our federal government to realize that Marine Atlantic and air travel is really our extension to the Trans-Canada Highway. No different than it is for somebody from New Brunswick to go to Nova Scotia; no different than it is for somebody from Ontario to go to Manitoba.

So if we're fully booked on Marine Atlantic and we don't have any more berths to offer people, then is there going to be some kind of levy or something put in between the other borders of the provinces in order for them to be on an equal playing field with us when it comes to developing our tourism, culture, arts and recreation?

We can attract everybody we want to come to our shores, including this summer we're going to have the Canada Games. One of the things that I was able to do down at the Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador conference was I had a chat with the gentleman who runs our Airport Authority, a very astute man, I'm glad he's in place because he understands that industry.

What he would like from us, I guess, as the people who are bringing those things here is more communication in the fact of give us the dates of when we're going to have larger conferences, like the Canada Games, that way they can assure that there are going to be more flights available at that time. It's all part and parcel, to go back to the marketing aspect of our province.

When it comes to Marine Atlantic, I think that's the understanding is that when we joined Confederation, that was put into place. It's a very unique service for the simple fact that some people want to have that travel. I will say that last year at the Placentia Bay Industrial Showcase, I actually met the captain of the *Ala'suinu*. It's a female from Placentia; she was the

keynote speaker – actually, I'm getting goosebumps thinking about her. She is so impressive, just the fortitude and what she's overcome to become a skipper on a big ship like that. I'm not sure if I could do it to be quite honest. I can imagine the amount of fortitude she had to have being in such a male-dominated industry.

But she has no complaints. She's a go-getter. I was so proud to meet her. To listen to her keynote address was really all encompassing when it comes to somebody delving into an industry that's male dominated. We see that everywhere. As the former speaker said about our fishery and the minister and stuff like that, this is an industry that now understands that females can be part of that, too, and I support that. That's the whole point is that I always say – and one of my biggest things for me is that we're all in this together. There's nobody that has the silver bullet or all the answers or anything like that. So that's why I always make myself available to be part of the discussion.

When I get invited to that, I'm firm believer in the fact that the Lord gave us one mouth and two ears for a reason. We should be listening twice as much as we speak. When I go into these meetings, I always have, I guess, something to add on behalf of the Official Opposition, but it's that opportunity to network that, I think, we're missing that we need to really extenuate and tap into. Because creating a network is one thing but then once we create the network and we have all the right players in the right room, the networking needs to occur where it's not about the one individual or whoever came up with the idea or anything like that. It's not about pats on the back. It's about getting the job done and looking out for an industry that has so much potential.

I mean, it's something that's not new to us but, I think the way we looked at travel for our province was really our opportunities to go elsewhere in the world but then to attract as many as we can seems to be the

impetus that we've looked at over the last probably 20, 25 years and really made a stronger focus. Again, when Marine Atlantic has no berths and people are calling to come to our province and they're not able to, then that to me is a bit of an issue. It's a major issue because if Marine Atlantic is full and we have the opportunity to still bring other people here, I don't want to be turning away anybody. Therefore, I think it'd be very important that Marine Atlantic and the Airport Authority work with each other so that we can bring people into Newfoundland and Labrador and include the Labrador portion of our province to make sure that it's not looked at from years gone past, as I just alluded to, about us getting in and out of our jurisdiction. It's about being able to attract people because it's not too expensive, or it's average compared to all the other provinces and things like that.

But when we don't have any berths left on the Marine Atlantic, I think there needs to be an opportunity – from our federal counterparts as well – to open up a larger network for air travel that's a little bit cheaper. The thing is that if we have the network and we have the ability to move people into our province, then I don't think it needs to be subsidized for the simple fact that the customers are there. They don't mind paying their way, but when we don't have an available way for them to get here or it's absolutely too expensive compared to going to other jurisdictions even in our own country, then that becomes very prohibitive for our Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation Department.

For me, we're going to host the Canada Games this summer. That's a great opportunity for us to network with many people from across this beautiful country, and it gives us an opportunity to find out where Newfoundland can fit in their plan, what their province is doing because maybe we can work together and play off each other. Instead of holding the cards so close to the chest and looking at competitive advantage, when we open up our cards for

everybody to see – and we learned this through coaching in hockey, but the thing is that when you open up and everybody knows your competitive advantage, then the thing is it kind of pushes you to fine-tune it and make it your own. There's nothing wrong with anybody else utilizing that because it's a great idea because it might increase their business.

So that's how we get from our \$1.2 billion right now to \$3 billion. I think we can do that in short order through marketing, creating a network and doing the networking. If you're going to do the marketing and you're going to create a network, if you're not going to get the networking done, then everything falls flat, and we don't get to really tap in and make a showcase for our great products that we have.

Again, the volunteers that are signing up to do all these major events, like we just witnessed with the East Coast Music Awards, those are the people that we need to make – let them have the information; let them understand what we have to offer from Signal Hill until you get on the boat in Port aux Basques type of thing, and all the way up to the tip of Labrador.

We have so much potential but the whole Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation Department is so dependent on our people. I will be honest, it is so appreciative that they get on board and they do volunteer and they do speak so highly of our province, because positivity begets positivity. They get to take that home and do great things with it.

The last thing I'll touch on in my last three minutes is that we talked about how air travel and Marine Atlantic can come together and work together. We're talking about how –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The level of conversation on the floor is getting really loud. It's getting difficult to hear the Member speak. I ask all Members to try and keep the level down a little bit.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I appreciate that because what I'm talking about actually does deserve everybody's attention. It affects every point and part of our province.

We have a great opportunity here to expand on our tourism product but, again, my real point is that it's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that are our best ambassadors. When we give them the knowledge – like, all of our volunteers that are going to be there now for the Canada Games, it's so important that maybe we can get some information out to them about the things that Newfoundland and Labrador has been involved in, so that if it's somebody in a taxi or if it's somebody just walking down Water Street and they bump into somebody or whatever, they have a few facts that they can add to it. When people get information and they can run with it and they can go back to it, then it's a big deal.

Now I'm down to two minutes, and I'm going to make this last point. The thing is that we can create a network and we can do all the marketing we want, but if we don't do the networking, all that falls flat. One of the most important things about networking today is Wi-Fi and cell service. If we don't improve that, we are doing a disservice to our Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation Department. It's not about the highest concentration is in here on the Northeast Avalon, the rest of the province is just as important, because outside the overpass, we have all the products, really, to offer that people are coming to see here about our culture and heritage.

There's a lot in St. John's, don't get me wrong, but I think St. John's and the City of St. John's has the budget to be able to do special things on promoting themselves.

I would say that everything that I talked about here today, as the shadow Cabinet minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, is very important to the expansion and the ability to showcase Newfoundland and Labrador for the exact place that it is, because I love this place and our volunteers love this place, and for the people inside of the department, I say keep doing what you're doing but just make sure that we're always thinking outside the box because that's what attracts people to get here.

They want a unique product that we already have. We just have to make sure that we create the network, we do the marketing, we do the networking and we increase the Wi-Fi and cell service so it's not prohibitive for people to be here.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on the concurrence just momentarily while I do a couple of motions.

SPEAKER: Motion to adjourn debate.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

L. DEMPSTER: The seconder is the Deputy Government House Leader.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 14, but shall continue to sit to conduct Government Business and, if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Yeah, that should be Motion 5.

L. DEMPSTER: That's what I said.

SPEAKER: No, you said Motion 1. It's Motion 5.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I did have five, Speaker. When I grew up we used to say slip of the tongue, no fault to the mind. I apologize.

Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 on Monday, May 12, 2025.

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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13, 2025.

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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1), this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 15, 2025.

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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, the Concurrence Debate on the Resource Committee, and move that we continue. That's seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

We'll move into debate again now on the Resource Committee.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise and talk on budget items but traditionally, it's always to recognize your district. Before I begin, I would like to say congratulations to the new Premier and, certainly, his opponent during the leadership. The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi invested some important time to go across the province and listen to the people of the province, because that's certainly very important. We'll certainly see, in the future, the vision of this new government under the new Premier, that it shows that he listened to the people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say as well that I have a new role again now; it's like going home. I would like to say thank you to the deputy minister of Digital Government and Service NL and certainly the staff for the last year of preparing you. The hard work that they do in the department has not gone unnoticed and I would like to say thank you to him and the staff.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of speaking to your district, there's a lot happening in your district that you want to make note of, and the first thing for me is health care. We talk about the challenges of health care. Virtual care, I look at as a level of support because

I know when COVID was hitting us, virtual care was, I think, brought to the forefront even more. It was a kind of scary level of health care delivery, but I think people have warmed up to it to realize that it is a support level for health care, especially in rural parts of the province.

There is much discussion around travelling nurses as well. I've had a chat with the current Minister of Health around travelling nurses, and I chat with administrators in my district as well, and without travelling nurses, emergency rooms pose a challenge of closing down. So we do not want that to happen and I think all sides realize that we would love to move away from travelling nurses but, at this time, they are levels of support delivering health care, especially in rural parts of the province.

On seniors, Mr. Speaker, the shingles vaccine: I heard from 50-plus clubs last year when I met with them and we delivered on that in an announcement. A lot of seniors said we didn't go far enough but, thankfully, we are going the rest of the way to support anyone 50 and above and that's certainly welcome news. I heard it from many on a visit to Gander last weekend. That's a welcome announcement and thank you for listening once again, and we'll continue to do more because I believe we need to do more for seniors.

In terms of the fishery, Mr. Speaker: We all talk about the foundation of this province in terms of what the fishery means and no difference in my district. I have lots of buddies that are not in my district but go crab fishing. The catch rates are up and doing very well, but in my district crab is not the focus, lobster is and they're having challenges again this year, in terms of the weather and being out.

The catch rates are not as high but they do have other – I call it a variety of species in order to make a decent living. That's halibut, some crab, lobster being a big focus there, and cod. They work hard. Again, the

weather is a big factor in them having a good living. I even know family members that are challenged this year in terms of trying to get their hours for EI for during the winter and stuff but it's very important, and even though it's not a provincial jurisdictional responsibility, that supports harbour authorities and infrastructure.

I heard it during the federal election, and the supports, certainly in my district, in communities like Hermitage-Sandyville, down in Belleoram, down in English Harbour, down in Harbour Breton, these communities need that infrastructure investment because it's a long-term investment for fishermen and others, so that's very important. I look forward to working with the MP for our area to bring home and get those applications approved for the fishermen in my district.

The other piece of the fishery is in aquaculture. I always talk on aquaculture because it's vital in Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune District, and not just my district but throughout the province. I've said it many times in this House how important it is because we have one town in my district, Hermitage-Sandyville, that about 99 per cent – and the mayor always says he's going to go after the other 1 per cent – are paying taxes in the town. Not many mayors can stand up and champion about that, and that's a good thing and that's due to the aquaculture industry; not just fish in the water and growing the fish, it's also the supply industry as well. It's huge and lots of investments, and investments in my district are investments in the whole of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's on the fishery, and I heard the former Minister of Fisheries talk about the idea of a group of harvesters. That if they had a business plan, I think he said something around 4.5 million pounds of crab within their business arrangement – he called it – then that's an idea that I had some harvesters bring to me before even that announcement was made. So I think that's

a good move because it's in partnership with harvesters and if the business arrangement made sense, then there would be a primary processing licence issued. That would mean jobs and security and that's a good thing.

During the federal election, too, Prime Minister Carney made sort of an announcement about DFO restructuring, I think was his words. I look forward to it. I don't know what that means because he said we want to bring it closer to the wharf. What does that mean? Nobody really knows what that means but for a federal leader, who is now prime minister, to even say that we need to restructure DFO – because there is restructuring that needs to be done. If you talk to a lot of people in the province, DFO just doesn't work for Newfoundland and Labrador with challenges and stuff.

So it's going to be interesting to see what that means. There will be a Cabinet announced tomorrow, and we'll see who will be representing Newfoundland and Labrador in the Cabinet, but I believe that's a big piece. I'm sure the current Minister of Fisheries will make sure that's on her agenda for discussion with her first meeting with the federal Minister of Fisheries because we know how important it is, and joint management. I've said it every two times I was in FFA in talks to any federal officials. That joint management, let us be involved in the decision-making. We would welcome it and we believe there'd be better solutions if we were involved.

Mr. Speaker, roads investments, whether in local or provincial roads, are very important to the districts. I look forward to more road work in my district, a rural district and that's important, but look forward to getting back to the department and looking at the whole budget around roadwork and what's being allocated for this year.

I always talk about volunteers and support for volunteers. Whether it's fire departments, councillors, youth

organizations, we cannot do enough to support volunteers because they are the foundation of our communities. I spoke to Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador last week, and the Member for Exploits was there as well. I challenged him to come on the stage and sing a song with me, but he wouldn't do it.

But it was a good discussion with mayors, and I had some words to say and then I had a mayor come up and he said you should have talked a little bit more about enforcement and policing. I said, yeah, I should have. I should have had more to say about it but, I said, it's important to this government and we will be doing more because it's necessary. Policing in our communities, especially in the rural – not just rural parts of the province as well.

Whether that's officers, the presence of more officers, but I know I attended MNL back several months ago; it was last fall. There was a presentation by the group from RNC and RCMP there. It was a good presentation and reassured people that the numbers will increase. They're looking at more recruits and people having the choice now to come back to their home province and home communities, which was not before. I think that's a determining factor. I think that will make a difference.

Mr. Speaker, if I can just talk one item in my previous Department of DGSNL, it was around the speed cameras piece. I believe that's a good support as well for road safety in our province because we witness on the news media too often car crashes and sometimes fatalities, and speed is definitely a factor. So that's another \$3.9 million investment into road safety in this province to keep people in this province safe, and it's not just DGSNL that's involved as well. It's JPS that's involved and ensuring that staff is ready and available, and I think we're there. It's rolling out as we speak and look forward to what will become of those speed cameras.

To move to some budgetary items and announcements, in terms of the budget that says *Smarter. Stronger. Better.* I believe it's very fitting words for the budget and just to highlight some, in the budget we talk about jobs. We know the Minister of Jobs, Immigration and Growth will do a good job in terms of attracting employment to the province.

In talking about the increase in employment in the province, it did increase by 2.8 per cent, which equals 6,700 persons in 2024, continuing a multi-year trend in job growth. That's a good news story, and it should be repeated and repeated to those not even in this province who are looking to come to the province for employment purposes. Population is up. It increased 1.2 per cent in 2024, the second largest annual increase since 1975, very important. Retail sales totalled \$12.1 billion in 2024, and that's an increase of 6.1 per cent compared to 2023. The trend is positive because it's in an upward trend.

Capital investment, as well, has increased 24.1 per cent from 2023, and that's billions of dollars in estimated investment in the province. The value of Newfoundland and Labrador international exports totalled \$13.7 billion in 2024; another increase of over 10 per cent, so very important. We know about the challenges around international now, with the president who, on a daily basis, we don't know which way or what side of the bed he's going to crawl out of. They are challenges for us as provincial government and Canadian government and all provincial governments. It's concerning, but I'm sure we will right the right path with negotiations with the federal and the president of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, moving back into the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, it's certainly a pleasure to go there. I look forward to working with the staff that's there. I was there for two years and look forward to going there again and working on some important files.

Just to talk about some of the investment in supports for projects moving forward from the Department of TI: We have \$19.3 million to redevelopment of the Martin Gallant Building in Stephenville Crossing; \$17.5 million to continue the procurement of the replacement of HMP – very important; and \$4.5 million to complete the redevelopment of the Labrador corrections facility.

We talked a lot about health and well-being, and we know that investing in construction of hospitals and the enhancement of existing facilities certainly will help future demands. In terms of modern infrastructure, we have a total of more than \$39.5 million in *Budget 2025*, and this budget that is *Smarter. Stronger. Better.* actions a series of health care infrastructure improvement initiatives, including such initiatives as \$23 million to support the planning and development phase of the new acute-care hospital campus in Kenmount Crossing. And, not just the hospital piece, but that announcement alone included the road infrastructure, which I know is very important to the Town of Paradise and beyond, from many, many lenses. You're getting a new health care facility to service all Newfoundland and Labrador. We have road infrastructure that's going to include entrances and exits out of Paradise.

Being a real estate agent there for seven years, I know the challenges of it. This will open up the door for housing prices increasing. If you're a seller, I guess that's a good thing. I know the challenges around buying, but that's market adjustments. I've been there when there was a good market for sellers; I've been there when it's a good market for buyers. A balanced market is better, because it benefits both sides.

So that's an important piece. You talk to anybody in Paradise, anybody, they're extremely excited about that. Not only that, a water tower, because I know in terms of new home construction, I was involved in new home construction, and the water pressure is important to people that are

existing there, and they're excited about that because that's going to help with their water pressure issues. So that's, again, good news for them.

We have \$7 million for the advancement for the new Health and Well-Being Centre. As I said earlier, health and well-being is crucial, I think, to anybody who's working. Or not just working, seniors or whoever it may be that your health and well-being is crucial.

And \$1 million for the replacement of the Bay St. George long-term care facility; \$1 million for redevelopment of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner; and almost \$350,000 for continued planning for a new multiplex recreational facility. Because we realize recreation is a piece of therapy for their well-being as well.

That's just a few things on health care. We certainly know the value of education. I don't need to speak to the value of it. We all realize how valuable it is. *Budget 2025* includes supports of over \$70 million for a number of school infrastructure projects to include Paradise, Kenmount Terrace, Cartwright and Portugal Cove-St. Philip's; more investment for Dorset Collegiate on Pilley's Island; \$1.9 million for completion of the redevelopment of École Rocher-Du-Nord; and \$150,000 for planning for the potential expansion of L'École Boréale in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Pasadena Elementary and some schools in St. John's. That's certainly a focus on education, which is important as well, Mr. Speaker.

I don't need to say how important the transportation network throughout Newfoundland and Labrador is. I know that's important to all Members in this House of Assembly, but certainly a focus of this government. It certainly will be my focus again, in going back into the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, and I thank the Premier for that opportunity.

We know in this province we have approximately 10,000 kilometres of

provincial highways and roads, 1,300 bridges, 21 airstrips and 14 ferries, with that can bring challenges no doubt. We are continuing to invest to the point of \$316.8 million to continue to support thousands of new paving, brush cutting, as well as new culverts and bridges. I'm proud to say the last time I was in TI we made that record investments by the wonderful Minister of Finance that has agreed to give over a billion dollars for roadwork, recognizing how important it was and is. That's listening to the people of the province.

There are millions and millions more in roadwork that I could talk about, Mr. Speaker, but I'll end there because it's not just about transportation. There are municipal works as well under the infrastructure umbrella that is important and there are millions of dollars that go into infrastructure projects, and we know how important that is to rural Newfoundland. I'm proud to say that this government will continue to support rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you for this time, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you very much, Minister.

I now recognize the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Many of the things we discussed in the House of Assembly supports rural Newfoundland. That's a good segue, what the minister had just finished on.

Before I get into the resource sector, which I'd like to speak on forestry, immigration, population growth and skills and then the fishery, I want to go back to the shingles vaccine. Speaker, we've talked lots about having the shingles vaccine for every person over 50. We had a session here in the House which we introduced that motion to the government in a resolution, a private Member's resolution, and the government

did not vote for it at that time. They spoke against it. One step at a time.

The only thing I'd say now, the new Premier has written the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board stating that we're going to review it and we're going to now open it up. Timing is everything. If you ask Mrs. V. who's 91 years old, living in Virginia Waters - Pleasantville how her life has changed in contracting shingles that has not left her over the past year, and the medical expenses that she's incurred since then, if you ask Mrs. V. in Bonavista who, three years ago, contracted shingles and it hasn't left her, and that is two of our valued seniors that their lifestyle has been greatly diminished. Their quality of life has been greatly diminished.

I would say let's amend the budget, let's do it, we're all in favour of it, and let's have the shingles vaccine eligible for everyone 50-plus and if the government tracked the data and looked at the data, they might even know that it's advantageous financially to do it, especially on the quality of life and the hospital visits.

Number two is the sugar tax. Just like the new prime minister axed the carbon tax in federal, the new Premier comes in and he's going to follow suit and he's going to axe the sugar tax. I can see a similarity, but I agree. Because we've been asking for the elimination of the sugar tax. We would like for an amendment to be brought in and let's do it this sitting to eliminate the sugar tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Now, if the government stood up and said we had this idea to tax people in rural Newfoundland, in urban Newfoundland on the sugar tax, we're going to tax them and we're going to reduce the consumption – keep in mind, the consumption was reducing before they ever brought the tax in. It was going down. So if there's marginal decrease, that's the pattern

of where the data was headed before they brought the sugar tax in.

But, Mr. Speaker, nobody in the rest of Canada has lined up to follow this government with the sugar tax. And what does that say? There's not even an expression of interest from any other part of Canada on the sugar tax. It ought not to have been brought in. We've spoke about it numerous times not to bring it in, to abort it and abolish it. I would hope that it will be done this sitting.

Mr. Speaker, the resource sector, we went through the Estimates and I'd like just to touch down on the forestry first. I want to acknowledge Gerard Wall in hon. Member for Exploits District, in Bishop's Falls. Gerard is from the forestry region of our district, of where, probably to a big way, a lot of valuable forest products come from Central Newfoundland and the Bishop's Falls area. We don't have a forest management plan. At least we're working on that, like we're working on a lot of things, but we don't currently have a forest management plan.

I want to share a little story with you. I have four children and one Christmas holiday not that long ago, we wanted to return to Terra Nova park during the winter and walk the trail; it wasn't much snow. We walked from the Newman Sound campground down to the wharf. If anybody camps at Terra Nova, they'll know that path and that route. Well, we did it. Then, my kids were saying, this is a complete wasteland. Fallen trees – it was a picture of a forest from Newman Sound to the wharf that was literally dead.

What happens with a dead forest of fallen trees? It releases all the carbon that was captured over the years, over the 60 or 70 years, and releases it back into the atmosphere. I would say, on a forest protection plan, where are we with our environmental strategy when it comes to our forest? The federal government, where are they? Is that where we ought to be?

I have heard now that the last animal life that was in that Terra Nova park was the pine marten, but then some local people said that they're gone too. They don't see as many pine martens now in that element of the Terra Nova National Park going from the Newman Sound campground down to the wharf.

Sexton Lumber is involved with the forestry, one of the big forestry producers in the province. It's the largest employer in the District of Bonavista, 104 jobs – Sexton Lumber – bringing in an annual payroll of \$6.7 million. That is a significant industry for the District of Bonavista in forestry. When they harvest the lumber, Mr. Speaker – and you will know about this – and they make it into building supplies, those building supplies capture and maintain the carbon. A fallen tree beyond 60, 70 or 80 years, releases the carbon into the atmosphere. So I know that in the forestry industry, we are capturing that carbon in the products that are being produced.

I want to go on to the next – one of the sectors is the Immigration, Population Growth and Skills. When I attended the Estimates, I had mentioned that back in 2019 they closed the office, which was the immigration and skills office back at that time. We put an announcement out and said for any children that want to attend a job fair, you go to your closest office. Well, the closest office is Clarendville about an hour and 20 minutes away. The last job fair that was held there, there was nobody from my district, a high school student, who attended the job fair.

I would bet if the office was in Bonavista, there would have been lots of students, from the lower part of the Peninsula in particular, that would have been attending the job fair. Now, I thank the minister who sat at the Estimates that time when I spoke because I've since heard that there is a job fair being planned, and I thanked her this morning when she was with her fourth set of

Estimates that she was there. I know it's ongoing.

One step further for the new minister would be to reopen the office in Bonavista – reopen the office in Bonavista. It closed in 2019. I approached the then minister and he said, well, we're saving half a million dollars on closing that office, because renting the office space. The math didn't work out, Mr. Speaker. The response went back and said the math doesn't work. The follow-up came back; they had it reduced to less than a quarter of a million. So we lost a quarter but, still, that's unfair because if you can occupy existing government buildings down there, and the people that now got to drive to Clarendville, the closest office, and back, it would be more productive and feasible for them to stay in that area, especially with that office being one the offices that was in the greatest demand by clients in the province – not the least. It was, if I'm not mistaken, one of the most visited offices in the province.

On the fishery, Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker, the current Minister of TI, stood up and he mentioned joint management, and I thought what a nice time to bring up *Hansard* from the previous minister of Fisheries and what he had stated. This is back, well, some time ago, when the previous minister was minister in '17, and when joint management came up, here is what *Hansard* reads.

The question was asked by the Opposition Member about joint management, and here is the answer from our past minister: "Mr. Speaker, of course we always discuss joint management whenever we collaborate; that is joint management.

"When we talk about responding to the crisis in the groundfish fishery and the federal government and provincial government working with each other to make sure that the resource is not only sustainable but available to Newfoundland and Labrador fishermen, when we talk

about adjacency, when we talk about historic attachment, when we talk about rules that are established to be able to afford those sharing frameworks, that, Mr. Speaker, is a form of joint management.”

Now, I would say that is a form of joint management in its most basic form. When we talk joint management, what we need to do is frame out exactly what you’re asking. What are you looking for? We can harvest 98 per cent of the northern cod stock. Are we talking about joint management of the northern cod? Because we don’t have to have anybody else sit in joint management, that’s our resource. We can’t say the same for other species, but we certainly got dibs to 98 per cent of the northern cod. We ought to be the managers of our northern cod. We ought to be able to have joint management with the federal government on northern cod – we, 98 per cent of that species.

A couple of interesting issues that I would say impact our province. We have David Boyd from Twillingate. David have sent messages and emails to all of us. He said we have to worry about the consolidation of fishing licences out there. We have to be worried of it because there are fewer and fewer fisheries out there.

At the Estimates, yours truly asked a question: What do you know about the concentration of fishing licences in Newfoundland and Labrador? Because the Standing Committee had an expert from Quebec who was saying that there have been 465 fewer fishing licences in Quebec. That was between 2012 to ’21, 465 fewer licences, representing a decrease of 8 per cent while the number of fishers has increased by 34, or 3 per cent – more licences in fewer hands. So I asked. The answer was, I don’t have that responsibility so I can’t really speak to it as such. So I asked: You have no data on the concentration of fishing licences? No.

Well, thanks to reaching out to DFO, I have some data on the concentration of fishing

licences for snow crab. I’m going to use 3K; we’ve heard a lot about 3K from my colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay. In 2016, there were 626 licences for snow crab in 3K. In 2017, it went from 626 to 606. Then, in 2018, it went to 589. In 2019, it went down to 570. Now can you understand what David Boyd was talking about? Data shows that we’re putting a stock that was out there with many, in fewer and fewer hands.

Anyway, in 3K where we started off, we started off with 626 in 2016. Well, in 2024, we were down to 523. That is a significant drop in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our department and our government didn’t have the data; or that’s what they stated.

The second thing I would put out there would be controlling agreements, Mr. Speaker, another thing that we have fishermen who can’t access finances in most cases to get their own licence, but they have to get the help of a processor. They’re called controlling agreements, and they are illegal – they are illegal. I stated in this House before, Jimmy Lee Foss in La Scie, he was the one who came out and said I’m in a controlling agreement. He was going to be put out of his controlling agreement, but we offered no support to Jimmy Lee Foss. We offered no support to anybody in a controlling agreement.

Even though they’re illegal, we want to help them out. We want them to maintain a livelihood and help. What can we do? We can provide them a loan, the Harvester Enterprise Loan Program. Why wouldn’t we offer Jimmy Lee Foss and say, you continue on fishing because we know that we didn’t have – but now, we have the loan program up and running and we’re going to help you out that you can support your family and continue fishing. We’ve just lost another licence.

What I would say is what we ought to have done was support those, like Jimmy Lee Foss and others, to help them out. So I

asked the question, do we have a handle on the number of controlling agreements that we would have in our province? Those agreements, Mr. Speaker, are private agreements between two entities and the department does not police that.

I would say to you, you need the data to be able to look at and forecast where the fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador is going to be. The two significant ones, controlling agreements and concentration of licences, it's data that we ought to be discussing and looking at what can we do to curb it.

The minister spoke before me – as my time runs out – he touted the Harvester Enterprise Loan Program. Nobody in my district could access it. It had to go through the banks. They couldn't get through in order to be able to be considered for a loan. They couldn't get a loan. You had to have the financial resources, I would assume, for the banks to be able to look at you and you to access the interest-free loan. So I would say the program was a little – I shouldn't use the word "misguided" because that's unparliamentary. It fell a little short for those inshore fishermen.

Those are a couple of things from the resource sector that I've drawn from, Mr. Speaker, on those three topics.

Thank you so much for listening.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you to the Member.

I now recognize the hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It is certainly a pleasure to stand this afternoon and make a few remarks about

the Concurrence debate, but before I get into it and talk about the department I just actually left a few days ago, I wanted to take a few moments just to recognize the first responders, all the volunteers, all the agencies, the fire departments and everybody –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: – who played a significant role last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday in Adam's Cove and the surrounding area with the wildfires. I was there yesterday afternoon and had an opportunity to actually speak with the fire chief and a number of members from the fire department who had, quite frankly, just got back from putting out a hot spot. So there are still many issues right there; they're working through it.

I have talked to the ministers from this government who would be involved in the next steps, and I can assure those people that we will make sure that we are there, as we've been for other communities around this province in times of these natural disasters. It's very important that we do, understanding that these things do take time, and the disruption to people's lives is significant. We certainly understand that, but we'll be there to make sure that the necessary reliefs, the necessary arrangements are made that people can get back to some form of normalcy as soon as possible.

