



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTY-FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

Monday

March 2, 2026
(Throne Speech)

The House met at 2 p.m.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Please be seated.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mr. Speaker, the Justices of Newfoundland and Labrador have arrived.

SPEAKER: Admit the Justices of the Supreme Court.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mr. Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador has arrived.

SPEAKER: Admit Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise.

(The Speaker leaves the Chair.)

(Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor takes the Chair.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: It is the wish of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor that all present be seated.

HER HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (Joan Marie Aylward, ONL):

Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly and Invited Guests:

As the representative of His Majesty the King, I am pleased to welcome you to the opening of the First Session of the Fifty-First General Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In opening this session, we respectfully acknowledge the province of Newfoundland and Labrador as the ancestral homelands of many diverse populations of Indigenous people who have contributed to 9,000 years of history including the Beothuk on the

Island of Newfoundland. Today, this province is home to diverse populations of Indigenous and other people. We also acknowledge with respect the diverse histories and cultures of the Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit.

Today, we also pause to stand with the Newfoundland and Labrador families whose lives have been forever changed by disaster. This includes those evacuated during the Kingston Wildfire in Conception Bay North, the fires in Adam's Cove, Chance Harbour, Musgrave Harbour, Paddy's Pond, Martin Lake, Holyrood, Lethbridge, and Badger; and the more recent flooding in Badger; and the many other individuals and communities affected during the 2025 wildfire season. We recognize the loss, disruption, and uncertainty these events have caused.

Behind every headline are real people. Families who faced fear, uncertainty and loss. And today, we hold them in our hearts.

If there's one truth that defines this province, it is this: Newfoundlanders and Labradorians take care of one another.

Over the past year, we have seen that truth again and again in neighbours helping neighbours, families opening their doors, and communities lifting each other up when it mattered most.

In those difficult moments, we also saw extraordinary courage. We want to express our deepest gratitude to the first responders and the volunteers who step forward without hesitation, putting themselves in harm's way to protect others.

In times of crisis, we are reminded of who we are. We saw the very best of Newfoundland and Labrador – in compassion, in resilience, and in the quiet strength of people standing together,

And that spirit – that deep care for one another – is something from which the world can learn.

EXPRESSION OF THE MANDATE

Today, as we open this Fifty-First General Assembly, let me begin by articulating a principle that we believe should unite all of us.

No matter where you live. Where you come from.

Or who you voted for ...

... every single Newfoundlander and Labradorian deserves to feel represented and respected in this place.

Members of the House of Assembly – as you take your seats and begin fulfilling the solemn responsibilities entrusted to the Members of this Chamber – we encourage you to remember that the seats which you hold do not ultimately belong to you. They belong to the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who sent you here.

The Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who – in any given electoral district – may not have voted for the victorious candidate but who, in exercising their democratic rights, nonetheless deserve to be assured that their voices and views will be respected in the deliberations that lie ahead.

That does not mean you will all agree. Or that you should all agree. The legislation that you will scrutinize in this chamber will impact people across our province. The issues that you will debate will be serious. Debate will often mean that not everyone will be satisfied.

But in a time when democracy seems imperilled elsewhere, all of us are made stronger by our willingness to have those debates freely, frankly, and respectfully.

Our government was elected on a solemn promise to be a government that will serve “For All of Us.”

Let us pause to consider the importance of what that phrase truly means.

All of Us means that we are all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

All of Us means that regardless of whether you are Indigenous, whether your family has been here for ten generations, or whether you have just arrived, you deserve to live an affordable life – with access to health care and other services – and to live free of fear from violence and crime.

And All of Us means all generations are respected in this House. Whether it is our seniors who deserve to live with dignity and have access to necessary services they need close to home. Or our students who deserve affordable access to the education and training they need to build their future right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. And it means that vulnerable families have the support they need to ensure no child goes hungry.

All of us means a province where you are afforded respect regardless of where you live. Where families who live in Labrador, the South Coast, Central Newfoundland, the West Coast, the Port au Port Peninsula, the Great Northern Peninsula, Bonavista Bay, Trinity Bay, or Placentia Bay feel that their voices are heard and respected the same way as those who live on the Eastern Avalon. Whether we are talking about our roads, public services, or public safety, a different postal code should not consign anyone to a life of lower standards.

All of Us means that the power of your voice should not depend on the size of your bank account or who you know. After all, this chamber is the place where all voices are heard and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are represented.

All of Us means a place where there are equitable opportunities for men, women and gender diverse individuals. Last year we celebrated the 100th Anniversary of women's suffrage in Newfoundland and Labrador. Let us live up to the example of Armine Nutting Gosling, Fannie McNeil, and all the trailblazers who fought to ensure a place for women in our public life.

And All of Us means that regardless of the colour of your skin, whether you have a disability, the language you speak, who you love, or how you pray, you will be respected and welcomed here. All of Us means that our government embraces and celebrates all people for the rich diversity, experiences and perspectives they bring to our province. Let all of us commit to continuing the work to ensure there is never a place for racism, antisemitism, or any other form of hatred in our province.

At the same time, let us understand what All of Us does not mean.

It does not mean that any special interest – from inside or outside of our province – gets to veto or overrule the clear commitments on which our government was elected.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians voted for change, and they are right to expect their government to follow through on that promise.

Nor does All of Us mean that the government can be all things to all people. No government can be. All voices deserve to be heard. But when the time comes to make a difficult decision, our government will be prepared to act.

ACTION TO DATE

Since being sworn into office, our government has been supported by a strong and dedicated caucus, united by a shared commitment to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador with integrity, humility, and purpose. That collective sense

of duty is reflected in the Cabinet we have assembled – a team drawn from every region of this province and grounded in deep respect for the responsibility entrusted to us by the people.

This Cabinet reflects a simple principle: that public service is a privilege, and that every decision must be grounded in a clear question – will this help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

Ministers have been directed to focus on results, not rhetoric. They have been tasked with working collaboratively, acting with integrity, transparency and accountability, and delivering on the commitments that earned the trust of the people of this province.

At the centre of this work is a renewed focus on what matters most: strengthening health care, easing the cost of living, and building safer, more resilient communities.

The Deputy Premier and Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure is focused on delivering reliable, safe, and modern public infrastructure that connects people, strengthens communities, and supports economic growth in every region of our province. From roads and bridges to public buildings and essential transportation links, this work is about ensuring Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can move safely, stay connected, and seize opportunity wherever they live.

The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board is restoring discipline and transparency to the province's finances, guided by a renewed commitment to responsible stewardship and respect for taxpayers. The Minister has also been entrusted with responsibility for seniors – ensuring that the voices and needs of older Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are at the heart of government decision-making. Our government is working to strengthen supports, improve access to services, and

help seniors live safely, independently, and with dignity.

