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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit visitors.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, budget debate.

SPEAKER: We will now be debating the subamendment of the budget.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, it's a pleasure to get up and speak on the subamendment of the budget. It's always nice to get up and represent the people who elected me and put me here. Last night, of course, I sat here and I listened to a great deal of the debate. There was a lot of issues brought up, a lot of concerns by the different MHAs.

Health care, of course, was one of the big ones that I did hear and there's no difference, I guess, in my district. Again, I will bring up the health care issues. I suppose I'll start with that one. In 2016, the Liberals stripped the 24-hour emergency service out of the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre.

Since then, there has been two promises made, two different elections, two different premiers, still Liberal government and nothing has happened. That decision in 2016 was nothing primary, only a government decision. Nobody else's decision. Staff was there, people were there and the facility is there. Actually, prior to 2014, in a previous administration, there was over \$4 million spent on that hospital to

do up the blood clinic, the lab, everything was done. The facility itself, I think, there was roof repair. All of that stuff was done to have a great facility there. They stripped the 24-hour service in 2016, and it still remains a big issue today.

Of course, doctors in the region – we spoke about it yesterday – Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans where the Central Newfoundland Regional Health Centre is to, we're lacking in doctors. The emergency unit up here stressed, overwhelmed; 24-hour emergency service at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre gone.

We need to streamline that, as I said before. In 2019 the first election, what did the one of the former premiers say? We're going to reinstate the 24-hour emergency service. That went a couple of years. Never happened. 2021, same thing. New premier, new candidate, they promised we're going to reinstate 24-hour emergency service. Not my words, that's theirs. They came out and said it. Everybody knows it. Still not happening.

Actually, the Liberal candidate at the time who made the promise, where's he to? I've heard this brought up a couple of times last night: Where's he to? The 2021 campaign, Premier's office, Grand Falls-Windsor, failed Liberal candidate, okay, we'll give you a job in Grand Falls-Windsor in the Premier's office.

Yet, we still can't get our 24-hour emergency service.

AN HON. MEMBER: Decisions (inaudible).

P. FORSEY: Decisions that they make, yes. And to see that they could put someone, open up that office in the Premier's office in there.

At the time, 2019, Central East, Central West, I'll call it, seven MHAs, basically. At the time in 2019 we had five Liberal MHAs and two PC MHAs got elected. And the two

PC MHAs, I must say, we were doing fine. We were talking to the constituents, doing work. We didn't ask for the Premier's office in Grand Falls-Windsor. We didn't want it. Nobody consulted us.

So I'm left to believe why that decision was made. I wasn't consulted. I didn't need any help in there. I don't think the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans needed any help in there. As far as I know, he wasn't asked.

The only thing I can see is out of the candidates that got elected on the Liberal side, they needed some help. Or the Premier at the time didn't have confidence in them – something there, something happened. I don't know why. It had to be one of it. We didn't need any help. Yet, they could put a failed Liberal candidate at the Premier's office in Grand Falls-Windsor.

I'm hoping now that we have a new Premier he will see fit to say that I don't need any help in Exploits. I'm sure the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans doesn't need any help in his district. We can work fine with the constituents.

Anyway, to see that they can find funding for that kind of stuff to support their Liberal friends is ridiculous. It's bad decisions, totally bad decisions. It really is.

I've talked to people at the Exploits Community Employment Corporation, they've been there for years. I know this money comes through transfer funds through the federal government. I know it does, and it's employment money for people with disabilities to put them to work. Last year that was cut. Nobody is advocating for them – nobody – through the federal government to get this funding put back in place.

Now, that's funding that puts people with intellectual disabilities to work in different areas, different places and they work well in society. They love their jobs. They feel great

that they're part of the community, community based. They feel great that they're doing something. They have initiative in the morning to get up and go to work, and we have lots of it out there. We have a lot of people out there in those predicaments that need that sort of help.

Was there anything extra in this budget for those people? No, nothing there extra for those people. I think they had it up to somewhere around \$2 million, I think, somewhere in that area that they were employing people with those disabilities. Great to have the funding for them, great initiative, great project, great way to have people employed.

Now they're just barely hanging on; only working, probably, three months at a time or whatnot; just getting enough to even keep the offices open when those people worked with those individuals with disabilities. So where are they left to now? Probably some of them have enough work that they've got EI, I guess. After their EI is finished, where are they to then? What happens to them then? More than likely on our own assistance. That's basically where they are going to end up to when they are good, productive people of our society and they're left out, fell between the cracks because of government's decisions.

When I see that government's decisions can employ a failed Liberal candidate, Liberal friend in an office in Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans in Grand Falls-Windsor, not on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Put that money where it should be. I know the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans said a quarter million dollars, and we've all said a quarter million dollars. And yes, there are lots of places we can spend it. I know we can say a quarter million dollars for the hospice, which the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans mentioned yesterday. I know we can say a quarter million dollars for that.

I know I could say I take the quarter million dollars and give it to the Exploits Community Employment Corporation. I know I could say take that quarter million dollars and give it to some organizations. Take that quarter million dollars and let's invest in some of our roads or food banks. There's lots of areas that we could spend that quarter million dollars a year. Lots of ways – summer students, again.

But to see that it's there to support a Liberal candidate that was out making promises in the last election, and they're willing to support that. I mean like I said, the government side, they're willing to support it. The office is still there. We have another new Premier; the office is still there. And there's lots of places that we could spend that quarter million dollars. Not saying we don't want a lot more. Yes, I mean I just mentioned a few places. No trouble to get rid of a quarter million dollars. It's pretty simple, pretty easy.

To see those people at the Exploits Community Employment Corporation falling through the cracks, it's terrible – it's terrible. Their mothers and fathers they call me. I've gotten the calls. Pleaman, what am I going to do? Johnny loved his job down at the drug store, loved his job over at the shoe store, loved his job doing the construction. Now he has no job. Where he could do that job and the people around him loved him. They really did. They loved what he was doing. He interacted with the community. He felt like he was contributing to society, but there's no funding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. FORSEY: Anyway, they all want to say something about it, so they can get up and talk about it all they like what they're going to do. They can tell me what they're going to do when they get the chance.

But when they said some of them are still working, so is the member in the office in Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans. He's still

working as well, and not coming out of it, either.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Anyway, that's one of the issues I hear, but if they want to get up and explain that situation, they can. If one of them would get up and have something to say about it, I don't mind. I'm sure the crowd at the Exploits Community Employment Corporation would love to know what you got to say about it. I'm sure they would like to know, really.

Then we hear of closures and diversions in health care. They say they're doing marvellous work with health care. We're still hearing closures and diversions every week. Closures and diversions on the Connaigre Peninsula, Baie Verte, Lewisporte, Kitiwake, all those areas still being left without physicians, still being left without those services.

So the 24-hour emergency service and the way the government has used the fundings where they cut and then put it somewhere else and the type of spending that they're doing, the people in my district see it easy enough. They really do. They see it and they feel it. Those are things that need to be done, more constructive decisions at government's expenditures. We certainly need more constructive decisions.

I'll go to our volunteer sector. I got a few minutes left, so I'll talk about our volunteer sector. Our volunteer sectors in our society, especially in the Exploits District, make up for community projects, community benefits. They're amazing for what they do for our communities. They really, really are, all of the community sectors.

The volunteer fire departments are what we depend on. We have no career firefighters in the Exploits District, but we have all volunteers. We depend on them every day and I think somebody here mentioned it yesterday that they're first responders now.

They need the equipment and the tools to be able to be first responders. Because what they're responding to these days, accidents and medical calls – they're even the first call now for a medical call, not ambulances anymore.

I spoke about it through a petition here earlier this year. They needed some of their fire equipment – all declined. All of the small fire departments all being declined when the government is relying on those people for their services every single day and they're low on equipment. They're low on equipment and telling me, b'y, can you check on my application or we got declined on our application, we don't have our breathing apparatus. We don't have our tanks. You know, we need this. To see those people left out when we rely on them every single day – now don't tell me it's not happening. I had the letters; I had them through a petition and brought it up.

It is happening, so we need to put the funding where it should be. There's another spot right there. A million dollars for four years after \$250,000 from the Premier's office in Grand Falls-Windsor – a million dollars, man, if you gave a million dollars and that's where it went, through some apparatuses for those volunteer fire departments, sure they'd be all done now. They'd be all done; they'd be all looked after, rather than throw it away up in the Premier's office – wow.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: I did say four or five times but it needs to be repeated.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: It needs to be repeated, but I'm glad I finally got your attention. I'm glad I finally go your attention.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: There you go, somebody else got to say.

You look at the websites every day, there's virtual care – virtual care is what they call it now. Virtual care is actually what they call it now. You get the virtual care; they don't even tell –

E. LOVELESS: (Inaudible) said diversions on the Connaigre Peninsula; that is a lie.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. FORSEY: What was that word?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the Member to retract that please. I clearly heard it.

E. LOVELESS: I will do the honourable thing and get on my feet and I'll apologize for that comment.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Anyway, Speaker, I see my time will soon be up, and I know they're eager over there to speak. I can tell this morning that they can't wait to go. So I think that we're going to have to go and vote on our budget. I heard the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands last night bring up a good point actually. I mean to say he mentioned of the \$400 million that was in the budget last night, the way it was put in the budget, he's having doubts about voting for the budget and –

P. LANE: No doubt.

P. FORSEY: No doubt, apparently. He says he's not voting for it.

As a matter of fact, the way he spoke about it last night, it got me convinced. It got me convinced of not voting for the budget. You know, I had second thoughts. I was right on

the borderline of whether I was going to vote for the budget or not, but the way that Member spoke last night and proved that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: – you know, that's what's happening, this type of situation in the budget, I'm convinced as well. I think now I'm finally convinced. I think my mind is made up.

So other than that, Speaker, there are lots of things that I could bring up in my district but –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) leave.

P. FORSEY: Actually, I think there's somebody mentioning leave. I'll take the leave. I don't care. I could stay here all day. I actually could stay here all day, but one thing I would like to bring up, Speaker, is the fishing of course.

I do have a small community in my district – actually, it's where I'm from and very proud of it. The community of Leading Ticks are the only fishing licences that I have in my district. Their fishing season is on and I'm glad the season went ahead this year without too many disruptions, because fishing is what they do. Fishing is what they love, fishing makes their community and when they get up in the morning, that's what they want to do is go fishing. So I'm glad that they're back on the water this year without too much disruption.

I do wish them a very successful and safe season, and I'm looking forward to talking to them every time I go down.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Good luck with the fishing season and continue what you do.

Other than that, Speaker, I got a few seconds left, but I'll just take my seat now and let somebody else take a turn at their

speaking privileges. It looks like they can't wait. There are two or three of them that can't wait there now to get up, so I'm going to let them get up.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't plan to take any time to have anything to say this morning, but I think it's the responsibility of all of us in terms of when we speak and when things are said that are not correct and not factual, then they should be pointed out and it should be corrected.

I would like to know where the Member for Exploits got his information – please table it and provide it – that down on the Connaigre Peninsula, there are closures and there are diversions. His exact words, but that is not true. It's not factual.

I would like to know where his source of information is, and I say that because the people in the Connaigre Peninsula went through a very difficult time when there were diversions on the go. He knows it; we all know it. So I have a responsibility on behalf of my constituents this morning because somebody may be listening to that and think, oh, there are more diversions and closures now. What closures? There are no closures.

If anything, we got a good situation in the Connaigre Peninsula hospital down in Harbour Breton and in St. Alban's and in all the other clinics. What he said is not true, so I think he should do the honourable thing and go back and do his research and come back and report to this House what is correct.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I just wanted to also correct the record. In my previous capacity as minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, I did oversee the Supported Employment program. The Member this morning has been talking about that program, so I wanted to correct for the record what's going on with the program. We did talk about that extensively in Estimates, so I would encourage anyone who's interested to go back and review the Estimates records for that as well.

The Supported Employment underwent a review, Speaker. We've extended all of the contracts for the Supported Employment agencies until the end of July, and then new contracts will be starting August 1.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: I just also want to say, the government is not the employer here, but also, the amount of funding is being maintained for all Supported Employment organizations. There is no funding being cut. Every participant is being grandfathered in and we're making changes to make sure that the spirit of the program is maintained, because in not all instances was, necessarily, the spirit of the program in place and I guess in the contract, so we are making sure that all the contracts align with the spirit of the program.

There were also areas where there was budget in other areas that was not being utilized. We want to make sure that all the available budget goes towards giving clients who need it employment and job trainers and putting it towards helping people get to work and get back to work.

I fully disagree with the statements of the Member. All the funding has been maintained. No one should be without employment and government is not the employer. The Supported Employment agencies are the employer. If there is anything going on outside of what I've described, please let myself and the current minister know and we'd be happy to have the team to look into it.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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. I'm so proud to represent them. But I want to start today by wishing probably the most compassionate, hard-working, honest and faithful to their job people and say happy Nurses Week.

I think it deserves a round of applause actually.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: We heard from the new Premier yesterday, and it was actually nice of him to stand in his place and talk about the budget because it was the first time I heard a Premier talk about the budget in a long time. He had a lot of things to say and carrying on with the mandate that he inherited, and that's talking about our health care and filling those gaps in the health care.

We couldn't be happier to make sure that that happens as well because it's so important to each and every person, but not only that, to our doctors and nurses and administrators that work in our health care system that really need that support at this time. Like I said, with the recruitment and retention, if we can get those programs to

be robust, I think it will make a big difference. You know, we have a minister now that has a former health care background, so just yesterday we started working on a very important project together as well.

So, again, there are good things about what we're doing here but the gaps in the system, I guess, are the big issue. We understand that it takes time, but the thing about it is, we've already utilized a lot of time that never did bear any fruit. I think the thing is, when we recreate health care from our Health Accord, we have to understand it's not a lens of how it affects you as an individual. It's a lens that we need to look at of how it affects the people of the province that so readily need it on a daily basis.

I think it's important that the communication from our hospitals to our patients is more robust, I guess, kind of thing and making sure that there are no missed appointments or there are no gaps in the system, I guess.

I got an 86-year-old man now that doesn't have a family doctor and there is no nurse practitioner near where he is, and he's unable to get that note to go and say that he can keep his licence. With that being said, I want to make a shout-out to my old buddy Eric Courtney. I'm sure he's watching in Arnold's Cove. He's at the Golden Years Manor. He is 96 years old – he just turned 96, actually, two days ago – and he actually has his licence.

He's still allowed to drive around Arnold's Cove. I don't think he's out on the highway or anything, but in the meantime, he has a smile that goes for days. It's a new lease on life for him because he really has always driven. It gives him an opportunity to go to the grocery store and all that stuff whenever he wants.

Like I said, that's the kinds of things I focus on and that's what I think that my job is as the MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue, to make people's lives better where I can.

That's the whole reason why I always say that through hard work and communication we can accomplish a lot of things. That's where I come to and in saying that, I also give a big shout-out to Wayne Follett and Joe Mercer in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Absolutely two gems that I tell you – I would say their best attribute is that they listen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: They care.

J. DWYER: And that's why they listen, because they care.

Do you know what? I've never had a rebuttal or anything like that. I've met with those guys and the ministers, and just to know that any minister that comes into Housing does not have to micromanage them, I can tell you that right now. They know what they're at. I think they're the ones that are helping us with filling some gaps. We're not there yet but, with people like Wayne Follett and Joe Mercer, I think that we're going to get there. That's the thing, it's the internal people that are in our public service that do so much great work, like our nurses.

This being Nurses' Week, the whole point is that we're all in this together. We all have a job to do. Nobody has a silver bullet and nobody is an expert in everything. That's the point I want to make. If you know how to listen, you can become an expert in everything, but if you think you're an expert in everything, then keep running your mouth and you'll have a sidewalk to walk on real soon.

When I listened to the Premier speak, he was talking about a laser focus on rural Newfoundland. I think the laser must be still warming up because there's no focus on rural Newfoundland, not in my district anyway. My district goes from Marystown to

Long Harbour and all places in between. Everything is off a branch and everything is – let's take English Harbour East. It's 32 kilometres from the highway but it's also 45 kilometres by the time you get down to English Harbour East from Goobies, so there's a distance. They're right in the middle with Terrenceville and Grand le Pierre.

It's a really different area for the simple fact that they're equidistant between Marystown and Clarendville, but the other odd part about my district being so large is that we don't actually have a physical hospital in our district. I do depend on the Burin Peninsula Health Care Centre, which I support tremendously; the G.B. Cross and Discovery Health Care, that I support tremendously; and Whitbourne, as well. I was honoured to go out there to their rally and help save the services for the Whitbourne hospital, which was very important, not only for the people that are employed there that are from my district, but the people that would present and the people that would have any issues while they're on their way to St. John's to get help – and Carbonear helps a lot as well.

The thing is, in saying that we're all in this together, there should be never a personal lens put on it when somebody's asking for help. You can't take it personal and you just have to help them. I mean, whether you agree or not with what they need help with is fine. Just because it doesn't fit into how you see your life doesn't mean that you can't help somebody with what they see as good in their life.

There's a few things I'd like to point out that, I guess – we don't want to say that anybody's derelict in their duty but there are things that have happened that I've been working on for literally years. Actually, come Friday for all the people that came in in 2019, it'll be our sixth anniversary of sitting in these seats and representing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think we're all proud of that. So like I said, we all come

in here together, but we all have different things for our districts that we have to focus on because not all things are equal and not all funding that comes to each district is equal.

I'll just talk about a couple of things actually. One thing outside of my district, I have a young girl – something I'm working with the new minister on. Hopefully, we can get there because it's kind of been one of these cans that has been kicked down the road with no real solution. I've brought a solution, and I'm hoping that we can look at it as a one-off or a unique piece.

This young lady has some issues with epilepsy and mental health issues. She's an adult and she's out on her own. She's already approved for 70 hours; they have a worker that comes in and does 40 hours and does a great job. She's been there for three years, but when somebody else comes in to work the 30 hours, I guess when they see an episode or anything like that it kind of scares them. They move away from it and the father is always left to look after his own daughter, but he's also a retired teacher that we could probably use in the teaching field. He's not able to apply for a job, even as a substitute, because he doesn't know what days his daughter will need him. If somebody up and quits or somebody doesn't show up for the shift, they're not replaced right away so he has to automatically do that.

We know that this is a real solution to this gap and, in this instance, I think it would only make sense because the father has to do the training, actually, for the new people that are coming in if they take the other 30 hours even. He's more than done his part, but I think that's the solution: just let him get paid the 30 hours because (a) he's not able to go back to work, and (b) he's filling a gap that, right now, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services can't fill. So I think this young lady is more than deserving of getting these hours filled because bringing on

somebody new is a little bit strange for this young lady as well.

Again, this is somebody that I'm dealing with from outside my district. I'm not here to call anybody out or anything like that, it's just that this family had been told by other family members and past relationships that if you want it done, call Jeff Dwyer. He'll help you out. He'll certainly call you back. I think that was their issue, they weren't getting called back from their own MHA once they reached out, but I've got nothing to say about that. Those people can do their job the way they want to do their job.

We've still got diesel on the ground down in Swift Current; we've got a Department of Environment. I find it really weird or funny we all talk about environment and how it's our job to take care of the environment and, you know, if you saw a fellow throw a chip bag out the window, b'y, you might take his licence plate down. That's how we're after being groomed to this point, do you know what I mean?

But when we spill diesel, if you don't have insurance, don't worry about it. The environment will take care of itself. Unbelievable; what an attitude. I could not believe it. The way this has been handled is derelict of duty, and I will say that for the simple fact, let's clean it up and let's go after the administration and the insurance and whatever needs to happen after the fact, but let's clean up this diesel – 700 litres of diesel.

A lady has a hobby farm next to it. You know, she's trying to grow some root vegetables for her father that lives on the other side between the two houses. It's just unbelievable that we'd be here today talking about – this happened back in, like, February or early March. I can't believe it. We're still here today talking that people are not calling them or people are not talking to the people of Swift Current.

Isn't it our responsibility in an emergency situation to go out and clean that up and then go after the cost later if we've got to recoup cost? It's the environment. Apparently, only if you can pay for the environment then we're worried about it. I guess that's what this whole transition to an economy means and all this kind of stuff. So when we beat the drum about the environment, let's make sure that we're not just doing it for our own self worth. I say to the former minister of Environment, you can get up and explain why you didn't want to talk to the people of Swift Current whenever you're ready.

About six years ago we came in, when they did the Health Accord, we, in Arnold's Cove, were losing a doctor that had stuck around for over 50 years, Dr. Geoffrey Fowlow, and I tip my hat to him. He's retired now but he still has some patients I think that he is helping out and still going to the homes and stuff like that. He's a great guy, actually. He's a big part of our community in Arnold's Cove. He's a wealth of knowledge and I appreciate talking to him all the time.

Again, we started about five or six years ago on this Arnold's Cove clinic because we understood that we were going to be a spoke to take away some of the pressure off G.B. Cross in Clarendville and the Newhook centre in Whitbourne. We have an area there where we have an aging community, but it's also a very industrial area and it could really use a clinic.

