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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA*

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The House met at 10 a.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Are the House Leaders ready?

Order, please!

Admit strangers.

### Orders of the Day

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**S. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**S. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that the Member for Lake Melville be appointed Deputy Chair of Committees.

**SPEAKER:** The motion is that the Member for Lake Melville be nominated for the Deputy Chair of Committees.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always great to be in the House of Assembly. I would like to say, to start with, to

be elected the second time – I know the first election was short; it was two years. To be re-elected for the second time by the people of Exploits, it's really an honour. It's an honour to be here.

I would just like to congratulate everyone else for being re-elected and elected to this House of Assembly. It's been a privilege and an honour to be here, to sit in and talk about the things in our district, talk about the cares we need, the things that people need and the addresses that they need put forward. It's really a privilege to be here, Mr. Speaker.

During the election, again, this year, lots of times you hear the same problems, the same issues. Health care, of course, is the first and foremost in my district, in the Central region. It's been a big issue and still remains a big, big issue. Of course, I can't miss the 24-hour emergency service at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre. Mr. Speaker, I've heard it all throughout the elections. This is three times now that the 24-hour emergency service has been beat around in our district. It was promised in 2019. It was committed to for 2021. During the election now in 2021, again, there was even an announcement made that the 24 hours would be reinstated in June. The people of Exploits are really looking forward to that announcement because it's really an issue to them.

I didn't see anything in this budget for the 24-hour emergency service to be reinstated. Why does government keep making promises and making election issues, but then don't carry out with their promises? It makes me only believe that they're just trying to get a seat in government, basically, rather than trying to do something. It's horrible; it's terrible that people are treated like that.

Mr. Speaker, they're really looking forward to the 24-hour emergency service being reinstated in Botwood. It takes a lot of pressure, a lot of – the stories that I've heard with regard to that 24-hour emergency service, people from the outlying area, Leading Tickles, Fortune Harbour, have an hour's drive just to get to Botwood on a normal day. Put in bad weather, stormy conditions and you can put that to two hours probably – from one hour to two hours – to get to the emergency service. Somebody with

bad health conditions – a heart attack, whatever – every minute counts. To force people to drive an extra, I've heard a half-hour, from Botwood to Grand Falls-Windsor then, on a stormy night, bad conditions – no, forget it. You can't do it. If you can, you're endangering lives even more.

Mr. Speaker, that 24-hour emergency service, it's time for the government to commit, reinstate it and do as promised in the elections. Not just using it as political issues, political ploys but come good on their promises and let's get that reinstated. That is still a big issue in the Exploits District and it certainly needs to be addressed.

Also in health care, Mr. Speaker, the home care. I've heard from some of the seniors that the dental programs and the eyeglass programs, they have to pay more. They need dental work; there's nothing there for them to avail of. Some of the home care services – it's stressed that they'd like to see seniors stay in their home longer.

During the election, I was talking to one lady who was 92 years old. She said that she still feels good but really can't afford to stay in her home. Back in 2016 her subsidy was cut. She was staying in her home, I think her subsidy was around \$119, she was telling me, but she was receiving the benefit. When the benefit was cut, then they increased her contribution. So it's costing her almost double to stay in her own home than what it was before and she just can't afford to do it.

She has heat – I visit her periodically just to see how she's doing. You go in there in the wintertime and she has the heat down. You'd almost freeze to death when you walk into her porch. It's terrible to see seniors being treated like that, because she can't keep warm. I know friends and family bring meals to her at times.

To treat a senior like that who is well up there in age, more than capable of staying in her own home – more than capable – and to have to pay the dental cost, the eyewear cost, and then increase subsidies for home care, it just doesn't make sense. Those are the issues and problems that I've been hearing in my district, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure we have them all across the province. If we're going to keep seniors in their own homes, we better start looking out for

the seniors so that they can stay in their own homes and feel warm, comfortable and be attended to. That certainly needs attention.

Mr. Speaker, tourism in our district; it's an amazing district, we've got tourism galore just starting now. Of course, June 1, the salmon is just starting to hit the river in Bishop's Falls, and I'm starting to think I'd like to be there myself, but, anyway, that does bring a lot of people to the Central area in the summertime, especially the two months, probably June and July would be the prime months, of course, for the salmon fishery. If we put more into tourism in our area we can certainly bring people to our area from all around. If we can't have outside-the-province visits this year, or limited, we can certainly drag people in from outlying areas in our own province and enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Exploits District and the Central area itself.

Once you leave Bishop's Falls and you go out through Exploits, you can go down through Botwood. Botwood has some of the best murals in Atlantic Canada. I'm sure a lot of people have heard about them; I don't know how many people have seen them, but I would certainly invite you to come out and see them this summer. The beautiful murals that they have on all of the buildings down there, depicting the heritage of Botwood and the history of Botwood. Seeing how I was on the hospital, I'll certainly mention the one of Dr. Hugh Twomey, a great doctor, a great physician himself, who helped build that community and build the hospital in Botwood, Mr. Speaker. There are beautiful murals there.

Then you keep on going down through the rest of the district, you have Point Leamington, Fortune Harbour, Cottrell's Cove and Leading Ticks, all beautiful scenic area, Mr. Speaker. Rugged coasts, beautiful beaches and beautiful people; the people themselves are wonderful to be around. They'd help you and assist you in any way they can. Mr. Speaker, tourism is certainly an area that we can develop and make that area a lot more feasible for tourism.

Roads: I'll just mention a few things on the roads. Being from that area, with regard to getting to the – if the people have to drive to Grand Falls-Windsor and the outlying areas on the roads, that can be treacherous at times. If

we're going to develop tourism, I'm sure the roads would need a little bit more attention. There is some roadwork that needs to be done, Mr. Speaker.

I'm hoping to meet with the minister and hoping to address some of the attention on the roads. I'm sure roads in every district, in every area, everybody is looking for roads because it is good for transportation. If we're going to increase tourism, drag people around our own province to get them in from other areas, roads is something that has to be addressed so people can avail of it and be comfortable with regard to driving in the areas, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, also in the district, I know employment becomes a big issue. I'm sure it's seen all across the province, Mr. Speaker, of employment. In Exploits, we have an abundance of forestry, we have an abundance of mining and I must say, yes, there is a mine started in Valentine Lake right now. Marathon Gold is up there, they're starting to mine and that's going to bring upwards of 400 people in capacity when that mine is up and running in 2023. It is great. That is great news to hear and to see our province taking on mining like that. But in other fashions, we've also got lots of minerals in the Central region, in the Exploits region. I've talked to geologists out there and they feel that the minerals there are still untapped with regard to the industries that could be put there with mining.

Not only mining, forestry is another industry that is really not tapped into. It is tapped into in Central Newfoundland, of course, in the Exploits District, the big zones 10, 11 and 12 are the big forest baskets. There are sawmills and industry right now on the Island, of course. The West Coast and outside Central, they do take the pulp and the timber from Central Newfoundland and just carry it away. People in that area are just watching the trucks full of timber and loads of timber just leaving our area when we need something with secondary processing in the Exploits District, Mr. Speaker. It's there, our resource is right there on our own doorstep but we're watching it being all trucked away and all pulled away. The people feel like this could certainly be an industry that we could tap into, Mr. Speaker, to keep employment, to keep

people in our Central area and to keep everyone employed and create jobs.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Botwood harbour is one of the deepest harbours on the Northeast Coast. It has potential. If shipping becomes a problem, I'm sure the Botwood harbour, once we tapped into the mining a lot more, use the forestry a lot more with products and the minerals we have, if we could get all that working in the Central area, we'd have a great place to live; economically, we would have a great place to live. Botwood harbour, if it means shipping lanes, I mean that was a shipping lane for years with the old Abitibi in Botwood and the papermaking. They shipped it all out of Botwood at the time and that, like I say, again, that port is one of the deepest ones; beautiful harbours on the Northeast Coast.

I'm sure if we needed to ship forest products, if we can find an industry, if we need to ship our products and our mining and our industries, if we could get something there and use Botwood as a port, we'd have a full operation down in Exploits District in the Central region which could avail of lot more jobs, a lot more industry in the area. We need to put more attention on that.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture, that's another big industry in the Central Newfoundland region. I talked to some of the farmers and the crops that they grow are – it's wonderful to see. Food efficiency is becoming a thing now especially with COVID. We've learned that we need to be more self-sufficient with regard to food. I know that the government has tried to increase the crop availability here from 10 per cent of what we have right now to about 15 to 20. To do that, Mr. Speaker, we need to help the farmers that are already there.

I know there was a program in place, \$2.7 million for potato farming – youth, new farmers, that kind of stuff coming in, but that doesn't help the Central region right now. That seems to be all going to the West Coast and other areas of the province rather than directly into Exploits and the direct Central area.

There are experienced farmers in that area, Mr. Speaker; they've been at it for years. They know how to grow a crop. They know what it takes.

They started off with nothing, basically. They worked themselves up and they have experience and they have great crops in there now. Some even have apple orchards on their farms in there. It's great to see that. I'm sure with some help and some funding they can diversify in a lot more crops and a lot more food, Mr. Speaker, and expand our food self-sufficiency in years to come.

To do that, Mr. Speaker, they need some assistance in order to expand and to grow. Even irrigation in some of the areas is a problem to them. Even if we could help with that, the water supply, especially in a dry year and dry summers. This could be another summer that might be dry because it seems like this year the rain, the runoff seems to be happening a lot quicker. The brooks seem to be a lot lower so this could be a year where we're putting in money to help – if you're putting in money to help expand the crops, well, irrigation has to be one thing, because if we lose a crop, then our food self-sufficiency is certainly depleted.

We need to put more emphasis on the experienced farmers. Not only the new farmers but we need to put more money into experienced farmers, farmers that have the ability, have the know-how to expand, Mr. Speaker, and make this province a great place to live and be self-sufficient in our food.

Mr. Speaker, when I go back to health, diabetic pumps are another thing I've heard that people are needing assistance with. There are lots of things in health care that really need attention in the Exploits District. I know that all across this province it's probably the same. People are looking for the same things, no doubt. Whatever district we're in, wherever we go, people are looking for it. We need to put more attention on the people that we have here. We need to put more emphasis on health care, growing our own province and making our communities a lot stronger.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'll end off by saying, again, that anybody wanting to reach out and explore the Exploits District this year, I'm sure that you would love to come there and, especially, take up some of the area in just, like I said, the salmon rivers. It's great to sit down on the salmon river in Bishop's Falls there. They

have new lookouts and you can watch the salmon. I can't get off the salmon because it's on my mind. I see the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay; I guess he likes doing a bit of fishing himself.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, it's always great to get up in this House of Assembly and talk about the district because I believe in the Exploits District; I believe in the people of the Exploits District. I believe that we can make it work in the Central area; we can make it work in the Exploits District alone for people. We have lots of development that can happen there. We have people who want to make it work there, with some help from government in those areas, to help the people along.

We have some great entrepreneurs in there that are looking to expand and looking for businesses out there. They have some ideas. If we keep tapping into our resources, tapping into our people, Mr. Speaker, we will make Exploits District a great place to live and this province a great place to be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, it's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to the budget this morning. Unfortunately – well, it depends on how you look at it, I suppose, whose point of view. From my point of view, unfortunately, 20 minutes is not a lot of time, considering there are so many things in the budget and so many things we could speak to. I'm sure there will be lots of opportunities throughout this process. I know there are some money bills coming as well, so there will be lots of opportunity to speak about specific aspects of the budget.

This morning I just want to sort of hit the top of the trees on my view of the budget at first blush. I have reached out to my constituents seeking feedback. I haven't received a lot of feedback yet, but it's like anything else, I'm sure we've all been inundated with emails from – NAPE

employees are obviously saying reject the Greene report in totality, basically, don't lay anybody off and so on. We've all received numerous emails, I'm assuming, from the NLTA and concerns that teachers have. We've all received them from the Employers' Council telling us to get on with it and start making the cuts and adjustments that they feel need to be made to get us on a better track financially.

Those are opposing views. Obviously, they all have their own interests and so on. I'm not saying that they don't have the interest of the province at heart as well, but they all come from their own perspectives based on – I guess where you sit is kind of where you stand so they say. That's the expression. We get that. But some of the feedback I've received from – and, again, not a lot thus far – some constituents of mine is they felt that the budget has not gone far enough in addressing our fiscal circumstance.

Now, I realize again that depends on the individual and perhaps it depends on the region of the province that you represent. But looking at the demographic that I represent, from a general point of view, I think citizens are very concerned about the year-over-year deficits, the huge provincial debt and the solvency of the province. I think it's fair to say many of them I have spoken to don't believe the answer is simply to take the easy way out, just tax people to death and try to solve our fiscal situation that way. They believe that we need to look at the expense side–

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The level of talking is a little too loud.

**P. LANE:** – of the financials and look at ways that we can be more efficient, more nimble and save money.

That seems to be the general theme I've received thus far. I realize not everybody shares that view. No matter what government does, it doesn't matter; you're going to have people that are going to be for and against every measure taken in a budget, generally speaking.

Let's face it, in an ideal world people want to see better services and less taxes. That's not always possible. There's only a finite amount of money to spend. As much as we'd like to see more money for this and more money for that, particularly in our districts, the reality of it is that we have a provincial debt that is crippling us. I'm not sure what the net debt is now but it's over \$15 billion for sure, maybe more than that: \$16 billion.

**S. COADY:** Seventeen.

**P. LANE:** Seventeen, there you go. Thank you, Finance Minister.

Seventeen billion dollars, with a B, just think about that, for a population of 500,000 people and, of course, we're going to borrow probably another billion again this year or more. That's going to bring us up to \$18 billion. That's just with the net debt. That's not with all the other unfunded liabilities and everything else thrown in there.

It is a huge problem. It's a huge problem. The Auditor General has pointed it out on numerous occasions. Our lenders have obviously pointed it out. I think we all know deep inside, whether we want to admit it or not, that action has to be taken. I think we've known it for a long time but the will just has not been there. I understand the political pressure, I get it.

I'm sure that there are going to be some tough measures that are being proposed that I'm going to support, depending on how they're done, of course, and if they're done right. I'm sure I'm going to take some backlash for supporting some of these things, but, at some point in time, we have to realize the situation we're in financially and be willing to say that some action has to be taken.

There were some positives that I saw in the Budget Speech, some things that I was kind of happy to see. I was happy to see that there's going to be a continuation and perhaps an enhancement of the specialty courts, whether that be family violence intervention court and Drug Treatment Court and so on. I'm certainly not a lawyer or nothing like that, but I have sort of read up on, to some degree, the benefit of having these speciality courts and trying to deal

with people's issues as opposed to just strictly taking punitive measures and incarceration, trying to actually deal with the root of the problem and so on. Having specialty courts that are going to deal with some of these social issues and addictions and everything else, I think that's a positive move and I would certainly support it. I was glad to see that, actually.

I was also glad to see that there continues to be a commitment to our oil and gas industry in terms of there is some investment there. I wish our federal government was as committed to our oil and gas industry as we are in this House of Assembly. I am really concerned about that, I really think that there is this sort of ideology in Ottawa that is not on our side when it comes to our offshore oil and gas, and I think it is hurting us and it could hurt us even more.

I think we all understand in this House the value of our oil and gas industry and the tremendous benefits that it has brought to our province, both from the perspective of royalties, but also employment and the building of expertise and so on in our province. It has been tremendous for us. Let's face it, it really has been a godsend for our province.

Unfortunately, we have been experiencing issues which are – global issues, let's face it, it is not Newfoundland and Labrador issues per se; these are global issues. I certainly hope we can get things on track, but I was glad to see signs and signals in the budget that the government is committed to our oil and gas. As others have said, and I would certainly agree with the fact, the world is not going to be coming off fossil fuels tomorrow: that's not reality.

I have had some people reach out to me, I'm sure others have as well, who've said shut her all down, everything is going green, it is a dying industry and so on. I understand the world is slowly moving towards a green economy and many would argue that the faster the better, and I agree in terms of global warming and so on, that needs to happen, but there is what we would like to see and then there is the reality. I try as best as I can to deal with reality, not wishful thinking. I think the reality of it is that it will be around, oil and gas will be around and petroleum products will be around for many years to come.

If it is going to be developed and it is going to be needed throughout the world, somebody has got to benefit from it so why not Newfoundland and Labrador. Especially given the fact that we have some of the cleanest oil, so to speak, on the planet, so I understand, from a processing perspective and so on. It makes sense to me that as we transition, that we exploit as much of our product as we can to benefit our province so that we can use those revenues to help get us out of debt and help us transition to the new green economy.

That just seems to make good sense to me. Again, I'm no expert in that either but it makes good sense and I was glad to see a commitment from our government that we're not giving up on our oil and gas industry. I would be very, very – disappointed would be an understatement if we were.

I was also pleased to see that government has committed that they're going to be developing, I guess, a new renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy or plan or whatever you want to call it. That's good news because there was great progress made by the former administration. I think it was started under Premier Williams, if I'm not mistaken, the Poverty Reduction Strategy. They made good progress over the years, but it seems to me that it kind of stalled. At some point in time, it kind of stalled and we haven't seen that type of commitment for a few years. We've maintained what we've had but I don't think we made a lot of strides beyond where we've been, certainly not enough.

I'm glad to see that government is saying they're going to sort of renew and kick-start that process and, hopefully, in doing so we can find ways to help lift people out of poverty and make them healthier and contributors to our province.

The fitness tax credit: Obviously, that's a positive in terms of trying to move from – in our health care system prevention, I guess. I guess the only criticism of the fitness tax credit – obviously, a lot of people in my district think that's a wonderful thing because a lot of those people are of the income base and so on that they have the money, not all, but I'd say most people have the money to be able to go to a gym and whatever. They're doing it now anyway, so if they can get a tax rebate for going to the gym

or for having their kids in sports, well, then, obviously, they're going to say that's a good thing so I'm not going to be against that.

But I would point out, I think as others have pointed out in reaction to the budget, I'm not sure that does a lot for low-income families and people who can't afford to – they can't afford the gym membership and then wait for a tax credit at the end of the year. They don't have the money upfront to even afford to go to a gym or some of them can't afford to put their kids in sports. I know there are programs like Jumpstart and so on, which are great programs. I know certainly in Mount Pearl all of the sporting groups, they will never let a child who wants to participate not participate because of money. Whether Jumpstart is available or not, they always find other ways internally to make sure every child who wants to play can play. I certainly commend them for that.

Again, if we want to be committed to this and going down this road, this is a positive, but we need to find ways to make sure that people of low income can participate in this as well, and that they have ways for their children to avail of sports and fitness. By the way, the same thing goes on the sugar tax issue. That's received somewhat of a mixed review in the public. Some people are applauding it and other people are saying that you're attacking the most vulnerable who can't afford healthy food.

Personally, I don't think it's a bad idea in concept, but I would like to see – and I don't know how we do this by the way, so I'm just throwing it out there as a thought more than a plan, because I don't have one, I'll admit that. It would seem to me that if we're going to be collecting extra money from a sugar tax, somehow that money should be diverted into some kind of a program to help low-income families to be able to afford milk to replace pop, healthy foods and healthy drinks. You're not really solving the problem unless people can afford the healthy stuff. We need to be doing more to get healthy food for people who can't afford healthy food.

It's fine for all of us here and many people who can go up to the grocery store. We might complain. I know I go up to the grocery store lots of times and say: Oh my God, look at the

price for a few grapes or whatever, it's ridiculous, but at the end of the day, I still buy them. I might complain about it but I still buy them, I can afford to buy them. What about the people who can't? Somehow, we have to do something for those people.

I was very pleased that government had announced that they're going to be adding oversight here in this House of Assembly to agencies, boards and commissions. That was probably my favourite highlight of the budget, to be honest with you, on a personal level, because it's something that certainly I've been advocating for in the last number of years and I really believe it's the right thing to do.

As I've said in this House of Assembly in other Budget Speeches and other times, here we are counting pencils in the minister's office and then just approving one line on the budget that transfers millions or billions of dollars to a particular entity. I think with the Minister of Health, as an example, it is \$3 billion – one line, a \$3-billion grant to the health care authorities. We're not even talking about \$3 billion but we're asking the minister how much he spent on photocopying in his office, which is kind of ridiculous when you think about it. I definitely applaud that move. I'm glad you did it. I'm glad you listened.

The electric vehicle grant, I think that's a good idea. The feds are doing it and other provinces are supplementing the federal grant with a provincial grant. I'm not sure if our grant is as high as some of the other provinces, but it's a start. It helps move us down that road of a green economy. I thought that was a positive, as well as having the infrastructure in place across the province for you to be able to charge your vehicles. I think these are moves in the right direction. Also, the grant to convert oil to electric heat – that was another one.

We've maintained, of course, the \$25-a-day child care. The \$25-a-day child care – and I know the feds are saying they want to get it down to \$10 and a lot of people will applaud that. There's no doubt that child care is a barrier to getting people in the workforce. No doubt about it. I think these things will pay for itself over time, I really do.



On the \$25-a-day child care – and I don't know if other Members have gotten calls from daycare operators or whatever in their district, child care operators, but one of the issues that I'm hearing is that there are a number of child care operators that are not offering \$25-a-day child care; they're not doing it. They can't do it because they were charging \$45 a day. That was their business model that they were utilizing.

The government is saying we want to reduce to \$25 a day, but we're only going to give you a subsidy of, I think it is, \$13. If you do the math, if they charge \$25 and the government gives them \$13 – \$25 and \$13 is \$38, not \$45. They have to take a \$7 cut in their revenue per child, a \$7 cut in order to offer this program.

Many of them are saying I can't afford it. Maybe if you're a large operator and you're doing it on volume you can suck it up somehow and make it happen, but a lot of the operators can't. They've had to say: No, b'y, I'm sorry. There are a lot of people that are not getting the advantage of the \$25-a-day child care because their child care operator is saying: I'm sorry; I'm not enrolling in this. I can't. If you want to try to find somewhere at \$25 a day, be my guest. Of course, they can't, because there's nowhere else to go because they're full. So people are still having to pay the \$45. That is a problem that needs to be addressed.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, when I started, all I've done is I've sort of ticked off a few positives. I haven't even started on any of the cuts or proposed cuts and I'm out of time already. I'm glad I'm going to have lots of opportunities to get on that track as we move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, it's a privilege to speak in this House on behalf of the wonderful people of Labrador West. Maybe I'll take a page from the book of my colleague there – from his response to the budget – from Stephenville - Port au Port; I'll name all the communities in my district: Labrador City, Wabush. There we go.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**J. BROWN:** I know. I only have two communities, but I have more iron mines than I do have communities, so that's a bonus there. There are four operating iron mines in my district alone, maybe soon to be five, maybe soon to be six.

