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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Order 5, second reading of Bill 5.

SPEAKER: Order 5, second reading of Bill 5.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm honoured to stand here today even if the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay don't want me to. Listening to him yesterday, I found it really funny that he said, because we're all supportive of the bill, we should just not say anything. I think that's counterintuitive to what we all believe in. I think people in our district elected us to have a say. I know the hon. Speaker used to stand in the House of Assembly every day in his space, every piece of legislation, and say I'm just going to go on for a minute to put my name on the record, I think was his line, and not without question, went 20 minutes, almost every time.

So I do want to take the opportunity to put my two cents' worth in for the seven-cent reduction that we're talking about here today. It's not a reduction – I want to be very clear to the people of this province, because Members opposite have said it's a reduction. It's not actually a reduction. It's maintaining the status quo.

Over the past number of years, probably since 2022, we on this side of the House, when we were on the other side of the

House, thought it was important, for the people of this province, to reduce the gas tax. We did that and this was a lever we had to do that, with this piece of legislation that we're talking about.

Almost a year ago to the day, we were debating this very topic in this House of Assembly. Although we were on the other side, we were doing the exact same thing that these Members are doing today, almost exactly the same, the thing that they're doing here today, which we agree with on this side, and many of my colleagues have said it, that we're going to make it permanent. We would have made it permanent as well, had the federal government allowed that to be the case, to not force us to have the backstop which was existing at the time.

A year ago –

L. PADDOCK: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. DAVIS: I thank the hon. Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay for reminding me, because last year around this time, there was a change in leadership at the federal government. Almost to the day, this week, I think, Prime Minister Carney was elected leader of the Liberal Party federally, and then came into an election in April. This legislation was passed, I think, on March 10 last year. Prime Minister Carney didn't even take office until after that point. The carbon tax was not paused until April – or stopped in April, so we could not do it.

Facts do matter in this House of Assembly, and it's very clear that facts do matter –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: – but I am standing here very happy to be speaking to gas tax Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2. I thank all hon. Members that had the opportunity to get up and talk about the

cost of living that we've all been seeing from our constituents, the concerns that come forward with this. One of the things that is very interesting about this piece of legislation and the fact that we're holding fast on maintaining the reduction that was put in place in 2022, is that it's going to help. There's no doubt.

There is no doubt that the people in this province, had this legislation not been done, gas would have gone up. There's no doubt about that. We had done it since 2022, and we were going to do it again this year and next year and the year after. It's like this, maybe this year we would have had the ability to do it permanent, just like we're doing here and we're having the ability to stand up and support.

We agree that anything we can do to make certainty – and one of the comments that I think the Member for Harbour Main mentioned was certainty. In one of her speaking opportunities yesterday, she talked about certainty, and I agree. It's always nice when you can have businesses or individuals have certainty in what is going to be coming at them in the future.

We all know that the world changes on a daily basis internationally when the gentleman south of the border decides to invade a country or bomb a country or try to add stability or instability to the world. Gas prices are no different than that. They go up and down significantly. We've seen massive increases that we haven't seen since the early '80s. We understand that. We think that's important. We also think there's an opportunity for us to do things for all of us. We hear that term in this House an awful lot, for all of us across this province.

I am happy to stand representing Virginia Waters and I'll take a page out of what the MHA for Cape St. Francis says, it's a beautiful district that I happen to represent, great people, but they have concerns too. They bring them forward on a regular basis like they do to all, I would venture to guess,

40 Members in this House of Assembly. They bring them forward. It's our job to ask those questions and hopefully get answers. We haven't seen a lot of that lately, but hopefully that will get better. We're all learning our roles.

But one of the things that I think is interesting when individuals get to ask a question is they said, I've got calls from my constituents saying okay, this piece of legislation is coming forward that you're talking about in the House of Assembly – because some people watch the House of Assembly, which is great. They're not all from Bonavista that watch the House of Assembly, but there is some from Virginia Waters as well, and I would venture to guess some in Cape St. Francis.

One of the things that they're asking me is, well, what's changing in this? I said nothing. Virtually your life will be no different today than it will be tomorrow when this legislation passes. There will be no difference. The only change is that a piece of legislation that we have brought in place since 2022 will be permanent, meaning that it won't change at all.

But when we say permanent in the House of Assembly, I'd like everyone to be reminded that the House of Assembly is like a time machine. It's like a time machine. You can change anything at any time, as long as 40 Members bring forward a piece of legislation, vote on it, and they can retroactively change things. They can go back and fix this next week. If you wanted to change it, you could. That's what the House of Assembly is. So to say something is permanent, it's as permanent as it can be, which is a good thing.

So when they ask the question: Is my gas going to be seven cents cheaper tomorrow when this legislation passes? I said, no, because it's not going to be. Had we done nothing, the legislation would have went away on March 31, and then gas would have gone up by seven cents, no doubt –

well, 8.5 cents. It would have went up, there's no doubt about that.

What we're doing is we're doing a status quo piece of legislation. It's not going to hurt the people of this province, absolutely not, but it's not going to make their lives any more affordable than it is today. I just want that to be clear and on the record.

We all know that the upward pressure that we're facing on fuel and all cost-of-living items, whether it be groceries or items that we're purchasing, that the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi has mentioned, on a regular basis, clothing for children, essentials. We all know that we live on an island and a very big piece of property called the Big Land. It's very expensive to move things around this province. So any time fuel is increasing, the cost of everything is going to go up. It may take a little bit of time.

I heard the president of Akita Equipment talking on the radio yesterday, and he said that his business is going to go up significantly. His costs are going to go up significantly because gas has gone through the roof, and diesel in particular for him. He said that trickle-down effect will happen very quickly to the goods and services that we all have to buy in the supermarkets or the grocery stores or the Avalon Mall or the Riff's store in your local community.

I think it's very important on all of us to understand that we, as a House of Assembly, should look to do as much as we possibly can with legislation when we have it before us.

A couple of weeks ago, when the upheaval in the Middle East was occurring, and continues to occur right now, oil tends to move very quickly when those actions happen. I think currently oil is at \$91.87 US per barrel, and I think the Finance Minister – I see him nodding over there, because he always listens intently, as the Member for Cape La Hune always says.

E. LOVELESS: Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

B. DAVIS: Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, sorry. My apologies.

I do think that the Finance Minister would be pleasantly surprised at the change in oil prices for the financials of the province; obviously not for the people that we represent, but the financials of the province.

That could mean somewhere in the tune of about a half a billion dollars to the Treasury of this province, if it was maintained for the full year. I'm going to be clear, because I'm not going to stand up here and say something that's not factual, it needs to be maintained for the year.

We all know that that's not going to be the way it is – well, we hope it's not – but that money should be utilized and there should be a way, and I've seen the Facebook posts from the then Leader of the Opposition, now Premier of the province, talking about that the premier of the day has the ability to move gas prices more effectively based on what's happening in the marketplace.

So I would hope that, based on the windfall that's occurring right now for the provincial Treasury, they would consider some of those things that would be in place. I'm not suggesting by no stretch that that windfall is going to be sustained, I just think that when gas prices move in the way they have moved, we, as province, should consider all options on the table on how we can help mitigate some of those moves with fuel prices for the people that we all represent.

Those are the concerns that I get calls on. Those are the concerns that I'm sure every one of my colleagues are receiving right now when any one of our constituents go to the pumps, whether it be a spike of 12 cents or 14 cents or 16 cents, whatever it is, it's challenging for people during a challenging time for everyone. We've all heard that.

I go could on. I know there are more people that want to speak today and we do want to get to the debate on that. I haven't seen the Speaker move his hands to gesture me to finish up yet, but I'm very excited that we all get the opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation.

All of us, and I've heard many conversations from my colleagues, both new and returning Members to the House of Assembly, but I get the opportunity to hear some pretty cool things that are happening in their district when we get the opportunity to debate or have conversations. So I will always say to the individuals that, when a piece of legislation comes forward, I think we can all stand to learn from each other about the concerns that our constituents are facing, the things that are happening within our districts.

Whether it be a fantastic piece of legislation about an advocate or whether it's a piece of legislation that we're talking about here today, about gas tax and the effects that it has on each and everyone of us, although the effects maybe felt differently in each district, they are felt.

On this side of the House, I know we support the idea of what we're doing here today. I think, we could do more. Hopefully we'll see how that translates over the coming days and weeks as we lead into a budget process, but I do say, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this today. I look forward to hearing from other Members.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to take a second here, it's my first chance to speak to a bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: It's an honour to stand here, but just bear with me for a few seconds, Colleagues, please because I really have to take this in. It wasn't long ago that I was wearing coveralls when I worked in oil and gas as a tradesperson. I pumped a lot of gas as a teenager.

To stand here to speak about this and to speak about the tax of who removed and who didn't remove, I think the greatest story here is that it is removed and the fact that people are hurting. We hear it all the time. We talk about grocery prices. We talk about the effect of the realities of where we are in economic times.

I, myself, personally have no issue saying this, but when I go into a grocery store, I come out angry, and that's wrong. The size of this province, our demographics, our geography, especially in my district and the larger districts, you can't just hop over to a Superstore. Like, I noticed here in St. John's, everything seems to be a reach away but it impacts every part of our daily lives.

On a good note, Mr. Speaker, we're very fortunate with the oil and gas in our province. The projects that we have announced that are coming forward have already created hype. I can remember growing up, getting into trades, Hibernia, all the projects that were here. I think sometimes we have to take a moment to look around us and see how fortunate we are to have the resources that we do.

Hibernia, Terra Nova, Hebron, White Rose, I get to hear a lot of those names where I'm in lodging at the hotel, and its mostly offshore workers. I had the opportunity to go offshore years ago and I didn't take it, Mr. Speaker, because I was too scared. That's because it's extremely dangerous work, and I don't think every time that we go to fill up our gas, even with the price and the expense to us all, that we really understand

the importance of and the respect that we need to pay to offshore oil workers and oil workers general.

It's an extremely, extremely dangerous industry. I just want to say hats off and thank you to those fine folks for what they do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Opposition has heard it, when our Premier says we're back in the oil business, that's a fact, folks. That's a fact. Because the reality is, since 2015 – and I watch federal politics, geoglobal politics all over – and a former prime minister came talking juice boxes or paper and all these things, the oil and gas conversation went away. It really did. I could get into paper straws and all those things.

But the reality is the prosperity of speaking of oil and gas, which creates our existence – because we don't exist without it. I would challenge anyone, as I have with friends in environment, to look 360 degrees and I can show you every part is a by-product of fossil fuel. It really hit me in the hospital when my late father was there, and his oxygen machine was going and the tubes were running to keep his oxygen going, and I'm thinking, you're not going to do that without oil and gas.

I think we really need to take a pause to see the benefit of this resource in our province. For our government to be able to keep the gas tax off, this isn't about who did it or who didn't or the fact as the Member opposite said, you know, I get it. It looks as if this government comes in and we're taking all the hype and the goodness out of what work might have been done before, and what was not done, but we're focused, as in our platform, on making things affordable for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: I'm not an economist, but I've watched a lot of debate in this House, and the reality of to maintain balance when the price of oil goes up and the barrel goes up, the coffers get better. Does the price hurt you at the pump? Absolutely. But it's initiatives like this that can continue to give people some hope. Because why? Hearing other people's experience. The more we can do, and the more I know we look forward to doing to help people, happens here.

This is where the change is made. Just as the Member opposite said with legislation, it's revolving evolution. This is what we're here for, to improve the lives of others.

Mr. Speaker, I could stand here probably way too long to speak about keeping taxes lower for citizens as much as possible. I think it's fair to say we're all open to ideas on how you balance the Treasury and how you have a prosperous society that allows us to have funds for education, health care, roads, infrastructure.

At a municipal level, it's a much smaller budget – much smaller – but similar. It's how you balance it. A benefit for taxpayers on a municipal level – some could say it's a benefit, some could say it's a harm – is that you have to have a balanced budget. I can honestly say with the team surrounded here with me, we're going to work towards that and, as the Premier has stated numerous times, it won't be on the backs of the citizens.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Mr. Speaker, something is happening. I've asked former leaders around provincially that I know – like I said, I've been involved in politics – reaching out, interested in solutions and how do we do better. It always comes back to oil and gas. There's no way around it. Land, sea, air, everything that you see, everything comes around it and it's a very important start and a very important step that this is now

removed permanently. It's in the best interest of all taxpayers and all citizens that we maintain this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to sit down now but before I do, I just want to say it might take me a little while to settle in here because this still feels surreal to know that I sit here, I stand here and I get to speak here and work with my team and all these colleagues in this province for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I think I'm going to take over your role now and just get on the record here today and speak about this very, very important topic. We're debating Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2, today in the House of Assembly. It's a very important act and, in fact, as one of my colleagues alluded to it was exactly, I believe, just a year ago we were standing in this House introducing a very similar bill. This is the concept in relationship to what we introduced a year ago, Speaker.

It's very important for the District of Placentia - St. Mary's and for any rural district in this province, this particular bill. It doesn't change things today, but it does make things more permanent. But as one of my colleagues alluded to here also, there are 40 of us here in the House of Assembly and at any point in time we can introduce legislation and change a bill or introduce a new bill.

But the fact that this seven cents is going to stay off, given the climate of today's environment and especially now that we are going into the spring of the year when harvesters will be getting ready to go fishing

again, and the price of fuel definitely impacts their bottom line, Speaker.

Keeping this off the gasoline, people are not going to see a difference. There's going to be no difference in today, but if this was to go back on, I can assure you, they will see a difference. The difference they are seeing right now is the fact that affordability is a major, major issue.

Just in relationship to some of the government Members when we stand up over here as Opposition, and Speaker, this is relevant. There's a poem that's called "First They Came", and the last stanza says "Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me." Well, I can assure the general public that the 18 of us over here on this side are definitely here in an Opposition role to speak for the public, and we will stand and we will talk on everything that the government brings in, Mr. Speaker. We will represent the people –

AN HON. MEMBER: It's our job.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, it's our job. It's definitely our job.

When fuel goes up, groceries go up, construction costs go up, the cost of doing business goes up, everything goes up except your pay, except that cheque that you receive every two weeks or once a month for seniors, the pensions. That doesn't go up. That seldom goes up, but the government coffers do go up when the price of oil goes up, so they do have more money.

There is an expectation on this side of the House that with that money, they will in fact stay true to the Blue Book, Speaker, and they will impact people's lives with the affordability issue, that they will do more, that they'll make life more affordable. Some ideas, some things that they could do, Mr. Speaker, are index income support rates. That's something that could be done, indexing income support rates. Another

thing that could be done is making food more affordable.

So, Speaker, in rural Newfoundland, access to public transportation, in my particular district, is just about nil. I think there's one program in Placentia that a housing and homelessness organization there runs that provides some transportation, but other than that, throughout the district, there's some taxis that run packages back and forth to St. John's, but otherwise 99 per cent of people have to rely on their own personal transportation, going to the gas tank, putting that money, paying it out for the gas, and just seeing the money being drained out of their pockets as gas goes up.

The distance to travel is a huge issue. People have to go for medical. It's not a luxury. Travel is not just a luxury in the District of Placentia - St. Mary's, it is mandatory. It is a necessity. A lot of people go back and forth to St. John's for work and, you know, you've got to pay. You're constantly going to the fuel pumps paying for your gas.

Like I said, groceries are going up and we really can't afford for groceries to go much higher, Mr. Speaker. We really can't.

Another colleague here said we shouldn't be talking about Muskrat Falls. Well, we do need to talk about Muskrat Falls because we do need to talk about facts and Muskrat Falls is a fact. It's a reality. It's a cost and 2030 is not that far away – four years away – and we're going to have to deal with the rate mitigation again. A lot of people forget about that because we're dealing with it and we're addressing it, but in 2030 that's going to be an issue.

As we continue to debate Bill 5 here today, it's a good thing, there's no doubt. The government putting this in permanently is a good thing, but it's not going to change people's lives. It is absolutely not going to change their lives. It would change their lives if it went back on, it would make them

a lot worse, but it's not going to make them better.

Like I said, the money that they're going to receive from the price of oil going up will allow them to make people's lives a bit better and we will be looking for that in the new provincial budget. We will be expecting it and we'll be looking for measures that line up with the Blue Book.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Good morning, Speaker.

This is my first time getting up, standing and talking on a bill, so it's very exciting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Let's talk about the rural reality of the Northern Peninsula, my district.

The travel to the Northern Peninsula is long, it's a long road and this is where high prices on gas do affect the Northern Peninsula, the people in the district. Lowering the tax on gas and diesel is going to be a big impact for the communities, the families and seniors up there.

I know, for example, I have friends and family up there that recently had a baby and living in St. Anthony on the Northern Peninsula. Okay, you have a baby. It's not like you live in a city. You need a stroller, you need a playpen, you need diapers, you need a lot of essentials. What happens is you have to travel; you have to travel to Corner Brook. You can buy some things on the Northern Peninsula, but there are not a lot of options. When you do, it does cost more and the reason being is because of

fuel. This gas tax is going to bring down the cost on the fuel.

I know from experience, I've worked at a gas station. I was actually the first female gas attendant on the Northern Peninsula.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: So I know personally that gas goes up and down and up and down, daily and weekly. So you can't predict where the gas prices are going to be because it's based on the economy and everything that's going on globally. But there is one thing that we can do, as our new government, is to reduce that gas tax permanently, being the lowest in Canada for gas and the second for diesel.

I also want to mention, too, when I was going around knocking on doors, I was talking to a lot of seniors. There are a lot of seniors on the Northern Peninsula and there was one family that stuck out to me a lot. It was a couple, I'd say they were in their late 70s and they were living cheque to cheque. They needed their bridge fixed and they needed their roof fixed but they never had the money to do it.

Everything comes back to gas because everything up there is affected by gas and this is going to be a big impact on the cost of things that are available because the cost of living up on the Northern Peninsula – the fuel prices, the prices affect everything from groceries to construction material, tourism, transportation, small business operators and when gas goes up, the cost of living goes up. This gas tax is going to change that for a lot of people on the Northern Peninsula.

Being the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts; and Recreation, and coming from a district that relies on the tourism industry, I've been involved in the tourism industry ever since I was a teenager and I worked at the Grenfell Historical Society, as a tour guide. I've met thousands and tens of thousands of tourists,

visitors coming here and a lot of them come off the cruise ships. A lot of people coming off cruise ships don't spend a lot of money, but there is money that comes in from the ports and it's advertising because a lot of people who come to the Island on the cruise ship, return. So when they do return, they face the cost of fuel.

I think a lot of people, they plan their trip to the province and they don't realize how big the province is. I know people that come here for a week. They want to go from St. Anthony to the top of Labrador, to St. John's and everywhere, and they're like, I can't do it in a week. You can't do it. So they plan their trip and then they come back again.

So fuel does play a big role here because I know there are people who are like: the Northern Peninsula, it's pretty far up there, right? What do we have? Well, we have L'Anse aux Meadows, the Viking settlement – people loves it. They come up and they dress up with their hats on and they're dancing around. They come up for the feasts at the Lightkeeper's Café and then they discover other things while they're there. We have the Northland Discovery Boat Tour, there are outfitters in the summer and the winter and the restaurants – there is a new restaurant that opened in Port Saunders there just a few days ago. There was a church that was redone and turned into a little suite so you can go up.

Right now, in Port Saunders, all the seals came in there last week. The seals came in the bay and they all had their baby pups. There are whitecoats everywhere up there and people are coming from all over just to go to the Northern Peninsula. They're not really thinking about the gas. They're thinking about the baby seals, and they loves it.

But it all comes back to gas. Like I said, when I was at the gas station years ago, it was going up and down then; it's going up and down now. I had people coming up, they wanted \$5 worth of gas because that's

all they could afford, because they wanted to get to work.