The Minister of Health and Community Services has been entrusted with advancing meaningful improvements to health care access and outcomes, while also serving as Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality, Minister Responsible for Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, and Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs. The Minister will ensure that equity, dignity, and safety are reflected in the policies and services that shape people's lives, and that the government continues to work in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and Labradorians across the province.

The Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General is advancing safer communities through a justice system grounded in fairness, accountability, and public confidence.

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is focused on preparing the next generation – strengthening learning outcomes and aligning education and skills development with opportunities for tomorrow.

The Minister of Energy and Mines is focused on ensuring that the province's natural resources are developed responsibly, and in a way that maximizes benefits for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, charged with a new stand-alone mandate, will deliver focused support to vital industries for the province, ensuring its sustainability and long-term strength for which the communities depend.

The Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being is advancing a whole-of-government approach to housing, poverty reduction, and support for vulnerable residents – guided by the belief that opportunity should be within reach for all.

The Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Foods has been given an expanded mandate that includes strengthening emergency preparedness and resilience – recognizing that responsible stewardship of our land and our resources must also include protecting communities in times of crisis.

The Minister of Jobs, Growth and Rural Development is leading efforts to attract investment, promote rural development, support immigration, and create new opportunities for people and communities across Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs is working with local leaders to strengthen the communities that form the backbone of this province, ensuring that residents in every region feel heard, respected, and supported. In addition, as Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, he will focus on strengthening climate resilience in our communities, protecting biodiversity, improving waste reduction and recycling, and ensuring that environmental stewardship remains a shared responsibility – one that honours our connection to the land and secures a healthy and sustainable future for generations to come.

The Minister of Government Services and Minister of Labour will advance more modern and responsive public services while supporting workers and ensuring safe, fair workplaces. In partnership with the Office of the Chief Information Officer, this work includes accelerating digital government, improving cybersecurity, and delivering accessible, and efficient services for residents and businesses across the province.

And the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation is supporting the industries that celebrate our identity, preserve our heritage, keep people active, and share the Newfoundland and Labrador story with the world.

Together, they will deliver results that people can see and feel in their daily lives.

There will always be more demands than there are resources. In this time of global challenge and risk, this challenge is particularly acute.

It has never been more important to have clear priorities, and from the day our government was sworn into office, we have been clear with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador about where our focus will lie: better health care, lower taxes, and safer communities.

The early days of our government have included early action.

When it comes to better health care, we have renewed and refreshed leadership of the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, better positioning us for the transformation needed. We have already announced plans to proceed with a new urgent care centre in Conception Bay South, increasing access to health care for residents. We have also raised our voices with our federal counterparts, advocating for a fair and equitable national pharmacare program.

Our government has taken early steps in advance of the spring budget to restore transparency and discipline to our public finances.

In December, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians finally received a true picture of the province's fiscal situation, including the deficit we face. The news was sobering. That is why our government has reprioritized infrastructure spending. Newfoundland and Labrador can no longer afford to announce projects without a plan for how to pay for them.

When the Minister of Finance tables his budget, there will no mistaking the fiscal challenges that we collectively face. Our government will first and foremost ensure

that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can hold on to more of their own money to help balance their household budgets.

Our government has been clear it will not allow Memorial University to balance its books on the backs of students. Government will freeze tuition until its confident the university is addressing its financial challenges.

When it comes to safer communities, our government took immediate steps to address an important safety risk in rural Newfoundland and Labrador – the safety of our roads. This winter's extreme weather is a constant reminder of why the restoration of 24-hour snow clearing was, and is, the right thing to do.

Our government is also focused on the recovery for the Conception Bay North area following the 2025 wildfires. The Cabinet Committee on Conception Bay North Response and Recovery has visited the area and has met with residents to understand their needs and will continue to provide ongoing support.

Our government has also initiated a comprehensive review of the courts system to address concerns and improve access to justice and better serve Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

THE ROAD AHEAD

In the coming session of the legislature, you can expect our government to move with urgency and purpose on delivering its agenda to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This will start with the 2026 budget through which our government will prioritize lowering taxes and reducing the cost of living for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

You can expect meaningful action that will include a permanent repeal of the sugar tax that unfairly punished lower income families.

Our government will ensure that taxation on gasoline and diesel will not increase next year, by finally providing certainty on the permanent reduction of the gas tax.

Our government promised action to increase the basic personal exemption – or, in other words, increasing the amount of money every Newfoundlander and Labradorian can make before they start paying provincial income taxes. This is a tax cut that benefits lower income families most of all, and you can expect it to be a key feature of the legislative session.

Seniors and lower income families will see increased supports to ensure more people get more help with the cost of living.

You can also expect our government to deliver meaningful action to build a more accessible, reliable, and affordable health care system for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Our government is also committed to ending the cycle of rural emergency department closures and diversions by recruiting and retaining physicians, nurse practitioners, and nurses.

We are working with the Registered Nurses' Union Newfoundland and Labrador to eliminate outside agency nursing with a home-grown solution that will see more nurses from within the province working in our communities. We will also increase access to nurse practitioners and ensure that anyone can see a nurse practitioner for free, with no strings attached. When people need health care, they will not have to worry about how they are getting there, nor how much it costs. The people of our province deserve real access to health care – not just a place on a waiting list.

We are taking action to reduce wait times and to improve access to care across Newfoundland and Labrador – from emergency departments to mental health services. This includes expanding team-

based care, improving patient flow, and investing in front-line supports so people can get the right care, in the right place, at the right time. Our government will also expand mobile crisis response teams to ensure people experiencing a mental health crisis can receive rapid, compassionate support in their own communities – helping reduce pressure on emergency rooms while connecting individuals and families to the care they need sooner.

Our government will listen to doctors, nurses, and front-line health care professionals – the people who deliver health care every day – to determine how systemic change can best happen, by working with these professionals who work in the health care system every day. Most importantly, we will focus our health care efforts on the people receiving and delivering health care, not on the bricks and mortar buildings in which it is delivered.

Our government will deliver on our commitment to safer communities. Our government will take early action to support our brave first responders by doubling the tax credit for volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers.

Reliable cellular service is essential for safety, economic opportunity, and daily life. Yet too many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians still live and travel in areas where they cannot make a call in an emergency. This is not acceptable. My government is committed to closing critical cellular coverage gaps across Newfoundland and Labrador, with a focus on rural communities and major highway corridors where safety risks are greatest.

We will work with telecommunications providers and the Government of Canada to accelerate infrastructure investments and expand reliable service to underserved regions. No one should be placed at risk because of their postal code. Improving connectivity is about safety, fairness, and

ensuring every region of this province can participate fully in a modern economy.

Working with provincial and national policing leaders, we will increase the number of RNC and RCMP personnel in the province in order to give our communities the safety, security, and peace of mind that they deserve.