So again, thank you to everybody involved: the fire departments, the town council; the fire departments from throughout the entire district, actually, that showed up, lent their services, lent their equipment for this tremendous effort; and to the people in the department, the water bombers to be on site and to get those fires out as quickly as possible. I can assure you, the destruction is widespread. As people would have seen in other communities around the province and around the country, wildfire certainly takes no prisoners and it's very fast and very destructive.

So again, thank you to everybody involved in those efforts. We can assure them that, as a government, we'll be there to help them through the coming days and coming weeks as they continue to rebuild their lives. Thank you again to those people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Speaker, it's great to stand here, I guess, for my first remarks as the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology – I'm still getting it all figured out, but very pleased to take on that role.

Before I move into that role, I want to thank the people at Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation who I had the pleasure of spending a little over four years with. A very worthwhile experience I had in that department. Tremendous group of people to work with. Take away many, many wonderful memories from that department. None of which you won't top in my political career, the absolute privilege I had about a year ago actually, a little less than a year ago when I was fortunate enough to travel to Northern France as we repatriated the remains of an Unknown Soldier from Newfoundland and Labrador.

That was the highlight of my political career, I can assure you. Along with representing the people of my district, that was the most significant moment I had in a ministerial role. Again, thank you to everybody in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation for the tremendous four-plus years that I was there. I had the opportunity to go in there as we emerged from a pandemic and our industry was absolutely decimated.

It was long said that the tourism industry, hospitality industry would be the last to recover from the pandemic and we're still seeing remnants of that today. Budget 2025-'26 recognizes that again with a new restaurant loan program, because we see the struggles of the hospitality industry and it's so important that we put that industry

back on solid footing. Twenty thousand employees working in the tourism and hospitality industry in this province, \$1.4 billion into our economy every single year, bringing thousands of people from around the world to our province. So, Mr. Speaker, a significant contributor to our economy.

I now look forward to a new role. One that I took on just last week as the new Minister of Industry, IET, and look forward to some of the things that face us in that file and look to some of the promising things that we have in this province, when it comes to Industry, Energy and Technology. We see great strides made. I'd be remiss if I didn't remark about the tremendous efforts and the tremendous job that my predecessor, Minister Parsons – I think I can say his name now? I think I'm allowed to call him –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Oh. Well, I think the critic across the way is going to be okay with me recognizing the former minister who did a tremendous job in this role. So I thank him for his service and obviously, on the record, wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

If you look at the challenges and the opportunities that are before us with files like Bay du Nord, hydrogen and wind developments, technology – where we've come from with tech in this province – and just to touch on the mining industry and the effects that that has on our province as well now with so many activities, so many mines that are up and running and the promise for that future when you think about critical minerals and other opportunities.

I guess this is the department that I now have the fortune of being a part of. When you think about the developments around the Churchill Falls agreement and what that can bring to our province, \$225 billion – a quarter of a trillion dollars – over the lifespan of our new agreement, it's very important that we get that agreement

finalized so that the people of this province can benefit from that resource that has long went not to the full benefit of this province. It's certainly important as we move forward that we ensure that that resource is to the benefit of the people of this province.

Speaker, when you reflect on *Budget 2025*, you see initiatives and continuation of affordability measures. I think, in our new Cabinet that was sworn in just last Friday, we see the importance put on families and affordability and seniors, two groups in this province who are so important to the fabric, and understanding that affordability. The measures around affordability are so important when we think about the times that we've been through, coming out of COVID and the inflationary pressures that were caused from that period in time.

Now with the uncertainty around tariffs and trade, I have the privilege, I guess, carrying as a part of my portfolio the Minister Responsible for Trade Opportunities. We understand that, as a province right now, we have to look to different trading partners. As Prime Minister Carney would have said, I think a few weeks ago, our relationship with our neighbours south of us has changed and changed forever, but we need to find those opportunities to actually export our vast amount of natural resources to the world – not only nature resources, manufacturing and talent.

There are so many things when you think about trade and the effects that the punitive measures of that administration can have. Just last week they talked about a punitive measure on the film and television industry; one that, if it were ever to come to fruition, would practically destroy the Canadian film and television industry with a tariff on that piece of an export. Lots of times when we think about things like film and television, and others, we forget the trade value and what it brings to the people of this province and Canada in general.

There are so many industries out there that are affected with trade. This province was built on trade. It's how we pay the bills quite frankly, trade and exports. So again having the opportunity now to serve in this role is tremendously rewarding and I look very much forward to that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Any further speakers?

L. PARROTT: Yes, me.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I think I lost seven seconds; no worries.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always on honour to, I guess in this instance, sit and speak to the budget. In this instance, obviously, it's Concurrence with the Resource Committee.

I'll go back to what the Member for Corner Brook said earlier about our trades and the importance. There are no people more important in Newfoundland than all of the workers, all of the men and women that occupy every job that's here in the province. When it comes to our trades, I think at times we fail the individuals who have taken the time to go to school, to better themselves, to work in our industries and obviously, we need a different plan going forward with some of the exciting things on the horizon, if they are to come to fruition.

As recently as this morning, actually, I sent the minister an email about a young man who is trying to get his journeymen signed off as an operator. The deal is, he has to drive all the way to Stephenville for a one-hour test that could be done here in St.

John's. That's indicative of some of the pitfalls that some of our tradespeople face today.

Most recently, we've seen *Open Line* with lots of calls. All kinds of discussion around people who have gone through an apprenticeship program, they have their hours where they can do their Level 2, 3 or 4 block to get their red seal and those opportunities aren't offered in school. If they do get to school, the unfortunate fact is that we've had full classes – full classes – of individuals fail on an exam, and the question then is: Is the problem with the individuals as they're out in the workforce or is the problem with how we present these courses and the tests that are being offered?

Well, I would argue, if you talk to any of the men and women that worked on the Hebron project or any of the people who work in IOC, Wabush mines, Voisey's Bay, the new mental health facility and, certainly, the long-term facilities across the province, you would hear from their employers that the issue is not with the employees. That all of these men and women employed in those sectors, whatever the trade is, whether it's sheet metal, electrical, pipefitting, plumbing, welding, any of them, they've had great work from these individuals, but then they go off to school and they don't get any further – if there's an opportunity for them to go to school.

Just recently, we had a class, they were instrumentation techs, and every one of the students came out of Labrador West. Instead of finding a way to do the instruction in Labrador where these individuals had an opportunity to stay with their families, some of them with children, they had to come out here to Newfoundland to do the course, and the entire course failed. That's just another example of the poor planning and, to be quite honest, at some times, the delivery of education to students where the resources aren't there, they can't do the practical, they don't have the literature inside the class in

order to pass the test and, admittedly, instructors have reached out to me and said the same.

If we are to get better, we have to start right here at home. We have to do better for the young men and women that are trying to better themselves. We lose so many people in this province. I've heard from individuals who actually leave the province to go to another province in order to pursue their red seal. You go to Alberta and a lot of this testing is obsolete. They do real hands-on testing so they can prove their skill. They pass and they move forward and they work in their field.

Again, I'll look at some of the megaprojects and some of the smaller projects that we do in this province. If you look at how we do things and the success that we've had in doing these things, you will clearly see that it's not an individual issue with the people who work in these fields. It is an issue with the province and government's delivery of education while these people are challenging their blocks. So we really need to start right there.

The next thing I'll say is that, when we talk about people working in this province, in 2019, we delivered a community benefits agreement and we urged the government to move forward with a community benefits agreement that put the people of Newfoundland and Labrador first, not just in a work standpoint but in a procurement standpoint.

Here we are in 2025 and we've heard multiple ministers boast that, oh, we have 85 per cent working on the hospital in Corner Brook or we have 80 per cent at the mental health facility. Well, it's not good enough. The reality of it is that this has to be enforced by government. It has to happen, actually, and it hasn't happened and it is no good to talk about it.

A good example would be the gold mine out in Central: Calibre. So when we talk about

that, we get reached out to on a daily basis and I believe the agreement out there is somewhere around 85 per cent. Now, during Estimates, I delivered a solution to the minister. Having said that, two years ago I delivered the same solution to the minister and I'll deliver it here again today. If we're going at 85, 80, 90, whatever the percentage is when we're holding a company accountable if they come to Newfoundland and Labrador and work, it ought to be on each individual item that they put out to contract.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: So what these companies do is if they're being held to a standard of 85 per cent, they come in and they hire the lowest paid people in order to get their numbers up and then when they do things – and this is the example that's being used and it's a legit example. We've got a company out of British Columbia called Gisborne when there were companies here in Newfoundland that could have done this work for equal price – very, very close in the bids; I've seen them. Instead of it going to a Newfoundland company, it went to a company from British Columbia, and they've brought a large workforce from British Columbia and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have been displaced.

The company is not violating the agreement because they have had almost 85 per cent of the workforce employed but that 85 per cent that are employed, some of them are unskilled and are skilled labour. What we need to succeed in this province, the reason and the way and the path forward for us is through skilled labour have been neglected, overlooked, pushed to the side. It's not the unions. It's government policies and companies that are coming here to do things.

Now, I'll just go to three things. It's funny because one of the ministers, earlier, referenced our employment rate, how good it is, right now. So we're clear, right now.

We're not talking about in January. We're talking about right now. I'll highlight three things that all three of the ministers that have stood and spoke here today have talked about. One of them was the fishery. The other was tourism and the other is skilled labour.

So here's what I will say. Why is employment up? The first thing I would say is because the crab fishery just opened. The second thing I would say tourism operators are getting ready to proceed with their seasons, so that would drive employment up. The next thing I would say is if you look to Alberta and you take into consideration what happens out there in the spring, spring break up and things are thawed, what do they do? They do all of their refits. They go into shutdowns and they hire people back.

We don't ever talk about what our employment rate would look like if we didn't have rotational workers that went away to British Columbia. I would argue that if we took the 25,000 men and women that go away to work and we put that into our unemployment rate, as a real number, we would see that our numbers aren't below 10 per cent. They are far above 10 per cent.

It's shameful. We manipulate the numbers in order to make it look like we're doing better. We've done the same with tourism. We know that the biggest problems that this province faces right now are geography and population. When we look to things like conflict in Ukraine or other places in the world and it bolsters our immigration rates and our population, we've been utilizing that to say that we're doing well. Well, we're not doing real well, there's no question about it.

We've invited people to come here to protect – and I applaud that, we should have done that, it's our role and we ought to be doing that for people; but, at the end of the day, it skews the real numbers and the real numbers are what matters. If we're going to use false numbers to prove how good we are, then we're never going to be

good, I can tell you that right now. It's probably one of the worst things we could do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: We don't talk about retention – and before I get heavy into the mining and the oil and gas sector, one thing I'll say is that a great example is in 2020 I had a physician come to Clarenville. He applied to go to work and he couldn't. He wrote IELTS and when he wrote the IELTS he scored 69. Now if he sat in this House today and he was in this chair and he was speaking, he would speak as clearly as I do, so he failed the written part – 69. The passing score is 70.

At that time, I went to the then minister and the premier and asked for help. So this is a gentleman who moved just prior to COVID, went through COVID, could not get his foot in the door anywhere. He couldn't practise. He ended up on our social services program, welfare, however you want to coin it.

This is a doctor who could have practised here in Newfoundland. Next to that, he volunteered to go to work in a hospital just to keep his credentials up. He said he would work along side another physician for free. There were other physicians in the Clarenville area who said they would take him on. Again, shut down. The argument was that the college shut it down. The reality is that the college was okay with this. As a matter of fact, some of these types of jobs were actually advertised.

The other thing I'll say is that we hear all the time from government how they're fixing health care and part of that is translation services. So if we're so desperately in need of doctors and we're bringing translation services in so we can help patients, why can't we utilize those same translation services for a one-year period –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: – until a doctor gets certified and he can move forward?

Now, government is always asking for solutions and that's what I'm doing here right now.

The next thing I'll go to is we often talk about our future and what we're going to do. We talk about wind, oil and gas, mining, expanding our fishery, all our resources, incredibly important if we are to succeed. One of the things that I think is a huge failure on our behalf – and I'll go back, this goes right back to community benefits agreements. During Estimates, I highlighted this, I would argue, very clearly and I haven't heard a response back from the minister's office, so I invite the new minister to tell me how they're going to handle it.

Here's the first example: Labrador West, you go to Labrador West, you go to Wabush Mines, you go to IOC, you go in and you look at the contractors that are there and you look at the equipment they're using and the first thing that they have on every piece of equipment is a Quebec plate.

These people are operating inside of Newfoundland and Labrador with vehicles that are gassed up in Quebec, that are insured in Quebec and that are operated by Quebecers. Now, I'm not questioning whether or not they should be in there working; what I am saying is it is a huge gap and opportunity for us to claim revenues through vehicles, through insurance, through registration that should be coming to this province.

Now hold on, that's not the biggest problem with all of this. But if you think about what happens, if I as a resident – and I know this, because I moved around enough with the military – go to another province to work or do anything, I have 10 days to renew my licence and put a licence plate on. I'm pretty certain that that's the exact same rule that exists here in Newfoundland, 10 days.

Now I say, get aboard a plane and go to Voisey's Bay. Voisey's Bay, the gem of our mining industry right now. You go to Voisey's Bay, every single vehicle that's there has a Quebec plate on it, but don't stop there. Go look at the *UMIAK*, beautiful ship. The *UMIAK* fills up with ore to come to this province to be processed and I would say again that when we look at processing, we need to do more processing in this province, we don't do enough. Secondary processing is one of our biggest downfalls.

When the *UMIAK* leaves Quebec City, it comes down around, sales around Newfoundland, depending on ice conditions it may go through the Straits, but most times it goes around, goes into Argentina and guess what? It offloads its cargo and it is then responsible to refurbish Voisey's Bay with everything.

When I say everything, I mean everything from building materials to the food that feeds the men and women up there, to the fuel that runs that thermal generation plants, all things that could be supplied by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. But guess what – and this government has known about it for a while, because it's been highlighted several times by myself and most likely by others. That ship then proceeds to Quebec City and it goes to Quebec City and it fills up with fuel. That fuel supplies the thermal generation plants at Voisey's Bay.

Guess how much carbon tax money or how much provincial gas tax money or anything of that stuff comes back to this province? Zero. All the fuel is bought in Quebec. All the groceries are brought in Quebec. All of the supplies that run Voisey's Bay are bought in Quebec and we haven't said a thing about it. What a missed opportunity, and it's not something that's new.

If you go in there and, from a health and safety standpoint, you look at the vehicles that are working on-site and you look at the plates and you understand what's going on

– and government's known about it. This isn't new, okay. This was brought up in 2019, in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, and here we are, not a thing done.

We talk about all the time our ability to deliver services to seniors and to other people in this province, people with disabilities. It doesn't matter what walk of life you're from, we talk about all the time our inability to deliver the services that are required to give people the life they deserve in a province that struggles with population and geography. Yet, we still do these giveaways, and that's what it is. It's a giveaway, because I can tell you if I went to work in Quebec, I would not be allowed to have a Quebec licence plate, I would not be allowed to carry Quebec insurance and I would not be bringing fuel and all my goods in from Quebec.

If you are a contractor in Labrador West and you want to go to work in Fermont and Mont-Wright, you cannot do those things. So government has missed the boat on this. What's the solution? I believe that government needs to address it. I believe government needs to have that conversation with the mining company that's up there and let them know that it's not acceptable, because it's us as a House and the people that populate this province, the men and women that live here, that lose out on those revenues every single day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: I heard my colleague from Placentia - Bellevue West – he gets made when I say that – Placentia West - Bellevue this morning, just a little while ago, actually talk about Wi-Fi and cell service; another solution I offered to the minister.

We don't know when or if wind projects are going to go ahead. My gut tells me maybe some, not all; we'll have to wait and see. Stay tuned. But here is one of the things we should be doing and it's not a conversation that anybody is having. The first thing is,

there is no community benefits agreement. We don't know how people that are working there are going to be selected or if they're going to come from away. We don't know where procurement is going to happen, any of those things, but here's what we do know.

We're going to have these huge towers all over the province, and we also know that we have a huge issue with communications in this province in the form of cellphones and Wi-Fi. There's also lots of data out there that shows that wind towers make that worse. It's out there, it's a reality and I don't know how we can get worse, but here's how we can get better and they're doing it in the UK and they're doing it in all parts of Europe but nobody is saying a word about it.

Why not take these wind towers and make sure that these companies are going to put repeater stations on top of them for cell phones and Wi-Fi. That makes our communication in this province better. Why not talk to the communications companies and make sure that this can happen. It's an easy solution that helps everyone, but we aren't a government that creates solutions. We're a reactive government. We wait until there's a problem and then we try and find a way to fix things.

Labrador is untouched, and it's funny my colleague from the Coast of Labrador this morning talked about airfare, and she's not wrong. When we talk about what happens in Labrador with regard to our resources and the blunder – and I will say blunder – and I know everybody is big on the MOU but the whole idea that we have not said to Quebec from day one, from the very beginning, these things. We're going to negotiate but a part of that negotiation doesn't start unless there's a corridor through Quebec. That corridor includes pipelines and energy. We're going to negotiate but that negotiation doesn't start unless we have access to power right now so we can develop resources immediately.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Instead, we give power away for free, and it's free, make no mistake about it, so Quebec can prosper and we're going to wait until 2030 for a buildup that moves into 2035.

It's a five-year window before we get anything and in that five years we're going to try and revamp Holyrood. We're going to do upgrades to Bay d'Espoir and we're going to do the things that are going to try and make us self-sufficient, when the reality of it is, because of the redundant powerlines that were put in between Chapel Arm and Bay d'Espoir and the redundant powerline that was put in between Muskrat Falls and Churchill Falls, we can access that power today but Quebec won't give it to us. We never asked for it; there's the bigger blunder. We talk about rate stabilization and we understand what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are paying.

Now, to be very clear, if you look at it, we understand also, that we are currently number five or number six in the country when it comes to pricing. The reality of this is, this government in their negotiations, had the ability to negotiate a way the smaller amount of power from Muskrat Falls at a higher rate, and recapture the Churchill Falls power and sell it to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador so their rates would be lower. In turn, our rates would be higher. It was never considered.

We heard that answer here on the House of Assembly's floor and it was never a consideration. If we're looking for solutions, my God, you'd think the first place you would look is inside. You'd look at yourself and see what you can do. To me, for us to overlook that now, it wasn't just us that looked over that, and this is the words of the Liberal government: It's our brightest and best, it's the people that are going to negotiate this contract and it was never a consideration – never a consideration – and here we sit on the horizon of this

monumental deal that could have been much better, much bigger and we haven't had that discussion.

It shocks me that you've got Labrador West – so you've got Wabush 3, you've got Search Minerals and you've got the expansion of IOC. You've got all of these mines that want to start. We've got mines all over the Baie Verte Peninsula everywhere. Do you know the one hiccup that they have? No electricity. No electricity. So what do we resort to? Thermal generation.

Now, don't take my word for it. Ask the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair whose people are fighting against the thermal generation plant because they don't think it's a solution. Keep in mind that we're talking about a government who has said they are environmentally conscious. They put all of these goals forward and, as a matter of fact, supported carbon tax and then implemented more thermal generation.

Anyhow, Speaker, I have lots of time to speak because I was absent last week. So I'll say the rest when I'm ready to speak again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Government Modernization and Service Delivery.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Yes, I'm still getting used to the title. It's a privilege, thank you.

I'd like to start off today by, I guess, recognizing and congratulating our new Premier – very exciting. I've been working with the Premier in former roles for four years now so it's an honour and a privilege, Speaker.

I'd also like to thank the staff at Immigration, Population Growth and Skills. I had nine or ten months, I believe, working with them. I have learned an incredible amount about our immigration system, about newcomers, about how we can have a more welcoming and inclusive society. I want to thank them. They work very, very hard to help newcomers.

They also do a lot with labour, employment and skills, as we know now the new department name of Jobs, Immigration and Growth. They administer the labour market development fund, which is a huge opportunity for organizations and businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador to respond and react to business changing needs, community changing like the tariffs, for example.

That's one lever that, as a government, we have to help community organizations and businesses react and change to the tariffs, and that funding comes from the EI pot. So when people pay into the EI pot, the federal government takes that and they give a significant portion back to the provinces to help people get back into the work. I'm assuming that's where the jobs component comes from for that department name, Speaker. That's an incredible opportunity.

I also had the opportunity to have an acting role in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, as well as Mental Health and Addictions. I just want to thank the teams there for working with me during my short tenure with those departments. Again, a privilege and an incredible learning opportunity to learn about some amazing parts of our government. I had worked with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing extensively as an MHA and it was eye-opening to see from the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing corporate side, I guess, or the government side, some of the challenges that they face and opportunities and how we, as a government, can expand housing to improve the housing availability and accessibility for everyone.

I was very pleased with the government, while I was talking about housing, that we did maintain an extra \$8 million for repairs and upgrades to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units. I think that's extremely important and very pleased that the department can use that to help make sure that we reduce the number of people on the wait-lists and also make sure that we get people into the units as soon as possible and the turnover, we reduce that time as much as possible.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to talk about Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in that way. Then, obviously, from a mental health and addictions perspective, what an incredible privilege to be minister at the time that the new hospital opened up. I had an opportunity to tour the new hospital and I also had an opportunity to tour the former hospital. What an incredible and stark contrast, Speaker.

I mean, I think thousands of people, if not hundreds, toured the new facility before individuals were treated in that facility, before it was open to the general public. I know that the community reaction was incredible. People seemed to be very pleased. I had the opportunity to join two tours and just how excited the staff were was infectious. They were so excited and to hear how incredible they thought that the physical building really will have an impact on the individual's mental health that go in that building. I just contrast that enthusiasm and positivity, and they're the experts in mental health, and to hear them so passionately talk about how they really believe that this new building will help those in need of mental health supports contrasting that with the former facility, which I also had the privilege of having a small tour of, the image that stuck with me, Speaker, was there was an outdoor area with patients and it felt like a cage. It was a dark and dingy cage. I'll never forget the image of the patients in my head, sitting in what seemed to be a cage, to the outside world.

The stark contrast between that and the bright and open and airy outdoor spaces within the new Mental Health and Addictions facility – and I know that every single area of the new facility has open air, outside space for the residents. I just want to give a kudos to – because I know that was designed by the needs of the mental health experts. That was, I think, an amazing initiative that started long before my time here with government, but what a privilege it was to see that amazing new facility.

I just want to thank all the teams. I know they worked above and beyond to make that happen. I just wanted to give a shout-out, I guess, as well – I didn't realize this but when you're moving hospitals from one hospital to another hospital, that is an incredible operation. So there are companies that specialize in hospital moves. I had no idea.

There's actually a company that specializes in hospital moves that the team had worked with for over two years to move the former Waterford Hospital, move all the patients to the new one. There was a dry run. Everything was completed, I believe, by 2 p.m. on the day of the move and there was a whole kind of infrastructure and expertise around hospital moves. That same company was also engaged to do the Corner Brook Hospital.

I just thought that was really interesting and I was trying to think how are all these staff going to do their jobs and take care of the patients and deal with the patient transport, but all that was handled by an expert outside company. I just thought that that was a really interesting point to share with anyone watching today.

I do want to talk about, in the budget, that we highlight investments for immigration, as that was recently my department. I just wanted to give a shout-out, as the Minister of Finance mentioned in the Budget Speech, the amazing work of our team and how many professionals we were able to

bring to Newfoundland and Labrador through our various immigration streams.

S. COADY: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Minister.

Last year, we were able to recruit 257 nurses to Newfoundland and Labrador and 91 per cent of those are working outside the capital city.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: So we are really supporting health care in rural Newfoundland and Labrador: 433 personal care attendants, 65 early learning and childhood educators, 111 social and community service workers and 154 skilled trades workers. I know that they work really hard, and it's been really eye-opening to see how hard they do work to attract those people. Given the changes to the economic relationship between the United States and Canada and North America, we've talked a lot about how do we recruit health care workers from the United States.

I've been really impressed about how the team, I guess – they do that on an individual basis. Writing people on LinkedIn, looking which health care professionals in the United States are talking about how unhappy they are with the United States and then reaching out to them on a one-on-one basis to say, have you thought about coming to Newfoundland and Labrador?

That's the kind of work that the team undertakes in recruiting experts to help our hospitals, to help our people in Newfoundland and Labrador. So I want to give a super, super shout-out to our immigration team who work very hard to bring health care workers to Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I also wanted to highlight in our budget some of the more things relevant to Government Modernization and Service Delivery, formerly Digital Government and Service NL. Although I am hoping to kind of expand what we were doing before but I'm still working on what that might look like.

I'm very pleased, Speaker, that we're able to maintain half off the motor registration costs. So when people renew their vehicle, formerly \$180, now is \$90. I think we're directly putting \$90 back in the pocket of people with vehicles when they renew their registration.

I just want to give a shout-out to the MyGovNL team as well. We talked about, in Estimates this morning, there are over 400,000 residents in Newfoundland and Labrador who have a MyGovNL account, who use their MyGovNL account to interact with the provincial government. So I think that's an incredible adoption of users. I guess, just kudos to the team and, as the critic was mentioning this morning, he was so surprised at how easy it was to make changes to your motor registration policy, as well as your MCP.

So kudos to the MyGovNL team and I know they're always adding more functionality and I look forward to regrouping with them to learn about where they are and what we're going to do next.

I also just want to highlight – I know we implemented ridesharing when I was there before, and I know that Uber just announced that they're going to be rolling out across Newfoundland and Labrador – so everywhere. While the service probably won't be as fast as if you're in St. John's where you can get a car in one to three minutes, I know that it provides another transportation option for people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador who might not have a taxi service. So as long as there's a driver nearby, people can pre-book a vehicle and arrange a ride in advance, potentially. I think that's a great opportunity

for people who live in the area without any transportation services at the moment.

I did also want to mention – I know the previous speaker talked a lot about apprenticeships and, recently, that was under Immigration, Population Growth and Skills and I don't have all my materials for that department in front of me or else I'd be happy to address many of the points the Member raised. I'm pretty sure we have a higher-than-average red seal pass rate in Newfoundland and Labrador and we recently commissioned a review of our apprenticeship system, of which we recently made the results of that public.

When you look at that report, I guess the concerns that the Member raised I don't see reflected in the report. I'm not an expert in the apprenticeship system but I will highlight two things that we did really well in the apprenticeship review. One was financial incentives for people going through the training, studying. We paid for living costs. We helped pay for child care costs. We pay for a range of things that people might need while they're going through the apprenticeship system and to becoming a tradesperson.

I also want to highlight the report gave the department kudos for our engagement with Indigenous tradespeople and how many Indigenous tradespeople are engaged because we have an office for Indigenous trades in Labrador, which I've met with numerous times. They do great work. I just want to thank them and the apprenticeship team for what they do. The report did offer recommendations, so the team are implementing those recommendations now. Some of them are already completed.

One area of opportunity that comes to mind was increased industry engagement, so I know that they're working on that, as well as supports for people doing apprenticeship training. For example, there are a lot of accommodations for apprenticeship training, so I know that they are working on that.

Speaker, I was very pleased in the budget that we are able to reduce all the exams fees for apprentices.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Because we do want to make it as easy as possible and reduce any barriers for people to get into the trades and progress to the next level of trades, Speaker. It's not perfect but we did have a review, which I encourage anyone interested to have a look at, and our team are working through the recommendations of that review.

A few other things I just want to highlight that I particularly am very proud of in our government's budget, Speaker, obviously the ongoing investments in \$10-a-day child care, over a \$110-million investment this year. I'm in and out of child care facilities every day and I really see the value that it provides to families around the province. I can't imagine – I know now that three or four years ago people were paying \$30, \$40, \$50, \$60, \$70 a day or more for child care.

When I'm in public or talking to my peers – I was talking to someone this weekend who has three kids and they were saying I wouldn't be able to do this if it was \$50, \$60, \$70 a day for each child. I think the \$10-a-day child care alleviates a huge financial burden for people across Newfoundland and Labrador. I just wanted to voice my support for that initiative.

Another one that I thought was particularly impactful was the child benefit for eligible families went up by 300 per cent. So that would be for, I guess, lower income families. We do have \$1.7 million to support our early childhood educators with grants and subsidies in terms of students becoming early childhood educators.

I do, as an MHA, have constituents reaching out to me who operate day homes and I guess with the \$10-a-day now they're

finding less demand for their private day home, so I always try and encourage them to become an early childhood educator. There are very generous financial incentives available to help them on their education journey to become an early childhood educator so that they can work in our now \$10-a-day child care system which I think is incredibly valuable.

Speaker, I'm very proud of our budget this year. I look forward to working with the digital government and service NL team, now the Government Modernization and Service Delivery. I'm currently wrapping my head around how we can expand and improve on service delivery across government, not just in this department because there are still some services offered in other departments, and hopefully we can get some quick wins that we can implement in the coming months, Speaker. But it's been a privilege to talk about the budget, and I look forward to talking about it again if I get the opportunity.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

I now recognize the hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always good to get up and talk about my district, especially at this point and in Concurrence. I know we had the Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, we had TCAR, we had Environment and Climate Change, IET, and like, Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, Environment and Climate Change and IET sometimes usually sort of go together with different projects and different things that are happening in the area. So there are a couple of things I'd like to touch on when it comes to those aspects.

Forestry: I know it has been mentioned here a few times actually. Forestry is a big part of Central Newfoundland, of course. I know my colleague from Bonavista mentioned it earlier. When you look at forestry in 10, 11 and 12 in the Central region, I have mentioned this before, that there's no secondary industry in 10, 11 and 12. I know forestry is very important throughout the province, and we need to maintain the sector of forestry that we have, and we have to share, and we have to make sure that we maintain the forestry sector and some of the industry that we already do.

