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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Wednesday

June 9, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 11.

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 pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 10, 2021.

SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always an honour to speak in the House of Assembly for the people that I represent in the beautiful District of Terra Nova.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't bring up something that we missed as a House, I guess, and as a Legislature and that's June 6. It just passed and there was no mention of it in the House of Assembly. It's sad to say I missed it as probably the only veteran here in the House. June 6 was the 77th anniversary of D-Day.

The first thing I'd like to say is that, not only did we lose a lot of allies but there were an incredible amount of men and women from Newfoundland that died on that day. I think it's our duty as Members of this Legislature to always honour our veterans and remember days like that. I apologize.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: It's a very important day. There is a few more coming up. We need to go out of our way to make sure we recognize our veterans.

The first thing I would like to talk about is volunteers. We all look at volunteers on different levels throughout our own communities, districts and, certainly, the province, but I would just like to touch on something with volunteers that gets overlooked sometimes, and that's what they contribute to the entire province as a whole with regard to health care and providing help to people in need. There are lots of different organizations that come to mind: Daffodil Place, Hope Air, Power to Hope and the Salvation Army. I think this is Red Shield Week, actually, so we should recognize that also. Where would we be without all of these volunteer organizations? I think we always overlook that.

When we look at Newfoundland and Labrador and we consider the geography, there's one thing that is very apparent, the hon. Member for Labrador West spoke about it very eloquently yesterday, and that is it doesn't cost the same to get sick in Newfoundland. If you live outside of St. John's your cost of care can be substantially higher. I don't think we, as a government, do enough to help people.

I'll also go on to say imagine where we would be if we didn't have organizations, or provincial leaders, in my mind, like Daffodil Place, as an example. Imagine if you had come to St. John's, Gander or Corner Brook for cancer treatment from Labrador, the Northern Peninsula, Port aux Basques or areas where there is no ability to get these treatments and you have to stay somewhere other than Daffodil Place or other places that are set up to help people.

We went through it with my mom. My mom had breast cancer, I guess, about 13 years ago, and she was in Labrador West. At the time, I was living in Gander. She was told that she had to come to St. John's to get her treatment. Now, I have to be honest, I don't know if they could have afforded to do it if they didn't have somewhere to go. So after many weeks of fighting to get the care transferred from Eastern to Central, we managed to get her to Gander and she came and stayed with myself, my wife and my children. She was six months, like six full months, where if she had to go anywhere else or if she didn't have the supports that she would have had to pay out of her own pocket, and it's a substantial amount of money.

We really need to understand how far health care doesn't go with regard to people who need help, because if you live outside of St. John's and you get any kind of an illness and you have to travel to St. John's to get treatment, or you have to travel Gander, or you have to travel to Corner Brook or Grand Falls, any of the major centres, there's an extreme cost associated with it. It's not just as simple as getting on board a vehicle and driving there for some. Some don't have vehicles, some don't have cellphones to communicate and some certainly don't have the ability to buy food or rent hotels. But there's another thing, too. When people are sick there are a good many of them that don't have the ability to even look after themselves.

I'd really like to give a hats off to all the volunteer organizations throughout the province that go out of their way to help the men and women of this province every single day. I shutter to think of where we'd be without them. I mean, all you have to do is look to the Dr. H. Bliss Murphy Cancer Care Foundation and the money that they've raised in order to do the upgrades for cancer treatment, something we

should all very proud of. Many businesses and men and women contributed. I'm not saying government doesn't contribute. But what I am saying is that if we didn't have the support of these volunteer organizations, this province would be an awful bad state. It would be an awful bad place to get sick. We need to recognize that every single day.

The fact that there are two levels of health care in this province, to me, it's very sad. Because, like I say, you're not on an equal playing field.

I used to be involved in a fundraiser with Power 2 Hope. All of our money actually used to go towards travel for cancer patients. It's shocking to find out that there are actually cancer patients inside the metro area who can't afford to get to the Health Sciences to get treatment. Just think of that, they live here in St. John's and they can't afford to get a cab to go get treatment. That's pretty scary. It's a very scary situation.

Anyhow, I just wanted to recognize the volunteer organizations that raise all the money for the health care corporations and different things they do. I think it's a very important part of how we survive here in the province.