We are blessed that we have such abundant resources. I think one geologist told me: Don't worry about buying anything or building a home or a cabin in Lab West; you'll be good for 200 years. I'm glad to hear that there's at least 200 years of iron in the ground around my community alone.

That brings with it a lot of opportunity. If we look at the budget lines and stuff like that, it referenced iron ore a lot in the budget, which I'm really pleased to hear. In it, it referenced man-years or people-years of work, and it's in the thousands. So thousands of person-years of work, that's a good shining light. It's a strong, steady industry that's been around forever and a day. The first prospectors to go into the area were in the 1900s, so we always knew it was there. We always knew we had this asset in the ground. The question always was how do we get it out in an economical way?

Thanks to the post-war boom of World War II, they found a way to get it out. Building the railway alone was considered the greatest railway-engineering project in the modern world, just to build a railway into Labrador to get up onto the height of land. Ingenuity – if it's there, it's there, and if they want it they'll come and get it. We have an abundant resource, we have a great opportunity there and let's continue to grow that opportunity in a reasonable manner.

We're now entering the world of the green, low-carbon economy and even the mining companies are looking at themselves internally and saying: How do we continue to do business and how do we do it in a green, economical way?

Here's the great thing that I've noticed after speaking to some people in industry, is that it's actually creating more jobs in the mining industry by switching to low-carbon initiatives and stuff like that. They're actually creating more jobs within their own organizations, which

has been a fascinating thing in a sense that the investment into green mining that we all know no matter what we build or what we need, we're always going to need iron; we're always going to need nickel, copper and the list goes on.

But how do we get it out of the ground and do it in a way that we're not hurting the environment beyond what we've already hurt it? This is where we need to take a strong initiative and investment to look at the technology, the research and development.

I know last evening we were here for Estimates with the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology and we had a great conversation about all of those kind of things with the staff of the department. We have to work towards this, we have to invest in research and development, and we have to get Memorial University on board to do that in their facility because there are opportunities there. We have to get to them before somebody else gets to them, because if we lose our foothold in that market, if we lose our foothold in the change into the green economy, then we're behind the eight ball and then it's just no good.

We have to take our time – well, not even actually take our time, we don't have time. We need to take an initiative into investing in these opportunities while we have the chance, while we're ahead of the game. We have some of the biggest players in the mining industry in our province already that are looking at these things.

I know in Labrador West, one of the mines there is looking at the idea that: I'm burning too much bunker C, I need to stop burning bunker C, because if I keep burning bunker C I can't trade with the European Union because they're putting in such strict rules about even what goods they import. They already have it on gold and silver and all of that stuff in the EU that if these minerals are coming from an area that's not environmentally friendly, trade friendly, treat their employees well, they won't import it into the European Union.

Now, this is coming down onto base metals like iron, copper, nickel and all this stuff. They're saying that they don't want to lose their foothold in the European market, so, obviously, they have to take a shift. These new regulations, these

things are putting pressure on these companies to actually change, and some of them are taking the initiative to do it just before the rules come into place.

We have mining opportunities there that are saying, do you know what? I have to stop burning bunker C. I have to convert from using that. Well lucky for us in this province, we have hydroelectricity, which the European Union sees as an opportunity, they say it's okay if you're using hydroelectricity, you tick the box for environmental in the sense that you're not burning fossil fuels and you're not releasing carbon.

Now, they're looking at technology of how can they convert certain mechanics of their operation into green technology. This is where we have the opportunity to invest in the mining industry and changing the mining industry in a way that we can be the leader in the world for green mining.

I know if you look at the term green mining, well, you're still digging a hole in the ground, you're still doing that, but you at least have to start with your carbon emissions and then work back on other opportunities you can to make sure that we leave as little destruction and little footprint in the environment we have, especially in Labrador. Labrador has always been deemed the last natural frontier in this country. It's the last place that you can go and still see things as they were thousands of years ago.

This is another thing, too, we have these opportunities, we have these active operations, do it with the least amount of impact to the environment, but, at the same time, do it in a way that when we clean up the site and everything like that it's like it was never ever there.

That's where we have to take these things. We also look at orphaned mines and orphaned sites and other industrial sites throughout our province, too. We have to take the opportunity to clean it up, put it back to the way it was so that we can also remember that, yeah, we did that, but, at the same time, we put it back when we were done because we don't want to leave it for another generation. I'm sure the generation behind us is already a little pissed off with us as it is, what we've leaving them with.

We have to keep that in mind that we have a responsibility to the environment, we have a responsibility to the economy and we have a responsibility to the people of this province. We have to weigh those three things very heavily on the sense that what we do over here will have an effect with the other two and vice versa.

I always have the interesting thing that in my community we have a cyclical market that is the iron ore market. Today is a great day, ore is trading at – I think this morning it was 190-something tons on the 62 per cent market, which you add premiums in, that's over \$200-and-something dollars a ton for ore that comes out of Labrador because it's a better quality ore.

That's great, that's record highs, but, at the same time, it creates problems; low-income people in my district usually get bumped out of housing, contract companies and stuff coming in to do work for the mine bumps things around. We always have people who don't work in the mining industry, who work in the service industry, who don't make quite enough to pay for the \$2,000 to \$3,000 a month apartment. We always say it's great, the mine is doing great, but the balance is thrown off.

We always have to take that into consideration, what you do over here is going to affect over here. So we always have to take the effect that homelessness and stuff in my district is a little different than it would be here, probably in the metro area. It does get to 40 below in Lab West and it does have its challenges. Then once the mining market goes the other way around, you'll see that homelessness and stuff kind of disappears for a little while because those people who are charging \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month for an apartment needs to get people back in their building so they drop it down to a reasonable rate, the people move back into these apartments again and then the cycle starts all over again.

When we do get these markets and we look at development and all these things and all the opportunities that we do create, we also have to put in safety nets or measures in place that keep protecting the people on the other end of the spectrum. We need to make sure that when we're doing great, that the negatives that come with doing great don't outweigh or affect the people that are on the other side. We have to

find that perfect – well, not perfect balance, but we need to find a balance that everyone in our society is protected from certain elements of other things.

We look at the housing, we look at that, we make extra sure we have enough housing in place for when it happens, but we also have to look at the ideas that when we are in a downturn, it is a great opportunity for maintenance review and look at what you have to make sure that it's ready just in case it happens again.

I always find it interesting in my district, we have a very large population – we are one of the largest regions, communities that don't have an emergency shelter – no barrier shelter. We don't need it all the time but in times like this is when we need it. We find ourselves sometimes, a single individual venturing up to Lab West to, hopefully, find that job and hit it big, but sometimes they fall on hard times or there are other issues in the way and they find themselves homeless, no job, trapped in a community that is not familiar to them. It happens pretty frequently. Or they haven't hit it big with that job yet and they get kicked out of an apartment and end up having to leave the job because they don't have a place or don't have a vehicle.

We get these situations that we are not prepared for. We don't have the mechanisms in place to deal with these situations like other communities in this province that do have it. We find ourselves in these situations that we need that little investment, we need that safety net built in place to protect these individuals.

There are situations – sometimes it's not even a fault of their own; it's a fault of the situation of how the markets and that work in Labrador West. Some people are just not prepared for that. Everyone always jokes and calls us sometimes little Fort McMurray, because we have similar social situations that they have, but on a really scaled-down version.

We have the opportunities and stuff there. Like I said, another big one that comes up when we're in a good high market is addictions and mental health issues. I always tell people big money comes with big problems. In some cases it's addictions. We've always struggled in Labrador West with addictions.

One shocking revelation came to me one day that some of the people in the community were finding needles and stuff around the community. I was informed that, yeah, injected narcotics have made its way to Labrador West. That's a scary, scary thought to think that we're going down that road. We need to make sure that we have the net for proper drug and alcohol addiction treatment in our region.

Gambling addiction is another huge issue that we battle with. Like I said, big money becomes big problems. It's not unheard of, unfortunately, to hear stories of complete paycheques put in one of those machines. We're blessed with one thing, but it comes with its own challenges, it comes with its own demons, per se.

It's very hard to think that we're doing so well, but at the same time, there's a group of people that's not doing so well. We need to make sure that we have as much social safety nets in place that we can to make sure to minimize the impact of these things. Then, when the market does – and it will – come down, we go into another thing where a lot more people will be negatively impacted and we'll stretch the services and stuff very thin.

I'll take a moment, too, to talk about the seniors in my district. We've never been a community known to have a large seniors population, but now we do. Like I said previously to that, we're a newly aging town. We've only been there since 1959, but now we're going on third- and fourth-generation Labrador West residents. The second and third generations are sticking around to watch their grandkids grow up in the community that they helped build, but the thing is the services and the care for these seniors is just not there. A lot of them are stuck in very large houses with large maintenance bills. Trying to downsize into something reasonable is not there. Some people, they're widows with a bit of advanced care. There's no seniors' home or anything that could take care of them, there's only Level 4 long-term care.

I take the example of my Aunt Blanche. She's 94 years old. She's currently the oldest living resident in Labrador West; first to get her vaccine in Lab West, too. She only just recently had to go into long-term care. She spent many years alone in a large house that was very hard

for her to maintain, until she got to the point where she had to go into Level 4 at the long-term care facility because she had a loss of mobility. She came to the community when she was young and she was one of the many people who helped build it to what we have today. She stuck around because she wanted to watch all her grandchildren, and nieces and nephews and everything, grow up in the community that she helped build.

We have many residents with similar stories. They don't want to leave because they helped build it. Why would they want to go somewhere else? They want to see the fruits of their labour and watch their grandkids and great-grandkids grow up in the community that they helped build. We're really struggling with that. We really have a need to look after our seniors, but it's just not there. An investment in seniors is a good investment, because they helped build this whole province to the beautiful province we have. We need to make sure that we look after them and put them in a place that they are comfortable and treated with respect and dignity.

Right now, my residents, unfortunately, don't have that opportunity to stick around. They're being told they have to go to communities that they don't even know. They may have passed through on the TCH, but they've never been there; they don't know anybody there and now they're asked to live there. It is pretty heartbreaking to have to tell residents that if they want that kind of care, they have to leave Labrador West. Like I said, we are the most western point in this province. We are the most far-flung and now you're telling people to leave to go 2,000 kilometres away just to have the care they need. It's pretty hard to tell them that. We have the opportunities and we should put the investment into looking after these people who helped build our community.

Another great opportunity in Labrador now is tourism. I spent a bit of time on the Gateway Labrador board. We talked about tourism and how we can turn Labrador West into a little bit of a tourism hub. It's not our main industry. A lot of the oxygen in the room gets sucked up by the mining industries, but there's a great opportunity there. A lot of people want to come and see. They want to see a haul truck or a giant mining shovel. Actually, in this province the

rarity of seeing a train does draw people to Labrador West. So we do have some of that opportunity, but we also have natural beauty, which is another thing.

When I was with Gateway Labrador, we talked about all the different aspects of how to bring tourism and stuff like that. One season, we decided to do a survey on what kind of people were actually coming to Labrador West. We had a volunteer survey and the first category was Québécois. One of the larger groups that did come through was people from Quebec. The second was German or German speakers, so people from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. They were our second-largest group of tourists to pass through Labrador West.

It was pretty interesting to see this German group come through. They were coming through as adventure tourists. Most of them had specially designed retired military vehicles, modified to take them on these very long journeys. Some of them were coming right on up from South America, right on through and that, but they heard about Labrador, they heard about its thing.

A lot of them were disappointed to find the road was paved. They were always told about this great big, long gravel highway. I told them we're grateful that it's paved, but to them, they wanted the adventure of a gravel road, but so be it. They were always told about Labrador. I'm guessing some of them must have been reading *The Lure Of The Labrador Wild* or heard about Leo Hubbard or the great adventurers that passed through Labrador. That's what they wanted; they wanted that adventure of travelling into this great, unknown territory.

It was very interesting to see that we have this market for tourism over in Europe like we do, but it was all word of mouth. They were all finding out about this through these stories and these things: this was just word of mouth and it was a significant group of them. So capturing the idea of Labrador's raw beauty as a tourism thing is possible. We should take some strong investment into just enticing people to take in Labrador as it is and as it currently stands as this last bastion of natural beauty and opportunity for people in this province. It is great to see that we have that and we need to capitalize it, not create

tourism, but just use what we already have to our advantage.

Another thing I do want to say is – and my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands touched on it too – is the thing about sports and encouraging healthy activity. I always say it starts at school. Healthy eating habits and physical activity starts in school, because that's where people pick up on their habits and people pick up on the different things that they do in their adult life. Investment in school sports and the ability to have – post-COVID – school sports and stuff, to compete with each other and to create that camaraderie is really important.

The hardest thing for Labrador residents is to leave Labrador to compete on the Island for sports and in the arts. There used to be programs at one time that did help with this. I really think we need to go back and look at that again, to give the opportunity for school sport and for school art, to be able to travel to the Island portion of the province and compete or show off their works as one province. Right now, the majority of it is Labradorians are trapped in Labrador and people on the Island are trapped on the Island.

We should have the ability to enable school sport and art communities to travel interprovincially and meet each other and compete or perform, because I think that comradery was a very key thing in this province, and the idea of team sport and stuff like that, or even individual sport, but competing –

**SPEAKER (Warr):** Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time is expired.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'll concur with my colleague from Labrador West, it is an absolutely beautiful area. I worked as a paramedic there at the Captain William Jackman Memorial Hospital and it was fantastic. People that are great, and there are lots there, so.

First of all, I want to thank the people of Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans for re-electing me again. In 2019, they saw an oil-covered driller from out west that came home and wanted to do the best for his province, and they gave me that opportunity. I wanted to work hard and make them proud and give me the second opportunity; that's what they did. I thank them for that.

I also want to recognize everybody else here that were successful. I want to acknowledge everybody's families – wives, husbands and children. It's not easy to go through an election and it's much harder on them, I find sometimes, than ourselves. So kudos to all them as well.

Why are we elected? I'm elected for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans because we can't fit 18,000 people in this House of Assembly from that area. I am here to speak for them, and that's exactly what I intend to do. When I speak for them, I do the best I can for their interests. That's what we're all here for. The government listens, we bring their voices forward, their concerns, their issues, and we expect action or we expect at least an acknowledgement.

I know some time ago I presented a petition here in the House of Assembly about bullying in schools. That can touch on mental health, it can touch on education and whatnot. I also know that ministers are busy. This is not to call anybody out or embarrass anybody. But when I presented that petition a lot of parents, a lot of students, a lot of people put a lot of work into that for me to present into this House of Assembly, to get a reaction, to get some sort of answer. Again, it's not to embarrass anybody or call anybody out, but I was hoping to get an answer or at least a response, at the time, from the minister.

Now, I know the minister's very, very busy. I know he works very, very hard. I know he's put pretty much a lifetime into our province. I can't thank him enough for that. But it's very disappointing when we bring the voices forward, the people we represent, to the ministers, to the government, and we don't get a response. If there's a phone call made, there's no phone call back. That's very deliberate sometimes to ourselves. We don't like it, our constituents don't like it. It's not the way it should be.

I'll just remind everybody in this House of Assembly, the ministers included, you're the minister for your department for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and I just want to get that straight. I might be sitting as a minister one day and I hope somebody reminds me of that as well because sometimes it may be needed to remind somebody of that. I appreciate the work you do, but remember what your role is. It's a separate role from your constituency, in my opinion. I just wanted to get that straight.

You know I don't care if you're a doctor, a lawyer, an oil rig worker, teacher or hockey player from Bell Island, it doesn't mater, check the ego at the door. When you come in here everybody is the same; everybody should remain the same. Everybody should have the same goals in mind.

I'm learning as I go here, it's been two years, I learned a lot in the past two years and I have so much more to learn, I look forward to it. That's that, I look forward to working with the government as we move forward for the best interests of the people from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, and all throughout the province.

The next thing I want to do, Mr. Speaker, is acknowledge something very important throughout the world and especially here in Newfoundland and Labrador and that's Pride Month. We just entered Pride Month here on June 1. I want to recognize all those men and women, children, boys and girls who find the courage to just be themselves. It's very difficult sometimes, especially in this day and age. I want to recognize everybody who does that.

I'll give you a case in point and how hard it can be sometimes. In 2014, I picked up my youngest son Declan, he was about nine years old at the time, I picked him up from sliding, and we were driving home. He looked at me and he said: Dad, I think I want to paint my room – true story. I said: That's great son. What colour would you like to paint it? He said: Purple. I said: Absolutely. Let's get on it when we get home and get some purple paint and paint your room. With that he sort of looked down and he looked up at me again and he said: Well, Dad, you probably don't want a son with a purple room,

do you? It absolutely broke my heart. We sort of knew back then which direction he was headed.

Fast forward to the summer of 2020, this past summer and when he came out to myself and his mom. That kid is my hero because he was always himself. He grew up – and I tell you what, he had some tough days growing up, like so many other people here in Newfoundland and Labrador. That kid remained himself and stayed true to himself, when so many people are fake in this world. Boy, he was my hero growing up. I love him to death.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**C. TIBBS:** There are so many like him and what they suffer through their whole lives, not just until they get to adulthood but their whole lives, what they suffer through, holding in what they would think to be an embarrassment or what they would be outcast for. Boys and girls, it's a different age and time, and thank God it is.

For any young men and women throughout my district, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, there's a very modest bungalow at the corner of Knight Street and Newhook Street. If you ever need to get away or if you ever need to seek a place of acceptance, understanding or safety, you go to that house. I guarantee you, I'll be there waiting for you and we'll take care of it from there. I promise you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**C. TIBBS:** I'll just spend another moment on this and then we will get into some more details.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize our men and women throughout the military who gave these people the right to be who they are, past and present. Thank you so very much to all soldiers past, all the soldiers present for working so hard, fighting, giving up your lives so my son can be the man that he is today.

Many districts throughout Newfoundland and Labrador face different challenges, but many districts also face the same challenges: the pandemic. I'm not talking about COVID-19 pandemic; I'm talking about the mental health pandemic that we face every single day. Some people face it more than others.

The societal pressures that are put on parents today are absolutely overwhelming. It's absolutely crazy to think about it. Most of us in here are parents, and there are so many parents out there, but the pressures that are on parents today can break a man or a woman, absolutely.

I look back 40 years ago or 20 years ago, 30 years ago, when I growing up, for instance, when I was 12 or 13, a \$2 plastic hockey blade at the bottom of the stick, b'y, that's all I needed at the end of the day. Now, a parent is pressured to buy a \$1,600 iPhone for their kid, because they need it. To face those pressure and challenges, oh boy, it's tough sometimes. It's tough on everybody, I can guarantee you. It doesn't matter which part of society you're in; it's a very, very tough thing to deal with.

The price of goods, services, food – my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands alluded to it earlier – they're not in line with the money we're making now. Not us, but people in general out in the province. It's a struggle for a lot of people. If you want to see something absolutely heartbreaking, when you go to Dominion and Sobeys – I'm a bit weird, yes; I am. I'll go to Sobeys and Dominion intentionally. I'll spend hours there. I will. Just talking to people, of course, and observing people. There's nothing more heartbreaking than watching a senior citizen pick up something, put it in their cart, think about it, look at it and put it back on the shelf; a senior, a person on low income.

When you're standing in an aisle and you're trying to decide whether you can buy something or not – food, not just buy something or not, but buy food – that's absolutely heartbreaking when we've hit that point. There are so many contributing factors that go into it. The people of this province and the people of the country – and, again, I'm not putting blame on anybody, because this has been going on for eons, way before anybody that is sat in this House of Assembly.

The people of this province right now are surviving; many are not living. That's not the way we should be living. It's just a survival game right now and it's very, very sad to watch. It is so sad to watch. Forty years ago, many families lived comfortably with one person,

whether it be a mom or a dad working, and then the other person staying home. It created that family dynamic which seems to be missing the past few years. I think that's something we have to get back to because it's much different today than it was back then. I would love to see it now again.

In this year's budget, I'm very happy to see the \$2,000 family Physical Activity Tax Credit. It's going to get people moving, hopefully. It's going to get those kids out. I think it benefits about 3,500 families. It's fantastic to see. It's something we need because, again, it's heartbreaking to see a child who cannot participate with his or her friends because of a money situation. It's heartbreaking and you know what? These are the things that I talk about. I'll never be the smartest person in the room, and I can live with that, but my heart absolutely breaks sometimes, and that's exactly why I'm here. I've lived some of it, so these are the things I enjoy talking about.

It's what we see on the faces each and every day. Again, this is going to sound a little bit different, but you drive through the city, stop at a traffic light and just look at the car next to you. Just look at the worry and anxiety on people's faces as they try to think about how they're going to get through the next day. It's hard to think about. It's hard to do. We're with the people of the province and we have to work better here together to make sure that they're taken care of as well.

The sugar tax: I'd like to touch on that for a second. It may sound great on the surface, but I'm just wondering how this would make a difference for healthy, affordable food when it comes to the people that we're trying to put it in effect for. Right now, I don't know if it gives them more accessibility to affordable, better nutrition, as opposed to just putting up a price on something that's terrible, instead of bringing down the price of something that can be very good for you.

The tobacco and alcohol tax is another thing. You know what? It's not that I disagree with it, it sounds great in theory, but we have to keep in mind, too, the implications. There are families out there, and men and women, who are going to have these substances no matter what. If they

have to take from another portion of their family's income, that's exactly what they're going to do. We need to keep these families in mind as well. It sounds great on the surface, but if it's going to start taking away from a kid's hockey registration or whatnot, that's something we should consider moving forward when it comes to these taxes, and have certain things in place to help these people out as well.