Then you talk about work. Well, St. Anthony has a lot of industry and that on the Northern Peninsula, so there are people that drive an hour, drive two hours to get to St. Anthony to work.

So, again, the gas tax is going to help the people there, the workers. It's helping new families. It's helping seniors. It's helping workers. It's helping with people that have tourism industries, truck drivers, fishing vessels. Delivery services are all impacted. Small businesses already operate on a tight margin. So I see this as a positive change. The fuel tax increases their costs and it can slow economic growth in rural regions.

In all fairness, rural Canadians should not be penalized by their geography, so bringing this in is going to be huge. It's going to be huge for the Northern Peninsula. It's going to help. The Progressive Conservative government here, we're all about making things more affordable, lowering taxes and this is where it all plays in.

We know that the Newfoundland and Labrador tourism industry is one of the most valuable assets contributing right now to our economy – \$1.4 billion to the economy annually and employing over 20,000 people. You have 20,000 people in the province that are involved in tourism, that's 10 per cent of the working class. They're all affected by the gas tax.

I just think this is a positive change to make this permanent and I am for this 100 per cent. I loves it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's great to be able to stand here today in this hon. House representing the wonderful people of the District of Burin - Grand Bank.

Yes, there's a lot of talk in my district, as in all of our districts, about the high cost of fuel at the pumps. I guess the other part of that is, in talking to people in my district, the cost of buying an electric vehicle is still very high. There are not enough charger stations on the Island, especially in my district and the whole of the Burin Peninsula to sustain that kind of buying by our residents. So when you look at it, it's something that we're going to be stuck with for a long time.

We have to look at as well, I mean, out on the Burin Peninsula I get a lot of feedback on the cost of living. Of course, what we're doing here in the House, with this bill, is certainly going to put a lot of people at ease. As my colleagues have already spoken to in this House, they won't see any difference tomorrow or the next day in the cost of fuel, but there will be a sense of relief when it becomes permanent. That was something that this government had planned to do anyways, but it's still good to have it done

We've got to look at the affordability as well, and a lot of people today have mentioned seniors. I speak to seniors a lot. I go to all the seniors' events in my district. I've gone to the 50+ Federation meetings and annual conferences and so on and I speak to a lot of seniors. Cost of living is certainly something that they feel is very, very important and, you know, they are impacted.

As I've talked about in the House the last time, I think, I stood, I talked about a family that needs house repairs. Because of the regulations around how much funding you can get if you need to do a house repair and you qualify, you look at \$500 and then you have to wait seven years to get more funding, and that's wrong. That's something that we intended to look at, and I hope it's going to be looked at in this year's budget,

is that we look at increasing thresholds for our seniors.

When I think back to my days at CSSD, I think about the Opposition at that time and the way we talked about trying to help people who are less fortunate in our community. We talked about families and we talked about increasing the income for families. We brought in the school food programs, which certainly was a big help. Changes to the Child Benefit rates, certainly something that we were very proud of. Persons with disabilities, what a great thing that was. Like, \$400 per month for persons with disabilities. Another \$100 for the disability tax credit. Absolutely wonderful and very well received.

We have to make a difference in everybody's lives, but especially those who are homeless. We did a lot of work there. We created a lot more spaces there for our homeless people and we're seeing a difference now. We didn't see any encampments this year, and that was due to the fact that we put a lot of time and energy and funding into making sure that wouldn't happen.

We increased the benefits for those on income support. For example, if you're living with someone and that person was receiving social supports, then there would be no clawbacks and so on. We increased the actual rates for those people that were single and living with other people, paying rent and so on. We did a lot of work there, and it's something that this government is very proud of, and we should be.

The whole idea around child care, just think about it. I know families that have three children in child care – \$30 a day, \$150 a week, it's phenomenal. It's making such a difference in the lives of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is. It allows people to go to work.

The problem is, as I see it, I live in rural Newfoundland and we don't have enough of

those seats in rural Newfoundland. I know people, for example, that work in the fish plant, husband-and-wife teams working in fish plants. When the plant opens, when they have to get child care, they have to go to a home environment or get somebody to come in to look after their child. We don't help them, but they have to go to work. A large portion of their salaries go back to help child care. That cycle has to stop somehow. We need more child care spaces in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Oil to Electric, you know, great program – I know a lot of people in my district have switched from oil to electric, and they love it. In most cases, the \$22,000 covers it, covers the cost, but for our seniors and people with older homes, the first thing that has to happen is they have to upgrade their electrical, which adds another \$6,000 to \$8,000, on average, to the cost.

So even though this program is a great program, and us, with the federal government, are doing wonderful things for people who need it, but it's not helping those people who don't have that \$6,000 to \$8,000 to put into it. We still have people that rely on oil only, and would love to switch. Thinks there would be nothing better than being able to switch, but they can't. We need to take care of those people.

Keeping our seniors at home, so important – so important. I know we all know people that say, listen, I'm not going into a home. I'm staying in my own home. This is where my husband and I or my wife and I lived, and this is where I want to stay. This is where I feel most comfortable. I can have my family in to visit. This is what they want. And that's what we want. We want that for everyone.

But the cost of that is hurting our seniors to no end – the cost. Because if you get home care, there's a contribution that has to be made. I know people that have 30 hours of home care a week, that are paying upwards of \$800 a month. We need to intervene

there. I know people that have loved ones in long-term care units, long-term care facilities in my district – actually, I read a letter from one this morning – that are being charged \$800 to \$900 a month.

Now, just think about it. You and your partner are living together. You have an annual income, both of you, and that takes care of you, of your bills, of your heat bills, of your gas bills, it takes care of all of that. But all of a sudden one of you have got to go into a home. When you go into the home, to a long-term care facility, you have to pay upwards to \$800, \$900 per month to have your loved one there. So all of a sudden your ability to stay in your own house is undermined. It's something you can't afford to do. You can't afford to stay there.

Plus, these long-term care facilities that exist in rural Newfoundland, they're probably an hour's drive or longer from your home to that facility. You can't afford to get there with the price of gas today. Instead of going to see your loved one every second day or every day, you've got to cut it back to twice a week. That's not right. It's not right.

With this windfall that we are now receiving, government is receiving because of the high price of gas, we should put that directly back into helping these people, right away, today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Not wait for the budget, today.

We also know and talk about tourism in our great province. It's going to have a big impact and we have so many not-for-profits and actual businesses that rely on the tourism industry. We have so many. We need to bring the price of fuel to a level that people will be able to travel around our province.

Our province is vast. For me, for example, I have 21 communities in my district. It takes

me a day to go around to these communities. It takes me a day. If our parks are going to be full this summer, then we're going to need to look at fuel prices, because you won't be able to afford to tow a trailer behind your vehicle, for sure.

In St. Lawrence where I live, we have a mine. The mine has been working and it's hiring people from not only St. Lawrence and the Burin Peninsula, but all over the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and through the rest of Canada. They are feeling the pinch of the fuel increases. They budgeted for this year on a certain level of gas, the same as everybody else, even in your own household, but they've budgeted for fuel. What is going to happen now? Will they have to do layoffs at that mine in order to pay the high cost of fuel? Will the actual production be affected, so they are going to lose profits?

We have to consider all of those. It is not only mining, it's all of industry, but we're going to have to take a look at that as well.

Our towns, we're going to have to look at probably increasing our MOGs. Why not increase the MOG if costs are going up for towns? A lot of our towns right now are struggling with the cost of living, but maybe we might have to look at the MOGs to adjust them with the fuel increases. I'm sure the minister is already thinking about that.

I think this bill is a good bill and I will certainly be supporting it. I thank you for the opportunity to go on record as well today to speak to this very important issue.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure here to stand up and represent the fine folks of Labrador West again.

Speaker, with every tax reduction measure like gas tax, personal income tax that our government is going to offer, it will be quite welcome in Labrador West.

Everybody has been here the last couple of days talking about the cost of living, the price of gas and that. There's a quote that says it's a little more in Labrador. That quote is no good anymore; it's a lot more in Labrador now than what it used to be, an awful lot more.

I'll just give you some examples. I don't know what a piece of two by four costs here in St. John's, but in Labrador West it's \$7. A piece of two by six by eight is \$13.52. I goes over to the gas station – I'll reverse that. I go to the grocery store to get a steak, it's \$30. I go over and fill up my 20-pound propane tank at the gas station, it's \$44 for 20 pounds. Out here, you can go to Costco and get it for \$14. It's crazy, the cost of everything.

I was putting down an ice rink a couple of weeks ago in my front yard. I went over to RONA, looking at a tarp, a 50-by-30 tarp. I looked on the website and it said \$66. When I went up to the checkout I said, you're punching in \$129; it says \$66 on the website. The attendant looked at me, she said, Sir, you're on the Halifax website. I felt (inaudible) for a minute, a little bit stunned. Again, \$66 in Halifax and \$129 in Lab West, that's what the price of fuel is doing for everything to come in over the highway from either Quebec to come into Lab West or even Goose Bay. The prices are outrageous in Lab West.

As I said the other day, people are coming out for medical appointments, out of Lab West, and it costs them \$1,700 for airline tickets. It's really no cheaper to drive, when you look at it. The price of gas this morning in Lab West is \$1.75. In Port Hope

Simpson, it's probably over \$2 today. I just tried to look it up but I couldn't find it. It's usually 30 to 40 cents higher than Lab West. If we're driving out through Quebec, we get out to Gabriel, it's \$2.10 out there this morning. So it's really expensive, driving or flying, it don't matter. The price of everything in Lab West is outrageous.

Recreation – the cheapest recreation activity you can do now in Lab West is skiing. You don't have to put no gas in skis. So that's the cheapest thing. Like my colleague from Lake Melville said the other day, we're all out skidoing. We don't have one Ski-Doo. Everybody in your family has a Ski-Doo. I got four Ski-Doos. The MHA from Lake Melville probably got three or four. It's not just one Ski-Doo you're driving, your whole family is driving a Ski-Doo. Two weeks ago, when I was back in Labrador West, I filled up a five-litre gas can for \$33. If I was to go to the gas station this morning to fill up that same can, it would cost me \$47. Big difference in the last two weeks where the price of fuel has gone.

Every Thursday in Lab West, it's like we've got a forest fire. Everybody's over at the gas station waiting to see what the price of gas is going to be, see if it's going up or down, whether they're going to fill up. It's really crazy. The cost of rent in Labrador West has gone extremely high in the last three or four years. It's gone from \$1,500 – there are people now paying \$3,500, just for a month's rent, one- and two-bedroom apartments. So like I said, the cost of living is a lot more in Labrador than it is on the Island. People just can't afford to live in Labrador West, unless we do get tax relief that our government is willing to offer.

I won't take up much more time, Speaker. I just sat back here the last couple days listening to everybody talking about the cost of living around the Island. I know Minister Barbour said it's expensive to get to the Northern Peninsula, which it is. Our colleague across the floor, it's expensive to get out to Burgeo and that.

We get all that in Labrador. But still, when it comes to Labrador when you're trying to travel, either flying or driving, it doesn't matter, it's really expensive at the end of the day. So I just wanted to throw that out there to let everybody in this House know what actually the cost of living is in Labrador and how much more it is than here on the Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

What a tremendous privilege it always is for me to stand and speak on behalf of all of the fabulous residents, my constituents, who just put me back to work for them for the fifth time, since I ran the first time in 2013, the people of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair. I always try to do my best to be a voice for them.

As we continue on in second reading, Speaker, of Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2, the whole focus is on amending the *Revenue Administration Act* to maintain – to maintain, not new, not bring in something that wasn't there, but something we're going to maintain that's been around since budget '22, but there's so much discussion and debate in the House around the cost of going to and from.

I just had the honour really of being in Labrador, in the heart of the Big Land again for a few days. We've got the Labrador Winter Games happening there; it happens every three years. We're not without our challenges in Labrador, but I'll tell you the Winter Games brings Labrador together like no other event that I have ever, ever seen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: So there's so much spirit, there's so much comradery, but it comes with a cost. In order to participate, some of these little, tiny communities – we had communities walk into the arena on Sunday evening that had like three and four people on their team. When you're coming up against larger communities like Labrador West, like Lab City or Wabush or Goose Bay, then you see little communities like West St. Modeste in the Straits and some of them, like the little, tiny Town of Pinware, bringing home a medal just a couple of days ago, there's a lot of pride in that.

However, Speaker, there's also a cost, as we've heard, to living in Labrador. I was thinking last summer when the fires were on and we were out in Central and somebody said to me – it might have been our leader. It was pretty late at night and he said, I think we'll drive back to Gander for the night; are you good to go another hour? I said: Go another hour? Where I live, I drive three hours to get my hair cut. That really is the reality. That wasn't a joke, Speaker. Like I live in Charlottetown, it's about three hours to the Straits where I go for that.

But it's a huge cost to living there. So if you live in Red Bay and you have an appointment in Forteau, if you have an X-ray in Forteau, you're driving about 65 kilometres each way to go for that appointment. If you are living in Southeast now – and we're very thankful for the road, it's allowing a lot of people to go toward Goose Bay for their chemo and their radiation and things like that, but you're looking at 800, 900 kilometres, Speaker, on the road of driving to get there for that and back.

We heard a lot about the cost of gas at the pumps. The Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows talked about it's going up and down; it's going up and down; it's having impact. Well, as my colleagues, and my colleague from the North Coast in particular

would know, where we live, once the last supply of fuel comes in in the fall, our prices are suspended. The locals would call it frozen, and we're frozen for the winter.

Recently, that was a break when prices went up on the Island and we were locked in; however, we've gone through some really, really difficult times when that price is locked in and then all winter, you're seeing the price drop on the Island. Week over week over week, you're seeing the price drop, and we're still paying the same. We're pretty much down to one supplier.

On the Island, places like St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, they would come under the new harbour pricing market. Literally, the PUB, the regulator, follows what happens with that pricing, but we don't have that where we live. So that's always been a bone of contention. I think it happened – there were folks that went to John Hickey at the time, as I recall that bit of history, and lobbied to say we want the prices locked in. In all honesty, the supplier is carrying huge inventory, so there's a risk. If you're carrying a monumental amount of inventory, and you buy for this much money, you can't sell and stay in business if you're going to sell it at a loss. So that is different for us.

Another thing that's different, my colleague talked about the benefit of the heat pumps. Because all of the communities that I represent are on diesel-generated stations – in the Labrador Straits, we are linked into Robinson Lake, we get a little bit from Quebec, but with the really dry, hot weather that we've had lately, we are mostly on diesel, so we don't qualify.

So that's really difficult when you have, in particular, seniors reaching out all the time, regular basis, every other day; but that money as I understand it, comes from the federal government and the criteria is attached. I have met with the past MP for Labrador on multiple occasions, and I've already met with this MP on probably three different occasions already, continuing to try

and lobby, advocate, be that voice, keep this file top of mind to say there has to be a way that the people in coastal communities in Labrador can be eligible for those heat pumps.

Speaker, I mentioned in budget '22 we did this. I was reflecting back to my time in CSSD when poverty reduction was under me, and I remember that I asked someone to tally. We recognized the cost of living to people, we recognized that we needed to do more with affordability measures and I asked staff one day, tabulate for me the total of what we're doing right now with affordability measures. At that time, we were investing \$286 million in affordability measures. I had been told by staff in the department at that time that that was the biggest investment ever in history, is where we were. I don't know where we are today if we were to tabulate the affordability measures, but that's what it was then, Speaker.

So I'm happy to see that this is being maintained. It is a good first step. We agree with that, it's a good first step. But where we disagree is that we believe there's more that can be done. We believe that the government can go further and, in a little while, we're going to suggest how we believe that they can go further, Speaker.

Folks on my team at least have heard me for years and years talk about Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe. My grandparents were well into their senior years when they took me in at four years old and I joined that large family and I was raised by my grandparents. So not just as a minister for almost 10 years, but even from my day when I got elected, every single thing that we did, I tried to look through the lens of how will this impact Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe.

That's the people, the people who blazed the trail for us, before us, who made life a little bit better in Labrador because of their work, because of their fight, because of their advocacy, fighting to be heard, to educate

the people of the province that life is different here. We live in a beautiful land, but it's very spread out and when you have a small population and a large land mass, there can be challenges governing and providing services.

So it's important that people like us that are elected to represent that area, that we explain to those around us some of those challenges. When I think about Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe, it's important that we are where we are. But whether they gassed up yesterday or whether they gassed up today, they're not seeing any change. So just to be clear that we are maintaining.

Speaker, I think that's all I'm going to have to say right now. This reduction is not new, but I am really happy to see us continue with this. With that, I'll take my place right now.

Thank you for the opportunity.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I always say I'm going to be brief and then I run out of time.

I feel I couldn't let the opportunity pass me by to talk about the price of fuel and I guess the taking off the tax and making it permanent and what that can do for our community, Speaker. But for me is, historically, in Labrador, Labradorians always paid a higher price for gas and that's always been a sore point with people in Labrador.

In actual fact, Speaker, the most southern part of Labrador there, in the Straits, when you, cross from Labrador into the Northern Peninsula, even though I know the price can be high in the Northern Peninsula, it's always been significantly higher.

Labradorians always pay a higher price, and that's a big gap, Speaker.

When you look at the distance, the distance doesn't warrant the cost and, in my district, it's all brought in by ship as a bulk-fuel transfer into bulk tanks. So, Speaker, the way the fuel is moved, for my communities, is probably the cheapest, most efficient way. We don't understand why our costs are so expensive. It's always been 30 to 50 cents more a litre than other regions, especially on the Island. So, for us, it causes a barrier to transportation.

More importantly, what's transportation? What's the value of transportation? Because the value of transportation, in my communities in Northern Labrador, is significant. It impacts people's lives because when you gas up your Ski-Doo, as the Member of Lab West talked about – I, Speaker, have a Polaris. I'm not a proud Polaris owner. It's not like cheering for the Montreal Canadiens, you know, where you put a lot of value.

At the end of the day, in my district, a snowmobile is not a luxury item. It's not a toy. It's not something used for sports. A snowmobile is the way we get around for a large percentage of the year; it's how we travel. When we get on our snowmobile, we could be going down to the store or we can be going out into the wilderness to access food from another store – natural environment, hunting and fishing.

For us, being able to gas up our snowmobile or, in the summer, gas up the speed boat is a way for us to access food. We need actually to be able to travel to access food because the cost of food in the stores is very, very expensive. People can't afford to live off store-bought food. As my mother would say, even if we could live off it, even if we could afford to buy it, we don't want to live off of store-bought food. We want to be able to access fish, salmon, things from the marine environment, also

partridges, rabbits – and one of the biggest things we relied on was caribou.

Our communities were much healthier and had better food security when we could access caribou. We did that by snowmobile. So why is that important? For us, it's about food security but also if you're not food secure, it creates stress in the household. So being able to afford that gas, being able to afford the gas to put in your snowmobile or put in your speedboat in Northern Labrador has a different meaning than most places in our province.

It's about being able to access food, especially healthy food from the natural environment, improves your physical health. But being stressed about not being able to afford to access the natural food impacts mental health. Also, it impacts families. It impacts the Elders in the house, it impacts the children in the house and it impacts the adults in the House, Speaker. So it's very, very important, the cost of food.

The cost of food is impacted by the cost of gasoline. So, for us, any reduction in gas prices is greatly welcomed. For us looking forward, to have this tax permanently taken off is going to mean a lot to people in my district. We're very pleased to have the security of knowing that it's been removed.

Speaker, also I just need to talk a little bit about the social determinants of health as being the Minister of Health. We talk a lot about the social determinants of health. In order for people and families and communities and regions to be healthy, we have to make sure they have access to healthy food. That's a huge important part, but also there are other factors.