The next thing I'd like to talk about is first responders. When we talk about first responders we generally think about police officers, ambulance drivers and firefighters. But we also have to think about – there are two separate levels of policing in the province, or three really with municipal. There are also air ambulance drivers or attendants and water bombers.

I question all the time how we're failing these people on many levels. The reality of it is we are. All you have to do look to the current labour dispute with the ambulances. The ambulances were ready to go on strike. We legislated them back to work. But it's not that long ago we were in this House of Assembly and instead of talking about legislating ambulances back to work, we were asking government to consider an essential services contract.

Anyone who can look at me and tell me that an ambulance driver isn't an essential service in this province, I'm bewildered by that. The fact that they go into a negotiation is fine. We'll hear that this is private business. We've gone out to

contract and this is a part of it, but they're still an essential service. We, as a government, ought to be looking at it in that way.

There are two separate levels of ambulance care in this province. If you live in St. John's or if you live in rural Newfoundland, it's entirely different. Wait times are different. The level of standards for people on the ambulance is different. The level of pay is different. There's a whole lot that's different about it. We're letting our first responders down on that fact.

We look at the RNC and we're hearing that training has been cancelled. We need police officers. Last year during COVID, we sent a full class over to PEI, I believe, for training and now all of a sudden we don't need to do it anymore. Why are we doing that?

RCMP: I met with the superintendent out of Gander during the election. He told me flat out the RCMP will lose services in this province if they don't get more money. Very, very open and honest about it. They can't afford cruisers, they have police stations that need replacing and staffing is a huge issue.

I didn't hear one thing about RCMP service in the budget. They're very bullish on it. They went around and they met with everyone they could to tell them the situation that they were in. I'm certain the Justice Minister has heard the same from the RCMP. They are severely underfunded and it's a big issue. All you have to do is go into rural Newfoundland and look at the issue with policing and the amount of overtime that they're having to work and different things because the RCMP are underfunded. It's a big deal.

If we talk about our firefighters, we know – I come from a family where I was a volunteer firefighter, my dad was a fire chief in Wabush, my brother is a fire captain at the Ottawa airport and my other brother was a volunteer firefighter. They volunteer; they're the first people to show up. It's not just fires anymore. If there is an accident on the highway or there's a first aid call and an ambulance isn't available, it's the fire halls that respond. These people put their lives on the line every single day. It's not just what they put on the line during the day to respond to these things, it's what they deal with after they

respond to it. We don't ever consider that. They see the worst things in the world. They need more help and again this year, we've lowered their budget. It just doesn't make sense to me with those guys.

Air ambulance: We hear all the time another story that an air ambulance was late. It wasn't called. It didn't get there in time. They couldn't get staffing. It was after hours. It was weather; they couldn't land in a VFR situation, IFR only. Again, it just shows the level of care between St. John's and the rest of the Island: there are two different tiers.

The other one that really stands out to me is water bombers. We look at our water bombers and in 2013, I believe, there were five. I heard the Member for Labrador West talk about no water bomber stationed in Labrador West. It's not about a water bomber being stationed in Labrador West or Goose Bay or wherever, the bottom line is that we have three and we used to have five.

We had one that crashed in 2013 and I believe another one that was in an incident in 2018 with a major repair. We have a college out in Gander that could probably do some of these repairs. The question has been asked of the deputy minister last year in Estimates and they didn't know if they were going to check into it. Here we are a year later and the water bomber is still grounded.

If we have a major fire – and I've lived through and seen major fires in Labrador and they're much different than the forest fires that we get here in Newfoundland. I can tell you we've seen fires up there where it is incredible the amount of forest that is devastated and how close it comes to the communities. You have to think, when it goes to a community in Labrador, escape is not as simple as other places in every instance. It's a big deal.

Why do we only have three and what's the plan? These two aircraft have been missing for –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: We have a fourth one now?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: Yeah, one is busted. One doesn't work.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: Yeah, no doubt. Anyhow, the water bomber situation is dire and we do need to have a look at where we're putting them and how we're utilizing them.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands mentioned yesterday something that's huge in my district and I'm sure it's huge to other districts; it was very evident during COVID. During COVID, when there was a return to play – or we're still going through COVID – for sports, there were provincial sports teams and provincial organizations that could have sports events in St. John's because of the private buildings and different things. Every kid that lived outside of St. John's was at a disadvantage because there was nowhere for them to go.