Back when Abitibi pulled out, there was an allotment left there in Central Newfoundland, specifically for Central Newfoundland to have some sort of secondary processing in the Central area. All those permits along with the 280,000 cubic metres that the government unlocked in 2018 of course and the other allotment, all that's gone, everything has gone to the three bigger players, and I've mentioned all this before.

We need some sort of an arrangement done. Other than some logging, firewood and the pulp that's coming out of there, we need some sort of secondary industry in those areas because of the fibre that's in that area. Everybody congregates on that area because the fibre is so good in that area. Of course, we're known as the fibre basket, and I said all this before. But that's part of the forest industry.

Another thing, of course, the forest fires. We have to protect our forestry. We certainly have to protect our forestry. With that, we have to bring our forest fire capacity up to standards and we haven't got to look no further than the recent, last couple of weeks. I know this can go probably a couple of years ago, back in 2023, 2022, I think, it was for Central Newfoundland.

Last year, again, Labrador, it happened, devastating fires. Again, this weekend, last few days, devastating fires. We're up to 58

fires now amongst our province. We certainly need our forest fire capacity back up to standards. With that comes, I guess, the fifth waterbomber. We put the fifth waterbomber out there; we've asked many questions. Back in 2022, when the bad forest fire was in Central Newfoundland, we ended up with five forest fires at that time, which the government found out, very quickly, that rotating those bombers to its highest needs don't work. We needed that fifth waterbomber.

They decided we'll sell, we won't sell, we won't sell or we'll fix. It's only lately that decided to fix the fifth waterbomber. It's said that we'll have it back for 2026. Well, I sure hope so that we'll have it back for 2026.

But it takes those type of accidents, those type of natural things to happen that leaves government scrambling. That's what they do, they scramble for ideas. Last year, after the forest fire in Labrador, of course, now government are scrambling, okay, let's go, let's fix that fifth waterbomber when we've been telling government all along that we needed our fifth waterbomber and we needed our forest fire capacity up to standards. We've been telling them.

What did they do? All right, now we got to act. Now we have to do something. We have to react now because these forest fires are causing us problems. So anyway, they made some initiative.

Crown Lands: We brought in a PMR a couple of years ago. Everyone on the other side got up, nope, no good, we're not going to go ahead with that. So they all voted against it. The minister gets up earlier today talking about the big initiatives he's done in Crown Lands. If we didn't push government to have Crown Lands fixed, through PMRs, through questions, petitions, open lines, news, they wouldn't have even brought in the legislation to be changed. Wouldn't even have done it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Left government scrambling, and why? Because they were getting that much push back. They were getting that much push back on the Crown Lands, they had to do something. This is looking bad out in the public eye, b'ys. We have to do something. Left government scrambling.

So that's two pieces of it. Now government is scrambling to try to get that done. With the Auditor General's report, of course, last fall – scathing report at that, for Crown Lands – they have a lot of work to do. I know that the applications into Crown Lands now are after doubling, after tripling and trying to get through, to filter through. Can they do it in five years, before all this is abolished? Because that's what they have, five years. So that's what they have is five years to get it done. It's going to take a lot of work – it's going to take a lot of work.

But it took government those types of initiatives from us to have it done, but it left government scrambling for answers. Health care again, the Minister of TI got up just now talking about initiatives in health care. We were telling them that long about it, what did they do? They had to make some initiatives, they had to do something and they started the Family Care Teams. Because they couldn't get the doctors and they couldn't do anything with it, so they started the Family Care Teams. But we were pushed to keep initiatives coming from government.

The Premier earlier says no more sugar tax. We've been talking about the sugar tax here for the last four or five years. Or since I came in, we've been talking about the sugar tax. Now something may happen within the next six months – we're not sure when it's going to be, but there's something going to happen within the next six months of an election. It doesn't look good in public – leaves government scrambling. After leaving them scrambling again, now they're going to cut the sugar tax. Why? Because now they're scrambling again to try to do

things right, which we've been telling them all along.

I'm glad that we're on this side to keep government intact. To have them do the things that's right and held accountable for what they're supposed to do. Through us, we pushed that the waterbombers, forest fire capacity needs are up to snuff; we got that done. Crown Lands needed to be fixed; we got that done. Now the sugar tax is gone, because we pushed the sugar tax.

But it also left government scrambling, because initiatives of what they feel now that they've got to do, because it doesn't look good in the public – and it don't either, by the way. You'd be right in thinking that. You'd be definitely right in thinking that. That needed to be done but you had to be pushed and you scrambled for ideas.

Again, Environment and Climate Change came under the resources. Another thing with the forest fire capacity, I don't see it done. I know the Member for Bonavista did touch on it. It's the dry brush, dry foliage that's in the woods areas that need to be cleaned up. It certainly needs to be addressed so that when lightning strikes or natural causes, could be glass in the woods that magnifies and catches all that and with the climate change that we're having today, those fires ignite quickly. They spread quickly and they do a lot of damage quickly.

Not only do we need the precautions of being able to fight the fires when they happen, but we need to be able to have precautions in place that we can resist those fire fires before they do happen with initiatives like that. Have cutting permits out there probably to take up those areas of the dry foliage, cutting the brush back from the roads, from areas, from houses, from towns. Especially all the windfalls that's down and all the dry foliage that's there, we need to do something to have all that dry foliage taken away so that when the lightning strikes that it just doesn't ignite for fires to happen.

So that's some of the precautions that we can do. I talked about some of the agriculture, like root crops. Now, the minister did mention earlier about the facility in Central Newfoundland, Wooddale – yes, great facility. That is a great facility. It really is. It was an initiative that was took on years ago, and a lot of farmers do avail of those products.

But more needs to be done for farming. I mean I'll bring up Crown lands again. By the time new farmers get a piece of land cleared, the expense of all that seed and clearing and through the red tapes of that government has, in a couple of years, that new farmer, that young farmer is up and gone, wants nothing else to do with it. They're tired, they're gone and they're out.

If we're going to increase our food self-sufficiency – I know we're up to almost 20 per cent as government says, but we can do more. We certainly have to do more. With the cost from the boats, we rely on that boat. We rely on the food coming in, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, I know. But our own root crops that we can grow right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we can do more. We can do more for the people of our province. We can put food on those shelves for the people of our province that can avail of those products. But it comes to government initiatives, and, like I say, Crown lands for farmers to be able to start the process is another way of doing it.

Beef: I've heard from some of the beef farmers that getting their products in national chain stores because of federally regulated rules that they have trouble with getting beef on the national chain stores. So federally regulated slaughterhouse – well, it could be a good way that we can get our meats and get our beef on the shelf.

So that's the kind of initiatives that we have to do, especially now if we're going to do intraprovincial trades, you know, buy local campaigns. If we're going to say the local

campaigns, we have to support the local campaigns. We have to try to do what we can for our province to keep ourselves food self-sufficient, grow our own foods, and we'll be self-sufficient for a long, long time, and expand our food self-sufficiency.

That's some of the ways we can do it. Us over here are not just saying this so that you fellows can scramble to find ideas. We give you those ideas.

Environment and Climate Change, Forestry and lands, all come under the Resource Committee, like I said. But there's something that I didn't hear much of. We did ask some questions in Environment and Climate Change. We know that there are some wind projects that are coming about. There have been some EAs done. There are some programs done that way.

I know in my district alone, I've heard a lot about wind and I know there are some projects. But when it comes to the wind projects – and I did ask in Estimates if we had legislation. But we're adopting our legislation. So we really have no written legislation for our province.

That's a bit concerning that we have no legislation to go by, some of the rules and regulations that they have to go by. Now I'm not saying it's not – the industry is good. We need industry in our province; we need to support our industry. But it has to be done right. We need legislation and we need rules and regulations that need to be done. We need primary beneficiaries. We have to make sure that we are the primary beneficiaries of our own resources. We really do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: So that means that we are the primary beneficiaries, community benefits from those big projects, if that's where we're going, community benefits need to be done for those communities. There is lots of work.

There's lot of infrastructure in those communities that still needs to be done.

Government knows there's infrastructure that needs to be done. The Member for Terra Nova came up with a good idea for cellphone service, if we're going to go down that road. So those are good initiatives, good ideas that we can get some of our own benefits back from those projects. That's if they go through with new rules and regulations.

That's sort of the types of things that I'm hearing out in my district when it comes to the wind projects. A lot of people have concerns about the environment. I tell you what they're not hearing, they're not hearing from government – they're not hearing from government. They have concerns for government of how this is working, the environment protections, what's really involved. They're not hearing anything from government. So government needs to come out and specify, really, what's happening.

Now I know the former minister of IET is no longer with us and we have a new structure of Cabinet –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. FORSEY: With the sound over there, they don't sound like they want to hear this anyway.

Anyway, with the new structure of Cabinet, they have all new ministers. The former IET minister is gone. I suggest that they all get together, because these are very important projects, and get briefed up to standards of what those projects are going to be, because nobody seems to know what they are. Nobody seems to know what they look like.

You have all new ministers, you have FFA, you have Environment and Climate Change, IET, and those projects are probably only a couple of years away. They need to get briefed. They need to get out and tell the

people what's really involved. They really do. You need to get out and tell them. People are asking questions. They've asked lots of questions.

I'm not saying that it's bad ideas or whatnot, but we need to do it right. If we're going to do those projects, we have to do them right. We really do. That takes some initiative from government, from everyone involved, people asking questions, people getting answers of what they want and we can do it right and everybody can be under one page and we can move on. That's what I'm hearing about the wind and especially new legislation, that sort of stuff, for wind or for any industry when it comes to that. We certainly need legislation.

With that, Speaker, that's a few points that I had with regard to the Resource Committee. I enjoyed all the Estimates. We got some answers in the Estimates and some have to come back to us, but it was good to be able to get involved in the Estimates. I thank the ministers and I thank the departments, of course, for giving us the answers and look forward to another great discussion as we move along with budget debate.

With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat and we'll continue some conversation later on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a good opportunity to talk on Concurrence, Resource Committee. I'm just going to speak briefly in my critic role here about the Environment and Climate Change.

Speaker, when we're talking about Environment and Climate Change, a lot of things get lost. There are a lot of things that I could speak on, such as pollution from microplastics. Also, we're talking about the

invasion of different species because of climate change. Speaker, right now, I am just going to focus on climate change.

Here in our province and across Canada a lot of times when we're talking about climate change, we talk about emissions. Combustion to fossil fuels contributes significantly to climate change. We talk a lot about greenhouse gases and emissions. When we look up greenhouse gas emissions, a lot of times they talk about the contributions by the economic sectors. So transportation can be 15 per cent; agriculture, forestry and other land use, 22 per cent; buildings, 6 per cent; electricity, heat production – it talks about industry, transportation.

Speaker, it's not cut and dry what contributes to global warming. It's not cut and dry what contributes to climate change, but one of the things we know is there's a huge call for investment for us, globally, as Canadians and as people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, to transition off fossil fuels.

When we look at that, there's been some talk about investing in electric vehicles. At the end of the day, it's like the grocery stores switching from plastic bags to cloth bags. It can't be a get-out-of-jail-free card if people are actually going to buy electric cars. We can't say, okay, now we've done our part when we didn't use the plastic grocery bags. A lot of people said, we did our part. They didn't look at the big picture. The big picture is how are our investments, as Canadians, as residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, going to really offset emissions, the contribution to the greenhouse gases.

One of the things that we've also talked about is charging stations. We have to look at electric vehicles as just a part of the solution. For us to be able to encourage our residents and also our businesses to invest in electric vehicles, the household capacity for recharging, business capacity for

recharging, it has to be viable, it has to be accessible because, without that, there's going to be no transition. A lot of times when people talk about transitions, they just talk about the jobs.

Now, what about investments? For any kind of transition off fossil fuels, we have to have the capacity to store the energy. If we're going to be looking at wind and solar, where are we going to store the energy? Is that energy, then, going to be easily accessible? One of the things that comes up is the batteries, the changing technology.

We, as a province, can be a big part of that solution. We look at Voisey's Bay. We look at the deposits up in Northern Labrador and on the Quebec side of rare earth minerals. So, in actual fact, Newfoundland and Labrador again has the opportunity to be leaders in transitioning off fossil fuels. The economic potential when we look at expanding renewable energy: rare earth mineral deposits.

A lot of people don't even know about it in the province when I talk to them. People in Northern Labrador know about it because they're already being impacted. On the Quebec side, the government and the businesses, Torngat Metals, they're interested now in building a road straight out to the ocean so they can actually truck the rare earth minerals and ship it out as part of their production.

People in Northern Labrador are very, very concerned because of the lack of consultation. Because if you put a road across Northern Labrador, you're going to impact many, many of the animals and the vegetation that is essential for the Innu and the Inuit. When we look at that, it is so important.

Also, Nunatsiavut, on the Labrador side, the revenue that could be generated for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador could be just as lucrative as the hydroelectricity. But, in actual fact, on the

Labrador side, that deposit is on mineral-exempt lands and is held up because this province has not dealt with the Nunatsiavut Government Land Use Plan. They've had it now for 13 years.

So there are all these delays that is really impacting it. And do you know something? That trickles down to our contribution to global warming, our impact on the environment. No one talks about that. One of the things that we have to look at is, what is global warming? What are greenhouse gas emissions? Look at the deposits of Strange Lake.

When you look at that road, that's basically going to impact caribou. Over where the deposit is, calving stations for our caribou. We look at our char and our trout, the spawning areas, where they overwinter. We look at the Innu and the Inuit rights, the consultation process. In actual fact, there are a lot of things going on that we need to be aware of.

When we look at Voisey's Bay, Voisey's Bay is sought after because it has nickel, cobalt and copper. Voisey's Bay is very efficient in its mining. It's very, very sustainable. They've won many awards for their environmental stewardship and, basically, to make sure that production is not impacting the environment. People could learn a lot from Voisey's Bay and the way they deal with their Indigenous groups, the way they deal with their adjacencies in terms of employment and treating the Indigenous people and the local Labradorians and the people of the province fairly when it comes to job opportunities. There's a lot to learn from the way Voisey's Bay, Vale has done things. Back in the day it was Inco, the Voisey's Bay project.

Just talking a little bit about transitioning off fossil fuels, Northern Labrador, the whole North Coast, all the communities in Northern Labrador and Southern Labrador, do we have access to the hydroelectricity that's being generated? They call it the

clean energy. No. Northern Labrador and Southern Labrador, our electricity comes from the diesel-generating stations, massive carbon emissions.

In actual fact, the failure to address Northern Labrador communities and Southern Labrador communities has contributed to our carbon footprint. It has contributed to global warming. That's something that has not really, really been addressed.

So why are our coastal Labrador communities still on diesel when we got Churchill Falls? Churchill Falls is powering a big part of the Island. When we look at Muskrat Falls, where is that electricity going? It's certainly not going to the North Coast or the South Coast of Labrador. There's big controversy now in Southern Labrador because Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro want to have this super diesel-power generating station. The people in Southern Labrador are saying, hey, what about clean energy? Why are we looking at that when, in actual fact, the hydroelectricity is going south? The people in Northern Labrador say the same thing.

Also, another thing that people don't really understand is about the global awareness for emissions. When you look at that, we look at climate change. We look at the UN climate conferences. There are words such as the Kyoto Protocol. People look at the Paris Agreement. All of these things is where the countries in the world have gotten together and said we need to do something about global warming. We've got to do something about climate change.

We look at the '90s. You're looking at three decades ago. Where was Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro when it come to the diesel-generating station in Southern Labrador, in Northern Labrador? Did they say, as a Crown corporation, hey, we have to be responsible? Everybody in Canada and globally is saying we have to switch to renewable energy. Did Newfoundland and

Labrador Hydro do anything about it? No, they did nothing about it – nothing.

So we're stuck on diesel and it's impacting us because, as the price of diesel went up – and I call it diesel because, I tell you now, when you go down to the fuel stations in my district and you want to buy your stove oil or your furnace oil, you're basically getting diesel. They charge you a different price, same thing. When the fishermen go off and they're buying their fuel for their longliners and for their ships, they basically get it from the same tank. They are different prices. That's a different story.

Looking at this now, Northern Labrador and Southern Labrador, what's our role as a province? We're talking about climate change. We're talking about environment. We're looking at Churchill Falls. Where's Churchill Falls? It's in the middle of Labrador. What does Churchill Falls do? It generates electricity for the province, for Newfoundland. What about Muskrat Falls?

Luckily, Goose Bay, Central Labrador and Lab West do have access to Churchill Falls electricity but when we look at Muskrat Falls, no, nothing. We learned, in January, we had this MOU we had to get up here and, so call, debate. The MOU on the Churchill Falls Expansion project, Gull Island, we had to debate it.

So one of the things I asked about when the CEO of Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro was here, was I asked about transmission lines. What about transmission lines for Southern Labrador? What about transmission lines for Northern Labrador?

In actual fact, I am the MHA for Torngat Mountains, Northern Labrador. So it's my duty to represent my constituents. As critic for Environment and Climate Change, it's my responsibility to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador to also address the issues that impact us provincially.

So what about transmission lines? The CEO of Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, Wendy Williams, she said, when you're going to actually bring in transmission lines, usually it needs large companies, businesses or mining industries. That's the end-user.

That, to me, if I didn't know any better, I would be kind of shocked at that because what did I talk about? I talked about Voisey's Bay. I talked about the Vale mining operation. How long has that been in existence? It's a viable mine, an end-user that really could use the hydroelectricity. Viable mine, Northern Labrador – Inco was there. Construction in 2003 up to 2005 and we went into operations – and I say we because I was a big part of it. I was a big part of the environmental health and safety building that mine, went into production.

I got to tell you now, when we were dealing with and everybody knew – Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro knew that we were supposed to be looking at renewable energy, what did we do for Voisey's Bay? We actually built three great, big 11-million-litre tanks to hold the diesel for the diesel-generating stations.

If we had brought a transmission line up to Voisey's Bay, just a few kilometres north was Nain, our most Northern community in Labrador, we could have all been put on the grid. We could have all had reliable energy, cleaner energy but now we're stuck still burning diesel 25 years later, and 30-plus from when the global demands and the signing of accords and having summits and saying we, as world leaders, have to take responsibility for emissions – viable mines, 20 years and no transmission line.

We look at climate change, Speaker. When we look at climate change, we have to transition off oil to electric heat. What was one of the incentives that was put out there for the province? Oh, you know, we'll do our part; we'll get them on the hydroelectricity from Muskrat Falls from Churchill Falls.

We'll transition the entire province, basically, off the home heating fuel. Up to \$22,000 per household could avail of it, but Northern Labrador communities and Southern Labrador communities, we couldn't avail of that. We're still stuck on the diesel generating.

Also, a lot of people don't even mind paying the cost of electricity in my district. They would rather pay the high cost of electricity if they could actually have these mini splits that are more energy efficient in their houses. Because, the cost of a drum, 200 litres of stove oil, is about \$500. Even if they were paying a thousand dollars a month for electricity, that would be cheaper than buying three or four drums in the coldest months of the winter.

So, Speaker, it's a reality. There are many layers to climate change. There are many layers to global warming. At the end of the day, when you look at Northern Labrador, we are suffering the consequences. Labrador as a whole is suffering, because climate change and global warming is already in Labrador. We've seen it with the forest fires. The Member for Exploits talked a little bit about forest fires. That's the result. What are we doing as a province? We're going to actually have the consequences. The consequences are coming.

When we look at the price of electricity, in my district, when I got elected, we were paying 18.5 cents a kilowatt hour when it went over the life block of 1,000 kilowatt hours, which is nothing. If you use electric heat, you're going to go over that. You're probably going to use three or four times that. Now they're up to 21.1 cents.

I remember here, the MHAs in the House of Assembly were worried, had raised it over and over again – what's going to happen to us? We're going to be frozen out of our homes because we might be paying 16, 17 cents a kilowatt hour. Sixteen or 17 cents a kilowatt hour was going to freeze them out of their houses in the province on the Island.

Does the Island get the temperatures that we get in the winters, in the fall, even in the spring? No, they don't. But now we're paying 21 cents, so where's the outrage – where's the outrage? Many layers.

And when something was complicated, had many factors weighing on it, the old folks would say that's layered like an onion. But I have to tell you, the politics of Newfoundland and Labrador is a rotten onion. The layers are rotten. To me, as the Member for Torngat Mountains, I have to draw attention to this. As the critic for Labrador Affairs, I have to draw attention to this because it's not just Northern Labrador that's being impacted. We saw Lab West. You know, I have relatives who live over in Lab West. They didn't know if they were going to lose their houses. They didn't know what was going to happen.

We look at Churchill Falls, the power-generating station. The whole province was at risk of losing that power because of the forest fires. Forest fires are a reality. In actual fact, about 15 years ago, when I was working with Aurora, and I was flying around in helicopters, I saw the devastation of forest fires. I saw large landmass burned right out to the rivers, right to the ponds, everything black, with a little bit of green around the river.

When I was flying over, I was wondering where are the animals now? This has basically killed or had to force movement of the bears and the moose. In actual fact, the impacts. In actual fact, Speaker, a lot of these things are very, very important, but one thing I do want to say because I don't think I've really been on the record is talking about our offshore companies, the oil industry. The offshore companies that basically produced oil for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador have become very, very efficient. They have reduced their carbon footprint. Basically, the work they do to get the oil out of the ground and export it is minimal compared to other countries.

That's not to be confused with when you burn the fuel, when they combust the fuel, it still produces emissions. But our offshore companies have to be commended for their insight, for being proactive, because our companies actually have a lower carbon footprint. That's what's called responsible development. That's what are responsible companies and our offshore companies are responsible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Basically, they look at sustainability, they look at the impact to the environment. So, in actual fact, as a biologist, as a person who has spent my professional years in the environment, I have to say they need to be commended. I'm not actually doing a contradiction. In actual fact, we need to support companies that minimize their environmental footprint when it comes to producing oil – very, very important.

More importantly, as a Member for Torngat Mountains, I want better access to health care, I want better education, I want better travel.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: And who's going to pay for it? Basically, right now, oil contributes so much to our revenue, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaking about the Resource Committee, I guess this one is close to home as

someone who worked in the mining industry for many years as a tradesperson. I went through the apprenticeship program. I know the Minister of Jobs – his new title – did speak about the apprenticeship program. I went through that, myself and my spouse. We were both trained apprentices. I moved off to something else halfway through but my wife went through the entire process, right up to journeyman.

I'm surprised she hasn't ripped all her hair out trying to go through that process, trying to get through the red seal, trying to do the exam, trying to get rewrites for the exams. It was a living nightmare for my spouse at the time. So she switched careers. Now she has a cooler job. Actually, a job that I'm kind of jealous of, but that's fine. She works for the railway and she's having a fantastic time here, but it's a more federal apprenticeship now with that job.

At the time, trying to get through the apprenticeship program and the issues and stuff with that, I'm sure she could write a book. But she loved the job at the time and she loved the career that she choose but she never got the support, and many apprentices never got the same support that they did.

So I wanted to put that out there. We've had reports, we've had things and we've talked about the program. Listen to apprentices, we live it and we've lived it. I did it for a number of years. My wife went through the apprenticeship program and was an apprentice up to a journeyman for a number of years in her field before changing careers. The thing is, you make decisions and choices – apprentices, they're the ones who are going to tell you how it works and it needs to work. And even class calls and where block training is located and all these things, listen to apprentices. They're the ones who will guide you the most, and that seems to be the ones who were completely ignored in that.

Talking about apprentices, I have one of the most concentrated amount of apprentices and journeymen anywhere in this province, working in the mining industry. Rio Tinto IOC, 2,000 employees; Wabush mines Tacora, another 500 employees; Tata, another 200 employees; Labrador Iron, I'm not sure what they have right now, they're there; Kami is looking at 800 employees; Julianne Lake is an unknown right now; and also the Joyce Lake project, which I think they're looking at about 300 employees. So we're talking big numbers, a lot of them in the resource community.

But right now operating I have Rio Tinto IOC, I have Tacora, I have Tata and I have Labrador Iron. And on the books that are coming down the pipe, we have the Kami project with Champion; we have the Julianne Lake one that is actually a mineral-exempt land that the province put out for an RFP; and then we also have the Joyce Lake project, which is kind of in between Schefferville and Lab West there around Joyce Lake and Iron Arm, that's another project that's currently going through the EIS process.

These are a lot of very big projects. They're not small in any real imagination. The amount of iron, by volume and weight, is one of the largest exports this province sends out.

Going back to my spouse, who works for the railway, right now the company that she works for they do two trains a day every day, 365 days a year. They don't take holidays; they don't take breaks. There are two trains. Each train is 267 cars. Each car carries a hundred tons. So you just do the math and see how much volume of iron ore that one mine hauls out in the run of a day. And that's not the big one, that's the small mine.

So this is what we're dealing with here. We've been in this continuous cycle of mining for 71 years now. I know last year I got to say 70 years, but now it's 71 years.

Seventy-one years of continuous mining in one part of this province. Not many places in the world get to say that their mine was open for 71 years, but I get the privilege of saying that, that the mining in Labrador has continuously mined for 71 years and their projections are in the multi-hundreds of years. I think, if you add all the mining projects together and their expectancy, you're pushing 200 years of known reserves.

Potentially, in 200 years, someone could be standing in the same spot talking about mining in Labrador West. That's the thing, the proven resource that that place has. But it comes with needs and understanding from government. We talked about that; it's power. Yes, we're going to get power, finally after – I was here for six years talking about the need to make sure that there's new power found for Labrador West because, as we move and change, techniques change, mining requirements change – and thankfully Lab West was always ahead of the curve. The majority of the operations were always done by electricity rather than fossil fuels so the conversion was a lot less painless, but there is still a large amount of electricity still required to move into the modern era.

Right now a lot of the mining companies, like the pelletization process is switching to an electric process versus where it currently right now uses bunker fuel. They're one of the dirtiest fuels you can burn but right now it's moving to electrification. That comes with a large amount of megawatts needed. That is on top of adding new mining shovels which are electrically operated, drills which are electrically operated and a lot of other processes that are being changed out from using fossil fuels over there.

We're lucky enough that we have a proven resource and we're close to a large powerplant, but the process was that they were already in the process of electrification, years and years ago, back in the '70s. So we were lucky that way, but it

still requires a large amount of electricity and now that we're moving into the modern era where companies, smelters and things like that are looking for a way to move forward, but we can't do it without electricity and making sure that we secure that electricity into the future.

Right now, the mines in our region are signing deals with electric arc furnaces around Europe and other places in the world. That's where the metallurgical world is going. That's where smelters and that are going, is they're using electric arc furnaces which uses little to no carbon for the process and little to no fossil fuels.

France, Sweden, all these countries are now building new electric arc furnaces for their steel mills and they're looking for an iron source that is low in carbon and can actually be put into these electric arc furnaces? Guess what? Lab West has been mining for 70 years and it turns out their iron is the best to use for electric arc furnaces. Guess where they are? We have a line-up at the door of people wanting to buy our iron ore, which is fantastic, which is great for a place like us.

Like I said, I have the privilege of saying we've been mining continuously for 71 years. I hope now into the future someone gets to come up here and say we've been mining for 100 years, 200 years. This is where we are right now, but like I said, we need to make sure we have secured electricity and we also have to make sure that we secure that.

Now, power is one thing, but housing – you can't have a mine without workers. Unfortunately, we've been suffering a bit of a housing crisis in Labrador West for the last number of years. I don't know the amount of people that have come up and tried to take jobs, try to get into the industry and can't find a place to live. Then they turn around and say, well, we can't get anyone to do the jobs, but these mines are crying for workers. The first thing they do, they turn

to fly-in, fly-out. That is the last thing a mining community needs to hear is fly-in, fly-out because that destroys the fabric of a community.

You just have to ask our friends in Fairmont, Quebec. When they allowed a brand new mine to open up in their area to do fly-in, fly-out, their population dropped by over 60 per cent, most of all their businesses closed down, a lot of the youth and young people left the community and their families moved out. A lot of them said, well, why are we here when we can just get on a plane every two weeks and come back and forth, and it destroyed the fabric of that community. Only now they realize the error of their ways, and now they're trying to stem the tide of their communities being gutted.

They've made some progress there but here's the thing, we have a new mine opening up and there are no houses. They want 800 workers; we don't have houses for 800 workers. So now they're going around pitching the idea of maybe we'll be a fly-in, fly-out mine. That is the last thing a community like Lab West wants.

So here's the thing, we've been doing it for 71 years. We've been doing it very efficiently for 71 years and now, like I said, the last thing we want to hear is that a new mine is going to open up and they're going to try to push this fly-in, fly-out – build an 800-personnel camp and try to push fly-in, fly-out. This is the last thing we want. This is where we need government and the community to stand up and work with us to make sure that we actually build affordable housing in our region.

We all know that the future is bright for our region. We know that we were included in the MOU when it came to trying to secure power for us. We know that there's a future here. Yet, we haven't seen any movement when it came to housing and trying to secure housing and make sure that the communities are able to do that. That's where, like I said, we need government at

the table, but also, government to be our partners, because I want someone to be here in 100 years' time and say we got 171 years of mining.

I want to make sure that my future – my grandfather went up there in 1958 and worked there at the very beginning. My dad was there. Now I'm here. I have two kids and, hopefully, out of my two kids, at least one of them sticks around and continues the family tradition of working in the mining industry. You know, that's four generations of this and we're doing the same thing. There's a really, I guess, important part where – and I've talked to a lot of people that really had their kids actually go out and do the exact same job their parents did in the mining industry. I have a good friend, his grandfather was an electrician, his father was an electrician and now he's an electrician and they all work in the same area in the mine.