You know, at this point we're not even really looking for a doctor; we're looking for a nurse practitioner that can work there. Like I said, through COVID and all this kind of stuff, the jigs and the reels, it's not exactly anybody's fault but I think this is a fault that needs to move forward now in short order so we can really break ground this year, get the clinic built and then get it staffed with a nurse practitioner or a doctor.

To the people of Arnold's Cove, we're almost there. I know it's taken some time and it's been unfortunate, but we're going to

get there. We are going to get there, and I'll stick with this until we get there because it's the volition of the town, it's the volition of the area and as long as it's their volition, it's my volition as well. I know that it will be a great help to take the pressure off G.B. Cross in Clarendville, that's already overwhelmed.

In my last four minutes, I guess I'd like to touch on the roads because having a large district, it's very important that people are able to come and go as they please. When we talk about roads, it's a whole trickle effect because, you can do whatever you want with the roads, if the brush is still there, it's not much sense. If you don't have any shoulders on the roads, people can't even walk. There are a lot of different things and, I mean, like I said, everything in my district is off a branch.

You have poor old Rushoon and Baine Harbour that have a school down there and a cow path for a road. I've asked many times, even if we can get a bit of cold patch or something just to try and fill in these gaps, and to no avail. It's unbelievable. We get invited in to give our priorities. I have 36 towns and 8 LSDs and 4 unincorporated areas, 16 fire departments and I get to bring in three priorities. Is that to tell my district that I didn't care about the other 42 entities?

I'm thinking so because the three priorities that I laid on the table are very rough areas and, to me, the reason why these areas are so rough is because we have five depots in my district and three of those shut down in the summer time for whatever reason. That really hasn't been explained yet either, but when you have a large district like that, it bodes well that maybe it's not that we have to close down the same three every time. Maybe there's a couple that could stay open so that they can work on those areas that they are supposed to oversee; because, when it goes down to two, and that's not to take away anything from the people that work in our depots that are still open, it's just the fact that they're overwhelmed and

they have, probably, too big of an area to cover for the amount of time that they have.

All I ask is, when we sit down and you ask for my priorities and they're not fulfilled or they're not even on the order sheet, was it a waste of time? I guess, really, if I'm not being listened to. That's the whole point, that's what I'm coming back to, you're only going to be as focused as good as you're listening because we all don't have the silver bullet. If you're not listening to people and how they see their lives and how they want to live their lives and live their best life, then I think we're missing the boat on really representing the people with the utmost respect and integrity that we should be doing here in this House.

Like I said, I do get a lot of calls from all over the province and I work with ministers and ADMs and EAs all the time to make sure that those people are looked after. What I always remind anybody that I work with is let's work on this together for somebody else. I'm not looking for a pat on the back. I'm not looking for anything. If the people want me to continue as their MHA I certainly will, but the thing is, when we're all in this together, people know that they can approach me, and I'll call them back.

I think that's the integrity that I bring to the table and the respect that I have for the people that have given me this opportunity to be their voice in the House of Assembly. On that note, I know my time is running out. I want to say thank you to all the people that do work with me on behalf of my constituents in Placentia West - Bellevue, and I really want to say I hope all our nurses stay safe and have a great Nurses' Week.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always an honour to stand and represent the good people of my district and, of course, the pleasure today to speak this morning to the subamendment to *Budget 2025*.

Speaker, last night here in the House of Assembly, I do know it may have gotten heated at times. I commend you on the job you're doing, Speaker, but at one point the Premier did stand and, in the midst of debate, said: On this side of the House we care. I wrote it down when the Premier said it, I know several of my colleagues did the same, but it wasn't until driving home last night and I received two messages from constituents who were watching last night saying that it insinuated that we didn't care.

Now with all due respect to the hon. Premier, I know, again in debate, when things are said and it may not be thought through fully but I know that the 40 Members of this House care. I know in His Majesty's Official Opposition we care. Everyone cares in this House of Assembly. I just wanted to say that for the benefit of the two that did reach out to me who were watching the House last evening. I fully understand in the heat of debate things are said that may not be fully thought through, and, Speaker, I know again, with you in your position as well, that you do care.

So I just want to make that known for the people that did reach out to me, there are times heated debate does bring out these comments.

Speaker, last night here in the House, my colleague from Torngat Mountains spoke about food security and she spoke about the methods that families come together in her district when they are looking for affordable ways for food orders that come into her district. I realized, after speaking with her, the compounded challenges that constituents in her district face when it comes to food security and how that impacts her job as an MHA in helping her constituents in the best way she can.

Yesterday, also in the House, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board stood when my colleague, I believe from Bonavista, spoke about food bank usage. I can be corrected, Speaker, but I do believe that the minister was referring to numbers coming down here in the province with respect to food bank usage. I'm not quite sure of the data she was using, but the message she was trying to convey to this House was that food bank usage was coming down in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, in my beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, I know that the food bank usage has increased dramatically. In my former role as an elected municipal official, I began working with the food bank. I continue to do what I can to support the Northeast Avalon Food Bank in the Town of Torbay, which services all of my district and a portion of the neighbouring district. As I said, food bank usage has increased over the last number of years.

A significant portion of food bank clients are children. Approximately one in three food bank clients are under the age of 18. So when you look at a single-parent family, albeit a mother or father with young children, I've spoken to several of them and they reached out as to how do we begin the process of receiving from the food bank.

When you look at it, Speaker, it takes a great deal of courage for an individual to speak up and to ask for help. I'm always, as my colleague from Placentia West - Bellevue just said, at the ready to give help and to be available, but it is becoming more and more prominent in my district. I'm sure we have other districts in this hon. House that are feeling the same.

Speaker, I went to just look for some information and HungerCount 2024 did some stats in that year, and they reached out to a total of 62 food banks across our beautiful province here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Those numbers state that

15,425 visits to our food banks, these 62 in particular, were in the course of one year, with one-third being children involved in the food bank usage. In their numbers, the visits increased by 12 per cent over 2023. I fully appreciate the stats that the Deputy Premier said yesterday with respect to food bank usage, but it's not matching what I'm reading and what I'm experiencing with my boots on the ground in my district.

To further continue on with that, Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest percentage of seniors accessing food banks in Canada, in our country. Newfoundland and Labrador seniors had the highest percentage accessing food banks nationwide. That, as I've spoken to in this House many times over the last four years, is a product of the high cost of living, and of course, wages not matching or keeping up with that.

Speaker, in addition to all of that, Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest percentage of homeowners accessing food banks. The highest percentage of homeowners in Canada are in Newfoundland and Labrador accessing food banks.

Now, one of my colleagues from across the way has said many times over this sitting of the House that numbers don't lie. Well, Speaker, numbers do not lie. When it comes to food bank usage, it is steadily increasing. That is alarming to me when I look at people who once supported the food bank, donated to the food bank, volunteered their time and their effort there are now users of the Northeast Avalon Foodbank in Torbay in my district. Speaker, that is very concerning when it comes to food security and moreover when we have children and seniors who are a part of that.

I would like to just give a shout-out to the new board of directors who are now operating the food bank in Torbay, as I said, the Northeast Avalon Food Bank. In December of 2024 a new board of directors

came on, and I'd just like to share with this hon. House and the people of our province the individuals who are now operating that food bank: president, Crystal Murphy; vice-president, Cassie Manning-Dyke; the treasurer is Corrina Martin; the secretary is Emma; and director, Tera McDonald.

Now, Speaker, I do know that this group is enthusiastic. They are a solid team and very excited to help the people of my district and to carry on the future endeavours towards community care when it comes to accessible food and to helping out seniors and low-income families in our district.

I know I might get a ribbon for this one, or not, but my wife always tells me I shouldn't be naming names or making lists. From the top of my head, over the years, the people that provide great support for my district and the neighbouring District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island to the Northeast Avalon Food Bank – and I just want to share with you some of the people, organizations and groups that are always on the ready. They're always there to help and to provide assistance to those who are in need.

Speaker, we have the Lions Clubs in my district, Torbay Community Garden, the Canadian postal workers, the sports teams at Holy Trinity High in Torbay, students from St. Francis of Assisi in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove, local businesses, annual memorial softball tournaments that all funds go to the operation of the food bank, the Northeast Eagles Minor Hockey team, the various church fundraisers, Torbay Folk Arts Council, Music for Young Children and the many personal family donations.

The five municipalities, I'm very proud to say, all support, and the municipality of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's in the neighbouring District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island does as well. The Torbay Harbour Authority, the Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove Development Association, the Knights of Columbus and the dozens and dozens of anonymous supporters; I'd

like to publicly thank all of them and, of course, those I have missed because I'm sure I've missed some, Speaker, but they're always there to provide assistance for those who are in need.

Unfortunately, with today's cost of living, with what the people of the province are faced – I believe my colleague from Exploits said earlier that it wasn't in the budget to help offset the difficulties the people of the province are facing. These individuals, these groups, these not-for-profit organizations, they all help out and I'd like to publicly thank them for what they do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I want share with you now, a couple from Pouch Cove, Tony and Mary Palmer. Two individuals with a family who looked at what they could do to help others. I know I had the conversation with the Minister of Municipal Affairs in his former role with CSSD, but Tony and Mary began the food pantry in the Town of Pouch Cove. For my hon. colleagues in this House who are always attentively listening, and I thank them for that, the pantry redirects surplus food just prior to being out of date from the different box stores, from grocery stores and what have you.

They have a process of going to these establishments, picking up the food in a safe manner, bringing them back to the Town of Pouch Cove and dispersing this food to families, to hundreds of constituents in my district. I've seen first-hand the positive effects that Tony and Mary Palmer are having on many demographics in my district. Anyone can come to the pantry regardless of age and regardless of income. I've seen students. I've seen seniors. I've seen working families. I've seen those on income support. I've seen all demographics access this food pantry and no one is turned away.

I can tell you, by speaking with some of the people who are accessing the pantry in

Pouch Cove, some who cannot afford to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, some who cannot afford to purchase milk, this is reality. This is what some people are facing in my district, and I know this is not a one-off. We have 40 districts in this House and I do know that many districts are facing the same and, Speaker, I'd just like to share with you some numbers.

From retail stores from June to December of 2024, there were 51 food rescues. It was an average value of \$3,500 per rescue. That's just under \$180,000 of food that was rescued from going to the landfill. Again, it's just prior to being out of date and the food is still good. So approximately \$180,000 worth in value, 65,000 kilograms of food. That was just from June to December of 2024. I cannot comprehend the number of meals that 65,000 kilograms of food can produce, but I do know the smiles on the faces of the people who access the food pantry on a weekly basis that Tony and Mary set up.

Thanks to the Town of Pouch Cove for providing space, the municipal building that they operate out of two days a week to provide these food rescues to the individuals. I see the positive effect it has on the single mother with two young children who can't afford to buy yogurt, fruit cups and various things for their lunches. I've spoken to seniors who, for the first time in a long time, had fresh fruits and vegetables in their fridge. I've spoken to the working class who are between jobs for whatever reason and the difference that it makes to their household all to the thanks of Tony and Mary Palmer and the food pantry in Pouch Cove.

Speaker, just some more numbers I'd like to share with you. The food rescues from Second Harvest in 2023 was \$37,000 in value and in 2024 was \$32,000 in value. All of this makes a big difference. That's not going to the landfill and it is supporting our residents, so I would like to thank Tony and Mary Palmer for all that they do.

I can tell you they're feeling the pinch out of pocket when it comes to the price of fuel. For example, they're travelling from Pouch Cove to Costco twice a week, or to Dominion or Sobeys or whatever, and this is impacting their pocketbook with respect to paying for fuel in their vehicle to do this, and they're doing it all out of the goodness of their hearts. I'd like to thank them for what they do, what they're going to continue to do and I'll support them wherever I can as they continue to support my constituents.

Speaker, in the few minutes I have left, I do want to touch on Transportation and Infrastructure. I know the minister is always listening when it comes to Transportation and Infrastructure. Over the last number of years I've worked with three Ministers of Transportation and Infrastructure and, shortly ago, I presented a petition to this House with respect to roadwork.

First and foremost, I'm very appreciative of the roadwork that was approved for my district for 2025-2026. I've said that to the minister and I'll say it publicly. I look forward to that work being started very soon to make a difference to the people travelling through my district. I did present a petition on roadwork in this hon. House, and in that included the need of grading in my district. I asked a question with respect to the horrible shoulders that are on Route 20 and 21. I've taken many pictures; I've sent them to the department. In places you have a drop of six, seven or eight inches off the side of the pavement. If you go off that you know what's going to happen? You're going to damage your vehicle. You're going to have an accident.

I did ask the question; the minister of the day said that he would get back to me. I checked with my CA and we did not receive anything from the minister with respect to the last time that grading was done in the District of Cape St. Francis on Route 20 and 21. I would like just to remind the minister, if that information could be received and the need for grading to be done in the district.

I do know that throughout the province there is much that needs to be done. My colleague from Exploits spoke about brush cutting. With respect to grading in my district and to correct the horrible shoulders on Route 20 and 21, it is something that's necessary. It's a safety concern. I've spoken to people who, unfortunately, went off the shoulder, dropped and damaged tires and rims, ball joints and front ends. So if we could get that or if the minister could provide that information and hopefully get a grader in the district to get some work done, it would be very much appreciated.

In my last couple of minutes, Speaker, I do want to touch on housing, and I know I spoke about housing just a couple of days ago but I want to speak on it again with respect to the information we received in Estimates and the further work that needs to be done.

My colleague from Placentia West - Bellevue earlier this morning mentioned two particular staff. I hate to single out staff, but these two individuals, Wayne Follett and Joe Mercer, are doing tremendous work and I would like to publicly thank them. I know the minister is nodding in agreement with respect to the work that they do. They are available whenever we call. They are always willing and ready to help and they have assisted me and my constituents many times over the last four years.

I'd just like to publicly say thank you to Wayne Follett and Joe Mercer for what they do and, of course, to all the staff within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. It is a challenge and I admit that. It's not an easy task with respect to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, but there are many people that do need help. With over 2,500 people on a wait-list for housing, the more that we can do, the more that government can do, with respect to getting available housing back up and running for the people of this province who are in need.

Of those numbers, Speaker – out of 2,500 – we have about 430 who are listed as homeless, who don't have anywhere to lay their head. I know at night, when my head is on the pillow, that does concern me. It does keep me awake. Speaker, I do know that – you're nodding as well – it is one that does bother me when it comes to that. So with respect to Housing, whatever we can do with respect to getting more housing available, more housing built, more housing refurbished to get people back into, it is only the correct thing to do.

Speaker, I appreciate your time, I appreciate the attention of Members opposite, and I always thank the people of the District of Cape St. Francis for putting me in this role. It is a tremendous role. It's one I don't take lightly. It's always an honour to stand and represent my district, and I will have a chance to speak again, Speaker.

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you to the hon. the Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the wonderful residents of Topsail - Paradise. We're talking about the budget subamendment, talking about the budget and what's in it and what's not in it. That's what we look at; we look at the whole picture. Although before I go on, I do want to congratulate the new Premier on being elected. I haven't had the chance to say that publicly, so congratulations to him, and I also want to congratulate Jacob Lewis last night.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: What a very proud moment for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. DINN: Oh, I will be there. You won't know what my talent is, but I will be there.

In any case, just to talk about the Premier rose yesterday and spoke about the health care and talked about it being a primary focus – and it should be – and talked about health care being available for all and listed off some things that were in the budget. I look at it, and I know there's a balancing act between funding and priorities, but I think we all agree health care should be a priority. I thought of things that I would like to see in the budget.

I hear from seniors in particular, but others who are on a drug program, and a particular drug works for them but is not covered and they can't afford to buy it. So I think we need to do a closer look at that because it's not a lot that are in those cases – sorry we can't fund this drug, but you have to use the one that's not working. So that's something we need to be looking at.

Long-term care continues to be a huge issue, continues to be a huge issue for seniors, and in particular, seniors who are couples and cannot be put together in an institution on their final years. We do need to do more there. I know there was a report done on it, but more action, certainly, is required there.

We're all very familiar with our demographics. We're an aging population. I believe we're the oldest population in Canada, so many challenges come along with that. One being dementia care. I know there has been a document put out on dementia care, but we still have huge numbers of individuals and families dealing with dementia, and it's not pretty. It really isn't. It may be because we are living longer, but one thing – and I'm hoping and I think I got the cue that government is going to do something about this. It's not going to be soon, but they promised to do something about it and that was the shingles vaccine, which has been proven to reduce the cases

of dementia by somewhere around 20 per cent.

That's something that saves us money in the long run. I said the other day, looking at a report, that dementia care in Canada costs over \$40 million a year for various forms of care that someone suffering from dementia deals with. That would be a true investment.

Of course, I've always spoke about the continuous glucose monitoring devices. I won't say much more about them. I will get up again and talk to it, but that is an investment that we're not seeing in the budget that would save us, according to the Canadian Diabetes Association, upwards to \$100 million per year. Those are investments in our residents and in our health care that actually save us money.

I also look at things that are time sensitive. I've got up in this House many, many times and advocated for IVF treatment here in this province. The Liberal government, during their AGM in 2016, spoke to doing that; five years ago, on the campaign trail, the past premier spoke to doing that, and we're not there. We know that it's been promised now for another year out.

For young families and young mothers or women out there who want to start a family, those six years now gone are lost years and some of them may not be able to conceive now. We talk about a demographic where our population is declining and people want to have families, start them here in the province and stay here in the province, then funding IVF is a no-brainer as far as I'm concerned there.

Mental health: I've risen here in the House many times talking about long-term continuity of care for mental health, those struggling with mental health. There's a wonderful building been built. On all accounts it's a wonderful, bright building and people that have entered the building speak highly of it. But we still need to come

up with the programs and the staff that can provide individuals struggling with those challenges to have long-term continuity of care.

Speaking to that, you talk about our education system. We know the huge increase in violence in our schools, and it continues and continues and continues. The NLTA spoke to, in a recent report, that it's almost a 30 per cent increase, just shy of a 30 per cent increase in reported violence actions in schools. That ties into mental health because 70 per cent of mental health issues occur in childhood and adolescence. So we need to come up with more preventative measures that help young children struggling with mental health. And, hopefully, would be one measure to curbing violence in our schools.

I don't mention it much, but I will mention it here. The buzzword for us all is Muskrat Falls. I know the Premier spoke to that yesterday as well. I know when that was brought to this House – it must be four or five years ago now, the report – I actually stood up and I spoke on that. I looked at it: a misguided project. I said that word's not even strong enough for it. I remember the Member for Gander who was right across from me actually applauded me for that comment.

But I'm speaking truthfully to that. The project itself, as a hydro-producing facility, is a good project, no doubt. We need electricity. How it was managed, how it came to be, how the cost overruns occurred is totally unacceptable. And we certainly don't want to see that again.

Similar to the Churchill Falls agreement, signed back in, I think it was '67 – I stand to be corrected – we don't want to see that again. Just think of where we would be if we had a good deal back in '67. Just think of where we would be if we didn't have a mismanaged Muskrat Falls program. They have both held us back.

When we look at the discussion around the current hydro project and the MOU, we want to be ultra, ultra sure that what's being done, what's being proposed is the best deal for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That's what we want.

I listened to the Premier, yesterday, reading quotes from the report. I don't think any of us can argue the report. It was a well-done report, and you have to learn from that I think was the words the Premier said. But when I look at it, the number one recommendation in that report – and I'll read it out – “The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should never undertake, on its own or through one of its Crown corporations or agencies, the planning, approval or construction of any large project (meaning a project with a budget of \$50 million or more) without: a. Engaging independent external experts to provide a robust review, assessment and analysis of the project.”

The number one recommendation in that report, and I know everyone on this side of the House would love to see that recommendation followed through on because that gives us the certainty, or as close to the certainty that we can have. You know, you talk about independents, people who are not influenced or controlled by the project or those who are doing the project. This is a huge piece of our future, this project, and there's nothing wrong with wanting to have the best for this province.

I note actually the Premier spoke yesterday and called it a good project, and I know throughout the discussion we had on it, the debate we had on it, no one mentioned the best, only for afterwards in the press one of the panel actually said it. We want to be sure from an independent point of view, that MOU and a potential agreement will give us the best.

So there's no disputing that, and that's where we stand on it. That's, at least, where I stand on it. I couldn't vote against it

because maybe it is the best. No one has told me that. I couldn't vote for it because, again, no one said it was the best deal, no one that was independent as per the first recommendation of the Muskrat Falls inquiry. Why spend money on reports – and that was a much-needed report – if we're not going to take heed of the recommendations that are contained therein?

I also want to just touch base on the Education Accord. January 2024, we were promised an Education Accord. We were promised an Education Accord that was going to solve all the problems in education. That was promised for – well, I believe it was New Year's Eve – December 31, 2024. As we all know, that didn't happen. A month or two later, a report was tabled but it was an interim report, which, as I said a year ago, is going to be a rehash of all the reports we have, and a good portion of that was. It was really a rehash of what the previous report said, as well as *What We Heard*, but stay tuned because two months ago we were supposed to get the actual report and we're still waiting on that.