As it delivers on its priorities, our government will also take steps to empower and protect the most vulnerable amongst us.

Our government will introduce legislation to create an independent, dedicated Advocate for Persons with Disabilities. This advocate will do more than be a powerful voice for speaking the truth. They will also have strong investigatory powers to uncover the truth. People with disabilities deserve a champion, and with this new independent office they will have one.

At the same time, our government will strengthen the role of Newfoundland and Labrador's Seniors' Advocate by providing broad investigative powers. Seniors deserve the peace of mind that their government is on their side and with an empowered advocate, they will have that.

Our government will also take meaningful action to reduce the red-tape burden that leaves too many organizations spending too much time focused on paperwork, and not enough time focusing on the people they serve.

We will also make improvements to the Crown lands application process that will increase accessibility and simplify the process for the people of our province to secure legal title to their homes and properties.

Our government will work with municipal partners on a long-term plan to build more reliable infrastructure, including roads, water and sewer. It's time for our planning to align

investments with the greatest needs – and to sustain that commitment over the long term.

Our government will also work with municipalities to identify and address vulnerabilities such as storm damage, forest fires, flooding, and emergency preparedness plans for dealing with the increasing number of extreme events – which the past months have told us are more likely than ever.

In education, our government will focus on improving literacy and math proficiency while also enhancing science and computer skills for jobs in the future. We will expand skilled trades programs and create clear apprenticeship pathways in high schools, preparing students for high-demand careers that are essential today and into the future.

Our government will move forward with a real plan to help families. This includes a comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, one which considers the broader social determinants of health. Our goal is to make our province's poverty rates the lowest in the country. As a necessary first step, our government will expand eligibility for the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit to ensure the families of 3,000 more children get the additional support they need.

Our government has appointed a dedicated Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. Our government has already begun advocacy with the federal government to initiate long-term reforms to the fishery, including a long-overdue change to open the crab season earlier. Joint management of the fisheries remains our ultimate goal.

In farming and agrifoods, our government will launch a long-term agricultural strategy. This will focus on removing barriers for new farmers, increasing food production, indoor growing, and lengthening the growing season. We will open more Crown lands for farming and we will support food processors

who want to invest in processing facilities, navigate red tape, and market their products.

Of course, we also know that our economy is about far more than resources. It's about our people. Millions of people have travelled to Newfoundland and Labrador to experience the arts, culture, hospitality, and natural beauty that make our province a place like no other. This is why our government will work with tourism partners on a new strategy that focuses on authentic, local experiences, season extension, better infrastructure, as well as encouraging people to "vacation at home" and adopt active lifestyles. We will also expand our province as a hub for regional and national connections, as well as a year-round site for flights to Europe.

Our government's plan for all of us will be a plan for more jobs and investment in Newfoundland and Labrador. As the global trade environment is rapidly evolving and the risk of a global economic slowdown rises, our province cannot proceed with business as usual.

Our government is focused on ensuring access to global markets for all sectors of the Newfoundland and Labrador economy.

That is why our government will spend less time chasing the headlines and more time getting down to basics. Newfoundland and Labrador has both the resources that the world needs, and the skilled workers that the future requires.

That is why, after a hiatus, Newfoundland and Labrador is back in the oil business.

This will start with a focus on Bay du Nord, which has the potential to kick-start the entire energy sector in the North Atlantic. At a time when global energy security is paramount, Newfoundland and Labrador has the critical energy supplies of the future, including our offshore oil and gas.

On this, you can expect our government to govern under two flags.

The first flag will be a Canadian Flag. Canada can, should, and must do everything in its power to create an investment climate that provides a certainty for development of these resources in order for our country to grow as an energy superpower.

And inside of Canada, under a Newfoundland and Labrador Flag, our government will remind our friends across the country of the significant oil and gas potential that exists right here on the eastern frontier.

Our government's commitment to resource development will also extend to mines and minerals. Our province has a long mining heritage, and with untapped reserves of the critical minerals the world needs we are capable of so much more. Our government will knock down regulatory burdens to mining development and make our province a global leader in attracting international mining investment.

When it comes to our workers, let us put it plainly. Newfoundland and Labrador has a lot of workers – talented workers and skilled workers. For too long, too many workers have needed to leave home to find opportunities in other provinces and other places. To any expatriate Newfoundlander and Labradorian thinking about returning home, there has been no better time to come home than now.

In the coming months, you can expect our government to launch an aggressive strategy to attract new industrial investment. This will include federal defence spending.

Newfoundland and Labrador is built for defence. Some advantages are structural, others are natural, and some are forged with grit and determination through history.

Our province has a rich and proud military history, defined by remarkable contributions from past generations and those who serve today that continue to shape our province and our country.

Newfoundland and Labrador holds a strategic position on the eastern frontier of North America – a gateway at the intersection of the Arctic, Atlantic, and North American defence domains. We bring world-leading marine and off-shore expertise, a highly skilled workforce, dual-use technologies and growing innovation capacity, along with strategic infrastructure across the province.

Newfoundland and Labrador is ready to play a bigger role in building a stronger national defence sector.

And the skilled workers of this province are ready to help build that future – supporting Canada's security while creating opportunity here at home.

As Newfoundland and Labrador's economy grows, we will also do our part to ensure that all of us, in every part of the province, share in this prosperity.

We will also ensure that our regional economic development funding will be regionally led. Our government believes that you cannot build up rural communities by governing only from St. John's.

Labradorians take great pride in the regional uniqueness of the Big Land. Labrador contributes enormous sums to our prosperity and to our wealth, despite this Labradorians have felt left behind.

We will ensure that sufficient medical flights are available for residents of remote communities and make sure Labradorians can access emergency air medical transport when needed. We will also increase access to mental health supports and services across Labrador. Our government will also invest in reducing the cost of air travel to,

from, and within Labrador. We will also push for federal funding to upgrade Labrador airstrips.

Our government will also continue to partner with Indigenous Peoples. As part of our update to the K-12 curriculum, we will ensure it contains appropriate content on Indigenous histories, cultures, stories, and languages. We will provide opportunities to Indigenous children and youth to learn and champion traditional language, craft, and skills so that they can share their heritage with non-Indigenous children and youth throughout the province.

To help communities across our province, our government will also introduce local-benefits legislation to keep more money in our economy. Our resources must always be developed primarily for the benefit of our province and our people.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are ready to contribute. We're ready to build. And we are ready to work with, trade with, and partner with others. But there can be no rubber stamps in our government. When it comes to the generational opportunities in front of us, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians must be the primary beneficiaries of our own resources. That will never be handed to us by outsiders. We have to demand it.

This includes the Churchill River. Today, as we deliver this speech, an Independent Review Committee empowered under Part II of the Public Inquiries Act is examining the existing MOU signed by the previous government with the Government of Quebec. Our government will not prejudge the conclusions of that independent review. But coming out of that process, our government will be ready to act on what we learn.