The tax increase to people making over \$135,000: people need to pay their fair share of taxes, absolutely. In doing so, I just want to recognize those hard-working men and women throughout Newfoundland and Labrador who work hard every single day and pay their taxes. I want to thank them.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**C. TIBBS:** Absolutely, it's great. I take my fair share, absolutely. The rotational workers that put it on the line every single day. Whether they're in Uganda, whether they're in Scotland, whether they're in Alberta or anywhere else, these people go away and every tax dollar pretty much comes home right here. It's fantastic. I did it for 17 years as well. I didn't mind doing it. I was happy to bring all that money back to my province.

These people, rotational workers, we need to make sure that we keep them as happy and engaged as we possibly can. They just had a very rough year, as everybody has, but I know rotational workers who, cumulative, haven't seen their families in three months over the past year. They sacrificed, they did what they had to do, but I want to recognize those rotational workers and let you know that our hearts are with you as well.

My portfolio is Immigration, skills, labour and population growth, some very important line items when it comes to moving forward in this province. Immigration: I want to thank anybody who comes from a different country to come to our beautiful province to work, work hard and contribute and to see the benefits of living here. It's absolutely fantastic.

We have some great people out my way. Some very close friends of mine, Rahul and Jibin – these gentlemen come over and, boy, they work very, very hard. They hunt and they fish. They



love it here. It's exactly what we want because we have to stop this revolving door of bringing in the immigration and sending them out the other way. We need to try to keep them right here, in my opinion the most beautiful province in all of Canada.

Skills and labour: We have a huge skill set right here in Newfoundland and Labrador and we need to make sure that we let everybody know that. The men and women of Newfoundland and Labrador – when I worked out West, there were two requirements when I applied for just about any job. The first requirement was, of course, where are you from? Newfoundland and Labrador? Great, you just ticked off one box because we know how hard working you're going to be. The second requirement was do you have a family? Absolutely, because they knew that you would have to stick around and work for a paycheque. I just want to recognize the skilled labour unions, the skilled labour people we have in Newfoundland and Labrador and thank you for everything you put in.

The community benefits agreement: We've been talking about it and kicking it around since I've been here since 2019, and I'm sure well before me throughout different administrations. I keep hearing that, yes, it's something we're working on, something we're working on. Are we working on it? Let's see the progression on this. Let's see the progression to the point where we can start putting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians first, the people that actually work here.

I am still dumbfounded by the people putting up drywall in the Corner Brook hospital brought in from out of province. It's still mind boggling to me. I don't read it in a report, I talk to the people over there, that work there and they're telling me the exact same thing. I'm just wondering how we got there. I know it's not an overnight fix, but it's something – I keep hearing: We're working on it; we're working on it, working on it. Where is the progression? Please show me the progression so I can at least add something and we can start putting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians first.

Population growth, two questions: How do we keep people in this province? I constantly hear young people nowadays, I can't wait to get out

of this hole – can't wait, can't wait, can't wait. We need to keep these people here. If we don't keep our young people here, the province is done. It truly is. The second, of course: how to get new people to come to our province. How do we attract them? How do we let them know that Newfoundland and Labrador is well open for business and this is the place where you want to be?

Those are some questions I put forward when it comes to population growth, because that is the sustainability of our province moving forward. There are a lot of contributing factors around it, but for the most part, population growth, more revenue, if we can get some good people here working, back to work, I think that we're going to be just fine.

Putting people first and employment in Newfoundland and Labrador, how do we do that? Well, put people first. Crown Lands: there are so many issues with the department of Crown Lands it's not even funny. I would venture to say that 30 per cent of the people that call my office have an issue with Crown Lands.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, some people would say we are at a disadvantage because of our spread-out population of 525,000 people. It's a unique opportunity for us to have land, for us to have a cottage. So how is it that it takes two to three years to get a piece of Crown land? That's still beyond me. I still have never had an answer for it.

I've heard people say, oh, no, it only takes 60 or 90 days. I challenge anybody in this province who has gotten a piece of Crown land in 60 or 90 days, let me know, please, because I haven't had one person in my district who got it in 60 or 90 days. They're waiting years, so that's something that I think that we should get a handle on as well.

The outfitters here in the province, they just had a hard year. I want to acknowledge the outfitters. I just had an outfitter in my district show me the receipt he had for two guys that wanted to come from Texas. They had to pay for their own flights, five days, for two caribou and two moose coming up this fall. Hopefully they get to see it. Thirty-six thousand dollars for the two of them. That's amazing revenue to bring into the

province. Hopefully, the outfitters get to do their thing coming up now in the fall, open up, and we have a great fall hunt with those guys as well, and girls.

People with disabilities; seniors, once again; the most vulnerable, for the most part: This is why we pay our taxes; we try to keep them in mind. It's incumbent, I feel as though, on all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, too. Let's not just shut ourselves in and say: Do you know what? It's not my problem. It's all of ours issue. You know the ones that are the most vulnerable in your communities.

I'm not just talking to the MHAs; I'm talking to everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador. If you know somebody who might appreciate a bowl of soup or a phone call or something like that, reach out to them. It's incumbent on all of us. That's what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have been known for: to take care of each other. I know we can do that, because we've done it in the past and we can do it again.

Data centres: In Grand Falls-Windsor in 2016, we had a proposal for data centres to come. It would have brought hundreds of millions of dollars over years to the province. At the time, for one reason or another, it wasn't done. Dame Moya Greene mentioned it when we had a conversation, that this would be a great place for data centres. I think it's something that we have to address moving forward. I think it's something that can be brought here. When you talk about technology and the future of this province, something like data centres can definitely benefit us here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Great things are going up in the Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans District. Marathon Gold and the mining, I can't thank those people enough for coming up. They have been giving so much to the communities already. It's fantastic to see. Of course, the employment is what we're going to have. I thank the government for taking the right steps and getting Marathon Gold up there and keeping them engaged. They're very happy, from what I'm hearing, so I'm very happy as well.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank everybody for doing their part and stepping up. I

want to encourage the people across Canada, across Newfoundland and Labrador. We just went through over a year of hell. Seventy-five per cent of the population is about to get vaccinated almost. This place is about to open wide up. Have the best summer of our lives. Travel around this province; see what it's all about. See the people. Have a great summer.

In closing, to all of us inside the House of Assembly, I encourage all of you, please, remain humble in your jobs.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to have just a few words on the budget and the issues today.

First of all, I always, forefront, like to thank the people of Humber - Bay of Islands for their support once again. It's pretty difficult running against two parties, but I always said that when you stay in touch with the people who elected you, they will reward you. I do have and I did have a great working relationship with all the town councils and all the working groups and the firefighters, all the seniors' groups. I just want to recognize them and thank them for their support.

As I said before, back to 1999 when I first got elected, I'll make two commitments to the district: I'll be available and dependable. Those are the only two commitments I ever made in the almost 30 years in politics. I just want to recognize the campaign team, Donny Johnson and the campaign team for getting me elected, again. Sometimes it's a tough chore to get me elected, but it worked out. Thanks Donny and all the crew that helped out.

First of all, I say to the Minister of Finance, you've got a tough job. There is absolutely no doubt about it, you have a tough job. You'll be criticized, you'll be ridiculed and you'll have people coming at you from all fronts. I've been there back with Hubert Kitchen, and it's just the

nature of the job. I say to all the people of the province, all the interested groups, all the unions, let's do it in a way that is constructive for Newfoundland and Labrador.

I remember when Clyde Wells made a statement and people criticized him. He said: If I put horns on my head and I put a devil's hat on, is it going to change the issue? The answer is no. So what we should do is go after the issue. This is an issue, collectively, for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is no individual issue here in this province, in this House of Assembly. It's an issue for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We're going to have disagreements, definitely. We're definitely going to have different points of view, that's just the nature. We're going to have interest groups coming at the government, we're going to have unions – which they should. That's their role. That's their role, to put their thoughts forward for their membership.

I remember – I said it before, and I'll keep repeating it every opportunity I get – in 1992 when there was a major fiscal crisis and everybody was concerned that the Liberal government was in power that if you went off and made the necessary decisions you had to make, that you had an election coming up, and I remember I said to Clyde Wells, and I said it in this House many times, going to Gillams when I brought it up to him again, some of the peoples' concerns. He said: I'd rather lose the election with honesty than win with dishonesty. When he ran in 1993, he received more seats than he did in 1989, even after the situation that he had to face and that he did face. Honesty, with it all, is a very big part of it.

I'll just go through some of the issues that I know out on the West Coast and bring them forth and how to deal with it. One of the biggest issues – and it's a tough issue; it's a federal-provincial-municipal issue – is housing. It's a tough issue. Social housing, it is definitely a tough issue. This just can't come on the minister's back or in his department, this is collectively with the federal government. As much as we put into social housing, as much as we put into repairs, there's still a great need for it in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

If there's one thing that would help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, who sometimes are struggling or sometimes just can't meet the demand that they need for their families, is housing. I don't have the solution. I know there's money put forth on a regular basis, but if we can solve the housing issue, if we can help more people to get into housing that they can afford, that they can say this is ours, they have some form and some type of stability in their lives, it will make this province much better.

I don't have the answers. I don't think government has the answers. This is an approach with the federal government, a long-term approach with the federal-provincial-municipal governments and social groups in the areas. That's the number one issue that would change a lot of lives for families and kids in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is housing.

You hear it up in Lab West, it's the same condition. This is not a knock because I've been in government, out of government and this is continuous, but that's the biggest issue that I hear is that we can help people in Newfoundland and Labrador if we ever get a strategy where we can get social housing where people have stability; stability in their lives so that they know here's what I have to pay for rent, here's what I can do and the kids have this sense of belonging and the kids have a sense that they're stable. It will make some difference. How we do it, I think that is something we all have to put our minds to and work it out.

Of course, then there's COVID; we've been lucky in COVID. I'm sad that we had a few deaths through COVID, but a lot of front-line workers all throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – what COVID made you aware of more so than before are mental health issues. Again, I know a couple of budgets the province worked on that. We need a mental health strategy. There are always underlying – often mental health issues. This is not just mental health because someone has an issue today; this is a long-term strategy because mental health issues are long term. Once the issue is (inaudible) and they're struggling and you get help, you can't just say, okay, you're good now, just cut it off.

If one thing that COVID has shown in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is that our mental health strategy has to be updated and helped. We probably need a lot more social workers; we need mental help crisis teams. Housing and the mental health issues during COVID have been two of the major issues that you hear of people.

You always hear people want to come back to the province and you deal with the COVID through the Department of Health and Community Services. But when you hear the people on the end of the line or when you're chatting to them and they're going through a rough time with the COVID, of course, we all know, away from their families, then you can't do the things you can do and, financially, it kicks in. It is a tough time for a lot of people.

I just want to bring that up to the government. Again, this is no easy solution – absolutely no easy solution whatsoever. This is no criticism of our mental health workers, no criticism of the Department of Health and Community Services as we speak; it is just something that has reared its ugly head much, much more than it ever has before. You hear it, you see it, you speak to people and you try to deal with it.

I noticed on many occasions that we're talking about the economy and oil and gas. You hear some people on one spectrum say let's get rid of oil and gas, but I always ask the question when they say let's just get rid of it, drop it right away – the question is: How are you going to pay for the services that you want? It's a big issue.

There is another thing when you're talking to the youth. The youth are moving to a green economy. Us old fogeys like it or not, they're moving to a green economy. What we have to do is put initiatives in place; put some good strategies in place because the younger generation coming up today, I can assure you, will find a way to turn our province into a green economy. They will. It may take 10, 15 years but they will.

I heard the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans talk about keeping our youth. One way we can keep our youth is to put in place some kind of strategy for more initiatives for the green economy. They will develop it. I can assure you,

they will. If you want to find some way to keep the youth home, that is the way to do it, to set up an initiative that they can roll up their sleeves and show us – listen, this is a new world here now. We will show you how it's done.

I have confidence in the youth. I know a lot of the youth that want to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador will do whatever they can to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a government and others, I would say we need just to put it in place for the youth to expand and to grow themselves, and Newfoundland and Labrador will be a much better place – and off the fossil fuels, but it can't be done overnight.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go through a few things in the budget here. I'll just pick up a few highlights of the budget. Of course, we know we're facing tough times. If there's any advice that I can give the minister, if you want to take it, it's be honest with – and I know you will – people up front. Tell them, here's the situation.

I can assure the minister – and I know my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, said it – I have no problem supporting government in any good initiative for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I have no problem, if there's a good initiative or if there's something that we have to do as the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, standing up and supporting it shoulder to shoulder with the government, if it's going to be beneficial to Newfoundland and Labrador.

I know myself and my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands discussed this. We're not here in this House to always criticize the government; we're here to help the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and help our districts. We had many discussions on this. This is not us and them; this is all of us together. I know I'm speaking on behalf of my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands, that we will support the government in any good initiative. Any tough decision that you have to make, if it's in the best interests of Newfoundland and Labrador, you won't just hear me or my colleague stand up and criticize because we might get a few brownie points. It won't happen. It just won't happen. I want to put that out there.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk about a few things. I just made a few notes on the Budget Speech that the minister made. You look at the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information: that's going to be brought into the core of government. I remember going back a nice while; we had them in the Public Accounts. There were pay increases going down at that centre.

We asked who gave you permission. The chair, who sat right here – they were sitting right here, right in front of me. They sat here and they said, how did you get that? Oh, we spoke to the minister, with a wink and nod, and said go ahead. We said, well, did you get anything in writing? No. The pay increase was so huge that it even stuck out for the Auditor General. Just to be able to do it on their own because they're not under government and they're off on their own.

We were astonished. We said who gave you permission? It says in the guidelines that you have to get approval from the minister. I'm not going to get into who the minister was or anything like that, it's just why some of this makes good sense. The chair, who sat here, said, yeah, I spoke to him and he winked at me and said okay. That was it. If you ever look at the pay – I'm sure the Minister of Finance looked at the pay scales down there. It's unbelievable. They can do it without any questions asked, just walk in.

Bringing that into core of government and putting them under the same scale as government will save a lot of money. I know it will be much more beneficial to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Already being done.

**E. JOYCE:** What?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Already being done.

**E. JOYCE:** Already being done? Perfect. That's great news I'll say to the minister.

The other thing is the 911. I had that all arranged before and we backed off on it. I won't get into the reasons why. I don't have the figures here now, but I would be willing to bet they have a surplus in their account, a large surplus. I'm

willing to bet right here right now, they have a large surplus.

When 911 was set up in Corner Brook – and I'm not knocking Corner Brook. Does anybody in this House – and I asked the minister of Finance and I asked the minister of Transportation at the time, how did the City of Corner Brook get being paid by 911 without ever going to tender?

Do you know how that happened? These are the kinds of things that cost the taxpayers money because they upped their phone bills. Do you know how that happened? A wink and nod between the minister of Finance at the time and the mayor of the City of Corner Brook. Let's put it in the City of Corner Brook, never even went to tender. They're paying the City of Corner Brook annual rent for 911 in Corner Brook. Plus the City of Corner Brook is getting an administration fee from 911 and the taxpayers don't even know they're getting it, so bringing that under core government.

I remember visiting an ambulance service out in Clarendville. I remember looking at their system they got for ambulance and for calls. It's well advanced more than 911 – well advanced. You have callers, you have professional people on the line – 911 callers are great, too, they're great, but they can track the call, they have a system of what questions to ask. Yet, for some reason, everybody was protecting their own little territory at the time; that 911 couldn't come into core government.

I applaud that move and when it's done look at the best services that you can apply for 911. I advise whatever department in Municipal Affairs that comes under to look at the best way to supply those services. That alone will help a lot in the areas around their concerns with 911.

I applaud the workers. I know a lot of them in the Corner Brook area, but the way it was set up and even right now, still paying the rental fee to the City of Corner Brook without any tender, whatsoever, and paying an administration fee to the City of Corner Brook, and the taxpayers of the province are paying for this all over this province; their cellphone is paying for that right now as we speak. That's good moves.

I also noticed in the thing: “A House of Assembly committee will be created to review financial statements, budgets, and the annual reports of Crown corporations and organizations.” That is a great strategy; a great move. The only thing I’ll ask government on that is to give it some teeth. Just don’t have them come in and say: Okay, here it is. Make people answerable to the decisions that they make when the funds are given out.

It’s a great strategy. I’m sure once we sit down, a lot of the issues, a lot of concerns that we do have will be taken care of, a lot of questions you will have. But there may be some questions there that will be questionable and some things that you may be able to offer suggestions. We all know, once we know there’s oversight then people are more thoughtful and more apt to make sure that they got everything done in a proper manner.

That is a great idea, and a great suggestion is that give it some teeth to whoever is on the Committee. I know the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has been pushing this. I’ve been hearing this in my ears for a long while, about him pushing to have this oversight Committee. I’m glad that the government listened to it and will respond, but give it teeth so that you can hold people accountable and make suggestions for improvements.

Another good positive thing – and I’m not going to get into the financial part – is bringing the school boards under the Department of Education. We hear it here – and I have been trying this for years and even when you’re in government people always got their – but with government we can do this now. I’ll tell you what it is: when people who have coached sports like I have and been around and I hear it with the youth, do you know one thing we don’t do in rural Newfoundland and Labrador? We always talk about health for the kids, but we don’t open the schools past 3:30 or 4 o’clock.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**E. JOYCE:** In rural Newfoundland and Labrador, if you want healthy kids, what do you do? You give them access to facilities. Do you know right now we can’t get the schools open past 3:30? They go home. Ball hockey,

basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, anybody who wants to go in, it can’t be done. I will say to the minister, if you want the youth to be healthy, get the schools open in the nighttime, in the afternoons so that the kids can be healthy and be athletic.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think people kind of cringe when I get ready to speak because it is all doom and gloom, but my district has so many gaps in services and infrastructure that if I want to speak on the reality of the conditions in my district, it has got to be doom and gloom.

I want to say a couple things, sitting in Opposition a big part of your role is to critique the government and to hold the government accountable. A lot of times when you have a district like mine that has been neglected and has so many gaps in services and doesn’t have adequate infrastructure, a lot of times it becomes negative.

During the election, the ongoing never-ending election from – I don’t know if I can say it – hell.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Pretty close.

**L. EVANS:** Pretty close, yeah.

It was a good bonding time for me and my mother because we were bubbling together. My mother is older and it was a good experience. We talked about the Minister of Health because we were dealing a lot with Level 5, we were at Alert Level 5; we were locked down. I already said this to the Minister of Health because I took the time to talk to him. She said: You know the Minister of Health, he’s a good doctor. He’s a good man.

People see me out there in the media, and people see me questioning in the House, and part of my role is to be critical because in my district there

are huge gaps in health services, which the minister has acknowledged. I just wanted to tell people that when you criticize people, that's one thing, but when you critique a government on their delivery of services that everybody needs, it's a different thing.

My mother's comments about the Minister of Health, when he was a doctor, was he was a really good doctor. He had a wonderful bedside manner. He was very caring and compassionate. I think she said, again, he was a very good doctor. I just wanted to acknowledge that.

When we look at the team that we have looking after us during COVID, we had a really great doctor, as our Minister of Health, and we had Dr. Fitzgerald.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**L. EVANS:** I want to acknowledge that. It's not always about criticism and it's certainly not personal criticism, attack on people. This is something we need to be aware of, especially at budget time. I just wanted to make that point that we do appreciate you, Minister of Health – I can't say his name. The people of Labrador really appreciated you as a doctor.

Moving on now, also I just wanted to talk a little bit about the search and rescue inquiry that's ongoing. The reason why I wanted to say that is I think it's important to explain to people.

Back in 2012 when Burton was missing and the community of Makkovik and the neighbouring communities rallied around and went and helped and searched; people came down from different communities, going around on Ski-Doo, in the back of komatik boxes looking for this 14-year-old boy. We never successfully found him and it was heartbreaking.

People were upset and people were angry and people protested including myself, all my siblings and everybody. It was so dramatic. Now, we look, nine years later, and the inquiry is going on; you can hardly get anyone to comment on it. But I want to explain to the people that it's not because we lost interest. It's not because we don't care. It's not that we're not upset. It's important to make that distinction.

Actually, I thought about it last night and I wrote it down so I could go back to sleep. I said that time moves the pain and overwhelming loss that we suffer to a place that's not quite – and I couldn't put a word on it. But time moves that pain to a place where it's not as crushing. Nine years: to describe how we feel now with time, that pain and loss of what happened to that young boy that was family and community to us, it created like a veil, a transparent veil that you could look through. It covers you but it's always there. You never forget it, that loss that's there.

That pain has changed now to that veil and it's not a crushing feeling, it's not a knife that stabs you anymore. A lot of people who go through extreme grief and loss know what I'm talking about. So when the people in Makkovik and the people on the North Coast are not screaming out on Facebook, not going to the media talking about the long delay of this inquiry, it's not because we don't care about what happened to Burton Winters. It's not because we don't feel the loss. It's not because we're not angry that it took three days for aerial search and rescue to come and find him within a half an hour of entering the airspace of where he was. It's important for people to realize that, but also it's important for people, especially people in government and people who make decisions on when an inquiry actually happens – it's important to realize that you're impacting people's faith in the system. I have to tell you, we don't have much faith in systems. We don't have much trust. We really don't.

It's important for people to realize that because sometimes in politics it's a strategy to draw things out. We'll wait them out. Eventually they'll forget about it and they'll move on, they'll turn to something else. The media does. We know that. The media loses interest in a day. That strategy really betrays people's trust. It does. It's important for people to acknowledge that and talk about it.

Also, just looking at the memory of Burton Winters – 14 years old. When you read about it, they say that he perished because his snowmobile broke down. His snowmobile didn't break down. Basically, he drove until he got into the rough ice; I think he ran out of gas. Then he walked for 19 kilometres. If he could have found refuge, he would have actually saved himself.

It was a long delay. We have to realize that the inquiry is not about being negative or criticizing; this inquiry is supposed to be about finding answers to make sure that our children don't suffer the way Burton Winters did and our families don't go through that loss. So that, eventually, the pain is more like a veil than a sharp knife stabbing you. Even though you feel anger, you don't actually come out and talk about it.