So it's pretty special to be able to pass on something like that to our kids because there's not many mining places today get to even say the same thing, where you get to pass on what you did. This is where we want to make sure to secure the future but also to secure the future for the people that live in Labrador West.

When we talk about the resources, we have to talk about the people that are behind the resources, the people that extract them and work for them. I see it every single day. I just have to look at my spouse; she works in the mining industry. I look at my parents. I looked at my grandparents. They're the faces behind the resource and they're the ones that extract the resource and they expect a little bit of the benefit from it.

If you can't get affordable housing, how is the next generation of miners going to stay in Lab West when there's not a house for them to buy? How are they going to stick around when there's no support there, when services are not available anymore? Where you're having a hard time keeping nurses

and doctors in the community; trying to keep teachers or even just day-to-day government officials in the community because there's no housing, there's no support, there's no this.

There is a human face behind the mining industry. There is a human face behind every resource in this province, and they're the ones that we need to be supporting the most because they're the ones who extract the resource and they're the ones that make it an actual commodity that we sell on the global market.

We've got to remember when we are talking about resources, we should be talking also about the people behind the resources to make sure that they secure that resource but also make sure that we secure those people that extract that resource.

I got the privilege of working in the mining industry. I have an appreciation for it. I understand that, you know, there are a lot of people that make that work. Like I said, once again, IOC, Rio Tinto, 2,000 employees; Tacora, over 500 employees; Tata – I'm not 100 per cent sure but I'm thinking they're up around 300 employees; you've got Joyce Lake coming around; Julianne Lake which is exempt-mineral lands that's gone out to an RFP from the province; and then they also have the closest one, I guess, to be opening now in the next few years is the Kami Project with Champion.

So these are massive, massive projects. We're talking hundreds of millions of tons of iron ore over the lifetime but there are human faces behind each and every one there. There are 2,000 faces behind IOC, there are 500 faces behind Tacora and these people are the ones that run the day-to-day operations of it. They make sure, as a lot of the people said, get the ore down the track as they say up in Lab West and these people need support. They need support of government to make sure that they actually have houses, they have

services and they, actually, continue to live in their communities and try to avoid, I guess, the scourge that happened in Fermont is to avoid it becoming a fly-in/fly-out mining camp and that what we do not want to see.

That's why when you talk about the resources and the community, you know, they're the ones that make the money. They're the ones that pay the bills. They're the ones that we need to be supporting the most.

With that, Speaker, I'm done.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The time is expired in 20 seconds actually.

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that the Concurrence Motion for the Resource Committee –

E. JOYCE: I want to speak on this.

SPEAKER: Under *Standing Orders* –

E. JOYCE: (Inaudible) but I want to speak on the Resource Committee.

SPEAKER: The time is expired. There's three hours allotted for the Resource Committee, and the time is expired.

All those in favour of the Concurrence Motion for the Resource Committee, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Report of the Resource Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, the Concurrence on the Report of the Social Services Committee dated May 2025.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House concur in the Report of the Social Services Committee dated May 2025.

SPEAKER: We will now do debate on the Social Services Committee which comprises of the Children, Seniors and Social Development; Department of Education; Department of Health and Community Services; Department of Justice and Public Safety; Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs; and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

We'll start debate on this.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to say it's an honour to stand again in this House of Assembly on behalf of the constituents of the District of Harbour Main. It's important to just give a little bit of background about what exactly we're doing here in terms of process. I think sometimes we need to do that just to help anyone who's listening about what we're doing here.

The Standing Committee, which is what we are involved in right now, completed a review of the Estimates and the Committee – basically this is the Concurrence Motion that we are debating, and generally that goes for approximately three hours, the debate takes place in the House of Assembly, the Speaker is in the Chair, and there are three Committees that review entire Estimates documents.

This Committee that we are in presently, at this moment, and I'm the first speaker on it,

is the Social Services Committee. As has been stated, there are a number of departments of government contained in that Committee. That's CSSD, Children, Seniors and Social Development. That includes Persons with Disabilities, which is one of my shadow minister portfolios. It also includes Education. It includes Health and Community Services. It includes Justice and Public Safety, and that's another department that I am responsible as the shadow minister for. There's also Municipal and Provincial Affairs and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation. This is the Social Services Committee.

Previous to this, we heard from the Resource Committee and that had a number of departments that were contained in it. Environment and Climate Change; Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture; Immigration, Population Growth and Skills; Industry, Energy and Technology; Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. Those were the departments in that Committee.

So we're on the second Committee. Now, what do these Committees do? Basically, these Committees – and there are three, so there's another one after this Committee. But they basically look at the Estimates. That's all part of the budget process. They look at the Estimates and, ultimately, the goal is to approve those Estimates. But these Committees review the entire Estimates document and then that means they bring it before the House of Assembly and the House of Assembly will approve, hopefully, most of the Estimates.

When all of these three Committees are concluded, then the House of Assembly will approve the majority of the Estimates. There are some other things that have to be dealt with, but that's the majority of the Estimates.

That is really important because prior to these Committees, we had to sit in the House of Assembly at Estimates, and I had the privilege to ask questions in the two

portfolios that I am critic of and that would be Justice and Public Safety and Persons with Disabilities.

It's a great opportunity, Speaker, for us in the Opposition to find out, to ask questions about line-to-line matters in the budget and to explore and to find out exactly what the departments have done in terms of expenditures, in terms of spending the taxpayers' money.

So it's a really valuable process. The step that we had of Estimates was quite informal. I had a representative from our staff, a researcher, who was phenomenal in advising me, Megan Winter, and basically helping me in terms of the questions that I was asking the minister and all of the minister's officials. We get down into the nitty-gritty and find out exactly what's happening in terms of the taxpayers' money and in terms of expenditures in these departments.

Then, in addition, we're going to have three heads of expenditure: the Legislature, Consolidated Fund Services, and Executive Council. That will happen after these Committees are approved, when we concur in the Committee reports.

That's kind of the background of what we're doing here today. Each of the shadow ministers – and as I stated, I am the one for Justice and Public Safety and for Persons with Disabilities. I get the opportunity now to speak for 20 minutes, as do each of the Members who are involved in those Committees who have material that is related to their portfolios. You generally try to ask questions pertaining to – at least that's my approach – the areas that I am responsible for.

As the shadow minister critic, I'm going to start with Persons with Disabilities and then I'll proceed to Justice and Public Safety. I'll pretty much focus on those two areas that it is my duty and responsibility as the Member of the House of Assembly for Harbour Main

District, and as the person who's assigned to question the government, hold this government to account on those important portfolios.

So let's start with Persons with Disabilities. Speaker, this portfolio for me has been an incredible portfolio because I have got the opportunity – I assumed the responsibility in the last year and a half, two years – to get to know some incredible, incredible persons within the disability community. The groups and organizations that are a part of this portfolio and are involved in trying to advocate for reforms for persons with disabilities are incredible individuals and groups.

But I'm going to say, first of all, Speaker, they're disappointed right now. They're very, very disappointed. They're disappointed in *Budget 2025*. Do you know why they're disappointed? The first reason, they are disappointed and they're really shocked that they have not seen any disability advocate mentioned in *Budget 2025*.

Now why is that important to them? Why is it important to have a disability advocate one might ask? Well, let's start. One reason is that persons with disabilities account for at least 30 per cent of the population of Newfoundland and Labrador and that 30 per cent is those people who self-identify as having a disability. I would venture to say that it's even a lot more than 30 per cent because I would say there are many people who do not identify with a disability but are suffering from a disability or quietly not identifying that they have a disability.

But we know, if we're looking the measurement that is self-identification, 30 per cent of our population in Newfoundland and Labrador identify as a person with disability. Yet, this promise of a disability advocate, in 2020, the Premier of the day, in mandate letters to their minister, directed the minister to look at the creation of a disability advocate, five years ago, Speaker. Then we see that basically nothing has

happened. There has been no momentum. There's been no action. We know that there has been a lot of talk, oh, we're working on it and this kind of thing, but there is no disability advocate. That was in 2020.

Now, we also heard the excuse – and I will call it an excuse – well, we can't have a disability advocate now because three years ago, I think it was in 2021 – it was 2022 actually – there was a structural review of statutory offices by Justice Fowler. In that, the issue of a disability advocate was reviewed and there was some talk about perhaps what might best happen is to have a merged disability advocate with the Seniors' Advocate.

Let me tell you, Speaker, that is not receiving good reviews at all. Merging the disability advocate with the Seniors' Advocate is not considered to be a good idea. Why is that considered to be a problem? Well, first of all, we have 30 per cent of the population that identify as persons with disabilities. The argument is that surely, they can and ought to have a stand-alone advocate –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – representing their needs and their interests. Merging them in with the Seniors' Advocate, who is also very – the percentage of the Seniors' Advocate I believe is around 30 per cent as well of the population of Newfoundland and Labrador. But merging those two advocates together is seen to be diluting the importance of one over another. Stand-alone advocates are what is required. The needs and the interests of the persons with disabilities are so immense and, at times, complex that they need to have an advocate in and of themselves, a stand-alone advocate.

There is definitely argument to be made and there's a lot of concern about this combining of the two departments and it's felt by the disability community, of persons with

disabilities, that this would not be in the best interest of persons with disabilities.

Yet, the excuse now, well, we're reviewing it. We heard today in Question Period, well, we're getting up to speed and we're looking at it. I mean, it's the same old thing year after year. When we look back at 2020 and still there's been no significant progress that we can look to, to see that there's a disability advocate.

Speaker, I would say that's not acceptable; that's not good enough. The disability community in our province deserve better than that. They deserve to be respected and to be treated. Their interests and their needs, need to be given priority. I would argue that this government, by the fact that they have done little to nothing about it in the last five years, has demonstrated that it is not a priority for this government today.

With respect to that issue, it's very concerning that this has not been addressed, Speaker. The community, the persons with disabilities, are asking for more attention to be given to this and are very disappointed and disillusioned that that has not happened.

When I also think about persons with disabilities – and I have met with a number of the organizations, Nancy Reid who is the executive director of the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities and there is also a network of community organizations that are so dedicated to the interest and advancing the interests of individuals that have persons with disabilities. You know, even recently, we've heard that the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities were even concerned that they might have to shut down because they cannot really sustain their organization without having any core funding.

That's another big, big issue, Speaker. This government has not found this to be a priority. They need to look at multi-year core funding for non-profit organizations and

organizations like this who really desperately need to have some idea, going forward, how they're going to fund their entities and fund their organizations. Right now, they don't have that.

They go from year to year – and it's very discretionary. Right now, the way that the funding exists, from what I understand, there is just not that objectivity and it's at the minister's discretion. There are lots of concerns about that. That it's not independent. It's not objective enough and that core funding needs to be addressed. That's something that we, in the Opposition, are committed to, not only in the creation of a disability advocate, but also we are committed to core funding for organizations like this.

Speaker, there are many issues with respect to this portfolio. I do feel privileged to have had the opportunity and continue to have the opportunity to advocate on behalf of individuals with disabilities, and it's such an important area. The government has to give more attention to this. They really have to make this a priority and not give us lip service. It's just not acceptable. It's not fair.

Speaker, I only have a short amount of time now, but I will have another opportunity to speak with respect to when we get to the subamendments. So I'll still have opportunity to speak about the important issues, but I am going to talk a little bit about the important portfolio of Justice and Public Safety.

First of all, this week is an important week because this is the week of National Police Week. I'm just so honoured as well, because in this portfolio as the shadow minister for Justice and Public Safety, I have had the opportunity to meet many, many police officers throughout the province.

This week is National Police Week; it's from May 11 to 17. The National Police Federation, the NPF, sent out an email to

me just recently talking about the importance of National Police Week. I really am honoured to stand here to show appreciation and to say thank you to all of our police officers that are there to protect our communities and who are committed to ensuring the better and safer future for all of us.

So I want to thank them, thank police and other first responders for putting their lives, basically, on the line. That's what they do. They do it 24-7, 365 days of the year. I think it's important for us to, even if we're out this week – I mean, we probably should be doing this all the time but say thank you or a friendly wave to a police officer that you see. It's only a small gesture, but it's those small gestures that make a big difference and can make a big difference in the lives of officers who are there to work on our behalf.

This is an important week as well because it's a time to bring public awareness, Speaker, to our police and law enforcement. It's about strengthening that bond that exists between us. It's about trying to foster open dialogue and understanding and mutual respect. So this theme that they have for National Police Week is Committed to Serve Together. That's what it's called. We are all Committed to Serve Together. The community, they are here to serve the community and residents.

This is an important week; it's about increasing awareness and understanding between police and communities. Because really, the police are not effective unless the community that they police are supportive and give them that confidence and trust. If the public doesn't have trust in the police, then the police aren't in a position to do the work that they do.

So there's an important bond that exists between the police. I would like to say that we have great entities, police organizations, in our province: the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, as well as the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police. That's what this is about, it's Committed to Serve Together.

We are so very proud of the work, not only of our Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, that primarily functions in the urban areas of our province, but also the RCMP who have traditionally served the people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and who have been an important feature in our culture and in our communities, so we're very proud to have the RCMP as well.

On that note, thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

It is indeed an honour, always, to stand in my place and represent the people of my district. This evening, as we sit, we are discussing Concurrence on the Social Services Committee. In that, we have Children, Seniors and Social Development; Education; Health; Justice and Public Safety; Municipal and Provincial Affairs; and Housing.

Speaker, in my critic role with respect to Housing – I'm going to touch on that for that most part – I had the privilege of sitting in Estimates here in the House last Monday and I have to say it was a very productive Estimates process. I thanked the minister and her staff at that time but publicly now I will thank the 307 active staff with respect to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing who give of themselves to do the best work they possibly can with what they have.

We do know that our province, we're in a housing crisis. That is no surprise to many because of the high price cost of homes, the limited availability and, of course, the growing demand. Speaker, when you look at the limited availability and you have the rental costs that are increasing – and I'll

give you an example from my district. I spoke with a single mother of two young boys who is looking to rent in my district a two-bedroom basement apartment plus own utilities is going for \$2,200 a month.

Speaker, I can tell you – and I see some of the reactions from my colleagues across this hon. House – that's pretty steep. Especially for this particular case, for this single mother, hard-working young woman of two young boys, who was dealt a hard hand but she's getting through it. But for that price, it's impossible to achieve, unfortunately.

I fully realize that this crisis and the cost of living, especially when referring to housing, impacts many groups, including our vulnerable populations. I have many people reaching out to me on a regular basis and to my CA at the office from the middle working-class who are struggling, and it's difficult to hear; it's difficult to listen to.

As the MHA, when they reach out to try to find some answers, there's not always a solution, and it comes down to what is available. I do know it is a struggle. It is a real demand for housing, and not only in the urban, but in the rural areas as well, we're finding that. We have many young families who are affected, as I just said with that example. We have many seniors who are affected as well.

I'll give you another real-life example with respect to seniors, a couple from my hometown in Pouch Cove, both in their mid-70s, both worked hard all their lives. Productive members of society, raised a family, volunteered, and it came to a point where they couldn't basically afford to live where they lived in the home that they built because of the cost of living.

Of course, when they made the decision to try to move elsewhere, you're back to the limited availability again. Unfortunately, they had to move out of the district, and moved into the city, into an apartment building where they continue to live today, but,

Speaker, it is a struggle when we're looking at our seniors. Then, of course, we have those with complex needs, and that makes the whole situation that much more complex.

So with the high housing costs and affordability challenges, the pricing increases, it does make it difficult for people to afford housing. Especially, as I said, with low income and individuals with families, seniors, what have you.

Speaker, there's no quick and real answer to it; however, when we sat through Estimates, and we are still waiting on some information from Estimates that has to come back to us from that department, but currently on the wait-list here in the province, Speaker, we have 2,535 people on a wait-list for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Out of that 2,535, we have, unfortunately, 430 people who are experiencing homelessness.

I realize that there are shelters available that people can avail of. We know that our shelters are full, and the numbers that came from housing for the last year, just over 1,700 people availed of shelters here in our province, with a cost of approximately \$17.9 million. When you look at the total picture with respect to housing, the lack of, the wait-lists for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, the increased usage on our shelters, it does cause people to deal with mental health decline. All of it comes hand in hand, Speaker.

I do understand demographics does play a part in this when we're looking at those who are looking for housing, but I can certainly tell you it doesn't make it any easier when it comes to trying to solve the problem. Here we have 2,535 on wait-list and 430 experiencing homelessness. Just this past week, I had a mother in my district reach out, whose son was having difficulties, and unfortunately this young man who's 40 was living in a tent in Torbay and has been for the last number of months.

Speaker, I don't care how hardy you are, if you're in a tent in the last couple of months, we have a serious issue. Now, I do know there was mental health and addiction issues there as well, but I'm very happy that the mother did reach out to me. With the help of the staff – I don't know if I can say his name, Barry Hewitt. I'm going to say it because he needs to be commended. Through the help with Mr. Hewitt and his department and his staff, we managed to get that young man some help.

I do know that it's not just a singular issue. It's an issue that's happening far too often unfortunately. As I said, we try to handle the situations and issues individually but, of course, we do have to rely on the staff to provide that assistance and I'm very thankful for that gentleman to have helped this young man and, of course, to help out the family.

Speaker, when we're looking at our vulnerable groups, our elderly and our seniors and my colleague from Harbour Main spoke about the Seniors' Advocate just shortly ago, they're struggling with the cost of home maintenance and, of course, the heating and the impact of housing on affordability. It all comes full circle. I do know that the lack of housing and the high cost of living is leading to, as I said earlier, mental health and well-being decline. They're all interconnected when it comes to what is required.

Speaker, I do know that with respect to, as I mentioned about the shelters, we have over 1,700 people that availed of the shelters here in our province at a cost of just under \$18 million, and then we look at, of course, 106 Airport Road.

We had much discussion on 106 Airport Road. It was mentioned here today earlier, if it's going to be continued – we're about halfway through – if the program is going to be continued or not. I asked about the projected cost for '25-'26 and it was about \$4.8 million. Speaker, \$4.8 million was the

projected cost and, up to now, we had approximately 73 individuals stay at 106 Airport Road, with 18 transitioning to more stable housing.

So it's going to be interesting to see if that does continue. If that is going to be continued for the people of the province or if it isn't, how it's going to be maintained under the current government and the new Premier. Of course, it's going to be interesting to see how that moves forward.

Speaker, I want to touch on Justice and Public Safety for a moment. We were not in the House at this time, we were on the Easter break, but from April 13 to 19 was National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week. I wasn't aware of that until someone from my district brought it to my attention, and I'm happy that she did. That week honours the men and women who respond to emergency calls, dispatch the emergency departments and professionals and equipment and render life-saving assistance to those in need.

Whenever I get an opportunity, I speak to my district and to both of the volunteer fire departments, Pouch Cove and Torbay. I'm always amazed and impressed by their level of training and dedication to that volunteer position. We just came through Volunteer Appreciation week; they were recognized then and I'd like to publicly do so now with respect to what they do on a daily basis. They're always, always enhancing their skills, and I'll just give you an example, Speaker.

When we look at our volunteer firefighters, we don't think about the different aspects of training that they perform. So with this one, they did the powerline and safety session with respect to working underneath active powerlines. They also did ice water rescue training and high angel rope rescue training and that's, of course, in addition to all the code 4 medical calls that they respond to, house fires, structure fires, motor vehicle

accidents. They have these high angle and water rescue training as well.

So I'd just like to give a shout-out to those members of those two departments for the work that they do on a regular basis, and it's certainly impressive when you see what they do on a regular basis. My colleague from Exploits earlier spoke about the forest fires and water bombers with respect to what the province has and the fire in Small Point, Adam's Cove, Blackhead and Broad Cove. Of course, that was certainly tragic, and we applaud those who answered the call there as well, but I can certainly tell you that we had a very close call in my district on April 19.

We had a brush fire on the East Coast Trail, and it was called into the Pouch Cove department. Unfortunately, the fire was 2,500 metres off of the closest publicly maintained municipal road. So, Speaker, you can appreciate, the members of Pouch Cove volunteer had to literally drag the lines, the hoses, 2,500 metres to put out that fire. They realized what they were facing and the close proximity to homes, and they reached out to the Town of Torbay, through a mutual aid agreement that was signed, and Torbay responded as well.

I do know that Chief Sullivan reached out to Paddy's Pond, the Department of Forestry, and the call wasn't answered. There was no staff available because when they called back, 45 minutes later, the staff said that they are on as of May 1, and they were not available to answer the call.

Now, Speaker, I have to say I have grave issues with that. I emailed the Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, and explained the whole situation to him in the email. Unfortunately, I didn't even get a response from the minister, because forest fires don't wait until May 1. We had a very dry winter, with less precipitation, less snow, and of course, when this brush fire began, it quickly spread. When the province wasn't

there to answer the call, because that department, of course didn't open up until May the 1, as what was told to Chief Sullivan, it kind of left a very poor impression, a very bad impression on both Torbay and Pouch Cove fire departments.

I can tell you that two staff from Forestry did show up about an hour or so later in their personal vehicle, and they said that they were working from home. They were not in the office. They didn't have any resources. They came down to just check in. It only bodes that much harder for our volunteers dealing with that issue. Luckily, between Pouch Cove and Torbay, they knocked it down, they contained it and it didn't reach the houses, and I'm very thankful for that.

But it just goes to show the level of volunteerism that is needed throughout our province from our volunteer firefighters. It is truly, truly impressive when we see what they do on a regular basis. As I said, we just came through Volunteer Appreciation Week. I'm very happy, between my CA and I, we attended four events for volunteer appreciation in my district. There will be another one this week in the Town of Flatrock that I'm hoping to attend.

But it gives us, unfortunately, a stark reminder when we saw what happened out in the CBN area and how quickly that it can spread. Now, luckily, yes, the province was available and they did respond with the water bombers at that time, but I can tell you, when the call was made on April 19 from Chief Sullivan in Pouch Cove with no response, it didn't sit very well at all. So I would like to just give them a shout-out to thank both departments for what they do on a regular basis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: I do know, and I've said here many times before, they are the heart and soul of communities that have volunteer departments. I realize we have Members here in districts that don't have a volunteer

department, but I'm sure they do realize the importance of them. I can certainly say that I'm very proud of the members in my district. My son, Zacharey, just recently got his 10-year pin for Pouch Cove volunteer, and I certainly appreciate that as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I got a couple of minutes left, and I just want to touch on the ambulatory services for a moment with respect to my district and the continued challenges that are there.

On a bright note, I will share with this House that my daughter is soon going to be graduating from the College of the North Atlantic paramedicine program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you.

She is certainly proud of that. I firmly believe it's from a good impression from her older brother being a volunteer firefighter and a high angle rope rescue technician that she went into the paramedicine field. But I can tell you, Speaker, she quickly realized after doing her 15-week clinical, the parameters that ambulatory services have to work around and work within, and the difficulties that they have trying to provide that crucial, important service.

She, of course, never breaches confidentiality, that's one thing, but she does have a ritual of doing a debrief with Mom and I when she gets home from her shift. She talks about her day and it helps no, doubt, but realizing the shortfalls that are there and how that can be improved, that's something that we can certainly work towards and look for a better outcome.

Speaker, I appreciate the time I was given to speak, again here, on Concurrence today on these couple of topics. I will have the chance to speak again as we move forward. I thank you for your time and your attention.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Rural Economic Development, and Labour.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's great seeing you in that Chair. I know how much you love being there. It's great always to speak here in this House of Assembly, this hon. House. It's always a great honour to speak on behalf of my constituents for the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, and of course now my new portfolio.

But before I get started, I'd like to extend a heartfelt congratulations to our new Premier, Premier John – oh, Premier Hogan. Sorry, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. PARSONS: To our Premier, and of course as well I would like to congratulate my colleague, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. It was an outstanding campaign, very professional and cohesive campaign. It was very classy. So hats off to everybody involved. Of course, we look forward to continuing that good work and moving it forward.

Also, Speaker, I would like to recognize and thank all the firefighters who have come together recently in Adam's Cove. It's in the neighbouring district of mine. We know a lot of damage happened throughout. I think it was more than a dozen homes that were impacted. So our hearts and our prayers are certainly with those residents.

But a big sincere thank you to all the volunteer firefighters who came together for that. I know a number of volunteer firefighters came from my district as well to help. In particular, members from Harbour Grace, but I do know Spaniard's Bay and

Bay Roberts also were involved, so a heartfelt thank you.

That's the thing about our volunteer firefighters. When a community is in need, they come together like a team throughout the region. So hat's off to them. I always say we sleep easier at night knowing that these men and women are there ready to answer the call.

Before I move on to my district words, I would also like to send condolences out to the family and loved ones of Mark Hiscock. As we know, Mark will go down in history as one of the best and most celebrated musicians here in our great province. He was a friend as well, a great person. Anybody who knows Mark knows that he was such a good person. As a matter of fact, over the years, we've had chats and we've talked about politics. I think he may have had an interest or a passion. I've certainly encouraged him.

But heartfelt condolences to Mark's family and whatnot. He certainly will be missed. He's left such a great contribution and a legacy that will never be forgotten.

So, moving on, of course, it's that time of year. As we know, it's the roadwork construction season. We have a short window here in Newfoundland and Labrador. But I'm happy to say we're getting significant roadwork in my district. I want to thank my colleagues for working with me, some good roadwork that needs to be done, in particular on Route 70 from Spaniard's Bay, from around the Restaurant 99 area up in through Spaniard's Bay past Holy Redeemer school. So we're going to get some roadwork done there.

Also, Upper Island Cove and as well as Port de Grave. Currently, workers are actually conducting work to replace the seawall along beautiful coastal Spaniard's Bay. I can remember that same seawall was there when I was just a little girl living there. That's my hometown. But I'm really happy

to see that work happening now to replace that. Because, as we know, our climate is changing and oftentimes those roads get washed out when we have a big sea and a big storm, especially within hurricane season, which as we know happens at the late summer toward the fall. So it's good to see that work done.

Also, back on the topic of firefighters, I recently celebrated with the Town of Spaniard's Bay, Tilton, as they received their new fire truck. It took a couple of years in the making but, as we know, it takes some time to actually get that. It's well deserving to help provide them with the equipment and the resources that they need to keep our residents safe. It was a great day.

It was on Saturday a couple of weeks ago – actually, the Easter weekend. We all gathered at the department. Town councils and councillors were there. The residents were invited. It was an open house and, of course, our volunteer firefighters were there. Again, not just from that department in Spaniard's Bay, but other departments such as Bay Roberts came by, Harbour Grace, Upper Island Cove and Bay de Grave. It's really good to see everybody come together for that.

Recently, the previous premier was out just before Christmas to announce that we will be getting another fire truck for the Town of Bay Roberts. They cover a huge area. Again, it's a regional effort and they all come together. So thank you very much to our volunteer firefighters. As their MHA, of course, they have my full support in anything I can do to advocate on their behalf to help put the resources in their reach to keep people safe, because they put their lives on the line and I can't say enough about them.

Also recently, Speaker, I attended a ceremony of the Battle of the Atlantic. As we know, Newfoundland and Labrador played a crucial role in that conflict in the Second

World War. The Battle of the Atlantic was actually the longest continuing event in the Second World War. Again, it's the same sort of approach, all the Legions in the area come together, they actually rotate the locations on where they do this commemoration each and every year. This past year, it was in Spaniard's Bay at the Legion.

I'd like to give a special recognition to – he's a veteran, actually, of the Merchant Navy of World War II – Mr. Johnny Pauls. That man, we just celebrated – he is in his 90s and he still makes the effort to put his Legion uniform on and get out to attend every event that the Legion has. So hats off to him and I thank him very much for his service. I must say, it's always nice to see his smiling face there.

We have a lot of great volunteers throughout our province, and of course my district is no exception. I always say our community spirit throughout all of my communities in Conception Bay North are outstanding. There's a lot of dedication from residents there. Recently, just last week, I went and attended the Harbour Grace Hall of Fame awards. I want to thank Don Regular and Zoe Anderson for the work that they put into this to commemorate all ages and all residents from the younger to the older and to celebrate their achievements and their dedication as well to sport and to our Museum Hall of Fame.

When I was there, Speaker, I had the honour to announce some funding. As we know, Amelia Earhart, there's a huge aviation history in the Town of Harbour Grace. Back in 1932, Amelia left the historic Harbour Grace airstrip to make that nonstop transatlantic flight – the very first woman to do so. She's only the third statue of a woman in our great province. And, as we know, recently, the statue went missing that used to stand in the Spirit of Harbour Grace Park there. There is a big plane overlooking the harbour where we know the SS Kyle is,

and of course there was a big, beautiful statue of Amelia Earhart.

As we know, and based on what we've learned in the news, somebody took the statue recently, and let me tell you, it was quite devastating and deflating, especially to the volunteers and the residents because they're proud of that history. Amelia Earhart, a world-renowned hero, a woman pioneer, and to take off from Harbour Grace, she's really put a good spotlight on Harbour Grace, and was the founder of The Ninety-Nines, a female pilot club. When they had their big conference there just a couple of years ago in Harbour Grace, they all came together. So there's a lot of community pride, and everyone was deflated in hearing the news and very disappointed.

But people are coming together. There's a lot of support. I was very pleased, in my last role as minister responsible for Women and Gender Equality, to announce \$50,000 on behalf of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador towards replacement of a new statue. That money will be awarded to the town to go toward the project for the rebuilding or the replacing of Amelia Earhart. So it was a great honour to do that.