The Health Accord talks about social determinants of health because Indigenous people – and my communities in my district the people are all Indigenous. I've got an Innu community and then I've got five Inuit communities. Indigenous people are impacted when it comes to all the factors

that actually determine their quality of health. That's right there in the Health Accord. That's why we always advocate for the social determinants of health.

Speaker, also, there are social factors that impact their health: being able to see relatives, being able to actually have social connections. Actually, the price of gasoline impacts the social connections in my community. A lot of families and friends live in different communities and we would like a road so we could drive to the other communities, but we don't have a road that connects us. We're not connected to the Trans-Labrador Highway, Speaker.

It's so important for people to be able to gas up their snowmobile, be able to gas up their speedboat, so they can actually communicate to the different communities and actually have that social connections with their friends and their relatives. That impacts mental health, Speaker.

Being able to go off to your cabin is a thing that everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador can relate to. A lot of times going off is not just going to your cabin or going off and putting up a tent and being out in the wilderness for social benefit. For us, a lot of times it's food gathering. Also, the benefits of that, Speaker, that involves social determinants of health, is being able to have the ability to do that.

We were raised with going off – normally, it would be me and my four siblings, it would be my cousin and it would be some of my other relatives and a few other friends. When we used to go off, we'd go off for probably two weeks or three weeks and we'd go off and we'd live in this great, big tent. First, we had a couple of smaller tents. My father secured a great, big tent and there'd be like 14, maybe 17 of us, in a great, big tent – many ages, three up to probably somebody in their 80s, living in the tent.

Other people would come visiting us because they would be out as well. We would actually be going in the fall – actually it wasn't in the fall; it would be like in August. We would be getting all our char, our brook trout, our salmon, the seals – because certain seals are in different regions and the rivers was where we'd like to get ranger seal because that was the better meat and it was actually a more tastier meat.

Speaker, we'd also probably get a few jumpers, some porpoises, the marine mammals, but that's what we did. We didn't call it hunting when we were going off, when we were going 'southard', as we'd call it, we go south; we would call it bakeapple picking. In our family, we'd call it bakeapple picking time, but we wouldn't have those memories if we couldn't afford to go. The only way we could afford to go is if you could afford to put the gas in your speedboat. It's very, very important.

So that was not only about accessing nutritious food for health; it was about the social gathering, the social sharing and building of communities and families. Because those relatives that went off with me, they were just the same as my siblings. I got cousins, now, that I think of as brothers and sisters because of that sharing. It wasn't just coastal Labrador; some of those relatives came from Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The memories we have last a lifetime.

At the end of the day, when you talk about gasoline, it's not just about the convenience of putting it in your car and going to the store or going on a trip. The convenience of being able to afford the gas is about being able to live your life, being able to travel, being able to pick up your kids at school. Speaker, for us, in different parts of the province, like rural Newfoundland and Labrador, it's about the ability to do the fishing and the hunting that we don't just want to do, we need to do, to be able to have quality of life. In actual fact, I can say that taking this tax off is improving the

quality of life of most of the people in this province, Speaker. That's very important.

Another thing I just wanted to bring up is, for us, there's another layer. Like I said, I could go on all day, there are so many layers, living in Northern Labrador. The cost of electricity, right now, I think is 21.1 cents a kilowatt hour. I used to bring up the price of electricity. When I first got elected, it was 18.5 cents a kilowatt hour and on the Island it was 12.2 cents a kilowatt hour. Everybody on the Island really was shocked when I say 18.5 cents. Then we saw it go up to nineteen-point-something and now it's up to 21.1 cents a kilowatt hour.

Speaker, how can you heat your home at 21.1 cents a kilowatt hour? Now, what happens if that home is up in Northern Labrador where the winters can get down to minus 30, especially with the wind chill? And we're seeing that. Some of the benefits that we struggle with, when it comes to climate change, is when the winters are not as cold.

Speaker, do you know something? Heating your house when it's minus 20 and heating your house when it's minus 30, not much of a difference. You still need to have the thermostat cranked up if you're burning electricity in your heaters, or if you're lucky enough to have a mini-split, but most families in Northern Labrador can't rely on electricity to heat their house because it's so expensive.

So what do you do? You've got to put the gasoline in the Ski-Doo. You've got to put the gasoline in the chainsaw. Then you've got to go off into the woods and cut the wood. Cut it up, bring it back to the community, chop it up and bring into the house.

Speaker, I have to tell you now, being able to do that is so important, but the price of gasoline has drove up the cost of wood, the cost of going off and getting wood. There are a lot of people in my communities, when

I complain about the price of electricity, who don't have the physical ability, first off, to go off and get the wood. They don't have the physical ability to chop it up. They don't have the physical ability even to bring it in the house, and I'm talking about a lot of seniors. A lot of seniors in my district live alone.

That's a barrier. So they have to pay somebody in the community, or they have to rely on their family members to be able to put the gas in the Ski-Doo to go off and to gather the wood so that they can live in a house that's not too cold. For me, when I look at the price of gasoline, I'm also looking at the fact that this helping people to be able to heat their houses – quality of life, Speaker.

When they can heat their house and it doesn't cost so much, they have a little bit more money to spend on other things, like food. Sometimes I just think I'm going to start laughing and not stop, and it's not funny. It's kind of like a little bit of hysterical laugh, because I don't know how people are making ends meet, when we look at that, when we look the price of food.

It's all related and this government here, just newly elected, said one of the things were going to do is we're going to make life more affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This is a big thing. This is sending a signal to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we want to make life more affordable for the people in the province.

Also, it can't be just about certain regions. We can't cater to urban. We can't. We saw what happens when a government or a party caters to urban. We have to make sure that rural Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are being able to access services. We have to make sure that rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador are treated fairly. The least that we can do is make sure that they can afford to have

access to food and that they can afford to keep their houses.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about hauling wood. Because when I used to talk about the cost of electricity and I'd talk about hauling wood, a group of the population seriously impacted are women. Now, we have a lot of women in Northern Labrador who can actually go off and haul wood, cut wood. Sometimes they do it in partnership with a male, whether it's their husband or their boyfriend or some relative, but there are a lot of women out there that can actually haul wood. At the end of the day, Speaker, it's not every woman who can actually be able to go out and haul wood, so they have to be able to purchase wood. This reduction in tax is helping them. It's helping everybody who can't actually haul wood in Northern Labrador.

Speaker, when I talk about hauling wood, like in my communities of Hopedale and Nain, to go off and get wood, it would take about four hours. The wood is far away and they got to put gas in the snowmobile and drive out, cut the wood and haul it back. So we're looking at probably four hours. That's not going around cutting the wood. If the wood is scarce in certain regions, they have to go to multiple places, Speaker, to drive off.

I remember a conversation I had with a woman who's not that much older than me. Her partner, her husband, she was worried about him and she was kind of whispering to me and she was saying, Lela, I'm really starting to get worried about him now because he's having problems with his eyesight. It's not necessarily that he can't see; it's the night blindness. As people get older, sometimes they develop what they call night blindness.

The problem is he is up in Northern Labrador and there's such a small window in the middle of the winter for daylight. He'd

get up 4 in the morning to get ready so that he could go out at a certain time so he'd have the darkness when he was going out with an empty komatik. The most important thing for him is so he could chop the wood, cut the wood while it was daylight, and be able to haul it back while it was still daylight. Because if he ran into a problem, driving, with his night blindness, he could have a serious accident or injury. Also, just being able to navigate if he broke down, with the darkness, just being able to fix his machine or if he had to walk back.

Speaker, there are many things that impact the life of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the things we talk about is the huge geography and the beautiful land, and the fact that there is so much diversity in Newfoundland and Labrador. Do you know something, Speaker? Diversity is one thing, but we have to make sure that we're addressing the needs of people in Newfoundland and Labrador and that we're doing what we can. The gas tax impacts everybody. It's not just people who have an automobile. It's not just people who can drive a Ski-Doo. It's basically for the services. If you have to buy a load of wood, it's going to be more expensive if the gas tax is put on it.

The thing about it is I'm really, really grateful for this but, more importantly, it sends a strong message that we're serious about making life more affordable for every Newfoundlander and Labradorian in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm actually going to take the last minute and a half and talk a little bit about offshore. Growing up, David Suzuki was a huge hero of mine, and I'd always wonder what he thought about me driving around in a pickup truck. At the end of the day, for me, and just looking at our debt and looking at the health needs across the province, looking at physical health needs, mental health needs, looking at air ambulance, ground ambulance, looking at access to family doctors, access to family care teams,

access to health care, the thing about it is the burden of cost to this province is great. For me, I will never apologize with having an offshore industry that can make health care affordable for people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: If we don't have access to that revenue, we are in great peril. So, for me, I will always defend investment for something that can generate so much revenue, not just in terms of taxes, but in terms of jobs, employment and security for not just individuals, but for families and communities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I would be remiss if I didn't begin my remarks to this House today without referencing an incident that happened in the community of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's yesterday – and there is relevance to the bill – and I talking about the fire that destroyed a business and put almost two dozen people out of work. I want to give a shout-out to the volunteer fire department from Portugal Cove-St. Philip's.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: I would also like to extend a special thanks, as well, to the volunteer fire department from Pouch Cove and from Torbay who showed up on the scene, as well from St. John's Regional Fire Department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: Speaker, it was a very tense situation there. I arrived shortly after the fire was noticed and spent most of the morning there and I watched these firefighters, as I did, as a former member of media, do what they do best. They tried to save the building. Unfortunately, they were unable to.

As I watched the fire yesterday, from this standpoint, as an MHA representing the people, most of whom work at the building, who live in the community that I represent, I thought about the fact that they are now going to wake up and be unemployed, that they don't have a job. They have to go on Employment Insurance or try to find another job at reduced pay on Employment Insurance and how an impact like the price of gas or buying food or anything would impact them directly.

It's funny because I was texting with some of my colleagues who were watching some of the threads going back and forth and we were also talking about what we would be doing in the House of Assembly yesterday and it would be talking about the gas bill. I thought about that when I looked around and I saw all these volunteer fire departments there, with their very expensive equipment and generators and all these vehicles, about 30 of them, not including the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and their vehicles there, the RNC with their vehicles and the price of gas to go in all those vehicles and what it would cost. That was just that one little snapshot, and to think about the people now who are unemployed today because that business is no longer standing because of the fire and how that will impact them and the price of gas.

I just wanted to put that on the record. I know that the people who owned that business, that building, and separate from the restaurant that burned, there was a food processing facility about to open downstairs which would have employed more people. These folks have put their heart and soul into this for the last four or five years and, of course, there will be talks with the insurance

companies now to find out whether or not they can rebuild. I hope they will because it was a focal point of our community and it's a great loss to Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

Again, thank you first of all to all the firefighters who showed up from the stations that I referenced.

It was interesting, Mr. Speaker, to hear over the last couple of days – and I didn't intend originally to speak on this bill, but I do like to hear and I try to listen as much as possible. Some of us get a little bit of other work done while we're here, but I listened as much as I can. It is a learning experience to hear the experiences of people from other parts of our province and what they have to go through. It makes us, as decision-makers, in here and how you vote and how you can sometimes, if you will, in a court case, listen to a jury and evidence and, from one minute to the next, you might change how you think about a certain thing. In this case it would be a bill, on whether or not to permanently reduce the price of gas.

I do want to say on the record – and I'm not trying to be overly political on this, but this is something that was done four years ago. Our government did this four years ago. Because we understood, coming out of COVID, the exorbitant cost increases in everything. I think the Finance Minister referenced yesterday the cost in terms of the revenue is about \$80 million. Now, that fluctuates obviously because of the price of gas and you can't put a number on it every day; it would be a different number. But it's tens of millions of dollars in lost potential revenue, taxation. It's also why our government eliminated the tax on home insurance, understanding that people were struggling. It's also why we reduced the cost of registering your vehicle from \$160 to \$80. This was all done back in 2022.

Again, not to be political, but the fact remains that every year in our province, the Finance Minister has to write a cheque for

almost \$500 million to mitigate rates on electricity to pay for Muskrat Falls. Without that money, whatever government is paying it and whoever is responsible for building it, we still have to pay that money. Otherwise, a person's electricity bill would have gone from \$300, if that was their average bill, to about \$527. We have to continue to do that until rate mitigation ends in 2030 and then we have to figure out where we're going to get the money so that each and every resident, represented by the folks here, across Newfoundland and Labrador don't see an almost doubling of their electricity rate.

The costs and the pressures on people – and I say this, and my wife and I talk about this so often, and we're privileged to be able to go to the supermarket and buy food. How do people who do not make a lot of money survive? How do they do it on a weekly basis if they have two or three children? As my colleague mentioned this morning, three children in daycare, \$30 a day, which was the \$10-a-day daycare which was adopted by the previous government. Again, recognizing the need for people, if they have to make a choice whether or not it's worth their while to go back to work, a mother or a father. Would one parent have to stay home because they couldn't afford daycare for three children?

Now to see the price of food has just skyrocketed over the last four or five years. I mean, we all heard, oh, it's because of COVID; it's because of supply chain. Well, COVID is long gone and the prices of food and other materials are through the roof.

The colleagues across the aisle here now, as ministers, will know, especially perhaps in Transportation and Infrastructure, the cost of building anything, the cost of paving a road, the costs are exorbitant and they keep going up. I thought about this again yesterday. As the ferry was coming across from Bell Island and docking at Portugal Cove last night, I was down there at about 7:30. Again, I thought about this, the price of

gas. People waiting in a lineup to get on the ferry, the cost of fuelling up the ferry, the cost of replacing ferries. It is so expensive to operate.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

F. HUTTON: Right. It's just continually going up and up for people.

I also want to talk about the fact that what we're doing here today – and I do support the bill, make it permanent, sure, but it's not going to actually provide any relief to anyone. So we need to be clear on that. The price does not change tomorrow because we pass a bill today. The price stays the same unless there is an interruption from the PUB, but the price of fuel will stay the same. It's not going down seven or eight cent a litre; it stays the same. We need to be clear on that.

So to say that people will see relief tomorrow is not accurate. The price will stay the same. As a matter of fact, the price could go up. Because if the PUB interrupts it or whatever happens geopolitically and the price of oil goes up, we'll be paying more. This is to make what we already did permanent and, again, I say we support it.

When I think about oil and gas – and I'm going to back up a little bit here – I go back to 1992. I started my career in media in the late '80s and, in 1992, you see things that you thought you would never see in your career. When they closed the fishery and 30,000 people were out of work overnight and you wonder, okay, how are those people going to get up the next morning and face the day? We weren't even thinking about fuel prices back then. I'd say gas prices were in the 30 or 40 cents a litre range. I don't know the exact price.

Fast-forward five years – and I was in the room, by the way, when John Crobie announced that the fishery would be closed. Five years later, I'm standing in a parking lot outside the same hotel in the office tower

next door where they gave out little barrels of oil – first oil for Hibernia. I think back to that day and I think about all the benefits this province has had because of oil and gas over the last three decades. Hibernia, Terra Nova, White Rose, Hebron, West White Rose and now, hopefully Bay du Nord, and the money that we get, the tens of billions of dollars in revenue from oil and gas and what it means to this province, in our ability to pave a road or to build a hospital or to pay teachers, to pay police officers, to pay everybody who works in government and to provide service to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and the benefits that oil and gas has brought to this province.

Now, as another Member has mentioned here today, from Burin - Grand Bank, we have oil at over \$100 a barrel. It will fluctuate, but is there a scale that we can do more than just keep it the same and give people an actual benefit?

I would support it right now. I'll tell you right now if you're going to maintain and continue with the reduction that's there, the eight cents a litre, the bill that we're debating but you want to drop it more, I'm pretty sure you'd have full agreement with everybody in this House because people need to feel some relief. They actually do need it. I know that every person in this House during the election campaign went around Newfoundland and Labrador, whatever district you're representing, and heard from people – the majority of people – that it's tough.

I don't know how young people are going to do it. I mean, we have four children and it's one of the things we always talk about. How are they going to be able to buy a house? How are they going to be able to have kids and afford to do this when the cost of living is so high? We heard it as well, which is why we took these steps to have rate mitigation, to take \$500 million. I mean, imagine what you could do with \$500 million

a year. The Finance Minister probably thinks about it every day.

As a reporter, through the late '90s and from, say, 2000 to 2020, in that area, every Finance minister I ever talked to and interviewed, one of the first things they ever did in the morning was to check the price of oil to see how that would impact the bottom line. It's a quick thing you can do on your phone right now. Back in 1997, it wasn't quite as easy but you did get information.

This is so important to us, but now that we have this windfall of prices, maybe there is an opportunity to explore where if the price drops again because it is a volatile commodity, bring it down again. It's something that people watch for. I mean, it's a news item all the time where they do interviews to say the price of gas is going to go up tomorrow, you'd better fill up tonight. Rush out and fill up your tank tonight so you'll save – well, last week it was 22 cents it went up over the last couple of weeks.

That's a big deal for a lot of people who can't afford it and they've got to make a choice between not going for a Sunday drive, whether or not they're going to go to work, or if they've got to bum a ride from somebody else to get to work or carpool. Maybe not such a bad idea for the environment but in Newfoundland and Labrador, as many of the MHAs here know, you're not going to jump on the subway and there are many districts here with no mass transit in this region. In my own community in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, there's no transit.

So, again, that could alleviate some housing issues because if you're a university student, you're not going to live in Portugal Cove if you don't have a car; or if you're somebody who's new to Canada, you can't live out there because you work in downtown St. John's and you don't have a ride. That is why we explored the opportunity of trying to get Metrobus to go through the Cove a couple of times a day,

back out Thorburn Road to the mall, get to these major points where people could get on and off.

So there are a couple of issues that you could solve there and housing could be one of them, open up more housing opportunities. Similarly, for my colleague from Cape St. Francis, we talked about this before, having busing service to communities outside there, where folks could open up housing options for people, for students or for people who just don't own a car, because it's expensive.

People, I'm sure, are making choices on whether or not they're going to continue to own a car. I know in my own district, I've heard from people who say they just can't do it and, oftentimes, are looking for ways to get around the community or to get to town to get their prescription picked up or do whatever it is they have to do, go about their daily business and getting to work.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of my thoughts, and I do appreciate the input from other colleagues from around Newfoundland and Labrador who talk about the experiences that they encounter or hear by email or by telephone, or by going door to door and listening to people, and that's what we need to do. I think what we need to do is listen to them and go beyond what we're going to do here today, which is just to keep the tax where it is already. Again, not to be political about it, it's already where it is and we're just going to solidify it. But can we do something more to actually help people today now that we have more money because of this windfall, if you will? It's unfortunate that the price of gas goes up, the government benefits, but people don't.

I will finish my comments today, Speaker, by saying that I do support this bill and I hope that the Members opposite will maybe look to see if there's something more we can do to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've sat here listening quite intently on what's been said over the last couple of days on this bill. The Opposition has impressed me; there's no doubt about it, they really have, and I don't say this in jest.

I almost wondered when we moved over from here if we left our speaking notes over there, because a lot of it is the same, but that's a good thing. It validates what we've been saying, but it also validates what we're hearing from the public. It validates that. So I'm happy to know that we're all on the same page, not that I had any doubt, but we're all on the same page when it comes to helping Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

One thing that I noticed we all seem to be having a problem with is temporary versus permanent. Temporary is a short-term solution with a defined endpoint; permanent is long-term solution with an endpoint that could occur at any time. I understand that, too.

But what's important here, in what we're doing today, is that April 1, we'll see no change and individuals will not see that tax go back on. That's essentially what's happening. That's what is happening and that does mean something. That means a lot to our residents out there, and we'll probably talk about a lot of it when we talk about our private Member's resolution later today.