It bewilders me why schools aren't utilized the way they used to be for sporting and cubs, scouts and different things. It only benefits our health, it benefits our kids' mental health and it benefits communities. Not every community can afford a megaplex or a sportsplex. Instead of embracing what we already have there, we've gotten away from it. Or in some instances, we've funded these types of buildings when they didn't even need to be funded; a lot of the infrastructure was already there.

I look to one of the schools in Clarendville; it has a full gym. The teachers aren't allowed to utilize it after hours which makes no sense to me. By gym, I mean a weight room. It's a school board policy, but they're just not allowed to utilize it. It makes no sense. It's there. We should be promoting them to go in and use this type of stuff after school.

Potable drinking water: I'm not sure what the number is today, but I looked at it a couple of weeks ago and I believe we had about 181 boil orders in Newfoundland at the time. It's 2021 – 181 drinking water boil orders. During the last federal election, one of their main pillars was potable water for northern communities. We had 181 boil orders in our province. It just bewilders me.

I think about Crown land and I'll echo with the Member for Botwood said – Bishop Falls, sorry.

AN HON. MEMBER: Exploits.

L. PARROTT: Exploits, Bishop Falls.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: Yeah.

While it may not be the number one issue in my district, it is certainly one of the things we receive the most phone calls about: the delays, the process. We have an office out there where one person works. They haven't been there since the beginning of COVID and they were only there for half a day a week prior to that.

It's really pathetic. If you put in an application for Crown land, it's never 90 days. I'm not talking about the tangly ones; I'm talking about the easy ones also. If we don't step in with application numbers trying to get things expedited, it just doesn't happen. We hear it every day.

So we have people that are trying to spend money to get land, most likely build a cabin, which is going to spend more money and generate revenue in the province, a province that is desperate for revenue, and we can't seem to get it right. We can't seem to help those people. We should be encouraging Crown land as much as we can. Not just encouraging but we need to make sure that it happens, that this lands gets out.

I listened to the Premier yesterday spouting facts about all the money that we've received from Ottawa. I guess it is plain to see that the Premier is here to defend Ottawa instead of talking about what we don't get now. He's not alone, because I haven't heard much from any of the federal MPs or any of the ministers with regard to oil and gas or the fishery. The numbers that come out are simply that, they're numbers. That type of money was given to every province; it was COVID relief. It had nothing to do with equalization. It had nothing to do with anything as a matter of need in this province and it wasn't anything special that was done for Newfoundland.

As a matter of fact, one of the numbers that was spouted was the \$320 million that was given to oil and gas, a complete industry that generates revenue not just for this province but the entire country. There was \$200 million given to a casino in Ontario, one of their friends. It is not comparable; I don't know why those numbers would even be brought to the floor. It makes no sense to me.

Rotational workers: Again, we talk about rotational workers on a regular basis. I read an article last night. Nova Scotia is now – if rotational workers have two vaccines, they are now welcome to come home without quarantine because they value the people that they have. They value their rotational workers. They see what they bring to their province and they understand that they need to find a way to keep them there. Now, in our instance, there's only maybe 20 days left before we go to July 1 and things change for them, but why not have a look at what we can do in the next 20 days instead of waiting 20 days.

These people have been away from their families far too long over the last 18 months – far too long – and not just 18 months, certainly for their whole careers if they're gone away for three weeks or two weeks, whatever they go for. We should be doing what we can for them. Instead, we raise taxes on them because they make over \$135,000 and we still make them quarantine and do things that we ought to be looking at different ways around.

To me, we've totally alienated, not just the workers but the families, specifically, their children. In my district, we get it all the time. A child of a rotational worker goes to school; we get parents calling our office complaining that the children are in school. We get parents complaining that they seen the wife out shopping. All the meanwhile, the rotational workers are following the rules, entirely following the rules. Staying there in their basements by themselves, away from their family, doing their quarantine when they've already had two vaccinations. They're tested multiple times. The likelihood of them having it is very slim.