I saw it in the eyes of people this winter. As an MHA, I didn't know if they want me to talk about it. Also, when the inquiry was coming up, I wasn't sure if they wanted to put forward all those concerns, complaints, issues and questions. It was just kind of like we just have to let it be just so that pain doesn't come back. We just have to try and hope that they do a good job of this inquiry because, if not, it's going to happen again.

Anyway, moving on to our budget – 29 pages. Everyone's complaint is it's light on the details. I think it's nine sentences for Labrador, right at the end of the book. It's almost like they forgot: Oh my goodness, we forgot about Labrador, we have to stick something in there. I'm being facetious, but anyway.

I'm pleased that there's mention in the budget about the Nain airstrip. I'm hoping it's a mistake where it says the prefeasibility study, because we've been waiting now years for the feasibility study. I could be critical and I could say I'm still disappointed with the provincial government's failure to step up to cost share. That really created this long delay.

I went to Nain with the MP for Labrador. The federal government was willing to step up and cost share. In her words, in front of the Executive Council, she said that up to 70 to 80 per cent of the cost of the feasibility study – because they were so concerned of the ongoing delays. Now we have the \$3 million, the cost share, but still we have to go through the feasibility study. Then, they're going to start construction if the money is there.

A lot of people in the province don't understand why I keep talking about the Nain airstrip. The Nain airstrip doesn't have night lights.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. EVANS:** During non-daylight hours, they can't medevac. You can call search and rescue, as the former minister of Transportation said, but we all know that often, when you call, they're not available. Even if they're available, it takes time to mobilize. A medical evacuation is a medical emergency. It's disappointing that it took so long and it is still going to take a few years, so people's lives will still be in jeopardy.

There is also harm that doesn't result in death due to delays. If anyone doesn't believe me, they should listen to a young guy from Nain who was struck by a snowmobile in the head. In actual fact, he was being interviewed one day, when we were talking about the Nain airstrip, and he talked about what the doctor said to him about his condition being legally blind. Some of it is actually the impacts to his brain and how things could have been different if he could have been medevaced out sooner.

In addition to that, we have conditions that if you don't get timely emergency care, it can impact your organs. Organ damage – irreversible organ damage. It's so important that we have that ability to medevac. If we had the road, the Trans-Labrador Highway connection, we could use ground transportation. It would be so important.

That moves me to the next item in the budget that I want to talk about: the prefeasibility study for the road to the North Coast. I have seven minutes left; I'm just going to read it so it's in *Hansard*. Page 29: "Construction of the Trans-Labrador Highway is nearing completion. Paving of the highway continues with a \$22.1 million investment this year and we anticipate this vital road network will be completed over the next two construction seasons."

My entire District of Torngat Mountains, the North Coast, five Inuit communities, one Innu community, either it's going to be divine intervention where we're going to have a paved highway within the next short period, or we're not a part of Labrador, because that's the way I interpret the language. In actual fact, if we're not



a part of Labrador, we're certainly not a part of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

With a road – a road brings so much. A road will bring so much to my district. It would actually help with housing insecurity. A building lot right now, the cost of putting in a building lot, not the land, the cost of putting in a building lot costs \$250,000, another \$200,000 to \$250,000 on top of that, so the cost of a house right now on the North Coast is probably going to be \$400,000 to \$500,000; a half a million dollars for a small, modest house.

Who can afford that? Also the fact that we don't have road access and we don't have the freight boat from the Island, our building materials and all of our costs have gone up. Even with repairs, now a lot of people can't even afford repairs to their house. It's difficult. It's very difficult for people.

I'm really glad that we have the announcement of the \$200,000 in last year's budget. I was disappointed that there was no real work done on it, but, hopefully, this year, we'll get to actually do the pre-feasibility work.

Anyway, I'm trying to be positive. I should talk about the resilience of our people since Confederation, since Joey and the government brought us into Confederation. It's hard to do that when I look at the gaps, the gaps in services and infrastructure development. This didn't happen overnight; this happened over a long period of time, where we didn't get equal access to services and to infrastructure. Money has to be shared and has to be divvied out. I think that actually a lot of it never came to the North Coast but went to other regions, and over time the gaps got bigger and bigger. You just have to come to my district and see it.

Now, cellphone service is a luxury. We don't have cellphone service in Nain. There's a short radius where they put in a short satellite box on the tower and they do have some cellphone service, but the rest of the North Coast don't have that. It would be nice. On the North Coast, we don't have real high-speed Internet. Also, in some areas the infrastructure is so old that even when the technician comes in, he can't repair it. We get 0.2 to 1.9 megabits per second.

I was in Rigolet trying to be on Zoom, 10 minutes for it to load and then it worked, but when I tried to do something after hours, I couldn't get it to load. I wondered then, well, what's happening with our post-secondary students who are doing courses online? What's happening during a lockdown when we're trying to have our kids in school? Are they really asleep and just pretending to watch the tablet that does not actually have anything on it?

It's also hard to be uplifting and feeling all good, warm and cozy when the lack of highway access and the removal of the freight boat have driven the prices of food up. I showed the picture around of the four pork chops for \$28 in the winter. Another one just came up, three freezer-burned chicken breasts for \$44. Now, these are actual pictures. They're a little bit extreme, but the cost – I can tell you how much coffee costs in Nain because one of my main staples is coffee.

The issue is 215 little bodies were found buried at a residential school, and it's a reminder to us that there was real harm done at residential schools. Not everybody was able to overcome that, and a lot of people had problems and they didn't do well in life and their children didn't do well in life. Now, we sit back and we blame them; we blame them for being alcoholics, we blame them for domestic violence, we blame them for abuse and we blame them for the inability to parent. It's sad. Even people who were able to be good parents and able to actually overcome a lot of the hardships, they're not all there. They're not all whole.

When you look at those 215 little graves – well, it was actually a mass grave – one thing I want to point out is that with residential schools, children came home, but they weren't whole. They never really came home. When you go to boarding school at the age of five –

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

Your time has expired.

**L. EVANS:** Yes, thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, that we now adjourn debate.

**SPEAKER:** In accordance with paragraph 9(1)(b) of the *Standing Orders*, the House do stand recessed until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Admit strangers.

Order, please!

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today we will hear statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Harbour Main, St. John's Centre, Topsail - Paradise, Placentia West - Bellevue and Torngat Mountains.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Sunday May 2, I had the honour of attending a food drive at the Star of the Sea in Holyrood. The food drive was in support of an initiative called the Little Free Pantries. These are little roadside cupboards, little mini food banks, if you will, which have been springing up all over the Avalon Peninsula with the goal of helping people who may be struggling with food insecurities. They operate on a take-what-you-need, leave-what-you-can, no-questions-asked basis. The District of Harbour Main has many pantries throughout the district in communities like Upper Gullies, Seal Cove, Holyrood, Avondale and Colliers, just to name a few.

Ms. Charlotte Wade, one of the volunteers who has led this initiative in Holyrood, has worked in the food industry her entire life. She recognized that people were in need, some were struggling

to make ends meet and many unable to put food on their table.

I ask all hon. Members to please join me in recognizing the founders of this worthwhile initiative, people like Charlotte Wade of Holyrood. This initiative is growing rapidly throughout the province and I am proud to say has a strong presence in many of the communities that I am pleased to represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Buckmaster's Circle Community Centre is more than a not-for-profit; it is the heart of the community and has been serving residents in the Buckmaster's Circle area since 1993, creating a sense of belonging and connectedness based on support and respect.

Three dedicated, full-time staff provide social, educational, recreational, health and employment programs and services to everyone within the community. Partnerships are essential in meeting the centre's broad mandate. With Eastern Health's support, the centre maintains an on-site clinic staffed by a Public Health nurse and part-time nurse practitioner. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing provides a family support social worker, one of two positions shared between five St. John's community centres.

COVID-19 required the centre to be creative and change program and service delivery. During the pandemic's peak, staff provided outreach services to families and seniors living alone, made check-in phone calls, provided breakfast bags to school-age children, delivered food hampers to single-parent families, supported families with technology for school, ensured residents filed their income tax returns and much more.

I ask Members to join me in recognizing the small but mighty staff at Buckmaster's Community Centre and their commitment to the people they serve.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ryder Rowsell, a Grade 6 student at Paradise Elementary, has been growing his hair out since Grade 2. After years of growing his hair, Ryder has decided it's time for a cut and see his hair turned into a wig. Not only is he cutting his hair, but he is raising money for Young Adult Cancer Canada.

Ryder, along with his mother, have been working on a project and created a GoFundMe page, Ryder's Epic Haircut For Kids With Cancer, with an ultimate goal of raising about \$5,000 by June 23. Ryder says: when school is out June 24, I'm going to come to school that day with a new backpack, a new haircut and everyone is going to look at me and wonder, who is that?

Young Adult Cancer Canada, founded in 2000, serves young adults affected by cancer. Over 8,000 young adults are diagnosed with cancer in Canada each year and its programs help young adults who have been recently diagnosed and are currently receiving treatment or have survived cancer.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Ryder on his tremendous effort to bring awareness and support to Young Adult Cancer Canada.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DWYER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I sit in this hon. Chamber today to show my appreciation for a project that was completed by the Grade 5 to 7 students at Swift Current Academy in our beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

I had the privilege of being included in a virtual presentation of their deep-learning project. The students' concern was the speeding that takes place on Seaview Drive through their

community. This is the main road that runs through their community, which is a part of Route 210, but is indeed the main road in this picturesque Town of Swift Current.

The Grade 5 to 7 students created surveys for the residents to complete, tracked the number of speeding cars at various times of the day, organized an awareness walk in their community and also made posters with the slogan: Slow down. This is a community, not a racetrack."

I am incredibly proud of these students for stepping up, recognizing an issue within their community and coming together to create change and become part of the solution. You're all true community leaders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I'd like to pay tribute to Travis Winters in Makkovik, Nunatsiavut, for his quick action and bravery that saved his uncle, Harold Winters. Travis and Amos Fox were out in a boat near Lance Ground when their speedboat broke down. Travis's Uncle Harold was nearby and was able to tow them back to Makkovik. They remained in their boat during the tow.

Close to home, the strain of towing the boat caused the risers to break away, releasing the tow line. The rope snapped across Harold's body, knocking him into the frigid water. This created a very dangerous situation. The unmanned boat, with motor still running, circling Harold in the water.

Harold was at risk of being hit. Icy waters also exacerbated a medical condition, impacting Harold's ability to stay afloat, while putting him at risk of drowning. Travis's large boat made it impossible to be able to row over and rescue Harold in time to prevent him from being struck, or worse, slipping below the surface.

As the unmanned boat made its third pass, it was close enough, so Travis took a great risk and

jumped into the boat, resulting in minor injury to himself and thereby being able to save his Uncle Harold.

Please join me in applauding Travis Winters for his bravery and courage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

**Statements by Ministers**

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, September 28 is municipal election day in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is an excellent opportunity for residents to get involved in their communities.

Prior to entering provincial politics, I had the honour to serve as the mayor of St. Anthony, and before that, as a councillor for several years. It was a rewarding experience. It was incredibly busy at times and certainly not without its challenges, but it did provide me the insight into the importance of local government.

The Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs has been preparing for the election through providing support to municipalities and guidance on the election process and legislative requirements. A circular has been sent to towns with information on municipal mail-in balloting and the department is providing elections training.

Several municipalities are considering and making plans for a mail-in option, in light of the ongoing COVID pandemic. While the vaccine roll out is going very well across the province and we reached an incredible milestone with the 300,000 first doses –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**K. HOWELL:** – we do recognize that mail-in ballots is another option to make voting as accessible as possible to all residents.

Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, or MNL, as we say, is also an excellent resource for communities and is encouraging participation through the Make Your Mark campaign. We are pleased to provide \$20,000 to MNL to support this work.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all those currently serving on councils and acknowledge the recent appointments of Amy Coady-Davis as president and Trina Appleby as vice-president of the board of MNL. I wish them both well in their new roles.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in encouraging all citizens from all backgrounds to consider putting their names forward for election in the fall.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. minister for an advance copy of her statement.

Mr. Speaker, all of us on this side of the House join the minister in encouraging everyone to run in the upcoming municipal elections on September 28.

As a former mayor, myself, of the beautiful Town of Pouch Cove, I have seen the benefits of municipal representation first-hand. There is perhaps no greater service than to have your boots on the ground and represent your friends and neighbours at the community level. Many of my colleagues on both sides of this hon. House have gotten their start, so to speak, around the council chamber.

I do hope that the department will endeavour to encourage more women and gender-diverse candidates to step forward and offer themselves for this upcoming election. Historically, very few women and gender-diverse candidates have been elected at all levels of government. I look forward to seeing the minister roll out her plan to address this issue in the coming weeks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

I want to give my best to all of the candidates across the province and the election officials, and thank you for participating in upholding our democracy.

It's wonderful to see that the municipalities are accounting for the realities of COVID and are putting a plan in place. It will serve them well to have their mail-in ballot plans in place and ironed out before the election. I hope Members of the government are also learning to care about voter rights in the province during this interaction.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality.

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I am pleased to recognize the recent groundbreaking appointments at Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. For the first time in the organization's 70-year history, the top two volunteer roles are held by women.

President Amy Coady-Davis, who is a Councillor with the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor and Vice-President Trina Appleby, who is Deputy Mayor of Torbay, will help guide Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador as they work to represent the interests of the province's municipal councils. In 1951, there were approximately 50 incorporated municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador. Today, there are 276.

Mr. Speaker, the Office of Women and Gender Equality recently collaborated with Equal Voice to present a campaign college, which was designed to help women and gender-diverse folks learn more about running for elected office. I was very impressed by the number of participants who expressed an interest in being involved in municipal politics.

I am hopeful that women and gender-diverse individuals look to the appointments of Ms. Coady-Davis and Ms. Appleby, as well as the leadership of my colleagues the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, the Member for Mount Pearl North, as well as the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair as positive signs. As we strive for more diversity amongst our elected officials, we encourage folks with a range of backgrounds and experiences to seek elected office, including in the municipal elections this September, and provide residents of our province with the representation they so rightfully deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to recognize Ms. Coady-Davis and Ms. Appleby on their appointments as the leadership of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. I would also like to recognize the work of Equal Voice as an advocacy and action group who work tirelessly to support, educate and champion women and gender-diverse individuals as candidate in our electoral systems.

As the September municipal elections approach, I add my voice to those who wish to see more gender diversity in municipal leadership across the province. I want all those who's considering candidacy to know that my phone and email are always open to them. I'm happy to support them and truly encourage them to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance of her statement. I would also think to extend our sincere congratulations to Ms. Coady-Davis and Ms. Appleby on their groundbreaking appointments to Municipalities NL.

Our caucus knows the importance of having a strong contingent of women leaders at the table. When our boardrooms, town halls and Assemblies are truly representative of communities they serve, their decisions are all the wiser for it. That's why we are disappointed to see that in this year's Estimates: "... grants to equality-seeking organizations, including Women's Centres, Regional Coordinating Committees Against Violence and Indigenous organizations ..." took a cut of \$405,000.

Once again, this government does a fine job of hitting all the right talking points but little in concrete action.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud – along with my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture – to speak in this hon. House today to recognize seven employees in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure who provided safety and assistance to our neighbours in Ontario.

Officials in our department work with our colleagues in the Department of FFA to provide forest fire services throughout our province.

However, when there were multiple forest fires burning in northwestern Ontario last month, seven crew members and two CL-415 water bombers travelled to the Mainland to join firefighters in that province.

For five days, captains Scott Blue and Ian White, first officers Sandra Curlew and Paul Carter and aircraft maintenance engineers Neil Murphy, Robert Hebbard and Jared Walsh left their friends and family behind to help protect lives and homes in Ontario.

As a member of the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre's Mutual Aid Resource Sharing agreement, Newfoundland and Labrador provides additional firefighting assistance to other parts of the country when needed. It's reassuring to know that the same assistance will be provided to us, if necessary.

Mr. Speaker, we often talk about the public service employees who go above and beyond the call of duty to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

These seven individuals went to great lengths to help their fellow Canadians, and we are very fortunate to have them working for us here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in acknowledging these crew members who work hard to ensure the safety of everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the hon. minister for an advanced copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues on this side of the House join the minister in congratulating these professional staff who travelled to Ontario to help fight forest fires in that province. We owe a debt of

gratitude to Scott Blue, Ian White, Sandra Curlew, Paul Carter, Neil Murphy, Robert Hebbard and Jared Walsh. I believe missions like this should be celebrated.

Mr. Speaker, as someone who worked in the department for years, I can personally attest to the high level of training and professionalism among the public service employees. Water bomber crews are no exception. This is why I find it somewhat worrisome that the water bomber that was damaged in 2018 has still not been repaired or replaced. I think it's time to make a decision.

In closing, congratulations again to the staff involved and putting service above self.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I also want to thank the crew in their work in protecting our province and for taking their skills abroad to help our neighbours in need.

Decisions at various levels of government in recent years have stretched firefighting resources thin. Their jobs are becoming harder, not easier. There has not been a water bomber stationed in Labrador West for some time and the residents miss the sense of security knowing that it was on hand during fire season. It only takes one spark.

Let's be sure to supply these people here at home and ensure they receive the respect and resources they deserve, as they should be for any of our first responders.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Premier said negotiations are ongoing with respect to rate mitigation, but he wouldn't disclose what's on the table because it would jeopardize our commercial decision to have those negotiated in public. The Greene report calls for the sale of electricity generation, transmission and distribution assets to the private sector.

I ask the Premier: Are these rate mitigation negotiations really about selling our hydroelectric assets to the highest bidder?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

As we've said all along – and it's been quite public – the parameters of these negotiations are known to all. Things like equity arrangements with the federal government, monetizing carbon credits, monetizing potential future energy within the project, reorganizing the debt structure: all these things are on the table and we've talked about it publicly.

I'm not sure why the Member opposite says that this has been in secret. It hasn't. With respect to the ongoing individual conversations on each one of those parameters, of course we're not going to negotiate in public. That wouldn't be in the commercial best interests of the people of the province, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will any new arrangements on rate mitigation for this province involve Quebec or Hydro-Québec?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** As we suggested, Mr. Speaker, right now the active discussions, the active negotiations are between Newfoundland and Labrador and the federal government.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is aware of an opinion piece published in Quebec's *La Presse* on May 15, which basically says the Churchill River hydro is solid gold. Newfoundland and Labrador is on its knees and Hydro-Québec could capitalize on our weakness to get a sweetheart deal for more cheap power, creating more wealth for Quebec into the future.

I ask the Premier: What assurances can you give that we won't end up with a rate mitigation deal worse than the Upper Churchill deal?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The one thing that I do agree with: it is solid gold. I'm not going to give away any gold to Hydro-Québec or anyone else, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** We as a government understand the incredible value that the Upper Churchill asset can provide to the people of this province and we're going to make sure that it does provide it to the people of this province. We need to make sure that we're the primary beneficiary of that asset and the whole entire Churchill River, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hope the Premier and his administration live up to that, but the fact that we're hearing that there

are conversations going on without any discussion around what impact it will have on the ratepayers of Newfoundland and Labrador is alarming to us. Hydro-Québec is rich enough to buy out our Lower Churchill assets because of the unrectified windfall it is continuing to reap on our Upper Churchill assets.

Is the province going to make sure Quebec compensates this province for at least some of the unfairness of any future Labrador hydro arrangements that involves Quebec or Hydro-Québec?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We wouldn't be in this situation if it weren't for governments in the past including the one that the Member opposite has been involved with.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** What we have said and will continue to say – and I'm not really sure why it's not getting through – there are no active conversations with Hydro-Québec.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** That's fabricated. There are no active conversations with Hydro-Québec in our government, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how many more times to say it. I guess we can keep answering the same questions over and over again. I'm happy to do so.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All I heard is that there are no ongoing conversations with your government. That doesn't mean there are not consultants outside doing it, there are not other people doing it, Mr. Speaker. That's our alarm here. We want to ensure that the people of Newfoundland and



Labrador know up front what deals are being made or what they may have to give up. We would hope that it gets rectified, that we get exactly what we're entitled to.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**D. BRAZIL:** Mr. Speaker, what we're getting at here is there's a long history of Quebec being favoured over Newfoundland and Labrador in Confederation. Quebec gets \$13 billion out of the \$20-billion equalization fund. We get nothing. The Upper Churchill deal heavily favours Quebec and the federal government has not lifted a finger to correct that injustice.

I ask the Premier: How can anyone expect that Quebec will come along and will not come out on top of the rate mitigation and the Atlantic Loop negotiations, given their history of receiving favouritism within Confederation?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's nice how he collides existential questions about Quebec's position in Confederation and our active ongoing discussions with the federation on rate mitigation, a project that we wouldn't have to entertain if it wasn't for the Member opposite, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to continue to make sure that we're making good progress. But I will assure the people of this province that whatever hydroelectric projects we're actively in discussions with will be brought to the House and there will be an open debate to make sure that people know what deals we're getting involved with, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**PREMIER A. FUREY:** That was a part of the problems of the past. We'll make sure it's fixed in the future.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**T. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I remind the people opposite that I think Moya Greene and others have said – and the former premier himself – that Muskrat Falls is a part of an energy project included in the Atlantic Loop and is a part of a national energy project.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**T. WAKEHAM:** So while we can all agree on the overruns, let's not keep that going. I'd sooner talk about the budget and the budget that was announced. Let's get to that.

Yesterday, I asked the minister if there was an HST hike included in the fiscal framework. The answer I got, as quoted in *Hansard*: "I appreciate the question, and the answer is no."

But yesterday afternoon in debate, when I was complimenting the minister for no increase in HST this year, next year or the year after, she reminded me that she had said there was no HST included in the fiscal framework. I want to clear up the misconception.

I will ask the minister: Will there be an HST increase during the 50th General Assembly?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll remind the Member opposite that Justice LeBlanc said it was a mistake – Muskrat Falls was a mistake. I'll remind him that it's being referred to as a boondoggle. I don't think he should take any sense of pride in the fact that his government entered into this project.