My colleague spoke about food security and people using the food banks and the community pantries. Just last week, I attended a food drive up in CBS. My colleague for Harbour Main and my colleague for CBS are very much aware of Louise and Bernie Mercer. They have a program they call it S.O.A.R. – S - O - A - R – Spirit of Alex and Riley. They lost both their children, I think one at nine and one at 15, to a rare brain cancer – both of them lost to that. I can't imagine that. I can't imagine how hard that is on a family; both of their children at young ages.

They wanted to give back to the community so they've held these food drives. They also have a Christmas toy drive but they hold this food drive every year. The community really is huge in contributing to it. The Salvation Army up there provides their venue for storage for food, and huge, huge

stacks of food. Every year I go there I speak to the food bank, because it goes to the Paradise-CBS food bank, and every year I'm told this amount of food would last three weeks, then, this amount is going to last two weeks, so the amount of food is not going as far as it normally did because there's a greater need. There is a greater usage for those food banks.

What does that say about society here? What does that say about our government? What does it say about us dealing with the most vulnerable out there? As I said earlier, our seniors, who are in need of life-altering or life-saving drugs and treatment, can't get it. Children – families who can't put food on the table. We should be embarrassed. We really should be embarrassed that we allow this to happen.

You know, having kids go to school who are hungry doesn't do us any justice. Our children are our most valuable resource and they should be treated as such. We should give them every opportunity to succeed. I know we have a new Minister of Education. I will give him credit because he did reach out already, and we're going to hopefully have a get together and chat about some of the issues in education and, particularly, in Paradise so I can talk about that on another note.

I do want to just briefly talk about the roads. Route 60 running through Topsail in the district has been in a terrible state of disrepair for many, many years. I've had the opportunity to actually meet with the many, many different ministers over the years, all very cordial and having a chat and all very committed to doing something about it.

I guess this is the first year that we've actually seen that road on a list. This section of road that's been covered does not quite cover what needs to be done. I've reached out to – well, I'll have to reach out to the newer minister now because I reached out to the most recent one and have a discussion on how far we can get

that road to go. It's a heavily travelled piece of road. We've seen people get injured because there are not a lot of places to walk there. It's a very eroded shoulder to that road and something needs to be done.

It's not a well-lit piece of road going through there. Again, lots of traffic goes through there. There's a soccer field. There's a beach. There are a lot of other amenities down there that people go to access on a daily basis. Of course, we're going to have – it may not be fixed in time for that – Canada Summer Games events down there as well so that road will be well travelled and, this time of year, we see, well, some will call them potholes and some will call them craters. Call them what you want but they're dangerous for traffic going down there and damage cars and vehicles.

I think the new minister was the minister before who I spoke to, so I hope to sit with him and determine exactly where that segment of road is going to go and, hopefully, we can extend it a little bit to cover the most serious areas that need repair. I'll be up again to speak a little bit more but thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's an honour to stand here on behalf of the constituents of the District of Harbour Main and speak on the budget, specifically with respect to the sub amendment.

Speaker, I had the opportunity yesterday to hear the Premier speak about the budget. First of all, his introduction was very interesting I thought. He talked about the money that has been spent on the budget. For example, he referenced the budget includes money for health care, money for the vulnerable and so on and so forth. He

referenced the \$10 billion that is involved here with respect to the budget.

When he got into his speech, he stated when he was in his law practice he practised defence law for most of his years and that that gave him the opportunity to listen and hear the arguments of the case first from others and then to poke holes in some of those cases. Well I too am a lawyer and had the opportunity to practice for pretty much most of my legal career as a defence lawyer so now I will get the opportunity to assess some of the points that he made yesterday, some of his arguments, and I think, perhaps, poke some holes in some of his points that he presented.

One of the things that he seemed to be intent on, Speaker, was talking about the importance of the facts. I, as a lawyer, believe that facts are everything. That's how we are trained is to look at the facts, not opinions, but facts. In fact, he said let's stick to the facts, so I'm going to do that in the next 20 minutes. I'll talk about some facts that I think the government here has to be reminded of.

First of all, with respect to *Budget 2025* – now this is my opinion – it shows that this government are not good stewards of taxpayers' money. What I am basing that opinion on are some of the facts. Let's look at the facts, the massive debt. Let's look at the fact of the record borrowing this government has engaged in, the record spending, and in my opinion, that would be very irresponsible spending which indicates poor fiscal management of taxpayers' money. I would argue, Speaker, that the road to prosperity cannot be achieved through reckless spending that we have seen this government, in the last 10 years, engage in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: When we look at this budget document, I'll look at some of the facts. This budget is a recycled

document, I would argue. Why is that a recycled document? It is filled with Liberal reannouncements – announcements over announcements, and I will point to the Justice Department as evidence and let's stick to the facts, as the Premier stated. When we look at the Budget Speech and what was argued and what was presented there, that \$20 million over two years bolsters new public safety initiatives, well, guess what, Speaker? That \$20 million, that was announced actually back in November 6, 2024. The same thing with reference to the \$40 million that was added over the last five years. That, too, was referenced in the announcement back in November of 2024.

I can go on and on. When we talk about the Joint Task Force Unit – the RNC and RCMP – that was part of the \$20-million investment announcement. Well, that, too, is a reannouncement, part of a recycled document. That announcement was made way back in November 2024. The same with the \$180 million annually of Policing Services Newfoundland and Labrador. That, again, was referenced on November 6, 2024.

This continues on and on. When we look at November 6, 2024, starting in '26-'27 there would be an additional 19 police officers. Yet we know – and this was ignored by the government – that the National Police Federation had requested, I believe it was 24 officers. That was ignored. The RCMP out in Harbour Grace area, they had requested police officers. Again, last year and this year, that was ignored in this budget.

So, Speaker, when we're looking at this budget, it's recycled. It contains Liberal reannouncements, more debt and really, I would argue, it's just simply more of the same of what we've seen in the past 10 years by this government.

Now, when I look at what the Premier had stated, yesterday, in his speech, he stated that we will get things right. When he talked,

my colleague from Cape St. Francis indicated about this nonsense about them caring on that side of the House, insinuating that we don't care. I'm very surprised that our new Premier is starting off with that kind of rhetoric because that's all it is, Speaker, it's rhetoric.

On this side of the House, yes, we care as well, but I would argue, as my colleague from Cape St. Francis said, we all are in this because we care. We are here because we represent the people of this province. We believe in what we're doing to try to improve the lives of the people that we represent.

For the Premier to insinuate that, I mean that is just very disappointing. He has to do better than that as the new Premier of our province. This has to be about building bridges, not walls, and that kind of statement reduces that to dividing us as a people. I would even go as far to say that the population and the people that we represent are sick of that. They're sick of that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: That kind of divisiveness that's going on.

We have to be in a spirit in a time of hope and at a time where we are coming together. We have many external challenges facing us in the world today, south of the border, and even within our own communities in terms of issues that are happening as related to crime and people struggling to make ends meet. So this is a time when we have to be together. We have to join one another and try to support the good initiatives, and I, for one, when I see that there are positive things that are done by the government, we have to support that. That is what the people want to see from us.

When we see that government is putting forth policies that are good, then we will support them, and we will commend them. Like, for example, the sugar tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Finally, they have agreed to scrap the sugar tax. I spoke before the Easter break saying we need to scrap the sugar tax. Well, fortunately, the position of the Opposition Party has now been adopted by the government, and we're happy about that. That is good.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: And we commend the government for doing that. The same thing with the carbon tax, the same kind of approach there. We advocated always for the axing of the carbon tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Now we have seen government adopting that policy of ours. So we're happy about that. That is a good thing. We stand with you on that and that's what the people that we represent want to see from us. They want to see that co-operation and that collaboration. But make no mistake about it, when we see you doing something wrong, we will be the first to announce that to the public what you're doing. That is our responsibility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I hear this often, this indignation from the government because we are asking questions in Question Period and well, that's a good question or that's a bad question. Every question we ask on behalf of the people we represent are good questions. They're legitimate questions. It's not for you to say what is good or not.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: We represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and we will not be intimidated or challenged by you that we are not permitted

or given the permission to ask these legitimate questions.

So, Speaker, this is what we're about. We believe that this is time for us to have a change of attitude here. I mean, we have an important role in this parliamentary system as Opposition Members. We cannot and should not be expected to apologize because we ask tough questions, or it may hurt a minister's feelings because these are tough questions. As a minister, you are in a very important position and if you're not able to take the heat, get out of the kitchen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, this is important for us as Members of the House of Assembly to say that we have a responsibility to represent the people that elected us. Now, every time we get up here and question the government or challenge them on something they do, they basically look at what we say and try to twist it and try to make it out to be something that it's not.

That's not what collaboration is. That is not what co-operation is. That is not working together for the purpose or for the people that we represent. I would say that to suggest otherwise is disingenuous of this government.

When we look at the responsibility of Members of the House of Assembly, we have to bring forward issues that matter. When I look at this budget, this budget is about choices and, yes, the Premier got up yesterday and he talked about the money, the \$10 billion. There's no question that there was incredible spending in this budget, but our position is, that spending, that money has to be allocated properly.

The Liberals and this government had a chance to make smart choices in this budget that would make life better for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at a time when so many of them are struggling. But I would argue that they failed to do so

and I'm going to talk to you a bit about policing and the justice system.

As I indicated earlier, the budget ignored the recommendations of the National Police Federation. They asked for 25 more police officers in the province. Why is that important? Well, we should know, as this is National Police Week, this is a very important week for us because, right now, this week, we are showcasing and highlighting the important work that our police officers do.

The RNC, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, these officers are there every day, seven days a week, 24-7, 365 and they are here to represent us and to protect us in the community, yet we know that many communities have been left without the resources that they need. Many communities do not have the policing that they need at a time when they are experiencing more crime. The rise in the illicit drug trade is very worrisome and yet they don't have the resources that they need.

Now when I look at that, Speaker, I'm going to address one of the – recently we heard and I think this is very important to mention, last week, enough lethal drugs were seized in St. John's to wipe out an entire metro region. That's the headline that we're seeing in our media. That was on last Wednesday on a VOXM article, and then CBC referenced an article: Fentanyl seized in N.L.'s largest-ever bust enough to kill half the province.

Speaker, this is definitely a crisis. There's no question about this. The largest fentanyl seizure in the history of the province; 500 grams of fentanyl were seized. This drug trafficking bust has to be of major, major, major concern to everyone involved in any type of policing policy decision-making. Why is this so serious? This was 15 times larger than in any of the province's history. This is the largest fentanyl seizure to date and

we're told that 2 milligrams of that fentanyl can be considered a lethal dose. We have our young people out in our towns and communities that are exposed to this.

We have a very serious, serious issue and yet, we do not see the level of police resources that we need. I don't know what it's going to take. Thankfully, the RNC were able to execute this drug bust but how many more drugs are out in our community? How many more that are slipping through the cracks? The RCMP and RNC need resources urgently. We see this happening; it's very serious. I think we need to also invest further in our education system so that our young people in school are really exposed to the risk of drugs in our society. I think we need to focus more on that, as well.

Speaker, when we look at calls for service for the RCMP and RNC, they can't keep up. What does this mean? This means that they cannot deal with the calls for service; that means that they're not able to really do the proactive policing, the crime prevention strategies that are necessary and the surveillance. Imagine what they would be able to do if they had the resources to do it, if we empowered them with the resources to do the crime prevention, to do the surveillance, to get out there in the towns and communities to provide that police presence.

It is not happening, Speaker. It is not happening. We need to see proactive crime prevention. We need to see more investment for our police officers. They require proper resourcing to make our community safe and it is my position that *Budget 2025* failed abysmally in that regard.

Speaker, as well when we're looking at the drug crisis right now, we see that there are insufficient addictions treatment options in the province generally, which is driving drug-related crime. I've had the opportunity to speak to many police officers, and they have said to me that they're not able to

really target the prolific offenders. They're saying as well that most of the crime that we're seeing, especially in rural area, is related to drugs; it is directly connected with the drug trade and the drug trafficking that's going on.

We need to see more attention to that. We need to see a focus, a priority by this government, on this matter. Otherwise, I think we're going to be in serious trouble when it comes to – we are right now as far as the drug addiction issue is in play.

On that note, I will conclude, Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak on the budget and I look forward to speaking again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, it is a privilege to be able to get up here this morning and talk on the budget subamendment, which denotes the neglect across rural Newfoundland; across our residents, businesses and communities.

As an MHA for Baie Verte - Green Bay, a rural district, I will highlight some examples, but I will also highlight across in representing Central Newfoundland and in supporting my fellow colleagues from that area as well. Also, some impacts that are truly across our entire province of Newfoundland and Labrador. So where do I want to start? I want to start first with health care and come back to last night and an issue that my colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans highlighted, and that was the Lionel Kelland Hospice.

That Lionel Kelland Hospice, as was so passionately highlighted last night, was a grassroots effort. Fundraising for that occurred across all of Central

Newfoundland. It's a hospice that's in Grand Falls but the fundraising, the drive and the vision for all of that captivated all of Central Newfoundland because it was a need that was lacking and it was a desire to do what is right for our seniors in the last days of their life, and for their families as well.

A significant fundraising effort was undertaken and, as the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans highlighted last night, over a million dollars was raised.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Like he said, some of that was small, \$1, \$2 or \$5, and then also some significant donations from businesses across the area because they saw the need. They saw the void.

Once that hospice was ready to open, lo and behold, photo op, and the Liberals swoop in for that photo op. This year, with the budget, we have a situation where that hospice now needs a little bit recurring bridge funding to continue to provide an ongoing capability, not just for Central Newfoundland, but all of the province. So let me explain.

That hospice is an opportunity for those within palliative care to die with dignity and to give their families some comfort and support and wraparound services as they do that. I have witnessed that myself, that story, from a number of residents within my own communities in my district. They spoke of the impact of having that hospice there and what it meant to them, what it meant to their families and what it meant to their friends.

I commend the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans for so passionately highlighting that last night.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: A little bit of funding now would take pressure off, not just the Grand

Falls regional hospital, but the two regional outlets that I have in my area, Springdale and Baie Verte, but also across the province. We're getting those in palliative care, not just from across Central Newfoundland, but all over the province. This is simply the right thing to do. This is about having dignity. This is about having compassion. This is about doing the right thing for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that helped build this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: I believe the Premier hoisted in that impact last night when it was highlighted by the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans. I somewhat expected to come in here this morning and hear or see a press release that the funding was going to be there. Unfortunately, that did not occur.

Then, this morning, I listened to my colleague from Exploits who further reiterated the issue with Lionel Kelland and then also tied it to the Liberal office in Grand Falls-Windsor. Budgeting is about choices and, as the Member for Exploits highlighted, we have an opportunity here with regard to an opportunity cost. We could do a little bit of cost containment on that office – that unnecessary office – in Grand Falls-Windsor and support something that is providing a vital level of support, taking pressure off hospitals right across the province.

So I was thinking about this as the Member for Exploits was speaking, a lot with regard to budgeting is about public engagement. We saw an example of that last night when the Member for Bonavista gave us a couple of polls for here in the House. I wrote up a couple of poll questions too, that I hope are not just for this House but also for the greater public to potentially engage with as well.

The first of those polls would be: Should the taxpayer fund a Liberal office in Grand Falls-Windsor? Now, I fundamentally

believe that the resounding response to that would be no.

Further to that, and that would be like I said previously, that is about cost containment, and as we seen with the budget, we have significant cost containment to undertake. The other one with that is, as was highlighted last night and highlighted again this morning, budgeting is about choices.

The second poll would be: Should the Liberal office in Grand Falls-Windsor be closed and the funds diverted to the Lionel Kelland Hospice?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: A simple choice. Let us do what is right, not just for Central Newfoundland, but for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: I would hope that the greater public listening to that would help to make that a question of the day.

The next item I would like to speak on is road safety. Road safety is a significant issue across most of the areas in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and road safety is not just about pavement. It encompasses line painting, signage, guardrails, shouldering and, most notably, as was highlighted last night by the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, brush cutting. Brush cutting is a huge issue, and I'll touch on some examples in my district.

But we have opportunity here to do what is right for a lot of our secondary routes in the province. Signage: Why can't we give a little bit of funding allocation to the depots, if they see something that needs to be fixed, let them get on with it and fix it? That is centralized. It is not working for those depots. They want to fix it. In fact, those public servants are the ones getting beaten down because those signs are in disrepair.

The other is guardrails. You know, as I previously highlighted, we're bringing in a lot of posts from Nova Scotia, driving up the cost. We have an opportunity here to leverage Newfoundland companies with regard to supplying those posts. For a tourist coming in and looking at that combination of very poor signage – some signage you can't even see, as I highlighted last summer – guardrails, lack of shouldering, a lot of them you see after they'll post on Facebook: That small community was a great place to visit, but I warn you in going there because of the road. That is simply unsatisfactory for the residents of those communities.

My colleague from Fogo Island - Cape Freels gave the example of driving to Hare Bay and the road was like driving through a tunnel – no chance to react if you see a moose. I was reminded this morning when I picked up the Moose Hide Campaign and a tenet that was highlighted on that about having a responsibility to protect women and children in your life. In my district, and this is the same across rural Newfoundland and Labrador, we have a lot of mothers that are driving their children for a variety of reasons: doctor's appointments, school sports. Our roadways are our lifelines and those secondary routes require significant attention.

In my district, I think of Route 410, that's the Baie Verte Highway, serving 19 communities. We've had multiple moose accidents over the past couple of years. Routes 411, 413, 417, 418 and 419, all of those highways require brush cutting, and coming then to the Green Bay side, Routes 380, 381, 391 and 392. This was talked about before from my colleague for Placentia West - Bellevue, it's about having a roads plan. It shouldn't be that this goes into a void and you're waiting for an answer, we need a legitimate five-year plan – no politics – covering both pavement and road safety, including brush cutting.

Brush cutting right now across my district is a significant issue. We have to give our residents, our motorists, our visitors to these towns, tourists, the capacity to be able to react in a sufficient manner. That requires additional brush cutting.

The Premier spoke last night about, for rural Newfoundland, he would have your back. Now, I know a couple of routes in rural Newfoundland in my area, Route 413, where, if you're driving on them, you're clicking brush. You're actually clicking brush as you drive by. So I respectfully, then, ask the government: Let's take the effort to clear the brush off the back of the residents that drive along those highways.

Now I'll come back to health care within my district. A number of residents have approached me and they highlighted that it was only a couple decades ago that we had front-line access as doctors would come from Grand Falls and see us on a weekly basis. It was set up for the clinics in Robert's Arm, Triton and La Scie; they've lost all that.

The Premier last night spoke about public access to health care. Let me say this: Right now, the plan is to have these collaborative clinics and you'd have one in Grand Falls-Windsor. That does not work for residents of Westport, Purbeck's Cove, Wild Cove, Coachman's Cove, Harbour Round, Miles Cove, Long Island or Brighton. We have to make it easier for the residents of those communities to be able to access front-line care.

The model that we have been advocating and the model that works across Northern Canada is a nurse practitioner. Can you imagine if a nurse practitioner would be able to provide front-line access in a number of those smaller communities?

We would take pressure off Baie Verte, we would take pressure off Springdale and, ultimately, we would take pressure off Grand Falls-Windsor and by doing so, we

would probably retain more doctors and nurses as well because they wouldn't be so overwhelmed. As I highlighted, that is a model that works across Northern Canada with the nursing stations. It's a model with regard to front-line care that we used when I was serving in the military, as well, with medics. It is a proven model, and it's a model that needs to be now leveraged.

A year ago, when we were on the campaign trail with regard to the by-election in Baie Verte - Green Bay, there was a significant promise made with regards to health care in my district. That was in regard to the clinic in La Scie and the clinic is Triton.

Now, I queried in November, again, because nothing was happening with regard to those two clinics, and the answer that we got at that time: It's being worked on. Here we are now a full year later, how long does it take to implement a promise and why would you make a promise if you're not going to keep it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: So these types of promises just being trolled out willy-nilly is not doing any of us in this House any favours. That's why a lot of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador become cynical to politicians. If you do that, I think you become morally bankrupt. When we make a promise, any of us here in this House, there's an expectation and a duty that that promise will be honoured.

So I respectfully ask that the promises that were made last May with regard to the two clinics, one for La Scie and one for Triton, in addition to promises that were made for roadwork along Route 392 and 391 be honoured. It's your duty.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I moved, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now stand in recess until 2 p.m.

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

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit visitors.

Before we begin this afternoon, in the Speaker's gallery, I'd like to welcome would like to welcome Eileen Pendergast, wife of the late fire chief, Jim Pendergast, along with family members, friends and coworkers of the Wabana fire department.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also, I'd like to take a moment to advise that Members of the House of Assembly are participating in the annual Moose Hide Campaign and showing their support by wearing the moose hide pin. This year marks the eighth consecutive year that our Legislature has participated in this event. Special thanks to Inuk Elder, Emma Reelis, who led us in reflection and prayer earlier today.

The Moose Hide Campaign is a grassroots movement of Canadians, committed to protecting women and children and speaking out against gender-based and domestic violence, grounded in the Indigenous ceremony of traditional ways of learning and healing.

I want to thank all Members for participating today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, I respectfully retract my comments and questions from yesterday afternoon.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I do thank the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay for withdrawing your comments from yesterday, but I would also like to take an opportunity to remind all Members of the importance of maintaining decorum in the hon. House.