It's good to see our mining industry is picking up. I said to the minister last week during

Estimates that there's lots of good stuff happening. The one thing that always bothers me though – I look at Vale as an example of where we can do better. There is no road into Vale. There is no power line. The cost is astronomical, we know that, but part of the deal before they went underground was that we'd get rid of the turbines and there'd be a power line in there. What a place to sell our power. Instead of selling power to Voisey's Bay, we watch them get their fuel from Quebec. They power their diesel-generation plants from fuel that comes from Quebec; an astronomical amount of fuel, too, if you think about it.

Not just that, I encourage anyone to go visit Voisey's Bay and you'll quickly see that every vehicle up there has a Quebec licence plate on it. On the Coast of Labrador, in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a company that operates in our province has all the vehicles registered in Quebec, most likely insured in Quebec. All the supplies come from Quebec and we don't say a word about it. It's a huge revenue that we lose out on – massive.

The ship comes from Voisey's Bay, it goes to Long Harbour and then it leaves and goes to Quebec to get refilled with goods and supplies and we don't say a word. Just imagine, if all the fuel and all the licence and registration and everything that was done was done through Newfoundland, how much money that would generate. It just doesn't make sense.

I always talk about Bull Arm and our glorified Walmart parking lot we have out there. We have the Henry Goodrich, the West Aquarius and the Terra Nova out there parked. It's a sad state of affairs. There for a while the government was bullish on cold stack, that it was the greatest word in the world. Oh, look, we're cold stacking these rigs; look at how good we are.

Cold stacking a rig is the death of a rig. It means that it's probably not going back into service. It's out there parked. They're getting minimal rent; if they're getting anything, I don't know. It's probably costing us money knowing our past blunders. All the while our industry is dying. Make no mistake about it, it's dying. Bull Arm should be utilized. There should be a long-term plan for that facility. There ought to have been a long-term plan in place in 2016. It should have

happened in 2017. It should have happened in '18. It should have happened in '19. It should have happened in '20. Here we are in '21 and it still hasn't happened.

We can talk about the global pandemic and the oil crisis, but all of this stuff happened long before that. There should have been a long-term plan. There was no plan. There was no work done. There was EOIs that came in. There were people that had great plans, in my opinion. Maybe not ideal, but certainly better than what we've been doing with it.

A site like that has to grow. It's not going to happen overnight. There has to be people allowed to come in, set-up and make a future. There is no future.

Then we have Argentia West White Rose out there. We gave them a pile of money out of the \$320 million and they laid people off. We still don't know what the future of that holds. Make no mistake about it, that rig is critical to that oil field. If that goes, so does the oil field.

The Barents: Our exploration is doing great now. There's very little going on. Stena Forth is out there doing one hole and one hole only, and they're moving on. It's great that we have seismic going on but seismic is not the type of exploration we need going on out there.

I've said time and time again, we need to make it easier for oil companies to come here and we need to make it harder for them to leave. That applies to all of our natural resources. We have to find a way to take advantage of it.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, this won't be the last time I speak on the budget.

I thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's indeed a privilege to be able to speak in this hon. House. I do appreciate the opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of where I live. I appreciate the responsibility that has been put on me by the constituents of Cape St. Francis. It is indeed an honour. I will speak and represent them to the best of my ability whenever I can.

Mr. Speaker, we all realize that we are surviving through this COVID pandemic. It is nice to see some of the easing of restrictions that are coming forward. We need to ensure, of course, that we all keep ourselves safe in all the actions that we do as we stay here in our province for now.

I had the privilege of sitting in Estimates last night with my colleague from Topsail - Paradise. I have to say it was a good Estimates. It was very engaging and I compliment Minister Haggie and, of course, his staff for the great job that they done. It was recognized last night, as I said, by my colleague from Topsail - Paradise; I wanted to say that again to the minister with respect to his staff who he quoted was working around the clock for quite a long period of time. I just want to say that we do appreciate all the work that's being done. We all are looking forward to, again, the easing of restrictions but keeping in mind, first and foremost, keeping everyone safe.

It's going to be interesting going forward as we start to open travel. I'm hearing from residents in my district - I'm sure everyone else is - with respect to that happening. Everyone has mixed feelings about it. We all know the purpose of opening and lifting restrictions. We have tourism and business that needs to be supported as well. But we all have to, first and foremost, keep everyone safe and doing what we have to do as we go forward.