With regard to HST, I should remind the Member opposite that our budget is being well received by bond-rating agencies and I'll come to that in a moment – very well received by bond-rating agencies.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** I will say, just as I said yesterday to the Member opposite, there is no increase in HST in the fiscal forecast. That is clear, that was the question he asked me and I'll say that again; however, in the Speech itself it was clearly noted that we will look to see if there will be any change to that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**T. WAKEHAM:** So, clearly, Mr. Speaker, the minister has not ruled out an HST increase. I'll move on now.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the fiscal situation of the province and actions needed, but the people of the province have a right to know the details and what it will mean for them. So far, we haven't found those details out; in fact, yesterday, the minister asked me to focus my questions on this year's budget, so that's exactly what I'm going to do today.

I'll start off and ask the minister: How many people will lose their job as a result of the English School District moving to the Department of Education?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to refer now to what the bond-rating agency has said. DBRS bond-rating agency: "... this budget begins to chart a path toward fiscal recovery ...." "... we believe that this budget is a step in the right direction."

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** Scotiabank, Mr. Speaker: "Budget highlights the depth of the fiscal challenges facing NL, presents better-than-expected near-term results, and serves as a first step on the path to longer-run fiscal sustainability."

I'll read from RBC: "The path to balance laid out in Budget 2021 coupled with a commitment to streamline expenses and adjust tax rates for

higher earners signals that the government is serious about 'taking definitive action now.'"

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** Finally, Mr. Speaker, TD: "In what will likely be well received by investors and rating agencies, Budget 2021 commits to significantly improving Newfoundland and Labrador's fiscal position in coming years."

I ask the Member opposite –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**T. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Either the minister doesn't know or she doesn't want to tell us, so I'll ask the minister another question: How much money will you save when you move the English school board to the Department of Education?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As we've indicated in yesterday's budget and has –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. COADY:** – been confirmed by both bond-rating agencies and creditors, Mr. Speaker, we are doing a tremendous amount of work –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'll have no chatter across the room. I want to hear the speaker.

Thank you.

**S. COADY:** – to transform government. We wouldn't be in this position except for Muskrat Falls that they're so interested in, Mr. Speaker.

I will say, the analysis is ongoing. The Department of Education is looking at the work that has to be done to ensure that we be seamless in bringing the school board into core government, Mr. Speaker, and that work is ongoing.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**T. WAKEHAM:** Mr. Speaker, it has been confirmed that they're making a significant move by bringing the English school board into the Department of Education without knowing how many people are going to be laid off or actually how much money they're going to save, so let's try another one.

How many people are going to be laid off when we move the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information to the Department of Health?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

I hear the Member opposite making false accusations that we're going to be doing mass layoffs. For example, he talks about people leaving and going and all that stuff.

Mr. Speaker, we have been very, very, very clear: There will be no mass job loss. There will not be. We are working with departments; we are working with NLCHI; we are working with the school board; we are working with others, bringing them into core government so that we can have better quality, better assurances and better work.

I would ask the Member opposite: What would he do? Because he hasn't told us one thing that he would do to clean up his mess.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**T. WAKEHAM:** Well, Minister, I can tell you what I wouldn't do: I wouldn't bring in a budget without knowing exactly what I'm talking about in terms of ...

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**T. WAKEHAM:** Yesterday, it was determined that this government offered a 15 per cent equity stake in the Terra Nova project. I've examined the Estimates, but I cannot find the money set aside.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Can you please detail where the money for this equity stake is budgeted?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I can do is basically speak to the negotiation, perhaps, and more so what I can say is what I'm not prepared to do is to discuss the negotiation of this extremely important asset here on the floor given the commercial sensitivities, given all the moving parts and given the urgency. I do not think that would be appropriate.

What I can say is that we are actively involved in this process every single day with the different players. There is some information that is out there that has been discussed, but, at this point, what I would say is that whatever we're prepared to do will be disclosed to the public upon that time.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** It's kind of like the movie *Jerry Maguire*, is it: show me the money.

In the budget, \$2.5 million was announced in additional funding for geoscience data collection and interpretation. However, last night, in Estimates, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology admitted they did not have the money, nor did they have the information on it.

Mr. Speaker, how does the Minister of Finance expect a department to advance a new program that they know nothing about?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the question from the Member. We certainly did have three hours last night of Estimates, talking about all the great things happening in Department of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**A. PARSONS:** What I can say is that – again, I appreciate the fact that I did promise to show you where it was. It is in the COVID contingency fund, I believe, under the Department of Finance. But the bigger thing I can tell you and I can guarantee you and I can promise you, just like your quote of *Jerry Maguire*: We are going to be showing the money.

We are showing the money, an extra \$2.5 million to the mining industry. We are going to be taking advantage of the hot streak that industry is on right now and we've just put our money where our mouth is by in putting \$2.5 million. I'll tell you who's going to be happy, is everybody involved in the industry: prospectors, juniors, you name it. They're pretty excited about what our government's stance is on mining.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Mr. Speaker, this is \$2.5 million that we talked about last night. The minister and

his officials could not find this money in the Estimates or even had the slightest clue about where it was. The minister did note last night that he could, and I quote: throw the Minister of Finance under the bus.

Mr. Speaker, is the budget wrong? Did the Minister of Finance misspeak or is the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology wrong?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What's funny is the Member – I'm fine with the Member trying to throw me under the bus or accuse me of not knowing anything, but he sat here last night and he complimented the officials in the department for all the work that they do. Now, he gets here today in Question Period and he's questioning their ability.

What I can tell you is this: you come back here next year, if you're in that spot over there in the same role, and I will show you \$2.5 million spent on mining exploration.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I in no way think that the Member here is questioning the ability of the staff in the department. What he is asking is for the minister to do their job and answer the questions.

**L. PARROTT:** Thanks.

**P. DINN:** Oh, you're welcome.

Mr. Speaker, private ambulance workers provide a vital service to people of the province. Private ambulance workers represented by Transport and Allied Workers Union local 855 are without an agreement. For some workers, this dates back to March 2020.

Can the minister provide an update on the status of these negotiations from a government's perspective?

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

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. As we are well aware, they've been working through a contract with a conciliation officer for well over a year now. Those contract talks have broken off. They're also now moved into a conciliation board situation where we're waiting for two parties to come forward with their representatives. When that's done, there'll be a chair put in place and then we'll move forward through that process.

We hope that there'll be a negotiated deal based on that, because it's such an important thing to have a balance between both the employer and the employee. A negotiated deal is always the best preference for all of us.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do hope that those negotiations move along sooner rather than later.

Mr. Speaker, a briefing note prepared for the Premier on January 7, 2021, stated that the province received over 100,000 counterfeit N95 masks, some of which were used by our health care workers, our front-line workers.

I ask the minister: How did these masks pass inspection?

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

**J. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

My understanding from officials in the supply chain in Central, these were mixed with genuine masks and the issue was a sample, which passed muster. It was identified because of information subsequently from 3M, the other manufacturer, and these were then retrieved.

Some 1,300 of these masks had been used. We have not been able to find any clinically significant injury or damage as a result of that. We have returned the batch and are seeking our money back, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Seeking money back is great but this is a health issue for front-line workers that could be exposed to COVID or any other disease. A notification was issued by the N95 manufacturer on December 18, but the province did not become aware of this notification until early January.

I ask the minister: Why did it take so long to identify such an important issue and have it resolved?

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

**J. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm informed by supply chain that there were some labelling issues, which have been investigated. The issue has not been one that has produced any risk or any deleterious effect.

We have time gone by. None of the people who were involved in the use of these defective, substandard masks have suffered any health consequences as a result of it. We are in the process of dealing with the vendor to try and ensure: (a) this doesn't happen again and (b) the value of the masks is replaced one way or another.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find it appalling that he would say there is no risk. There is a risk if there are masks that are gone out and our health care workers have the opportunity to wear. There is a risk.

What assurances does the minister have that other counterfeit health care supplies have not slipped through the cracks, creating risks of exposure to COVID and other diseases for health care workers?

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

**J. HAGGIE:** As a consequence of this finding, Mr. Speaker, a review was done of inventory and nothing untoward identified thereafter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In this year's budget a new integrated corporate services model was included for purchasing.

Is the minister abandoning the purchasing model that he announced in July of 2017 because of these issues with the health supplies?

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

**J. HAGGIE:** No, Mr. Speaker, in actual fact we're not abandoning it. This is phase one of a five-step procedure which involved a variety of other back-office functions.

We have been in discussions with the Minister of Finance to see how we can integrate our learning from the health care system across government as part of a government-wide purchasing system, rather than simply one for

health. Other areas include such things as payroll, HR and similar activities, Mr. Speaker. We're building on it, not replacing it.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the budget it was announced that the province-wide emergency 911 service will now become a part of core government, but in Estimates the minister admitted: We've only reached out to 911 yesterday afternoon – right around the time of the budget – and I haven't had any discussions with them yet.

I ask the minister: If you haven't had discussions with NL911, then what was the basis of your decision?

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

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you for the question.

Mr. Speaker, we did reach out to NL911. We wanted to discuss with them and advise them what was going to be announced in the budget. Obviously, we wouldn't have done that further in advance than when the budget was going to be brought forward by the Minister of Finance.

I want to ensure all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that NL911, when it is brought into government, will not jeopardize the safety or the stability of that system. The purpose of bringing it in is to find efficiencies for this government as we move forward with the Department of Finance's plan, the Minister of Finance's plan. We'll find efficiencies in things like payroll and finance. It will be good and a better service for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that decisions are being made without proper analysis. In Estimates, the minister said, and I quote: I haven't had any discussions with them yet about jobs and where this will go in the future. He did not rule out job losses.

Will the minister provide any analysis or breakdown on how much will be saved and how many jobs will be lost?

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

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the questions.

It is an ongoing situation. We're dealing with NL911 the same way this government is dealing with the school boards, NLCHI, other entities and those entities that are being brought into government. Of course, the purpose is to ensure the services that are being offered are not going to be changed or diminished in any way. But we will be able to ensure that those services are provided at the same standard that they are now or better, and at the same time finding efficiencies within government so we can grow our economy, grow this province and be where we need to be.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, that answer does not provide assurances about whether there will be any job losses.

The Budget Speech references joint partnerships and alternate service delivery – privatization language. On the other hand, the Finance Minister says there will be no mass layoffs. When we asked about moving NL911 into government, the minister did not rule out job losses.

I ask the Finance Minister: Yes or no, will there be layoffs as a result of changes to service and program delivery?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Members opposite like to fear monger, but I will say to the people of the province that we are modernizing and transforming government. As such, we are working on efficiencies and making very effective service delivery. We don't anticipate any massive job losses at all.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I will say to the Members opposite today on the boards, there are over 500 jobs available within government. So I would say to the Members opposite that there is certainly opportunity within the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for employment.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance if she agrees with Moya Greene's assessment that the Public Service Pension Plan and the Teachers' Pension Plan are severely underfunded – 50 per cent according to her, in the case of the Teachers' Pension Plan – and that the unfunded liability is \$1 billion more than it was six years ago.

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I've said to the people of the province, we will be going out and consulting on the Dame Greene report, the Premier's Economic Recovery Team report. Mr. Speaker, we are going to be listening to the information that the

people bring to us as to what they feel is the future direction of the province.

I will say to the Member opposite that we are fully aware of the changes that have been made for the joint partnering on the pension plans, and have been working very collectively – and I say that sincerely, collectively – on ensuring those plans are strong and self-sustaining.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DINN:** Then I ask the minister: Is she aware that Moya Greene's facts are wrong, inaccurate, that both plans actually have a surplus of assets and are in the best shape that they've ever been and that the unfunded liability has been eliminated?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, I think anybody who has a pension or anyone who has RRSPs knows how very, very good the markets have been this year, and how strong that recovery is looking in our pension funds, in our RRSPs and any of our investments, Mr. Speaker. I will acknowledge to the Member opposite that there has been growth in those pension funds. I think that there has been a lot of collaboration, discussion and effective work that's been done to ensure the future sustainability of those pension funds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DINN:** So there's no willingness to admit that Dame Moya Greene has it totally wrong.

I ask this: Would the minister explain how Dame Moya Greene got her facts so wrong, since she says she got her information from the

Department of Finance? How could the information be so terribly wrong?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Member opposite is trying very hard to get me to speak directly on the information that is contained in Dame Moya Greene's report, the Premier's Economic Recovery Team report. Mr. Speaker, I'll let that stand, they are very knowledgeable and learned people, I'll let them stand for what's included in their report.

We are very interested in having good discussions with the people of this province as to how they believe we should best move forward. We all want a strong, smart, sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador and that's exactly what we're working towards.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, the new Acute Care Hospital has been in the forefront during the last election in the Corner Brook area. One major issue was the PET scanner. This piece of equipment was committed to be put in the new Acute Care Hospital and this was confirmed by former Premier Dwight Ball.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services: Can you please provide this House with an update on the status of the PET scanner for the new Acute Care Hospital?

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

**J. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to inform the Member opposite that the funds promised to be delivered to the Western Health foundation in trust are en route. The decision about what, when and what kind of machine will be made by the clinicians providing cancer care on the ground. The slab for the PET scanner and the accommodation is



there, built into the fabric of the building already, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**E. JOYCE:** Another major issue which had been the design for the new Acute Care Hospital is the laundry services. It was literally put in the design, to the best of my knowledge as I was involved. There are many rumours in the Corner Brook area and workers in the Western Memorial Regional Hospital are very anxious of these rumours and possible jobs.

Can you please provide this House with an update on the laundry services, if it's included, and the space allocated in the new Acute Care Hospital in Corner Brook?

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

**J. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I can't quite remember whether the Member opposite was still on the infrastructure Committee when the decision was made that \$100,000 a square foot was a very expensive footprint for a laundry and that there were other ways of doing that. My understand is Western Health has gone out with an RFP to examine options as to how best to provide those services to the entire Corner Brook area's health care facilities.

The current laundry at Western Memorial will still be functional for another three or four years so there is time to get this right, Mr. Speaker, and do it properly. The RFP is on the streets.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The time for Question Period has expired.

The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Women and Gender Equality.

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand on a point of order. I'm very disappointed to hear my hon. colleague, the Member for St. John's Centre, suggest that there have been cuts to the department of Women and Gender Equality.

I ask the Member to withdraw that statement. It is simply incorrect, 100 per cent. I will confirm that the budget has been maintained. As a matter of fact, there has been almost \$500,000 added by our Premier for very important programs such as the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner unit, among many other important programs.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**P. PARSONS:** I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that the Member withdraw the statement as it's simply not true. Furthermore, I ask that he table the evidence that suggested him to make such a statement in the first place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** I'll take that under advisement and review the information.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### **Tabling of Documents**

**SPEAKER:** In accordance with section 19(5)(a) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, I hereby table the minutes of the House of Assembly Management Commission's meetings held on December 23, 2020, January 5 and May 19, 2021.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

**Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given**

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During Question Period, there was a question about the \$2.5 million for mining that was announced in the budget. I'll tell my colleague opposite that it's under the COVID contingency fund services head of expenditure. It will be transferred to the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology during the year and reported under the head of expenditures.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Petitions.

**Petitions**

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The current Registry of Deeds is not mandatory, and much of which gets registered as errors and ambiguities. Uncertainty abounds when registering an interest in land, leading to impediments in acquisition and transference, along with additional unnecessary costs to residents.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**C. PARDY:** – to establish a committee comprised of representatives involved in the land transfer process to investigate immediate improvements in policy, along with recommendations for legislative changes to better protect the public's and Crown's interests.

We know that one of the biggest assets that we have in the province are our land holdings. Many would say that they are not being

managed properly, Mr. Speaker. We have the Registry of Crown Titles for public lands and we also have the Registry of Deeds for private lands.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'm trying to hear the petition.

Thank you.

**C. PARDY:** While we made good advances in the Registry of Crown Titles, we do realize that, as my hon. Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans stated this morning, nobody in his district ever got a land claim within a couple of years. Usually that's the limit that it would take, but it's certainly not 90 days. The nature of this petition is for the Registry of Deeds.

Remember, we have a registry of land deeds that is not mandatory, but is riddled with inaccuracies and ambiguities. So what happens is that there are land disputes, land challenges and land transactions that they need to get the document from the Registry of Deeds, only to find that it's not accurate. I would say what happens at that point in time is that it costs the residents an enormous amount of legal fees to try to have control or to attain or to acquire property. Much of the land in the District of Bonavista, they've either been squatted on or it's been granted over time. We know the historic District of Bonavista and Trinity, that they would have such areas.

The suggestion is that we establish a committee comprised of individuals representing various groups like lawyers, land surveyors, realtors or developers to look at legislative and regulatory changes.

The last thing I would say is in the budget they suggested launching a process to maintain and improve service delivery. Maybe this is one of those that might be on the docket for improvement.

I look forward to the minister's comment.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was starting to have a bit of complex there for a while.

**SPEAKER:** I couldn't see you back there.

**P. LANE:** If I had feelings they would have been hurt yesterday, I can tell you.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, the cornerstone of any democratic society is the right for citizens to choose their representatives to serve in the Legislature. This process must not only be carried out in a fair and impartial manner with all the appropriate checks and balances to ensure this principle is upheld, it must be perceived as being conducted that way.

The recent Newfoundland and Labrador provincial general election has brought serious allegations, numerous concerns and inconsistencies to light, including potential breaches of the *Elections Act, 1991*. As a result, thousands of people were potentially denied their democratic right to vote.

We, the undersigned, therefore call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to work with the Opposition Parties and the independent Members in the development of terms of reference for an initiation of an independent investigation of the recent provincial general election to be carried out by an individual or entity, as agreed to by all parties and independent Members of the House.

Upon completion of the investigation, to table and debate the report in the House of Assembly, with a view of seeking accountability for any inappropriate decisions made and ensuring a legislative review of the *Elections Act, 1991* is conducted in order to restore the public's confidence in our electoral system.

Mr. Speaker, in presenting this petition, I realize that the last point in the petition regarding new legislation or an amendment to the Elections

Act, is being undertaken. I acknowledge that and that's never been my issue. I'm glad it's being done. Hopefully the Committee is going to do their work, they're going to consult with people and they're going to make appropriate changes. That's not the issue.

The issue that's being missed in this whole thing, from my perspective, we have an independent Officer of the House of Assembly. That independent Officer of the House of Assembly reports directly to us in this Legislature. That person was appointed and approved by Members of this House of Assembly and he works for us. We have a case, as has been outlined here.

We all know the issues that occurred in the last provincial general election and that Officer of the House needs to answer this House of Assembly as to all of these inconsistencies. We need to have that investigation to find out what went on. He needs to be questioned on all decisions he made, why he made them and so on and have a report for us to debate in this House.

There's even a section in the Elections Act itself that talks about if the election is not carried out properly, or if there are any issues of incompetence or anything like that, he can be removed under the act. We're just going to pretend that this mess didn't happen and there's something fundamentally wrong with it. Saying we're going to forget about it and move on doesn't cut it.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Your time has expired.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The reasons for this petition are as follows:

The Shoal Harbour bridge is in need of replacement and is in a serious state of disrepair. Residents no longer believe that this bridge is safe and it is a major cause for safety concerns.

The bridge is a vital link between the communities of Shoal Harbour and Clarenville and the entire Bonavista Peninsula, particularly for first responders and other emergencies.

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 –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**L. PARROTT:** Can you ask them to stop, Sir?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for safety and emergency response to remove and replace the Shoal Harbour bridge.

Mr. Speaker, this has been going on for quite some time. Originally, back in 1992, Manitoba Drive was transferred from government to the Town of Clarenville. I'll note that Manitoba Drive does not include this piece of infrastructure.

In 1993, the towns of Clarenville and Shoal Harbour amalgamated and, again, in 1994, Balbo Drive was transferred. When that was transferred – again, this piece of infrastructure is not a part of Balbo Drive – there was never a formal transfer agreement put in place. At that time, Minister Efford was the minister; he wrote a note and said that this transfer of the road could not have any adverse effect on the communities from an economic standpoint.

This bridge is condemned. It was inspected in '95 and at that time, there were serious upgrades required. It was scheduled to be replaced in 2014. There have been multiple conversations with many previous ministers of municipalities, Transportation and works and two previous Justice ministers.

There have been letters, legal letters written with a legal position that the Town of Clarenville does not own this bridge. The province hasn't even given the town the courtesy to reply to the legal opinions. As a matter of fact, one member from Transportation and Infrastructure called and said there will be no response and hung up on the town manager, which is, in my opinion, very disgraceful.

What I find even more astounding is that after the province has made this position that they do not have ownership, in this year's ICIP funding under comments, when they recognize this bridge they clearly say – after they have said a hundred times – they don't own this bridge: Funding would be contingent on the town taking ownership of this bridge. Ownership would need to be handed over prior to any project proceeding. This is coming from the department that says they don't own it, but they're also saying they have to transfer it before they're going to give any funding.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious safety concern for the residents of Clarenville. The residents of Clarenville can't take this on just based on risk and the risk associated with the overruns of any bridge of this magnitude: the silt, the cost of any pile work or anything associated with the replacing of this bridge.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, this is the province's piece of infrastructure. They tried to hide it away and I strongly suggest that they take a second look at this.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

**P. TRIMPER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The current provincial *Animal Health and Protection Act* came into effect in 2010 and was last updated in 2013. The changes at that time did not address, however, strict enforcement, adequate penalties or in-depth animal care standards that would improve the welfare of animals in care – including companion animals. In short, the act continues to fail the companion

animals and livestock of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Those on the front lines working with abandoned, abused and neglected animals – including chartered SPCAs in this province – are a valuable resource in terms of animal intake for the above-mentioned animals.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon this House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to perform a comprehensive review of the *Animal Health and Protection Act* in active consultation with chartered SPCA branches in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to raise this today; it's a very important item. I'm very familiar and I have very good friends who work with me and who are neighbours in the community who I know volunteer their time with the SPCA on a variety of issues.

I just want to take a few minutes to explain some of the problems that the current act has in relation to trying to do the right thing our furry and feathered friends that are in our care or serve as service animals. For example, animals that are brought into care from an RCMP seizure, if it's around an animal complaint of some kind they often get tied up in court cases. We therefore have a volunteer organization now tasked with having to take care of these animals. Sometimes the court processes go as long as a year or more, as we know.