When we get this right, not only will our province develop a once-in-a-lifetime resource, but we will also do so with the earned wisdom of hard history and the

peace of mind of good government built around trust, transparency, and full facts. All of our resources must be developed with an eye to more local jobs, more local benefits and more local revenue – always putting Newfoundland and Labrador first. That is how we protect what we have. And that is how we build something better.

CONCLUSION

Members of the House of Assembly, the thread that connects this agenda is that we must always remain laser focused on what matters most: better health care, lower taxes, and safer communities.

Delivering on these commitments will, in part, depend on executing a vigorous economic development agenda that ensures the resources of our province are developed by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The challenges in front of us are serious, and the opportunities are immense. Success is not automatic or guaranteed.

The business of this chamber does more than guide the direction of government. It steers the very future of our province.

As you engage in this sacred trust, and engage in rigorous and respectful debate, we expect you to ask the most important question:

Will this help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? Will this help All of Us?

Speaker and Honourable Members of the House of Assembly: estimates of expenditure will be laid before you in due course, and you will be asked to grant Supply to His Majesty.

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence the work of the First Session of the Fifty-First General Assembly.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise.

(Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor leaves the Assembly Chamber.)

(The Speaker returns to the Chair.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Please be seated.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to make a speech to the Members in this General Assembly. We shall take a few moments now to distribute the speech to Members.

(The Pages distribute the speech to all Members.)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, Bill 1.

SPEAKER: Is there leave for the hon. Government House Leader to introduce the said bill?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave has been granted.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

TABLE OFFICER (Russell): A bill, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate. (Bill 1)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time.

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 1 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for St. George's - Humber, that an Address of Thanks be presented to Her Honour in reply to the gracious speech with which she has been pleased to open the present Session of the House of Assembly, and that a Select Committee be appointed to draft an Address in Reply and that the Members of that Committee shall be the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, the Member for St. George's - Humber and the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that an Address of Thanks be presented to Her Honour in reply to the gracious speech which she has been pleased to open the present Session of the House of Assembly, and that a Select Committee be appointed to draft an Address in Reply and that Members of the Committee shall be the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, the

Member for St. George's - Humber and the Member for the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

It is my absolute honour to rise today in this hon. House of Assembly for the first time as the Member for the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank Her Honour for delivering the Speech from the Throne – the first Throne Speech of our new government's mandate, a mandate for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: I ran to become a Member of this hon. Chamber because the people of my district wanted change, a new approach to government, a fresh perspective and clear priorities.

The people of our province had their say and they elected a new Progressive Conservative government to bring forward that change so that more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can achieve their dreams right here at home.

Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the hardship faced by

residents along the Conception Bay's North Shore, who continue to bear the impacts of last summer's devastating wild fires. Behind every headline are real people; families who experienced fear, uncertainty and loss, and today we hold them in hearts.

If there is one defining truth about this province, it is this: Newfoundlanders and Labradorians take care of one another. Just as we have always done, we came together to support the residents of the North Shore. Our government's Cabinet Committee on the Conception Bay North Response and Recovery have visited the region with me, meeting residents, listening to their concerns and working to understand their needs.

We are collaborating with community leaders across the province to address vulnerabilities, including connectivity and communications, and to reimagine emergency preparedness in the face of increasingly frequent, extreme weather events. The past year has shown us these events are not rare. They are realities we must be prepared to meet.

Too many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians still live and travel in areas where they cannot make a call in an emergency and we saw that first-hand in Conception Bay North this past summer. As Her Honour mentioned earlier today, our government is committed to closing critical cellular coverage gaps across Newfoundland and Labrador, and I will ensure that Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde gets its fair share of upgrades.

Speaker, our province has stood and will continue to stand with the people of the North Shore. Our Premier has made it clear that we are here, we are listening and we are acting. Our commitment is long term and, together, we will recover and build a stronger future for all of us.

Speaker, all of us must seize the opportunities before us to make a difference

and to deliver positive change. Our Premier has been clear that we will spend less time chasing headlines and more time focusing on the fundamentals. Look no further than our natural resources.

Newfoundland and Labrador has the resources the world needs and we have the skilled workers the future demands, including hundreds of talented workers in Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde who are ready to build their futures at home. This includes expanding skilled trades programs and creating clear apprenticeship pathways, preparing our next generation for the high-demand careers that are essential today and into the future.

Our government has made it clear that we are back in the oil and gas business and this begins with renewed focus on Bay du Nord with a pro-jobs government that can, after a decade of delay, kick-start a new development off our shores and revitalize the energy sector in the North Atlantic.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Newfoundland and Labrador has immense potential to be a nation-builder through our resources, our workforce and our story. Our government will be there every step of the way, positioning our province as a reliable global supplier, while building a stronger Newfoundland and Labrador and a stronger Canada for all of us.

Speaker, what brought all of us to this hon. House was a clear focus on what matters most: better health care, lower taxes, safer communities for all of us. Our team and our Premier heard directly from the people of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde and from communities across Newfoundland and Labrador. They wanted a government prepared to tackle challenges head-on; a government ready to work for all of us. That is why I am committed to working with our government to deliver more RCMP officers

in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, making our community safer.

That is why we are ensuring that no one is left behind when it comes to health care. That is why we have been clear that we will not balance the province's books on the backs of the very people who built it. Despite the fiscal challenges ahead, our government will work to ensure that young people, including those of my generation, have every reason to build their lives here at home for decades to come. A different postal code should not consign anyone to a life of lower standards.

Speaker, while this past winter has brought many cold and stormy days, particularly in my district and across the Avalon, I am confident that, under the leadership of our Premier and our government, brighter days lie ahead for all of us, and it is a profound honour to serve as the Member of the House of Assembly for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. I am grateful to the Premier for the opportunity to serve as his parliamentary assistant.

Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government focused on renewal for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. As Her Honour reminded us today, the challenges before us are serious, but the opportunities are immense. Success is not automatic, nor is it guaranteed. However, I am confident that in every decision our government makes, we will act in the best interests of all of us.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

H. CORMIER: Thank you. Speaker.

Speaker, it is a great honour to rise in the House on behalf of the constituents of the District of St. George's - Humber and to

second the motion that a Select Committee be appointed to draft an Address in Reply to this year's Speech from the Throne.

Before I begin, I would like to echo the sentiments of my colleague from Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde and thank Her Honour for the excellent delivery of today's Speech from the Throne. I also extend a warm welcome to all Members of this hon. House as we begin the Fifty-First General Assembly, especially to all new Members like myself who are both excited and determined –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: – to serve as a government truly working for all of us. Each day is a privilege to serve as a Member of this Chamber. As Her Honour reminded us, the seats we occupy do not belong to us. They belong to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who sent us here. That responsibility must guide everything we do.