Also recently, we're celebrating the 100th anniversary of when women gained the right to vote here in the Island of Newfoundland, Speaker, because you would be well-versed on this as well. As we know, residents – women and men – in Labrador, did not get the vote until some time later. We know that the trailblaze was led by Armine Gosling and her group of suffragists who fought long and hard, for decades, actually, to win the right to vote, to be recognized as persons. It's actually called the Persons Case. And finally, 100 years ago, they won that right to vote.

As a celebration, this year, I was very happy to make the announcement of a scholarship program. It's open to high school girls and gender-diverse from Grade 10, 11 and 12, that they can apply for a scholarship valued

at \$1,000. So there will be 100 scholarships awarded to students across Newfoundland and Labrador for this, and those applications are actually open now. I encourage all high school girls and gender-diverse to certainly apply for this. And even Grade 12 students that are currently finishing up their academic year, their graduating year, those applications are open for them. I certainly encourage everyone to apply, and it's a great showing of support.

We opened it up to young girls and gender-diverse in celebration of women winning that right to vote 100 years ago. Because as we know, unfortunately, women did not enjoy that human right to vote. They had to fight long and hard for that. So, in celebration, that's what we did do. It was an honour to hold that announcement at Ascension Collegiate high school in my district. Actually, I'm also a graduate of Ascension Collegiate and I can't say enough about the school community there. It's amazing and students can always go back years after. The school community is there to support the alumni and the students.

They also had their graduation this past week, this past Friday, and I had the opportunity to speak and to address the graduates. Congratulations to everybody, all of our graduates at Ascension Collegiate in Bay Roberts. Again, I'm obviously very proud of this high school, but they are a wonderful school community, very cohesive.

I also want to extend a congratulations and a way to go to the principal, Neil Kearley, who's actually retiring, as well as Mr. Fred Simms, who's a teacher. He taught me and he was actually my softball coach when I was there. So he's actually retiring this year. As well, Ms. Skanes, who addressed the students at the graduation.

So congratulations on your dedication and your work. I have a feeling probably it won't be the last time that they will certainly walk

through the school. I must say, it was a very busy week. But it certainly was nice to conclude the week speaking to graduates at Ascension Collegiate.

Also, I will say we are coming up on our summer tourism season in Bay Roberts and Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, and we're ready to kick off the Songs, Stages and Seafood Festival in Bay Roberts that's happening from May 24-25. I encourage everybody to make the excursion around the bay. Come out and see what they're all about. There's also wonderful, local talent, as well as great seafood by a lot of local chefs. It's a real fun event. I'm also happy to announce \$10,000 toward this festival again this year. So many good things happening, of course, around our province.

As you mentioned, Speaker, I am grateful and I'm honoured to serve in a new role now as Minister of Rural Economic Development, Labour, as well as WorkplaceNL. Something that I'll be focusing on in this role is the rural economic development in particular. I look forward to getting around Newfoundland and Labrador and meeting with residents and business owners all across our province. Because, as we know, we have so many great industries here in our province.

I always say we have the pure ingredients to be an abundant superpower, really, with our fishery, our minerals, our wind hydrogen. We're embarking on a new memorandum of understanding with the renegotiation of Churchill Falls, and of course our fishery. Our fishery is the reason why we all came here in the first place. I come from a fishing district, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. That said, I want to extend a congratulations and well-wishes to all harvesters and I hope they have a safe season on the water.

I want to highlight some things that we have done for rural economic development, some investments that we have made in *Budget 2025* which includes significant program

funding to support economic development in all regions of our beautiful province. For example, Speaker, \$35 million is available through the Department of Innovation, Energy and Technology to support research and development, commercialization, investment attraction, regional development and business growth activities.

In transportation alone, in our past budget – and I think it's a great budget, and I want to extend a congratulations to our Finance Minister who is also our Deputy Premier. It is a great budget, and everywhere I've gone in my district on our constituency weeks and throughout Easter, people are happy. They're happy to see that their government is listening to them, and of course that we're doing everything that we can to support the people of our province.

In *Budget 2025*, it includes a total commitment of \$316.8 million to continue to support thousands of kilometres of new paving, brush clearing, as well as new culverts and bridges. A significant amount of this work will directly impact transportation infrastructure throughout rural areas of our province. This investment will create direct employment, spin-off benefits for small businesses and ensure that roads are safe for free flow of goods and people to and from their communities.

In municipal infrastructure, *Budget 2025* includes a commitment of \$188.7 million to help towns and communities deliver strong municipal services and meet infrastructure needs, building on their long-term economic growth. These investments include water and sewer, municipal roads and recreational infrastructure and much more will all contribute to the well-being of residents and businesses throughout all regions of the province.

Connectivity is something that we've been working on for some time here in our province. It's no secret that there are certainly areas and desires for improvement, and we saw that just recently

in the wildfires. We've heard residents talk about this. So connectivity based on a multi-year commitment from federal and provincial funding investments of more than \$120 million will provide high-speed Internet to over 40,000 homes in rural, remote and Indigenous communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

As we know, Speaker, better connectivity creates new opportunities for businesses to compete locally and globally and develop stronger workforces. This was previously announced, and the work was awarded to Bell and Xplore who are implementing these improvements over the next several years, the next three years.

In education, investments in schools such as Pilley's Island and Cartwright, create construction jobs, help attract new teachers and make it more attractive to raise families in these beautiful areas. Investments in health care are investments in health of rural communities, and they help attract new residents to communities who want and need to work and to live closer to health care.

In consecutive budgets, we have made record investments in health care, as we know. Much of that investment is focused on improving access in rural communities, which helps improve the economy. We have invested substantially in recruitment and retention initiatives for health care professionals, which include hiring incentives and bonuses for accepting work in difficult-to-fill positions located in rural communities.

Also, I'll touch on, in agriculture, our programs and services reach the rural communities where most of Newfoundland and Labrador's 500 farms are located. Funding for land development and new farms address innovation, market development, food processing and environment, which help generate further employment and increase food self-sufficiency.

So a lot of great things happening. We're continuing our cost-of-living measures as well for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. As we know, the cost of living certainly has been impacted globally and so there are some great initiatives. I encourage everybody, if they can, to certainly go and research the budget and to see those good initiatives that are there.

Again, Motor Registration still remains cut in half. I think we actually have the lowest gas tax in the country, here in our province. Again, hats off to our Finance Minister; she's led this now for several years here and I'm certainly proud and confident in the work that she's doing and proud to see a good, strong woman be Deputy Premier here in our great province.

It is always an honour to get up and speak on behalf of the people of my district. We're getting ready to get into the summer months, so I look forward to getting around and seeing residents. Although I see them all the time anyway. There are always some good community events happening. The Loyal Orange Lodge just recently had a celebration as well. The Shearstown lodge hosted. Again, hats off to that organization as well, because they do so much to give back to their communities.

Again, on that note, Speaker, I'll take my seat and I'll look forward to speaking again. It's always a great honour and privilege to speak on behalf of the people of the Harbour Grace - Port de Grave District.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now recognize the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this area.

I'll start by saying I will have to leave for a while after this, since I'm going to see a dance recital of my oldest granddaughter, so you'll excuse me if that takes precedence, but I'll get my words in now before I go.

Tomorrow I'm, interestingly enough, heading up to Toronto to take part in the second part of this international conference between the State and provincial legislatures from Germany, the United States and Canadian provinces. The first meeting we had was back in, I think, it was January or February – I'm losing track of time. It's interesting, Speaker, that the issue or the topic of this is looking at what contributes to social cohesion, about inclusion in a democratic process. The title of it is Laboratories of Democracy, and it was an interesting meeting.

The first time, I was interested in Germany and just to hear the attitude or the point of view of the German legislators and how they proceed some of the issues around Ukraine and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and also in the United States legislators, between those who were Democratic as State legislators and those who were the Republican. Certainly, I think they got a very clear assessment from the Canadian legislators from across the country about a very clear understanding of world order.

The last bit we were discussing more or less – and you can imagine trying to come up with a consensus then on what makes for social cohesion. A lot of the issues lately have been discussed about how do you create an inclusive society? What's the role of education? I think the two issues that certainly I've been promoting, and others, have to do with the importance of education and also a need to address poverty.

I don't know if any of you remember Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. If you read it, you can look at it as a pleasant story, but it's also a social commentary on the situation in

Victorian England at the time. The ghost of Christmas present, the one seen where there are two very meagre looking children clinging to his legs, they are mankind's children – one is want and the other is ignorance – and the ghost said, of the two: Beware the boy – the ignorance – about the lack of education.

Certainly, I've been thinking about that in terms of what we're seeing in our world today with the whole prevalence of so-called fake news, alternate facts and so on and so forth. I have said a few times, certainly in a previous role with the NLTA, that children are our most valuable resource. That, in the end, the working conditions of teachers, those are the learning conditions of students.

I guess the other guiding belief I have and certainly when I used to read upon Jacinda Ardern, the former prime minister of New Zealand, well-being budgets, is that we do better, Speaker, when those around us are doing well.

We have a budget that announces 400 teaching units, and more than one person has written as to how much will this \$20 million really get us. The other issue, of course, has to do with the numbers of – any input of resource is going to be welcome; however, the question is being asked by many is, where are we going to get these people? Because we already have – I'm looking in the metro area – a significant number of people who are retired, some who have been retired for over a decade, subbing. Not just here in the metro area, but up in Labrador as well, and not just a few days here and there, but almost full-time in some cases.

That would have been unheard of when I was teaching here at Holy Heart back in 2013 and in my role even as president, but it's become a problem. There are schools that still do not have the resources.

The other part it comes down to is, where are we going to get the people? I do believe part of the issue is probably the conditions in the classroom itself and the remuneration.

During Estimates, and a little bit during my first response to it, I spoke of the fact of the impact on schools. On the same day that the budget was being delivered, I had a school administrator reach out to me. On that same day, they lost two units. One of the things that they wanted to know is, will they get those units back? Thirty, Grade 5's – I've had 32 level IIIs, but I'll take 32 level IIIs over 30 Grade 5's because, at that level, there are a lot of things going on. Almost half the students in that class have some identified exceptionality and others are waiting to be diagnosed.

One full-time teacher learning assistant, that's all they have for 190 students or so; 22 kindergarten students. Reading specialists have been cut 100 per cent to 50 per cent and in the learning resources centre.

When I look at it, these are the real-life issues. I heard my colleague speak about the real examples certainly with housing. Here we see it in education as well.

Last year, during IPGS Estimates, we were told that we had 686 Ukrainian children who entered the province. Almost 63 per cent of that number in the metro area and another 37 per cent in rural areas. I had a teacher recently reach out to me where schools are using their cafeterias as classrooms and, often, multiple classes at once.

So I go back to my opening comment about the importance of education. Is this the way we develop our most important resource? We've heard of early childhood educators and bursaries and so on and so forth, but no mention really of sick leave, a pension or a decent health plan. Those are the things that will keep people in that profession.

Many schools are now looking at using staff rooms as classrooms as well. Some, the same as Larkhall did last year. Remember the reconfiguration that was supposed to solve the problem? Well, it hasn't. Larkhall is now almost over 400 students again. As this teacher pointed out, the catchment is way over capacity all the way through; wants to know when the new school is going to be ready; schools are going way over capacity; wondering which programs will have dedicated space in schools and which ones won't. Is it going to be the resource teacher, English as an additional language? The question that's been asked, how about restructuring the catchment zones to send children to a less crowded school?

That's the problem we're facing here in the metro area, but the other part I often think is look at the concentration. Most of the students are in metro area, and part of that I would say, and I've spoken to a number of newcomers, is the lack of public transportation. Think about what you could do if you had a decent public transit system in the outlying area, you wouldn't have to be dependent or need to live in St. John's. People do need cars to get around but if we develop that, we could actually probably spread and allow people the opportunity to move outside the larger metro area, maybe even help solve the problem.

The other issue that still has not been addressed and needs to be addressed, Speaker, in terms of school and education, is the violence in the classroom. The Education Accord was brought in – and I will say this in response to a substitute teacher who went public about the violence in the school system. At that time, I knew of another school in the district where a teacher had her jaw broken. Recently, before Christmas, I had another example from a primary and elementary school where the student threw a chair, tripped up the teacher who, now still, has not been back to work and is severely injured.

Here's the thing: You will never get any of the teachers that I've talked to blaming the student. What they're most concerned about is the fact that that student does not have the resources or the setting that will best help him or her learn to his or her best potential, and also make sure that the students around them are safe.

There are 160-plus reports on PowerSchool related to one student. I bring this up too, because I'm afraid it's going to take something like what happened in New Brunswick again, and what happened with Carter Churchill, to get the department and get government to take the concerns seriously. New Brunswick, as I think I referenced briefly, there was an occupation and health tribunal that basically decided that the right to an inclusive education doesn't supersede the right of people to a safe working environment

A response cannot be, as in some cases, what I've heard, people wanting to have police brought into the schools. When we're talking about primary and elementary schools – and my colleague from Bonavista will confirm, probably, that most of the incidents of violence I would witness, it was probably at the primary level when the children hadn't learned to self-regulate. It wasn't malice. It was never malice. It was never intent, but people sometimes got hurt.

I guess what I'm looking at here, one thing I still need to keep harping on is that when we're looking at the putting resources into the school system, then it certainly needs to be addressed to look at the composition of the classes. Not only of the language barriers, but also the exceptionalities that impair or impede learning, and also maybe the educational deficits. Also, what do you do to help families to compensate?

That was one of the discussions at this group about equity. It seems that certain legislators from the United States did not want to use the term "equity." To me, equity is about making sure that you provide the

resources so that everyone is on a level playing field. It's different than equality. I guess equity is a way of creating equality.

So, to me, I always remember this incident from one school I was at, where the district was deciding whether the student needed two people with him at all times because the violent outbursts were no longer there, so maybe we don't need those supports. The question that was never entered, I guess, is that maybe the reason that he's no longer violent is because he has two people with him at all times. But that allowed that person to stay in the school, and also protected the people around him. It created a safe learning environment for both that student and others.

In the few minutes remaining, again I heard my colleague from Cape St. Francis speak to housing because that's the other thing, poverty and housing, I think, are linked. I attended the St. John's Summit recently, last week or week before, and it was about how do we make the downtown area safe. It was a productive discussion, I think, certainly with regard to community policing. Not in terms of being reactive, but having police, more or less, out in the community building trust, building that sense of community and so on and so forth.

The other piece, of course, was housing. I will tell you this – and I'll certainly get a chance to come back to this at some point: rents. I've heard the same stories and I've told about the same stories in here about increase in rent. Single moms, single parents, working three jobs and barely keeping up on it but here's the thing. I don't know about people here, but I know when my wife and I were first married, we rented first and part of that was to save for a downpayment on a house. That was, sort of, the entry level or entrance into owning a home. Because there is still a strong need for people to own their homes. That's still something that people desire to have. No one sets out, I guess, to rent for their entire

lives but here's the thing. At least, at that time, we could.

Here's what we find. People are paying a mortgage in rent. To me, \$2,200 is a mortgage. It's probably more than what you'd pay in a mortgage. Think about this. Those same people, even if they keep it up, will never qualify for a mortgage. They'll never have a downpayment. People are paying a mortgage or more in rent and will never be considered, by banks, for a mortgage.

So it goes back to, I think, here – and I encountered this, too, even during the last federal election when I was going around with the NDP candidate for St. John's East and I was bringing her around to the apartments, these REITs, these Real Estate Investment Trusts. As far as I'm concerned, they're predatory but each one of them, they have had increases anywhere from \$50 a month up to \$160 a month, each year.

REITs buy up the properties cheap and jack up the rents. They will squeeze whatever they can out of the people living there. So one of the reasons I have been pushing here and we've been pushing as a party is on rent controls, rent and vacancy controls, especially on these large, financialized landlords is to keep people from being evicted because they can no longer afford the rent. Many of them will say that going into these apartments, Speaker, it's the housing last resort. They have nowhere to go.

I know I've heard the issue, the counter argument, that it will discourage investment. Well, I will say this, this is not the type of investment we need, because these REITs and other large financial landlords, they're not building new homes; they're buying up properties. It's an investment fund. That's what it comes down to.

From my point of view, if we want to keep people housed, it won't solve the housing problem, but it will stabilize it and keep

people from being unhoused. Yet, there's resistance. We hear talk about stakeholders. I will tell you right now, the REITs, large, financialized landlords are not doing anyone any favours. If anything else, if we want to stabilize and give people a chance at maybe saving for their own home, we can start putting some controls around rents.

I'll have more to say the next time I speak.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I now call on the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Community Engagement.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good evening, everyone.

What a pleasure it is to be able to stand up in the hon. House and speak about my new position, new portfolio of Municipal Affairs and Community Engagement. I'm also pleased to stand up to represent the wonderful people of the District of Burin - Grand Bank.

As well, I certainly would like, while I'm up, to thank the staff of CSSD for a great ride. The last couple of years, I must say, they were a very dedicated staff and I was so pleased to work in that department.

My department focuses on supporting the economic and social sustainability of municipalities, communities and regions through the delivery of programs, services and supports to local governments. This is done through legislative and financial land-use planning services, training and funding for municipalities through various programs.

Our department has approximately 60 staff, with offices located throughout the province.

We have an office in St. John's West Block building, and staff in Corner Brook and Gander. I'm certainly looking forward to meeting and working with the staff of Municipal Affairs and Community Engagement, as I continue to learn about my new portfolio.

My colleague Dr. Haggie –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. PIKE: Minister Haggie, sorry.

SPEAKER: The minister.

P. PIKE: He certainly gave me a great rundown on the staff of Municipal Affairs and Community Engagement and indicated what a dedicated staff they were.

For me, this is a good portfolio, given the fact that in my previous life, I spent 28 years on council in the Town of St. Lawrence as a councillor, as a deputy mayor and a mayor. This portfolio is something I really wanted. I also spent time with the board, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador board. I also spent time as a communications chair with the Municipal Assessment Agency. So this certainly fits my profile.

During my time on council, I had an opportunity to meet with many mayors and many dedicated individuals who were very much a part of their councils. I always call councillors the ultimate volunteers in the sense that they certainly give of themselves unselfishly and work with the communities to make our communities in Newfoundland and Labrador a better place to live and work.

I'd also like to thank the councillors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador who will be offering themselves for election. Election date has been set for October 2, 2025, and hopefully we'll be able to attract a lot of people to run. I think that's something

that our department will be working on. We've already started, by the way.

Getting people out is going to be very important, and getting people out not only to vote, but getting people to actually offer themselves as councillors. Many times, in small communities, people offer themselves or put their names forward, but it's always the same people doing these things in our communities, volunteering and so on. Let's hope that this year, with our Make Your Mark campaign and other campaigns that we will be doing in the next little while we'll attract more people to actually run for council.

As you know, municipalities play a crucial role in strengthening our communities. This year, my department is investing key funding initiatives to support vibrant and sustainable communities. We have \$187.5 million for funding programs and grants, including MOGs, we call them, or Municipal Operating Grants of \$28 million; Special Assistants Grants, we call them SAG grants in the municipal world, \$6.9 million; Community Enhancement Employment Program, \$4.9 million; provincial gas tax, \$7.1 million; and the Canada Community-Building Fund, \$140.5 million in federal funding.

We have \$350,000 to support the 2025 general and municipal elections which will be held in our cities, towns and, for the first time, Local Service Districts on October 2, 2025. Our funding includes developing an election tool kit for interested communities. We will also be offering volunteer training for those councils that need it for their municipal election officers, such as returning officers.

It includes creating a public awareness campaign, Make Your Mark, as I previously mentioned, in collaboration with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, who are a great partner to us, and Equal Voice Newfoundland and Labrador to encourage new and diverse candidates to

step forward for the October 2025 municipal elections.

We have to motivate our volunteers to run as well. We have to motivate our volunteers to get out and offer themselves for this important – one of the most important organizations within their town would be their community councils.

From a legislative perspective, during this past winter sitting of the House of Assembly, our government implemented amendments to the *Urban and Rural Planning Act, 2000* and the *City of St. John's Municipal Taxation Act*. These amendments are helping to further strengthen municipalities legislative authority and to encourage more housing developments and access to affordable homes.

The amendments also modernized three pieces of our legislation and provide a clarification to municipalities with respect to tools that enable housing developments. In the case of the *Urban and Rural Planning Act, 2000*, the amendments facilitate inclusionary zoning, incentive or bonus zoning, virtual public meetings and modernization of public notification methods.

As for the *City of St. John's Municipal Taxation Act*, the amendments provide gender-neutral language and allow real property tax exemptions to help enable affordable housing development projects – very important. Each of these amendments align with our province's Five-Point Plan as well as the federal government's funding program in support of housing.

In addition, the department proclaimed the new *Towns and Local Service Districts Act* which replaced the *Municipalities Act, 1999* and this happened on January 1, 2025. This new modern and enabling legislation reflects the current and evolving nature of towns and Local Service Districts. The new legislation also acknowledges the role of our

Local Service Districts in providing services to the residents and strengthening their accountability.

The department has offered a series of in-person training sessions, which have been very well attended, to date. The training sessions are designed to help and inform key stakeholders such as professional municipal administrators, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and communities about new legislation.

The department also holds voluntary and mandatory training sessions and information sessions with municipalities every spring and fall. In addition, individual sessions are held annually with councils and staff on everything from orientation to council responsibilities, to budgeting and other information. For instance, as mentioned previously, this year the department will be offering voluntary training for municipal election officials such as returning officers.

One of the things I wanted to talk about is the code of conduct. This time, I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication put forward by councillors and all municipalities to have a code of conduct in place. This is very important. In a perfect world, as we all know, there'll be no need of having a code of conduct, but reality is that we need them. This is an important process that had been put in place to protect residents in municipalities and elected municipal officials. Municipal codes of conduct are essential tools to strengthen municipal governments.

Community collaboration: Our government recognizes that many of our province's municipalities are facing a wide range of challenges related to aging infrastructure, inability to deliver enhanced services and so on. A collaborative, shared services approach can provide many benefits and help communities overcome challenges that they may be facing. We are seeing that in a lot of areas where we see fire departments taking over multiple communities. I know the

Burin fire department, in my district, they take care of five communities. That's the kind of co-operation and collaboration that's required in some areas. This pooling together of resources is really helping certain areas.

Before I end, I would just like to talk about the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award that the previous minister had announced. The Derrick Bragg Leadership Award is a memorial award established to honour our colleague and good friend, the late Derrick Bragg.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: This award will acknowledge and recognize individuals that make a significant and lasting contribution within Newfoundland and Labrador's municipal sector.

The Derrick Bragg Leadership Award will be granted annually at the Professional Municipal Administrators fall forum to one recipient who has to be a town clerk, a town manager, town clerk/manager or chief executive officer that demonstrates dedication to their municipality, municipal sector and public service.

It's important I mention this as well, as many of you know, nominations have been opened and have been opened for some time for this award, but the deadline is May 16. Today is May 12. So if you know somebody out there, make sure your towns know. We've sent all this information out a couple of times but make sure your towns know. There are a lot of good people that work in these positions in communities. I encourage you to reflect on these administrators and those who go above and beyond for residents.

For more information on the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award, please visit my department's website or have your town do so.

Anyway, I certainly look forward to working in this position, and hopefully I can bring some of my knowledge that I've learned over the years to this particular department.

Thank you very much. I've been told that my time has ended.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to have a few words now, and I'm going to speak about the minister who just spoke, the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I remember when you were the mayor of St. Lawrence and you fought hard for your town, I must say. I remember there was one piece of land that you needed done and it was on private land. You needed the money for the water and sewer, and I couldn't do it because it was private land. I'd like to see how many pieces of private land you're going to put water and sewer in.

Now you understand it's a bit of difference when you're in the department to do it, but I have to say you did fight for your town and we had a lot of frank discussions on that issue and many more on behalf of your town. I just want to say we go way back in the discussions, and you were a very strong mayor for your Town of St. Lawrence, and I want to recognize that.

The sugar tax, that was going to be scrapped. I can't wait for the legislation to come forward in this House so we can discuss that, but I just want to make it quite clear to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, that sugar tax, when we worked out that deal, myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, with the Opposition and the minister, that money was supposed to be put in education for health across the province with diabetes,

heart and stroke and that. That was the deal. That's what the Minister of Finance said.

Once we got in, it went into general revenues. If I'm saying something wrong, stand up because the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands was there and we worked that out to get that legislation through and we were told that. So this wouldn't be a bigger issue if we knew it was going through heart and stroke, was going for the children's diabetes, for education across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. So that was the big fuss that I always had with that sugar tax.

Now, of course, the minister is not standing up, so I'm assuming that she agrees. I know she may not recall. I heard that before, I don't recall, but I can tell you, to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, that is what the purpose of the sugar tax; it wasn't to put into use how they wanted to. And I think if we had to use the sugar tax as agreed to by the minister, we would have done a lot better in Newfoundland and Labrador, around this province for education in schools and other activities that are health related.

S. COADY: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: The minister is saying I'm right. I know I'm right because I was out there.

I'm going to go through this – I'm going to have a few words on each one of the topics.

The Education Department, now – and this is so confusing, Education or transportation and works? The school bus stopping, the school buses – and I wrote the minister at the time of transportation and works, and he's the Minister of Tourism now. I wrote him on four or five occasions. I have to get it straight because I know the minister is currently over there listening attentively. This is so important, because there's a second issue that came up.

There was a school bus stop for 32 years in one place. It was stopped this year. The minister of Transportation and Infrastructure sent out and said here's the reason why it was stopped. I don't know even know if it reached your level, Minister of Tourism.

It stopped because they said it was where the old Atlantic Gypsum plant, that area, and they said it's unsafe. Then in the letter that was sent to me, they would have to get off up the Station Road and walk down because they had a sidewalk to walk home. That was in the initial letter that was sent to me.

I wrote you back – and I don't even know if it reached your level, I have to say. I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt. I don't even know if it reached your level. So I know the new Minister of Transportation is listening attentively, because it is safety – it is safety.

What I did, I actually sent pictures where there's no sidewalk, where the kids had to walk, no sidewalks. It's around the turn whereby they actually have to walk on the road. In the letter – this is why people lose faith in government – they said to the parent, you have to lobby the City of Corner Brook to cut down the trees because it's out on the road. We're having a seven-year-old and an eight-year-old walk on the road, walk around the turn, where are trees out, because someone said that the bus now is unsafe.

No one knows who it was. I wrote the minister, and I'll be writing the new minister also. Who made the decision? No one will tell me who made the decision. The parents can't meet with anybody because they don't know who made the decision. The other part about it, they said the bus is unsafe. Again, the former minister, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, I will, because I don't know even know if it reached your level. Someone said, ah, fool that – and I wrote about five times. I took pictures of the bus driver getting out. I could flick a cigarette

butt where he was smoking and hit his bus. The child had to walk out, walk on the sidewalk, walk on the bus to get on. But they said it's unsafe.

There are pictures in that office of him standing up smoking, here to that chair right there away, right on the sidewalk, but it was unsafe. When he stops his run at the day, that's where he stops, right there. And there was no one who would make a decision.

I even sent pictures this winter. I was so adamant. I took pictures this winter of the car, where I stopped the car, and the whole sidewalk, the whole part is all gravel, even the trees, was on the road. There wouldn't be another car pass. There are no sidewalks. But these two kids, seven and eight, had to walk there.

The grandparent has to come everyday, pick them up and drop them off, up the road which is over 300 or 400 metres away, because someone – and no one knows who, because it's either Education or Transportation and Infrastructure, but no one knows who's making the decisions and you can't talk to anybody. The pictures are in the office.

I'll say to the current Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, I'll be writing you on this because this is serious. It is serious. There's another one now out in Lark Harbour, Little Port Road, over 30 years, used to stop right in front of their house and walk across the road. Now, all of a sudden, someone said, well, you can go 300 metres down the road, there's a stop. Here's the part about this. Here's who wanted to keep that bus stop where it was at: the parent, the child, the bus driver and the school.

To this date, I don't know who made the decision, because there's one person in Education saying, no, it's Transportation. I don't even know who's head of it out there making the decision. I don't even know and

you can't find out. This is why people lose faith in government.

It's such a simple, simple fix, but for some reason no one wants to take the responsibility to make the decision. I will be writing the new Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and I'll be sending all the letters. I'll be sending all the pictures. Again, tell the parents who they can speak to in Corner Brook or wherever, who made the decision. We don't know. It's sad.

Now, out in Lark Harbour, the same thing, making a six-year-old child walk 300 metres. Out there now, we've got the *Baltic III*. They're building a road, and the government did give the permits fast enough. Now they're going to build a road for light-duty trucks. We have heavy-duty trucks coming along that Little Port Road, which the minister knows also, it's in very bad shape. There are heavy trucks bringing rocks out there. They're bringing gravel out up to \$8 million- and \$10 million-project out there and this little kid has to walk alongside that road, and we don't know who made the decision, why they changed it. It was 30 years that one – the first one was 32, the other one is 30.

Even the principal of the school wrote and said, please keep it there. They won't keep it there. The bus driver said there's nothing wrong with it. We've been doing it for years. There is nothing wrong with it.

So this is the kind of thing that irritate people and myself, with such an easy fix when you want to get it done. That's the part that I just can't understand why someone in the department can't sit down and work out an agreement with the parents and the schools. Actually telling kids, seven and eight years old to walk alongside the road where there's a sidewalk, where in the minister's office there are pictures, there's no sidewalk. Please check the pictures. There are absolutely none.

Then writing and saying where the trees are out over this rugged little corner, about a foot long, little gutter where there's a curb inside to the big retaining wall, telling the parents they have to write the city and get the trees removed because they're out on the road, and they can't get it done.