Certain situations, if there are animals that need particular care – such as neutering, for example, or spaying the animals – those decisions cannot be made until these situations are cleared up. You often have important services that can be provided to the animal, seized and tied up by problems in the court.

The RCMP and the RNC are obligated under the act to investigate animal-related complaints; however, the officers, as we all know – and as I spoke to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety of the day – are often very busy and unfortunately in many situations, and, in fact, probably the vast majority of them are not trained in what to do and how to respond to these animal complaints.

It's suggested the SPCA does need to be deemed as first responders under the act, therefore you would have someone who's trained and be able to deal with the thing.

My final point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is that for everybody just to understand that we have an organization such as the SPCA providing an important community service and they have to fundraise to do this. We really need to increase our funding for those volunteers on the front line and let's take a look at that act.

Thank you very much.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call Orders of the Day.

**SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

#### Orders of the Day

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a privilege to speak in the House and to speak on the budget is obviously a bigger privilege because you're speaking for the residents, the constituents who put you here.

Budgets have a different meaning, I guess, than a lot of other things that happen in the House, the legislation and a lot of other important work, but a budget affects every single one of us. In some way or another, a budget has an impact on every one of our lives.

One example I give when you look at budgets, you look at government and you look at this

House is during elections, there were lots of conversations about elections. When you go campaigning and go around and you knock on someone's door and they say: I don't vote. I have no interest in voting. Government don't do anything for me. Why am I going to vote?

We all hear that, I know I hear it more times than I want to hear it. We all hear it regularly. It's an unfortunate assessment that people have of government. Now, we're part to blame and successive Members and governments before us, but that's an issue that I guess we live with and we try to work on every day, but my response has always been, everything you do in your life, government has some input in it. Whether it's your licence, your vehicle, it's the road you drive on, it's the school your children goes to, it's how fast you drive down a road, it's when you go to the gas station, the taxes on the gas and I can go on and on.

Every part of a person's life, government has a big role to play, and it really astounds me sometimes when I go and hear this from, what I consider to be, intelligent people as well. I think it's a role that well all take on when we run for office, you accept that, but you always feel that you're trying to change it. Whether I've changed it in my time since I've been there, I don't know. Maybe I have, maybe I haven't.

When you get this opportunity just to sit in House and speak and look at budget items and listen to lots of banter back and forth and points being made on both side of the House; they're all valid points. You don't have to agree with everything and sometimes if you're on the outside looking in you're wondering if there is going to be blood drawn, is there going to be fisticuffs because some of the stuff can appear to be pretty heated but a lot of times that's passion. I believe you have to have passion to do this job.

Of course, the budget comes up yearly and we all – when you're on the Opposition side you speak to, you lobby government and you advocate for your constituents. You try to, I suppose, imply and enforce the government to try to get your views across for your constituents. Whether it be a busing issue in your area, maybe one of your schools is dilapidated and you want a new school, whether your roads – I mean we have lots and lots on

roads and we have road issues; we need road paving.

All of this always comes back to one thing, it comes back to a budget. We can all have a wish list that is very long or very short, but the budget is the final decider and, of course, that's decided by government. So when we look at lots of items, we can talk lots about budget and you go down through the itemized list, I guess one of the issues that jumps out at me – and we're looking at this budget now – is it is very thin on details.

I guess there was evidence in Question Period today that it seems like there is a little bit of pushback from the other side when you ask them question – and they're good questions. There is no one out there today working with the English School District who are not concerned about their job or their spouse's or their son's or their daughter's job, or their mother's and father's jobs.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** There is not a soul out there in this province who is not worried about that.

But when the question is asked, I personally believe – and it is what I adhere to and you can ask anyone in my district, I never hoodwink people – if I don't know the answer, I don't know the answer. But to not give an answer and to come back in defiance and to come back with listings about what other bond agencies that have never probably set foot in this province have to say, it's a bit insulting, Mr. Speaker, because that's not the question that was asked.

The question that was asked is about the people that are home today or at work today wondering and having water cooler talk: Have I got a job tomorrow? Have I got a job next month, next year? There is no evidence in there. There is nothing there in the documents I can see that really jumps out at me. Well, I have Estimates tomorrow night for Education so I'll get an opportunity to ask more then. But that's the question.

When we look at some of the antics that happen in this House, that's what people want us to ask. We all go to our districts, we call people from

home or talk to family, that's the stuff they want to ask. How many job losses? What are they going to do now? What's going to happen to this one? What do that mean for this one? What do that mean for that school? Everyone is full of questions. We can go on with questions on any issue, rampant questions.

When you ask a question in this environment here – this is a pretty high-level area. You're in the Legislature of the province, this is where these decisions are being made. This is the government who is responsible for \$9.3 billion spending and you get those responses back – no answers. It's almost like they're insulted when you ask them a question. One response back: Why don't you tell us what you can do? That's not what this is. That's not the way this works, Mr. Speaker.

This is the Opposition, this is the House of Assembly; it's Question Period. If you read through the legislation, the Opposition questions the government; government don't question Opposition. If they feel that we have all the answers, well maybe they should move out of the way and let us go over there and do the job.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** Simple.

I sit here day after day after day and I've been here for year after year after year and it's the same old thing. Unknown to a lot of Members opposite, they should try – I know some have, there's a couple over there have that have been on this side of the House, a lot of them haven't; a lot of them were elected and they went into government. They have no idea what it's like to be over here, none.

To get a pothole fixed is a challenge, but you're not in government. To get a summer job, you go in with cap in hand, not to get you elected, it's because a young girl or a young man comes to you looking for a summer job. You take it under advisement. You tell them it's probably a slim chance but you'll try. You might get one, you might not.

Members opposite have to get five, six, seven, eight; they could get a dozen jobs. We're very lucky if we get one, maybe two. That's beyond

lucky; that's if they can't find anyone else. That's really sad. That is sad because they're in government.

I'm getting to a point where I'm going with a lot of this, Mr. Speaker, and I'll get there. But being in government and sitting on that side of the House and being responsible for a \$9.3-billion budget does not give you carte blanche to treat Members on this side of the House any differently than Members on that side of the House expect to be treated.

The adage says treat others as you want to be treated yourself. I try to aspire to that. I like having debates. Don't get me wrong, I'll challenge. I have no issue with challenging people for debate. I appreciate debate; actually, I like debate and anyone that knows me well enough will attest to it. I have no issue having a debate, but you always have to be respectful. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't really find that the respect level in this House shown by government since this last election is where it needs to be.

We're in a very difficult time in our province, in our history, probably one of the most difficult times. Budget morning, I went up to the local Tim Hortons. The manager was there and he says: Big day today. I said: Yes, it will be interesting to see what's there or whatever. He said: Tough decisions have to be made. I said: Yes, you're right; we're not in a good place. He said: I don't have to tell you that. I said: No, we know. Everybody was saying the same thing. Everyone was accepting. We're not in a good place; some decisions have to be made. I knew that. I don't think there's a Member in this House didn't know that.

When you come in and you get a budget that was kind of like – I don't really know, they're still trying to figure it out themselves. They're answering questions now three days later. They don't understand it probably themselves, but we definitely don't. Part of me on Monday, when the budget was released, started thinking: This sounds like an election budget, because you could probably go to the polls on a budget like this, based on our situation we were led to believe.

Moya Greene's report, that's pretty startling. That shook the world in Newfoundland. There's no doubt about it, Newfoundland and Labrador's world shook the day that report came out. It's pretty eye opening. There are things in there we don't know – and this is where I'm going to get to – where we are with this budget, because there are a lot of things in there; we don't really know what they mean. I don't know even know if the government knows.

You're going to review; you're going to assess; you're going to review; you're going to study; you're going to form a Committee. That doesn't mean a thing. Who's on the Committee that they can't answer it? What are you going to assess? We're going to assess, say, the NLC. How long is that going to take? We don't know. How much money did you save by moving the school district? We don't know. How many people are coming into government? We don't know. How many people are getting laid off? We don't know. How much is this going to save? We don't know. Where did that money come from? We don't know.

It might sound facetious, Mr. Speaker. You can chuckle. I've laughed myself, but that's where we are. I can't be more facetious when I'm saying this because it's true. We ask questions. I've been around long enough to know that sometimes you get tired listening to some of the responses, you get tired listening to some of the questions. I'll be honest; it's not just one sided. But if we're in a situation now where we are in the province at our time in history, don't you think it's about time everyone starts giving the proper answers to the people? Isn't that where we should be?

You've seen these antics back and forth. In Question Period today you can't help but wonder – and here I am with a smiling face again, I'm laughing. I've been around here long enough to know and when I wasn't here, I was right there. So I was pretty close to this place for a long time, a lot longer than most in this place. You know the one term that I just start to laugh at every time I hear it? It's Muskrat Falls. It's the be-all and end-all. It's the buzzword, I get it, but it's kind of been overused now. That's not going to solve our problems, Mr. Speaker. That's not solving our problems by pointing the finger.

I said to the Premier today, I wasn't here; I didn't agree to Muskrat Falls. That ship has sailed. As well, the Upper Churchill has sailed. That's as silly as me looking across the way and blaming Members opposite for Upper Churchill because it was done by a Liberal government. There's no difference. The only difference is the calendar. It was in the '60s; we're in the 2000s. That's the only difference. There's no difference whatsoever.

But then you're met with laughter and snickering, and what they're going to do and the responses back. It's the buzzword on Muskrat Falls and what you did to us. I didn't do anything to you on Muskrat Falls. I had no more say on Muskrat Falls than Members opposite had a say in it. I was here in the building; I never had a vote. There used to be stuff presented. I remember being back when we were up in government. We didn't have a better understanding than anyone in this House or anyone in this province. We were all citizens. We were all spectators.

I still think there were good parts of it. It was a mismanaged project and all that, but that's for another day. My point is why every single time you ask a serious, valid question, you get the response back: Muskrat Falls. I mean it's unbelievable. The Premier himself was quoted as saying he wanted to look forward, not backwards. He wanted to do everything on a go forward. Don't look back; don't look in the rear-view mirror, look ahead. I heard that. I said that's great to hear. I was really encouraged when I heard that. He said that when he first became leader. Who is over there talking about Muskrat Falls and the former Premier Williams? He himself. Chirping at me. Very good, b'y. Great to see you take your own advice. That's very comforting.

That's what we're dealing with. Why wouldn't the public get cynical when I'm cynical? I'm sitting here looking over. Our Finance critic today did a great job on his questions. He kept asking valid questions. He was told about what the bond-rating agencies thought of the budget. Unless I'm losing my sight or I can't read anymore or whatever, I never saw anything written down about what the bond agencies thought. It's avoidance, it's deflect – avoid, deflect, avoid, deflect. Do you know why? They



don't have the answers. They don't know the answers. I went through all that. They don't know anything. You go through it – I don't know.

So Estimates tomorrow night I'm not expecting a lot, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going in with any expectation. I respect the Minister of Education, I do. I've known him a long time. I'm not expecting a lot. I'm really not. I'm going to go in with a very open mind. I don't have to take a lot of pads of paper to write notes I don't expect. It will be deferred; we'll get back to you later. We may, we may not. We don't really know, but that's what we're dealing with.

I listened to the commentary this morning coming in on the road and do you know what was said on the radio stations? There's no analysis or we don't know the analysis. We don't know what's going to become of this. We don't know what the outcome of that is. This has to mean layoffs. I said, wow, that sounded like Question Period yesterday because I asked similar stuff. My colleague, the Finance critic, he asked similar stuff. We got similar answers.

Does that tell me it's a good budget? It may very well be a great budget but we don't know and, unfortunately, they don't know. Here we are, Mr. Speaker, and that's the situation we find ourselves. That's going to be the rallying cry to this budget. If you ask me, that will be the story of this budget. 2016 had a different theme. That was pretty drastic. It was high tax with no cuts and it was hated by every single person in the province. This may hit every person in the province but we don't know.

Mr. Speaker, on that note I want to move a non-confidence amendment. I'll now move an amendment, seconded by the Member for Harbour Main, that all the words after the word "That" be deleted in the motion before the House, Motion 1, and the following words be substituted: "this House exposes this government's failure to properly plan and implement strategies that will create the conditions for the growth of economic opportunity and jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador building effectively on our strengths."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** This House will recess now as we review the amendment.

### Recess

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Upon review of the amendment, I find that the amendment is in order.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker.

I guess to get back to my conversation I was having, I don't know if it's called a Budget Speech or a conversation, but I'll continue on.

I think that you're going to see it evident through most of our budget debate over here, and I've already alluded to it, is the lack of detail. That shouldn't be – that shouldn't be. This is not a new government. It's a new government with a new Premier, but there are a lot of familiar faces there; there are a few new faces. This is their third election so we shouldn't be flying by the seat of our pants. Based on the economic times we're in – it's well documented, the talk of the country and we hear it every day: we have to make bold decisions, we have to hit this lever and that lever. Sometimes it feels like we're in an excavator but we have to hit some levers, there are a lot of levers in motion.

Yet, we get a budget – and, again, I'll go back to it – no answers, there are no details. They're grasping at straws. It's like last night they didn't know where \$2.5 million went and now today they're scrabbling and they figured out it came out of COVID. I'm not so sure if that was discovered today. We don't even know exactly what's accurate and what's not accurate. You don't have the details. When you can't tell me if one person has been laid off, or two people are laid off or if you save five cents, or \$5, or \$5 million or \$50 million, that's pretty scary.

I guess, the crux of the problem is when you look at things, on March 27 we got the results of the election, and regardless of what people may have suspected, in this election no one knew

what was happening. We're now into June 1, the budget was presented, we know it was gone to print a week or so ago before that, so it was finalized probably even a week or so before that; not a lot of time. The Greene report was released in between all of that, plus you had a swearing-in of Cabinet, plus you had the swearing-in of the House of Assembly, new faces. A lot of these things had to be put into place, and then you're trying to get a budget in place. That's why we're getting what we're getting. That's why they're so scant on the details because they really don't have the details.

Now, is that acceptable? I don't know. Maybe the voters should ask that question. It's too late now, they have the decisions made. I don't know if it is acceptable or not. That's not for me to say. I don't think it's acceptable. We have a province in a fiscal situation that it's supposedly in, we could be having to save upwards of \$900 million next year. We don't know what's coming; that could be a rough year next year.

But I'll go back to the point again, I can't believe these decisions are made, affecting people's lives, and there's no real, proper analysis done. They could draw the numbers out –

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**B. PETTEN:** – they can draw the numbers out.

The Member for Corner Brook underneath the mask, I heard a muffle of Muskrat Falls again, so I'll go back to that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** All I can hear –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** It's very muffled, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** It's very muffled, but it's Muskrat Falls. It's the rallying cry, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** See?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, again, for that protection, Mr. Speaker.

See, this is where they get a bit sensitive, because when you don't like the message, you respond back with things you think will hurt.

Muskrat Falls doesn't have that appeal to me or to most Members on this side of the House. We weren't responsible for it. We all feel a responsibility as elected Members to try to get things right. I've bantered in this House many times and I'll banter again, but right now I really believe the problems we have facing us are too serious for banter. They're too serious for Muskrat Falls. You have a pothole that might cost a \$20 bag of cold patch, but we can't do that because of Muskrat Falls. That's what you're dealing with. It's all right to build a \$45-million pool in the middle of COVID, but, no Muskrat Falls. Excuse the cynicism again, Mr. Speaker, but that's what I hear.

I have a lot of Members on that side of the House that I have conversations with and I actually consider them to be decent friends. We can have sidebars off and on when we're out of here; they will agree with me because they hear the same thing. But you come in here and you wear your party stripe. I get that, too. I understand that. That's not the way it works. There's no way of anyone telling me you don't hear the same things we heard. People are tired of that.

The Member for Corner Brook with those comments, he doesn't realize it; maybe he does, maybe he doesn't care. People are tired of that. His name, actually, has been brought into the conversation sometimes: time for him to move ahead. Twenty-five years as a politician, you have to move with the times.

That meant something at one time, but it doesn't mean the same anymore. How silly would we look over here if every time they opened their mouth and we didn't like what they said, we threw Upper Churchill at them? That's what it's akin to. Same thing. As I said earlier, the only difference between that and Muskrat Falls is the calendar. Our leader today asked questions about 2041: What about a share of equalization?

Again, obviously, it wasn't that great, I can't remember what he said, because if it was anything good, we would probably write it down and kept note of it. Excuse it, but that's the reality; that's what we're living in. We don't expect anything, Mr. Speaker. That's what we've become.

As an elected Member in this House that represents a large municipality, like the Member for Corner Brook – similar districts, similar sizes – our people that we represent care. They may not be glued to the televisions sets watching this, but rest assured, they know what happens in here. They read; they hear; they know. They're on Twitter. They get an idea of what's happening. They will ask enough questions.

I'll say this over again and I'll continue to say it because it should be kept being said: People deserve better than what we're giving them. This stuff, the times we're into now, to be relegated to this because we're asking honest, serious questions – to be relegated to be getting that thrown back at you, Muskrat Falls, how about answering a few questions?

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**B. PETTEN:** The Member for Corner Brook is hooked on Muskrat Falls, but I'll give him a break because he does that sometimes. He'll have a free pass this evening; he can say Muskrat Falls all afternoon.

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**B. PETTEN:** He keeps saying it, Mr. Speaker. It's pretty scary, actually.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go through a couple of other things now that when we talk about – I said earlier when I spoke and I touched on some arrogance, because that's what it can only be

described as. That's what I've been told by others. They see it, they feel it and they sense it. But why? Because you're given a privilege, an honour, maybe the tough task to try to govern the province through the situation we're in now, does that give you a right to be arrogant?

We've sat in this House. I've been in the scrum area; I've been on microphones outside this place. You can go find it; I've said it outright: We want to work with government. The times we're in now, the people, our residents, the constituents want us to work with government. They're not catchphrase words; they are real words. We really feel that way.

I can speak for this caucus over here, who are a strong bunch of individuals. I'm privileged to be a part of them. They will tell you that too, our leader is after saying over and over and over again. We can play the little rhetoric games here if we want to, but we stuck to it. I'm on record again; we want to work with government.

The Premier was there – one day I pointed directly at the Premier and he acknowledged it. We want to work with you, but this is the way it works. You just go back and read *Hansard* and some of the responses and we'll keep getting them. Whenever government decides they're going to have the wisdom to stand up and speak during debate – we're not sure when that's going to happen but it will eventually come – I'd like to hear what they have to say. Are they going to get up and blast what happened back 10 years ago, 15 years ago, or are we going to deal with what's happening now, here and now where we are?

Why is it right for Quebec to be getting what they're getting in equalization? Forget about the formulas, forget about all that, put all that aside. Forget about what the PCs did or Muskrat Falls but is it right for Quebec to be getting – that's a simple question and I'll ask anyone in this Chamber, anyone watching, do you think it's right for them get \$13 billion a year and Newfoundland get nothing? Is that right?

If anyone says, yes, I'm sorry but it's a sad statement. It's not right.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, it's not.

But if we always hang our heads, it's because of the formula. It is because we are not entitled to it, it is revenue-driven. Our revenues are too high; we don't qualify. There are certain things not included in the formula. This has been a debate forever and a day, but is it right.

You drive down any street, any main area in Quebec – and I have in Montreal – it's astounding the amount of construction. There is billion-dollar bridgework, the place is booming. It's booming. Then drive down through some of our streets. You see it boarded up, closed up, potholes.

Down in our leader's district, Conception Bay East - Bell Island, there was a big pothole. There was a big pothole a while back. It was so big they had to put the pavement over the sandbags. That's how big it was. But up in Quebec you don't have that problem. Just again, \$13 billion; we are getting nothing, but that's okay because we went to Ottawa and they said: No, that's the formula.

It is never a bad thing to stand up and fight for what you believe in. Is it just because you have a Liberal prime minister, a Liberal government, you can't fight? Really, is that why? Is that why we're not allowed to fight for our fair share because they're the same stripe? That means nothing to me; you fight for the people here. Fight for the people you're elected to represent, fight for the people in this province, fight for the people here in this Legislature.

That doesn't cut it with people in this province. Forget about in this Legislature, this doesn't cut it for these people in this province, so that's fine. I heard some people agree that it's not correct for Quebec to get \$13 billion and we get nothing. But when we asked that question – and *Hansard* will tell you, over the years I've been in this House that question has been asked over again and repeated people have answered it. It's been riddled with cynicism and potshots back across the way. Probably blame it on Muskrat Falls. You could have changed it, pointing fingers and that, but where does that get us?

Now we're talking about we may be bankrupt. No one knows where we are. Really, no one

does know where we are. I'll go back to my comment on the budget, because they don't know what's in the budget. They have no idea what's in that budget. If they did, we'd like to know. If they're going to tell us, this is an opportune time when the world is watching. The media are there. Everyone wants to know what's in the budget.

Then I get from the Member for Corner Brook: Muskrat Falls. Under the mask: Muskrat Falls. I don't know if the people at home or anyone else watching can't see that. That's what it is. It's under a muffle because he has an extra thick mask on; it's under the muffle, Muskrat Falls. That's fine. For some reason he can magically get elected election after election, so who am I to criticize. I guess he probably – CBS might not be the best place for him to run, but he is doing all right where he is.

**G. BYRNE:** If you think that's magic, you have another thing coming.

**B. PETTEN:** Trust me; I know it's no magic with you.

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** Mr. Speaker –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Address the Chair, please.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The point I'm making is it's answers about questions. It's questions you want answers to. The government are not here to question us. That's not what this is about. We have a job to do and I keep saying that. We, as Members of this House, have a job to do.

Like I said earlier, it's not easy sitting on this side of the House. Some Members have experienced – not many have. They should sit on this side of the House. If they sat on this side of the House, they'd get a real indication of what's really involved, what it takes. I'll tell you, it's not easy. I'll tell you that, it's not easy. You don't have carte blanche access to everyone –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**B. PETTEN:** I'm trying to behave myself, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, I understand the game, but they understand something else that never throws me off. Now, I'm hearing there was something said there, but I missed it. Maybe we'll figure that out later, but I'm not worried about that either. They should be more worried about running the province and getting us out of the jam we're in, dealing with people's issues, but we're not. This is what you're subjected to.