I saw a Tweet earlier from the hon. Minister of Health with respect to the totals of vaccinations by age. According to the minister, we are at 66.3 per cent. That's encouraging. I would encourage everyone to, of course, be vaccinated, to keep everybody safe. We all have a part to do.

We have a lovely province here, Mr. Speaker. We have to do what we can in order to keep everyone safe and do our part. I would encourage everyone to get your shots, your vaccinations. Of course, we can all have the opportunity to speed up that process as well. Go

back online and book in your new appointment dates, and keep everyone first and foremost.

Mr. Speaker, it's been said several times in this hon. House this week about essential workers. I've spoken to many essential workers during the election, since the election, as late as last evening, who worked through the pandemic. They all need to be thanked. We need to personally thank them whenever we see them for what they do. I won't list off everything that everyone who are essential workers because I'll definitely miss somebody; however, they do need to be recognized and thanked.

Mr. Speaker, before I entered into this hon. House, I spent 27 years working in mental health. That was alluded to by my colleague from Conception Bay South yesterday. I'm very proud to say that I worked with mentally delayed and autistic adults for 27 years.

I didn't have the option of staying home during the pandemic; I had to go to work. The care, welfare, safety and security of those residents were my utmost responsibility. I didn't have the option of staying home. At the time, my wife was a cancer patient. She was going through treatment. All of that was on my mind as I went to work everyday for a 12-hour shift, sometimes a 16-hour shift, because it wasn't cut and dry with respect to hours of work at the group home.

I recognize my former colleagues and those that worked on my team – I don't have it in my notes but I'd like to recognize them now. I worked with a great team for over 10 years before I came to this House: Roger Brinton, Mike Nofall and Christopher Smith. The four of us were as tight as you can appreciate. We worked well together. We did an awesome job looking after and caring for the residents in our care at the time.

We didn't have the option of staying home during the pandemic. Of course, we all had family members at home that we had to be mindful of as well. I'd like to salute all of the essential workers for what they have done and what they're continuing to do. We're going to be living with COVID for quite some time. The work is not going to stop. I would just like to publicly say that I appreciate all that they do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, as every district in the hon. House has, I have quite a large numbers of seniors in my district and their main priority is staying healthy and staying in their homes for as long as they possibly can. I see that on a personal level as well. My parents and my in-laws, in their 70s, who are looking at possibly downsizing; health is of the utmost importance at all times. I see it first hand.

The many seniors that I spoke with throughout my district were pleased, I have to say to the hon. Minister of Finance. I have received messages and calls from them to see what was in the budget for seniors: it is encouraging, no doubt; to say that they are committed to supporting seniors and ensuring citizens remain healthy, active and engaged. Of course, the budget outlines what's there for seniors.

It is optimistic, I do thank the minister for that and I know I speak on behalf of all the seniors throughout my district. It is important that we can support them in whatever way we can. I've said it here before and I'll say it again: I do have a soft spot in my heart for seniors. When you have the opportunity to drop by, to visit them, to send them a birthday card or anything that would uplift them in their daily lives, I would encourage everyone to do so.

Some seniors, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, don't have what everyone else has with respect to the level of family engagement and support that we sometimes take for granted. I know that we have to keep that in mind. I've been doing that for years and just because I'm in this hon. House is not going to change me going forward, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker; to keep everyone included and keep everyone first in our minds is key.

My colleague from Terra Nova spoke shortly ago about volunteers. I'm not going to try to top you, at all, but I'd just like to recognize all of the volunteer groups in my district as well. They are essential to the work that is being done in the district, in each municipality in the district and throughout the province.

We would not be where we are today without the work of volunteers. Some of the people in my district are school volunteers, church boards, right down to the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts. All the sports groups: where would we be – it was said yesterday with respect the level of commitment from volunteers with respect to sports groups. Personally, I know that as well. My daughter Kristen played sports for her entire time in school with respect to basketball, soccer, fast pitch softball and rowing down on the Lake in the Regatta. So we would be in a very poor spot if it wasn't for all the volunteers that we have that support our youth with respect to sports.

Then, of course, we have those in the heritage society who are promoting and encouraging us to look back at our heritage and what we have.