Wintertime – go check the pictures I sent in – I actually parked my car and I walked back and I took pictures on a Sunday morning and the car is out in the middle of the road. The person who made the decision in Corner Brook, I still don't know, can't find out. No one will let me know or the parents know. This might be small, but it's big to a lot of people, a lot of kids.

I'm going to move on now and talk about the education part, the Sacred Heart. I wrote the former minister too on Sacred Heart – nice school, small school down at the bottom of the road from me. I went to school there. I coached basketball there for 11, 12 years. Right now, you can't even get an answer back. The front of the building and the side, it looks like it's ragged, like no one lives there, just trying to get it painted – and every time you talk to anybody in Corner Brook, oh, you have to go to the Department of Education in St. John's. You can't even get the place painted. You can't even get a response from a letter asking can you do some work on the school. It's a proud school.

The school there, I guess, was there 75 years, 74; well-built school, all concrete; a lot of pride in the school. It's a great school. A lot of kids in the school that come out, move on, their education in the school but it looks like it's rundown. You can't even get an answer to a letter.

When you write and you expect to get an answer come back and say, no, we're not doing it, at least you can pass it on and say it's not going to be done. But when you don't get a response, it just shows lack of concern, the arrogance of it all. The actual arrogance that the parents and the principals who come to me, let's make our

school a bit pretty, let's make us proud and not get a response, there's something fundamentally wrong.

If you're walking along now, the fence in by Sacred Heart, all the kids got together, it's all hearts made up different colours; let's show love. There must be about 150 hearts. Every one of the kids put a heart on the fence, got it wired on, yet they can't get a bit of paint put on the school. Can't get a bit of cement falling off on the ground, they got to go out, the maintenance has to come down and brush it up – falling off, can't get it done. You can't even get a response to a letter to get it done. It's not a lot of work. Just give pride back to the school. That's why people get so upset with governments when they're in there too long. That's a prime example.

Health and Community Services – now, this is another one that's been on the go out our way. I've been saying it for two or three years, you're going to have an influx of people, long-term care patients who are going to move in the hospital. I've been warning for two years. They made the move. Guess what?

Sixty-two patients that were in the old Western Memorial hospital were moved into acute-care beds in the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital. When patients come in now to the emergency department and they need to be put into beds, they can't get put in. They're either waiting there in the stretchers in the hallways, a lot of them go home and I've been telling government that. The part of the plan was they were supposed to build a couple of more bungalows for the long-term care patients for when the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital opened up. It wasn't done. It was neglect.

If you want to hear complaints about a hospital, where we hear today all the big announcement about how many doctors we've got, how many nurses we've got, Family Care Teams, come to the West Coast. Ask the Member for St. George's-

Humber how many calls he's getting. Pasadena, Deer Lake – ask him. I'm getting the calls.

It's something that we should work on. I've been trying to find out about the PET scanner. The PET scanner was supposed to be into the original plan when the radiation unit was put in. Then it was cancelled by this government. This government, back in 2021, made the big announcement, oh, we're going to put \$2 million into the PET scanner after taking it out, like robbing someone, and saying now I'm going to give you back your money –

AN HON. MEMBER: Like the sugar tax.

E. JOYCE: Like the sugar tax.

What happened then, they said, oh, now we're going to announce the PET scanner but what they forgot to tell the people – and if you tell the people and explain it, they will listen. They may not agree but, at least, they'll have an explanation. What they forgot to tell the people – and this is the sad part. This is people's lives we're dealing with here.

With the PET scanner, once you buy the PET scanner and just say, here's the money and we're going to buy the PET scanner and everybody is right happy. What they forgot to tell the people, it's going to take us six to eight months, a year to get a PET scanner. Once we do get the PET scanner, then it's going to take another two years to get it certified.

So back in 2020, if they had to follow through on what you were supposed to do, the commitment was made with the new hospital and have the PET scanner, it'd be certified now but we've got to wait now to buy one, then we have to turn around now and wait for it to be certified for another two years, so we're looking at three years for a PET scanner that's supposed to be in the new hospital. And there are people out there from Western Newfoundland who

have to drive from Western Newfoundland in here for a 15-minute, 20-minute PET scan and go back home, when it could be done in Corner Brook.

The doctors – well, I won't get into the doctors because we hear so much about the Family Care Team. That was announced three years ago in Corner Brook and still none yet. Health care is vital, and it's the biggest single issue that I hear in Corner Brook and Western Newfoundland is health care. I know people, and I know them personally, because they were trying to get stuff, had an operation on cancer. After the third day, still living in a hallway after the operation, the wife came in, took her husband home. Took him home because he didn't want to be in there anymore because he had to rush to the washroom – out in the hallway, had to rush to a public washroom. Little jacket on, get up out of his bed, rush to the washroom, all the germs and all the people coming by him, so she actually went in and took her husband and brought him home because he'd be safer home than the hospital. And this shouldn't happen. This should not happen.

When I hear all the big announcements about health care – and I said it to the Premier, I said it to the former minister, I'll say it to this minister, if you want to know about health care concerns, you think I'm just up here talking trying to embarrass the government, come out and go to the emergency department. Come out – I'll even arrange the meetings for you.

Come out and meet the doctors themselves and let them tell you what the issues are. Come out and show me where that Family Care Team is at. Come out and meet the people who have to come in here now to get a scan done. Come out and show the people out there where radiation was supposed to be open in 2023, no radiation. Come out and meet those patients who have to come in here for six months to take radiation and can't get it done out in Corner Brook because they dropped the ball on

trying to get a radiation oncologist over the years.

This is not something that I'm just bringing up here and trying to embarrass the government. This is reality – this is reality. And I always said the happiest day that I'm going to be as a politician, when the first person gets radiation in Corner Brook. But from '20 up until '24-'25, those four years, there was no recruitment for radiation oncology. I know it.

I know a person at the cancer clinic here, a doctor, who wanted to move to Corner Brook – he's from Corner Brook by the way. I still have the text message on my phone. I know the family well. He wanted to move to Corner Brook to start setting up the radiation unit and health care. He was actually denied leave. That is the issue. He was denied leave to go out to Corner Brook to start setting up the cancer unit.

I ask anybody here, who's better to recruit people in the cancer care field than a doctor who's already in the cancer care field? Who's better? Because he has contacts all around the world. But he was denied. Then finally, after a bit of pressure – and I went to him again. I said: Are you interested? He said: No, the kids just started high school. He said they want to graduate with their friends here in St. John's, so he wasn't moving to Corner Brook. It was a shame. It was shameful.

This is where I feel that the need and the level of concern by this government to have that radiation, to have that PET scanner up and running was fated. It was just gone for some reason. I can tell you one thing, there are more people suffering today who have to travel to St. John's to get radiation or to get a scan done, a PET scan, go to the PET scanner here in St. John's. They should not have to do it if government had to do their work. They should not have to do it.

So I'm calling on the government, even if you can't do something, even if you can't, at

least explain it to the people so they can understand. But trying to skid the idea that this PET scanner, we just bought one, is going to be set up tomorrow is false. It's absolutely false.

First of all, taking a PET scanner out of the original agreement, letter from the former premier saying yes, it's in there. Going public and saying yes, it's in there and taking it out and giving it back and saying look how good we are, forgetting to say it's going to take three, four years to have it up and running.

This is the concern about health care in Western –

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order!

The Member's time is expired.

E. JOYCE: Thank you.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's so great to see a full House over here to listen to my speech. It was wonderful to see them all coming in.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: I knew you were – with bated breath.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, great to have an opportunity to speak, as always. I have a few different issues I want to sort of raise.

The first one I want to raise is Marine Atlantic. I guess it would fall under Tourism, but it could certainly fall under – Tourism was a big part of it, but also Industry and so on and economic development as well. And Transportation, certainly.

We all understand the importance of Marine Atlantic for our province. I was very pleased

to hear Prime Minister Carney when he was campaigning, at least – I think maybe after he was sworn in as prime minister; I could be wrong on that. Basically, he has indicated that Marine Atlantic rates should be cut by at least half. That was his words: at least half. That's very encouraging to hear that.

I guess my question would be to the minister and to the Premier and so on – I know Prime Minister Carney was only elected recently – what are the plans now to meet with the prime minister or with the minister responsible for Marine Atlantic, federally, and get the ball rolling on those Marine Atlantic rates dropped?

Certainly, when it comes to Marine Atlantic, it's not just the lowering of the rates that needs to happen, but my understanding from industry, tourism and so on is that we have issues with capacity as well. So we need to look at increasing capacity and lowering the rates. Again, that important for the economic development of this province and it's important for tourism in this province.

When we talk about knocking down interprovincial trade barriers, as I've heard the Premier say and others say before, probably one of the biggest barriers we have to interprovincial trade in this province is transportation, is Marine Atlantic. It's a big piece of it.

So I would certainly encourage the minister or the Premier and whoever else might be involved to reach out to your federal counterparts and let's get the ball rolling on reducing those ferry rates and increasing capacity on the Marine Atlantic ferries.

Speaking of the interprovincial trade and so on that ties into the tariff issue, we all recognize about a month or two ago – it was a couple of months ago now I think – the province launched the buy right here campaign. I haven't heard much about it since to be honest, not a whole lot, and at

that point in time we were talking about interprovincial trade. I know there was an MOU signed with New Brunswick, I think, recently, which is good to hear. But we also talked about the need to expand our markets and so on, our trading partners throughout the world and we also talked about the need to buy and support local.

That's something that I just want to raise here because I've had a people reach out to me over the last few weeks. One I want to speak to the Minister of Finance about personally, which I will talk to her about when I get an opportunity, a specific case, but I've had a few cases of people coming to me that have concerns about the fact that even though the government is talking about the need of supporting local business, supporting Canadian business, supporting Canadian products and so on, that I'm being told that's not necessarily the case.

There have been concerns brought to my attention around the tendering processes. One particular thing was one contract recently – I won't go into all the details, but the bottom line is there was a contract and the way that the tender was written, clearly, the products that they were looking for, the certification they were looking for, was a US certification, not a Canadian. The tender was awarded to a company supplying US-based products and it could have been done here for a \$2-million contract, I was told. Instead, we went to another company here and we're going to pay \$5 million versus \$2 million buying US products versus buying Canadian products. That's just one example, but I've had a number of people reach out about that.

So I have to ask how serious we truly are, when it comes to this notion of buy local, buy from Newfoundland and Labrador companies, buy Canadian companies and has that message been sent to our Procurement Agency? Has that message been sent to all the departments? Was that just a one-time splash in the pan announcement in reaction to the tariffs, or

are we truly serious about buying local and supporting local?

I'm not sure what's happening there but I would say to the minister, to the government, if we are serious about it then every department, every minister, should be talking to those responsible for procurement in their departments, certainly through the Procurement Agency, for sure, and all the departments to say, listen guys, we need to find ways within the realms of legislation and trade agreements and everything that might exist, but we need to find every reason to include Canadian, local companies, not find ways to exclude them for some flimsy reason, to start giving stuff out to US companies and so on. We should be making that concerted effort to buy local, to buy Canadian. I'm not sure that that's necessarily happening. I'm not sure that's happening.

I would say likewise, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, as I said to your predecessor, I believe, before we shut down, have we reached out to the municipalities in this province? Has the Minister of Municipal Affairs reached out to MNL that represent municipalities in this province and encouraged them to buy local Newfoundland and Labrador products, to buy Canadian products and to boycott US products? Have you done that? I don't know. I don't think you have. Maybe you have.

I can speak to the City of Mount Pearl on their own initiative. No one told them to do it but on their own initiative, they've taken their own initiative to do everything they can to buy local and to buy Canadian. As a matter of fact, the councillors, as well, have banned all US travel. So if they have conferences and stuff they would normally go to, they are no longer going to participate in any conferences or anything or staff are not fully participating in any conferences in the US. It'll only be Canadian conferences and Canadian travel only. That's an initiative the City of Mount Pearls has taken on their

own initiative. Every municipality should be doing the same thing if we're serious.

I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the government have a role to reach out to them and encourage them to do so. That doesn't just apply to core government departments. It should also apply to government agencies, boards and commissions and so on – if we're serious. The jury is out, as far as I'm concerned, if they were truly serious or not.

The next issue I want to raise relates to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing programs. We know there are some good programs out there. There's the Provincial Home Repair Program if people had a leaky roof or need repairs to their home. There's an energy efficiency program through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and then there's also the program for people who have disabilities and so on – Home Modification Program.

All good programs but the problem with the programs – I'm sure other Members have had this as well – you've got to be just above or below the poverty level in order to qualify. It all looks good on paper, but the household income threshold is so low that pretty much most all seniors, unless you're at the very, very, absolute bottom, you don't qualify for the programs.

I think a household income of \$32,500, I think it is – just think about it now. You've got a husband and a wife and they own a home. They've got to pay for the upkeep on their home. They've got to pay taxes and everything else. They have an income of \$32,500 to do that with and you need to have that or lower in order to qualify for any assistance for these programs to help keep them in their homes. We're talking about keeping seniors in their homes – the importance of keeping seniors in their homes.

It is very difficult to be talking about that and expect that to happen when you're offering

assistance through programs that have such a very low threshold. I would say \$32,500, a more realistic number is probably \$50,000. Off the top of my head, in today's world with today's –

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that gross?

P. LANE: Yes, gross. That's, again, off the top of my head, just to be reasonably in a range that can help people. Speaker, \$32,500 might have been okay 10 or 15 years ago, maybe, but not today. So I would ask the government, that's something that needs to be reviewed and considered to change.

My colleague here from Humber - Bay of Islands talked about the issues with doctors, whether it be family doctors or whether it be doctors in these care clinics, whatever the case might be. No doubt, we all know we have an issue when it comes to primary health care. I don't care what anybody says, 811 doesn't cut it. Pretty much everyone I've ever talked to said when they called 811, they were told to go to the emergency. So why we're paying – and I can't remember what the amount is now, but I remember we looked into that before. It was a significant chunk of change that we're paying for that 811 service. What's the number you say?

AN HON. MEMBER: I think it's \$75 a call.

P. LANE: It's \$75 a call? I think it was more than that, but anyway, it was a pretty outrageous sum, I can remember, when we looked into it about a year or two ago, just to be told go to the emergency. What a waste of money, really.

And then virtual care, it might be okay in certain circumstances. Depending on what it is, it might be okay to get a routine prescription filled or something like that, perhaps. But we all know, the reality of it is, it isn't cutting it. It's really not.

I understand we can't knit doctors and so on. We all understand that as well, but we do have a group, certainly, in terms of nurse practitioners, a new discipline, and there are other disciplines coming forward. We've had a couple of other disciplines that we passed legislation in this House to allow to practise here in the province, but a nurse practitioner is one that certainly comes to mind, and they can help fill some of that void. And they're doing it now.

I know my colleague here in Humber - Bay of Islands has talked about it before. I think they have a couple clinics out in the West Coast, nurse practitioners, but the problem is that they cannot bill MCP. So now, if you're a senior or whatever and you need to see a doctor, you don't have a doctor, so you go to the nurse practitioner, now you have to pay out of pocket. It makes no sense. How can anybody justify – if I'm sick, I can go to the doctor and the doctor can check me out and write me a prescription, no problem; but if I'm sick, I go to a nurse practitioner, he or she checks me out writes a prescription, I have to pay for it. It makes no sense whatsoever.

Again, it's been suggested in this House of Assembly numerous times by numerous Members that nurse practitioners should be able to bill MCP. If the Premier is looking for something else he can do, because he just done the sugar tax and he said he's going to cover the shingle vaccine – it's all good. Thank God for changes in leaderships and upcoming elections, I'd say. It's all good, but I'm going to put that on your list. I bet you if you wanted to garner a few votes now, that's something you could do. I bet you a lot of people would be happy if they could go to a nurse practitioner and not have to pay for it out of pocket.

AN HON. MEMBER: He was the minister of Health and could not do it.

P. LANE: I know he was minister of Health, but maybe he wasn't allowed to do it when he was minister of Health. He wasn't the

guy in charge really. Now he is the guy in charge, so maybe he can do it. I'm going to hope he does.

The other issue, just sticking to health care, and again my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands alluded to this as well in his area when he was talking about people at the hospital and so on in the emergency rooms on stretchers for days and all this kind of stuff – which is a terrible situation, by the way, terrible situation. But I say to my colleague of Humber - Bay of Islands and anybody here on this end of the Island can attest to the same thing, I can assure you that the exact same thing is happening at the Health Sciences Centre, the exact same thing is happening at St. Clare's Hospital as well and has been for quite some time.

I'm not saying there are any easy answers to all this, but the bottom line is, I would say the number one call that I get – probably I'd say the number one call everybody gets – is related to health care in one shape or form. I've had lots of people reach out to me that have been to the emergency for hours and hours and hours on end. I've had cancer patients who have been at the emergency for hours and hours and hours and hours on end. You hear stories about people on stretchers for hours on end, the inability to get an ambulance or the extensive wait time to get an ambulance. Do you know why you can't get an ambulance? Because the paramedic is stood up next to the stretcher in the hospital for hours and hours and hours on end. That's the bottom line. It's all connected; it's all related.

I don't pretend to know all the answers here, but what I hear from people in the field that a lot of the problem, the trickle-down here, really, is the fact that we have lots of people in acute-care beds that ought to be in long-term care. That's what's causing the bottleneck, is that long-term care patients are stuck in acute-care beds for extended periods of time.

Therefore, when somebody comes in and there's only a few beds down to emergency and whereas they would normally send people up to the floor, they can't send them up to the floor because the beds are filled with people that should be in long-term care.

So then the beds down in the emerg are full. Now you have sick people that need a bed, so they're leaving them on stretchers in the hallways. And, of course, they're on stretchers in the hallways and because of the protocols, if I'm an ambulance operator when I bring that person in on the stretcher, I'm not allowed to leave them until I can pass them over to a doctor or a nurse or whatever. Now they're tied up and now when I call an ambulance, there's no ambulance available. Or I need an ambulance, I'm down in Flatrock, and the ambulance is on the way from Brigus or Whitbourne, or on the way to Brigus or Whitbourne.

That's what's happening. I mean that's reality is what is actually happening. I don't think people realize that that's what's happening, but it is what's happening. We all know it. I think most Members here realize that that is the case. But I think the big issue is getting those patients into long-term care.

Now, I'm not sure exactly what the issue is at long-term care. My understanding is that there probably are beds. I think there are beds. I think even now down here in Pleasantville there are beds, but there are no nurses to go with those beds. I think that's the issue.

I've been told that if we can correct the staffing issues in long-term care, that you're going to see a lot of these other issues will correct themselves, so to speak. Because that's where it's all stemming from. That's the root of the problem right there.

Of course, the other thing is we have people, because they don't have any

primary care, clogging up emergency rooms that really don't need to be in the emergency. That's where these 24-hour care clinics – there's one going to go out on Topsail Road by Blackmarsh Road, I believe. There's going to be a downtown clinic as well, I think that's the plan. I think that will be helpful.

When we have those 24-hour clinics, I think that will be helpful in getting what I would deem as non-urgent, non-emergent patients seen and help clear out the emergency rooms, the emergency departments. But, at the end of the day, long-term care is the bigger fix that needs to be addressed.

I'm not saying anything new that hasn't been said here over and over again. I know the government is aware of it, but we cannot let that issue die because that is the most important issue that I hear, and I'm sure most of my colleagues would agree that's what you're all hearing as well.

I know there's nobody in this House who wants this situation. I'm sure the government – I know they would. Why wouldn't you? If there was a magic bullet to fix all this, it would be fixed long ago. I know that. But, at the end of the day, we need to keep that issue top of mind and do whatever we can to resolve it.

I see my time is done, Mr. Speaker, and I'll leave any further comments until the next time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The Member spoke once.

Are there any other speakers to the motion?

If not, is the House ready for the vote?

All those in favour of the Concurrence motion for the Social Services Committee?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Report of Social Services Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, the Concurrence on the Report of the Government Services Committee dated May 2025.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House concur in the Report of the Government Services Committee dated May 2025.

SPEAKER: We will now be debating the Government Services Committee, which consists of the Consolidated Funds Services; Digital Government and Service NL; Department of Finance; Department of Labrador Affairs; Public Procurement Agency; the Public Service Commission; and the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to get up and speak on this. I had Estimates this morning and some interesting stuff that we asked and some good answers as well. Again, I'd like to thank the people of the District of Ferryland for voting me in here the last time and hopefully, when this government calls an election, they vote me in again. That's coming pretty soon.

First of all, I'd like to get into a story that I had, and I spoke to two ministers today and I got a favourable response but, just to bring

it a little further, I do have a lady that's donating a kidney to her sister. They're pretty close to getting that process completed. They've been at this now a year and a half, two years. They did blood work last year and have to get more recent blood work just to get an update to make sure it's good and clear because the day is going to come within the next week or two, they hope.

One of the concerns that they had is the lady that's getting the kidney from her sister, she will have support with her – they got to go to Halifax to get this done, by the way. So when they go to Halifax to get this done, the lady that's getting the kidney will get some support, a family person would be able to fly up and they'll cover their expenses to help this lady out during this traumatic event and been waiting a long time.

So she's been getting dialysis three times a week for the last two or three years for sure. Just think on the savings alone – hopefully, this surgery will be successful, that she gets this kidney and that everything will be good. It's a savings on government. Yes, it might cost them now, but half of that solution is the person that's donating – she's going up herself as well, obviously, she's donating her kidney, but they'll only cover so much of her time in the hospital. While she's in hospital – and, again, I spoke to the minister in between here today and they will cover her stay while she's in the hospital but the person that's donating is going to need just as much help as the person that's receiving the kidney.

That's a concern. Speaking to her over the weekend and speaking to her a couple of weeks ago and she wrote me a letter and gave me examples of other provinces that have stuff in their legislation. It's not in our policy.

So the reason I brought this up today, just to speak about it, but it's to put it to the Members on the government side to add

this to their policy, to be able to have help for the person that is donating. It's very important. I mean, they've got to go through the same thing. They can't lift anything for six weeks. Again, we had a very important discussion and they're going to look into it and they agree but I think it's time – yes, okay, we're going to get some help, hopefully, and that'll come back pretty quick because it's going to happen in the next week or two. There are other people that are affected by this, being donors.

When you fill out your MCP card, you're asked if you're going to be a donor and that's very important – or your driver's licence, sorry, not your MCP, your driver's licence that you be a donor, it's important that we get this stuff right. We get up here and speak and, hopefully, people are listening in the government side and bring this back and put it in the policy. The people that they're talking to agree but they don't write the policies. So it's something that should be added. I wanted to throw that out there.

Hopefully the government is listening and hopefully they can solve this problem for the person that's making the donation, along with the person that's receiving the donations. I congratulate her for that. That's a big decision to make on behalf of yourself to donate a kidney to somebody. That's pretty special, that's helping somebody out, and eventually – hopefully everything goes right – it will be an ease on our health care system from dialysis three times a day. So hopefully everything is successful.

Also, while we're talking about health care, I will touch on the subject, and Members all throughout the House today, on this side for sure, one of the issues that I see – she mentioned to me blood work today – is somebody going to get blood work. If you went into a doctor today and they were going to give you blood work – yeah, you can get that done tomorrow for \$25 to \$30. Most communities have that, I would think. Most communities have where they would

come in and do blood collections and bring it out and get it done quickly.

But at what point in time did we ever get in society that we're going to pay for your blood work? When did that happen? Since COVID? That's when it happened, that's when it started. But why is that acceptable in our society that we pay for blood work if you want to get it done quickly? It just doesn't make sense.

I was going to say three weeks ago, I was in there and I booked my appointment. Yes, I could go get it done but I wanted to see how long it would take to book an appointment to get blood work done. It was going to take three weeks to get it done. Now, there are some people that can afford to pay the \$25 or \$30. I wanted to check out to see what the time range was on it. Some people need it right away. I'm sure if it was an emergency they could probably call out and get it done, but to wait three weeks for somebody that could have a serious issue, that's not acceptable.

We seem to be accepting it in society. Why is that acceptable? I just don't understand how we got to that point. I just don't get it. Before COVID, you could go down to Major's Path – that's where I used to go. If you needed blood work, you could go down to Major's Path; you walk in and take a number; you sat there for an hour and a half or two hours and you got your blood work done.

Now the system that is down there, I will say this, that it works very good. You go in, you go over and you press in the iPad. When you're sitting there – you talk about stuff that goes on in our society – when you see the seniors going in there standing up with their slip of paper for blood work and the husband and wife who are going together, as soon as they see the iPad, it's incredible the fear that goes in their mind to touch the iPad. They think they're going to do everything wrong.

I was sitting there and I waited for half an hour. For us in here, that's pretty simple, or I'm going to say it's pretty simple. You go in and put in your name, put in your number, bingo, it comes up. You look at the screen, your number comes up and they go over and take your information. You go back and sit down and when your name appears up there, it comes up on a list, then you're done.

I have to say it was very efficient, but to wait three weeks, I don't think is acceptable. The system itself when I went in there, like I said, is very efficient, but it's something that we should be looking at to be able to walk down and walk in to get some blood work. To say we have to wait three weeks is just not acceptable.

I was listening on home care as well. Everybody deals with home care in here, whether it be people calling you that they don't want visitors coming in their house – first big issue that I see, and I know that because people have abused the system over the years, that everybody has to pay, and that's the wrong way to think in my mind. Because if you have a family member that's looking for home care, and there's somebody belonged to them that's there or a relative that would like to come in and they can't go in to take care of because they're related, well, that to me is wrong.

People have a fear of people coming in their houses. I've seen it. I had a lady, two or three years ago, in Witless Bay, she was 91, and she needed home care. She had two daughters that were retired, but people have their own lives. They worked so they could retire and enjoy their lives. Not that they wouldn't take care of the mother because that's what happened in the end, but if they were going to bring someone in and pay them, then why couldn't they go in and take care of it? And that is the issue that we deal with every day.

Now, there are people that have abused that, as I said, over the years, and that's

probably why the rules are there, and I'm sure that somewhere along the way they look at extenuating circumstances, but this family had three ladies and two sons that they were looking for home care for their mom. She didn't want anyone else to come in her house. And that's a fear that some of them have, and that's fine, they can live with that, but they were taking care of someone else. They were doing home care at another house for someone else, but they couldn't get paid to do the home care in their own mom's house.

To me, that was wrong. There have to be extenuating circumstances that they should be able to look at this. If she's helping someone else out, then why couldn't she go there and help her mom, and that didn't happen. To me, she wasn't really sick over her lifetime that she had to be in the hospital. A very healthy lady, lived to be 93, but at a point in time, she needed help, and she really didn't get it from the government, and I felt so bad for her. I couldn't believe it. Like I said, oh my God, how can they not help this family? They're an absolutely great family, but never got the help that they deserved in my mind, and that, to me, was very disappointing.

That's not only that family. I'm sure there's people here that have relatives that could take care of their own kin, but they don't get the opportunity to or don't – and I'm not saying they want to get paid to do it, but they have to be there. It's just sad that we can't make that happen – very sad.

I did hear the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands talk about ambulances. Well, I would say the first ambulance that left anywhere or changed when we came in this House of Assembly would be the ambulance out of Trepassey and, certainly, we heard lots about that over the years. This is the way this government performs: You're driving on the Trans-Canada in the afternoon; did you hear the ambulance is moved out Trepassey?

That's when I heard it, when somebody called me to let me know – no minister calling you. As I would say, the minister of messes, when it all started. You know, they take them, move and ambulance out and not let you know and you're the MHA for district. They call you, and now you got to fix it. That's the problem. I got to try to fix it all, but I wasn't the one that made the decision. Did they come and discuss what we should do, maybe?

There are two ambulances in Trepassey, 200 kilometres from the nearest hospital, driving over that country. It doesn't happen at 8 in the morning or 2 in the afternoon. It could happen 3 in the morning and they leave and go. There is one ambulance left in Trepassey. So when that goes, they're on red alert, and I dare say we're not allowed to say that either. So there are certain things you're not allowed to say, but I'm going to say it: It's a red alert. The ambulance has to come from St. Mary's or it got to come up from Cape Broyle or it might have to come up from St. John's. That's what's happening.

Now, they it in Ferryland. Then, they moved it to Cape Broyle and then it moved it back to Ferryland. They're looking to put one in Witless Bay, hopefully. Instead of coming from St. John's, they get one that dispatched in Witless Bay. The Witless Bay volunteer fire department in regard to calls – and we had that discussion today, a couple of MHAs here talking about ambulances and out to hospitals. As the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands had said, and the Member for CBS and the Member for Exploits, when they go and take a patient to the Health Sciences, until their triaged, they stay with that patient.

They got to go get triaged, and they have to stay with that patient until that's done. Or they could come out in an emergency room, like what happened to me, and say, can you take your dad here while we go on another call? We're just sitting and waiting for him to

go in and be triaged. I happened to do that and take him out there and wait.

That's not acceptable in today's world that that stuff is happening. It's just not acceptable and how it gets to that point is incredible, but that's what we're getting from this government. That's the stuff that we're getting. With no communications, nothing ever happening and then this stuff that's thrown on you. I get that all the time. I only went up to Trepassey last week and this is happening, that ambulance is gone. We had to wait two hours.

Down in Bay Bulls to, say, Burnt Cove, Bauline, St. Michaels as far as La Manche bridge, the Witless Bay volunteer fire department respond to calls. They're after responding on calls and waiting an hour to an hour and a half for the ambulance to show, and they do a great job at it. They're all trained to do it, whereas the volunteer fire department in Ferryland don't respond to these calls because they're not trained to do it. You know, they just don't have it. They don't have that capacity.