Our Standing Orders are rules agreed on by this House. They are orders which allow us to conduct order and decorum in this House. Standing Order 49 states: No Member shall use offensive words against any other Member of the House.

While the privilege of freedom of speech comes with responsibility for all Members to act within the Standing Orders and by doing so uphold the dignity of this institution, all hon. Members know, as stated in Bosc and Gagnon, chapter 13, "The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members." While I respect that debate can get heated and Members passionately speak on issues, I want to remind all Members to be respectful to one another, and also to this institution.

I just want to acknowledge that there is another point of order that has been brought forward, and I will be ruling on that one very soon, too.

The hon. the Minister of Seniors.

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, in the same spirit, I wish to withdraw my comment the other day when I was responding to a question from the Leader of the Third Party. I used the word misleading, and I wish to withdraw that and to thank you for your indulgence.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Seniors.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Torngat Mountains, Conception Bay South, Exploits, Ferryland, Fogo Island - Cape Freels and, with leave, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, Mount Pearl North and Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Nain's Julius Dicker leads with his heart. His strength and courage come from a place of caring. Everybody respects and loves him. Julius, known to many as Joe, is a true advocate, always standing up for the people of Nain and the Labrador Inuit.

First elected vice-president of the Labrador Inuit Association, LIA, in 1986, he served two terms until 1995. In 1987, he stepped up as acting president, and again in 1994. During his terms, a young Joe showed honesty and integrity, instilling a belief that you could trust him to help. I was fortunate to know Joe during this time. He has been a role model for me.

Nainimiut understand Joe was the right person to lead their community into the future. They elected him, in 2014, as AngajukKâk of Nain, again in 2018 and 2022. With a year left in his term, Joe recently stepped down for medical reasons.

I asked the other Inuit Community Government, AngajukKâk, for a few words. They spoke of his commitment to Nain, how he always calls asking how their community is doing, do they need anything, but their first words to me were about Joe's lifelong commitment and love for his wife and his family.

So please join me in thanking Joe for his contribution to his people and a return to good health.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I would like to extend congratulations to the CBS Kiwanis Minor Baseball Association for being selected as a recipient of the Jays Care Foundation Field of Dreams grant for 2025, which is in excess of \$100,000.

On May 4, Sportsnet's Blue Jay Central announced that the Jays Care Foundation, the charitable arm of the Toronto Blue Jays, has committed to over \$1.5 million in infrastructure investments to build and refurbish baseball diamonds in communities across Canada and through its Field of Dreams program.

The Jim Crosbie Field, home to the CBS Kiwanis Minor Baseball located in Conception Bay South, is one of 15 organizations in Canada chosen to receive this funding. The Jays Care Field of Dreams project aims to create safe and inclusive spaces, enhance and refurbish local baseball diamonds and promote the growth of the game of baseball throughout Canada. This initiative will transform Jim Crosbie Field and Stoney Hill Park into an inclusive baseball hub for the Town of Conception Bay South.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the CBS Kiwanis Minor Baseball Association, the athletes, coaches and everyone involved in this process. The funding will make a huge difference to both the baseball community and the Town of Conception Bay South. Well done!

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Today, I would like to recognize Kyle Morgan of Bishop's Falls, born on November 23, 1999. At two days old, he was transported from Grand Falls-Windsor to the Janeway, then to the IWK hospital in Halifax to undergo an 8½ hour open-heart surgery. Kyle was diagnosed with DiGeorge syndrome, which is a rare genetic disorder.

At age seven, he started playing the accordion, and he is considered one of the best in Newfoundland and Labrador. Now at age 26, he has entertained many people throughout our region with his impersonation of Elvis Presley and Jimi Hendrix. He had, also, the opportunity of performing with well-known talents such as Buddy Wasisname. He is a man of multiple musical talents.

Speaker, I would like for all Members of the House of Assembly to join me in recognizing Kyle for his continued entertainment and success in future endeavours.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this house today to congratulate Sowing Seeds – Growing Community. In the spring of 2024, Goulds Recreation, Goulds Lions Club, Kilbride to Ferryland Family Resource Coalition, St. Kevin's Food Bank, St. Kevin's Roman Catholic Church, St. Paul's Anglican Church and Amy Williams, an Ocean Wise alumna began a shared vision of providing produce for those in need and promote food sustainability.

During the summer and fall of 2024, Sowing Seeds – Growing Community distributed: St. Kevin's Community Food Bank, 1,900 pounds of potatoes, carrots and turnips, plus peppers, lettuce, tomato and zucchini; The Gathering Place, 550 pounds of carrots and turnips; Choices for Youth, 150 pounds of potatoes plus one crate of carrots; Community Food Sharing Association, 800 pounds of potatoes, plus four crates of small potato, carrots and turnips. This produce will be a part of over 10,000 meals for less fortunate in our local communities.

This project was funded by the Goulds Lions Club, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador Community Garden Programs and the Anglican Foundation of Canada. The land was provided by the Anglican Diocese of Newfoundland and Labrador, and tractor and ploughing services were provided by Mr. Bobby Searle.

Congratulations, and may 2025 be an even more prosperous season.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge the contribution made by the Robbins family in Lumsden. The Robbins family's presence in Lumsden dates back several generations. James

Robbins was born in 1878 in Cat Harbour and later moved to Lumsden North.

James was a pivotal figure in the community, and his legacy continues. His entrepreneurial spirit was strong, and it has followed through the family lineage. This is evident in many businesses the family has started, grown and seen flourish over the years.

For three generations, the family had operated businesses as varied as a salmon cannery, a cod liver oil business, a grocery store and a trucking business. The grocery store and trucking business are still in operation today and continue to grow and prosper, providing much-needed work for the people in the area.

The newest venture, Kev's Corner, a small restaurant where you can enjoy a delicious meal and enjoy the local history through the pictures on the walls.

Both Robbins' Clover Farm and Robbins Trucking Ltd exemplify the vital role family-owned businesses play in sustaining and enriching the fabric of small rural communities like Lumsden. Their dedication to service and community ensures that they remain cherished pillars in the region.

Thank you for your contribution and years of service to the residents of Lumsden and surrounding areas.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave with leave.

Does the Member have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to proudly recognize my friend and constituent Jacob Lewis of Butlerville. Jacob has quickly become a household name across our great province and those who have been tuning in to this season's episodes of *Canada's Got Talent*.

Jacob is an oil and gas worker in Newfoundland's offshore but with a wife and two young boys at home in Bay Roberts, Jacob decided it was time for a career change for him to be closer to his twin boys, Luke and Levi, and his wife Sam. His journey started when he surprised his wife by entering the contest to try out for the show this past October. Little did they know, he would go all the way winning the hearts of celebrity judge superstar, Shania Twain, and the many friends and fans who tuned in to watch his musical performances.

Jacob has always been a genuine and humble person. He loves his family. He's a great hockey player as well; he played for the Conception Bay CeeBees senior hockey. It was his performance of Tina Turner's hit, *Simply the Best*, that scored his biggest goal, the grand prize of a \$1 million just last evening on the season finale.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who took the time to vote to support Jacob on this exciting journey. A big congratulations to him and his family.

Jacob, you're simply the best.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Does the Member have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

L. STOYLES: Thank you, Speaker.

Our city is full of remarkable youth, and Courtney Abbott and Eamon Fogwill are two shining examples.

As Mount Pearl's Youth of the Year, they represent the young people of our community with respect, dedication and commitment. They have attended city events such as Frosty Festival, City Days, dances, socials events and so many other things. They just don't attend events, they roll up their sleeves and make a difference. They are both graduates of O'Donel High School and have both just completed their first year at Memorial University. They were both featured in this week's issue of *The Pearl* newspaper.

Courtney and Eamon, thank you for what you have done. You have been outstanding ambassadors for Mount Pearl youth and I am so proud of you both. I have no doubt you will continue to do incredible things in our community. Our future is brighter with leaders like you.

The next Focus on Youth Awards will take place tonight, Wednesday, May 14, and while we will welcome two new Youth of the Year, we will always be grateful for the impact that you both have made on our community.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in wishing them both success in their future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island with leave.

Does the Member have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

F. HUTTON: Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House, with a heavy heart but immense pride to honour the life and legacy of a remarkable Newfoundlander and Labradorian, Fire Chief Jim Pendergast of Bell Island.

Chief Pendergast dedicated an incredible 50 years of service to the Wabana Volunteer Fire Department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: For 27 of those remarkable years, Speaker, he served as the chief.

Jim also worked for the Town of Wabana for an incredible 52 years. He worked right up until last Thursday, the day before he passed away. Throughout his decades of service, Chief Pendergast was a leader, a mentor to fellow firefighters, a source of strength and comfort to families in times of crisis and a true pillar of the Wabana community.

A few months ago, Speaker, I was honoured to present Chief Pendergast with a 75th Anniversary of Confederation Medal. It was a private ceremony in his house with just a few members of his family and one other firefighter; he was not one for fanfare. He didn't want all the credit but he certainly deserved it. His legacy is forever etched in the hearts of those he helped, protected and inspired. Bell Island has lost a hero, and Newfoundland and Labrador has lost one of its finest public servants.

On behalf of this hon. House, I extend our deepest condolences to the Pendergast family: his wife of 52 years, Eileen, who his here; his children, his grandchildren, his great-grandchildren and some of the members of the Wabana Volunteer Fire Department. May he rest in peace.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge National Nursing Week and all nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. HOWELL: The theme of National Nursing Week 2025 is The Power of Nurses to Transform Health.

Our government is transforming health care based on the recommendations of the Health Accord NL and we value the role that registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and nurse practitioners are playing in that transformation. It's why we continue to make significant investments to improve the work environment and work-life balance for all nurses in our province.

Our actions include significant investments for recruitment and retention, child care spaces to meet the needs of health care shift workers, long service pay and retention bonuses for registered nurses, increased scope of practice for nurse practitioners and additional spaces for licensed practical nurse and registered nurse programs at post-secondary institutions. Our investments have led to a reduction in vacancies for registered nurses and nurse practitioners from over 700 in 2023 to below 400 in 2025.

In addition, more than 90 per cent of this year's graduates have accepted full-time work in our province, but we're not done yet. We do recognize there is still much work to be done and we'll continue to work on future incentives to show our appreciation for all nurses in the province.

I ask all hon. Members to show their appreciation for the nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Speaker, it's an honour this week to celebrate the hard work of the thousands of nurses across the province. We find the theme of this year's Nursing Week to be ironic, though.

The Official Opposition, like many others in the field, have been vocal for years about the ability of nurse practitioners to transform health in our province. More than 100,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are without a family doctor and many are forced to pay out of pocket for primary care, yet this government refused to take advantage of a commonsensical direction towards fixing the crisis.

In the meantime, we learn that they continue to spend more than \$100 million on travel nurses, despite reducing their use, all while refusing to hire local nurses seeking to return to the workforce. Speaker, we appreciate the work of our province's nurses, and we implore this government to reflect this week on their approach towards this vital health care role.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of this statement, and I also thank her for her service as a nurse. I want to thank all the nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador, especially those in Labrador West.

While the government boasts recruitment incentives, actual spending on travel nurses is higher than ever. We'd like to make some suggestions on a few incentives that would go a long way to make nurses feel more appreciated. Start by recruiting nurses after their first year of education; start paying for their work terms; set up an independent health sector council; and, most importantly, listen to workers, listen to the nurses. They have the solutions to help reduce burnout and listen to what they have to say because they're the ones who are on the floor.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Seniors.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize June as Seniors' Month.

Seniors' Month provides the opportunity to encourage seniors to stay active, connected and engaged within their community and to acknowledge how they enrich Newfoundland and Labrador.

Over the last two years, our government has made significant investment in the health and well-being of our seniors.

Budget 2025 includes funding to ensure supports and services are available to seniors to enable them to age at home, including initiatives under the Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan.

We are also continuing to invest in our Targeted Basic Income pilot for eligible people aged 60 to 64.

These initiatives are in addition to other programs that support healthy aging, including the Seniors' Social Inclusion Initiative, Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Communities Program, the Community Transportation Program and the Seniors' Benefit, which *Budget 2025* commits to indexing to the consumer price index.

We have recently released two guides for seniors in our province: *Bridging Generations: A guide to Intergenerational Programs in Newfoundland and Labrador* and, secondly, *Guide to Provincial Government Programs and Services for Seniors*. Both are available online and in print format.

Our government is committed to fostering inclusive, age- and dementia-friendly communities to ensure seniors remain active members of their communities, maintain their independence and age with dignity.

Speaker, I encouraged everyone to honour and celebrate our province's seniors and older adults for the important contributions that they make and continue to make to our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Seniors' Month is a time for us to recognize and celebrate the invaluable contributions of seniors to our communities in

Newfoundland and Labrador. However, recent statistics are alarming. A recent report indicates that food insecurity among seniors has risen to 18 per cent, up from 12.2 per cent in 2023. This underscores the urgent need for our government to enhance support system.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate, April 2025, publication, *An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure*, states falls are the cause of 85 per cent of seniors' injury-related hospitalizations and 95 per cent of hip fractures; 81 per cent of all hospital admissions for seniors were caused by falls, many of which could have been prevented.

We owe it to our seniors to do better. As they have paved the way for our community's growth and deserve to live with dignity and respect, let's unite in efforts to honour and support our seniors throughout the year, not just this month.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

We call upon this government to make the incentives for seniors more accessible. The Target Basic Income program needs to be expanded beyond its very narrow criteria to capture more people between the ages of 60 and 64, living in need. Improve the application process for the Aging Well at Home Grant so more people can access it. Finally, raise the very low income cut-off for the Home Modification Program and other similar programs so more seniors in this province can avail of these very important programs.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, there's a new food insecurity statistic report out for Newfoundland and Labrador and it is alarming. The new data shows that over 30 per cent of households in this province are food insecure – over 30 per cent.

After 10 years of this Liberal government, I ask the Premier, why are nearly one in three families still struggling to put food on the table?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

This is a very important conversation and topic. I think that all of us in this House of Assembly recognize that there are people who are struggling in our communities and we're doing our utmost to provide supports and assistance and changes to ensure that they are supported and recognized.

I will say that we have made big strides in affordability in this province. Speaker, \$750 million we put back into people's pockets. We've increased the Seniors' Benefit. We've increased the Income Supplement. We've increased funding for income support. We've increased funding for disabilities.

Speaker, I'm happy to speak more about some of the supports that we are providing, but it is a very important that everyone in this House recognize how important this is.

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the stats don't lie. Obviously, we still have a significant problem right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. According to Stats Canada, that 30 per cent is 158,000 people in our province who are struggling – more than one-third – and 33.9 per cent of children live in food-insecure homes.

So I ask the Premier: Will you provide the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit to more low-income families?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We have, indeed, increased the Child Benefit in this province. The Member opposite will recognize that that was done, I believe, in last year's budget, if memory serves me. In last year's budget, we increased that. We also increased the amount of money that we give to support children who are food insecure and that was a program that we put in place, again, last year.

There's a tremendous amount that we're doing to address poverty. The amount of support and assistance is continuing to increase. I know that we still see that there are people struggling and that's why we're continuously addressing this very serious issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, one of the challenges is we have lots of programs but

oftentimes we don't bother to look at thresholds. I know for a fact that many of the programs we offer, the thresholds have not been changed in 10 years. If you take a look at that, maybe so many people wouldn't be left behind when it comes to some of the programs that we're already offering.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Your colleague said during his leadership campaign, "obviously current financial support programs are not sufficient for our seniors, so more needs to be done." That's what one of the candidates for the Liberal leadership said.

So I ask the Premier: Will you fix your budget and increase the Seniors' Benefit by the 20 per cent as recommended by the Seniors' Advocate?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

As members in this House do recognize, we have increased the Seniors' Benefit by 15 per cent and now we are indexing the threshold, as well as the benefit. That's a huge step. It's very expensive for this government. The Members opposite were lecturing me this morning; I'm being fiscally responsible and that is fiscally responsible.

I will say to the Member opposite, we are continuing to work on how we can support seniors. That's why we have a Department of Seniors. I will also say, last year, we brought in a seniors' well-being program that supports our seniors to stay in their homes. I will say to the Member opposite that there is a full review being undertaken on thresholds.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

The \$46 increase that the Liberals have added to the Seniors' Benefit – \$46 – won't even cover the cost of one nurse practitioner visit for a senior in this province who have to pay to see a nurse practitioner.

I ask the Premier: Do you have any idea of how many people are paying out of pocket to see a nurse practitioner in this province?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

That's not a number that I have readily available at this moment, but I can certainly get it. If there's a way that we can improve health care access in this province, we're certainly interested and open to that conversation.

I know that the Nurse Practitioner Association here in Newfoundland and Labrador is very keen on their role of advocacy for moving the profession forward. I haven't had the chance to meet with them this week but look forward to doing so next week. I'm certain that that will be one of their key priorities to address. We're willing to work with them and continue those conversations to build a plan that meets the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and best accesses the immense scope of practice that the nurse practitioners in Newfoundland and Labrador do have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I can tell you how many are actually having to pay out of pocket to see a nurse practitioner in this province. Too many, it's as simple as that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Too many, because one is too many and instead of getting an answer on something they are going to do, we simply get more and more talk and more and more words. What we need, and what the seniors in our province are looking for, is action to be taken.

So again, most of the people that are actually going to see and pay to see nurse practitioners are seniors. I ask the Premier, again, when will the people of our province be reimbursed for paying out of pocket to see a nurse practitioner?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As we look at the plan for nurse practitioners in Newfoundland and Labrador, it's certainly something that we're interested in developing and building upon, as I mentioned in my previous answer.

They have the most extensive scope of practice here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and I know that they are keen and they are interested in becoming a greater part of the solution to access to primary care here in the province. So I would tell folks to stay tuned because we certainly are looking forward to those conversations in the upcoming week and building a plan with the Nurse Practitioners Association as we move forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, if Newfoundland and Labrador were like other provinces who are still deliberating on how to account for their tobacco settlement revenue, then what would be the deficit for this fiscal year?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I know the Member opposite certainly properly acknowledged that he overstepped and over torqued his characterization of the revenue recognition yesterday. He is a professional accountant, so he would know under the public sector accounting standards as to when we have to trigger revenue recognition, and that's when the payment terms are finalized. We understand from legal that they will be finalized shortly.

I can table how many times we've spoken about this in debate, in Estimates and in the technical briefing at the budget time. I will say to the Member opposite, decisions are budgeted based on what you have before you at the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, just let me rephrase that question so we can possibly get a number.

If the tobacco settlement revenue is not included, what would be the deficit for this fiscal year?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

Speaker, I will repeat what I said. You make your decisions based on the information that you have: what revenue you have, what expenses you have, what programs and services you would like to introduce. We did introduce a number of things, brand new things, in this budget including, for example, 400 new teachers – or more than that – 400 educators. We put more money into health care. We put more money into a number of programs and services, including economic development.

I am sure the Members opposite really responded well when they knew that we were going to have more educators in this province. I know the Members opposite responded well on ambulatory care and money for the health care system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, since I can't get a straight-up answer on that deficit question, let me just move along and rephrase things in a different manner.

This year's budget includes \$520 million in revenue from the tobacco settlement. So I ask the minister: How much of that will actually be received, in hand, this fiscal year?

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

S. COADY: Thank you.

The payment terms are still being finalized, Speaker. We do have the results of the court case now.

I want to put this in perspective: March 9 was the court date; they awarded \$32.5 billion. Newfoundland and Labrador's share of that \$32.5 billion is \$520 million, of which we have to pay legal fees and, as the Member opposite knows, yesterday in Estimates we talked about what the legal fees cost out of that \$520 million. If memory serves, it was \$130 million. So \$390 million is what we are receiving in revenue, what we can book in revenue in this particular fiscal year.

That is the public accounting standard that we're following. I can say it's a professional judgment by the accountants.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, last Friday the minister's department announced inclusion grants for families and organizations to hire support workers so children with disabilities can attend summer camps. But families of autistic children are telling us their kids need extra supervision, help with eating and bathroom support.

How does offering up to \$1,000 for the entire summer even come close to real inclusion, Speaker?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Families and Affordability, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. KORAB: Speaker, I appreciate the question. If I could get it repeated – this cut out about halfway through your question. Sorry, if I could get that question again?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, last Friday the minister's department announced inclusion grants for families and organizations to hire support workers so children with disabilities can attend summer camps. But families of autistic children are telling us their kids need extra supervision, help with eating and bathroom support.

But how does offering up to \$1,000 for the entire summer even come close to real inclusion?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Families and Affordability, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. KORAB: Speaker, I thank the Member opposite for the question.

So the program is in place for the summer camps for \$1,000. There's also a \$5,000 grant there for organizations that can apply to have instructors and people there to support this. We're always willing to work with persons with disabilities. We're always willing to work with organizations out there.

I'm happy to take that question back, review with staff, and come back later with an answer.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Yes, Speaker, we need an answer, because these summer camp spaces claim to be inclusive, but many children are falling through the cracks.