Seniors, those on fixed incomes who know for certain they're not going to have

anymore money tomorrow or the next day – so anything we can do, as a government, to help ease that burden is a positive thing. They know that come April 1, they're not paying more for gas.

This is one step. This has been said. This is one step in many steps that we're going to have to take to make life more affordable and especially for those who are most vulnerable. That is our seniors, in many cases. We're approaching a province where almost one-third of our population are considered senior.

This gas tax or the price of gas, in general, affects everything. It affects everything: our cost of groceries, our cost of lumber to build houses, our cost of transportation. That's tacked on to everything. I guarantee the delivery drivers, whatever they pay in gas, gets tacked on to what they deliver.

We've heard the stories of seniors who have the heat on or have a plug-in mobile heater in one room because they can't afford to heat the rest of the house and they move that heater from room to room. That's a given. That actually happens. We know of seniors out there on prescriptions and drug plans, splitting and diluting their prescriptions because they can't afford them. The price of gas affects all that.

Single parents who have to try and keep their children in school, in activities, trying to keep up with the neighbours next door, that all costs money and the gas tax, the price of gas affects that immensely. We need to do everything and anything we can to make life more affordable for those – well, for all of us, no doubt, but for those most vulnerable. They're the ones who need it.

We've taken steps – raising the personal exemption reduces the amount of tax you pay out; eliminating the sugar tax is another step; and what we're doing today is another step. In our Blue Book, we're going to review all taxes and fees. We have to look at those fees. We know 10 years ago, when

government changed, we came in with 300 new taxes and levies, and we need to look at every one of those and see if they are truly needed or if there's a better alternative. Again, the price of gas affects the poverty line for a lot of us.

Now, a number of years ago, a previous Progressive Conservative government had a poverty reduction plan that was touted as the best in the country, and internationally, others recognized it. You actually saw, in a relatively quick time, the poverty line dropping. You actually saw that; reports indicated that. I know times change, but I guarantee you we are going to do everything and anything to replicate that agreement, but also to do better.

I think every one of us in this House, no matter what we do, we all need to do better. We all need to do better, and I'm sure we will.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: But when you're elected, you see people in your district, you talk to them, you hear from them, you see first-hand what's happening in your district and no two districts are alike. If the gas price goes up, I can drive up to the pump and I can tell you, do I know the gas went up? Yes. But does that stop me from filling my tank up? No, because we are privileged. We have the money in our bank. But if someone is there going in and putting \$5 in a tank, then you know they're struggling and they have to look at other ways of where they need to put their money.

Imagine, having to prioritize your necessities. I'm not talking about prioritizing the nice to have, but when people are out there prioritizing their necessities and figuring out, okay, what do I have today? Can I afford the heat? Can I afford my prescriptions? Can I afford to eat? Can I afford to drive? Well, first of all, many of them probably don't have a car, but can I afford to take transit?

These little steps may be minute to some, but are big to others. But it is a step. It's a step of many that we need to take. I think we're going to work with everyone in this House because I know we're all on the same wavelength. It's been said the last couple of days. Yes, there are some things we want and some things we don't.

I'd be quite honest with you, I know people want to take credit – we all do; we all like to have credit for what we did or didn't do, but my credit is in doing the right thing for the people. If it's making their lives better, that's all the recognition I need. I mean, with a good Opposition, we need it, but also good governance we need it. We're going to disagree and I'm glad we all agree on this, on continuing on with this tax cut, we'll say.

When April 1 comes, people will know that we're not seeing an increase anymore. Some people use status quo or whatever, but right now there's no change. There's no change happening April 1, because we've agreed – and I know when the vote happens, I can say we all agreed that this is a good thing. This is something we need to do.

As we move forward, with other bills and we have discussion and debate, I know, in the back of our heads, those decisions have to be made to make a difference for those who need us to make a difference for them.

I mentioned the other day when I stood, talking about having to work during a strike with Income Support. You don't know until you work in that. Again, I applaud our social workers for what they do on a regular basis. I don't know how they do it. I don't know how they can go home every night with a clear head, because there are some real people out there who are in desperate need of our support. It's just unfathomable when you think about it, these individuals out there.

I mean, we saw the Tent City. That didn't just happen. That was happening. It's just

they all came out and it became more visible. When you see these instances, then you become aware. But they're there all the time. We just don't recognize it, like we should.

We talk about the cost of fuel and my colleague here talked about the price of filling a propane tank. I know during that Tent City, actually my brother and I, we'd bring down propane tanks to them, something they never had. Because when you think about it, they were in the middle of the winter out there. Like, they can't afford any of that, \$11 or \$12 tank of propane from Costco. They can't afford that.

Those are the people that we got to think about, and our seniors – our seniors who started this province, who gave so much to this province. I think one of the Members across also spoke about home care. These are all things we need to be looking at, the cost of fuel, living on an Island affects everything. Like I said, we may not recognize it, but I guarantee you those who are on lower incomes, those who are struggling daily, they see the difference.

I remember last year getting up to speak on the cost of living and, on the way home, one of my daughters texted me and said, Dad, pick me up a salad for my lunch tomorrow. I said: Okay, what do you want? I try to eat salad but it doesn't work so often. But anyway, I went into the supermarket. I won't say because all supermarkets are the same. I'm looking at this single-serve salad. This was last year. This salad was mainly lettuce with a couple of cherry tomatoes in there. I guess you'd call it a garden salad; I don't know what it's called. Then you had a little pouch full of toast, croutons, and you might have picked up a ranch dressing packet. On the lettuce and tomato, \$14-and-something-cents. I couldn't believe it. But the point is that to produce that, to package that, to ship that, the price of gas and fuel is part of that.

We want to try and eat healthy, and it's costing you that? We talked about the sugar

tax; I've said it, you know it hasn't changed the consumption of a two-litre of Pepsi, or any soft drink for that matter. What we needed to do was reduce the cost of healthy food. I mean, the cost of a two-litre of milk is huge in comparison to a two-litre of soda. Those are some of the steps we need to take. I'm sure as we work through our poverty reduction plan, and work on that as we move forward, I'm certain that we'll include many of those in that.

I know it's approaching noon, so that's all I'm going to say today. I will speak more on our seniors PMR later.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, that debate be now adjourned.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the debate be now adjourned.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, that the House do now recess.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The House now stands in recess until 2 p.m.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Before I admit strangers, I just wanted to remind all Members that we have a scent-free policy here in the Chamber. We do have individuals in the Chamber with allergies and chemical sensitivities and so on, so I would ask for all Members' cooperation as it relates to that policy.

Thank you.

Are all House Leaders ready?

Admit strangers.

Today, in the public gallery, I would like to welcome individuals from Stella's Circle, which will be the subject of a Member's statement today. Welcome to Laura Winters, Sarah Mills and Jessica Lee-Middleman.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we have Member statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Burgeo - La Poile, Burin - Grand Bank, Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair and Corner Brook.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Speaker, today I rise to recognize the exceptional work of the Gateway Status of Women Council in Port aux Basques, an organization that has been a steadfast source of support, advocacy and empowerment for women and gender-diverse individuals across the Southwest Coast for 40-plus years.

Their work is grounded in compassion and community, offering guidance, counselling and a safe, judgment-free space for those facing difficult circumstances. Much of the support happens quietly and without recognition, yet its impact is profound.

This past weekend I was honoured to attend the Council's annual Bread and Roses Dinner, a gathering that brings the community together to celebrate International Women's Day and to honour the strength, resilience and leadership of women throughout the region.

Events like Bread and Roses come to life because dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters give their time and energy to create a space where women feel valued and uplifted. From crisis intervention to violence prevention programming and outreach across rural communities, the Gateway Status of Women Council continues to change lives every day.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in thanking the Gateway Status of Women Council for their unwavering commitment to equality, dignity and community strength.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, for several decades, Robert Parsons has been researching, writing and publishing the Maritime history and heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Based in his hometown of Grand Bank, one of the most viable communities once engaged in the bank fishery, Robert has documented the rise and fall of the wooden schooner era. Robert's research included archival newspapers, shipping lists, gravestones and interviews which provided details of ships lost and survivors. These hundreds of personal interviews provided the details he brought to achieve.

Robert has been called a prolific writer on the subject of Atlantic Canada's analysis in ship disasters. He has been an award winner of the annual Arts and Letter competition as well as the Polaris Award. One of his books, *Courting Disaster*, is a *Globe and Mail* Bestseller.

Since 1991, Robert has published 34 books with documents that range from sea stories, crime, the Newfoundland dog, community history, World War I and Cape Race. Robert has since retired from researching and writing but still receives information requests from all across Atlantic Canada. He answers those, by the way, immediately.

I ask you today to join me in congratulating a great Newfoundlander and Labradorian, a senior of distinction, Robert Parsons.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Speaker, I rise today to recognize two individuals from Heart's Content who are committed to preserving Newfoundland and Labrador heritage.

In 2023, Hank and Valerie Whalen moved to Heart's Content after purchasing the former Anglo-American Staff Houses. They saw great potential in this rural outport community and have since made it their home.

Their efforts did not stop there; they also purchased The Superintendent's House with renovations starting this summer, as well as the long-standing local business now known as The Cable House Market.

This business has operated in the town for more than 100 years. Following major renovations, including the removal of modern materials, the building has been restored to a heritage aesthetic featuring traditional clapboard and rustic-style shelving throughout the interior. In their words: This town is on the cusp of something beneficial to the entire region, and we consider it a privilege to revive these structures to their former grandeur.

Through their dedication they have created several local jobs while pursuing their vision of preserving the architecture and heritage of the region. I ask all Members of this House to join me in recognizing Hank and Valerie Whalen for their commitment to preserving our province's rich history and heritage.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I rise to congratulate the beautiful Town of Red Bay on receiving the 2026 Cruise Vision Award.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: As both the National Historic Site and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Red Bay stands as one of the most remarkable places in our region and across the country. Steeped in rich history and vibrant maritime culture, this small but mighty community continues to share its story with the world.

Tourism in Red Bay continues to grow each year. Visitors arrive by road, by air and increasingly by sea – 12 cruise ships last year, and at least 12 booked so far for this year – drawn by its unique heritage, breathtaking coastal beauty and the warm hospitality that defines this special place. In recent years, the number of cruise ship visits has steadily increased – an impressive achievement for a town of just 140 residents.

This award is a testament to the dedication, vision and hard work of community leaders, tourism operators, volunteers and residents who proudly showcase Red Bay and all it has to offer.

My hon. colleagues, please join me in congratulating everyone who helped make this recognition possible. Their efforts are ensuring Red Bay's remarkable story continues to be shared with visitors from around the world, and should be commended. As we prepare for the arrival of the nao *San Juan* from Pasaia, Spain in 2027, the future is only going to get much brighter for Red Bay.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize an event that has nurtured generations of musical talent in Western Newfoundland: the Corner Brook Rotary Music Festival.

For decades, this festival has provided young musicians, singers and performers with the opportunity to step onto the stage, share their abilities and grow in confidence. Students from Corner Brook and communities throughout the region spend months – I know this because of my children – preparing for this moment, guided

by dedicated teachers, families and mentors who believe in the power of music and the arts.

What makes this festival special is not just the performances, but the encouragement. Professional adjudicators offer thoughtful feedback, helping participants improve their craft while reminding them that their voices and talents matter.

Speaker, this festival is made possible through the leadership and service of the Corner Brook Rotary Club and an incredible network of volunteers who work behind the scenes to organize venues, schedules and events. Their commitment has created a tradition that continues to inspire young people year after year.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating everyone involved in another successful Corner Brook Rotary Music Festival.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate an outstanding local organization that helps adults facing barriers to fully participate in their community.

Stella's Circle is the most recent recipient of the Council of the Federation Literacy Award for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: I am pleased to have them with us in the gallery today.

This award is presented to learners, educators, volunteers, community organizations and businesses in each province and territory that celebrates adult learners who undertake literacy training and the contributions made by Canadians in the field of literacy.

Speaker, Stella's Circle was chosen for their commitment to adult literacy and enhancing programming to give more people the opportunity to participate in literacy initiatives.

In 2025, Stella's Circle launched a new foundational literacy and numeracy program to support learners facing additional barriers. These new services are specific to newcomers, and the program is designed for learners who may not yet qualify for traditional Adult Basic Education pathways.

Congratulations to Stella's Circle on being honoured for its dedication and efforts, to provide literacy education, employment services, mental health programming and affordable housing.

Speaker, let us celebrate the dedication of Stella's Circle and their efforts to further literacy for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, I join in recognizing the important work of Stella's Circle and their well-deserved recognition as this year's recipient of the Council of the Federation Literacy Award for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Adult literacy is a cornerstone of strong and healthy communities. The ability to read, write and develop essential life skills opens up doors to employment, education and fuller participation in society.

Organizations like Stella's Circle play a critical role in ensuring that adults who face barriers can build those skills and move forward with confidence at no cost to the participants.

Speaker, the work of community organizations and the education and dedication of educators and volunteers make a profound difference in people's lives. Through programs like this, Stella's Circle helps newcomers strengthen their independence and confidence as they build lives in our province for the long term.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I congratulate Stella's Circle on this honour and thank everyone involved for their commitment to supporting adult learners in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I join in congratulating Stella's Circle for receiving the Council of the Federation Literacy Award for Newfoundland and Labrador and for their commitment to adult literacy, employment services, mental health programming and affordable housing. The award is well received.

However, if government is truly interested in tackling literacy, it could start by addressing long-standing issues of class size, of composition, in our K-to-12 system that will allow teachers to spend more time helping those students who need it.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much.

Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the critical importance of local governance training in strengthening our municipal sector.

Our department is building a solid foundation for effective and accountable local governance by providing cities and towns throughout Newfoundland and Labrador with practical guidance and targeted support on key governance issues.

Through our mandatory orientation training program, mayors, councillors and municipal staff receive essential training in professional standards and core responsibilities to successfully serve their residents. This includes: roles and responsibilities of councillors and chief administrative officers; council meetings and procedures; conflict of interest; council budgets and financial management; and access to information and privacy protection.

This winter alone, 89 training sessions are being delivered around the province. Participation has been strong, reflecting a clear commitment by municipal leaders and staff to serve our cities and towns with integrity and professionalism.

Speaker, we remain committed to working alongside our municipal leaders through governance training and ongoing support to strengthen our municipalities and improve outcomes for residents around our province.

As minister, Speaker, I want to thank every municipal leader who has stepped into their

roles and I look forward to working with them over the next coming years.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for his statement.

Speaker, municipal governments operate in complex environments. They face financial pressures, high community expectations and difficult decisions about programs and services. Training is important, and not just for new councillors, but for all councillors.

Being on a municipal council requires more than just managing budgets and policies; it involves strategic vision, ethical governance and understanding the role of council and that of staff. A well-trained council can engage, address and build consensus, fostering transparency and accountability, which are critical for public confidence and effective service delivery.

Training, of course, is important, but there are other things our government needs to do to help our cities, towns and the Local Service Districts. We need to encourage more participation in municipal government. It's a difficult job but it's very rewarding. We need to find ways for communities to access consistent, predictable infrastructure funding and we need to find funding to build permanent solutions to water and wastewater.

Speaker, municipal council training is a critical investment in our in cities and towns. Without it, councils risk conflict, legal exposure and diminish public trust, undermining the very purpose of local government.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: While I thank the minister for the advance copy of this statement, I have to acknowledge the hard work of elected officials in the smaller towns and LSDs across our province, most of whom are volunteers.

My many years of experience on both the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and FCM boards taught me huge respect for our municipal leaders across this province. They usually work without the same supports their colleagues in larger centres have, with nowhere to turn when actively navigating conflicts of interest or other important statutory duties.

That is why I call on the government to make sure that they continue to fund these sessions and they provide more permanent resources for councillors in smaller towns and LSDs.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the government claims to be transparent, yet everything we and the public learn about staff in the Premier's office comes through the media and Opposition asking for documents and asking questions.

The Premier recently claimed that a staff member was never on the Conservative transition team, then turned around and

claimed he was on the transition team. When the contradiction was pointed out, the Premier then claimed that the staffer was on some, apparently, secret, secondary transition team.

Why wasn't the Premier transparent in the first place, and why does he keep changing his story?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, nothing has changed, but while I have an opportunity to stand up and talk about issues, let me talk about health care. Let me talk about an issue in health care. We've been criticized for turning around and saying we're not going to continue with the development of this billions of dollars new hospital on Kenmount Crossing.

Speaker, if you really want to know the truth, the problem in health care is not the lack of acute-care beds; it's the lack of long-term care beds. Right now in our province, on any given week, on any given day there are between 300 and 400 people who are medically discharged, alternate levels of care, occupying acute-care beds. That's the challenge that we face. We need more long-term care beds.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I do agree with the Premier, we do want to know the truth, and I'm not going to get it by asking the Premier questions, that's for sure.

In just two short weeks, we've seen the disdain that him and his government have for this House and our democratic institutions. One minister was saying there's

no need for debate in the House of Assembly. Another minister, just yesterday, saying let's not waste time by having Members get up to speak about bills. Clearly, we have a Premier who refuses to answer any question in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Yesterday, though, the Attorney General – I thank her for her words – acknowledged the role that the Opposition plays in a strong democratic institution.

So will the Premier and his ministers listen to their Attorney General, or is this what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can expect during the rest of this Premier's mandate?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

We were elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador on the promises of –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – better health care, lower taxes and safer communities. And that is exactly what we will deliver on. In our upcoming budget, you will see measures taken that will actually make improvements to health care, make lower taxes for people and have our communities safer.

That's a commitment that we made to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's a commitment we intend to make, and we will continue to stand up here and talk about the things that we are going to do. That is exactly what we are going to continue to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Those promises were made, and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians expect them to be kept. They're not on a good track record so far, but I think implicit in those promises because Newfoundlanders and Labradorians expect honesty, truthfulness and transparency, and they're zero for three on all of those, Speaker.

The Premier might think these questions will go away if he doesn't answer them in the House of Assembly, but they won't. So I will give him another chance, as I've been doing for days.

Why did he overrule the warning from the public service? Why did he tell people the staffer was only working on health care when he clearly was working on other things? Where does it say that MCP can be used for political purposes, and why does the Premier continue to keep changing his story?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I'm going to continue to stand up here and talk about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the challenges they face with access to health care, the challenges they face with the cost of living and the challenges they face with safety in their own communities. That's what I'm going to continue to talk about every time I stand in the House of Assembly.

I'm going to talk about the fact that people who come in by air ambulance, to be treated at our tertiary care centre and when

they're discharged, they're told they have to find their own way home. We're going to change that, Speaker. That's why we're going to make sure that nobody gets left behind. If we bring you in, we will bring you home. That's the commitment that we're making to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, since the Premier still won't answer, I ask the Minister of Health: Were you consulted on this use of MCP funds for partisan political staff? How will you address the shortfall of \$275,000 every year from your MCP budget that is no longer being used on patient care or health care administration but, instead, on partisan political advice?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, the staffer that the Opposition is referring to is somebody that we have to rely on to help clean up the mess that was basically left behind after 10 years of Liberal government.

Speaker, right now, in Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, throughout the province, we have over 300 seniors or people who are needing long-term care or alternative level of care, that are taking up beds in the province. At least 25 per cent of the beds in acute care are being taken up by these patients who don't actually have access to the proper resources, so we are going to find solutions, Speaker, and we will use the monies that we knew we were saving from that –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

And, on the gas tax, of course, this Liberal Opposition supports keeping the Liberal tax cut low, which we have done for the past three years; but can the Minister of Finance confirm that the amount of gas tax and therefore the amount that people pay at the pump won't be changing from where it is now once the bill is passed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, yesterday, in a scrum had mentioned the fact that it appears that we don't realize that we are in government and there was some lack of decisions or lack of movement and actions done. I would say to the leader that he's not really paying attention, that we've done a lot in the short time that we've been in (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I would say that the permanent gas tax reduction, without the bill that we've introduced into the House, Bill 5, it would increase by over eight cents next month. We made sure that the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador will not see a further increase (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: My mistake, Speaker. I do agree with the Minister of Finance. They have done a lot. They've done a lot of cancellations. That's what we've seen in the last number of days.