So when they get a medical call, these volunteer fire people – volunteer – spend an hour, an hour and a half waiting for an ambulance, and they are there within 10 minutes. The key part is volunteer; they spend their time. As we said, you volunteer your time as a volunteer firefighter, or medical responder really as well, sometimes when you're volunteering, you got to sit back and realize what you're getting yourself into. What they do in every community across this Island is incredible – totally incredible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: I'll move on just to go back to some stuff in Service NL, and there is some other information again in TI as well.

In Service NL, we waited five years now that they've been trying to get speed cameras installed with a cost of \$4 million for 10.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're not done yet?

L. O'DRISCOLL: No, they're not done yet, no. They're not even close to being done.

This government is coming out and saying we're reducing red tape. I don't want to see the blue tape if that's red tape, I can tell you that. That's unbelievable. Five years to do that and it's still not done, but they'll have one more announcement when it's done and a few pictures taken. That will all come out. That will all be good. We'll be there to watch, I'm sure. We'll get an invite, same as you got an invite for the Gushue Highway when they were announcing that. When they announced that, we got an invite as well. Did you get one from Mount Pearl - Southlands?

P. LANE: No.

L. DRISCOLL: No.

This is the clarity that the government gets: They will go around that and invite the mayors from my district to go out but not invite the MHA. That's fine. I drove by and looked at it that day, fine. The mayor didn't know that I didn't get the invite. He was shocked really. I wasn't shocked, but he was.

That's the kind of stuff that we get from this Liberal government. We'll look right through it, no problem. Let it go – let it go. Well, I don't let it go, I can tell you that, because that's embarrassing but that happened. That absolutely happened.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's a photo op.

L. O'DRISCOLL: A photo op, yes. That's fine. We can get past the photo op. There will be another photo op when it's done, or another year and they'll be having another one just to see where progress is.

The next time there will be a photo op, we'll be in the picture.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: I asked a question here in the House of Assembly a little while ago on elevators. Again, we try to be clear and ask some questions that do come up. There are over 500 that are not inspected – 65 per cent not done.

The minister says, well, it depends on the people that are inspecting. When they get their inspection done, we can come back and we can inspect them, because there's a secondary inspection that the government needs to do. They should be pushing that a little bit harder or hire more people to get those inspections done. For there to be 65 per cent not done, well over 400, not acceptable.

So when you ride in an elevator, I only seen it here, there's an inspection date on it. It happened to be there the day that I asked the question. The inspection was 2017. A week after the question, the inspection disappears and goes to the security office. I don't know if that's written up over at the Health Sciences or down in the long-term care homes, but it's written up here in the Confederation Building: Go see security if you want to know when the inspection date is.

I never asked, but I might go out and look and see if it's updated, because I'm sure if it's done, they'd have it back up but it's not done and they don't want you to look at it. It's just so frustrating, some of this stuff, how clear they are and letting everybody in on everything. You find out when you ask that it will change, that's for sure.

I'll go to MyGovNL. I did have a good experience at MyGovNL, and I'm sure people here have used it. I've used it to renew my MCP card, renewed my driver's licence and, I got to say, it worked fine. I got to say –

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear! What a minister.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Good, yes. Hear, hear, no doubt. You didn't say hear, hear when the inspections were taken down.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. O'DRISCOLL: We didn't hear much hear, hear.

But that's facts, so there it is. They want to take all the glory but when it's not right, you don't hear them say anything. That's the issue I got. Be transparent, that's what we'd like to see. All the stuff I mentioned here now, there's not much transparency in it, I can tell you that.

We'll go to ATV training, and that's something that we brought up this morning. Again, we had helmet regulations and we all know how that went on the helmet regulations. They don't think it went wrong, but we know where it went.

ATV training, on a serious note, I really think should be the same as anything, you get your driver's licence and you should be driving an ATV in order to pass to be able to drive one, not just go in and write one online. I can write one online for my daughter. You know, that's how she's going to get her licence. That's not acceptable. Use anyone over 16, sure their parents can go in to write that exam. How does that make them any better to drive an ATV? It makes no sense.

They should be getting practical exams to be out and drive them vehicles. They're very dangerous vehicles to drive if you're not familiar with them. How many accidents have we seen? There are people that are veterans in driving these that are hauling wood and something turns on its side or turns back over. I had a niece only a couple of weeks ago on by herself that had a severe concussion with a helmet on. So again, she's young, driving it. She's under

16 but other than her father probably showing her, there's no training. You should be learning how to drive these.

Listen, we learn how to drive cars and we still have accidents, but we can prevent some accidents if we give just the small amount of training that we could apply to this. There are lots of things we can do, and if you speak to the safety councils, they've tried to go to this government. I'm not going to say who they are because I've spoke to them, but they're so frustrated with the system and how it's working. They're just appalled by it. We definitely should have training for anyone under 16 to be able to drive an ATV. What part of that don't we understand?

I have one minute. On motor vehicles, that was another one I brought up. The minister had said, b'y, we can have this discussion any time. Well, I'm after throwing it out there four times, I would say, about plate to plates for vehicles. Most of the time, the people that buy vehicles – and I did sell vehicles at the time – you sell them a car and if you had a plate to plate, you trade in your vehicle and you take your plate. The person that wants to buy that has to get their own plate on it. That would solve some of the problems. That's not solving all of them; that would solve some of them.

So to sit down and say we'll have a discussion, well, I'm after putting it out there four times and we haven't seen anything to correct it or make it better for society. You got all kinds of these vehicles that are out there with fines that they can't collect. This is one way that they can save some money. I think that they could save some fines.

Hopefully, the next chance I get, I'll be able to speak about it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very excited to get the opportunity to stand on my feet today to talk about the Government Services Committee and the great work that that Committee has done and, in particular, the great work that has occurred in *Budget 2025*. I'm very excited about that.

I'd be remiss, though, if I didn't take an opportunity to thank my colleague, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, for bringing forward and highlighting something that everyone in this House of Assembly cares deeply about, and that's the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award. I can't think of a more fitting person to have an award named after him.

I know that if he was around today sitting behind us, he'd be very disappointed that we would be talking about him in this way. He was very humble at things like that, but he was very passionate about a number of things – family, of course. He would probably make a great joke about it. I know the hon. Member for Ferryland was trying to make some jokes here today, but he would pale in comparison to the amount of jokes that Minister Bragg used to be able to make in this House of Assembly. I still remember the story about Willie Melt, the mascot for the winter carnival in his area. I still laugh to this day about that.

There are a few things that he was very passionate about. Municipal governance and the administrators that do that work in the towns and LSDs and communities and municipalities, all around this province, that he worked so closely with, I think he'd be very happy. I hope his family are happy with that, but I do thank the hon. Member for bringing that forward today and I look forward to hopefully being in the audience when someone wins that prestigious award

the first time. I know he will be looking down at us for that. I know it's very fitting how great an administrator he was.

I'll move on to a couple of topics about *Budget 2025*. In my previous role up until about a week ago, with Justice and Public Safety, I'd be remiss if I didn't also say thank you to those firefighters and public safety employees and staff that did such fantastic work on the wildfires that just happened, but also the ones that the Member for Lab West would know very well about and the Member for Lake Melville would know very well about over this past year.

It's starting earlier and earlier every season it seems like, based on climate change and other things, but I will take this opportunity to say thank you to those individuals, those men and women that are running towards disaster when many of us in this House of Assembly and everywhere else would be running in a different direction so I think they deserve a great round of applause, for sure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: In Justice and Public Safety there's been a significant amount of investments that have come in *Budget 2025*. I'm only going to take a couple of minutes, because I'm sure the new minister responsible for that area would love to talk about that as well.

We put in close to \$50 million in *Budget 2025* in Justice and Public Safety initiatives. Some of those that I'll highlight now is \$3.4 million for six new Crown attorneys, six for this year, next year and the year after; 14 deputy sheriffs to support the Office of the High Sheriff island-wide; a manager of court services and security in Labrador in the Labrador region; 32 correctional officers for His Majesty's Penitentiary as well as other correctional facilities throughout the province.

We formed a new joint task force. You'll see some of the drug seizures and busts, as they say, across the Island. Those are coming in relation to co-operation between the two forces. We formed a new Joint Task Force Unit comprised of RNC and RCMP officers to target weapons, drugs and contraband enforcement. We've put five new RCMP officers in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, as a recommendation of the Policing Transformation Working Group. The RNC leadership position for the Intimate Partner Violence Unit – I know that we put some support there as well from the minister responsible for that.

We also have ongoing police training, equipment and fleet operational requirements that we're always looking towards; 10 front-line RNC officers for the Northeast Avalon; and then there are an additional 19 police officers that we announced in *Budget 2025* that will be put in the areas of need based on the Policing Transformation Working Group working with both forces.

I know the hon. Member for Exploits is sticking up his finger in jubilation with that investment in this budget. I hope he's going to vote for the budget based on that and I'm sure that Policing Transformation Working Group will look at his community like all other communities and try their best to fill the resources that would be required to do that.

We have \$3.7 million in fire protection and equipment; \$3.5 million for disaster assistance; and \$5 million to continue the work of the Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System.

I'd also like to take a couple of minutes to talk a little bit about the new department that I'm in and the impact that would have. I know the current Minister of Health and Community Services could probably do a much better job in this department of talking about it. Maybe she'll get the opportunity to

do that, but children and youth in this province represent 20 per cent of the population and I've heard her say many, many times that it represents but 100 per cent of the future potential of our province.

So I think it's very important that we invest now into the future, and I'm very happy that the Minister of Finance and our team on this side of House are making those large-scale, targeted investments in education to support a prosperous future for our province. Some of those highlights that we're going to talk about in this budget are the early learning and child care centres. In *Budget 2025*, we're talking about \$110 million to support that operating grant program for \$10-a-day child care. There's \$3.9 million in a project to increase the number of child care spaces and \$1.7 million in bursaries and grants for students to become early childhood educators.

Those are some of the important investments that we're making for our future leaders in this province. We want to make sure it's not only an investment in the area of early childhood educators but it's also an investment in our own economy, because it allows parents and families the ability to get back to work after they have a child to get that individual child in a great training opportunity.

I've got two young girls and they're going through the system, myself seeing it from both sides now. Seeing one in kindergarten and one in the early childhood program, it's going to be a great opportunity for them and it's a great opportunity for me to try to make that better for, not just them, but for all of the children that we have in care in this province.

So in *Budget 2025*, we made a \$20 million addition to the K-to-12 system, which will include more than 400 educators. That will be learning assistants in the K-to-12 system. That's going to be an important piece. Some 245 are going to be educators such as classroom teachers, administrators

and school councillors. Approximately 175 of those are going to be teaching and learning assistants. All of those are going to be new resources to the school system.

Those are things that are going to make the system that much better, but we also have to worry about how we're going to recruit them. I understand that that's always a concern, so we're going to continue with the program that we put in last year's budget to continue with the \$850,000 investment to target recruitment efforts and retention initiatives for positions that are historically hard to fill. Whether that's in rural, remote or isolated areas of our province, we understand that's an important piece and it's important for us to try to target those resources we can.

We've also increased \$5 million in supports for technology. We all know that technology is important for the future of our young people and for our educators to ensure that those individuals get the best out of the resources we have, so investing in technology is really, really important. Those investments may include things such as network upgrades to support Internet connectivity; replacement of devices such as student Chromebooks, school computers, upgrading outdated technology, which is important to make sure that those individuals – and something that the NLTA would really appreciate would also be 20 staff hired in NL Schools IT, making sure that we'll have more people to do the work that's required to make sure that IT solutions are done the best way forward, and working with our departments in government to ensure that we have the best workers, ensuring they're providing the best skill set to the school system that we have.

I'm cluing up here now. Post-secondary is coming back to me this time. I started out in post-secondary when I first got into the ministry and now it's coming back. We invest some \$400 million in Memorial University, and it's a substantial investment. Some \$312 million of that is core operating

money. That's 70 per cent of the operating budget for the university. More \$78 million for the faculty of medicine; and then \$7 million more for more medical school seats, clerkships and expansion of internal medicine; \$2 million to enhance the Doctor of Psychology program; and we're also mainlining the \$1.7 million in continuing the three satellite sites for the faculty of nursing, which is important.

We're also making an investment \$13.68 million of reduction in core funding, our operating funding in relation to the tuition-freeze offset for Memorial, that's been received very well by Memorial; and \$70 million over the next eight years that will help in the deferred maintenance of the university infrastructure. We all know it's an issue.

I'd like the opportunity to continue on over the next little bit, so I'll pass it off to somebody else for now. But I do want to encourage my colleagues on both sides of the House – I know this side of the House will be voting for a very substantive investment in education as well as public safety. I encourage all my colleagues on the other side of the House to stand with us and stand with the people of this province as we try to improve and move us forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PADDOCK: Thank you, Speaker.

Given this is my first budget period, I feel it's a duty in representing the residents of Baie Verte - Green Bay, but also all residents of the province.

With regard to government services, one of the things – and I highlighted it during the Finance Estimates – that really stood out for me were the pensions. Most public sector

pensions are close to being fully funded. Some are slightly overfunded. With one glaring exception, Uniformed Services Pension is only 25 per cent funded – 25 per cent funded.

Now, a lot of those pensioners in that group, there are roughly a thousand of them, were first responders. They dealt with a lot of stress during their public service career. So I think it behooves government to now take the effort to reduce the stress on them during their retirement years –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: – and develop a plan to fully fund that pension.

The other point I'd like to highlight now is the Public Service Commission – a couple of points. We're going to have some significant HR staffing, I believe, over the next while, on trades. I highlighted a couple during the Estimates, and that was with regard to mechanics and heavy equipment officers, given the projects that are coming, and mining that's gearing up in Central Newfoundland. So it's something that's going to have to be looked at with regard to both the inventory and the demand.

So how do you grow that capability? We might have to look at increasing the training capabilities for those trades, and maybe even with regard to some of the government depots increasing their pay rate.

The other thing I give credit to government, after we raised it during Estimates and then raised it again during a follow-on Question Period, it was good to see government finally, after seven years, staff, on a full-time basis, the chair of the Public Service Commission. Now, the Public Service Commission oversees all the government staffing, so they should be setting the example. So it was completely inexcusable of why that was not properly staffed for seven years.

One of the things I was looking at when I went through the Consolidated Fund Services and the Estimates was funding related to a plan for a poverty reduction strategy, and that wasn't there. Ten years ago, Newfoundland and Labrador were rated as having the best Poverty Reduction Strategy in Canada, and that was under a PC government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: When the Liberals came to power, they cancelled it, and where are we today? Last in Canada. We went from first to last.

AN HON. MEMBER: Muskrat Falls.

L. PADDOCK: We're not talking about Muskrat Falls. We can have that in a subsequent debate. We're talking about a poverty reduction strategy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: So what did the current government do? Well, they just elongated the names of some ministers as they reshuffled the deck chairs, and those renaming of ministers does not equate to a poverty reduction strategy. We need less rhetoric and more action.

Now the other thing that really struck me when I was going through the Estimates was on rebates, and looking at it in both a fairness and an equitable manner. And I'll give you the first one – there's four that I want to highlight.

The fuel oil rebate: So \$500 for oil in St. John's, that amount gets you a little less in Central, even less on the West Coast and the Northern Peninsula and even less again in Labrador. Is that fair? Absolutely not. And there's a way to fix that. Just use the rates that your own Public Utility Board publishes. There's a way to fix that.

The other one that I want to highlight with regard to a rebate is the physical fitness rebate. Again, that is a challenge for a number of families and young people in rural communities. You don't have the same opportunities as in the urban area, and even more of a challenge for remote communities. That credit needs to be reviewed with a lens to be more fair and equitable for rural and remote communities.

The other one is a number of seniors have come to me because of the Oil to Electric Rebate. A number of them are taking it up, their friends, and some will come to me: We burn wood; what is the option there for us? I would encourage the government to look at extending that to seniors that burn wood. Because if we can keep seniors in their home, then we are reducing the cost on government for long-term care. So a small investment there is going to provide a return for greater government reduction in expenditures.

Finally, as my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands noted, is the Provincial Home Repair Program. Again, with the Provincial Home Repair Program, we need to look at the thresholds. I had a number of seniors that were excluded for the sake of \$14 – \$14. Again, if we make some small amendments there, we can keep more seniors in their home. They want to live in their home, in their own communities, better quality of life and a cost reduction for government.

Now I'd like to talk about the end-year deficit: \$372 million – not small. On top of that, our government has a contingency of \$200 million with no plan. So if they use any of that contingency, that's added to the end-year deficit. We could very well, right now, be looking at a total deficit end-year of close to \$600 million.

This gets even worse. The Premier, this afternoon, highlighted again two cost impacts on the end-year budget: shingles with regard to cost and the sugar tax with

regard to revenue. On top of that, as of right now, we are 11 per cent through the year, and we have a significant variance in projected oil revenue. Every dollar change in the price of Brent for the entire year is approximately \$29 million impact to the province.

Our budget was based on Brent US dollars at \$73.9. Over the last 40 days, it has averaged approximately \$64. On top of that is the exchange rate. The exchange rate was forecasted at 69.7 and the exchange rate over the last 40 days has been approximately 2.5 cents higher. Every cent change equates to, for the entire year, approximately \$31 million impact on the budget.

After 40 days, where are we? So we're roughly \$31 million negative impact on oil. We're, as of this afternoon, approximately \$15.5 million for the sugar tax and \$4.5 million for shingles. We are \$51 million in additional impact on the budget. For me, as a former accountant, that is a material change. As such, I cannot give my concurrence to the Consolidated Fund Services budget.

Now, government has majority and they can vote it in, but my recommendation to them now is to keep their stick on the ice for the rest of the year, because we need to be aggressive, as anybody at home would be aggressive if they are faced with a significant financial challenge, they would look at opportunities to reduce cost and/or expand revenue.

So what can we do? What can government do? As anybody would do themselves, one is cost containment. What can we do with cost containment? First of all, we can be aggressive and curtail any abuse of taxpayer money. Let's start by cutting that useless position in Grand Falls-Windsor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: If the Liberals want to fund it, then fund it with Liberal money, not with taxpayer money.

The other thing we can do is we can look at a range of opportunities for cost containment, travel nurses, reducing that comfort inn contract, et cetera. Government has to keep their stick on the ice until we take over to reduce costs.

On a revenue side, we need to look at every opportunity we can to accelerate revenue. My colleague from Terra Nova highlighted we need to look at every opportunity to expand secondary processing and grow revenue here at home.

We also have, out my way, down by Ming's Bight, Firefly Metals. The former Rambler mine, that mine is there, and they just submitted an environmental assessment. Now is the opportunity to accelerate that environmental assessment because once the handcuffs are off that company, they are full steam ahead to a 400- to 500-person mine, an additional GDP for our province. It must be done, and it needs to be done in a very aggressive manner.

The other thing I'd like to talk about with regard to accelerating growth opportunities is curtailing the roadblocks to growth. I believe a number of my colleagues have highlighted some of that, and that is reduction in red tape.

For those of you who are not aware, for five years in a row, we have received an F rating. Yes, a fail rating by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. That is not my assessment; that is the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We have to do more in a very aggressive manner to set the conditions for small businesses and, really, any business in the province to accelerate.

Now, one of those would be things like the payroll tax. Why are we penalizing small business and companies from hiring? It

really doesn't make sense. I'm going to give you three small case examples out in my area. The first two are two farms. They want to expand. They submitted it and the challenge there for their expansion was Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, Kruger. Kruger gave them a significant bill for timber rights. Now Kruger has no intention of cutting next to that farm, so why can't government swap that area for another area across the province somewhere so those two farms can expand? What would the province get back in return for that expansion?

One, a reduction in greenhouse gas; less vegetables and meat products would have to be transported in; more food grown locally. Currently, only about 20 per cent of food is produced here in the province. We would even have better food contact because it would be local. We talk about rural economic development, what a great way to do it. Also, when we talk about the cost of living, more often than not if the food is grown locally, it would be an opportunity to keep those food costs down.

The other example I want to highlight, there was a company out in my area that investigated the option of adding some six-by-six posts. Those posts are used for guardrails and most of those posts are brought in from Nova Scotia and they're outside. They, again, submitted and sought an allocation for that, and they were denied – unbelievable.

Let's look at the impact on the province if we had let them go ahead with that request. Again, environmentally good; a reduction of greenhouse gas for transport; government gets fees from forest harvesting and government also, because of the production here locally, gets a reduced cost impact for transportation and works. Why wouldn't government want that? Then the other thing, as I noted before, rural economic development, this would set the conditions to expand locally in rural Newfoundland and

have further economic multiplier in rural Newfoundland.

The other thing that I've noticed in going across my district, when we talk about roadblocks to growth, is permits. We have an opportunity here. We talk about interprovincial trade. Well, this is intra-provincial trade. We need to seek every opportunity to expedite that type of permitting. It is slowing down small business start-ups. It is slowing down housing starts. It is essentially slowing down our entire economy, and I hope from what I've said here, government will now seek the opportunity to put their stick back on the ice.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Seeing that we're talking about government services sector and that Committee there, and Labrador Affairs is covered under that, I'll take this opportunity, I guess, to go through the MTAP process and point out some of the ways that are causing a lot of frustration and that with a lot of residents of Labrador West.

I think so far, in the last number of years, I've filled out a lifetime's worth of MTAP forms, helping people get through this service, from the original thing and now the more modified one. There is a larger uptick of usage now these days, as more and more seniors who have retired and also finding themselves in need of more services that are no longer available in Labrador. One of the bigger ones is the eye injections, especially people with macular degeneration, diabetic eye disease and a few other conditions that are more prone to seniors or people who are diabetic.

This is a condition, especially macular degeneration, where a person has to fly to St. John's the same day every month, once a month, to get an injection to prevent themselves from going blind. Right now, I have about 16 individuals that come to my office every month to get MTAP forms filled out to get their ticket to fly out to get a service that takes five minutes, and they have to do it every single month because there's only two clinics in the province right now, that we're aware of, that were able to do it, and none of those clinics are in Labrador.

So right now, every month, these individuals have to come to my office and fill out a voucher form. They have to get a letter from the clinic stating that they have an appointment in St. John's. Sometimes they have to send the letter back because most of them are going blind, or after the injection, they can't see, so they need someone to be with them to help them. They have to send the letter back and get them an updated letter to get sent back because they need an escort to go with them. So that takes a day or two. Then they come back again, and then we fill out the forms with them to try to get their appointment. Within about 48 hours, they'll get their flights and they'll go out, and they'll come back.

A lot of the time they come back, and they'll fill out their forms. Most times, you know, it will go without a hitch. They don't get back nearly what they put into it, but they submit it anyway. Most times, it takes about 60 days before they'll even get to see any of their money back. But, in that 60 days, they've made two more trips back to St. John's to get eye injections done. In that time, they try to get through the (inaudible).

Sometimes there are delays getting their forms back and sometimes, by the third trip, they have to catch up on their forms because sometimes they've used up too many at this time and they haven't had any other processed claims. So sometimes they

don't get a voucher and they have to pay the entire flight out of their pocket and try to get all that back. In that time, they're trying to get back the other money that they put in the forms for a couple months before.

So it's a vicious cycle of a lot of this money and forms and letters and things tied up trying to get their money back to go out to get a service that takes five minutes because they can't get it in Labrador because these two or three clinics, that's all they have in the province right now for doing these eye injections.

The question is, with all this rigamarole trying to get patients flying in and out – I'm doing about 16 individuals right now that are doing these eye injections – wouldn't it be easier to have a doctor or these ophthalmologists to fly to Labrador, one trip, once a month, to do the eye injections at a significantly less cost to the province than it is to get these 16 individuals to fly out every single month to St. John's for a five-minute appointment to get their eye injections done?

So if you really look at the thing, the amount of people flying out for services, you could really quantify the idea of how much you're spending there, when really you just need to send one individual to Labrador to the clinic in Labrador to get this done. It always boggles my mind the amount of paperwork and effort and all this to do this when, at the end of the day, you realize the solution to the problem was a lot simpler than sending these 16 people every month to St. John's for a five-minute appointment.

In that time, these individuals have credit cards tied up, money that they don't have, because these individuals are mostly seniors, so their credit cards are tied up. They're waiting for money back for trips. While they're waiting for money to come back for trips, they're already gone out for another trip, and they have to do this over and over. It's just so frustrating. These individuals are so tired; they are so defeated

of trying to get through the paperwork and the letters. All doing this while they are trying to make themselves better. They have a condition. They're going blind in some cases. And they're trying to do all this while to navigate the MTAP system.

I'm surprised that the data is not collected from MTAP on why people are travelling because it would make life so much simpler, realizing that there are so many seniors who are trying to do it. It's the same thing with cardiac patients. The amount of cardiac patients that fly in and out of Labrador for routine checkups is very significant but, in the return, why aren't we having more cardiac clinics in Labrador? I know that they've been doing a little bit of work on that in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. A few patients that, normally, I see for MTAP forms are going to Goose Bay for a few tests. So there is a start but, at the end of the day, the amount of people travelling for routine five- or 10-minute checkups, just in a standard clinic, is getting significantly higher.

Some of these things used to be done in Labrador. Like, there used to be a cardiologist that used to regularly visit Labrador West. That's long gone. There used to be a pediatric surgeon that used to regularly visit Labrador West. They're gone. They don't show up anymore. There used to be a kidney specialist that showed up to Lab West. They don't do it anymore either. All these people are now being forced to fly to St. John's where they seem to be centralizing all of the services and, in that case, you're overwhelming people for travel. Now more and more and more people have to travel when it was never that necessary to travel when these one or two specialists would come up and do clinic in the region.

So, at the end of the day, is it practical to send 200 to 300 people a month from Labrador to the Health Sciences Centre, or was it easier to send five or six specialists to Labrador to hold a clinic? You know, the balance is just not there anymore. We've gone past that, and this is where I feel like

we're not doing better. I think we're doing more harm, because we're stressing individuals out. We're stressing sick individuals out, trying to get them on planes, trying to get them to fill out forms, trying to get them to get letters from doctors' offices, in and out, trying to navigate the system.

They'll get a letter – and this happens almost every day – saying I have to go out for this appointment. Okay. While I'm out there, I'm going to have to do a procedure and you won't be able to drive. Okay. You're going to need a guardian or someone with you after the appointment. Okay. The letter doesn't have any of that information on it. They submit it to MTAP. MTAP says no, you can't have an escort. The letter doesn't say that it's relevant. The person says, well, I'm having this procedure done. No, the letter has to say that you have to – anyway, they have to go back to the doctor's office, bother some person in a doctor's office, who's overworked as it is, to try to get a correct letter so they can go back to MTAP so they can get their tickets.

By the time it's all said and done, it was so many unnecessary steps that could have been easily smoothed out with a lot more clearer language or maybe an indication of like, okay, if you have to go out for a procedure, an escort is automatically granted to you. Instead, you have to go through the rigmarole of trying to get letters and notes and signatures from people who are very, very busy doing other things in doctors' offices instead of going back and forth with you trying to get something cleared up so that you can get a flight.

At the end of the day, it seems that a lot of this could be avoided by making sure that we had these specialists travelling up to clinics like that in Labrador or having a more clearer plan on how the MTAP program would work.

I always said if a Labradorian has to travel for a legitimate reason, it shouldn't have to be whole process; it should be a part of the

health care system, an extension of the health care system, not a completely separate program where there is so much bureaucracy to try to get through. Remember, we're dealing with people who are going through a medical situation. They're going out either to check up on something they've had before, or it could be a brand new thing or it's in the stages of diagnostics.

Any which way, these individuals are already at their peak amount of stress. They're stressing about their condition. They're stressing about the travel. They're stressing about their loved ones who they are travelling with who are sick. It's creating a lot more hardship, mentally and emotionally on them when in this time, there should be more compassion and a lot more forethought on how we deal with individuals who are travelling for medical reasons.

I understand that there can't be a cardiologist on every corner. I understand that there can't be a specialist in every clinic, but at the end of the day there needs to be more accommodation made on how we allocate those resources but also remember that yes, we are a small population compared to our neighbours as a province, but we have a large land mass to cover and we have a lot of different regions with a lot of different geographical restraints, conditions or opportunities in some cases.

So that's why we need to be considerate on how we allocate resources, but also how we get people – remember, it's about people who need to be from point A to point B and how can we maximize the impact of that.

I believe having 18 individuals fly out for a five-minute appointment for an eye injection, that can be done in other clinics around the province, but it's centralized into one region of the province – and as we see a lot more of our aging demographic and we also see a lot more ingenuity and innovation in the medical field, we're going to see a lot more of this. Unfortunately, we don't want to see

a lot more of this; we want to see opportunities given to people where they can have a lot of this treatment stuff done closer to home. So if there's anything to take away for one thing about it is, we need to see how we can allocate that.

The Medical Transportation Assistance Program, you talk to a lot of people on the Island, they may or may not know what it is. You talk to someone in Labrador, they absolutely know what it is, and a lot of them have to use it. We're not talking about just a handful of people; we're talking a majority of Labradorians, especially in the Lake Melville and Labrador West area that have to rely on this. And opportunities to optimize it or opportunities to make sure that some of the things people are travelling for are found closer to home, they should be opportunities that are taken.

We see that there has been room for change, there have been opportunities where it has been changed, but there's still opportunities to grow in how we allocate resources, but also allocate how (inaudible). One thing is, I know the minister mentioned it today about how the first \$1,000 is covered. It should be all covered. You know, this is an MCP-funded service that's not available in your region in a place like Labrador, then why is a person, out of their own pocket, have to pay to access medical care?