I come to this Chamber from the beautiful West Coast of our province, a special place nestled within the Long Range Mountains. My district stretches for hundreds of kilometres along the Trans-Canada Highway. Though it's vast in geography, the concerns of its residents are clear and consistent: affordability, access to health care and opportunity to the future.

In the short time I've been a Member of this government, I have witnessed the strength of this dedicated caucus, united under the leadership of our Premier and grounded in sheer commitment to the people who place their trust in us. Last fall, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians voted for change, they expect action and they deserve results.

Public service is a privilege. Like our Premier, I believe every decision we make, inside and outside this Chamber, must be guided by one fundamental question, how will this help the people of Newfoundland

and Labrador both now and in the years ahead?

“For All of Us” includes Indigenous peoples across our province. Our government will continue working with provincial and federal partners to celebrate identity, preserve heritage and advance meaningful progress in Truth and Reconciliation.

Our focus is clear: delivering real, tangible results that people can see and feel in their daily lives. That begins with lowering taxes and easing the cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, we must also honour our seniors, the generation that built this province. Under our government, they will see enhanced supports to help manage the rising cost of living and maintain their quality of life.

We also see tremendous potential in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Rural communities are not relics of the past; they are vital to our future. By reducing red tape and encouraging innovation, we create conditions for growth and renewal.

I’m honoured to serve as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands. Our government is preparing to launch a long-term agricultural strategy focused on removing barriers for new farmers and increasing food production here at home. Strengthening food security and supporting our land-based industries, we play a key role in shaping a resilient future.

The challenges before us are serious, but so, too, are the opportunities. The work of this General Assembly will help define the next chapter of our province’s story. No matter where someone lives, where they come from or how they voted, every Newfoundlander and Labradorian deserves to feel represented and respected in this House. That is why safer communities are so important to our government. As a former municipal leader, I understand first-hand the

value of strong partnerships in delivering safer communities for all of us.

We’ll work closely with municipalities to strengthen emergency preparedness and take early action to support our brave first responders by doubling the tax credit for volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: These actions reflect something larger – a government that is prepared to lead, to act early and to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people who keep our communities strong.

A new day has begun; a new government is ready to serve. In our first 100 days, we have already taken meaningful steps, and our Premier has brought the message to the national stage: Newfoundland and Labrador is ready to build. Newfoundland and Labrador is ready to grow and ready to stand as an equal partner within this great Confederation,

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: We will ensure that residents in every region of this province feel heard, supported and valued. I have the confidence in this team. We stick to a plan to keep our promises, to work hard and work together for all of us.

With that, Speaker, it was a great honour to second the motion that a Select Committee be appointed to draft an Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess we'll all need a little bit of patience as we get used to our new roles, you and me included.

I want to begin by congratulating the Premier and Members opposite on forming our new Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as the new ministers who have now taken on an incredibly important role as we shape our province.

I want to congratulate those Members who are sitting in the House of Assembly for the very first time, including Members on our side of the House from Gander, Burgeo - La Poile, St. John's West and Corner Brook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for delivering the Speech from the Throne today, and we are glad to be back in the House of Assembly – to finally be back in the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We look forward to dealing with the pressing matters and the opportunities before us as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Because, Speaker, this moment does matter, new governments bring new expectations and, of course as we've all heard, new promises. For Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the Speech from the Throne today is not just ceremonial; it's a signal on where we are going next and what questions remain.

The questions before this House today are important ones: Does the government's plan meet the urgency of the moment we are living in and does it meet the commitments they made to the people of our province?

We all know Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are facing real pressures right

now: The cost of living is straining family budgets; some of our health care infrastructure and our hospitals are aging and crowded and, as we recently saw at St. Clare's, bitterly cold. Power bills have skyrocketed throughout the winter.

This government made big promises during the general election. They made promises and it is on them to deliver on what they promised Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The people of our province do not want to hear excuses about how or why things can't be done; the people of our province want to hear what is going to be done to grow our economy, to provide access to health care and to help families get through difficulties that they're facing.

Quite simply, Speaker, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians expect results. They expect action, and we know that action requires revenue – significant revenue – and revenue that we've heard our province doesn't have right now. In fact, we see it across our country. Almost all provinces are struggling mightily with growing deficits and increasing debt.

Even oil-rich Alberta has announced an almost \$10-billion deficit for this fiscal year, and we see the same thing right next door in Nova Scotia, but there's a difference here at home. We have a solution, and it's not lost on me that the current government talks about a \$1-billion deficit, and the revenue from a deal with Hydro-Québec would have fortuitously given us \$1 billion a year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: With that deal, Speaker, while other provinces cut programs and cut services, here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we would run balanced budgets and even surpluses.

We could have been, and still can be, the envy of all Canadians; and this doesn't even take into account the indirect revenue from the jobs and economic activity that would

arise from construction on the Churchill Falls River. It is a generational opportunity that is within our grasp and, Speaker, while I know that the future rests with the current administration, I want all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to know that we want a deal and we want a deal under the current government. We don't want a deal for the sake of a political win. We want the deal for the sake of our future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So we will support the government, and encourage the Premier to continue negotiations to try and finalize a deal – the right deal, the best deal, a deal for Newfoundland and Labrador – but the Premier needs to take that step. Trust me, I know there's pressure. I know about sleepless nights thinking about and staring at that final deal and potentially being the Premier to sign it; thinking about not wanting to make the same mistakes that this province has made over and over again, but that is why it takes courage. That's why it takes leadership, and if you truly feel like you're the right person to lead our province, then lead it when the decisions are difficult and stressful and important.

Speaker, I can't tell you how many times I've been asked over the last few months about how I'm adjusting to the role of Official Opposition Leader, and what my approach and our approach will be. I've said this: Our job is to hold the government to account and to ask questions on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Now, Speaker, I certainly had more time on my hands following the election. The upside of that is I got to spend it with my family. I had the opportunity to binge watch television – Netflix – with Maggie, my 9-year-old daughter. We watched *Ted Lasso* – I'm sure a lot of people saw it – and a quote stuck with me during that time after the election: Be curious, not judgmental.

I want the ministers to know that when we ask questions, it's not because we've pre-judged your decisions; it's because we're curious about why you're doing it and what it means. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve to know why you're doing (inaudible.)

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So we will never oppose for the sake of opposing, but we will be strong in our advocacy.

Our Opposition Members will support measures that generally strengthen our economy, invest in people and protect our province's long-term interests. For instance, we look forward to seeing the government's finalized benefits agreement with Equinor on the Bay du Nord project – a project that the Liberal government fought for years to realize, despite federal resistance and red tape that got in the way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I would suggest, don't ever forget the past, because how soon it seems they've forgotten.