So we are on the same page. The gas tax will not affect the price at the pumps once this bill is passed.

W ask the government and the Minister of Finance: Will they support an amendment, that we plan to make, to reduce the gas tax even further to put more money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, I think he read our platform numerous times. I get the feel because he's well up on the things that we have promised the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador; indeed we do.

The only thing I would say was that part in our Blue Book is that we would plan efficiently. We wouldn't be making knee-jerk reactions on the spur of the moment that may have ill effects on the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, \$948-million deficit and Leader of the Opposition wants us to make decisions on the spur of the moment as to what we do. I would say, we want to plan efficiently.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Since the minister doesn't think a tax cut is necessary for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians but he talks about not making knee-jerk reactions, so I'll give him the

opportunity to take me up on my suggestion that we will make an amendment to give him the power and his Cabinet the power to lower the gas tax at the government's discretion when the price of oil goes up rather than requiring legislation each time.

Will the Minister of Finance accept my offer and agree to that proposal when we make it during the course of the debate on the gas tax?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, the official leader of the deficit – I mean, the Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, I withdraw that. That was a slip, and I do apologize.

I would say to the leader, pre-war in the Gulf, oil spiked to 69 per cent of what it was pre-war. That was at the start of this month. Today is March 11. It has dropped back down by 29 per cent, and I'm sure the leader referenced in scrum yesterday the price of oil is very volatile.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: That's unfortunate, Speaker. Those were good back-and-forth debates, but true colours always come through. You can't keep debate where it should be. It's always got to go a little bit lower, unfortunately.

So I'll move on, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: When our Liberal government extended this tax cut, at the time, the now Minister of Education said, we need to take it a step forward; we need to, say, get rid of the tax.

Why is the Premier ignoring his caucus? Why is the Minister of Finance ignoring his caucus?

I'll spoil the answer. As usual, they say things before they got elected and do things differently once they are elected.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I will give Members opposite the credit they deserve. They introduced that reduction in the gas tax. It was scheduled to expire on March 31. We've not brought in legislation to make that permanent.

But as the Leader of the Third Party referred to recently, there's more to poverty reduction than simply reducing the gas tax and the impacts that will have on the people of Newfoundland in other measures. What you're going to see from our government is a series of measures, including a 20 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit, including a \$90-million return in savings to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador when they pay their taxes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, I thought he had a plan but I realize he doesn't. He's like Pierre Poilievre

and now you have slogans and not solutions.

Mr. Speaker, facts matter and clarity on those facts matter. The government's social media give the impression to people around the province that their legislation is going to lower the price of gas. It is not. I got a call from my district this morning asking about that, if it was going to be lowered. All their legislation does is keep the tax at the level we left it, which is why we're introducing an amendment to cut it even further to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: Will the minister please clarify for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that their legislation won't be lowering the price of gas any further than it is today?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: My hon. colleague across the way, I want to remind him that we are the Progressive Conservative Party.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: And I'm sure he knows, socially progressive, fiscally conservative.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, the hon. Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune knows that if we didn't step in to make it permanent, the price on the pumps in Newfoundland and Labrador would be increasing by eight cents. Everyone in the House is aware of that. Everyone is aware of it.

If we didn't step in, the price at the end of this month would increase. We're saying to

the residents not to worry because we won't be adding the tax back on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Our Liberal government did it for the last three or four years, and we would have continued doing it, investing in Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and he knows it.

Mr. Speaker, this morning during the debate, the Minister of Education confirmed that the tax bill will not change the amount of tax people are paying at the pumps, yet the government's communications make people think otherwise: that gas will be going down tomorrow. Again, it is not going down.

This is confusing to the public, and I ask the Premier if he would listen as well. What will the minister say to people next week when the price at the pump hasn't changed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I would suggest that the hon. Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune read the bill. The bill said that it ends on March 31. There will be no increase in the price of gas due to provincial taxation at the end of this month. Nobody had stated that we're going to get a reduction tomorrow.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: It was at the end of this month. The end of this month is when the price will not increase over eight cents a litre in Newfoundland and Labrador – the end of the month.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Premier announced a new benefits agreement that's reached with Bay du Nord development. That was over a week ago, yet they failed to release the agreement – big surprise, lack of transparency. Similar agreements, however, have been released in the past and, in fact, posted online.

What are they hiding? Is the Premier concerned that releasing this agreement will expose that he did not get the deal that he promised?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Not only did we get the deal that we were looking for, but we got a way better deal than they ever did –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: It's pretty rich to stand on your feet and say –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – that you had the support of the building trades when you never met with them. He met with them in June and from June until now, he never talked to them once. It's pretty rich when you said you had a deal, that you talked to Equinor, when he met with them in June and never talked to them since.

A hundred and thirty-six days we're here; he was there just as long, not only did he not

bring anything forward, he didn't even talk to the people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Can't even get through one answer. I talked to them in June, and then I didn't talk to them ever. I mean, you can't make it up, Speaker. I didn't do a deal because I didn't take a deal that was bad for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I didn't take a deal because there were no topsides being built in Newfoundland and Labrador. I didn't take a deal because there was no guarantee that one single job would be for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

But while the Minister of Energy continues to contradict himself, both inside and outside the House, I asked him when he said on *Issues and Answers* that this is between two commercial entities, why did he forget that the government, in fact, signed this agreement as well, and why won't he release the agreement?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: The 2018 deal, the deal that the Liberals had: 22.3 million person-hours. Our deal: 31.3 million person-hours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Operations: \$12 million for the deal they had; \$23 million for ours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Listen to this one. Fabrication tonnage: 15,400 tons for our deal. Their deal: 5,000 tons.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Research and development: \$100 million for our deal. Their deal: \$75 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Fabrication fund: \$200 million for our deal. Their deal: Nothing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've never met someone in my life who talks so tough, but is afraid to provide the actual answers. You're the only one who has seen the agreement. Back up what you said in this House of Assembly when you sat right here on this side: I'll debate anyone, anytime, anywhere because I know everything about the oil industry. Release the agreement, me and you go out there and debate it one on one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've been clear on this deal. We know it's going to bring us royalties, life-of-field benefits, long-term work, a plan for future work. We know exactly what we've done.

CAPP is happy, Energy NL is happy, the building trades are happy and while I may not know anything about this stuff, I don't think he knows anything about it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: He's missing the point again, Speaker, either intentionally or because he's not listening to the questions or he doesn't understand the questions.

The fact is, no one in this province knows what's in the agreement, so no one knows what anyone is talking about, because they haven't seen the document.

Again, you talked about releasing the document before with other projects; you've talked about debating it before you sign the agreement, but when you're on the other side it's I'm in charge. Nobody ask any questions. Nobody debate it. Don't worry about it. Take our word for it.

I am not taking the minister's word for it. Release the agreement and show Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what's in it. Minister, what are you afraid of?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: We will release this deal in due course, but I'll tell you what won't be released –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – the deal that he says he had. I'll tell you what else what won't be

released: the Rothchild report. I'll tell you what else won't be released –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: I said order, please!

L. PARROTT: – the secret bonuses that they voted for themselves.

I tell you, there are a lot of things that we've seen over the last 10 years that weren't released, that sat on a shelf and collected dust and they're still there. When we asked for them, and we can get permission, they will not give it to us. So we shouldn't be talking about what's getting released and what isn't getting released.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

Dr. Michael Cohen, a family physician in Grand Falls-Windsor, is retiring on March 27. He has a physician willing to take over his practice and care for his 2,000 patients, but NL Health Services has advised that the physician must be placed in the hospital instead.

So I ask the minister: What is the plan for the 2,000 patients that will soon be without a family doctor?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, there seems to be some misinformation out there. What's at the heart of this is the doctor that they want to replace and take over the family care doctor's patients has a provisional licence and has to be supervised. So the thing

about it is, right now, that can't be accommodated.

It's not like Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services is not working with the family doctor and this doctor that has the provisional licence to make something successful. We don't want to have patients stranded. We don't want to have patients without access to a nurse practitioner or a family doctor or a physician, Speaker. We are going to do what we can to accommodate it.

But, at the end of the day, Speaker, we have –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, last week, Dr. Cohen went public on the situation, and he had hoped to hear from government. One week later, no one from government had contacted him to provide a solution.

Speaker, why hasn't the minister contacted this physician to discuss solutions? Why are you not allowing this physician to practice in community?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, in Canada there's criteria that doctors have to follow. There's criteria that Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services have to follow when, actually, we have people caring for patients.

Right now, the doctor in question, that they have earmarked to take over this family practice, has a provisional licence. We're going to work with the doctor to get them up so that they're fully qualified, but right now that's not happening because they have a provisional licence.

We have to follow the laws that are put out there to make sure patients are safe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: At the end of the day, we have to make sure patients are safe and that they're properly cared for, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, during Question Period yesterday, the Premier committed again to free medical transportation for all medical services.

Can he clarify exactly what conditions and procedures will and won't be covered, what it is going to cost and how the government plans to pay for it when they refuse to pursue new sources of revenue like the Churchill Falls MOU?

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, the Member who asked the question is a former Minister of Labrador Affairs and is very familiar with the Medical Transportation Assistance Program, MTAP.

When we were campaigning, the Premier did commit to ensuring that, instead of MTAP partly covering your patient travel, we're going to increase MTAP to 100 per cent coverage. That's what we're doing. We're working on that now. We're planning to roll it out in the next several months going into the summer, Speaker, so that patients, who would normally have to pay out of pocket, will not have to pay out of pocket when they're travelling for medically necessary services; that's covered under MTAP.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, the Throne Speech was strangely silent on the PC election promise to address long-standing education issues such as large classes with complex needs and school violence that affect the working conditions of our educational staff and the learning conditions of our students.

I ask the Minister of Education: Will he table a plan to address class size and composition and school violence in this sitting of the House of Assembly, and will there be money in the budget to address it?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: Now, Mom is watching.

P. DINN: I do want to say, if Mom is watching, we are not fighting; we're debating. We're debating.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: But I do thank the Member for the question.

Part of what I took on when I was assigned of Education Minister was to go out and meet with everyone and anyone. I've had a couple of meetings with the NLTA and part of that discussion has been around the resources that are needed in the classrooms, and we're going to continue to have those open discussions.

In fact, the School Safety Coalition, a committee previously created, hadn't met in a year. We've had one meeting and we're going to have another one in the very near future.

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

J. DINN: I think, Mom, that sounds like a no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: Speaker, Canadian fire regulations recommend 20 square feet per person in a classroom and a minimum of 30 inches between rows or desks. Under the *Fire Protection Services Act*, public meeting spaces have capacity orders posted setting maximum occupancy limits.

I ask the minister: Will he commit to posting capacity orders on the classrooms in our K-to-12 school system to ensure rooms in our schools are not over capacity and our students and staff are safe?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I know Mom wouldn't want us airing our dirty laundry out in public, but the Member across the way heard no many times growing up – many times.

But to the issue at hand, again, we're working with the NLTA. We brought

together the School Safety Coalition, which brings together a number of stakeholders, and we're going to continue to with that. We've had one meeting already. The next one is scheduled for early June.

The documentation on Safe & Caring Schools, our protocols on lockdowns, it's all out there for them to have a look at, for them to get back to us with proper answers. We're going to work with all the stakeholders and we're committed to working with them to make our education system better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, there is a shortage of long-term care beds in the Corner Brook area. There are currently between 45 to 55 long-term care patients in acute-care beds at the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital.

This lack of acute-care beds causes many residents to have been placed in corridors, hallways and crowded rooms which cause a backlog at the emergency department. There were 45 beds for patients with long-term needs built at the old Western Memorial hospital, 20 were designated for long-term care patients.

I ask the minister: Would your government renovate the old Western Memorial Regional Hospital to accommodate the needs of the long-term care patients and free up the acute-care beds at the hospital?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'd like to thank the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands for his question, and I understand his advocacy. We support increasing beds for long-term

care patients and alternate level of care patients.

I agree with the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands that facilities are lacking when it comes to those beds. We are working right now to come up with solutions to increase that, Speaker, but what we're not going to be doing is spending \$10 million to \$14 million on acute-care beds at a new hospital that is not going to meet the needs of the province.

We will work with the Member, and we'll work with the hospitals, especially in Western. We know that Western Memorial right now is at 31 per cent. It's actually –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the renovations to the old Western Memorial Regional Hospital with the announcement of the nurse practitioners allowed to bill MCP on April 1 will help reduce the number of visits to the emergency department.

I ask the minister: Will you commit today to reviewing this request to have the residents of Western Newfoundland in acute-care beds who are long-term care patients; that you will work with Western Health and the people involved to have long-term care beds available at the old Western Memorial hospital?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, that is a viable and possible solution.

We will be working on addressing the issues for Western Memorial. We will be looking at expanding the capacity as the Member suggested. That's a really good, possible solution, and we will make sure that the needs are met for our long-term care patients and our alternate level of care patients. We will be expanding capacity, and we certainly will be looking at what the Member suggested.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has now expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

WHEREAS traffic congestion in and out of the Town of Paradise has become untenable for the residents in what is one of the largest and fastest growing communities in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS on a daily basis, commuters face enormous traffic congestion as they attempt to get to work, school, medical and other appointments in neighbouring areas; and

WHEREAS previous councils and provincial governments are already well aware of the frustrations caused by the inadequate transportation system for a town of this size; and

WHEREAS the known disruptions caused to daily lives of people who live in Paradise who commute to other areas should be addressed, as was the plan put forward by the previous government;

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to continue with the previous plan to construct additional access and exit points to and from Paradise to the Outer Ring Road.

Mr. Speaker, just for some context for anyone who may not be aware, my district is Conception Bay East - Bell Island, which includes a large portion of Paradise. It includes Bell Island, Portugal Cove-St. Philips and, if you enter St. Thomas Line from Thorburn Road, it goes right across to Topsail Road. Everything on the right-hand side along the way there is included in the District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island and everything on the left-hand side basically up to Paradise. Then, it gets a little bit choppy in the area of Acharya Drive, but I represent all of St. Thomas Line – on most sides of it – Seascape Drive, Summit Drive, Atlantica Drive, Ashlen Crescent, Summit Drive, Paradise Road, Acharya Drive – as I mentioned – Sedgewick Street, which is off Topsail Road, and Brittany Drive.

During the by-election campaign of 2024, when I campaigned in the area, there were so many houses that I went to and people that I spoke with just in the Paradise area, and their main concerns out there, there were two. One was the high school. They needed a high school for their community. They wanted their kids to be able to go to school in their community, have their own hockey teams, have their own basketball,

volleyball teams and not have to travel to a different area.

We, of course, announced the school, and it is proceeding. There will be some extra road infrastructure put in for that high school; I met with the minister and I appreciate the fact that he gave us that information.

The other major issue that people face living in Paradise is traffic; trying to get in and out of it is just an absolute nightmare for them – their words. To a person, everybody wanted to see extra access and entry points, and when they heard about a plan to do that, coming from off Paradise Road and that area, they thought it was a fantastic idea.

Even if you talk to the council in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, they'll say so many people from the Paradise side now come to Thorburn Road to ignore and get away from the traffic that's on Topsail Road by the Outer Ring Road.

Mr. Speaker, with that in mind I would implore the government to continue with a plan to have extra access and exit points to Paradise as it's much needed by the many residents who live there and depend on getting in and out of the community on a daily basis.

SPEAKER: The Member's time is expired.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The hon. Member, I met with him. Actually, I met with the Town of Paradise as well, the mayor and I have also had a lot of discussion with my colleague, the MHA for Topsail - Paradise, who is responsible for a

larger part of Paradise, I would think, or a good part of it.

Traffic congestion is a big issue in Paradise. It's a big issue in CBS. It's an issue around the Metro area. I am aware. We've ordered a traffic study for CBS, Mount Pearl, St. John's, Paradise, the full regional study to get an idea of where and what we do in that area. So we're waiting for that to come back, but we're aware of the issue and we're looking at options.

I think one thing that's important to let everyone know, and I've heard a lot of it from the Member opposite and from the Town of Paradise and others, we didn't need to build a \$10-billion, \$11-billion or \$12-billion hospital to get a road. They're two separate issues. Water towers are separate issue. I hate the fact that things were jumbled together. You can have one without the other.

When we get the traffic study back, we're going to work at options. It's a plan. It's a work in progress and we're having regular conversations about it. We'll report on that as time goes on, but we're well aware of the issues and working on the solutions to deal with the traffic congestion in that area.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

The rising cost of living continues to place significant financial pressure on households throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Electricity is an essential service, not a luxury, particularly in a province with a harsh climate. Many Canadian provinces have recognized electricity as an essential service and have removed or never applied sales tax to residential power bills.

Removing the PST from electricity bills would provide meaningful and immediate financial relief for families, seniors and others on fixed incomes.

Therefore, we petition the Honourable House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to remove the Provincial Sales Tax – PST – from residential electricity bills in order to reduce the financial burden on households and recognize electricity as an essential service.

Speaker, I would recognize that we have signatures from different communities in my district again, from Port aux Basques, Burnt Islands, Cape Ray and even as far as St. Andrew's. I know my hon. colleague, the Minister of Finance, has been listening to my petition a number of days as it's not the first time that I've presented this petition, but it's certainly a good solution to maintain – I mean, sorry, lower taxes – that the government always offers for a solution.

I just wanted to highlight that this has been an issue that's been brought up to me a number of times since the election, and actually during the election this past fall. I had a number of residents send in their bills to me showing a reflection of month to month, especially in the fall of the year, later in the fall, and I just wanted to highlight some of those examples for the House here.

So we're talking November to December in 2025. For November, \$198.39 and December, \$458.08. A senior living on one income, OAS, CPP: November, \$258.69 and December, \$666.77.

Speaker, those are significant increases. As we mentioned before, there are a lot of different factors in this matter, but removing the provincial sales tax of electricity would be an immediate financial relief to the people of this province.

As long as this petition continues to come to me, I will continue to urge the government to take action on that matter.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I stand with a very important petition around safety on behalf of the people I represent in the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

WHEREAS Route 510 on the Trans-Labrador Highway is in need of brush cutting, specifically Route 513, 514 and 516; and

WHEREAS these three branch roads in the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair need constant maintenance for safe driving conditions; and

WHEREAS these roads have high volume traffic and significant moose sightings;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to allocate sufficient resources to keep the brush cut for the safety of the travelling public.

Speaker, my petition is signed today by folks from Cartwright, St. Lewis, Pinsent's Arm and Lodge Bay. One of the things that is a real challenge – I have a number of petitions and I was leaving this one for a little while until later in the spring. Then I realized that they are waist-deep into budget planning right now and it is absolutely imperative, if we're going to

continue to deliver on the promise of safety for all of us, that we do need sufficient resources allocated for brush cutting.

In the more southern part of my area, you don't see the alders grow up as much, but down in the southeast, it's absolutely incredible. Myself, I'm on the road probably as much as anybody there, and when you're driving – many, many close calls with moose. We're seeing, year over year, an increase in the moose population. We have a lot of black bears, not uncommon to see two, three or four. Recently, I saw three wolves together on a branch, when I was stopping while driving out from Goose Bay late at night. So there are all kinds of reasons why we need to keep the brush cut. It's not cheap, Speaker, I know. We were in government for almost a decade and there was always tremendous demand on the brush cutting.