And that's one of the crux of the thing is we're supposed to have a universal system where there's no challenges of accessing health care that is provided under the MCP program. You look at like, I mentioned the cardiologist, having to go see the cardiologist. That is an MCP-covered service, yet out of someone's pocket from Labrador, in most cases if they are going by themselves, out of an airline ticket, most of the times they just pay \$200 to see a doctor. Then they have to pay for a percentage of the hotel room because it's not 100 per cent covered.

So, at the end of the day, someone actually had to pay to go and see a doctor. That really flies in the face of the universality of our health care system, but it wasn't that person's choice to pay that money, that person had to pay that money to go see a doctor.

We need to be looking and moving forward into a system either of how getting more specialists to come to Labrador to host clinic, or are we going to start moving MTAP into more of a 100 per cent travel-funded program because individuals are being forced to pay to seek medical attention.

That's the thing that we need to look at. We have to make sure that we are getting people to those centres because more and more people are choosing to miss appointments. More and more people are choosing not to travel to these appointments because of the complexity or the frustration or just the inability to afford to get to these appointments.

It's in my own family. I have to twist some arms of my own family members but yes, you have to go to your appointment. But, Jordan, I can't afford the appointment. Well, you have to go to the appointment because it's a part of your health care. It's part of making sure that you stay healthy. It's the growing frustration of having to travel, the growing frustration of having to pay out of pocket, the growing frustration on how the system is currently set up is one of the reasons why people are choosing not to go to their appointments.

We shouldn't even have to have that conversation with our loved ones about missing appointments because of these reasons. It's because of the circumstances, the lack of specialists travelling into Labrador to host a clinic, the lack of the universality of MTAP, people are choosing, sometimes, just to throw up their hands and say no, I'm not doing it. This is very disappointing to see when we really need to

make sure that when there's an appointment, you grab it when you can.

That's not even getting on top of wait times, the waits to get an MRI or the waits to go to see a specialist right now. Those, in their own right, are challenges and burdens that we are currently facing.

When they actually got the letter and it says, hey, you've got your appointment. It's on this day, at this time. You have to come to St. John's. Then a lot of people I know look at it and go oh, I have to go all the way to St. John's. Now I have to try to book flights. I have to book a hotel. I have to book a rental car. I have to try to get down and then you explain the MTAP to them and they try to go through that and sometimes even that makes it much more difficult, realizing well, I'll have to get these letters. I have to submit these forms. I have to do that. It's really draining on individuals, especially, like I said a moment ago, talking about the emotional toll on individuals trying to seek health care.

It's about building bridges so that we can actually access things, having fair and equal access as residents of this province and we should be treated no differently. I have a hospital that is nine years old now. Most of the services that it was designed to be in there are not in there. Or they are in there, but there's no one to actually physically provide the service. So, once again, you look at the disappointment of not having specialists travelling anymore like they used to, or not having the ability to have other types of specialists come up and do clinic.

You see the growing use of MTAP but we also see less and less specialists coming to Labrador. It's a trend that is going in the wrong direction. We should be encouraging more specialists to come to Labrador. We should be working towards having more specialist clinics in Labrador to try to have less and less people use MTAP.

The goal should be to have less people using MTAP and more local access and

being more cohesive of how they do things, but instead we're seeing it the other way around. There are more and people who are trying to get onto MTAP and seeing more and more centralization of services into the Northeast Avalon area. I think we're going in the wrong direction with it.

At the end of the day, we should be encouraging and trying to get either a more user-friendly way of doing it or having more specialists come here. Because, just looking at the matrix of it, that we're not really going on the right trend. Having the idea of paying to go and get medical help is also another real reason why we have to take a step back and look what's actually going on and how we can actually improve things.

That's where I see it, is that we really need to see more specialists coming to Labrador. I shouldn't have these 16 individuals come to me every month to try to go out for a five-minute appointment to get an eye injection because the only clinic they can do it in is in St. John's and then we're not seeing any opportunity or any encouragement of having that specialist come to Labrador to do clinic once a month for these individuals.

There are more of them. That's only the 16 that I know of that come to me. After talking to people about macular degeneration and diabetic eye disease and a few other things that people have been going out for month-on-month appointments for, I'm sure that 16 is a much higher number within the community. These are conversations we need to have about getting specialists to come to Labrador and having more specialist clinics in Labrador and less reliance on MTAP.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now call on the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to speak again on a few things that I didn't have time before to speak on. It's some of the parts that I spoke about – the health care is very big in Corner Brook. Another thing, the Department of Municipal Affairs – it's good to have a good memory but sometimes it's bad because you remember things.

We have a relocation policy by the department. The relocation policy was changed to bring it down to 75 per cent. I'm going back probably a year and a half when Mud Lake applied for relocation – well, they never because they couldn't get the number to apply for relocation. The policy is 75 per cent and it has to be driven by the community itself.

I know the Member for Lake Melville himself said that he was pushing for that, and I give him credit, he got it done and he joined the Liberal Party. There was no community initiative from it and there wasn't 75 per cent; it was the people who wanted to move. Now, Mud Lake did have a major flood; I agree to that. I was there right after the flood.

So the minister at the time, and this is where fairness and this is where – and I wrote the second time – the Mud Lake people were given the option. If they wanted to move, they would get bought out. There was no 75 per cent voted for it as the policy states. It was not community-driven as by the relocation policy. It was given because the Member himself pushed for it. Then, I know in his statement: That was the main factor that I joined the Liberal Party; I went back to the Liberal Party.

I'm fine with that. The problem is there's a house over in Cox's Cove that it's washing out underneath their house. They can't go in the house and the road has to stop. So I wrote the former minister and asked that, and he came back: As per Mud Lake policy, we moved Mud Lake. There was no Mud Lake policy. There was no Mud Lake relocation policy; that statement was false.

So what I'm going to be writing the minister, because it's already on the file there, is that if you're changing the policy for Mud Lake that people just put it in for Mud Lake and the people who want to use it can use it and relocate, you should do it for everybody in the province – you should do it. There's already a letter on file where the minister wrote back and said, as per the Mud Lake relocation policy. There was no Mud Lake relocation policy. It's a relocation policy by the department. So I wrote back again and explained that there was no Mud Lake relocation policy. This was done on circumstances which people can decide for themselves why it was done.

I'm saying to you, as the minister, if you're doing it for the residents of Mud Lake where four or five can sell out and keep their cabins, there's a house in Cox's Cove that's being washed out underneath. They can't live in their house. The road is cut off. I wrote the minister – and I'll be writing you again because I think everybody should be treated equally. If you're doing it for the residents of Mud Lake because there's a Member who's pushing for it and then he rejoined the Liberal Party and stated publicly that was the final thing that made him cross and go back with the Liberals – taxpayers' money and not following the policy that was set and voted on in this House, by the way.

We voted to change the policy in this House. But when you want to take individual communities, which Mud Lake had a serious flood, I'll be the first to say this, but this family in Cox's Cove are serious too. They're losing their house. They're losing everything they've worked for. The town now has it cut off because it's so dangerous. I'm saying to the minister, you should treat everybody the same, not on politics. That's my point. I'm just giving the minister a heads-up that I will be writing you again on that, because it's just not fair – absolutely not fair.

We've been discussing this today, myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, on some issues that the policies and the rules we make in this House are just thrown out. We just throw them out. No, we don't need it now, government just throw them out. We have a few coming up that we're going to discuss, I can assure you that.

But my issue with this here is that if we vote on something in this House of Assembly on the relocation policy, which we decreased from 90 per cent down to 75 per cent, we should live by it. Then when you break it for one household, or two or three that wanted to move – because most of the people in Mud Lake did not want to move. There are some people who wanted to move, now they're getting paid to move, but they're keeping their cabin. There was no cost estimate done, what it's going to save government – absolutely nothing. Usually there's a cost estimate done. There was nothing.

So, again, if that family in Cox's Cove is not treated as a household in Mud Lake, it's wrong. It's absolutely wrong because there's a lot of people in Mud Lake who will not move. They stated they will not move. The community-driven will not work. The vote will not work. You're supposed to do a cost estimate, what is going to help in the long run, so the government can save money before you do the relocation. And none of that was done.

I'll be saying to the minister, that's on file up there now from me, and I'll be writing again because when I got the letter from the former minister, I wrote him back, and he said that's the Mud Lake policy. There was never a Mud Lake policy discussed, debated and approved in this House of Assembly – absolutely none. So when I wrote back and said that statement was false, I never got a response. I'll say to the minister, I'll be writing you again on that also.

Another thing I'll say about Municipal Affairs and government –

P. LANE: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: What?

P. LANE: A precedent has been set.

E. JOYCE: It's been set. If you going to do it for one family, you have to do for everybody. And if you never did it for the resident of Mud Lake without going through the act that we approved, then you have to do it for this family because this family's losing everything also.

I feel sorry for the people of Mud Lake because I know what they went through – I know what they went through, I really do. But when a lot of them didn't want to move, you couldn't just take so many until about a year and a half, two years ago, and I even looked up the statements that were made at the day that, I think it was in Goose Bay when the Member, again, joined the Liberal Party – and that's fine too. The final reason was the Mud Lake, let people who wanted to move, move, get paid, keep their cabin.

So that was a big step, and that opened up the doors, by the way, to a lot of other people in the province, and Cox's Cove is going to be one that I'll be writing the minister.

The other thing I'm going to say on behalf of being a bit experienced, Municipal Affairs and Transportation and Infrastructure. One thing I always disagreed with, and I say to the minister with all due respect, the department, the capital works and engineering should never have been taking out of Municipal Affairs. It should never have been. Because what's happening now, it's in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure – and to be fair to the minister, the former minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the department is just so big – the department is so big.

I'll ask anybody in this room who deal with municipalities – many do, some don't, but many do – what's going to take a priority? A \$200,000 water system for a town, or \$10 million for the road on the Trans Canada Highway? Once the government took it out, it was just after I was out of our government, once they took that out and put it in Transportation and Infrastructure, the department just got too big, moving the engineering out.

Now, towns the department deals with and the minister deals with, where before you could sit down with them and go through the project yourself as the minister of Municipal Affairs, now they have to go through Transportation and Infrastructure. So the work that you're doing with the towns now is without the funding that you used to have. Because there's no one closer to the towns and communities in this province than the Department of Municipal Affairs.

So that was done a few years ago. I just ask the minister – I know the current minister understands that also about having the department so big and all the infrastructure, the funding for infrastructure and all the engineering move from Municipal Affairs to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

I really feel, I honestly feel that when that was done, that was a disservice to the towns and municipalities in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's just my opinion. It's something I think the minister, as a former mayor, you know how much Municipal Affairs meant to the towns. But now it's Municipal Affairs, then you have to go to Transportation and Infrastructure, you have to wait for their decisions to make what you're going to help out the towns. So it's just something that I throw out there.

I'm going to bring up one more little thing, it's Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I know the minister is working on it. It's the subdivision up in Corner Brook. I know for the units, I think it's 32 units or 40 units that

they went out for proposals and no one accepted the proposals. My personal opinion, I think you should put out what you want and let people bid on it. Because if you don't, it's going to take a long while.

This is over a year and a half, two years now. First, before you became minister, that area up there never existed until there was a camera shot and story done, oh my God, the building is there. The building then, you said, okay, we can't repair it because we didn't repair it in the first place, now we have to tear it down. It was torn down.

Then they said we're going to get units built. Then they asked for proposals. No one came in with an acceptable proposal. My understanding is there are no proposals that came in to build the units. So we are still in Corner Brook, which was 32 units, still over a year and a half, two years, and had two or three announcements on it and they're still not even started the work yet. If we don't get it started soon, it won't be done this year.

I know the minister is working on it, but I'll just mention to the minister what you should do is put your own proposal, drawings, what you need done and let someone bid on it to build it for you. That's just my suggestion to get it done. Because if not, we're going to go back to the same thing again. It's going to be those potential units not built in Corner Brook. The minister is well aware of it. I know you worked hard on the housing. I know you met with the group about the housing on that. That's just my opinion on that and, hopefully, you'll look into that matter because housing is a serious need in Corner Brook also.

I'm going to get a bit political here now. I don't usually do this, because I'm usually pretty easy, and just bring on the issues about it. I have to say one thing first of all, the *Baltic III* out in Lark Harbour, out in that area when it got in a dangerous storm ran aground. I'll say to the Minister of Environment, they are starting to build a road. It's a small road just for light vehicles

so the people can get on and off with the oil, but they are starting to build the road. They started last week. Also, on part of that, if they need to build a cable line out to it, they will. That's the email that I got.

The government did step up the time and fast-tracked that environmental request to get it done. They are doing it. It's slow. It's very, very slow. I'll say to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure – and this is serious, I'll say it to the minister, very serious – out in the area, Bottle Cove Road, the previous minister got the department to right it, because where the water and sewer is going to be going out in Bottle Cove Road, out beyond that, the road is terrible. There's an agreement there that the former premier brokered actually with me, because he drove it himself, is that there are potholes there very deep. They said that until there's water and sewer put in past that, they would do a lot of patching. They actually need the mill and fill the pavement to fill it in.

Here's the problem with that – and I'll say to the minister, it's very serious. I drove out there Sunday, myself. I say the problem with it is that they're building the road to the *Baltic III*. There are heavy trucks carrying armour stone out there. The road is torn right up. It's just terrible.

So for about a kilometre and a half to get to the site where they have got to go into the ATV trail, there's about a kilometre and a half, there are potholes a foot deep, a foot and a half deep all throughout that kilometre and a half. It was bad before but now with the heavy trucks going out – which they've got to go out with the armour stone and this is a four-kilometre road and when you get out to the beach, there's probably about a 40-foot drop down to the beach from the end of the bank and that's all got to be filled in with armour stone. It is serious.

I ask the minister to ask the regional office to go out. It is very unsafe. I'm also going to be writing the RNC and asking the RNC and

I'm even asking the minister now if you could check into it to reduce the speed because those trucks are going and coming as fast as they can to get more rock. The speed is 50 kilometres. I can tell you that road, when you make the turn to go down to Little Port, it can't sustain that now with those heavy trucks. It's not the dump trucks. It's the flatbeds with the armour stone on the truck, four and five large rocks for armour stone is on the truck.

So I ask the minister to look into that because that's a serious safety concern. I will be writing you and asking you if you can reduce the speed because a lot of the residents of the town – it is a transportation and works road and a lot of the residents in town are very concerned about the number of trucks and the people on the road and the unsafe condition of the road from the Bottle Cove area out.

I just want to ask the minister to have that looked into because it is a very serious issue. The road, I can assure you, it's tore up so bad that, right now, even the heavy trucks, you could hear the banging and people are scared the rocks are going to fall off. That's how bad it is. There are potholes there a foot deep, other places a foot and a half deep. It is a bad road anyway but since that *Baltic III*, it's even got 10 times worse. So I'll just leave that to the minister.

Now I'm going to speak on something, again, that's a bit – and you always think about leading by example. I can remember Clyde Wells when he came in in '89 leading by example, the Cabinet. We have a Cabinet now, including the Premier, 18 people – 18. So we're asking everybody around this province, tighten your belt, except the government – tighten your belt. I just want to give a bit of comparison and why people bring it up to me and ask me about it.

We were talking about it last night, myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands. I'm just going to give a bit of

comparison why you feel – forget the changes to the departments, the cost it's going to cost to change the letterheads, to change departments, to get new ADMs, get new DMs, all that cost. That's a big cost to the government.

Nova Scotia has a population of over a million people; they have 21 ministers – almost twice the size of Newfoundland. Manitoba has 18 Cabinet ministers, including the premier, 1.3 million people. Almost three times the size of Newfoundland, they'll have the same size of Cabinet in Newfoundland. Saskatchewan have 1.1 million people and they have 16 Cabinet ministers. When you compare to Newfoundland and Labrador, we have 18 and 520,000 people. Then you look at New Brunswick, 775,000 people, 250,000 more than Newfoundland and they have 19.

When you talk about examples and telling people we know there are struggles, but we need to get elected. We need to make sure anybody who might have to keep a seat, we need to make sure they're put in Cabinet so they might have a bit of profile and they might be around Cabinet, but it costs the taxpayers money. Always the questions are brought up to me that this government is asking us to tighten our belt and they're asking the seniors, well, we know you're hurting but we're not going to hurt because we need to get elected. It's sad.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I could be wrong on this, and someone could hold me to this. I seen Prime Minister Mark Carney make a statement, we're going to have 30 Cabinet ministers in Ottawa, 40 million people. That's the statement he made. Remember, we used to have like parliamentary assistants to ministers? Then he's going to have 10 or 12 of them. We used to have parliamentary assistants to ministers also, and that's what he's going to appoint with 30 Cabinet ministers. That's what Mark Carney said that he's going to have for 40

million people, and we have 18 in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have to say when you put on this idea to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, we're struggling, we know you're struggling but no, we're with you, but you're really not. Because if this Premier cut down the Cabinet, lead by example. Then I say to government that's something you should consider. I really feel strongly that people would notice that if you led by example. I really, truly, honestly feel that.

Then again, that's going to be an extra cost. There's two or three extra divisions and departments. There's a deputy minister. There's an ADM. There's staff that goes with that. There's a PR person that goes with that. There's another assistant that goes with that. So you're talking a million dollars alone, just for that alone. Then that's the numbers that I actually went out today and looked at for across Canada in comparison to Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'll just take my seat now in a few minutes, and I'll say to the former minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that I know there was a lot of work that's going to be done in the Bay of Islands, and I just want to recognize that, the work that you done in the Bay of islands (inaudible).

SPEAKER: The Member's time is expired.

Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

Before I get onto the main thing I wanted to talk about, I did want to just raise one issue that's come to my mind because it relates, I guess, to Public Service Commission and House of Assembly and so on, and it's the Independent Appointments Commission.

I just wanted to throw it out there that we've raised questions and concerns in this House of Assembly for, my God, three or four years or more, for sure, about the Independent Appointments Commission. About the fact that three names could be presented to the minister, and the minister doesn't have to pick any of those names. Basically, any sense that's supposed to make the process open and transparent, it does the exact opposite because we have no way of knowing if the minister ever picked any one of those three names that were presented by the Independent Appointments Commission.

There was a review done about a year, or I'm not sure if it was a year or two years ago now, at least a year ago, and there was a commissioner and so on that did a review. I made a presentation to the commissioner about it. There was a recommendation that came out in the report. What was recommended is that should someone be appointed, and it went through the IAC and the minister chose someone outside of the IAC process – in other words, didn't pick one of those three names – then the government would be required to publicly advise the House of Assembly and, hence, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that I chose someone who wasn't recommended through the IAC. Then, of course, the minister would have to be responsible for explaining to the House of Assembly why that was done.

That's a recommendation that came out about a year, year and a half ago by the commissioner, and I can remember asking a question about it, about a year ago, and all I hear was we've accepted the report. That's the go-to answer, we've accepted the report, but there's still been no change. I did want to throw it out there. Hopefully, at some point, the government can update us as to where we are on that report and the recommendations and whether or not they intend on moving forward with the recommendation to make changes to the *Independent Appointments Commission Act*

to allow for more openness and transparency as was recommended by the commissioner and brought up in this House on several occasions.

Now, the main thing I kind of wanted to talk about this evening – and I want to thank my colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay. I feel like we're very much on the same page and he's raising these issues on a regular basis as well, and I thank him for that. That's about the bigger financial picture associated to our province. Because we all know that there's an endless list needs; we all get that. Every day you're here in the House of Assembly and someone is saying, well, we need more money for this and more money for that and more money for something else. I think I heard the minister at one point in time, one of the ministers of Transportation say he would need something like \$2 billion or something to fulfill all the requests that there are for roadwork and bridges and everything else. We understand that it's not realistic and I think we all understand there has to be a balancing act, if you will, by the government in terms of what we absolutely need, what we would like to do and then what we can afford to do.

As my colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay spoke to, a little earlier – I thought he did a good job – was the fact that in this particular budget we have an estimate of a \$372-million deficit this year. Of course, with the price of oil down from what has been projected and the Canadian dollar up from what has been projected, that's going to have a cumulative, negative effect of another \$50 million, if it continues, of course, on that \$372 million. Then we also have a contingency of \$200 million and if that were to be spent, that's going to be another \$200-million impact on the budget.

Now, that's on a deficit this year. That's just a deficit this year on our operational budget. What he didn't mention and I'm going to mention is the fact that we had a briefing – it's in the budget anyway, but we did have a

briefing – this morning about a loan act that's going to be coming forward in the next day or two or three or whatever.

That loan act is going to be asking this Legislature to vote to borrow up to \$4.1 billion, with a B, \$4.1 billion again this year. Of that \$4.1 billion, \$1.8 billion of it is going to be basically refinancing, so it's not going to have real impact on the debt as such, because a loan comes up and matures and then we just borrow at a lower rate to continue on with it.

AN HON. MEMBER: Maybe not a lower rate.

P. LANE: Well, yes, my colleague says maybe not a lower rate. The Minister of Finance always says it's going to be at a lower rate, and I'm sure that's what she aims to do. But theoretically at a lower rate.

But there's still \$2.3 billion as part of that \$4.1 billion that's going to be \$2.3 billion borrowing for capital.

E. JOYCE: What?

P. LANE: It's \$2.3 billion for capital.

Now, I've heard it said before over the years, oh well, that's capital. And yeah, because we can put an asset against that liability and all that. That might all look nice on the balance sheet, but whatever way you size up, at the end of the day, it's still another \$2.3 billion added on to our provincial debt.

So right now – I don't have the number in front of me. I just scratched down \$20 billion. I'm not sure, in that neighbourhood. I think we're going to have, with this amount added to it for sure, we're going to be up around \$20 billion, our provincial net debt. The net debt will be about \$20 billion. I would suggest the actual debt is probably closer to maybe \$30 billion, by the time you put in all the unfunded liabilities and the pensions and everything else, I do believe.

But what they call the net debt is now up to \$20 billion, with a B.

Now, we are going to be putting more money into a Future Fund, \$108 million. With that \$108 million, it's going to give us a total in the fund, according to the budget, of \$467 million, after that \$108 million goes in. Just think about that for a second. We're going to have a total of \$467 million in a Future Fund – that's in total – but we're going to actually go deeper in the hole by \$2.3 billion on the capital, plus another \$600 million, \$650 million shortfall on this year's deficit. So we're going to go about \$3 billion in the hole, but we're going to put \$108 million into a Future Fund.

Now, I'm not against the idea in principle of Future Funds and so on, of putting away money for a rainy day. I don't think anyone would. But if you look at your own household finances when you have your savings, normally savings come from, you have your revenue coming in and you say, well, these are the bills I've got to pay, this is my expendable income that I have left over and I'm going to take a portion of that and I'm going to put it away so I've got some emergency money, savings or whatever you want to call it. But you don't go and take your Visa or whatever or go to the bank and take out a loan, just to take it and cash it out and then go put it in your sock drawer, so to speak. That doesn't really make any sense. That's kind of what we're doing.

I know the minister has said in the past the Future Fund money that we would get, personally, would be greater, that we would make off with it, than what we're paying on the interest on the loan. She's saying that it works out that you're actually gaining a little bit of money. I'm not sure if that's true. I'll take the minister for her word on it but, at the end of the day, the bottom line is that we are now going to be going into around \$20 billion in debt.

That is a concern. That ought to be a concern for everybody in this House of Assembly. I'm not saying this, by the way, to be critical of the government. I'm really not because this debt has been accumulating year over year over year and there were times in the past when oil was at almost \$120 a barrel, at one point. Something like that, in the neighbourhood – to be fair – \$120 a barrel.

S. COADY: \$150.

P. LANE: Well, okay, the minister is saying – I don't remember it being \$150. Again, maybe you're right. I remember \$120 for sure. At that point in time, we were still borrowing like a billion dollars a year because I can remember, at the time, standing in this House of Assembly and referring to the minister of Finance at the time about all the revenue that was coming in and she was going to have a billion-dollar shopping spree is what I referred to, just to try to tease her a bit, I suppose. But the fact of the matter was, we were going to borrow a billion dollars with oil at over \$120 a barrel, so spending was definitely out of control.

This is not to blame any particular minister or any particular administration. That's not my purpose in saying it, but the point is that we have continued to rack up debt and more debt and more debt and more debt and sometimes it's important, I think, that we all need to kind of come down to earth a little bit and recognize that.

I thank my colleague again from Baie Verte - Springdale for –

AN HON. MEMBER: Green Bay.

P. LANE: Green Bay – because he tends to do that every now and then and I do appreciate that very much because it is important.

That will bring me back to something I raised the last time we sat, around the need

to have a financial plan to dig ourselves out of this hole that we're in. It's going to have to go beyond the Future Fund. I look at the opportunity that we had before us – I said it before and I'll say it again, for *Hansard* if nothing else. We have an opportunity potentially, and I'll say potentially before us, as it relates to the Upper Churchill, should that happen.

Who knows if it's going to happen or not? I don't know if it's going to happen. I honestly don't know if it's going to happen, how it's going to go. I don't know if anyone knows 100 per cent for sure. It's going to have to come back to this House of Assembly, I hope, for a vote and a lot more scrutiny. But just taking it based on what we heard the last time, if you want to take those numbers as they were presented – and I have no reason to believe that the numbers were wrong. We certainly had, I felt, independent expert people who were giving the information, answering the questions. I don't doubt their credentials, certainly in the finance business and so on and the electricity business, but we've been told it's going to be an additional billion dollars. A billion dollars a year from now or from when the deal is signed to 2041.

If it were to happen next year, that would be like \$15 billion that we didn't have. Fifteen billion in found money, so to speak, because we never had it all along and now we're going to have it. And we also know, or we hope, or we're told, that mining is doing quite well. There's going to be a lot of opportunity to raise revenue in terms of our mining opportunities. I don't know where we'll go with this hydrogen wind stuff. I'm still not convinced that's even going to happen, but anyway, you never know. It might happen. Some of it might happen, and I'm not sure how great it's going to be if it does happen.

But I think the point is that there is opportunity on the horizon that we should have some decent years from resources even over and above the Churchill if it were

to happen. That we should be able to carry us through a number of budgets on that revenue if we manage it properly, hopefully, alone. And that billion dollars a year, I'm not saying the whole billion, but a good portion of that money could be, and in my opinion should be, put down on reducing our provincial debt. I think it's the responsible thing to do. I think it's a real opportunity that we have.

I thought that as a province, I'll be honest with you, we were never going to get out of the hole. I was of the belief, man, we're never going to get out of this mess. We're never getting out of the hole. But if the Upper Churchill happens as described or some version of it, and all that additional revenue starts coming through the door that we never had, never expected, what a legacy to leave our children and our grandchildren than to pay off this crippling debt.

Imagine what we could do if we never had to pay \$1.3 billion on debt servicing alone. That's what we're paying in our budgets: \$1.3 billion in debt servicing alone. We could balance our budgets. We could live within our means. We could provide the services that we needed, and we could have a debt, if not totally eliminated, certainly a debt that's more manageable and under control, and save on interest and so on, but it's going to require fiscal management. It's going to require political will because, guaranteed, as soon as that new money comes in through the door, regardless of who's in the government, the temptation – we know the demands are going to be there.

Everybody in the province is going to figure that, okay, now we want this, we want that and we want something else. I'm not saying we ignore the needs of the people. That's not what we're here for. We're not here to ignore the needs of people. We're here to provide for the needs of the people, but we have to do it in a responsible way.

I certainly hope, whether it's this government, or whether it's this potential new government, whatever way she goes, I hope that the will is going to be there to have a solid plan in place of how do we get this albatross, call that provincial debt, how do we get it from around their neck. And there are opportunities there to do it. I hope we take that opportunity to do it.

Like I say, we're only going to be here for a short time. Some of us maybe longer than others; some of us not so long. But there are generations coming behind us. I have four grandchildren. I know there are lots of people here that have children, grandchildren and so on.

AN HON. MEMBER: How old are you?

P. LANE: How old? I'm getting there.

And I want them to have a future. I want them to have a future here in this province, I really do. But we have to get our fiscal house in order. I think that the opportunities are there in front of us. I'm hoping they're coming – I think they're coming, between Churchill Falls, potentially the wind, all the mining up in Labrador, mining on the Island. I know there were talks of a new salt mine I think out in Stephenville, somewhere. Atlas Salt or something. Biggest one in North America, I believe I heard, something like that.

There are opportunities. Our tourism industry is doing really well. It's only growing. Our IT sector is doing well. There is lots of opportunity for us, but it's how we manage the money.

I think if you were to talk to a lot of people in the province, people that – I've talked to a number of people in this province who do follow this stuff and they are very concerned about our province. There are people who've said we had lots of opportunity over the years that we've squandered. I think a lot of people would say we squandered a lot of opportunities. Just didn't manage it right.

So, as we go forward, whoever the government is, let's get that solid financial plan in place to utilize these future revenues to pay off the debt to put ourselves in better shape in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, is the House ready for the vote?

All those in favour of the Concurrence motion regarding the Government Services Committee, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Report of the Government Services Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I would like for a moment to go back to Routine Proceedings and give notice of a motion, with leave of the House.

SPEAKER: Does the Member have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Tomorrow, Estimates will be done in the House of Assembly for Legislature and what's under that. So we just want to follow the same procedures we've done outside the House and this is more or less a request of the Table to keep it cleaner for them.

I give notice of the following motion: That for the purpose of reviewing the Estimates of

the Executive Council in Committee of the Whole House, debate shall proceed in same manner as adopted by Estimates of the House reviewing Estimates. That is 10-minute question and answer period blocks.

SPEAKER: Any further business?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, 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. tomorrow.

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