Yesterday, I spoke on the Lions Clubs and the important role that they have in my district. I'm sure that there are many districts here throughout this hon. House that have active Lions Clubs and work tirelessly for the betterment of others. We have to keep that in mind at all times.

Mr. Speaker, the Northeast Avalon Food Bank is a food bank in my district located in the Town of Torbay. I have to say, they are getting more active each week. It's sad to hear and it's sad to say that, but it's the reality. I will say that all the five towns in my district do support the local food bank, the Northeast Avalon Food Bank. They have an awesome group of volunteers as well who work tirelessly to support the food bank. If I wasn't in this hon. House tomorrow afternoon, I would be in Torbay at the food bank dispersing food hampers from 1 o'clock to 2:15. That's how I'd spend my afternoon.

Like many others in this House, I've volunteered most of my life. I see the good that the Northeast Avalon Food Bank does for those who are in need. They also just need a hand, and we have to be there to provide that hand up and to give them the support that's needed. I'd like to give a shout out to all of the volunteers in my group. I'd like to recognize the Northeast Avalon Food Bank as well for the good work that they do on a daily basis to help those throughout my district.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunately becoming more prevalent of people accessing

the food bank. We have many groups who we're supporting financially and by food donations. I would encourage everyone to keep that up. Of course, that goes without saying in all districts.

I'd like to recognize one young volunteer from my hometown of Pouch Cove. Her name is Harley Murray. Harley is seven years old. A lovely young girl, a constituent of mine, and recently she had a fundraiser where she made key chains. She had this initiative that she wanted to raise money for the food bank. She didn't know what, at the age of seven, she could do.

So she had this initiative that she wanted to make key chains, and on the key chains she put key words. She had four different key chains. On the first was "Courage," the second was "Be Kind," the third was "Kindness" and the fourth was "Smile." She made those key chains with the help of her mom, Jessica, but it was Harley's intent to do this to sell them to family, friends and neighbours. She donated the money to the Northeast Avalon Food Bank.

At the age of seven, she took this on herself. The end result was, Mr. Speaker, she donated \$1,370 to the Northeast Avalon Food Bank for her –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: – through her efforts at a young age of seven.

I messaged Harley's mom last night. I got permission, of course, to speak of her today. She said that Harley has a heart of gold. But we are a product of what we see on a daily basis. I would like to not only give a shout out to Harley but to her parents Jessica and Brian as well who are doing a great job. We, as MHAs, enjoy working with residents who are willing to give and to give of themselves. At the age of seven, I think Harley is on a great path to providing a lifetime of service to others.

Mr. Speaker, in my district, we have a facility that's regionally operated. I think it's the class act of regional co-operation: that's the Jack Byrne Regional Sport & Entertainment Centre. It's a regional facility owned by the four towns of Pouch Cove, Flatrock, Torbay and Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove.

Of course, we all know named after a well-respected Member of this House, the late Jack Byrne. It was Jack's vision to have this facility in the District of Cape St Francis.

All businesses and all groups had difficulty, of course, during this pandemic when businesses were shut down. We had, of course, the loss of income, but I do want to commend the administration, Lorne Tucker and Cathy Green, at Jack Byrne Regional and, of course, all of the staff there as well who worked tirelessly; who managed to obtain funding through federal funding opportunities with respect to keeping the business going. Of course, it's also supported by a volunteer board of municipal leaders and community representatives.

I sat on that board for a little over seven years before I entered into provincial life. I chaired the board for three years and I, of course, was treasurer for two. I'm well familiar with what's going on at Jack Byrne and the important role that they play in the district as a whole. Of course, not only to the district but to the neighbouring City of St. John's and surrounding areas – people who take part in activities at Jack Byrne. Besides the on-ice activities that happen, of course, there are many trade shows and events that take place in off-ice season. That's encouraging to see going forward with respect to the bookings that are coming up.

There are also many seniors and young parents who take advantage of the walking track at Jack Byrne as well. They took advantage of that during the winter months when you can't get outside for recreation and exercise; they take part in the walking track at Jack Byrne. I'd just like to send a shout-out, as I said, to the administration, to the staff and to the volunteer board at Jack Byrne Regional for what they do on a regular basis for keeping the doors open at Jack Byrne.