The former minister of Transportation, the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, started a pilot project where we would use a certain, I guess, environmentally safe chemical and he chose two or three areas to do that. I would urge the government to – I see the Member for Ferryland is looking at me; he was on his feet many times on petitions on brush cutting. So I know that Members over there understand the value as well of the brush cutting.

I do encourage the government to, (a), continue with the pilot project and to ensure that sufficient resources are set aside.

I have three branch roads: Charlottetown, St. Lewis, 29 kilometres each; Cartwright is 85 kilometres; Pinsent's Arm is a little bit less than that. So we wouldn't get that done every year, but maybe one year it'd be Charlottetown and St. Lewis. Maybe next year it would be half of Cartwright, but we have to have a plan –

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: Given the time of day and this being Private Members' Day, I now call upon the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels to move his motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West, that the following motion will be the private Member's motion to be debated in this House on this Wednesday afternoon:

WHEREAS all Members of this hon. House respect and give gratitude for the senior citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador in recognition for their lifelong contributions to our province and our communities; and

WHEREAS too many seniors in our province are living below the poverty line, as our province's Seniors' Advocate has consistently demonstrated in reports to this House urging meaningful action; and

WHEREAS too many seniors in our province go without the care and support they require because of barriers that include cost and accessibility;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House support the government in affirming its obligation and determination to improve the lives of senior citizens across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador through a range of meaningful initiatives that include, but are not limited to, the following: enabling more seniors to age comfortably at home with the care and support they require; working with the Seniors' Advocate on strategies and

meaningful actions that will help make life more affordable for seniors; and acting decisively on government's commitment to raise the Seniors' Benefit and continue to index it to inflation.

Speaker, this is a very important piece of legislation. It's a testament to the three pillars – better health, safer communities, lower taxes – which the Premier supported in our Blue Book.

I wanted just to reflect on my community when I was younger. The seniors had it right – they all had it right. They had their piece of property that they grew their vegetables on; they had their wharves and their boats; they caught their own fish; they ate their own wildlife; they built their homes out of their own wood that they cut; they had root cellars for the vegetables, so they could put it away in the winter to keep their families fed; and there was a community unity, a community spirit there.

They had it right. They didn't have to worry about going to Walmart on a Sunday to pick up groceries, because they didn't have to pick up much groceries. Furthermore, in that community at that time, and around all other communities in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Sunday was a family day. Sunday was a day we went to church, a day that we gathered with families and had meals and shared stories and everything else.

That's the pillar that they built this province on and, to me, the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador, not only in my district but in all our other districts, are the jewels of this province. They're the greatest asset in this province. Therefore, we should take examples ourselves, and show respect to the seniors of this province, by introducing this bill and increasing the Seniors' Benefit package to 20 per cent. I urge all Members, this side and the other side, to give it full, unanimous voting support.

Throughout my campaign, when I went out into the district, I visited a lot of the seniors' homes. I heard stories from the seniors about how hard they were having it, the cold nights. They had to choose between meals and medication, and they needed more supports and they felt left out. They were hurting. They were asking, what can you do? And like I told them, I don't make promises, but I definitely would advocate on their behalf.

So I'm happy to be here in the House, to be able to stand and defend their livelihoods the way – give them the dignity and their homes and give them the right to stay in their homes and live the way they want to live and share with family and live alongside their neighbours.

I, therefore, urge that we all support and give them back what we owe them. They built this province. They shaped this province. They are the reason why we're here today in this House debating this important bill.

During my campaign and after I got elected, I was into a lot of seniors' homes doing presentations of a lot of 50-plus anniversaries, and some of them were much more higher than 50 years of age. I went into one home not too long ago, and I'll never forget the happiness that was there with this gentleman and his wife. They were celebrating their 70-year anniversary. He was 93 and she was 90, and I took a strong feeling from that presentation. I've been in a lot of other homes throughout the district. I've presented presentations to 80-plus birthdays up to late '90s.

So it's a good feeling when you can sit down and talk to a senior and show your respect, show them that you care, because we owe it to them. We owe it to the seniors of this province, and that's why I want to urge everyone here to support this very important piece of legislation.

Another thing that they talked about, they didn't want to leave their homes, and they should not have to leave their homes. They should be able to stay in their homes. Some of the problems that they had, they brought to my attention, was home care. They're not getting enough hours for home care, and I agree with them. They're down to two and three hours a day. I mean, there are meals to be cooked, the house needs to be cleaned and some of them are sitting in a wheelchair, some of them got a walking cane, and some of them can't even walk at all.

So I urge, moving forward, that we listen to the needs of the seniors. Another problem – I talked to a home care worker; she was tired of running from one house to another to get enough hours to stay in the profession. She was telling me that there's a two-tier system with home care. Some are getting paid over \$20 an hour, and more are only getting \$17-something – \$17-and-change.

When you look at the minimum wage, right now it's \$16.35. You can get that serving a cup of coffee at Tim's or passing out a hamburger at McDonald's, but look at the responsibility of that home care worker and what she's responsible for and what she's doing.

I think we definitely should look at increasing the amount of money that the home care workers are getting paid so that we'll keep them in that profession, and that will help keep people in their homes. That will attract more workers because I know, in some cases, where some of the home care workers – and it happened out on Fogo Island in some of the communities out there – they left. They went to work on the fish plant for \$20 an hour.

When we talk about seniors, there are a whole lot of things that we're overlooking, and I think it's important that we do what we can for the seniors. Give them a sense of belonging because they taught us how to be

persistent; they taught us how to persevere; they taught us how to have courage; they taught us integrity; and they certainly taught us to show respect.

That's what I'm trying to do here today is show the seniors of this province, my district, your district, all of Newfoundland and Labrador, the respect that they should be given.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. STOYLES: Speaker, thank you.

I certainly want to thank the people of Mount Pearl North for giving me the mandate and support to serve this House of Assembly and serve them here in the House of Assembly.

I'm pleased to speak on this PMR that is focused on providing as much support as possible to seniors who, through their hard work and dedication, have built our province. The communities in which we live today reflect their efforts and it is only right that we work with them on every measure to allow them to enjoy their senior years. It is the least that we can do as elected Members of this House of Assembly.

Anybody who has known me realizes that I have spent my life being an advocate for my community. It is work that I enjoy so very much, and I know that every meeting I attend, every meal I deliver, every hamper I deliver, every community event I support, every person I meet, helps make our community better and our province a better place to live.

One of the concerns – the most important concern – for seniors is housing. We all

realize that in addressing this concern, we must continue to allow seniors to remain in their own home as long as possible. The comfort of their own community home is the best and first option. Our party promoted doubling – doubling – the Aging Well at Home Grant, which was \$400 to \$800, and also the Caregiver Benefit, from \$400 to \$800. This would help seniors get the much-needed help with the cost of living, like groceries and health care.

Speaker, however, when seniors do have to leave their home, we must ensure that the costs are reasonable and can be met without having to make choices regarding transportation, medical, keeping their heat on. In my district, which has one of the largest populations of seniors in this province, and very senior-friendly programs, the waiting list for a well-known seniors' housing complex community – Masonic Park – is well over 2,000 people on a waiting list.

Masonic Park, when people get there, after a 10- or 15-year wait, sometimes – because sometimes it's taking even longer now – once they get there, they are in affordable housing and there are people there to provide the support and community that they need.

Many of the new homes that are being developed in my district and in the province would be at a higher rate of rent, some up to \$2,000 to \$3,000 a month, and are out of reach of most seniors on fixed income. Government must consider increasing the threshold for assistance and subsidies. They must also consider how this impacts other government programs.

Like I said before, prescription drug programs, sometimes well-meaning, initial impact income cancels benefits such as the drug cards. I know, last year, I spoke to a number of seniors who when their income went up by a small amount, they lost their drug card, and that was devastating on some of the seniors. So when we look at

increasing the benefits for the seniors, we also have to look at the people that it's going also impact. We don't want seniors to lose their drug card, because that's so important to them. I encourage the government to make sure when they're looking at doing that, they will increase the threshold.

When seniors can interact with the community and receive services, they live a better quality of life. Across this province, there are many groups and organizations that work tirelessly to provide services for seniors. One group – and like I said, I have in my district the largest seniors' group in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Mount Pearl Seniors Independence has over 630 members. They do all kinds of activities, every week; five, six days a week, they're busy. They do guitar lessons, darts, cards, bingo, cornhole, the list goes on.

Besides the programs they offer, one of the other things they provide is income tax clinics. They do food drives, they help other seniors, and the list goes on and on and on. But one off the things that I'm very happy that they've been doing here lately is fraud protection.

Our seniors are the most vulnerable people in our community, Speaker. Over the past number of months, and the thing that has struck my heart over the past couple of years, is being in seniors' homes and sitting down and crying with them when they've been scammed. This past couple of weeks, I've had another senior's family reach out to me. The senior who lives in my district was scammed of \$88,000.

The banks turned her down. She couldn't get the money. She thought her grandson was in trouble and they had him somewhere in a jail, and she went beside herself. So she went to Payday Loans. They loaned her \$90,000.

She's been trying to get through Legal Aid ever since to try and get help. Her

grandchildren, who live outside the province, have been trying to help her. I've called Legal Aid myself several times, spoke to people down there, still nobody has called her. It's heartbreaking to see our seniors go through this because they're so vulnerable.

We need to look after our seniors, and I'm delighted to have been part of this government and what we tried to do, to look after seniors. Speaker, we all have seniors – and I look around this room and I see how many seniors are actually sitting here at this table. So let's not forget if we're not there yet, we're going to get there.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I do want to thank the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels for the motion that is on the table. Of course, we're all very concerned about making sure that we have affordability. We might all have different ways of approaching it, but I certainly thank you, as Member of the House, for bringing this forward.

As I mentioned in my maiden speech, I grew up on seniors' care. My mother was a nurse her entire career at St. Pat's Mercy Home, right in the heart of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. As my colleague here has mentioned, a very, very dense concentration of seniors in this particular district, let alone the entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, that we need to show respect for.

I go from St. Patrick's Mercy Home, the whole Tiffany Lane area, there are a number of apartment complexes, Kenny's Pond – there are just so many seniors' institutions, let alone the seniors that are

really trying to comfortably, affordably age in place. That is the goal, for those who can, and for those who can't, obviously, we need to do better in terms of supporting the care that they require – people more vulnerable and with more special needs.

So while this motion and the Speech from the Throne promises to strengthen the role of the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Advocate, I have to question why the PC government itself, what the government is going to do to specifically advocate for seniors to create relief and the peace of mind for that 25 per cent plus of our population, our elders, our hard-working parents and grandparents who deserve to live affordably while wealth disparity continues to increase. The wealthy are getting wealthier; the poorer are getting poorer. We see lots of that kind of prosperity, but we see lots of poverty.

Some seniors are willing to get out there, those who are able-bodied, and are able to go to work, but they shouldn't have to. They have spent their entire adult lives paying into the system, raising families and contributing to their communities. They deserve to live with dignity in their golden years and be treated with the respect that they deserve. That is something that, in many ways, we could achieve through a number of different ways. Again, yesterday, I talked about small pieces of the pie that we're attacking, but there are larger measures that I truly believe that we can do to enhance support for our seniors who really deserve the respect.

As I mentioned my mom's nursing career and, of course, I, too, was a candy striper. I learned really early on and such from my own personal experience as well and, in my artistic career, I did a lot of research and I published research, travelling around the coastline of the Island, a project called *Island Maid* where I did interviews with elderly women in particular.

We know women have an extra layer of systemic bias and prejudice that happens because, oftentimes, they are the ones that are not actually making the paycheque. They are the ones who are raising the families, especially in rural communities, we know that. In this day and age, the women have an extra layer of challenge in order to stay afloat. That doesn't count for the people who divorce, single parents and all of those kinds of things and, of course, deaths. People have to carry the load and you still have to support your families.

A lot of the research that went into this particular project, which I was so very proud, I learned so much and I was so humbled to hear the stories of rural women around the coastline, that told about the hardships and the challenges that they had. We don't want to see those days anymore. We lived in communities where we supported each other. But the days are different now. We're all into the technology. We have smaller families. People move away for work, because the prosperity is not here. As a result, who suffers? It's our seniors that suffer. So I find it's extremely important that we have a very broad view of the many ways that we can support seniors in our province.

Of course, I'm going to mention it again: guaranteed basic income. It's a beautiful, basic blanket that helps everybody. Lift everybody out of poverty. So again, regardless of the conversation that we're going to have with the federal government or whatever, we need to find out what the results are of that report. Because there are many, many organizations, many seniors' organizations, many organizations that support food security, that want to see that enacted. We do see other jurisdictions where it happened.

So I just mention that in this particular motion itself, we will support this motion. Again, a piece of a pie, kind of a piecemeal approach, but again, it doesn't go far enough. There's no certainty in renewal. A

senior yesterday called my office and, basically, they put their last \$500 into their oil tank. That's all she had. She's cold in her house still. That's the last bit of money that she's got. She called the office to my constituency assistant and myself to let us know. She just turned 75. Do we think that that's fair? Do we think that that's right? She's completely stressed about it, so worried about what's going to happen next.

These are the kind of scenarios that we have on a regular basis, of seniors who are really desperately in need. I'm living in the heart and representing the residents of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, right in the heart of the city. I can only imagine the multiple layers that there are – knowing my experience with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and of rural communities – about the extra hardships that there are for seniors whose children have moved away for work, et cetera, et cetera.

Speaker, approximately 50,000 seniors aged 65-plus get the benefit with the maximum amount of what is about \$1,551 per year. Our costed platform with the NDP, our NDP proposal would have given them \$388 more. So that would have been a little bit extra, costed platform; we knew where the money was going to come from.

Again, this is a motion and it's a good step in the right direction, but we have to do much more. Aging in place for those who can, increasing the wages and benefits for our home support workers is crucial – absolutely crucial.

The seniors in our province, they deserve to have the money that they need for their food, their medications, to heat their homes, to feel comfortable and it doesn't go near enough in the recent years that we can see. This is continuing to grow and grow.

As my colleague here mentioned, our seniors help build this province. They deserve to age with respect and dignity and

with the love of all people, not just their families, but communities. They deserve a better deal and our plan continues to try to help elevate them out of the poverty that they don't deserve in the golden years of their life.

In closing, again, thank you to the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels; I truly appreciate the motion that's on the table. We are all working, hopefully, in the same direction, but we hope that it will go further so that we can all continue, collaboratively, in this House of Assembly, that we're also privileged to serve, to continue to support our seniors in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's an honour to speak on this private Member's resolution today. This is an issue that matters to so many of us here in Newfoundland and Labrador. As my colleague stated here before, our seniors helped shape our province. We have seniors in our province that have served in this House. We have seniors in our province who protected us: firefighters, paramedics, doctors, nurses. We have schoolteachers in this province who are seniors, taught some of us; miners; offshore workers. Seniors are the backbones of our community. They are the people who built this province and so proud to call home.

I'm going to ask this House a question now that I'm curious about. I'm just wondering if Labrador West is the only district in this whole province that don't have seniors' housing. Is there either other district here that doesn't have seniors' housing, other

than Labrador West? I don't see any hands up.

I think it's a very important question. Over the last five to 10 years, we've been promised seniors' housing by the past government in Labrador West. The snow has come and gone nine or 10 times, still no shovels in the grounds. So hopefully, under this government, Labrador West will see some seniors' housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: As a government, we have a responsibility to ensure that older adults can age with dignity, security and respect, surrounded by the supports they need to live meaningful, connected lives.

Seniors' housing options allow seniors to maintain their independence and dignity while aging in place, reducing the burden on families. Development of seniors' homes can generate jobs, increase property values and stimulate local economies. Properly designed housing can include features for accessibility and safety for seniors like grab bars, wider doorways, ensuring the safety and comfort of aging residents. Senior housing fosters communities, community bonds and social connections, helping to reduce a feeling of isolation among older seniors.

In my District of Labrador West, senior housing is a major issue. Labrador West is becoming an aging generational community. Seniors want to stay in their communities, stay with their family and friends.

I've been working since October with the seniors' group in Lab City, since I got elected. We're hoping to put a 100-unit apartment, seniors' complex in Labrador West. This would also help with other housing issues and will free up 100 houses that can be bought by younger families that are willing to move to Labrador West and work there as well.

Another important step is making it easier for people to access supports that already exist, like simplifying the Aging Well at Home Grants application process for returning applicants. This means less paperwork, fewer barriers and quickest access to funding.

Protecting seniors must be a priority. Our government will continue to strengthen laws that protect our seniors and implement measures to improve home care, supported housing, personal care homes and long-term care. Again, by not having long-term care or professional care homes in Labrador West, it puts a tremendous strain on our health care system as well.

Another important step involves strengthening the role of the Seniors' Advocate. Our government is proposing changes to that act that will, if passed, give the Advocate powers of individual advocacy and investigation. This will bring our legislation in line with other provinces, ensure seniors have a stronger voice and better protection.

People are feeling the pressure of rising costs, whether it's groceries, home heating, transportation or everyday necessities. Again, as I spoke earlier here today, I don't have to explain again what the costs of things are in Labrador. A lot of seniors are low income and they can't afford a lot of these things.

In addition to our commitment to raising the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent, we will continue focusing on other initiatives that help ease the cost-of-living pressures. These measures are about helping people keep more of their hard-earned money while making sure our communities remain strong and vibrant.

At the end of the day, supporting seniors is about respect and the respect that they deserve. It's about recognizing the contributions they have made throughout their lives and ensuring that they are

supported in return. They deserve to feel secure in their homes, connected to their communities and supported by the government that serves them. When we take care of our seniors, we are just not honouring the past, but we're building the future.

I've met with the seniors' club in Labrador West now probably five or six times over the last three or four months. It's actually sad to sit down with a group of seniors that when you talk to them about this new project we're just trying to get developed and we're trying to get started, and they break down in tears. Because, for the last 10 years, they feel they're not getting nowhere, they're not making no progress and they're just really upset, especially when there are other projects going around Happy Valley-Goose Bay announcing seniors' housing and other housing projects. Somewhere out on the Avalon, there are housing projects getting announced and, again, after 10 years, our seniors don't see anything. So it's frustrating for them as well.

Our seniors club started in Labrador West in 1986, with 16 members back in 1986. Right now, in Labrador West, we have between 250 and 300 members in that club, so there are a lot more people staying in Labrador West. There is an urgent need and demand for seniors' housing that can be accessible and allow for them to live independently at an affordable cost.

I hope it doesn't take another 10 years. I'm hoping that when I got elected, and I'm on the side of government – I want to give it at least two years, and then we'll have housing for the residents and our seniors in Labrador West.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure, once again, to stand in this hon. House representing the constituents of Burin - Grand Bank. It's also a pleasure today to speak to this PMR put forward by the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

The first thing I'm going to talk about – and I talked about it a lot on the campaign; I talked about it at the doors; I talked about it among my colleagues when I was minister – is the whole idea around thresholds. Increasing seniors' thresholds is very, very important. Increasing a threshold for seniors expands the eligibility for benefits of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, allowing older adults to receive financial support that provides stability, health and a quality of life.

Seniors with modest pensions or part-time income can still access programs like the Guaranteed Income Supplement. It would greatly reduce the number of seniors living below the poverty line and the financial stress that is directly linked to poorer health outcomes. If you increase the amount of money, the amount of financial support, we give our seniors, it will be able to let them afford medications that they need and other vital personal products.