Speaker, \$1,000 over an eight-week camp works out to just \$3.12 an hour for a support worker.

Who does the minister honestly expect to work for that wage, and how is that respectful of the needs of children with disabilities?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Families and Affordability, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for the same question. And it's the same answer. It's there's a thousand dollars there for these summer grants for these summer programs. We're happy to take this back; we're happy to review.

I'm three days into this job. I want to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, persons with disabilities and all people.

We're committed to that and we'll be committed moving forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, three days into the job, that's no excuse. He's expected to be up to par on the responsibilities of this department.

Speaker, the department is offering up to \$5,000 to organizations to hire inclusion workers but, as one non-profit told me, at \$16 an hour minimum wage, we'd lose money just trying to be inclusive.

The minister can still give an opinion without having to go back to the department. Surely, you think – is this acceptable? Do you not see how children are falling through the cracks?

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

J. KORAB: Again, appreciate the question, Speaker, from the Member opposite.

People identifying with disabilities in this province are very important to my department, the Department of Families and Affordability, and Persons with Disabilities, as well as this government.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. KORAB: You'll get a chance to speak later, maybe.

We're very committed to this. It's something we'll commit to going forward. Again, I'm happy to take this back and look at it. That's my job as the minister for this department and that's what I'll do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, on May 8, there was another shocking violent incident in our schools. A student attempted to set another student on fire. Speaker, we continue to see numerous violent attacks, weapons and issues in our schools.

What specifically has the Liberal government done in light of this latest incident?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question.

I take this very seriously. In my previous role as Minister of Justice and Public Safety, I was working very closely with the chair and the former chair. Now me, as the School Safety Coalition chair, we're working very closely with the many stakeholders who are involved in that. At that table is, obviously, the Minister of Justice, the RNC, the RCMP, administrators and NLTA.

They're working towards that. We've allotted, as we've said many times through the Minister of Finance and others, some \$20 million in the budget for additional educators and resource people. This past year, we've doubled the number of newly introduced student services teaching and learning assistants. Those individuals help with areas within that school process.

Let me be very clear, any violence in the schools is not acceptable. We want to make sure that we're doing everything we possibly can as a government. We're going to continue to do that. We're committed to it and I'm committed to it.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Announcing 400 positions is cold comfort to a child who was almost set ablaze – think about it. NLTA has also said violence in our schools has increased almost 30 per cent.

At least the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services are increasing security measures in their hospitals. Speaker, why can Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services be proactive while this Liberal government are paralyzed with inaction when it comes to our school system?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Experiences that happen within our school system, and I've heard this many times by the former minister, reflect societal issues that we're facing in our communities, not just here in Newfoundland and Labrador, not just here in Canada, but right across the globe.

We're working very closely together with the RNC and the RCMP, as well as other educators and opportunities with the NLTA. I sat there next to the president of the NLTA at our last meeting and we had very frank conversations about things we can try to do. Putting resources in is what we're trying to do. I, just like the previous minister, do not want to see us having metal detectors at the start of school – walking through those.

What we'd like to do is try to work within the community to try to make it safer. All of us have a role in having a secure school

community. That's what we're going to continue to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Speaker, what I'd like to see is a decrease in violent acts to zero. That's what I would like to see.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: You should not have to be afraid to go to school – should not have to be afraid to go to school.

Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Service, since amalgamation, say: they've increased security measures across the province and are looking for ways to take it further.

Since the Liberals amalgamated the school boards, can the minister point to a single security improvement to make our schools safer?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On this, I can agree with the hon. Member. Very nice when we agree on something. Right off the start he said, one activity of violence in the school is one too many, and I agree with that statement. All of us in this House of Assembly, all 40 of us, regardless of stripe and regardless of the location where we are, want our school community to be safe.

That's what we're trying to do on this side. Obviously, I know that the Opposition are over here trying to do the same thing from their perspective; I appreciate that. That's why they're asking questions. We have increased the number of student assistants.

That's a tangible asset that we've done. There are other things we're working on. We're continually focused, with this coalition, to find solutions that are not just distant in the future, things that we can tangibly action today. We're looking at those options.

As I said, they're a reflection of the community we're in. We're working very hard with the Justice Department on this as well.

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

They talk about the money, the \$20 million gone towards 400 teaching units. The minister mentioned the other day that 245 of those would be teachers. If you do the math, 245 teachers would use up almost \$18 million.

I'd like the minister to provide to this House exactly where that money is going. How many teachers? How many teachers' assistants are being hired?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't readily have the numbers in front of me, but I can get them. I think the hon. Member is right in saying that there are, roughly, in the 170-ish range of assistants that will be involved in that and then there will be a portion of those that will be educators. Obviously, we're working as hard as we can to find where the needs are going to be placed for those things. That's why we're working as a department.

We all agree in this House of Assembly, and many people outside the House of Assembly I'm sure, that violence is not acceptable in any part of our community, let alone our schools. Everyone should feel safe going to our school communities. I know I want that for my kids that are in the school system and for every one of the kids that are in this school system as well. Whether they're our own kids, grandchildren or whatever, we want them to be safe and feel safe so they can have a great learning environment.

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, allow me to quote Food First NL. "The province is in the middle of rolling out a school meal program for all Pre-K to Grade 9 students. This is a huge first step, but the program should be expanded to students up to Grade 12...."

I ask the minister: Will you implement a school meal program for all K-to-12 students in the province's school system?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

That's, obviously, a goal we always have. We always want to continually expand services for our young people there, whether it be – you know, as I've heard many times before, you cannot learn with an empty belly. It's important that we feed as many children as we can; especially, considering that we do have some food insecurity numbers in this province that we're all working and wrestling to try to get down.

That's what we do in our school system. It's an opportunity for us to expand the program where we can. Find opportunities for us to continue to improve that program in every school in this province, is what my ultimate goal would like to be.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: In the answer to a similar question earlier, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board stated that we are doing our best. How do we know that the best is good enough?

Stats Canada report 2024 states: Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest rate of childhood food insecurity. Food First NL also called for a targeted income support for families with children reporting or experiencing food insecurity.

How does the Minister of Families and Affordability respond to this suggestion?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Families and Affordability, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

In 2023, part of this would be addressed through our poverty reduction program. We announced \$42 million in the last budget for the Income Support Program and final enhancements will come in 2025.

We reviewed the Income Support Program; there are going to be significant improvements here. We removed the variation rates based on the elimination of age, which will lower the rates; regardless of who you live with, boarders will get the same rate and there will be no clawbacks on people receiving disability benefits.

In terms of your question, it's a valid one. I'm happy to take it back to the department, meet with stakeholders. Again, we're going to do what we can for the people here of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, last year during the by-election the Premier visited Change Islands and announced that two doctors from Fogo Island were ready to provide care on rotation, promising improved access to health care services and virtual care. Now we learn those doctors have refused to return to unreliable Internet, making virtual care impossible.

Why did the government fail to provide the basic infrastructure needed to support health care delivery on Change Islands?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As we know, there are significant challenges in recruiting health professionals to many of our rural areas. We make every endeavour to support them in the workplaces that they have and we'll continue to do that. The issue that the Member identified is certainly something that we're aware of. There are gaps in the Internet and cell service across this province, but it has been recognized and there are efforts under way on behalf of this government to address many of those gaps and issues.

This one, in particular, is something that the Department of Health will be working closely with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure on to ensure that the best possible services are available in our health

centres and that we have the most appropriate tools and resources for our physicians or nurses or whomever is providing care in our facilities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, diabetes and pre-diabetes impacts one in three people in this province – the highest rate in Canada. The revenue from the sugar tax went towards the glucose monitoring program and now Diabetes Canada is wondering how government will support those with diabetes with the loss of this revenue.

Well, we have an idea. We ask the Premier: Will you finally sign on to the federal pharmacare program which includes funding for medications, glucose monitoring and test strips?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I would just like to inform this House that there will be no impact on programs or services delivered in the Department of Health as a result of the elimination of the sugar-sweetened beverage tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. HOWELL: We will continue to support individuals in this province who need continuous glucose monitoring, and we'll also continue to build on the plan that we've already presented.

The Member opposite referenced pharmacare; it was a pleasure yesterday to see that there's a new federal minister implemented, and we'll reach out on that measure. We know that pharmacare is

something that will benefit individuals all across this country and Newfoundland and Labrador will not be left behind. So we're certainly looking forward to that conversation and moving that file forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, New Democrats believe that every student should be able to have a nutritious lunch. The revenue from the sugar tax went to supplementing the program for the school lunch program.

Surely the Premier is not going to reduce funding for that program, so I'll ask will he commit to funding the program, but also expanding the program to make sure that all students in Newfoundland and Labrador will be covered under that program?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very happy to stand and say that will not be impacted at all, even in such a way to say, even in my own family, on Tuesday past, my daughter started the school lunch program and pay what you can. Six thousand students were introduced to that program and prepared healthy meals. It's a great opportunity for us to teach students in our school system to eat healthy which will, in turn, trickle through and follow them through their whole lives.

I'm very excited about that. I'm looking forward to further expansion that we can make in those programs. When I get into this department a little bit deeper, we're going to get as far as we possibly can when it comes to reaching our children and giving them the best opportunity for success.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Premier said that repealing the sugar tax was because he understands the burden of cost-of-living crisis put on residents, but people have to heat their homes, they can't choose to heat their homes.

So I ask the Premier: Will he remove the HST from home heating so that all Newfoundland and Labradorians get the benefit of reduction in cost of living?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

A very important topic. The Member knows that we have included in this year's budget – that I'm hoping he's going to support – the home heat rebate. That will continue, Speaker, with this budget. I would also say to the Member opposite, he does understand that HST is under the control of the federal government.

What we have done is mitigate rates because of the impact of Muskrat Falls, that's costing a substantive, hundreds of millions of dollars a year, Speaker, and we're going to continue to support the people of the province with the home heat rebate as well as rate mitigation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, as we know, there was almost a tragedy out in Cedar Cove. Right now, they're trying to get the oil off the ship, the *Baltic III*. Right now, they're going to build a road out to the *Baltic III*. The

former minister ensured that the road from Bottle Cove Road would be brought to standard because of the traffic in the area, until water and sewer is done.

I ask the minister: Because of the heavy loads of the dump trucks, the flatbeds with the armor stone, would the minister right now commit to extra resources and staff? The road is treacherous and it's unsafe because of the heavy traffic. I went out there last Friday myself and it is dangerous right now for school buses and for kids to walk on.

So I ask the minister: Would he commit to that, please?

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

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

On his request, I do go back to staff and I've asked the staff to come back with an assessment of what work needs to be done there. I recognize that was a commitment by the previous minister and I'll commit to that as well, but I need to know what exactly needs to be done. I've asked staff to do that.

Once that comes back, I'll certainly present you with the options of what needs to be done there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: The second part of the *Baltic III* disaster right now is there is a four-kilometre road that needs to be built to the ship. The former minister ensured that the permit was given in a timely manner and they're starting to build the road with the rocks. The concern that the towns have and the people there is, will the environment be put back to

its natural state when it's done, when this big company moves out?

I ask the Minister of Environment: Will you commit now that the grounds and the trail which they're using right now for the ATVs and the road that's going to be built, will that be brought back to its original state, to the best possible state it can be after construction of this road and the *Baltic III* has been removed from Cedar Cove?

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

S. REID: Thank you to the Member opposite for the question on this very important matter.

It's important to note here that the Canadian Coast Guard is the lead regulatory agency in response in this operation. The request that the Member is asking about in his question, on the face of it, doesn't seem to be unreasonable expectation that that would be case.

The road to Lark Harbour, there was some questions about environment, whether an environmental assessment was required to do work on that road, and it has been released from any environmental assessment.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

SPEAKER: Does the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands have leave to table a document?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

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

E. JOYCE: Last night, Mr. Speaker, there was a discussion here with myself and the Member for Corner Brook about my commitment to the hospital in Corner Brook concerning the radiation unit and the laundry services.

I'm going to table, first of all, two letters; one from the former premier in 2014 who committed to the PET scanner in Corner Brook and the second letter is the news article where the premier was interviewed and he said that he was not involved in any way of removing or delaying the PET scanner from the original design of the hospital.

So I just want to table that one letter – and that was already tabled, I say to the hon. House. The second letter that I'm going to table is when I said last night that I was part of –

SPEAKER: I remind the Member that we only have one minute and 30 seconds left.

E. JOYCE: Yes – taking out the laundry services. I'm going to table a letter here where the minister of Health at the time stated that the decision was made on July 6. I was not in Cabinet for three months prior to that. I had no participation in taking out the laundry services. The minister says that in the letter when I wrote back and said I wasn't in Cabinet.

I just want to table these documents.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: Any further tabling of documents?

The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Immigration and Growth. You have one minute, Sir?

G. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to table official documents of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador that reply to an access to information request for the record and is correspondence document 2021-04134-002, dated September 20, 2021, in which the documents provide clear evidence, documentary evidence that, at the time, there were decisions that were taken in 2016 and 2017 that the government of the day had taken the decision not to include a PET scanner within the new hospital facility, that there would be shelved-in space for a new facility, that out-of-the-scope elements of the project also included, at that time, laundry facilities and that the efforts were continuing for radiation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I call upon the Member for Labrador West to bring forward his private Member's resolution.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

WHEREAS Labrador is an integral part of this province; and

WHEREAS geography dictates that Labradorians must rely on air travel for many non-tourism reasons such as education, bereavement leave, visiting sick loved ones, or medical treatments not covered under MTAP; and

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

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

WHEREAS the differential in travel costs between people on the Island and those 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 additional hardship solely based on their geography;

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

I want to bring this forward because as someone who lives in Labrador I have experienced this first-hand and also someone who has experienced the steadily increase of costs for travel. I lived in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. I went to college in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. I would regularly, as a college student, be able to afford to easily travel between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and St. John's regularly – airfare. But as time went on, as airlines, I guess, got bought up and folded into each other and competition completely drained out of the region, I noticed very quickly how the cost of travel went up. Over the last number of

years, it's gotten significantly more expensive.

Since taking on this role of being the MHA and speaking with my constituents and other Labradorians, it has really become a more hardened burden on Labradorians to travel. We hear it all from people who are having to go out to St. John's for a sick loved one, to go out for bereavement, those travelling for work or school or anything that's in between, anything that's not covered by MTAP. It got extensively expensive very quickly and now that we see that more seniors are having to travel because of less and less services that are available in Labrador, a lot of them are having to travel out as well and we're also hearing about that.

Labradorians have been trying to find a forward, but we keep hitting roadblocks. Travel still hasn't come down. We're still seeing between \$1,200, \$1,300 and, some cases, I've known people paying individually up to \$1,500, \$1,600 for a single return trip from St. John's here to Labrador back.

This is really causing a negative impact not only on Labradorian's budgets, but also on business and on opportunity, and we're seeing it. We've seen it back in sporting events. Just this past, three weeks, four weeks ago now, my father curled in the men's seniors provincials. Only two teams were able to participate in the men's seniors curling because the cost of travel is so expensive to Labrador that no other seniors curling team would come to Lab West because of the cost.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. BROWN: Yes, the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi was there, and he did cheer on my dad, so thank you for that; but, at the end of the day, no other teams showed up to participate. There was a team from Lab City and a team from Wabush, and that was the entire of the provincial men's curling championships, and it was

very unfortunate that no other team wanted to participate because of the cost to try to get to Labrador.

Now, that's just one real at-home example, but if you talk to the people that actually live in Labrador, those who want to do it, it really also has a silo impact. It's brought up when we are trying to recruit people to come to Labrador West to work in professional settings, people that work in government jobs or health care jobs or anything like that. It's always, the cost to get up there and back and forth, and if I move up there, I'll never see my family; I'll never be able to get out of here because it's just going to be so cost prohibitive.

It's having a very serious negative impact on the social fabric as well. It creates a sense of unnecessary isolation. I understand, yes, we have a highway, but a lot of people don't want to drive. They want to be like any other place in this province, to be able to go the airport, get on a plane and travel somewhere.

Now, the strange part about all of this is, though, that's just to travel to St. John's, but if I wanted to fly from Lab City to Montreal and return, it's \$500. And why is that? Well, that's because the Quebec government implemented a travel program in their province to help boost travel into remote areas. Because we are a regional airport in Labrador West, a federal regional airport, we also encompass the beautiful community of Fermont, Quebec. Because our airport happens to be on our side, but we service that community, we got lumped into that program. So Labradorians in Labrador West have no problems becoming integrated into the part of Quebec because we can travel around Quebec for \$500. So it just goes to show that when there's will there is a way, there's an opportunity to do that.

I understand that we are subsidizing a profitable airline with that \$500, but there has to be somewhere where we have to come down and say enough is enough

when it comes to being cost prohibitive, but also the ability to actually have access to travel. It's having a very serious negative impact. And the strange thing, again, is I could travel Quebec easier than I can travel in my own province, and that's a serious problem that we have to take back and go, well, I can go to Montreal for \$500, subsidized by the Quebec government, but I can't travel to St. John's and actually get services that are required from my own government.

So this is where the people of Labrador West and the people of the rest of Labrador have grown their frustrations on how we can be more integrated, and that's why we're calling upon the provincial government to have a plan, to work with the federal counterparts, work in Indigenous governments, work with business, work with those individuals to try and come to a reasonable solution on how we're going to deal with this situation, because it's gouging at it's highest in my opinion of it.

We should not be negatively impacted because we choose to continue to live in Labrador. We are Labradorians, that is our home. We're not going to leave. We're not going to move out of there. We're always going to be there. This is where we built our lives and our livelihood. This is where generations of our family have lived. The negative impact that this is having on us is really causing a lot of concern and a growing sense of why – why are we so negatively impacted? Why can't we have what everyone else has? Why can't be an integrated part of the province instead of a subsect? Because right now, we are two distinct societies, but we don't feel like we belong. We don't feel like we are a part.

So this is where we really think this is, I guess, a wedge issue of where we can try to find a solution and, at the end of the day, it will benefit all of us. Because Labrador right now is starting to become a topic again of industrial growth and prosperity. We have great resources in mining from rare earth

minerals to iron ore to cobalt, nickel and everything in between. If you can think of it, it's somewhere in the ground in Labrador. We also have the massive hydroelectric complex that is the Churchill River. We have opportunities galore but if we're not an integrated part of this province where people can reasonably and easily travel around this province, then what's it all for?

We want to feel a part of this province. We want to be able to become integrated and make sure that we can easily travel our province. We do not want to feel like a second-class or third-class citizen. Just because we live in Labrador doesn't mean we should go without.

There is an expectation of service, there's an expectation of being integrated and we shouldn't have to beg. We shouldn't have to get down on our hands and knees and say, please, please, help us. We shouldn't have to do that. It should be a reasonable expectation that when this problem rose its head many years ago, about the increase of travel, it should have been looked at then.

I think, right now, is asking the provincial government to do the right thing, to work on a reasonable solution – and, yes, we have to go and drag our federal counterparts in on this and if we have to drag them by the ear, then we'll have to drag them by the ear because they also have a very key role to play. They are the regulator. They are the ones who are supposed to be watching this industry. They're the ones who are supposed to be looking at what airfares are. They're the ones who are supposed to do that.

So clearly, they were derelict in their duty as well, but we have to remind them that Canada is a large country and the majority of Canada is a remote country. Just like Labrador, they have a lot of northern places as well that they are responsible for, and the expectation is that what they do here could also help the rest of the country as well.

Once again, with my final minute, I call upon my colleagues here to look at this and remember that Labrador is a part of this province. We shouldn't have to beg for services.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

This is one of those times in this Legislature when you will see, despite the party affiliations that exist currently in Labrador, a lot of very similar types of comments and agreements. So I thank my colleague from Labrador West for bringing this PMR forward. The way he's worded it is in such a way that I can certainly live with and would be more than pleased to support it.

I have a just a couple of little background comments. I just want to provide a little bit of context for folks and just by way of some recent events and then some past events. Just a few days ago, I had the honour, I think it was the 2nd of May, to speak at a tournament organized by the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, a hockey tournament. Do you know what? This is the province's largest high school hockey tournament. It has been running for nine years. This year, for the first time, of the 16 boy teams and girl teams that were there from these different high schools, we had a team from Labrador.

It was a massive fundraising effort from the Mealy Mountain Hawks, but they were there. Their parents were there, very proud, and I was very proud as the MHA to be there to speak to that. It helps to underline the frustration of raising funds for travel. Even though I've seen our government increase funds, there's still so much more that needs to be done.

That's on sports. Another aspect is – I'm always thinking about youth and future generations – arts and culture programs. People involved in dance and choir and acting and so on, those young people also do not have an adequate opportunity to even travel within the province, to the Island, to avail of all that experience and exposure.

Perhaps, the most serious has been one that has plagued my office over the last 10 years, but also one that I've certainly welcomed – and I have to mention her name, Bonnie Learning. I call her the SACA, the super awesome constituency assistant, because 50 per cent, I would estimate, that we do in our office relates to the Medical Transportation Assistance Program. No one knows this program better than Bonnie because, folks, when they come to us, they're seeking medical assistance that is provided outside of Labrador. While we do have a good hospital in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, there are so many services, so many other specialist-type appointments that are required either in Corner Brook, typically, but most often it's in St. John's.