As I said when I started off, with the easing of restrictions, of course, more activities are going to be permitted going forward. Please God, Mr. Speaker, by the fall, when we come back again, we won't have to social distance and we won't have to wear the masks during the sitting. I know we've all spoken about that here and the staff as well. It does get cumbersome after a while but we know that it's for the greater good

that we have to do this. So the easing the restrictions is definitely going to make a difference to Jack Byrne Regional and to all facilities throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, this is the time of year when we have to salute all the graduates from Level III, of course, throughout the whole province. I'd like to take the opportunity today to congratulate all of them, especially to those from Holy Trinity High in Torbay. My daughter Kristen is graduating this year and it's an important time. It's an important time to see from kindergarten to Grade 12, the advancement that's been taking place, the work that's gone into it.

I have to say, the group that she started off in kindergarten with, she's finishing Grade 12 with, that social circle and peer support is key. We all know that it's difficult with respect to the pressures that society has on young people. They do need that peer support. It's good to see that my daughter's group does have that and, of course, I'm sure all groups do. I'd just like to commend them on their achievements and good luck in all your future endeavours.

I'd be remiss – and my colleague from Bonavista might say something to me after – if I don't mention the teachers. Of course, I'd hear it this evening when I got home around the supper table from my wife as well. So I'd like just to thank the teachers throughout the province for their level of commitment and dedication to our students.

I know that I sat in Estimates with the hon. Minister of Education and I see what they're putting forward with respect to education and keeping students and teachers first and foremost in mind, which is great to see. But what the teachers have gone through to keep the classroom productive, to keep the students educated and engaged. If you're not involved, if you don't have that intimate relationship and behind the scenes look at what teachers do on a daily basis, sometimes it's not appreciated. I can certainly tell you the level of work that goes in to teachers' daily activities is far and above the normal five, six, seven, eight hours that sometimes is quoted with respect to teachers.

I'd just like to give a shout-out to all teachers throughout my district and, of course,

throughout the province for their dedication to our students and for the high level of commitment that they have shown during this very difficult school year. Again, we're looking forward to less restrictions in September. I hope that the students in September, we have less restrictions on them going forward.

Mr. Speaker, we have the municipal elections coming this fall, 2021; something near and dear to my heart, as it is to many other of my colleagues here in this hon. House. I'd like to speak to the importance of municipal government. As we've said and the minister has quoted: It's boots on the ground. That's the best way to describe it, Mr. Speaker, because municipal government is the first line of defence for any issue that a constituent has in any district across our province.

They go to a councillor; they go to the mayor. Most times I've witnessed it, they've gone to the mayor with concerns. I would like to encourage all of those who are interested in putting their names forward for the municipal election this fall, to do so. It is an honour to do so, to serve the representatives of our town at the local level. I would just like to encourage everyone who has that inclination to do so.

Right now, I'd like thank all municipal leaders throughout our province for their last, almost, four years of service to the towns and cities that they represent. It's important to recognize the hard work that's done. Mr. Speaker, at times it's not easy. It's not easy work, at times, when you're representing your municipality and making decisions that affect your town as a whole. I'd like to give a shout-out to all of the municipal leaders in my district, in the five municipalities and, of course, throughout our beautiful province for the work that they do on a municipal level.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Mr. Speaker, I've only been in this House a short period of time and I haven't spoken as often as my colleague from Stephenville - Port au Port on roadwork, I can tell you that. I believe the word is Cold Brook?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Cold Brook, thank you.

I would like to say to the hon. minister that work has begun in my district with respect to the paving. I mentioned that before. I did speak to the hon. minister in Estimates last evening. The road preparation was done and there is paving underway. I look forward to that being completed, Mr. Speaker.

I spoke to a gentleman this morning before I drove in and he said: It's great to see a bit of new blacktop.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: And previous Member. That is correct and I've said that before.

I would like to recognize that going forward. It is indeed –

SPEAKER: Order please!

Your time has expired.