When our Liberal Government managed to get that over the federal line in the environmental assessment, I stood in this House when Members of our caucus received a standing ovation from Members on the other side, and the truth is Newfoundland and Labrador has never left the oil business.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Speaker, we will speak up when commitments are vague, when promises lack detail or when actions fall short of words.

On Bay du Nord, the government campaigned on getting all the topsides work in Newfoundland and Labrador, and we will not stand by if they back away from that

promise and other promises and try to sell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians something else.

We will make our own policy suggestions and recommendations, such as don't cancel plans for a badly needed, new, modern provincial hospital; don't dismiss experts who we have in our health care system for decades just for the sake of change; don't cancel sittings of the House of Assembly; and don't dismiss all the good work that has been done over the past number of years, such as providing recruitment bonuses to attract new health care workers and to build Family Care Teams throughout our province so people can access the health care that they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, the speech sets out what the government says it wants to do. The real test will be to see if it delivers.

I noted while I listened there was no mention of increasing grocery prices, increasing power bill costs, long-term care, our tech sector, the ferries, electricity for Labrador and teachers. If it's truly a government for all of us, I would suggest the government focus on all of us, because Newfoundland and Labrador has unmatched potential. We know about our rich and colourful culture, one we all love to share with visitors and friends. We're home to the most resourceful, resilient and kind people. Labrador is home to mighty rivers, abundant natural resources and proud northern communities. This all holds promise for the brightest future.

Across our Island, defined by its coves and bays and harbours, we see generations of hard work and a deep connection to the sea that continues to provide. We have strong Indigenous communities, and we urge everyone in this province to continue the path – the sometimes difficult path – towards Truth and Reconciliation.

I acknowledge members of our Indigenous leadership here with us today.

From coast to coast, Speaker, we know there are many opportunities from all industries: fishery, aquaculture, mining, tourism, energy and many more. We will always be a proud people. We want to work. We want to contribute. We want to build a future for our families here and the families yet to come. We stand by ready to work constructively where we can, and we stand by ready to challenge where we must. Above all, we stand ready to be a strong principle voice for the people who sent us here.

We all have the privilege of sitting in this House to represent and serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and they deserve nothing less every day than honesty, accountability and progress.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, let me welcome my colleague, Sheilagh O'Leary, and all MHAs both new and returning.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: Speaker, during the last provincial election, the New Democratic Party offered a costed platform that focused on affordability, transparency and a plan to achieve those promises.

We expected the same responsible approach from the other parties that we didn't see, and we didn't see it, really, in the Throne Speech.

It's been a year since we last sat in this Chamber, and almost five months since the Progressive Conservatives took power. They've done a remarkably good job of cancelling projects and overturning

decisions of the previous administration, but have not offered a real plan, really, to deliver on their bold promises. Simply tearing up agreements, Speaker, is not a way forward; nor is aspirational language, and we've seen that, certainly, in campaign promises and in the Throne Speech.

So while the parties have switched sides, the reality lived by many of the people in our province has not changed at all.

Last week, we held a constituency meeting at the Froude Avenue Community Centre; the lack of affordability was very real for those who attended – increasing electric bills forcing people to live in a cold house, a woefully inadequate Aging Well at Home Grant, expensive prescription drugs, the hardship faced by those who do not own a car and rely on public transportation, the serious lack of affordable housing, the crushing price of food and the cost to eat healthy. That is a reality for many.

What struck me most was how the mostly senior women on small pensions or some form of fixed income knew the relative prices of beef, pork, chicken and other food items down to the cent. They knew where the best deals were, the cost of transportation to get there and whether it was worth doing so to avail of the specials. I've often heard said from certain quarters that the poor should learn how to budget their money, and it was clear that these ladies knew how to budget; budgeting wasn't the issue.

In his book, *Bootstraps Need Boots: One Tory's Lonely Fight to End Poverty in Canada*, the late Canadian Senator, Hugh Segal, notes that the cause of poverty is the lack of money, and people with more money tend to be less poor.

Essentially, you cannot pull yourself up by your bootstraps if you cannot afford boots. How does a person on income support living with diabetes afford to eat healthy with a dietary supplement of \$30 every two

weeks? How does a senior on a fixed pension afford the annual rent increases? How does a single parent of three working multiple minimum wage jobs ensure her children have healthy food, school supplies, clothes and other necessities?

We heard the same message at a cost of living town hall at the Hub a month ago – the same hardship, the same struggle, the same stigma, the same embarrassment of not being able to provide for oneself or one's family. Poverty, the lack of affordability, is an attack on a person's dignity, and poverty costs all of us.

A 2021 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimated that poverty costs Newfoundland and Labrador \$959 million annually, and 2.9 per cent of GDP.

The COVID-19 pandemic decimated economies worldwide and pushed those already struggling further into the margins. Newfoundland and Labrador saw an increase in homelessness, exorbitant rent hikes and an explosion of emergency housing shelters and encampments. For the first time, many people were forced to live and sleep in the rough.

We knew how serious the issues of affordability, health care and decent housing are to the people of the province, and we had a pretty good idea about the province's fiscal situation. We sat in this chamber over the last number of years; we knew.

Our four-year costed platform that was released a week into the campaign was thoughtful, practical and a doable road map that attempted to address those realities. The governing party obviously ignored the past four years and proudly promoted a raft of costly promises and projected a \$30-million deficit.

The struggle of affordability is at the heart of our platform because we understood it intersected with many aspects of people's lives, Speaker. We presented real solutions

that would yield tangible results, practical solutions that encountered resistance from the other parties. For example, it took two attempts to get the government to strike an All-Party Committee on guaranteed basic income. Our private Members' resolution passed unanimously in 2020, and again in 2021, and still it was a struggle to form the Committee.

We collaborated; we did good work and signed off on the final report on September 9, 2025 – six months ago. We've heard nothing from the Premier about when or whether he will even release the report.

Now this report recommends that the province engage with the Government of Canada to co-develop a basic income pilot in Newfoundland and Labrador and direct officials to draft a potential basic income framework to inform discussions with the federal government. Guaranteed basic income has the transformative potential to address poverty and affordability. By delaying this, the government is missing an opportunity to do just that.

Guaranteed basic income must be part of any poverty reduction plan.

In a response to our letter to the Premier, the government finally announced an increase of 35 cents to the minimum wage; however, there was no commitment to enshrine the annual minimum wage increases in labour standards legislation, as opposed to regulations, nor was there a commitment to move towards a livable minimum wage.

According to another CCPA report, a livable minimum wage for Newfoundland and Labrador is much, much higher depending on where you live. In effect, the \$16.35 minimum wage is a poverty wage.