Greater housing stability is a very important advantage of this higher threshold. It helps seniors stay in their home longer, and that's key. That's what we're all about, by the way, we want to keep our seniors in their homes as long as possible. We probably have mothers and fathers living in their homes well into their 80s and 90s now. That's what we need to be doing. That's where they want to stay, as I said earlier today. That's where they're most comfortable. The higher thresholds will certainly allow that. It prevents them from being penalized for modest earnings and encourages them to continue to work if they choose.

What I've heard a lot of good positive things about is our seniors' housing. We've built a lot of housing units for seniors in this

province over the last number of years. We've done really well. Do we need to do more, absolutely, but you have to look at the domino effect of building those seniors' units as well, because it frees up homes.

I know in my end of the world, where I live on the Burin Peninsula, there's very little housing. As a matter of fact, in the community in which I live, there is no rental housing available – why – because we have industry and you cannot find a home to rent. If we had more seniors' homes built, subsidized seniors' homes, then we would be able to free up some homes to allow young people to take advantage of those.

Seniors now, in a lot of cases, they just can't manage anymore. Big yards, can't mow them; big driveways, can't plow them. We have to increase the thresholds. Increasing thresholds will allow so much for our seniors.

The Caregiver Benefit of Newfoundland and Labrador is available to those 65 plus. The caregiver has to be 19 years old or older. It works alongside the Aging Well at Home Grant, which supports household and health care service costs. Working together, they reduce the financial barriers and promote the independence of our seniors. They're designed to keep seniors in familiar surroundings, rather than moving them into long-term care homes, while reducing the stress on long-term care facilities.

One of the most important things about the Caregiver Benefit, which is \$400 per month, it provides stability and continuity of care from someone that they already know. It can be a friend; it can be a family member, but it will provide that additional care when there's no home care worker available, or when they've used up all their home care hours, this Caregiver Benefit will allow the senior to have someone come in their house to be with them during the night or early morning or late at night or whenever it is.

I know seniors that have said to me: I really can actually do some things around the house but the most important thing for me is I'm lonely. I'm lonely. I need someone to come in here to have a game of cards, to talk with me, to watch TV with me. They're lonely. This Caregiver Benefit takes care of that. It's so important. I know you all hear it. I'm not the only one who hears that.

The Aging Well at Home Grant, brought in by the former Liberal administration, that's extremely important. We worked hard to have it. It's a benefit for low-income seniors who may struggle to cover their basic needs, cooking and meal preparation, grocery and meal delivery. I mean these are things that our seniors need. I've often seen, in my little community – where there's only one store, by the way. One grocery store in my community, and I have some communities in my district that don't have any, how is a senior supposed to get groceries if they don't have a vehicle?

They get them by delivery; that's how they get them, whether it be a friend or whether it be the store, but it has to be paid for. I have communities where the nearest grocery store is 30 kilometres away. They don't have the services, so it's important that we certainly look at this.

Snow clearing – big issue this winter, as you know. More snow this year, but it's not only the plowing of the driveway. It's the step. It's around the house. This is what costs. That's physical labour. That's why, by the way, we increased the Aging Well at Home Grant from \$400 to \$800, and that was key.

Minister of Finance, I hope that's going to be something that you'll consider because it's so important. When I went around in our campaigning I said, it's a possibility, if we're elected, that this will doable. The biggest uptake of any of the seniors' programs – any of them – is this one, I can tell you that. You check with your CAs and you'll find that out. That's when they're busiest, when these grants are available.

I've only got a minute left. One of things that I also wanted to talk about are the seniors' resource centres or seniors' clubs, we call them, in rural Newfoundland, but seniors' resource centres, whatever you want to call them. These resource centres are key for seniors. Those are the places where people go to socialize, where our seniors go.

That's the reason why we have to look at busing for our seniors. Communities have to get together and look at, under CSSD –

AN HON. MEMBER: Social Supports and Well-Being.

P. PIKE: Yes, I know it's changed – but we have programs there for busing. I know the minister is going to be looking at that.

Just quickly, I was visiting a senior a while ago and the president of the club had to get a taxi to go to the club night. So it was on Tuesday night. The taxi cost her \$30 from her home to –

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

P. PIKE: – the club and \$30 back. So our seniors can't afford that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very honoured to stand today to speak on this private Member's resolution. First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels for introducing such an important PMR to the House of Assembly.

First of all, I'd like to just highlight a couple of points that the Member made, and I think it deserves repeating. He focused on some

of the important points here, like the lifelong contributions that our seniors have made. He talked about community spirit and the old traditions of our seniors that, really, we need to cherish and remember, and he described them as the jewels of our province.

I think that really sums up, quite eloquently, the state of our seniors in terms of how we feel about them and the respect that we have for them and the gratitude that we have. I think that when you look at the first clause in our PMR, it indicates that really is the essence of this first clause. It's about respect and it's about gratitude to our senior citizens. It's about recognizing all of the contributions they've made to their communities and to our province.

He also talked about the opportunity he has, and as all of us have, to go out in our communities and in our towns to present certificates to our seniors for their birthdays. I know I've attended many, many birthday celebrations for my constituents from the age of 75 and actually to the oldest person in Newfoundland and Labrador, Hersilia Moores, who turned 110 back in November of 2025.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I can say – and I'm sure this is the experience of each and every Member of this hon. House of Assembly – that it's one of the joys and one of the privileges and honours of being a Member of the House of Assembly, when we can go out and share with our constituents their celebrations. Whether it's their birthdays or their wedding anniversaries, and to be there with them and their families and loved ones and friends, I think that's one of the positives that I certainly find as being a Member of the House of Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: One of the highlights.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: That's for sure.

I think that needs to be stated that there are so many things that our seniors have done for us and that we need to, first and foremost, acknowledge that.

But then in the PMR, you'll note that the second clause goes into some of the challenges that our seniors are facing in our province. We see that it's first identified that many of our seniors, unfortunately, are living below the poverty line. We only have to look to the report that our Seniors' Advocate, Susan Walsh – basically she distributed the Seniors' report in November of 2025 and it was titled *Monitoring Key Indicators of Seniors' Wellbeing in Newfoundland and Labrador*.

At this point in time, I'd like to commend the incredible work of our Seniors' Advocate over the last number of years. Her commitment and dedication is second to none.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: She has released many reports. I know in the last 6½ to seven years that I've been in the House, there have been many reports that she has released and they're so important, Speaker. They're so important for us to have because they identify the data and the research and it's important for us to understand, really, how are our seniors doing.

That's what she does. She connects with our seniors and she's able to give us an informed evaluation and evidence-based data and information that informs us towards us, hopefully, making the changes and coming up with the solutions that we need to do. So her work is just incredible and I think that it's important that we acknowledge that as well.

One of the things in the most recent report, Speaker, that she identified – and there are

many challenges that are very concerning and very worrisome when we read her latest report, which was just a few months ago. She talked about food security. Food security amongst Newfoundland and Labrador seniors has dropped by 6 per cent over the last year. So this is very concerning. Perhaps one of the contributing factors is the rising cost of food, but the reality is that the seniors in our province are suffering and they're suffering when it comes to having food security.

She also talked about the number of seniors in our province that have access to primary health care providers and that has decreased and, as of November of last year, it was the lowest in Canada. So that is also very concerning when we see that access to primary health care for seniors is decreasing and it's the lowest in Canada.

She talked about the rate of hospitalizations that, for seniors, has increased and the rate of emergency visits. These increases may be indicative, she says, due to the lack of access to primary care. These are concerns that we, in our government, are aware of. We are listening to these concerns. We are hearing them and it's very important for us to acknowledge that.

She also talked about other challenges, and I believe the Member for Burin - Grand Bank had mentioned the issue of loneliness. That is a serious concern as well and worry amongst our seniors in the province. She talked about loss, isolation, chronic illness and pain, and she talked about that as being some of the factors that impact mental health and, in fact, place older adults at risk of suicide.

Again, those are very concerning and very worrisome facts that we're hearing, but we need to hear them. It is important to hear them, because it is only through hearing about these facts that will help us make decisions, that will help us be able to expand resources and expand programs and services and to create initiatives.

One of the other things that I found very concerning about her latest report was, in 2023, she talked about the median income of Newfoundland and Labrador seniors was \$29,710, the lowest of all Canadian provinces and territories. That needs to sink in. The median income of Newfoundland seniors, this was in 2023, was \$29,710, the lowest of all Canadian provinces and territories.

Speaker, these are very concerning facts, but it's all not bleak because we know that our government has initiated various things to address these concerns. We will be increasing the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent. We are going to put more money back in the pockets of seniors. We're bringing forward legislation to permanently eliminate the sugar-sweetened beverage tax, that will also ease the financial pressure. We introduced amendments to permanently reduce the tax on gasoline and diesel. Those initiatives will also help ease the pressure that our seniors are facing.

This government is committed and is acting on ensuring that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, who are seniors over the age of 65 and older, in particular, are going to have a better quality of life and that is very important to us.

One of things I found interesting, and I'll close on this, is in her report, despite all of these facts that she found, Speaker, despite all of these challenges that she found in terms of how our seniors are struggling, she found also that 88 per cent of seniors are satisfied or very satisfied with their life, and 84 per cent feel a somewhat or very strong sense of belonging to their community; both are higher than the Canadian average.

Doesn't that tell you something amazing about our seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: They are amazing, and we support them. We believe in them. We are going to ensure that their quality of life improves. That is a commitment that we are going to make and we will honour.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak about very important people in our province, our seniors.

Certainly, since I've been in this House of Assembly as a Member, as a minister and as premier, I've spoken a lot about what seniors have done for everybody in this province. They've built communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. They've put their time in. Like I said, they built their communities. They've contributed. They've worked hard. They raised their children. They volunteered in their communities. They've done everything that they could, they should and that they wanted to do to make sure Newfoundland and Labrador was as great as it can be and as great as it is right now.

What they deserve now, from their government and from their fellow Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, is to make sure that we respect what they've done and we're there to help them when they need the help that they deserve. I think it's only fair and it's only the right thing to do to recognize the contributions that seniors have made; but, of course, we know that seniors do have issues in this province and we continue to look at everything that we can do and I'm very proud of what we've

done during our time in government to help seniors in our province.

I think going forward with health care in our province, I'm very proud of the Health Accord. As I've said, it's a fantastic roadmap to where we need to go to redevelop and to reimagine and to recreate health care in this province. I said lots of times, certainly during my time as minister of Health and Community Services, that we're living in a health care system that was built in the 1950s, 1960s. We're 60 to 70 years on from that and it is probably time to start over. Of course, it takes a long time to change things that have been developed and integrated into this system here that we have right now in our province, but I think taking that initiative and recognizing that step needs to be made was a big one, and I'm glad we took it.

It does take a lot of time, as I said, to get to where we need to be. So health care is far from perfect in this province right now, but I can tell you that we're better off than we were a few years ago, and we're better off than a lot of other provinces in this country.

I certainly remember a meeting I had, when I was minister of Health, in Nova Scotia, with my colleagues from across the country, and more than one minister of Health said to me: We should have done the Health Accord years ago. We're going to steal that from you because you saw where it was going, and you saw you needed changes and you took that step.

So I know that, again, we still need to get better. There's still a lot of work to do. We still need to make sure that people have access to primary health care, creating Family Care Teams, using nurse practitioners as well; using people to their full scope, whether it's pharmacists or LPNs or RNs, like I said, nurse practitioners or family physicians; making sure that we don't have people waiting in the emergency rooms when they're not supposed to be in the emergency room and they're supposed

to potentially be somewhere else, like a Family Care Team; people who are in acute-care beds, and I know we talked about it here in the House of Assembly today, who aren't supposed to be in acute-care beds. They're supposed to be in other ALC beds, maybe it's long-term care facilities or somewhere else.

We did come up with some creative ways as well, worked with long-term care facilities in this province, some pilot projects to get ALC patients out of the hospitals and into those beds to free up the acute-care beds.

I will say that cancelling the new hospital here, I think, was the wrong decision. We talk about acute-care beds, there are two issues that we have to deal with. The acute-care beds at St. Clare's, it's a very, very – it's an understatement – it's a very, very old facility. Renovating those beds is not the right thing to do for those patients. They want to be in new, modern facilities where we can treat them properly; where doctors and other health care providers have the proper modern technology that they need to treat these patients and where these patients can be comfortable when they're receiving the proper health care that they deserve.

We do need more capacity for acute-care patients. It's not just about freeing up the beds that are used for other reasons – of course we need to continue to work on that – but more acute-care beds would help the situation as well.

I got a little bit down the road on the Health Accord, but the reason I wanted to talk about the Health Accord was not just all the work that's been done and all the work that needs to be done, it does focus very heavily on seniors. I just want to read out why it's important to look after our seniors, because where we are in Newfoundland and Labrador, it's important to note.

“There has been a rapid increase in the number of seniors over the past fifty years

in the province. In 2020, there was 116,228 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians 65 years or older, representing over 22.3% of the population. In 2021, this proportion was estimated to be 23.6%. This number will continue to increase as more 'baby boomers' come into this age group. The province as a whole and our health system have not adapted well to the increased numbers or to the increased percentage of the population who are elderly."

So very clear that the Health Accord has identified the problem. I don't think it was any secret; I think all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians knew it was an issue to deal with, but again, the Health Accord makes a plan for how we're going to deal with it.

Just as an example of one of the comments they made and the rationale for why we need to do it and what we need to do: a commitment to action on healthy aging; developing age-friendly environments; aligning health systems to the needs of older populations; developing sustainable and equitable systems for providing long-term care, in home, in communities and in institutions; and improving measurement, monitoring and research on healthy aging.

Those are some recommendations from the World Health Organization's Global Strategy on Aging and Health. So what did the Health Accord individuals do, Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth, they developed a policy to focus specifically on seniors, and how they can age and be healthy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"There are three areas in which the policy must be developed: (i) a formal Provincial Frail Elderly Program within the health system."

I can't tell you how many times I've spoken to Dr. Parfrey about this specific issue; it's very near and dear to his heart. Obviously, frail and elderly people in this province have health issues, issues with their homes, issues that they need help with, and we

can't ignore them. We need to focus specifically on that sector of our population.

We also need to have a policy for an integrated continuum of care, which I think is very, very important. When we look at everybody from the time we're born to the time we die here in Newfoundland and Labrador where and how do we live our lives, you're certainly at home. Some people stay at home for longer than they maybe used to nowadays, Speaker, but I hope my daughter and my son – they can stay as long as they want.

You do move into a different continuum of care as you age, and we want people to stay at home with supports for as long as they possibly can. We don't want, at the first sign of a health issue or an issue with their house, to have to move out into long-term care homes. We want people to stay at home, not only because it's the home that they grew up in and that they raised their family in, but it's their community. It's where they lived. It's where they contributed to society. We want them to stay in these communities all across the province, so we need to focus on that.

That's one of the reasons we came up with the Aging Well at Home Grant. That's one of the reasons our government, during the election, promised to double that. It might be something as simple as providing a ramp to get in and out of your house that will allow you to stay at home. Imagine you just didn't have that \$800 or \$1,000 to build a ramp, now you have to pay thousands of dollars or maybe the government has to pick up the tab to move you into a long-term care facility. That's not the right way to think. We want people to stay at home.

Of course, they do move through the continuum of care, as I talked about. That could be congregate living and then living in person-centred care facilities and, of course, then we move into end-of-life care. It's very important to keep all that in perspective as we talk about our seniors

and focus on what the Health Accord says about how we deal with these issues. How we focus on our seniors. How we make sure they're comfortable and living a full life for as long as they can right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Another thing that the policy talks about is age-friendly communities. So I'll be brief, it's very important that this government and we continue to focus on things for seniors and their communities: outdoor spaces and buildings, respect and social inclusion, community support and health services, transportation, communication and information, social participation, civic participation, unemployment and, of course, housing.

I just wanted to point out how important the Health Accord is and has been for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for getting good quality health care to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's not just about doctors and nurses and therapists and pharmacists, while that's all very much important, of course, it's about looking after seniors and identifying what they need as they continue on their journey throughout their lives, and doing what we can do for them.

So while we will support the private Member's resolution this afternoon, Speaker, I think it's good that we're all here to focus on seniors and talk about seniors only two weeks into the House of Assembly, but I do have an amendment I would like to propose to make sure that we always keep in mind the hard work and the recommendations that Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth made in the Health Accord. I think if we ignore them, it will be at our own peril.

So, Speaker, I move, seconded by the Opposition House Leader, that the private Member's motion currently being debated be amended by inserting immediately after the word "Labrador" in the THEREFORE BE

IT RESOLVED clause, the words "pursuant to the Health Accord NL and."

The THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED clause would then read:

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House support the Government in affirming its obligation and determination to improve the lives of senior citizens across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador pursuant to Health Accord NL and through a range of meaningful initiatives that include, but are not limited to, the following: Enabling more seniors to age comfortably at home with the care and support they require; Working with the Seniors' Advocate on strategies and meaningful actions that will help make life more affordable for seniors; and Acting decisively on the government's commitment to raise the Seniors' Benefit and continue to index it to inflation."

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Pursuant to Standing Order 63(9), the Member provided this amendment to me in advance and I rule that the amendment is in order.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I certainly look forward to all Members in this House – I haven't heard anybody speak against the Health Accord so I certainly would think that they would vote in favour of making sure that the Health Accord is adopted into this resolution.

It is the path forward for better health care for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and I think it's important when we talk about seniors, to recognize their importance and the fact that, in the Health Accord, there

was a specific focus on seniors in our province.

Again, I want to thank Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth for their work. It was a tireless effort.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Not only did Dr. Parfrey create this, but he did a lot of work in the Department of Health and NLHS afterwards. I want to thank him for all his years of service and contribution to the health care community in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

AN HON. MEMBER: We haven't seen it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

We're going to take a very quick recess just to discuss that last motion.

Recess

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The ruling that has been made stands; the amendment is still in order. The *Standing Orders* have been followed as they are written.

If there are concerns with the *Standing Orders*, then I would certainly recommend that it be brought to the Standing Orders Committee, but as far as what has been done today, everything is in accordance with the rules.

J. HOGAN: Point of privilege, Speaker.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you for recognizing that we follow the rules, but I'm just a little bit uncomfortable with the fact that immediately after you ruled that the amendment was in order, there was clearly a meeting that took place between yourselves, a Member of the government, clearly dealing with issues that were happening in the House of Assembly right now.

I think it impairs our ability to do the job when the Third Party is not included and when the Opposition is not included. You are here for everybody in the House of Assembly and there was clearly a procedural issue that was raised, which you've now said we did everything properly, but to not include both other parties of the House of Assembly at the time when you were having the meeting about something that's happening in the House of Assembly, I think impairs our ability to know fully what's going on in the House and Assembly and breaches my privilege and all of our privileges on this side of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: I think the Member just called shame on you, Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: She did.

L. PARROTT: Yes, she did, actually.

Speaker, the point of privilege, as I see it, we walked in, followed you into your office and the Opposition had lots of opportunity to come in here and join you. We did not say we didn't want you there. The door was actually open.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. PARROTT: Anyhow, when we talk about *Standing Orders*, and I respect your ruling and I know how it's written in the *Standing Orders*, but the Opposition knows that this

was not the intent when the *Standing Orders* were changed.

In 2022, when the *Standing Orders* were changed, we went from 15-minute speaking points back to 10. At that time, this was brought forward and it was brought forward, the ability to do this, to give people the opportunity to speak –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – and that opportunity –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I've recognized the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: That opportunity was so people didn't lose time and our process, why we have done this in the past, was to give the amendment to the other side prior to the House going in session. That is how it has worked in the last couple of years.

J. HOGAN: You made a ruling. He's challenging your ruling.

L. PARROTT: I'm not challenging. I just said I respected it.

Mr. Speaker, respectfully –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: He's speaking to your point of privilege.