We're asking honest questions. This is honest debate. We want to know some answers. Is that so hard? What do we get? I'll tell you, we still haven't figured this out. We have a lot of Estimates to go yet, so it's going to be a long three hours every night. I hope the staff are well prepared. I have a lot of faith in the staff. I'm not sure what notes they're going to give the ministers because it must be pretty simple. We don't know. No idea.

Actually, the briefing for any minister could be no idea. That's all you have to say. We can ask all the questions all night long, just no idea; we don't know the answer. That's an easy night for them. Not good for us, not good for people of the province, but an easy night for them. Mr. Speaker, looking at the items in the budget, different things have been talked about here. Before I get into that, I have some items I want to talk about.

There's one other thing I want to bring up, I want to come back to. It happened yesterday and I debated all day if I was going to mention it. I debated all last night if I was going to mention it, but I'm going to mention it. Petitions: We present petitions in this House, not for the Member for Cape St. Francis's own good benefit, or the Member for Harbour Main's or Terra Nova's, these petitions are presented for the people we represent. They come to us and they express concern about certain issues,

certain policies and certain things they want changed. We take it upon ourselves to assist them. Well, we can present a petition, bring some attention to your issue and usually the minister responds, and we'll take it from there.

I thought that was a good concept, because the ministers never always responded. This only happened a couple of years ago. We changed our *Standing Orders* and government opposite rightfully suggested. I thought it was a great idea. I think the former Government House Leader suggested it. We all thought it was a good idea to get a response to our petitions.

But it's more of a trend now of late and it's noticeable – I'm not the only one that noticed it. The responses are getting fewer and fewer and fewer. Some ministers don't respond. They don't respond to phone calls. They don't respond to emails. They don't respond to petitions. I've seen them walk out in the middle of a petition pertaining to them. Is that right?

**E. LOVELESS:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**E. LOVELESS:** I sit here and listen to the Member, and I'll let him know that he's on the Opposition side of the House. He leaves the impression that he's the only one that cares about the happenings in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What's the point of order?

**E. LOVELESS:** Am I given the time to speak to –

**SPEAKER:** It's not a point of order.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I never singled him out. I never said his name.

**E. LOVELESS:** The one who walked out of the House; you singled me out.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** I never said it was you who left the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**B. PETTEN:** Can I have the floor again?

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** There's lots of time for you to speak. You had all the main motions this morning, not one of them got up. The only one who spoke on the main motion is the Minister of Finance. The only Member who spoke is the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker. That's the only person who spoke on the main motion.

What confidence they must instill in the people of the province. This is what's running our province, b'y. She's in good hands. I don't have to say anything. Turn the microphone over there, that's all you have to do. I can sit back and drink water. This is what you're listening to. I don't have to do anything. You listen to that stuff coming across the way.

Well, what have I said wrong? Unnerve people? I never said anything about any particular person leaving the House. I saw it, and I don't think it's right. If I'm going to be accused of saying something like that and points of order because I was calling out something that I didn't agree with, I shouldn't be sitting in this seat. If that's what I'm elected for, to come in and disrespect and whatever to Members or disrespect the issues and not say anything or not speak up, I'm in the wrong business. Because that's what we were put here for. We're put here for that.

The Member for Ferryland was presenting a petition on roads, and he did a good job of it. He has big issues. I know where he's coming from because he cares about his district. Every Member in this House cares about their district. I never said that. That's not what I said at all.

I'm not responsible for Transportation and Infrastructure. I'm the critic, but I'm not responsible. I'm not the minister. My name is not over the door on the fifth floor of the West Block – it's not there. I know that department quite well, and I would hazard to guess that I know the department probably better than the minister knows it. But he's the minister. Show some decency and listen to the man's or the woman's petitions. What's so wrong about that? What's so wrong? Was there some remorse for walking out on the petition? That's not where we're to. I'm using the petition as an example, but it ties it back to the level of – just dismissive. It's so dismissive. They're dismissive of us, people see that.

Our last sitting there last month, or whenever we were here that first week for Interim Supply, I remember we were here and there was a bit of kerfuffle in the House. I did an interview on it and my simple question was – all we want is just a bit of respect. I don't think we're asking for a lot. We're not asking for government to do anything miraculous, just show us a bit of respect. That's all.

Respect is a big thing, Mr. Speaker. It's only a word if you don't – words don't mean anything. You can say you respect someone, but you have to show it. Respect is huge – huge. Again, like I've said, and people in this House know me, too, if I said something that was probably off – I don't mind apologizing. Not a bit. I don't mind, if I do wrong. My life has been like that. Trust me, I've made lots of mistakes, lots of them, and as everyone else here, but you have to be respectful.

I'm singling out an issue, not a person – but the person came out and disclosed their self – that I didn't agree with, that I didn't think was right. What makes that so wrong? I challenge anyone in this House that if they see stuff to speak up, no matter what side you're on. That's what you should be doing. That's what people want us here for.

I don't get elected to this House of Assembly by sitting down and nodding my head and agreeing with everything that's happening, nor do I get elected by disagreeing with everything that happens. But people respect – almost every one in this House are respected and elected because

they stand up for the people in their communities. They are standing up people. Most people here are stand-up individuals and they're strong in their districts for that reason.

But you can't come in here because you have the power, you're in the seat of power, the seat of government and be disrespectful and to look down on people because we're not on the right side of the House. That's where I have a problem, Mr. Speaker, and that's something that I'll stand by no matter what. I've always had that belief.

I have a lot of friends around on this side of the House, I think, that share the same views and operate the same way. It's a group that I'm very pleased to be in the same caucus with because we all share the same view. Show us respect, we show respect, we expect respect back. I think, for the most part, there's a lot of respect shown on this side of the House but we don't feel we get it on the other side.

Now, is that how we go forward for the next four years? Maybe so. I don't know what the next four years are going to bring. I do hope that they bring more answers. Because if they're going to show that to us, we can't do nothing about it.

We can fight stuff, as long as they get their 20 or 21 votes in the House here, we can't do nothing about it, other than we can voice our concerns and lodge our concerns and vote Division in the House and be public; put out news releases. Ultimately, government has that ability with a majority.

For the sake of the people in this province, and in your district, but, obviously, in the province, show a bit of respect. Take where we are seriously.

Our oil revenues have doubled and they're going to double next year so it gives you a bit of reprieve. There are a few things going good, but we still have tough decisions to make. We're all prepared for those tough decisions, but give us a bit of lead time, give us a bit of a heads-up. People are expecting that.

You can't just be treating – we're the messenger. I look at that sometimes, we're the messenger.

In our districts we're one of the population base, we're only one person and we have to bring the good and bad messages, but ultimately we're the messenger on both ends of it. We bring messages here; we bring messages back. We're reached out to constantly for our views and our thoughts and looking for direction, but, ultimately, we're all at the mercy of the government in power, which happens to be this administration now.

On a really sincere note, I really think that's where they need to be focused. Forget about anyone in this House for that matter, but be respectful and do us right, because I'm not seeing it and I don't think a lot of people in this province are seeing it. Will I call it out? Absolutely, every opportunity. We get lots of opportunities in this House and I'm sure my colleagues do too.

I will not, I cannot, I suppose I should say – maybe I'm in the wrong by saying this, but I can't sit idly, quietly by when I see stuff like that happen, whether people are offended by that, that's all I can do.

It was just ironic, though, when I started bringing up an example, someone jumped up and was all upset over it. Hopefully, that don't happen again; who knows, maybe it will happen every time after, who knows. I really don't know. Time will tell, but that's not the way this House is meant to be. It's not the way it's meant to be.

I don't expect a minister to get up every single time and answer a petition. It could be repetitive, I understand that, but show a bit of respect. At least once get up and give an answer to a Member that they can go back and talk to their constituents and maybe then provide an answer to them, because ultimately it's the answer to them.

Ironically, not everyone in his district voted Tory. There are Liberals coming his way, too, and NDPs. We all get that. Don't ever lose sight of that. Because you're helping out a PC Member; you're not helping out a supporter of your party: That's not the way it should be. There are a lot of Liberals in my district, too. We have independents. We have them all. We have Alliance; we have them all.

Don't ever lose sight of that. Sometimes that's what it seems like: It us against them. It's not the way we should be. It's the way it's looked across the way, when you hear sighs and huffs and that, but that's not the way it's supposed to be. Because I don't look over, it doesn't mean I don't hear. My hearing isn't the best either, Mr. Speaker, but I can hear enough to know the sentiments.

I want to speak about, I suppose, in the budget some of the issues we talk about. You talk about MUN. You look at MUN over there. I have a lot of commentary, a lot of back and forth. Actually, a lot of people agreed. Recently, I stated in an interview that I thought that MUN's spending was lavish. I have lots of evidence to suggest that I was correct, but what I was asking for when I said that was: What analysis was done inside MUN? What about your books? Why doesn't the AG go in and have a look? I said you had to look at one end of the spending before you could look at raising tuition. They couldn't do one without doing the other.

Again, I'll come back to my thing, but there's no analysis done on that. We still don't know that. That's a huge problem if you're going to take the tuitions in the province now and probably double or triple them, which they may very well have to do, but we don't know what's on the other side. Now, I know that they're going to come in the House for Estimates; they're going to have be subjected to the Auditor General, but now we have put the ball in motion to lift the tuition freeze. Not that everyone in this province disagrees with that, but it comes back to, again, what analysis? What was the analysis that was done? Why didn't we go in and do that before we did what we did? Because we still don't know.

We hear lots of alarming stories inside about some of the spending, and we will never know. How will we know that? Will the AG go in? Maybe, maybe not. We don't know. We're told they're going to go in; what are they going to find? When tuition is doubled and tripled and then we get declining enrolment from international and national students, then we're going to have to increase tuition again. Who really wins in that? We really don't know what's happening inside. We hear about leaky roofs and mould. The buildings need this; the buildings

need that. We don't know because there's no analysis done.

My district, CBS, has overcrowding in schools; big demand on schools, class sizes. Metro schools have that big issue, anyway, but I know in my district it is.

We're being told – read somewhere about the money – the minister said yesterday the money will come back to some classrooms and what not. That's good. We don't know how much money though because there is no analysis. We're taking the school district – how much money is coming back to the schools? We don't know. I'd like to know how many more students assistants are going to be funded in Queen Elizabeth, Frank Roberts, St. George's, St. Edward's and Admiral's Academy, I want to know that. I got to go back and say I don't know. I'd like to tell but they don't know. I ask but we don't know.

True, but they're issues. My colleagues in the metro area, they all got schools in St. John's area, they have the same problems that I have. They can't go and tell the principals or the parents in the schools or school councils how many more positions or how much money or an estimate: they don't know. They don't know. I got people in my district who work with the eastern school district; I spoke to someone last night. Do you know what I told him when I spoke to him last night? I don't know.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**B. PETTEN:** I'm not being funny either, Mr. Speaker. I'm being totally serious. Because do you know why? They don't know. Ironically, I asked that question today and they couldn't answer the question.

My colleague, our finance critic, he asked the same question today, too, and he was told about all the bond-rating agencies, how much they rated them, how wonderful they thought the budget was. Like I said, and I heckled, and I don't know if anyone heard it or not, but why don't you go to Topsail Road or why don't you go up on (inaudible) Street and ask the people up there. Don't ask the bond-rating agencies, ask the public what they think. Everyone is in the same boat, no one knows.



My colleague from Cape St. Francis asked how much the paving budget is this year. I said I don't know, it's somewhere in there. That's the problem. There is no one jumping up in arms. Do you know why? Because they don't know. There is no one throwing figures at me because they don't know. I've been here long enough to know that I'll get numbers fired at me left, right and centre and if I was one penny off, they'd turn on me. They're not turning on me because do you know what? They don't know. Simple, they don't know. Because if I knew and I was over there, I'd be beside myself. I'm hearing some funny little remarks but that's fine.

Mr. Speaker, I told myself a while back, every time you get in trouble in here for getting too carried away, there's a little fellow, he's on my shoulder now, and every time I feel that urge to go slip off one way, in the corner of my eye he's pointing at me. I take him with me everywhere now because it's really helpful.

To my colleagues opposite, I'll let them know, they can heckle and they can say whatever, I can deal with it later, but that little fellow is keeping me in line, because I can really go off the deep end sometimes. I'm really behaving myself to do that. It's just as well to be blunt and brutally honest.

**G. BYRNE:** (Inaudible.)

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** The Member for Corner Brook, he just came to again, Mr. Speaker.

Muskrat Falls, he said, as he took off the mask because it has his voice muffled.

**G. BYRNE:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**G. BYRNE:** Standing Order 49 protects Members from offensive behaviour or language from other Members. I believe what you will find, Mr. Speaker, is that the language used by the hon. Member was indeed offensive. It was meant to malign me. It was meant to diminish my reputation. To suggest that –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

There is no point of order there.

**G. BYRNE:** I believe there was, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** There is a difference of opinions among Members.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** You can't write it. There's no way you can't write this stuff. Anyway, I'll get back to the debate.

Mr. Speaker, we'll get into another couple of issues. The fisheries is mentioned once, one word something about the fishery. We're not sure what it is, we haven't figured that out either.

My colleague from Torngat Mountains, she said they put Labrador in on the end of it just so they didn't forget them.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Nine sentences.

**B. PETTEN:** Nine sentences, there you go.

That's what this budget is. We're going to review Marble Mountain. Every government for the last 10 years or 15 years said that has to go, but no one wants to buy it, that's the problem. No one tells you that. There's no market for it, but government is responsible for it. Whatever decisions are made, whoever made them, that's neither here nor there; it's done. It's like the Upper Churchill, it's done. It's almost like Muskrat Falls, it's done.

Now, you have to try to fix it, like those issues there, too. You're going to study that again. I know, I was in a room when there was one study released and no one wanted to buy it. There's no market for it. Here we go again, we're going to have a study. But this is the catch thing, not everyone knows those things, so that covers your ground; that buys you a bit of time: oh, they're going to go study that. Dame Greene said Nalcor needs to be shut down. I don't know if that's right or wrong. We're going to review that.

Now, will it close? We don't know but we're going to review it. We're going to find out. We're going to assess it. We're going to form a Committee. There are a lot of Committees being formed, too. Who's on the Committee? We don't know. How many is going to be on the Committee? We don't know. Terms of reference? No idea. How much is the Committee going to cost? No clue. Budget '21-'22 – what's really funny? Our future? We don't know. No clue.

*Together.Again.* is the new slogan to welcome everyone back. It's nice. Maybe they should have had: We don't know where we're going. We don't know if you're coming, but we're together. We will figure something out when you get here. That's the way we operate here. It doesn't matter. We'll get there. All the while, Rome is burning. We have Committees formed; we're going to deal with that. A Committee on this, a Committee on that. We're talking to our friends in Ottawa. We might form a Committee to talk about that, but we're not sure. We're going to get there.

It doesn't matter because oil went up. Oil is not their friend. The prime minister doesn't like oil. All his key people, they don't like oil. The federal minister of Natural Resources is from Newfoundland. Believe that or not. Could you imagine? An outcry we hear from the oil and gas workers and our own federal Member is the minister. The national minister is from Newfoundland. Can you imagine? Can you believe that? That's amazing. He can't get through. It's respect to him, but he can't get through the juggernaut up in Ottawa. It's all about green energy. It's all about green.

You can't afford a green economy without having money to do so. It looks pretty nice on the balance sheet now when you see the billions of dollars flowing in from oil and gas. It looks pretty nice. No problem spending that, no problem reducing your deficit. It looks good. In the speech – I read some of it, but when I found out that they didn't really know what was in it, I stopped reading some of it. I know some of the lines in it, there are nice catchphrases; it all sounds great how much they support oil and gas and where they are with the oil and gas, but it's almost reluctant.

We have \$300 million or whatever – \$320 million, was it – from Ottawa, but it was not targeted for oil and gas. They had to get it through a backdoor approach to get it to pass through the juggernaut in Ottawa. They had to kind of frame it up another way. It had to be framed another way because these key people don't like – there's no money spent in oil; it's all about green. That's what our oil and gas industry has been faced with. That's the reality we're in.

We see Terra Nova now possibly going and government apparently – again, it was something to do with a briefing note that they're holding close, they don't want to talk about it; we'll find out and hopefully we will get some details on it – buying an equity stake. I have no problem with an equity stake. If it's a (inaudible), if it's a value for money, if there's a proper assessment done, analysis. I'm not holding my breath, Mr. Speaker, because I have a feeling when we dig into that, they won't know that either, but I live in hope. There's a part two to that, but I'm going to leave that. I won't say that one.

This is where things fall down. You had the oil refinery out there. People were going, there were lots of people protesting and a lot of play, a lot of negativity. Take the money, whatever it was, \$20 million, whatever; we'll deal with that now. Push it down the road, we'll figure that out. Still waiting. That money is soon going to expire. I think it was only good to June, if I'm not mistaken, the warm idle.

I think the Member for Terra Nova probably is better up on that than me. I think it was the end of June that money was good for. We're into early June now so, yeah, where does that leave us? But if we ask the government opposite, do you know what I'm afraid they might say? We don't know, we'll see. June 30? I don't know. They may lock the doors; they may not. It all depends. Maybe it's warm enough we don't need the extra money. I don't know, Mr. Speaker.

That's where you are with things. That's how sad this has become. We'll run away, we'll run out and we'll throw \$10 million at this. Yeah, we'll fix that. That will get that solved for a while.

**B. WARR:** (Inaudible.)

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** Now.

**B. WARR:** (Inaudible) Member of the Committee.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** Now, Mr. Speaker, see what happens? At least I'll give them one credit. The Member for Baie Verte - Springdale, is it?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Green Bay.

**B. PETTEN:** Green Bay. Right on, sorry about that. He never said Muskrat Falls. I have no problem with him having a jab over across the way what I should have done. I have no issue with that to see the difference. He actually said something that he believes in. I have no problem with that. At least he never used the same catchphrase; he actually said something that meant something to him.

See the difference? It's called respect. I actually respect that man. I have no problem with him saying anything across the way to me. I listen to lots of commentary. I don't mind that. I listen to criticism, that's fine, but that's the difference, Mr. Speaker. You say something on this side of the House, we're all supposed to just bend down and walk away, take our knocks and go home because we're in charge, we know better.

You see where I'm going with all this stuff? I hazard to guess – now see they wouldn't understand that, Mr. Speaker, because there's not a big enough mirror. That's the problem. The mirrors are only pocket size. A big mirror, they might see it, they can't see it in the mirrors they have. We all see it; the public sees it.

I don't ever anticipate sitting on that other side of the House, to be honest with you. I'd say my patience will be gone sitting on this side, that another time around I don't say I'll have the patience to go across there. But whatever side I'm on and whatever seat I'm in, I'm not going to stop doing what I'm doing. You don't get elected by playing some of the games that are played on that side of the House – you never do.

That doesn't get anyone elected in this House. Being an honest, decent person is what gets most of us elected.

It's kind of unfortunate sometimes that people don't see a lot of the stuff that happens inside the Chamber here. It's really unfortunate, actually, because I think that would open a lot of eyes. When I first came in here I was really astounded by that, too, and I said, wow. I remember the first time I sat in this Chamber, I was in the next row over and I remember looking at the former premier. I couldn't believe how close he was, because even though I was upstairs, I didn't realize the proximity in this House and what you can hear on the floor of the House. I realized when you come here, we're all in this together; you're all here, we should all be in this together. There are times that has worked that way, there were times we've united as a group here in this House and we did a lot of good things.

During COVID, I sat here for one session. I think it was the Interim Supply session. I think there were 10 or 12 of us in the House. You're dealing with a very serious pandemic. Everyone parked their egos by the door. We came in, we asked some questions that were important and we passed what needed to be done to keep the finances of the province going. It was a respectful debate, but it was at a time when you felt like – you left here and you said: We actually did something for the betterment of the people of the province. At a time when there weren't a lot of people willing to go through the door – it was pretty scary times back then – we all stepped up because we felt we had to. That makes you feel that you're a part of something.

I remember when I was first approached to run for politics – as much as I was in the backrooms of politics for a long time, I remember when I was asked. The former Member was resigning or retiring. They asked me to run and I started laughing. I still to this day tell that story because I never dreamed in my lifetime that I would want to do this. I wonder sometimes now when I sit here and I listen to some of the stuff across the way – I see how some decisions are made, I see what decisions are made sometimes and I think back to that day and I wonder what was I thinking? That's not a nice way to feel, really. It's not.

Ultimately, like all of us, when you go home and you get over that, you go out and you run into – you do something, you meet someone and you help someone with an issue. Then you come back and say: You know what; this is why I'm doing it. But you always need that reassurance; you always need that rebound to know why you're doing it. That's what this Legislature has become.

Forty-eight per cent of the people voted in the last election. I remember the All-Party Committee with the government opposite. Minister Hogan was chairing it. We're hoping to make headway; we're hoping to get an opportunity to get answers, to get people's voices heard. I know my colleague, the Opposition Deputy House Leader for Harbour Main and my other colleague from Torngat Mountains, are also on that Committee with me; we all feel the same way.

I heard the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands talk earlier and he talks a lot about election reform. I support a lot of what he says; getting to the bottom of it. But if we don't find out what happened, how are you going to ever bring in new legislation in this House if you don't go back and find out what went wrong?

My fear is, the membership on that Committee and the way it's done – we're staying there. I know there was some debate. I know the Third Party decided not to; we decided to stay there and give it an opportunity because we felt we owed it to the people of the province, really, not only our district. You have to have some kind of balance in a Committee like that to make sure this doesn't happen again.

When you look at the percentage of people voting in this province, it leaves a lot to be desired. Was it because of mail-in ballots? Was it because of the fiasco at Elections Newfoundland or is it because of everyone in this House? If you sit back, I've given this a lot of thought, too, if you sit back and you let things go on that you don't think are appropriate, you'll never get them better.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You become part of the problem.

**B. PETTEN:** You become part of the problem, that's right.

The Minister of Transportation got highly offended there today when I was making reference about a petition, even though I never singled anyone out, especially him. Is that not part of our problem? Why not just say, fair game? Why don't you say I accept it? Why don't you say, yeah, good point? If you don't agree that's fine, too. But isn't that why we're where we are? That's why people are cynical. They're cynical because of the way this House has been conducted. They're cynical because of the way we conduct ourselves and we let this go and we let that go. We're no better than the person on the other side.