We proposed raising the minimum wage to \$22 an hour over four years and then tie it to inflation while phasing out corporate income tax for small businesses. In addition

to a minimum wage, we also proposed legislation to promote and protect good-paying union jobs in both the public and private sector.

We proposed measures to help families, from removing the HST from children's essentials, like car seats, clothing, footwear and cloth diapers, to investing in our early childhood educators by ensuring they have paid sick days and a pension, to entice more workers to enter the field. We committed to removing the HST from all forms of home heating. We even put a PMR, a Members' resolution, on this in November of 2024; both parties defeated the resolution. Now the Official Opposition, that they're in opposition, thinks it's a great idea.

We committed to raising the Seniors' Benefit 25 per cent and tying it to inflation.

These are just a few of the initiatives we planned to implement – realistic initiatives that would deliver real relief to the people across this province.

We have a strong, concrete housing plan to address the housing crisis facing the people of our province; whether people are renting and are looking for strong rent controls or you're a first-time home buyer looking for more help, we hear you and we have a plan.

The province spent over \$14 million in 2025 on emergency housing shelters. Now imagine what our proposed Newfoundland and Labrador homes plan could do with that kind of money to build affordable homes.

Meanwhile, the government promises to build 10,000 new homes over five years by reducing red tape surrounding new home builds and redevelopment – aspirational. Now I don't know, but it sounds a little like the 750 housing options promised by their predecessors.

We are willing to work with government to implement housing solutions that do not solely rely on private investment in the private market. We've seen the exorbitant rent and housing prices. While there is a place for private investment in housing, we cannot rely on it for deeply affordable housing.

We need rent and vacancy control, land trusts, land-lease communities, rent banks and, yes, tenant unions. We need more non-market, community-based housing. We need to invest in non-profits like the Co-operative Housing Association of Newfoundland and Labrador and other community groups. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation needs the resources and the personnel to regularly maintain public housing units so they are not demolished or sold off to the private market, as has happened.

The price of prescription drugs is another reality facing the province. If we had been in power, we would have signed on to the national pharmacare program and not missed an opportunity to make lives healthier and health care more affordable to those living with diabetes.

At a town hall a month ago, people expressed disgust with the Liberals for squandering the opportunity to sign onto the program, and with the current government for waiting so long to write the prime minister about doing so.

Pharmacare aside, our health care system is facing a human resources crisis. We focused on a full plan for recruiting and retaining health care workers and addressing the work conditions that health professionals are facing to address the emergency wait times, ambulance and offloading delays, long-term care, home care and the social determinants of health.

Speaker, it's impossible to discuss affordability without the looming specter of the climate crisis that has driven up – if we

want to talk about inflation – the climate crisis has driven up the cost of everything from food, building supplies, insurance premiums and health care, and threatens our communities of our water supply and our existence; that's the cost.

The Port aux Basques area is still recovering from Hurricane Fiona, and the recent fires devastated communities on the North Shore. We had one of the hottest and driest summers on record. Water levels dropped in ponds, rivers and reservoirs. Farmers had one of the worst years in memory. People lost their homes and some lost work.

Yet, the Premier has denied that there is any connection between all of these events and the climate crisis. The government has no plan to transition to a more sustainable, green economy that would create new jobs and protect our workers, our communities and the environment.

Now these issues are connected in some way or another by affordability, the lack of transparency and the absence of a coherent plan, and nowhere do these three themes intersect so clearly than in the Churchill Falls MOU. We know what is riding on this deal and why it's important to get it right.

From the beginning, the NDP attempted to set aside partisan politics, the anti-Quebec rhetoric and the Newfoundland nationalism rhetoric and judge the project on its economic and fiscal merits. We demanded transparency and along with the Independent MHAs. We were able to create and strike an independent oversight panel. The PCs had the opportunity to help at that time, Speaker, to help shape that Committee, but chose to walk out on the vote instead.

Transparency doesn't end, by the way, with releasing information about your predecessors, such as an unredacted resignation letter and the letter from the Clerk of the Executive Council. It should

have meant seeking collaboration on their new independent review committee.

Instead, the process was opaque and exclusionary. We know; we asked to be involved. We were never invited.

We have a Committee now that's chaired by the former CEO of Emera, who secured a very sweet deal for Nova Scotia during the Muskrat Falls negotiations; a Committee that insists on getting public input before they deliver their independent report on the deal, essentially putting the cart before the horse.

From the beginning, the Churchill Falls MOU has been a political football between the Liberals using it as an election prop and the PCs opposing anything Liberal.

Then there is the question of a referendum; what is the plan, Speaker, to inform the public so they can cast an informed vote? We sat in this House for four days, intense debate; what is the threshold for voter turnout and for the acceptance or rejection of the MOU?

More importantly, what is the plan to get power to Labrador? We didn't hear any concrete commitment from the Premier in his speech to the MINEx conference. Without power, the future of Labrador, the economy of the province and any hope of rate mitigation are thrown into jeopardy.

So many questions, so few answers and no plan.

So I will say to the government, Speaker, please do not let this turn into another Muskrat Falls debacle.

Transparency has not been the hallmark of either party. Transparency, I do believe, makes better decisions and why it favoured so heavily in our campaign. We continue to see governments use words like transparency and accountability, but without

taking meaningful actions it's just empty rhetoric.

During the election, the Premier said that he would consider our transparency policies, so I look forward to meeting with him to discuss the banning of corporate and union donations; capping donations and banning out-of-province donations; reforming conflict of interest laws so that they are accessible online, regardless of where in the province you happen to live; extending the cooling-off period, including for board appointments; and reviewing and modernizing our Elections Act.

These policies, Speaker, are not radical. They are the standard for provinces across this country. It's time that a government has political and genuine respect for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and bring this province up to the national standard for transparency.

There has been much talk about public safety, cracking down on crime, reforming bail, hiring more police and, as important as these issues are, our platform attempted to address the root of public safety because those treat the symptoms.

Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* was as much a critique of Victorian society and increasing wealth gap, poverty, attitudes towards the poor and an exploitation of labour as it was a heartwarming story of one man's redemption. The two children clinging to the Ghost of Christmas Present represented poverty and ignorance. They were retched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable and the spirit warned Scrooge to beware of both of them, but especially ignorance.

Almost 200 years later, Speaker, and it seems we have not learned the basic lesson that we do well when those around us are doing well.

I'll end with a quote from Maggie Helwig's book *Encampment: Resistance, Grace, and*

an Unhoused Community. Reverend Helwig is an Anglican priest at St. Stephen-in-the-Fields in Toronto and works closely with those experiencing homelessness, especially during the pandemic. She says we are all connected, and the life of one person is the life of all. We are made by the wind, by the breath and the voice.