Go ahead.

L. PARROTT: So as I said, I respect your ruling and we will be looking to change the *Standing Orders*.

What happened here today undermines the process as it happened before.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any other speakers to the point of privilege.

I will take the Member's point of privilege under advisement and I will report back at a later time.

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

C. PARDY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I think we can safely assume that all 40 of us in this House of Assembly are in unison in assisting and supporting seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador. I think, that is from all the addresses that have occurred here this afternoon, we are united in wishing to do more for the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Before I get into some commentary, I've been informed and, I would say, pleased to announce that we've had some extraordinary petroleum pricing notice occur or be launched this afternoon where there's a diesel decrease of 12.3 cents per litre and furnace oil 10.62 cents per litre.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I've stated in Question Period, when we're looking at affordability issues and the price of fuel and the spike that happened, today is March the 11th; it was earlier this month that the oil and the conflict broke out in the Middle East that the price of oil spiked. It spiked 68 per cent higher than what it was pre-war – 68 per cent.

As a result of the drop yesterday, about \$7.70 per barrel, it has now come down 29 per cent. We are at the 11th day – the 11th in the month – so I throw that out to know that the due diligence would be every one of us in this House would know the volatility with oil. We all know the volatility with oil,

but you can react so quickly to it and make decisions based on it without giving the due process.

The Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island had stated today that our coffers have grown in the province. Wait; I'm the Minister of Finance and I have no idea how much or what this bump in 11 days in the price of oil is going to manifest itself to the coffers in Newfoundland and Labrador. I don't know what information he would have to say our coffers have padding and have grown. I don't know where that is.

One thing I would say is that one of the pillars that we operate on is planning efficiently – to plan efficiently – and I think all 40 Members would agree that that's a good move. Anything you do in your own personal home, plan efficiently, but plan – make sure you plan.

The Leader of the Official Opposition stood a short time ago, and he stands by the hospital was needed. Every one of us would think and say, we would appreciate a new hospital, but when you plan efficiently and know that you have a net debt that is approaching \$20 billion, and know that a new hospital, if correct, between \$12 billion and \$14 billion is going to add 70 per cent on to the net debt, knowing that we pay \$1.1 billion servicing that debt, that's got to give you a little pause.

Sometimes we don't hear it from the Opposition, that part of planning and planning efficiently. Everything comes at a cost. To say you're going to do something on a knee-jerk reaction, that's wrong. That is inappropriate, and that's wrong. We have to make sure we do our due diligence, plan efficiently, spend smarter.

Seniors: I can repeat a lot of what was said before me, and everyone spoke so well about the value of supporting the seniors. Lots of times, we look at the monetary value of supporting seniors, and that is correct. That is a good one. I want to echo that, that

we want to increase the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent for our seniors. That's in our platform. We want to do that, and we're going to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: But when I hear, and when we talk here in the House and we're on the same page, we will vote, I would think, on this, and we may conceivably be unanimous in support of this PMR. That's a good sign.

The Member for Mount Pearl North mentions – and quite right – you increase the Seniors' Benefit and if you're going to increase the Seniors' Benefit for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but you find that the threshold has not moved and all of a sudden you're going to lose the drug card, that is something that has a whole lot of meaning. And that is correct.

We did it for the Aging Well at Home Grant. Maybe nobody noticed. We didn't send out a news release, but before we sent out the Aging Well at Home Grant, we wanted to make sure that the indexing on behalf of the federal government and the indexing provincially was going to make sure that those served were within that bracket before and that they would not be dropping people from that group that's going to be served by the Aging Well at Home Grant. So we did that.

Another thing I would say to you in my short time that I've got left; it's not only the monetary, even though that's what we talk about, but just let me share with you a quick story, to talk about the importance of good legislation, which we will bring in, in a short time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: The Member for Gander spoke about a situation and he read it out well from a parent he represented, and him and I talked after –

AN HON. MEMBER: Corner Brook.

C. PARDY: Corner Brook, sorry. Gander.

AN HON. MEMBER: Close, close.

C. PARDY: We're alongside of Gander, sorry.

So the only thing in a similar vein – and I have permission to use her name. Her name is Juanita Tremblett and her husband was Malcolm, and they lived common law for 30 years in the historic Town of Bonavista. Unfortunately, about five years ago Malcolm had a severe stroke, and he became part of the Adult Protection Act, because he really couldn't voice his desires and his opinions.

She spent 30 years, they filed taxes together, but she found through the health system and NLHS that she had no say on his care. There was no communication with her because she was not a noted decision-maker. So what Juanita had to do, there was a distant cousin that they knew of Malcolm's, in British Columbia. Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services had to communicate with the cousin in British Columbia who had to relay information back to Juanita who was at his bedside day after day.

That's not better health care, and that's not supporting seniors. So I would say to you, we will address that in the upcoming legislation here in this House, so that that doesn't happen. That is meaningful legislation.

My hon. Member for Harbour Main, she had stated about the Seniors' Advocate. Well, we're going to have some changes to the Seniors' Advocate – the act – that's going to improve the delivery of the service to seniors. The excellent job that Susan Walsh has done – not to repeat, but we all concur in the House of her passion in dealing with seniors' issues, and every report that she's put out was indicative of the passion that

she had for making sure that the livelihood of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador was looked after, well respected and improved.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi talked about the many ways to improve affordability. I will say, let's not get bogged down in one. Let's challenge what we do. But at the same time, there's a myriad of ways that we certainly –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the minister's time has expired.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Speaker, I rise on a point of order on Standing Order 1. I know the government is new. I think it's important to raise for this House, and I know the Minister of Finance just read out the gas prices, but that goes against the regulations and the legislation of this House of Assembly, Speaker.

The petroleum product regulations overseen by the Minister of Government Services indicates that boards shall keep confidential all information by the board of the wholesalers and retailers of heating fuel, motor fuel, except where the release of information is provided by the wholesaler or retailer who provided it.

I know that this is often on social media. Wholesalers and retailers sometimes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm trying to hear the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Speaker, I know on social media some people do share the information before it is public, but it goes against the petroleum products regulations. So I believe the Members shouldn't be releasing this information. It goes against the regulations and legislation of this House. It is petroleum products, section 8 of the regulations, a section about confidentiality.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, there's no point of privilege or point of order here. It's all over the Internet everywhere. It's been released.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: (Inaudible) because it's everywhere. You can go online publicly (inaudible). If it is a point of order for a violation of something, that's one thing. But if we're not allowed to use numbers that are put on gas pumps that are public, then that's something else.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to speak long on this, but I just read it on Facebook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: Can I just say that? The Member for Mount Pearl right here just said

that she just put it on Facebook. So it's out there. And she said I could use her name.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: My point is that it's already acknowledged –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: It's already acknowledged in the public domain, so to stand up and say to the minister, you shouldn't release it, when I can stand up here on Facebook and say it. So, obviously, all the minister has to say is I just read it on Facebook because it's released. People are saying that, okay, I read it on Facebook, so I can say it here in the House, which I can do right now.

So this is another issue of instead of talking about the great work that the minister is doing for seniors here, it's another way to say, okay, you shouldn't do this because it's against regulations, but you can read it on Facebook.

I'll give the minister a bit of advice. Next time, just take your phone and say I'm reading it on Facebook; it's on here. If you want to go to the site, whoever said it – the Member just said she put it on Facebook, so it has to be public.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: My point, Mr. Speaker – it's a serious point here – if people in this House got it on Facebook, someone had to release it. So someone had to release it unless the petroleum board got a leak, whoever makes the decision got a leak because if people out in the public got it, someone already had to release it before we came to this House.

SPEAKER: Speaker, get to your point.

E. JOYCE: So that's my point here, is that if the minister stood up and made that statement that's already in the general public, he's not releasing anything confidential, and that's just a moot point. Even people on the government side are saying they put it on Facebook, so how did they get it if it wasn't released?

SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I have a response.

SPEAKER: No, there is no point of order.

Our next speaker, the hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to the PMR talking about seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

M. KING: I certainly always appreciate the opportunity to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I don't like where things are starting to descend, may I say. So I'm going to recognize the Member for Burgeo - La Poile, and that's the only person I want to hear.

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll certainly remind my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands, I lost my train of thought yesterday, but I'm not going to do it today.

I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to the PMR, Speaker. I've certainly a deep-rooted respect for seniors in our province, especially those in the rural communities that I'm very proud to represent, and I certainly also appreciate following my hon.

colleague the Minister of Finance. I know he always listens when I speak in the House of Assembly, gives me a thumbs up if I'm doing a good job, so I certainly appreciate his attention to the matter as well.

Speaker, the seniors of our province – I say this quite often – are the ones who built our province. They built our towns, they sustained our industries and they shaped the character of Newfoundland and Labrador through decades of hard work, generosity and resilience. Just this past weekend, actually, I attended the 60th anniversary of the Gateway Seniors 50 Plus Club in Port aux Basques and, Mr. Speaker, I certainly always enjoy events with our seniors in our communities.

I tell you one thing, they put off a great meal, some speeches were along celebrating the occasion, but as soon as the music started, the dancing began. There was no song missed that the seniors weren't out, and I had asked the president actually – a good friend of mine who just took the role, Ester Green, just recently elected as president of the Gateway Seniors 50 Plus Club. I said: How late do you guys even go into the evening? Like, how long do you stay? She said: Usually I'll turn on the lights around 1 in the morning and they'll be dancing their way out the door. She said: They don't stop right from the beginning to the end.

So I certainly appreciate their enthusiasm in their community because it's groups like the seniors' clubs who are trying to create active living in the community for our seniors, and rural communities especially, there's not a lot of places for our seniors to go to socialize with their friends and other members of our community.

I think of the 50-plus club in Port aux Basques, and I also think of in smaller communities like Burnt Islands where there isn't a seniors' club. But the Burnt Islands recreation committee, who have taken a great interest in trying to, as I've mentioned,

create active living in our community, different events for people to go to and follow. So they've had a number of seniors days throughout the year, depending on, you know, it could be around Valentine's Day or certain holidays in the year. But there's music, there's food, there's bingo and there's cards. So a lot of great activities for our seniors to get out and enjoy.

Speaker, every community I visit, you know, small towns to the larger areas in my district, I meet with seniors who continue to give so much, whether through volunteerism, mentorship, or simply by being a steady guiding presence that keep communities grounded.

So I think also continuing to talk about different groups, we see a lot of our church groups in small, rural communities that are very active, like the ACW, I think of, who have different auctions and different events for seniors to come out and enjoy themselves, and that's a part of aging well at home, as we've mentioned a number of times. But that's all a part of it as well, being active in the community.

I heard my hon. colleague, the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, talking about seniors who live alone that are lonely. I mean, that's why these events are so important to help seniors get out into the community and to interact with their friends and their colleagues. So that's one of the things that I'm proud to see, are groups in my district take action on to provide those supports to our seniors.

Too many seniors, Speaker, are facing real challenges, particularly those living on fixed incomes in rural areas where the cost of essentials like heat, groceries, transportation, can be even higher. I heard my hon. colleague, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels who introduced the private Member's motion, and certainly appreciate him bringing this to the floor, but he talked about home care workers, and home care workers deserving more pay.

That's certainly something that I've heard a lot since being elected in the district, from different home care workers. Not just more pay, but also in addition there, it seems to be a discrepancy through home care workers working in an agency and those I guess independently working, that the pay is different.

Speaker, they've been bringing that concern to me. They are also the supports that we want to see for our seniors to age at home, but they need those supports as well. The workers are doing the same work and not receiving the same pay. So that is certainly something that I would encourage the government to look at as well, so that our home care workers can receive not only higher pay, which I certainly agree with the Member opposite on, but to actually have equal pay to their co-workers that work in the same field. That's so important, I think.

As I mentioned, if it wasn't clear, that I am pleased to support this private Member's resolution, because it affirms the importance of improving the lives of seniors across Newfoundland and Labrador, and it aligns with the work already under way, and reinforces our shared responsibility to ensure seniors can live with dignity, comfort and security.

I know that the Leader of the Opposition brought forward an amendment about the Health Accord, and the Health Accord has certainly been a great document that has been providing direction on how we address some of the health care concerns in this province and how we treat our seniors with respect and help support them.

The Aging Well at Home Grant was one of those things that came from the previous government, \$400 that helps support our seniors at home whether that needs to be mowing their lawn or getting someone to snow blow their driveway, pick up their groceries if they are unable to get out. I know so many seniors in my district who have reached out to my office to get help

with an application, because I know that money goes a long way to many seniors on fixed incomes, and any senior throughout the district who is trying to avail of that program to get those supports.

So anyone listening on the broadcast as well, March 31 is the deadline for that program, so I certainly encourage anybody to reach out to their Member to get access to the application to make sure it's in before the deadline and make sure the Minister of Finance gets that money out the door to our seniors, for sure. I would also encourage them as well, doubling the Aging Well at Home Grant would certainly be something that would help the seniors in our district. That's something that we proposed, another solution that I think would help the seniors in our province, Mr. Speaker.

We talk about seniors wanting to remain in their communities, as I mentioned, supporting home care services, improving accessibility and strengthening community-based supports are essential steps toward making that possible.

My hon. colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl North, who I know doesn't miss a seniors' event in her district for sure, but she talks about housing and how important housing is to access. I think about areas in my district like Burgeo. There are only so many senior care homes available for those who actually can no longer stay in their home. I think of the manor that's available in Port aux Basques, but there are only limited spaces, and these communities are certainly aging at a faster pace that we see in many communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Having those housing units or manors or home care available for our seniors is also so important, so I look forward to having continued conversations, especially with the Town of Burgeo. I'm trying to improve some of the housing options, especially for our seniors in our community so they can remain in our community.

As I mentioned, Burgeo is very far off the highway. It's not close to really another community, so having a senior have to leave Burgeo and move to another community would certainly be probably upsetting to them and their family, being so far away from home. I certainly look forward to the continued work working with those communities.

Speaker, especially when we think about seniors aging at home, in the last couple minutes that I have here, I think about my grandmother especially. As many colleagues here would have heard me in my maiden speech, my grandmother raised three children on her own at a very young age, and was in her home recently having some health troubles, had to leave her home, but that's something she continues to say is that she wants to go home. She even worked actually next door to her home. She had owned a bakery right next to her house for many, many years and made a living off of that, supporting her family. I certainly think of her strength and her resilience when we talk about seniors in our province for sure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: Speaker, as I mentioned, I'm very proud to stand to support this resolution. I encourage all Members to join us in supporting the amendment presented by the Leader of the Opposition to reaffirming our commitment to the seniors who have given so much to this province. They deserve nothing less than our full attention, our respect and our continued action.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always an honour and a privilege to rise in this lovely House and to thank my district, the great District of Lake Melville, for putting me here a second time, and to let them know, and to let everybody know, not to shock this House, but I'm coming in here at 50 years of age, and when I leave, hopefully I'll be a senior, so this bill applies to me. I'll thank the minister for bringing this forward.

So what are we doing here, Mr. Speaker? We're speaking on this PMR. We've all talked about it, and it was lovely to hear everybody's dialogue across the House here about their own families and the seniors in their districts and just getting to know a little bit about everybody else's district as well. We're going to increase the benefit by 20 per cent in this PMR, we're going to expand access to affordable and independent housing options and improve vision care coverage for individuals receiving long-term care and community support services. That's just a few of the little things we're going to cover in this PMR, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to say from a senior's point of view, I am a momma's boy. I've got no problem saying it. My mother, my gram and my nan were the matriarchs in all levels of our family. When you come from a large Indigenous family and a large Newfoundland family – I'm proud to always say I'm half and half, if you will, Mr. Speaker. My nan was born here on the Island. She was born in Riverhead. I'll tell you what, with my gram, she was born in Northern Labrador in a place called Big Bay. So that was where the Indigenous content comes from.

I'll just say, Mr. Speaker, that I wanted to talk about gram and nan from a widower's perspective because we always talk in this House about our seniors and all that stuff too, and I had watched both of my grandfathers pass ahead of my gram and my nan; and then I had watched health services, if you will, at work in our district as well, Mr. Speaker, because I had my gram,

who has Alzheimer's, and that set in. She was literally strong as an ox, and still when she was up in age, she was.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: I certainly loved my gram.

My nan, of course, right to the very end, well into her 90s, was sharp as a tack and had the wit of anybody in this House, I'd say, Mr. Speaker, and loved watching the proceedings in this House. Of course, her body then failed. I got to see both sides of that. So we got to see a long-term care aspect to that and then we got to see somebody who had health difficulties, you know, right from day one, if you will, when she started to be classified as a senior.

In saying that, I just wanted to say, like, in Labrador we talk about it. We got up in this hon. House, all of us earlier on today, in today's proceedings. We had the Member for Labrador West talk about seniors in his district and the Labrador way of life and the price of fuel and all that. We've heard many Members on this side and that side of the House, I'll say, talk about this too, just the high cost of living.

In Labrador, the hunting and fishing that takes place – so as our seniors get up in age, luckily there are a lot of people that have big families. They got somebody out there who will get you a fish, get you a couple of birds or a piece of meat when they can. But I'll say this in reference to the value of this PMR and the value of legislation, strong legislation in this House, it's because when those people that don't have anybody to look out for them, Mr. Speaker.

I tell you what, my father certainly imparted the teachings on me of, you know, we always share and share alike. So if I got a couple of fish, I'm going to make sure I'm going to touch base with a few of the Elders in my community – and you guys know who you are out there, special friends like Agnes Blake. I always bring Agnes a piece of fish

and a piece of my smoked fish as well, when we come back from the cabin, Mr. Speaker. That's the way of things all across our beautiful province, share and share alike. Basically getting into talking about just keeping our communities alive and all that as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I won't run on, the hour is getting late as we can see. But I just –

SPEAKER: The hon. Member's time has expired.

K. RUSSELL: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: I just want to reiterate what was said here in this House this afternoon. I am very privileged to have put the PMR through this House, and get the support that has been shown from the opposite and from this side. As I reiterate what I had said earlier, this is about the seniors of our province. This is not about us; this is about our seniors and showing them the respect that we should be showing them. Like I said earlier, they are the ones who shaped this province. They are the ones who put this province where it is today, and we have to show our gratitude and our thanks to them, and give them the sense they belong.

The most important part of this to me is: Keep them in their homes as long as they want to be in their homes. Take away the stress.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Help with the finances, like we're doing with the 20 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit package. Lower taxes,

especially keeping the gas tax where it is permanently, right now, instead of having to face an eight-cent increase at the end of the month.

So those are the kinds of things that we have to do, to reach out to our seniors, show respect and give them gratitude and thanks for what they have done for us.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Call in the Members.

Division

SPEAKER: Are House Leaders ready?

All those in favour of the amendment, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER (Russell): John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernard Davis, Sarah Stoodley, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Pam Parsons, Keith White, Paul Pike, Elvis Loveless, Fred Hutton, Lucy Stoyles, Jim Parsons, Betina Ford, Michael King, James Dinn, Sheilagh O'Leary.

SPEAKER: All those against the amendment, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER: Tony Wakeham, Lloyd Parrott, Joedy Wall, Lela Evans, Helen

Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Craig Pardy, Barry Petten, Loyola O'Driscoll, Andrea Barbour, Chris Tibbs, Lin Paddock, Pleaman Forsey, Mike Goosney, Keith Russell, Riley Balsom, Hal Cormier, Mark Butt, Jim McKenna, Joseph Power, Eddie Joyce.

CLERK (Hawley George): Speaker, the ayes: 16; the nays: 21.

SPEAKER: The amendment has been defeated.

All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion has been carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, Private Members' Day, this House do now adjourn until tomorrow, Thursday, March 12, at 1:30 p.m.