That's the problem, I think. That's one of the biggest problems facing us as a Legislature and a province. If we want to get voter participation up, Minister, I think we have to deeply look at what went wrong. We're going to get engageNL, hopefully; we're going to hear people's concerns. I encourage everyone out there to get their concerns registered because there are lots of them. If you want to increase your percentage of voters, that legislation no doubt will help. That will improve voter participation.

I heard the Members opposite, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and I believe the Minister Responsible for Women, speak about the municipal elections coming up today, getting more involvement, getting more females running, getting more people involved. I couldn't agree more, it's wonderful.

If we don't change the way we do business, that may be the problem. That may very well be the problem. I know society plays a role, too. We're in a society where it's not an easy game. Politics is not easy. Social media, it's not easy for any of us here. But if it doesn't start somewhere – and I believe there's no reason why it can't start here. It has to start somewhere. Actually, it should start here. You start using respect and treating people with respect, and people on the outside will appreciate it.

When we were in a minority government, which was an odd time, even though every second day there was someone going to the polls, I didn't like that part of it. There was so much

uncertainty. We actually worked on some things, whether they had no choice or whatever it was, we all agreed on certain things and we got certain things through as a minority government. That was working together because we were forced to work together. I get it. This majority government, and some of the arrogance is not unique to this government here. It happens. Different party stripes.

The PC Party had problems with that, too. I'm not saying it's just them, but I wasn't over there when it was the PC Party. I wasn't there, so I can't speak for them, but I can speak for what I hear on the street. I'll tell you, the 45 or 48 per cent turnout is only partly to do with the Elections NL snafu. Most districts, 55 or 56 per cent is the going rate anyway. Voter participation in my district was not down a huge amount, percentages. Why was it still so low, though?

Is it because people are tired of the same old rhetoric? Is it that someone's going to say: I heard you today ask a few questions, but all that came back was Muskrat Falls? What's that about? What's that foolishness about?

I'll tell you what I hear: How do you get the patience to sit out there? B'y, you must have some patience to listen to that.

**S. CROCKER:** (Inaudible.)

**B. PETTEN:** And that from the Government House Leader.

Again, too bad you don't turn the camera and the microphone over, because that probably would make this place a lot more orderly. It's constant. You can fire back, but sometimes it's almost like, yes, whatever. Because people don't want to hear that anymore. We heard it loud and clear. We've heard what happened.

Again, it's tone deaf, Mr. Speaker. I just said 45 to 48 per cent of the people voted. Why is that? Can anyone answer me that question? You say it's because Elections NL and because of the pandemic; that's not right. We have a lot of work to do as an All-Party Committee. A piece of legislation is only part of it. I think, as a Legislature, we have a lot of work to do, as people of the province. You have to get people

more engaged. You have to get people back into it.

It will make for better government, too, Mr. Speaker. I don't think we have the best government, the way we're operating now. Some of the stuff I hear in this House proves that we don't. You have to be able to answer questions, Mr. Speaker. You have to be respectful. That's not always easy to find. But answering questions comes back to the basis of what I said right through, and I know they don't like to hear it, and I will say it again, it is all about the answers to the questions.

You make choices; we all make choices. Government makes choices. That's what we live by: We make choices. They make choices they think are the best choices. Well, let us know what they are and let's assess them. Don't tell us this is what we're planning on doing but don't ask us the outcome. That's shameful; that is shameful.

This is the recipe – the remnants of a budget that was rushed and there was no preparation done for. There had to be a few sprinkling of the Greene stuff in there. All the words are there; there's the bowl, there's the making different moves, pulling levers – all those words are there. We hear them over and over and over, it has become the government of platitudes. If you wanted to just let yourself go off in la-la land you'd feel great until you wake up and realize that it was only a dream. That's what you're living with.

Everyday is a new one. Today, it's: *Together.Again*. I tell you, right across the screen, I was like come on. We still have thousands and thousands of people waiting for the vaccination. I have rotational workers contacting me daily. We still have people getting the virus. My colleague from – the Opposition Finance critic, I should find his district name because he's in the –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Stephenville - Port au Port.

**B. PETTEN:** Stephenville - Port au Port. His district is being hit hard now with a cluster. Those people out there – everyone would like to see us get back to normal, me included. There is

no one who wants to get back to normal more than me, but we're: *Together.Again*.

His district is dealing with a lot out there today, 17 new cases today. So while Rome is burning, we don't know nothing. We have no answers to nothing. Seventeen cases on the West Coast. We have lunch hour news with the teleprompter up in the end of the room: *Together.Again*. We're in good hands, that's what we're dealing with.

Excuse the cynicism, Mr. Speaker, but trust me, I'm speaking for a lot of people in the province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** I tell you that, no doubt. That's what the Members opposite don't see.

There was a time in February – if I was guessing, it was a part of February – government opposite was doing quite well. They were going to do quite well in the polls. But, again, I don't hide behind my words; I'll say what I heard. I knew that they were doing quite well. But the tides turned on them, and when the tides turn, they turned hard. People all of a sudden came to: Hang on; there's no transparency here. What are we getting here? We've seen everything in turmoil.

Our Dr. Fitzgerald has been an absolute saint to this province. Where would we be without her?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** I'll clap to that. I mean the woman is amazing. God help us without her, but we've seen so much indecision and pass the buck. There were bus drivers popping up everywhere. This woman was left to deal with it. I commend her for what she did, but the public saw that.

I never turned the polls. We never turned the popularity polls. It was a 25-point lead, a 30-point lead in the polls. That went down to 10 on election day. It went from being this massive big landslide majority – I was told one time we were losing all of our seats. Every seat we were losing. I was told that in 2015, too, by the way. We ended up with seven but I was told that. I wasn't told that by someone on the side of the road, pollsters were saying that. What

happened? The light came on. Someone hit the switch; hang on. They saw it for what it was.

Once the public saw that, things changed. It wasn't me changing anything, or anyone on this side of the House – really, probably no one in this House. No one could stop it because the public woke up and saw it. The public sees all this stuff. I don't have to sit here and ramble on forever on it; the public sees it all. They see what happens in here. They don't see it enough. That's the only sad statement. I wish they could see more.

We try to expose some of the stuff that happens in this House through our social media account because I think it's important. I think if Members in this House ask a question, whatever answer they get should be told to the people of their districts, the people of the province. If a critic asks a question – some questions we ask are provincial. Answers should also be provided because people have busy lives. But if we're not getting answers and we're getting rhetoric, we're getting we don't know, that's pretty sad.

To go back to all of the things that's going on – and we're talking about elections, we're talking about how do we get more people involved – we need a long, hard look in the mirror. It needs to be probably led by government opposite. Again, those are the people with their names over the doors in the minister's office. You won't find my name over a minister's office or anyone on this side.

We try to get the attention of the ministers opposite, the Members opposite; we try to get the attention of the Premier because we have to look after our own districts. But if you're going to look at the problems we face, you don't have to look very far. Then you get little digs and little comments come across the way. Most over there should realize now that doesn't phase me one little bit.

There was a time it would, when you first get up speaking in the House. I remember a few seasoned people across the way; they'd really throw you off. I used to come in, you'd be stuttering and stumbling. It was a good job. But then as you get up another couple of times, all of a sudden you realize, ignore that, because people want to hear what you have to say. Actually,

people care what we have to say. (Inaudible) realize that. We might not be top of the Nielsen ratings, but there are actually people who want to hear what we have to say. They'll go in and watch us online; a lot of seniors watch us in the afternoons. They like to hear what we have to say. Unfortunately, they don't hear some of the nonsense that comes across the way.

So I've tried my best today to try to translate – because it's hard to hear some of the comments under masks – some of what's coming across. Hopefully, there may be something come across that's valid. You know what, we may get an answer to one of the questions we asked, but I haven't heard it yet. It may be muffled under a mask. You may have offended some people along the way, but guess what, we never got one answer.

We spent 30 minutes in Question Period today, collectively, between the Opposition, the Third Party and the independents and we never got one answer. More questions than answers. I look forward to hearing what government has to say about – because when the Minister of Finance is the only person who spoke when she presented a budget Monday and we're into Wednesday evening and we have not heard from another Member opposite outside of a few catcalls.

We've asked a lot of questions. Probably in two days there are about 60 questions asked, if I'm not mistaken, roughly combined. The only answer we have is: I don't know. I'm not sure. Check back with us later. You have Estimates; you can find all that out in Estimates. When we go to Estimates, we don't know. So we'll ask you another 30 tomorrow and we'll come back Monday and we'll ask you another 30.

Now, somewhere along the way I'm expecting an answer because we found out today there was \$2.5 million. They scrambled this evening. That came up Monday, we scrambled this evening and we finally found out where the \$2.5 million went. We're not sure if that's accurate, but we're going to say: Okay, very good. We don't have enough time left in the summer, Mr. Speaker, if it's going to take us three days to get an answer to every question on the budget.

We'll be into September or October before we find out what's going to happen with the school

board. That will probably be next year's budget because they're probably going to start doing analysis today. So while people are cleaning out their offices over in the English School District they're going to start their analysis. Guess what they have to do before they start an analysis? Form a Committee. They don't know who to put on the Committee because the person who's putting on the Committee, I think, might be going home too. That's what you're left with, Mr. Speaker.

I know people across the way are tongue-in-cheek (inaudible) and some of it is, but most of it is not. I'm getting cynical because this is what we're left to deal with. That's true. I can't be more honest with you. We sit in our caucus room and we prepare for Question Period. Members opposite have been in that Opposition caucus room, some have. That's what you're doing. What can we ask? We can ask an awful lot. What do we get back? Nothing. Do you continue to do the same thing again and expect a different result? We have no choice.

I guess if we gave up on that we might as well leave what we're doing. We'll continue and we'll come in here tomorrow and we'll ask again, and we'll come back next week and we'll continue to ask. Somewhere along the way, within the next few weeks, we may not get anything, but hopefully by next year's budget, the next 2022 budget, we'll have a few things ironed out. That's if there's anyone left here in the province. That's a big question too. I think once *Together.Again.* comes out, there's going to be a lot of people shuttling off. That's the reality we're in, Mr. Speaker.

There's not a lot of hope being instilled across the way when you're asking serious questions and you get back these foolish responses that mean nothing to anyone. They never heard it the last time, but people are sick of some of that rhetoric. They just want answers. We want answers.

If they give us an answer, I might even start clapping over here. We'd all appreciate an answer. That's what the public wants. I don't have to like the answer but give us an answer. The days of deflecting – today asking a question about the school district and getting back with the bond-rating agencies. Ask them if they know

where Water Street or Topsail Road is. They don't even know where we are. They don't know where the Island is. They're looking at – oh yeah, great budget. Go drive down Water Street. There's no sweat to find a rental space. There's lot of it down there. That's what they need to look at.

Mr. Speaker, as my time expires I look forward to speaking further on this budget, but I'll leave one thing: The people of the province deserve answers. We all deserve answers. There's one thing this side of the House expects – and I hope we get more of it – is respect.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's one hour that we've listened to the Member opposite, with quite discouraging discourse I will say. I will say this as well: I just listened to him laugh about bond-rating agencies and creditors. I guess that does speak to how we got into this mess to begin with, Mr. Speaker, is the way in which the Members opposite regard our financial situation in this province. We've spent close to 10 hours, I believe, in Estimates going line by line through the budget; if they don't have answers it's because they got it wrong – they got it wrong.

Now, I'm going to start talking about some of things that I've listened to and the discourse from the Members opposite, because I've been sitting in my seat listening. I asked on Monday in the speech – and in case they didn't hear it, I'll repeat it. I said this was our moment to come together. That this was bigger, no matter our differences, no matter our politics, no matter our different interests, I asked everyone in this House, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, to come together. What we have is a disrespect of this House and what we see in the last few days is they got it wrong, over and over and over again.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit passionate here this afternoon because I just spent an hour being

– I thought it was disrespectful to the House and I can say that I think there was disrespect shown to the House in a lot of ways. I heard from a man who even said that – and I'm quoting now – he was cynical and tired. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the people of the province want us all to come together at this point – all of us to come together – to be energized to make sure that we fix the challenges that we have in this province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** I am pleading with the Members opposite to recognize how important this is to the people of the province – to recognize.

I heard the Member opposite talk about people on – I believe he said Topsail Road. The people on Topsail Road – because it's in my district, Mr. Speaker, maybe that's why he used that instance. But I can say that the people on Topsail Road want us to get on with it; they want us to make a difference and they want us to clean up the challenges that we've been having, fiscally. This budget, Mr. Speaker, starts to do that, and it really does get into the actions required.

Now, I'm going to say the first thing where they got it wrong, Mr. Speaker. They quickly grabbed up the budget the other day, and they ran out in front of the media and they said: Oh, you have to find \$900 million between one year and the next. Well, Mr. Speaker, they got it wrong. They didn't ask a question, they just got it wrong.

The difference in the level of expenditure from last year to this year is \$611 million. The expenses went up by \$611 million. Yet, I have heard time and time again in the last number of days in debate from the Members opposite that we should go to Ottawa. We should go to Ottawa and get more money, that's the answer, go to Ottawa and get some more money. Well, they got it wrong, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you. Of the \$611 million, which is different, \$476 million is 100 per cent federally funded agreements, yet they must not want us to have that in the budget –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!



**S. COADY:** – because they’re complaining about it. They’re complaining about it, Mr. Speaker. They got it wrong, and now they’re still complaining about it. Did they not want us to accept the \$320 million for oil and gas? I think, Mr. Speaker, that Members on this side of the House want us to work hard on oil and gas.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** They want us to do something to continue to develop our economy.

No, Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite got it wrong and they should at least admit they got it wrong; \$476 million dollars for 100 per cent federally funded agreements; \$160 million of one-time COVID funding; \$51 million for infrastructure cash flows and disaster mitigation. Mr. Speaker, I can go on, but I’ve made my point. That point is they got it wrong; they should have known differently. If they had looked at the numbers properly, they would’ve known why they could have asked the question: Why is there a blip in ’21-’22? Oh, that must be the federal government money that we’ve already announced, the \$320 million, plus the other cost-shared programs.

Then, yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I gave an hour’s worth of my attention, my time, my energy, I listened to the Member opposite talk about the Budget Speech. He went in detail on the Budget Speech. I make jot notes when I’m listening to someone because I think it’s very important that I listen to the Members opposite, and I do. I know Members opposite would have seen in the Budget Speech some of the things they asked for, some of the things they said: Do you know what? Government, if you did this, it would be a good thing for democracy. We included them in the Budget Speech. This would be a good thing for my district; this would be a good thing for us to advance in Newfoundland and Labrador, and we included it.

Mr. Speaker, I listen. One thing I do very, very well is I listen to the Opposition.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** Yesterday I listened, Mr. Speaker, and I heard: go cap in hand to Ottawa. I should’ve noted how many times, but I must

have written it down six times: go to Ottawa, go to Ottawa. Terrible, terrible thing, we don’t get any money from Ottawa. It’s absolutely ridiculous we don’t get equalization. Mr. Speaker, I’m one person that thinks we should get equalization. I’m one person that really believes that equalization is very, very important to the country. I have been an advocate of equalization.

I’ve been an advocate long enough that I remember when the PC Party said to their federal counterparts: remove non-renewable resources – and I said, that’s a great idea – from the equalization formula. Their counterparts in Ottawa didn’t listen to them. They’re always taking about how we don’t have effect in Ottawa; let me tell you what kind of effect we have in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, the last year we received equalization, in 2007-2008, this province was given from Ottawa \$1,788,046,000. That represented 25 per cent of our revenue, okay. Now, they don’t ask questions about these types of things, do they? In the ’21-’22 budget, \$1.89 billion from the federal – \$1.89 billion, 22 per cent of our revenue.

Are we not effective in Ottawa? I think that shows how effective we are in Ottawa, yet we don’t receive equalization.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** Mr. Speaker, Michelle Obama once said, when they go low, you go high so I’m going to keep it at that level, Mr. Speaker.

I heard the Member opposite talk about – kind of laughing about it – bond-rating agencies. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, how important they are. One of the highest expenditures of this government is the amount we pay down on debt. Let me repeat that: it is our borrowing cost that is one of the highest expenditures. It’s been higher than Education on a number of times. It’s been very, very high.

It’s very, very important to listen – again that word – to what the bond-rating agencies and what banks – who are our lenders and our creditors – are saying about this. I think they got

it wrong, Mr. Speaker, when they said it doesn't matter. It certainly does matter.

Again, I'm going to say what TD said, this is a quote, a direct quote: "In what will likely be well received by investors and rating agencies" – again, Mr. Speaker, borrowing costs are one of our most expensive items that we pay for in this province – "Budget 2021 commits to significantly improving Newfoundland and Labrador's fiscal position in coming years." I think that's to be celebrated.

Let me go on to what the RBC economics has said. RBC economics: "The path to balance laid out in Budget 2021 coupled with a commitment to streamline expenses and adjust tax rates for higher earners signals that the government is serious about 'taking definitive action now.'" I guess the Opposition got it wrong, Mr. Speaker, when they said it doesn't matter. It does.

The Bank of Montreal said Newfoundland and Labrador no longer has the highest debt ratio or the largest budget deficit relative to the size of its economy. I think, Mr. Speaker, that's to be applauded. That is to be applauded that we have multiple banks and a bond-rating agency saying and supporting the budget. Again, I'll say they got it wrong.

Let me just say that – the cancer community. This is from the cancer community: "Newfoundland and Labrador budget includes significant gains for cancer community; delivers on increased tobacco taxes, tax on sugar sweetened beverages, and expanded support for medical travel." I think that's a good endorsement. I didn't hear that from the Members opposite. They want to defeat the budget.

Mr. Speaker, the Heart and Stroke Foundation: We applaud the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for its groundbreaking sugary drink levy, a health-promoting policy that will help reduce consumption. Overconsumption of sugary drinks can be a risk to heart disease; a measure all provinces should implement to improve heart health. I believe, according to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Opposition got it wrong.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** Mr. Speaker, let me tell you a few more things that this budget does and that this budget includes, because I think Members opposite may have not been thorough in their reading. I heard one Member already say that he stopped reading the budget. Well, let me tell him some of the things that it contains because I think it's important.

Mr. Speaker, we are reducing our deficit. Last year, when I – it was only nine, 10 months ago – sat in this House I said that we'll have a deficit of \$1.84 billion; this year, \$826 million. That is a tremendous difference, a billion-dollar difference. Next year, we'll be down to \$587 million. By '25-'26, we'll be down to \$88 million. Will it take hard work? Absolutely, there's no doubt it will take hard work. That's why I ask for the support of Members in this House, because I think we must do the hard work.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. COADY:** I'll quote from the Member opposite. The Member opposite said he asks for a heads-up. Well, the budget certainly tells him what we're doing. It certainly gives him a heads-up. He asked for it, we gave it to him and still he got it wrong. Mr. Speaker, he said there are tough decisions to make – completely agree – and there are tough decisions in this budget. We have to be responsible. We have to be diligent.

We are coming out of a pandemic. We have to make sure that we are focused on supporting families and the communities. We also have to ensure that we're making the bold steps that are needed to address our financial concerns.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. COADY:** That's what this budget does. They got it wrong, Mr. Speaker – they got it wrong.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you some of the other things. Our borrowing requirements this year will be \$1.7 billion. One of the things that some of the reviewers have said is how strong our Treasury and debt management is. We're doing more work in that regard.

We're going to continue to focus on bringing down that second – from being the second highest expenditure in the province to lower and lower. We're going to focus and continue to focus on our debt management; that is incredibly essential: \$3 billion borrowed last year and \$1.7 billion to be borrowed this year. You know what; I'd like to see that lower and lower and lower. Some of that money, of course, is the renewal of debt as well, and we're continuing to drive down costs.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about the economic forecasts while I have a few moments. We're anticipating real GDP to improve by 5.6 per cent. During the pandemic it declined by 5.3 per cent. We're expecting not only recovery, but a slight increase in that. I think that is to be applauded.

I also want to point out that retail sales – do you know last year during the pandemic our retail sales still increased slightly to 1.4 per cent. That was unheard of in the country, yet we were able to do it here because of the confidence the people of the province have. Now it's going to rebound by 5.6 per cent. That is an incredible amount of change. That's growth. Our unemployment rate – I should talk about the employment rate. Our employment rate is improving by 2.6 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, there are tremendous – our housing starts, I'll go to that because I'm just watching the time, making sure I don't run out of time. Our housing units will rebound. What we lost last year we'll recoup this year. You're not seeing that around the globe or across our country because we have strength in our economy. Let me talk about the growth. Our growth is in household income. Our household income is actually growing by 2.9 per cent this year – 2.9 per cent. Household income is growing by 2.9 per cent. Our economy is actually strong and we are doing what is right.

I note in the non-confidence amendment that they want to “properly plan and implement strategies that will create the conditions for the growth of economic opportunity ....” I just gave how they got it wrong. We are growing the economy, we are improving employment, we are creating jobs, we are seeing growth and we are seeing strength. We just need to do more of it,

Mr. Speaker. We just need to have the support of the people of this province and the people in this House of Assembly who represent the province.

This is not about politics; this is about putting in place a plan to modernize government, to address our fiscal concerns and to ensure growth in our economy. We all want a strong, smart, self-sustainable and vibrant Newfoundland and Labrador. That's the goal of every person in this House and we have presented a path to get there. We have presented a path that the people, that our bond-rating agencies and that our lenders are saying: It makes sense. Yet, I keep hearing from the Members opposite that, no, they want to do something different, but they have not told us what they want to do different. I just heard yesterday, for example: Oh, if we change Nalcor, you're going to drive disruption; if we change NLCHI, you're just going to cause disruption. No, Mr. Speaker, we can do it properly and diligently.

I'm going to end with this Chinese proverb: The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it. On that note, I'll adjourn debate.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Before I call a motion, I'm just going to remind everyone that at 5:30 p.m. the Social Services Committee will be meeting here in the Chamber to discuss the Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

On that note, the motion is that this House do adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

We will reconvene tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.

This House is adjourned.

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