Travel out, with the minister responsible for the MTAP program, we have seen advancements and I will say that I'm looking forward to seeing more, certainly making suggestions to the floor. Despite those advancements, we still encounter, in our office, people who will cancel their appointments. They cannot afford to go out for the medical appointments; a very serious matter when you're dealing with life-threatening health issues and so on.

I've got a litany, unfortunately, of very serious stories, bringing them forward, trying to see what we can do to support them. We're doing our best and we are making progress. I'm hoping that, at some point, we'll be able to finally resolve this. Ideally, we'd like to all those services provided in Labrador. The numbers, our population doesn't necessarily always justify

it, although I have seen some programs where we could do that.

I don't want to digress too much in health care because I want to focus more broadly on what the issue is. I have seen in my, now it's almost four decades, of working and travelling, living throughout Labrador, an escalation of the cost of traveling to that area and a deterioration, unfortunately, in the number of options and then the quality of service that one enjoys on a flight.

I can remember my first time to Labrador was in the summer of '87. I was on a 737. I had a hot, cooked breakfast from here to Deer Lake. Then we offloaded, unloaded and then another hot, cooked meal by the time I landed in Goose Bay. I don't recall the price, but I remember the service and the options that were available to us.

So we have seen a rapid deterioration. A lot of it seemed to have escalated around COVID. It's been a common problem for air travel, not just throughout Labrador but in all northern areas. Frankly the whole country, as we know, has shut down dramatically as a result of the lack of travel and all the different procedures that were associated with COVID.

This came at a time when we were also seeing, finally, a slowdown in the construction activity that was going on at Muskrat Falls. During that particular project – and I'm speaking, specifically, about CYYR, our airport in Goose Bay – we saw quite a dramatic decline in ridership. During the construction period, where there tended to be a lack of charters, we saw a lot more workers travelling to and from the Island and elsewhere to work on that project. At one point, it had a huge workforce there and the riding public could join those flights, along with contract employees, and avail of more options, a much more affordable flight.

I'm bringing this point forward because I see it potentially as an opportunity for hopefully going forward. As we talk about the

Churchill River MOU and getting this in place and so on and work at Gull Island, I'm going to be advocating for a serious look at this issue of charters and I feel that they are definitely affecting our ridership and certainly the affordability. From an airline perspective, at the end of the day, we need these businesses to survive and run an operation not at a cost.

I'm not going to get into airline bashing at all. While we do have just primarily the one airline that's functioning, Provincial Airlines, in Labrador, I can tell you that if we didn't have them, we'd really be struggling.

So the question that I've been advocating for now almost a year since this issue really started to boil over, has been to have a third party, some way to do an evaluation and actually have a transparent look at what does it cost to operate an airline running to and from places like Deer Lake or St. John's to Goose Bay or to Wabush. And then, for my colleague, from Torngat Mountains, and then on into the North Coast of Labrador.

I'd like to see that evaluation. I'm aware there's been work ongoing. I'm also aware the minister's going to be speaking here soon. I'm glad and I welcome the new minister that's in this portfolio. Certainly, already been speaking with the new administration that's around me, bringing them up to speed on some of the suggestions and ideas that could come forward.

I'm going to compliment my colleague again from Labrador West on his final line, and that is on involving the various stakeholder groups from the different levels of government. Happy Valley-Goose Bay actually has six different levels of government based in that area. Two chambers of commerce, Lab West, our airport authority, there's a lot of wisdom there in terms of the demographics, what we need economically and so on.

What I would like to see, and I'd welcome to the table, is the technical expertise and get the folks with the technical expertise in the room who could really speak about air rates, subsidies, other aspects and strategies that could be used to address this very serious, pressing problem.

So many times when I'm in sort of a stakeholder group, it's a lot of venting. And I understand, because I'm doing a lot of it myself, because I feel that every day. But I feel what's missing often is to get the technical folks who really understand what is happening across Canada right now, what's working, what's not working, and bring that to the table.

So I felt, Sir, that your closing comment was particularly relevant. I feel that could be a good addition to the dialogue. I'm looking forward to hearing the rest of the discussion here today and I'm looking for good support on this.

I know that with our new administration, with our new Premier, Goose Bay Airport Corporation reached out immediately for discussion and dialogue and with the relevant ministers, the MHAs from Labrador and so on. So we'll do our best to engage in a constructive dialogue, making sure that everyone is bringing something to the table. Yes, they'll be the frustration of the region, but I also welcome the technical input and let's see what we can do.

A final thought is that when you're talking about northern routes in Canada and certainly in Labrador, we have not seen the recovery in ridership. I notice that Mr. Hogan this morning from the St. John's Airport Authority spoke about how ridership is now out of the St. John's airport back to pre-pandemic levels, and well done and congratulations to them. That has not happened in our northern routes. I think that's part of our problem and I would also suggest that across Canada this is also an issue that we need to think about.

So let's get to the bottom of it. I welcome the PMR and I welcome the dialogue that's going to come here today.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to stand and have a few words on this, as I seconded the motion and feel strong that there should be something done for the people in Labrador. Just to give you a bit of background, I never lived in Labrador. I'm not as familiar with some issues in Labrador as certain people here, I'll admit that, but I did have family living in Labrador and I spent a lot of time in Labrador.

With my time in Labrador, and I'll just go back with a bit of history, in 2015, when there was a realignment of districts in this province, one of the big pushes was to eliminate the seat in Labrador. I know that because I was the one who was the lead for our Opposition at the time. I fought very hard within our own caucus and with the government at the time to keep four seats because of the geographical area in Labrador and the challenges that people in Labrador face with it and what the MHAs have to face in trying to treat their constituents with decency, time and respect to be in the community.

Back then, I got a great lesson in Labrador of the trials and tribulations of living in Labrador. I'm glad that it stayed as four seats, to give everybody an opportunity to be represented on a fair and equitable basis.

This here is something that, again, the full details are not even out and this more or less started their discussion on for Labrador. This is tourism for St. John's, Gander and Deer Lake. So the issue I can't get the answer to is who's paying the extra

amount if PAL airlines don't make it and how much if they don't make a profit? How much? That's the question.

Here we are debating a private Member's motion to help out Labrador, and Labrador should be included, but we don't know the cost for Newfoundland and Labrador. What is the ceiling of the profit that they can make? Is it trips, number of people, or is it just for a period of time we should make this amount of profit?

So we are, as a government here, giving subsidies for tourism, and no one knows the amount. You can see why people in Labrador, all the entities in Labrador, are saying well, you're giving almost a blank cheque to PAL because we don't know, yet you're forgetting the Labrador part of it.

I heard the Member for Lab West say how easy it is to fly on to Atlantic Canada and within, and I know that. I have a family member who works up there, and it's cheaper for them to fly on to Halifax than it is to fly to Deer Lake – much cheaper.

This is the concern that a lot of people have who want to come to the Island, and I'll just give you a good example of some of the concerns that I've been hearing. I brought this up last night in the debate that I had that was about the cataract surgeries. Cataract surgeries now are being done at Apex. Most of the people right now getting cataracts in Labrador go to Apex in Corner Brook. If they're not aware of the subsidy or if they're over a certain amount, they have to pay their full airfare cost to come to get surgery. This is the concern that I have, and I know it because I hear it personally, is why I feel strongly that the provincial and federal government must do something with air travel.

I know of cases, and again because I do have family in the Straits of Labrador and up in Goose Bay, I know people who drive up to go to an appointment and the weather is too bad. They have to turn around, or the

boat is not crossing. They miss the appointment; they have to go back.

This is why we need something done here to help out people who want to fly, and the flight and the travel is expensive. It is expensive. I heard the Member for Lab West talking about how people in Labrador shouldn't have to beg. They shouldn't have to be in this House Assembly now; we should be in this House of Assembly and say well, we should be standing up for Labrador. Why this wasn't done to include Labrador is beyond me.

It's almost like throwing a piece of red meat to somebody and saying that, okay, we're just going to give you something to eat. The dogs over here are getting nothing. We're talking about the people in Labrador. We're talking about an area, a major contribution to this province, yet here it's almost like saying we're going to exclude Labrador. We're just going to take the tourists from St. John's, Gander, Deer Lake, and Labrador is still struggling to get the airfare rates down.

I can see why people are upset. I can honestly see why people are upset in Labrador. I make no bones about it. I would be too if I lived in Labrador. I would be too seeing the province, here, giving people luxury tourism. No doubt, there are a lot of people who love to travel. It may help the economy. I'm not sure how big it's going to be, if people want to fly from St. John's to Gander. I think a lot of people may think about it and say, okay, it may be a bit cheaper to drive. They'll spend the \$40 in gas than fly out, and that's the question. How many seats do you need to fill before you make a profit? Who's going to get on a plane in Gander, pay \$300, \$400, come to Corner Brook, 3½ drive, probably spend an extra \$300, \$400, \$500?

So even the concept of it is not fully thought out and excluding Labrador – I can see why the people in Labrador and all the entities in Labrador are saying, why are you treating us like this? I can honestly see it. For the

Member for Lab West to bring this up as a concern of the people and take this stand for the people of Labrador, I support you on that. This is why I second this motion.

I know the struggles in Labrador. I knew the struggles in 2015 when I fought so hard to make sure Labrador had four seats when there are people who want to cut down an extra seat in Labrador and put it in Newfoundland and Labrador. I said, no, that's wrong, just on geography – that's wrong.

So that's the concerns that I have with this here, not knowing the program, not knowing how much subsidy is in the program to people to travel for tourism, for going out – and we all know there are a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador, right now, can't afford luxury. We know that. We discuss this in this House. We know.

So here, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is giving a subsidy to people to travel for tourism, to have their little holiday, yet people in Labrador are left out. There's something fundamentally wrong and whoever the minister, I guess it's the Minister of Tourism, if he can explain what is the seat capacity for PAL Airlines to make a profit before the government has to pay the bill for that. That's something we don't know. We just don't know that. We don't know how much it's going to cost to subsidize this program. That's a very important issue that I'd like for the minister, if he has the amounts and if he has the – I don't know if it's the number seats. Is it the number of trips? That's something that hasn't been put out.

So I'll just close with that, Mr. Speaker, and urge the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to work with the federal government to find some way to give the people in Labrador a fair and equitable subsidy, or work with the airlines to ensure that they're being treated fairly and not, like the Member for Lab West said, have to come begging to try to get something done.

They should not have to do it. The people in Labrador have a lot of pride. They contribute a lot to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. They should be treated just like the people here in this province, because I know the great people that they are and I know the great struggles that they have.

We should all work together. I thank the Member for Lab West, again, for bringing this forward. I'm sure we're going to get a lot of support on this.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Speaker, thank you for the opportunity, and I thank Members for allowing me to speak today to this private Member's resolution. I thank the Member, as well, from Labrador West for putting it forward.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, I've been in this role for just a couple of days, but I've been part of government for just over a year and have lived in this province for my entire life, with the exception of a couple of years that I was away studying, and have had a career here, basically, covering the entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and speaking to people from all over this very large province.

I will say that it's always an honour to stand and speak on behalf of the residents that I represent in Conception Bay East - Bell Island, which includes the communities of Paradise, Bell Island and, of course, my home community of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's; but as a minister, previously in Housing and Transportation and Infrastructure and now Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, it's a pleasure to speak on behalf of the issues that are facing all people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is not lost on me that when we leave here this evening, or on any given day when we leave our offices here at the Confederation Building, as the MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, I can be in my home in my living room or at my dining room table within about 15 minutes. I have remarked to multiple people, including Members opposite and on this side, how challenging – and I’ve questioned it – it must be, because I know this is a challenging job for anyone, no matter where you’re sitting in the Legislature, that if you represent an area of Labrador or if you represent somewhere on the Northern Peninsula, the West Coast, the Southwest Coast, the Connaigre, the Bonavista Peninsula, anywhere that takes several hours to get to either by driving or by flight, that it adds that extra layer of complication to your job, to get back and forth.

So I see it, and I know that with my own colleagues in caucus but others as well that I see in the hallways how difficult it is to balance the family time and the amount of time that is spent in airports or on the road driving to and from your constituencies so that you can do the work for the people who you represent.

I want to just take a very brief moment, Speaker, to highlight the two colleagues who I work the closest with obviously, who represent areas of Labrador from Cartwright- L’Anse au Clair and from Lake Melville. We were in this House this morning, you and I and some others who were in the room for the Moose Hide Campaign, which we are wearing our moose hide badges today, brought to us by the Member for Lake Melville, I think it was eight years ago, a very passionate Member of the House of Assembly, very passionate on behalf of his constituents and the people he represents, constantly advocating for people in Labrador. Similarly for the Member for Cartwright- L’Anse au Clair and I will say as well, Mr. Speaker, to the Members opposite, the Member who presented this private Member’s resolution,

from Lab West and as well from Torngat Mountains, the MHA for that district as well, they are very passionate, as everybody in this House is, about their own district.

But there seems to be that extra little bit of push from the MHAs from Labrador who want to make sure that because of where they are located geographically, they want to make sure that people get a fair shake. Mr. Speaker, because the MHA for Lake Melville, I guess, perhaps this is his last session as he has announced, I just want to thank him for the advocacy work that he has done on behalf of the people of Labrador, the people he represents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: He and the other MHAs from Labrador and all MHAs, but we’re speaking specifically about a matter related to Labrador today, are extremely passionate about wanting to make sure that people who live in that part of our province are treated with the respect that they feel they need.

As I say, I have only been in this position for a couple of days, but it was the first email that I received, from the head of the Goose Bay Airport Corporation. Mr. Goudie sent an email to a couple of the Labrador MHAs and myself requesting a meeting. We had actually planned to try to meet next week, but I think we’re going to be sitting for another little while, so as soon as we can get there to have a meeting to discuss more solutions that are potentially agreeable upon.

You know, we also need to have conversations with the federal government. The Member who just spoke a couple of moments ago referenced the need to have those conversations, and we do. The airline industry is heavily regulated by the federal government. We need to make sure that they’re at the table. They have a role to play in this, as does the provincial government, as do the stakeholders in Labrador. The folks who are going to be impacted, they

need to have a say in what we do as we move forward.

So I just wanted to reiterate that I am very aware of the obstacles, if you want to call them that, that face the people of Labrador. Four years ago, a family member, my own daughter, moved to Lab West to pursue a relationship. She is now married. When they came down in March to get married, they wanted to drive from Lab West. They lived there, they wanted to drive down and have the wedding in our home and they wanted to take their dogs, so they had to drive. It took them almost six full days to get here because of the ice in Strait at the time. They were stuck. They had to have the added cost of extra nights in a hotel room, waiting in Blanc-Sablon, in that area, before they could get across.

Getting home, thankfully, was a little bit easier after the very tiring journey to get here, but since my very close family member has moved to Labrador, even though I had been aware of the situation with airline costs and the costs of travelling to and from that part of the province to this part of the province, it became more acutely aware. If we want to go visit them, if they plan to grow their family and we want to be part of that as well, that it is very expensive to do so, and for them to come here.

I mean, I just want to make sure that everybody knows that this is not just something I am reading about. I know about it because we think about our visits with our family members at all times and how we're going to plan them and how we're going to pay for them when the costs are that expensive. So I am aware of that. I think the first thing that I would like to say related to anything that we do from this point forward is that anyone who has worked with me in the past, not just in my government role, in elected office or working with Premier Furey, prior to that, or in my days in media, knows that I'm open to taking calls from whoever wants to reach out to me.

I think most Members in this House of Assembly have my personal cellphone number or my government phone or my email. I think working with these stakeholders and, as the Member opposite mentioned just a moment ago, the federal government and the role they have to play, all Members of this House, especially the Members from Labrador who are impacted and the people that they represent, they need to be at the table and the stakeholders in Labrador.

I was just listening to the Member for Lab West when he was reading from his private Member's resolution, and he talked about Labrador being 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. Nobody needs to tell anyone in this House of Assembly how vast this province is, how big it is, how difficult it is to service with health care, education, roads, transportation, all the services that people all over Newfoundland and Labrador require and deserve.

His private Member's resolution talks about the hon. House calls on the government to work with Indigenous partners, businesses, and the federal government to implement a plan that reduces costs and increases the accessibility of air travel to, from and within Labrador. That is why I support this resolution as well and think that it is something that we need to spend some more time talking about to find the solutions that are going to ease the burdens that are on folks from Labrador who are trying to get to this part of the province or any other part of the province, wherever they need to go for whatever reason it be.

We have MTAP, which has been increased in funding over the last couple of years, but beyond that, people who need to travel for any other situation that they may want to get, either from some part of Labrador down to the island portion of the province, or the

other way, that there can be some ease there.

So my commitment today to this House of Assembly and, more specifically, to the Member for Labrador West who brought forward this private Member's resolution is that I'm willing to talk with you and anyone who will want to speak to me or listen to what we have to say so that we can achieve that goal.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Always on honour to speak, and even a greater honour here today because I am a Labradorian. I'm from Labrador West, born and raised, seen the boom and the bust and understand what's going on up there now.

Labrador is different wherever you go. My time with search and rescue, I travelled the coast extensively and other places. At that time, and even still, search and rescue carries out missions that they shouldn't have to do, quite frankly, it's not a part of their mandate, but they do respond because of the lack of services that Labrador has when it comes to medevac and different things that happen up there.

A cultural mosaic, a melting pot, there's all kinds of words we can use, and the Minister of Tourism summed it up when he said his daughter moved up there. So there's no community, I wouldn't think, in Newfoundland that doesn't have family in Labrador. There's someone from everywhere up there, whether it's the original settlers and Indigenous people or people who moved there for mining, to support the military base or Churchill Falls, it's full of people from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Goose Bay faces different challenges than the South Coast and Labrador West, and I'll highlight a couple of things from Labrador West. Labrador West, as an example, now, people choose not to travel to Newfoundland because of the subsidy that the Quebec government gives. So you can travel out of Labrador West and go to Quebec. You don't have to be a Quebec resident, as long as you're flying into Quebec, it's \$500. My mom lives in Labrador West. It's cheaper for her to fly to Montreal and go visit my brother and then get on a plane from Ottawa and fly to Newfoundland and fly back to Ottawa and get a plane out of Montreal back into Wabush. To say that's ridiculous is an understatement. It's beyond ridiculous.

Now, what was spurned by this \$15-million announcement was phenomenal for me to see on Facebook. There's one guy, Neal Pike, I believe his name was. He put a post up, and there are literally hundreds and hundreds of shares and it's just about separation and that spurned it on. I'm certain people from Labrador don't want to separate but the reality of it is, it's how adamant they are about how they're treated.

I do believe that Labradorians are not treated the same as Newfoundlanders in certain aspects and airfare is one example. Here's a great example. So you had federally regulated airport where fly-in/fly-out jets were coming in out of Quebec with no firefighters. Transport Canada standards clearly say that you cannot land at an airport with that many passengers, that large of a vessel, without firefighters. They told the Wabush fire department, Lab City fire department that they were dependent on doing it. With a railbed that crosses it, if there was a train coming, there's no service. These planes were coming in and out all of the time.

FIFO, fly in, fly out, has affected Goose Bay, Labrador West extensively and it's given one airline a monopoly. Now, when I was young and I'm sure lots of people if they've

ever travelled up there would understand, Air Canada, at the time, Canadian Airlines, Air Borealis – there were four or five different planes that were flying in there all of the time. There were options.

So here's where I think government needs to go and needs to start thinking and they need to do it now. It's what we don't do and haven't done as a government. We've been reactive with everything. We need to be proactive and here's why.

There are multiple projects in Labrador West that are going to happen. We all know that. Search Minerals hopefully, again; all kinds of different things going on the South Coast for expansion; the Gull Island Project, hopefully. I have said it here 1,000 times, I hope the MOU is as solid as it gets and everything goes ahead. I'm not convinced that it is, but I hope it does. But we need to find a way to materialize on all that to ensure that, as more people are flying in and flying out, that there's better air access, that it doesn't restrict residents who live up there.

Not only that, but we need to ensure that the people who are given the option to fly in and out of Labrador to go to work are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that live here on the Island portion. We can't have access to Labrador inhibit our ability to hire people to go to work on these projects and grow population. I mean, we should be utilizing all of this to grow the population everywhere in Newfoundland and Labrador. I don't think we look at it.

The Member for Labrador West speaks eloquently, I know he fights for it. Just a few weeks ago, and I have no problem saying it, between the previous Tourism minister and the new Premier and the previous premier, I had multiple phone calls – multiple, multiple phone calls – fighting for residents of Labrador to come out here, young boys and girls, and play hockey. They were restricted. There was a solution found but I can tell you, in my six years here, I did more

legwork on that than I did a lot of bigger files that I did a lot of work on.

It was incredible how hard we had to work to get Provincial Airlines to come on board and make it happen. Now, I'm not blaming it on Provincial Airlines. I believe it was an oversight by Hockey NL and a scheduling issue. It got figured out, but here's the bigger issue with that. We subsidize Provincial Airlines for \$1,500 a player to charter that plane for kids to come out here and play hockey, and their parents flew out on commercial tickets for \$800, so how much work went into government subsidizing these young boys and girls to come play hockey?