Speaker, over the next few months and over the term of this government, we will demand transparency, affordability and a plan to address the root causes of the challenges facing our province. Above all, we will expect a budget and legislation that reflects our connectivity to each other and that the life of one of us impacts the life of all of us.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I want to begin by thanking Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for joining us in this Chamber and delivering the Speech from the Throne.

I would like to welcome all of our guests here today, and of course I would also like to welcome all the Members of this House, both new and returning.

Speaker, I hope our new Members took a moment to appreciate the history of this Chamber as they took their seats for the first time. I still feel honoured when I walk into this place that none of us ever take it for granted. What a privilege we all share – the privilege of representing the amazing people of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is no place like Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I know how proud you are to serve the people of Mount Pearl - Southlands, just as I am proud to represent Stephenville - Port au Port, and every Member here feels that same pride in the communities that sent them to this House. Every community in every corner of this province is something they are proud of.

I've been blessed to live and work in communities across Newfoundland and Labrador. I was born in Placentia. I've lived and worked in Grand Falls-Windsor, St. John's, Clarenville, Happy Valley-Goose Bay and, of course, my home now in Kippens.

My life has taken me to communities across this province as a basketball player and coach, as a CEO and as an MHA, party leader and Premier, and the greatest honour in all that time has been the conversations with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When someone shares their story, their dreams, their challenges, their family history with any of us, they are giving us the ultimate vote of confidence. They are telling us that what we do here matters. They are telling us that we matter to them. And our job, on all sides of this House, is to make it clear that they matter to us.

Speaker, you know where the phrase "For All of Us" comes from? It comes from a recognition that, in recent years, we became divided between those making decisions and those affected by them; separated by geography, by needs, by priorities. When people don't feel heard, government loses its way. "For All of Us" means putting people back at the centre of decision-making. It means ensuring their hopes, their needs and concerns guide every choice we make. That's what "For All of Us" means to me.

Her Honour laid out an ambitious agenda today. Speaker, our government will work tirelessly to deliver on it. Our agenda focuses on three core points, that we will

deliver lower taxes, better health care and safer communities. Let me explain why they matter. It starts with lower taxes. Speaker, the cost of living is rising – groceries, fuel, rent, mortgages. Everyone feels it, but seniors and low-income families feel it most. Lowering taxes is the most direct way government can help, and that is why we are taking real action.

Over the last number of years, people of this province have dealt with the impacts of a carbon tax; they dealt with a sugar tax because somehow it was thought that making groceries more expensive for families was good public policy.

I disagreed, and our government is acting. We will lower taxes. That is why we are permanently repealing the sugar tax. That's why we are permanently reducing the gas tax, and that's why we intend to increase the basic personal exemption so that no Newfoundlander and no Labradorian pays a dime of provincial income tax on the first \$15,000 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – they earn, the highest basic personal exemption in all of Atlantic Canada.

We're also going to put more money in the pockets of those who need it most. That is why we are raising the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent, and that is why we are expanding the Child Benefit to cover 3,000 more children in lower income houses.

Speaker, let me next talk about better health care. I know health care. I spent most of my career in it and I know it's not measured by buildings but by the professionals we recruit and the services they provide. These services will be delivered by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, not outside agencies. We are going to fully cover the cost of necessary medical travel, invest in new technologies like MRIs, invest in keeping rural emergency departments

open and guarantee every Newfoundlander or Labradorian health care graduate a job.

On safer communities, we've already invested in expanding the 24-hour snow clearing. We're also going to invest in putting more RNC and RCMP officers in Newfoundland and Labrador communities because we know that there is no such thing as a plan for crime that does not include a plan for more police.

We're going to invest in more Crown attorneys because, once the brave members of our police forces arrest repeat or dangerous offenders, we have to do a better job of keeping them behind bars. We also recognize that we have to do more to keep people from falling through the cracks, either as perpetrators or victims of crime, and we will.

Speaker, these investments are necessary but they also cost money. As the Minister of Finance has stated, the deficit is nearly \$1 billion. Past accounting practices may have made the numbers look better, but they weren't accurate and they weren't honest. You may not always agree with what we say, but you will always get the truth from this government. Because our deficit is real, we must grow our economy, and we will.

We will bring back oil investment and oil and gas jobs. We will capitalize on National Defence investments. We will support new mining projects. We will help fisheries and aquacultural industries grow, put thousands of skilled Newfoundlanders and Labrador trade workers back to work and make Newfoundland and Labrador the tourism capital of Canada.

We will also develop the Churchill River –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – but only with a deal that guarantees local jobs and local benefits; a deal that learns from the lessons of the past and guarantees that

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will always be the primary beneficiaries of our own resources.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are not responsible for the fiscal challenges we inherited and they will not be asked to pay for them through higher taxes or reduced services. We will help families balance their budgets before we balance ours.

Speaker, we have a lot of work to do, but I go into this work with excitement and with optimism. I know the challenges facing our province are real but the opportunities are bigger, still; and if we work hard and work together, we can cease those opportunities, we can build something special and we can build something that lasts.

Speaker, let's get it done for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion has been carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Notices of Motion.

SPEAKER: Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting the Seniors' Advocate, Bill 2.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act Granting To His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year ending March 31, 2026 and for other Purposes Relating to the Public Service, Bill 3.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, Bill 4.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2, Bill 5.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Pensions Benefit Act, 1997, Bill 6.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act, Bill 7.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Wild Life Act, Bill 8.

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue be appointed Deputy Speaker.

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That the Member for Labrador West be appointed as the Deputy Chair of Committees.

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That under the authority of Standing Order 65, the Member for Terra Nova, the Member for Cape St. Francis, the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair and the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi shall compromise a Committee and, in accordance with the *Standing Orders*, shall report within the first 20 sitting days of appointment a list of Members to compose the Standing

Committees for the House referred to in Standing Order 65(1).

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion:

WHEREAS section 7 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* prescribes that, upon nomination by the House of Assembly, the Sergeant-at-Arms shall be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council by Commission under the Great Seal;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Mr. Alex Brennan be appointed as Sergeant-at-Arms.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the current government recently cancelled the planned development of a new, modern provincial hospital; and

WHEREAS serious and ongoing concerns continue to be raised by patients, front-line health care workers and families regarding the deteriorating condition of some current infrastructure; and

WHEREAS St. Clare's Mercy Hospital officially opened more than 100 years ago and was not designed to meet the demands of modern, acute-care delivery; and

WHEREAS the Progressive Conservative government has failed to provide to the public any analysis on the cost to renovate St. Clare's;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urges the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to commit to a new and modern provincial hospital.

Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 63(3), the private Member's resolution I referred to will be the private Member's resolution to be debated this Wednesday, March 4, 2026.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, that the House do now adjourn until the 3rd of March.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the House do now adjourn until Tuesday, March 3, at 1:30 p.m.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House is now adjourned until Tuesday, March 3, at 1:30 p.m.

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