It's ridiculous when you think about it, right? They were charging double and that is, by definition, gouging. By definition, I mean, that is gouging. If I could book a ticket to fly out for half the price and government was subsidizing the airline to do it there's a big issue and it needs to be addressed.

The other thing that is going to be, I would hope, astronomical, phenomenal, one of the greatest opportunities for the province and a bigger opportunity for Labrador is Goose Bay Airport, YYR, I believe? Yeah, YYR should boom in the next couple of years. We should see a high-level presence of military coming back. We should be looking for ways to take advantage of the gateway to the North. We all know the things that are coming there and that in itself is going to create more problems.

We talk about, and my colleague – I was going to say her name, but I'm not allowed to say her name – from Torngat Mountains always talks about air access from the Coast. I mean, it is deplorable; there's no question. When I spent time travelling the Coast, the whole idea of getting a flight to the Coast, accessibility, even most of them are flying VFR. So that means it's visual, they can't land at night and there are all kinds of different things that happen there. It creates bigger problems in the airports. I

don't believe that Labrador has been granted the same opportunities as other areas when it comes to air travel.

I was listening to the Minister of Tourism speak and he didn't say it, he just talked about opportunity and different things, and he's right. We have to create opportunity everywhere for tourism and for this province, but this private Members' resolution isn't about tourism. This private Members' resolution was spurred on by a tourism announcement but it's not about tourism. The example I'll give is, I would think that if you live in Newfoundland and Labrador, you've seen more advertisements and more money spent on – the money portion is probably not right but it feels that way to me because I see it all the time based on where I live – Legendary Coasts and Saint-Pierre than we do on Labrador.

We spend more on sending people a few kilometres across the pond to France – and it is France, make no mistake about it – than we do encouraging people to travel within our own province. I don't know if anyone here has ever been to Battle Harbour or gone to Lab City and, I'll say it, as much as people hear me talking about Quebec all the time, go to Fermont and go to Churchill Falls and see how phenomenal that facility is, go to Goose Bay. Labrador is beautiful. The Coast of Labrador is untouched. When you go there, I tell you, there's only one thing I can compare it to, it's like going to the Grand Canyon. The first time I went to the Grand Canyon my exact words were: It's like going to a different planet. The beauty and the rawness and the ruggedness is second to nowhere in the world and I don't feel that we take advantage of it.

The whole idea that we don't subsidize the travel – and we talk about MTAP all the time, but again this isn't about MTAP. Ironically, contrary to what people think, even in Labrador West where everyone makes a great salary or in Goose Bay, there's poverty up there and people can't

afford to take advantage of MTAP in a lot of instances. They can't afford a plane ticket. It's really outrageous what people pay and, if you have to travel on short notice, forget about it, the availability of a flight or the cost is even more restrictive.

I can see my time is running out but there are a couple of things and the first thing is, I have absolutely no problem whatsoever supporting this bill. I think it could go further; I really do. I believe that there needs to be a lot of legwork done in order to try and expand air travel into Labrador. The population up there hasn't changed. As a matter of fact, I would argue with the amount of fly-in, fly-out and the projects that are coming up, there's probably more of a demand for air travel now than there ever was, but we have one company with a monopoly on it.

The other thing is that the Member for Labrador West made a comment about the airport in Lab City. The airport's not in Lab City, it's Wabush and that's where I'm from and I'm proud to say it.

Anyhow, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you.

I now recognize the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

As I'm looking at two gentlemen across the way, of the 40 seats, they're the only two that have been here longer than me. I believe I am the longest serving Member on this side of the House, just about 12 years in now. I've sat through a lot of different debate, Speaker, in the fall sitting and the spring sitting of the House. It is unfortunate that a debate has come on this very important topic, but it is also a bit refreshing to sit in the House and spend an entire afternoon where people from the three

parties and an independent Member are standing and talking about Labrador.

I'm happy that it was elevated to this issue, the very important matter. I want to thank the Member for Lab West. It was already said today that he does an incredibly great job advocating for the people that he represents, and I can certainly attest to that. I want to thank him for bringing this very important private Member's motion forward.

Throughout the ebb and flow of the debate this afternoon, people here in this House are also getting a little bit of an education into how vast Labrador is. When I leave and I travel back to my riding on the South Coast of Labrador, it is a nine-hour travel day for me. I don't get to do it every weekend anymore but, pretty much, I go every second weekend if I can, mostly because of flight restrictions. When I started, I had flight options six days a week out of Blanc-Sablon and, after COVID, that never rebounded past three days a week.

Usually, I take the three-hour flight into Goose Bay and then I do the 420-kilometre drive to the coast. If I have an event in Cartwright, that adds another 410 kilometres either way. So it's not uncommon to fly six hours and to drive 840 or 1,100 kilometres in weekend. That is life for us in Labrador. We do have the highway, Speaker, I won't say finished because I'm looking at my colleague for Torngat. We say that we've completed border to border from Lab West to L'Anse au Clair in the south, a beautiful 1,100-kilometre stretch.

We still have work to do. We still have communities that are isolated like my community was when I grew up, Speaker, but because of the vastness of Labrador, because Labrador is roughly 2½ times the size of the Island, there is still a need for air travel. It is still absolutely essential. If you were born and raised and grew up in Labrador, and even today as an adult, even today as a minister sitting in the provincial government, you feel like a lot of times that

the people around you don't understand the challenges that we face, that we live with, that we deal with on a daily basis. Oftentimes, I appreciate the folks on my team to take the time to listen and work with me to try and find solutions to the various challenges.

Speaker, I've got to watch the clock here. I don't want to run out of time.

AN HON. MEMBER: Seven minutes.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

So, Speaker, regarding the airfare, I look back to when I started representing Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair and the airfare has more than doubled. We've really seen across Canada where costs have no doubt gone up, averaging around 9 per cent. If you look to Labrador to our main airport, we saw that Goose Bay went up, I think, 33, 34 per cent; 47 per cent in Wabush. It's been said here this afternoon that there are multiple layers of government that need to come together to help find a solution to this. I believe that the federal government has a role to play.

On Mother's Day, on Sunday morning, I was dealing with people around the Wabush airport, folks trying to get back home for Mother's Day. They were deplaned in Deer Lake because of the snowstorm and in here it was quite nice and sunny and, again, it just reminds us how vast the province is. I was reminded that \$750 is the Transport Canada landing fee. No doubt that adds to the cost.

I do believe, Speaker, that the time has come for the province – we have a role to play. I stand here and I say that and the Member for Lab West certainly knows where my thoughts have been on this for some time. I know the hardship. When we look at who do we want to help, I think businesses travelling back, for the most part do okay.

I want to speak about medical transportation because it is the topic that gets discussed a lot. In *Budget 2023*, that provincial program came under me. At that time, Labradorians used the program 5½ times more than anyone else in the province. Now, three years later, since the program has been with us, we have doubled the amount of money. The need is great. The need is growing. Every year I have no issue going back to Treasury Board and looking for more money. We've doubled the program and we are now using the program 8.9 times more than the rest of the province. We introduced a voucher program.

I'm sharing this because that is a part of our affordability measures to help people who have to travel out of Labrador to access specialized services. I want to say to the Member for Lab West, my last data that I saw, 73 per cent came from Lab West. It makes sense when you look at our geography and we don't have specialists in Labrador, folks have to travel out.

Also, Speaker, the Sport Travel Subsidy for athletes travelling out of Labrador, that's now almost a \$1 million. Year over year, I'm pushing, pushing for enhancements to that program. Last year we added another \$100,000 to the program. Recently, for the North Coast, for the six communities in Nunatsiavut and in Natuashish, we now cover 100 per cent of the airfare for those athletes to get to Goose Bay, so that we level the playing field, no pun intended.

Because, folks, if you're from the South Coast from where I live and you're driving to Goose Bay to the airport, you do get your mileage rate covered, but folks coming from the North Coast were at a disadvantage. So then we pay 75 per cent of the airfare for those students 18 and under, and I think there are 14 different sport programs that are covered there.

Speaker, we do that because the cost of the airfare is so high. Things that weigh on me, things that can keep me awake at night is,

what about Nan, who paid for four years to help her grandson, see him walk across the stage and convocate because she paid so much for his degree? She wants to be there, but it's so cost prohibitive. What about the young lady whose mom or dad is in here in palliative, and they want to be with them in their final hours? Those are real life stories, and those are the stories that if you represent Labrador, we get all the time.

AN HON. MEMBER: Three minutes.

L. DEMPSTER: I have a timekeeper behind me and he's doing a great job.

I want to say that we've been at this for months and months, and I want to really give a big shout-out to GBAC, the Goose Bay Airport Corporation. They've done an incredible job with leading some great work on this and getting some great stats for us. I know Goose Bay Airport Corporation, Dean Clarke – the chair – and Rex Goudie, they have been working also with the chambers in Goose Bay, an incredible chamber in Labrador North. I think they're on par with any other chamber across the country, and the chamber in Lab West doing a great job.

So a couple of things that I know that GBAC have gotten some money from TCAR to look at some new route development. That's really important. What are some areas right now that are underserved that we could entice new airlines in?

The other issue is the affordability. Much of the focus this afternoon has been around affordability. That's important. I'm delighted with a new Premier and a new Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation there seems to be a collective willingness in the air to sit down to meet to start the conversation with the folks in Labrador, with the leadership to see what we can offer. Maybe some semblance, Speaker, of a Quebec program, obviously with some parameters around it to limit financial exposure too much to the province, but I believe there's something we can do there.

Does that mean that each flight that comes out, there's maybe two excursion fares on that flight that's coming out of Labrador, where if you know two weeks ahead that you're going to travel, you book ahead and you get a lower rate? So there has been, over the last year in particular, with one airline now in Labrador, an air access issue. Really difficult to even get a seat. I had people and someone passed away in their family on a Monday or Tuesday and couldn't get a flight until Saturday – really difficult stories. The access issue, the flights with the one airline, seems to have come along and there has been progress there, but we certainly still have to look at the affordability issue. We have to look at what opportunity we can bring with new routes.

Speaker, Labrador is so resource rich, world-class assets. We discuss it in this House all the time; recently in January, four days discussing the MOU and now moving toward definite agreements, a quarter of a trillion dollars in totality for that project and yet, if you live there, your experience can be very difficult than the person who is hopping on that flight where everything is paid to go and come.

We're just asking for some consideration here. I'm quite happy to support the PMR. I want to thank my colleague. I also want to thank the MHA for Lake Melville. I want to thank the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands who lives in Corner Brook but lots of family in Goose Bay and speaking on behalf of Labradorians. I want to thank the new Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. I want to thank the man who's always proud to say he's from Wabush. I believe right now he represents Terra Nova.

SPEAKER: Minister, your time has expired.

Thank you.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you all for supporting –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I now recognize the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak on this motion. My colleague from Lab West who brought forward this motion, what's difficult for us is the fact that we have to bring forward this motion. What's especially difficult for me, Speaker, is to sit here and listen to the nice words coming across the way. Nice words. Really nice words. Beautiful words.

They talk about finding solutions but they have to find words now to talk about solutions because they come up with \$15 million. I've been told – I've been corrected – it's not all \$15 million that's going into subsidizing the air travel. It's going in for tourism. It's going in for all the things that goes along with promoting this intra-provincial loop that's only on the Island.

It's upsetting because they're speaking as if they're trying to advocate for us but if they were properly advocating for us, we wouldn't have to try to compete with tourism when we're begging for essential travel. We shouldn't have to point to Quebec as how to do it right. It's shameful for a government to have its Opposition point to Quebec and say Quebec knows how to do things. Quebec knows how to look after its residents in rural parts of the province and the remote parts of the province. Quebec knows how to do it.

It's difficult when my colleague from Terra Nova, born and raised in Wabush or lived in Wabush, talks about comments he hears from his friends in Labrador about separation. I have to tell you not only do I hear it; I feel it. Ten years in with this Liberal government and I tell you right now, in this House of Assembly witnessing six years as an MHA, I think Labradorians are on to something. If this government continues to have power and continues to look after their bloody tourists more than the people in Northern Labrador, Lab West, Central

Labrador and Southern Labrador – it's difficult.

For me, I didn't know what direction I was going to go in, I didn't know what I was going to say when I stood up because I have so much to say. One of the things I talked about is rubbing salt in the wounds of Labradorians. This actual subsidy – because that's what it is. They tried to correct me and say, oh no, it's only if Provincial Airlines loses money that we're going to have to step in but my colleague over there from Humber - Bay of Islands, he said we don't even know how much this could cost, subsidizing the only airline in the province, the monopoly.

I better be careful, Speaker, even though I'm a woman, if I raise my voice I might be accused of intimidating or bullying. So I have to be careful when the passion in me, when I see how Labradorians are being treated, does come up it does raise your voice. It's difficult; rubbing the salt in the wounds.

The letter that I wrote to the Premier – now I don't know if this current Minister of Tourism has been copied on it because when I originally wrote the letter there was another minister of Tourism in there, but I guess this Minister of Tourism doesn't have to take any responsibility for this decision. I talk a lot about the revolving door of ministers. In trying to talk to a Minister of CSSD, do you know how many ministers I've had to deal with? I have to go in.

I, actually, don't think I met with the last minister because when I go in and start over – especially if I'm talking about stuff like CSSD, children in care or if I'm talking about hunger or I'm talking about the inability to heat your house. The one thing I do that they can't say they haven't heard is talk about things in the House of Assembly. I bring forward my petitions. I had a petition for airline subsidy for Northern Labrador. I talked about the difficulties we have in trying to travel, the cost and what it does to our

mental health. I'm not even talking about patient travel and the physical health.

For me, Speaker, it's difficult with the revolving door. I've got to say after being elected as an MHA, in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is a brilliant political strategy to not be accountable for your inaction by quickly and every so often revolving the door of ministers. In actual fact, we're kind of doing it with the premier's too, aren't we? Seriously?

At the end of the day they could be in power for 10 years, but they don't have to take any accountability – oh, that was before my time, before I became minister. Oh, I'm elected premier, but that was before my time. It's difficult, Speaker. It's really difficult. Actually, the letter I wrote to the Premier, this current Premier, the subject is \$15 million subsidy erodes Labradorians sense of place and belonging in our province. That's my words and that came from my heart. It's difficult.

Now, I would actually like to talk to you about tourism. Last June, when I was in Nain, I used to get up extra early, around 5:30, and walk down past the airstrip. The airstrip is, actually, almost in Nain. It's about a six-to-seven-minute walk with my rod. Sometimes my niece was in Nain and we'd go together and a couple of the people she worked with and we would just go down by the airstrip and we'd cast our lines out and the char would be coming in. There was one morning I was down there myself; it was a beautiful, beautiful day in June and you could hear it. If you aren't from Nain or Northern Labrador, you may not recognize the sound, but that was whales breaching.

This winter I'm driving through Nain, right in the middle of the community what do you see: partridges – ptarmigan, some people may call them. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to meet and go around Nain with a professional women's hockey player. When we were driving through, a rabbit cut right across the road. You don't

even have to go outside our communities to see wildlife. You don't even have to go outside of our communities to catch char, to see char. We have the polar bears there. We have to actually drive the polar bears away because we're afraid they might eat our residents. Now with the tourism, it's far game – just a joke, just a joke. I don't want anyone to rise on a point of order or say that I'm harassing anyone.

The thing about Labrador is we're very lucky to have the natural environment. We're very lucky to have all these things and for us in Northern Labrador, we rely on a lot of the wildlife for food. Do you want to know something? Tourists would come to Northern Labrador if they could afford to fly. They would come up and they would enjoy it. They would look at the way we hunt, the way we fish. Tourists will never get the opportunity to come up and see our natural environment.

I tell you now a little joke; it's about a tourist. I was playing softball here in St. John's, the coach was there and he was trying to learn stuff about Labrador. Actually, we were in the bar. I was of age; I was 18. Is 18 legal? No. I was 19.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. EVANS: I was 19, Speaker, and I just want to finish this, and I'll ask for leave if my time runs out. I was there and he wanted to know about Labrador. He was really interested in Labrador because the girls were always telling him about my stories, about bears, whales and hunting.

When I was 14, it was the first time I went North caribou hunting with my father. He was asking me questions. He said: Lela, do you get many tourists up there? I'm sitting there and I say, not a whole lot. I said: It's very, very expensive because they have to fly. I said: No, actually it's very expensive because they can't afford to fly, so they have to come by boat. He furrowed in his brow and he said, what? I said: Yeah, it's

too expensive for the tourists to come up there. We get very few because it's so expensive to fly; they have to come by boat. He said: Turrs. I said: What? He was asking me about turrs, too expensive to fly.

Anyway, that's my joke.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you to the Member for Torngat Mountains.

I know recognize the Minister for Health and Community Services.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's indeed a pleasure again to stand in this House on behalf of the residents of St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows and always appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak on their behalf. I know that the PMR today is in reference to airfare in Labrador but there's a very close correlation to most of Labrador access to airports in Labrador and the airport in my district, in St. Anthony. And we recognize that there are challenges getting to and from the Northern Peninsula as well as to Labrador.

The reliability and the price of airfare to and from my district is often a challenge. I was just actually looking up the price of airfare to return to my district this weekend at the close of the House and it's \$1,087 to return to and from St. Anthony on this weekend.

So I can appreciate some of the frustrations that come with trying to get to and from Labrador, especially in instances that have been mentioned in terms of bereavement or medical appointments. I did appreciate and certainly pleased to see the increase that had been made to the Medical Transportation Assistance Program. I would like to give the Minister of Labrador Affairs credit and tell her how thankful I am that she often remembers the challenges that are

present on the Great Northern Peninsula as they relate similarly to the issues that come out of her district in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

The work that's been done on the Medical Transportation Assistance Program has certainly been beneficial to the residents of my district who often have to travel to and from St. John's for medical appointments. The \$1,000 upfront voucher for airfare, it's a gamechanger for a lot of residents who haven't had the ability to pay out of pocket for these flights.

I certainly do appreciate the things that have been happening, and I know that there are times when it's just impossible to fly and the weather plays a huge role. We often joke about a point last winter where the road was blocked for a number of days, the ferry was stuck in the ice and the plane didn't leave the airport for seven days straight. So we were just as remote and isolated at that point in time as we could be, but luckily the fog lifted, the plow showed up and the plane did get in the air eventually.

But in speaking, again, to the difficulties that people endure as they try to move across this province for whatever reason, I certainly do recognize that there's a piece involved in tourism. We know that there's opportunities for people to travel all across Newfoundland and Labrador. I haven't had the opportunity to do much touring of Labrador, but I certainly do look forward to the chance to get up to the Big Land, and appreciate the invite from the Member for Lab West. We will certainly take him up on the opportunity, but I do appreciate the difficulties that come with getting to and from because it's certainly complex when you're trying to balance a schedule and you have appointments and there are different aspects of your travel that you have to consider.

It's a pleasure today to stand and support this PMR as we commit as a government to continuing to work with the folks in the Big

Land, to advance that part of the province, recognizing the value that they bring to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, it is a pleasure to be able to get up and speak on this PMR, given that I have family and friends and a cross-section of them, living and working in Labrador at Vale, IOC and I also, during my military career, had the opportunity to serve with a number of Labradorians.

I'm going to discuss several things here and I'll break it out across strategic, national and then at a tactical level and I'll talk directly to the residents of Labrador.

First at a strategic level, I'll highlight the first caveat that's in the PMR. Labrador is an integral part of the province, and clearly it is. We fully recognize that here in the PC caucus and actually during the hydro MOU, we reiterated that when Hydro-Quebec was trying to change the boundaries of the Province of Quebec. I would encourage the current government to continue to push back against Hydro-Quebec on any of those boundaries. Labrador is and will always be Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Secondly, strategic is the second caveat that's there is with regard to our geography. I don't think it's fully recognized across the entire province that our geography is a comparative advantage on a number of strategic elements.

Let me start first, it is a strategic advantage because it is on the eastern front of Canada

with regard to engaging potentially anything coming from the North Atlantic.

Now, I found it quite surprising when the government roles were redone that the minister responsible for military affairs was dropped. So who is now conducting that, I don't know, but that's a missed opportunity because now Canada is looking to expand engagement with NATO, expand GDP and we need to be there demanding the share for Newfoundland and Labrador, and in particular for Labrador, with regard to investment. There's an opportunity there to bring back low-level flying to an expanded degree and, also, potentially having some additional aircraft, as was highlighted by the Member for Terra Nova, stationed out of Goose Bay. We can only do that if we are in the game, and we must be in the game.

The other point that I'd like to highlight with regard to the strategic side is, as the MHA for Terra Nova noted, Goose Bay is the gateway to the Arctic. The former administration, the PC administration, had Arctic Opportunities that were promoting Goose Bay as the gateway to the Arctic. That was cancelled by the current government. Now we see places like Halifax that are promoting themselves as the gateway to the Arctic. We need to be continuously promoting Goose Bay and that is only going to be done if we are serious about it.

Finally, as we continuously see with regard to strategic and as we highlighted in a previous PMR, SAR, Search and Rescue. There's an opportunity to reinvest in assets for Labrador, particularly as we get the fish biomass moving north, we're going to continue to need it. Also, with regard to mining opportunities happening in the Arctic and then, potentially, with expanded opening of the Northwest Passage, SAR is going to be needed. We need to demand the same for Labrador.

At a national level, I'm going to talk about a couple of things: mining and tourism. Those

are significant GDP drivers, not just for the province, but for all of Canada, IOC, Vale. There needs to be a little bit more given back to Labrador from both levels of government. As was highlighted here by my colleagues from Torngat Mountains and Terra Nova, there is significant tourism opportunities for Labrador that's really being under presented. In the US, I think a number of you will note the Hoover Dam and how people go there, just to get their picture taken on the Hoover Dam. That same can be done for the assets that we have in Labrador with Churchill Falls.

I see sporadic advertisements for the Battle Harbour Historic Trust, but very limited with regard to promoting Southern Labrador and the number of icebergs that sail past there. We also have, in Torngat Mountains, a new national park and it's an opportunity to drive that home. The MHA for Torngat can correct me if I get the name wrong but that national park is known as Akami-Uapishk^u - KakKasuak-Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve. We need to have that park promoted in the same way as the other national parks in Canada are promoted with regard to tourism.

Now, what's important with all of this is the tactical level, it's the co-front, it's the Labradorians who are living in all those communities. A number of them are rangers, providing front-line, daily support for all of Canada, and they are challenged. They are challenged and they are seeking to be treated in a fair and equitable manner, not just as all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but as all Canadians.

An airline for a lot of the remote communities in Labrador is their highway, is their sea route. That airline is their means of getting in and out. That has to be better hoisted in across the province. That is their means of getting out for education, bereavement leave, visiting sick loved ones, medical treatments and coverage under MTAP as was actually highlighted by government. We have to ensure that the

people in those communities, the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in those communities, are treated in an equitable manner.

So there was talk here from the government side of \$500 for home heating. Well, \$500 in St. John's for home heating is not going to get you the same amount of fuel in Labrador. Again, when we look at policies it's about being equitable to understanding the geography, equitable to understanding the cost that the local residents in those communities are incurring.

And Labradorians deserve that, given the amount of GDP that they are generating for the province. That amount of GDP has an opportunity to notably increase across mining, fishing, tourism and the like. But it will not happen if some of the labour is not there and is not treated in a manner that is both equitable and fair.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now call the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm just going to take a couple of moments to support the spirit and intent of this motion. I will say, first of all, I honestly can't say I have a real connection to Labrador. To the best of my knowledge I don't have any family in Labrador. I've only been there once in my life, and that was for maybe a couple of hours, whatever, I went for a meeting. I flew from St. Anthony to Quebec, Blanc-Sablon and went to L'Anse au Clair for a meeting and got on the plane and flew back. That was my only time in Labrador, I will admit.

But, for me, the issue is about fairness. I don't know if we'll ever get to the point of

total equity with some of this stuff. Whether it be Labrador, whether it be certain parts of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, there is a reality of when you are in some of the larger urban centres and the capital region and so on and that's where the businesses go and so on, that's where a lot of the services end up being, that's not a Newfoundland thing, it's just the way it is everywhere.

But there certainly has to be a level of fairness. Now I will say, we're talking about air travel, I will say that I guess the jury is out on this announcement for PAL to go to Gander and Deer Lake and back to St. John's or what have you. To be honest with you, I'll be surprised if we don't end up subsidizing that. I'll be very surprised because, unless you're someone who might do that anyway for perhaps business purposes – and I guess back in my private life, the same time that I had gone for that one trip to Labrador; a couple of times I would have used PAL or so on to go to fly into Deer Lake because they had to do some business in Corner Brook or whatever the case might be. I don't know, as a resident of Mount Pearl, that I'm going to say, well, I'd like to go to Gander for the weekend. I think I'm going to go pay 500 bucks now or whatever.

It's a reduced rate. I don't know what the amount is but I imagine, based on what the rates normally are, even with a subsidy it's still not going to be cheap. I'd say \$500 or \$600 to go to Gander for the week when I can get aboard my car and drive there in 2½ hours. I'm probably not going to do it even for Deer Lake either. I'll just drive to Deer Lake if I'm going to go to Corner Brook or I'm going to go to Gros Morne or whatever the case might be. Because, if you go to Deer Lake, the next thing you have to do is get a rental car, for one thing. It's not just your flight. Now it's your flight, the rental car and so on.

I kind of believe that this whole announcement is going to do little to nothing for tourism. It's not bringing in new dollars.

It's not like we were offering some incentive for someone from Halifax or Toronto or wherever the case to come to Newfoundland and drop new tourist dollars in the province. We're only recycling our own money, if there is any recycling. I'll try to be somewhat optimistic but, at the end of the day, I think it's going to be a flop. That's just my opinion. Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think it's a good expenditure of \$15 million.

Just my opinion, of course, and I think that that money would have been much better spent – you know, when we talk about priorities, we talked about the \$250,000 in Grand Falls in the Premier's office, when it could go to the Lionel Kelland Hospice. To make that same comparison, I think, rather than spend \$15 million on this initiative, we'd be better off putting \$15 million in MTAP so somebody that needs to travel to St. John's for medical reasons, sometimes life-saving medical reasons, and so on, and particularly people from Labrador that have to endure the significant costs, I think from a priority point of view, we'd be better off putting our money there, not putting the money into this silly initiative that I really don't think is going to go anywhere.

The reality of it is that we all know the cost to get people to and from Labrador and the cost to get goods to and from Labrador. I hear my colleague from Torngat all of the time talking about the cost of food. I mean, it's just insane amounts of – I don't know how people can survive on the cost they have to pay for stuff, to be honest with you. Those programs are much more important to the people that we represent and, even though I might be representative of the urban region, the reality of it is we're all here collectively to represent the province and Labrador is a big part of that province and Labrador is a great contributor to that province.

There are literally billions of dollars coming into the coffers of the provincial government from Labrador. If you think about all of the

mining and you think about the hydro and so on over the years, and the other projects that are on the horizon, all coming from the Big Land. We take, we take, we take and yet, you have people living adjacent to these big projects that are bringing big dollars to this province and they're not, necessarily, seeing the benefits, from a fairness point of view, arguably, that they should.

So I am 100 per cent in favour of this motion of trying to find ways that we could help reduce the cost of travel for people in Labrador; particularly, I will say, as a priority – for me, at least – would be for essential travel and medical travel. I think if somebody lives in Labrador and they need to avail of medical services that are not available there, then, as a citizen of this province, we have an obligation to be able to get them there at a reasonable cost.

I also feel we have kids that are in Labrador and they're participating in sports and so on, they should not be the only children in this province that can't travel to tournaments because of exorbitant costs. It's not right. It does not pass the test of fairness. So I would say, from a priority point of view, issues around travel like that for kids and for school, for educational purposes, for medical reasons, that should definitely be a priority issue. I think that if we're going to put any kind of money into travel, rather than wasting it on this particular initiative, we'd have been better off if we had put it there.

Now with that said, there could be some opportunity, perhaps if we end up with some definitive agreements and if, as a result of that, we have all this activity at the Churchill River that's being talked about and all of the people that would be flying in and flying out of Labrador. I know my colleague from Labrador West, he wants them to fly in, he doesn't want them to fly out, I get that too but the reality of it is that there's going to be a lot of fly-in, fly-out.

Also with mines and so on, opportunities there for industrial expansion, perhaps with those projects and so on and with that activity, it's obviously going to require more flights to be going in and out of Labrador. Maybe that's the opportunity for the government, at that point in time, to be able to reach out to the carriers to find a way that we can kind of tag on to that. Tag on to that, tag on to the business travel and the travel associated to those projects so that regular residents who are not associated to those projects, whether it be expanding the flights, larger planes or whatever the case might be, get some affordable seats within those flights. That might be an opportunity to look at.

I think we need to look at every opportunity we can and leave no stone unturned to find reasonable ways to make life more affordable for our fellow citizens in Labrador. I don't think any Member in this House of Assembly, looking at it from a fairness point of view, would be against doing just that. Bearing in mind that there are realities around affordability for everybody, including all the citizens of this province, so we would have to be perhaps sometimes a little creative. At the same time we have to recognize the overall cost, but we also have to recognize the challenges that the people from Labrador face on a daily basis and also recognize the great contribution they make to this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIR: Thank you to the Member.

I now call on the hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm just going to take a couple of minutes. I'm sure everybody is wondering why a little old fellow from Marystown is going to stand up and talk about Labrador, but I have many ties to Labrador. Actually, my mom is from Jean de Baie, Bernadette Coady at the

time, and my dad is from Bell Island, Dennis Dwyer. They met in Wabush, so here I am. I guess I'm part of the Big Land as well.

AN HON. MEMBER: That is why it's more expensive now.

J. DWYER: That's why it's more expensive now, because they want to keep me out of it.

What I will say is that when I first came into the House of Assembly and I very attentively listened to my colleague from Torngat Mountains, something that stuck with me for the whole six years has been the story that she said about a can of Campbell's tomato soup costing \$8 that we go down to Pipers and get two for a buck. Well, not two for a buck anymore, I suppose. At the time, it was. In the meantime, just imagine paying \$8 for a can of Campbell soup that everybody else on the Island portion of the province get for a dollar or whatever.

She also spoke about when the boat stopped, about food and having to pay \$48 for a pack of four pork chops and then, you reach into the freezer and they're half freezer burnt. Those are the things that have sat with me for this whole time. The reason why I wanted to speak on this is because I have had some dealings with the people in Labrador that have reached out to me. Because they have family ties to people in my district or anything, they just reached out to me for some help.

We had an issue about medical travel and somebody getting bumped on a Wednesday. They were scheduled in for the Thursday, the snow came in and they couldn't go. Then, Friday there was something else but, on Friday afternoon, when I got the call, the first thing I did was reach out to the minister at the time, who is currently our Premier. To make the long story short, because I'm going to try and give somebody else an opportunity, he really filled my heart the day – I think it was

a Sunday afternoon – that he called me and he said, wheels up. It saved that lady's life.

When I think about the \$1,000 that we offer for people doing medical travel in Labrador, I often think about follow-up appointments and all this kind of stuff. We talk of doing virtual care where we know that the Internet is not great and stuff like that, so it's the infrastructure and it's the things that we're missing. I will say that I honestly think that the Labrador portion in our province would look a hell of a lot different if we had to get a lot better deal in 1969. That's the reason why I think that getting a better deal for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, in this new negotiation, is paramount.

It's not about giveaways. It's not about not taking on mitigated risk. It's about making sure that the resources of this province are a benefit to the people of this province, from the tip of Labrador to the south of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: We always say that we can walk and chew bubble gum. I hear this from the other side lots: We can walk and chew bubble gum. I'm the shadow Cabinet minister for Tourism and I feel that the subsidy was warranted when I first heard it but then when I hear about the complaints of where it leaves Labrador behind, I just think that automatically, as a government, we should probably even take some money out of the beautiful Future Fund and look into matching what we're doing for tourism. I think that would be very responsible.

Vale has a smelter in my district in Long Harbour. They very much rely on getting in and out of Labrador with their employees and stuff. It's very difficult at times, but the thing is that they know that Labrador has so much to offer, they've done even further exploration and are going to have a more long life for their product. So we can walk and chew bubble gum the same time. We can get people down from Labrador if they

need medical travel, but we can also get people to Labrador and around the province that are coming for tourism.

My colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay alluded to the Hoover Dam and how beautiful it is. I agree, I'm sure. I haven't stepped foot in Labrador but I am going to do it within the next 12 months. Actually, I have a friend that's down here from Labrador now that's visiting his mom and dad in Jean de Baie and he'll actually be coming into the House of Assembly tomorrow to see proceedings. So I look forward to that.

But my comment to my friend, my colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay, is that I want to remind everybody that the Hoover Dam in the United States of America is stylized by the dam that's in Davis Cove in Monkstown in my district. If you want to go see the Hoover Dam, just let me know and we'll arrange a trip, for you to go to Monkstown, Davis Cove.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Seniors.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I certainly appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate this afternoon on the private Member's resolution brought forward by the Member for Labrador West. I certainly appreciate the resolution and how it is worded and how it is structured. I think it's fair to say we can all agree with both the sentiments expressed within it and the intent here, which is really to have this House of Assembly join together and hopefully we'll continue to do that in looking at issues that resonate right across the province and, in this case, making sure it resonates well and loud and clear in Labrador.

The first cause says: “**WHEREAS** Labrador is an integral part of this province.” That’s easy to say, but as the Member from Labrador West expressed when he was speaking, do the people of Labrador feel that they are integral to this province? Are they being seen and heard by the Island part of the province as integral?

The answer should be yes but if people are feeling that there’s a void, that there is a distance – and I’ve been in Labrador many times and when I hear expressions about St. John’s and me growing up in St. John’s, it’s like they’re talking two different worlds. I think it’s fair to say that from the Island side and the further you are removed from Labrador, you don’t appreciate these sentiments, but we need to. We need to be making sure we hear loud and clear the call for support, not only when it comes to air travel and trying to figure out a way how we reduce the cost to the individual traveller, but also when it comes to social development issues whether it’s housing, health care, education, when it comes to transportation and, certainly, when it comes to economic development.

We had a very large discussion and debate here in January when we talked and discussed the MOU with Quebec Hydro and the future development of the Churchill River. It, again, was expressed loud and clear that this development, when it proceeds, has to make sure it takes the interests of the people of Labrador first and foremost in making sure that that project is developed with their interests first in mind whether it’s the Indigenous communities, whether it’s the settler communities, whether it’s the mining communities, whether it’s the Goose Bay communities, whomever, that they are seen as being significant beneficiaries of these new developments.

So that speaks to our ability with new revenues coming forward to address the gaps in services in Labrador. I know the Premier has spoken on that publicly. I have

in the recent leadership campaign to make sure that Labrador is finally, in this regard, getting its just rewards from the very broad economic development activities that have taken place in Labrador.

I think the Member for Labrador West said the mine is 70 years old? Am I right in that?

J. BROWN: It’s 71.

J. ABBOTT: It’s 71.

I know my father-in-law, when he was around, had lots of stories because he was up there back in the ’50s working on the railway getting the mines open and what have you. He had lots of stories to relay to me and it certainly opened my eyes to the pioneering aspect of that countryside. If we read any of the literature coming out of Labrador, the Minister of Labrador Affairs and her grandfather’s writings about Charlottetown and the opening of the communities on the South Coast, it’s all very interesting and quite different from the development activities here on the Island over the years.

So what is it we can do here to make sure that in one small way, but a significant way, we can bring the Island and Labrador closer together? I know from conversations, and I think some Members expressed it here themselves, the number of people on the Island who have not been to Labrador, and what an opportunity missed. I would encourage anybody in this House, anybody that’s listening, if they can find a way to Labrador, please, please try to do that, whether you drive, fly or take a boat.

It is a magnificent piece of – as Donald Trump would say – real estate. It is absolutely beautiful on every turn, every corner, every harbour and every lake. When you do fly, you do get to see how immense the territory is, how beautiful it is and, obviously, how rich it is in resources; particularly, it’s human resources whether it’s the Inuit, the Innu and everybody else

that had settled there and have lived there and made their way to have families and, obviously, grow their communities and their economy.

Many of us on the Island have missed out and continue to miss out on that and vice versa. Obviously, I want to make sure that the folks in Labrador get to come to my communities, my city, my district to see how we live and thrive in this part of the province. The only way we can do that is by transportation and allowing people to travel at a very reasonable cost. So I know speaking on this side, speaking with the Minister of TCAR, the Minister of Labrador Affairs and others, that we are going to make every effort to live up to this resolution so that we can find a path forward and so that the cost of air travel between Labrador and the Island is feasible and affordable for those who need to travel and want to travel between the Island and Labrador.

I know there are a lot of words, obviously, that have been expressed here this afternoon, but I'm hopeful that people in Labrador who are paying attention to this, which I suspect will be significant, hear what we are committing to as a House of Assembly and that the government is supportive of this resolution.

I want to commend the Member for Labrador West. As he commented, I happened to be in Lab City when he talked about the curling bonspiel. It just drove home the point that they have a provincial bonspiel but the teams from the Island could not get there – why – because of cost. That's just one small example, but I think it speaks volumes. Now, he was a very gracious host. I got to meet his family and we did have a refreshment as well at his cost. So I do appreciate that and I will be back.

Speaker, I just want to say thank you to the Member for bringing this forward, thank you to my colleagues on this side of the House for being supportive as well as the

Opposition. This augments well for finding a solution in the very, very near future so, with that, I will be supporting the resolution.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Seeing no other speakers, if the Member for Labrador West speaks now, he'll close debate.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker, and I want to thank all my hon. colleagues for supporting my private Member's resolution.

It's great to hear perspectives from all corners of the province and their thoughts and feelings on Labrador. It's good to know that we are in the positive thoughts and feelings of all that, because it's glad to know that we have the support of the House to move forward, bring some connectivity and make sure that we are all treated fairly and equitably and we are able to do this together.

I want to thank my hon. colleague from Lake Melville for his support. Me and him have had many conversations about this topic, and I think from the beginning we were always on the same page of where we could go with this. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Labrador Affairs for her comments and, the same thing, we've had many conversations about this. I'm glad that she is supportive of this motion.

My hon. colleague from Terra Nova: Yes, he is correct; the airport is in Wabush. My mistake, and I'm sure I will hear from him about that. No, his comments were great and I appreciate his perspective, especially his many travels and seeing different parts

of the world, that actually helps bring some perspective to this.

My hon. colleague from Torngat Mountains, we've had many conversations about this over the years. I want to thank her for the support but also, to contribute to her comments and her perspective, we're isolated in Labrador West but, really, there's a whole other level there on the North coast that needs to be worked out and I appreciate her continued fight for that.

I want to thank my hon. colleague, the Minister of TCAR, for his perspective, and you're one of us now. Your daughter is up there, you have to fly back and forth, you're one of us now so you'll understand the trials and tribulations of flying into Labrador. I appreciate your comments and I want to thank you for your support to work with us to make sure that this happens.

I want to thank my seconder here, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands. I appreciate your comments and thank you for your perspective. It's great to know that you've always had Labrador in your mind, even back at that time and it's appreciated that we have your support now. Also my hon. colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands. I get to visit your district a lot; I think you have to come up for a visit now. It's your turn.

I want to thank the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay for his comments and his perspective. It's great to know that you think about us and you support the idea that we all have to be unified and connected so thank you so much. On your perspective on the opening up the north and how that's going to effect things, you're absolutely right.

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Seniors. It was great to have you up for a visit. It's great that you got to see and understand and hear the perspective. I know that the time during the leadership run, you drove in and you travelled a lot and you got to see a

bit around. I guess you really, truly had to understand how it is to get around but, also, I remember you talked about how you drove from Goose Bay to Lab City that time and how that changed things for you. It's great that you understand and your commitment, to hear. We will hold you to it but I want to thank you for your support because this is a very serious topic for Labradorians. We really do want to try to build unity, try to build a relationship but also try to make sure that people can freely travel around this province without such an undue burden. It's very important.

Lastly, I want to thank my colleague from Bellevue – I got to get that right.

J. DWYER: Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. BROWN: Placentia West - Bellevue. All right, perfect. I had it backwards there.

I want to thank you. I did not realize that your parents met in Wabush so good for you. Maybe you're secretly one of us at heart.

J. DWYER: Yeah, a 16th.

J. BROWN: A 16th, but no, it's good. It's a very common story. I believe there are a few Members here that have connections to Labrador in some way, and I think that's what brings us all together. When Labrador was developing and stuff, so many people travel up there come and gone over the years but it means so many people grew an appreciation of the land, appreciation of the place that me and my four other colleagues here call home. It's a very special place.

Many of the Members that have been to Labrador have mentioned that when you fly over and you just see it all from above, you just know how vast it is, how beautiful it is and it's like no other place in the world. I think myself and my hon. other Labradorian colleagues here, including the Member for Terra Nova who actually flew over Labrador, have been in different places that no one in

this House of Assembly could ever imagine they've ever been to. There are places that are so remote, you're so far away from everything but you have an appreciation of the land and how beautiful Labrador is; how important it is and that is deep, deep in the soul of every Labradorian.

That's why, when we talk about issues that are important to us, like air travel, about connectivity and about being a part of the province, it's very personal for us. We appreciate our home, but we don't want anything to happen to our home. We don't want to be separated from our home. It means so much so deeply to us. That's why I really appreciate that the hon. House and, it seems, everyone is in favour of this motion to move forward to actually bring this to attention, to get connectivity, to make travel affordable and to make sure that we can stay connected and make sure that we can continue to grow our population, protect our residents and make sure that we can share Labrador with other people but, also, we can move about easier, freely and we don't have such undue burden onto us, because I think we should bring a little bit of Labrador to everybody.

So I want to thank the hon. House, thank my colleagues and I really appreciate that we are going to move forward on this. It sounds like unanimous consent of this so thank you.

Speaker, thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour of the private Member's motion presented by the hon. the Member for Labrador West.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I move that this House do now stand in recess until 5:30.

SPEAKER: This House do stand in recess until 5:30 p.m. this evening.