J. WALL: My apologies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed an honour, as it is for everyone, any time they get to speak in this House of Assembly that represents the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It will be my first opportunity to directly speak to the budget. I will speak in a roundabout way of where we are with the budget, some of the discussions around the budget and the impact it will have, but I would hope I'm going to try to set a tone where it is about Newfoundland and Labrador is on the right path. The people are resilient in this province; a collaborative approach to what we are doing; a tempered approach; and a balanced approach will get us to the promise land – for want of a better phrase. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

I say that based on an opportunity I had yesterday – I had the privilege to – I left the House early yesterday afternoon to be invited to a lady's gathering, who is in her 99th year. And you want to talk about an active lady who demanded – when she put on music and she had a barbecue out on here patio here in St. John's, in the heart of St. John's – that we all got up and dance, and she was the first one to lead that dance.

I say this tongue-in-cheek with all respect, I was 30 years the junior of every other person who was there and I'm no spring chicken at that, but what I will tell you, and why I tell you is if you want to see a vibrant group of individuals who are so positive about this province, who see the benefits. They may not get to reap all the benefits of the resources we have, the talent we have in this province, the approach that we're going to use as a collective group of leaders to direct where we go in the future, but there was no cynicism. The glass was definitely half full with the people around there yesterday.

That inspired me a little bit more when I thought about: What am I going to speak about today when I talk about the budget? It sort of enlightened it. Not only the fact that it is 28 degrees in June, sort or perks you up naturally, but when you got a collective group of seniors who come from every background, from 79 years of age to 99 years of age and they're all on the same page.

Newfoundland and Labrador might have some struggles right now. We may face some challenges that we probably haven't faced in the past. We may have to change how we approach things but we will get through this and Newfoundland and Labrador will be a much better place. This present generation and the coming generations will see the benefits of Newfoundland and Labrador and we will be – as we always have been and continue to be – world leaders in a lot of areas in this great world of ours.

I also wanted to note – and I was thinking about what do I say – it's a week ago and it was about 11 o'clock last Wednesday we were in the House that I had to leave to go to a meeting. I was in the parking lot and ran into our colleague, George Murphy – excuse me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Myself and George had a conversation. I said, George – I was being a bit cynical. When you get into your second decade of sitting in the House of Assembly, maybe you get a little more cynical on certain things when you're in here and it's a beautiful day.

I ran into George in the parking lot. We talked and had our pleasantries; we had a little chat about certain things. I said: George, it's too nice a day to be in there. He said: You're right but isn't it a privilege. That summed up a lot of things because he was so right –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: – sometimes we take it for granted. I know we banter here and I know sometimes our personalities conflict with others. I know that sometimes we feel that what we're proposing is the only thing that should be right and just without being flexible and open, but I think we need to be a bit broader.

I keep echoing the second decade. There are a few Members, my colleagues here, who've been around in that previous decade also. There were many more volatile situations in this House, many more disagreements and some personal attacks, unfortunately. At times, we probably didn't do the best job that we could have, as the collective representatives for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would hope, because of changes and new Members – I do welcome the new Members here, particularly – you come with fresh ideas; you come with a different perspective. You come, like everybody else in this House, with the intent of improving the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, not only in your own district but having input that has a positive influence on everybody: the present generation, the future generation.

I'm hopeful and I'm very optimistic – just in what I've seen in the last couple of weeks here and the previous week that we spent here since the election – that there's a willingness, an openness and an ability to be very more collaborative, more engaging and more open and transparent. That comes on both sides; I mean

that's not only directed to government. Any Member on the Opposition has a right to ask for information and to ensure that people get the proper information, but they have a responsibility to do it in a manner that is in the best interests of everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador, not just the Opposition for the sake of opposing.

If there's information that can be gotten without it having to be a confrontational process in the House of Assembly, why not reach out to a fellow colleague across the House – if it's a minister or if it's another colleague – in some way, shape or form to get that information? If it's felt that the information is not as accurate as it could be, or if you can make a suggestion on how that information can be disseminated or how it can be better used in making decisions, well, that's what the House discussion process is all about.

I do encourage that. We've had a multitude of conversations in our own caucus about how we can better do that. There's not one Member of the PC caucus who hasn't bought into doing whatever it takes to improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Sometimes it's even going along with government when you know they're going to get credit for something they've done, and rightfully so. Sometimes it's going to have to stand your ground and be adverse to what's being proposed, but doing it in a diplomatic, respectful manner that shows to the rest of the province that we can have disagreements, we can have a difference of opinion, but at the end of the day, the decisions made are based on the best principles to put forward to improving people's lives.

We've bought into it. I'm hopeful and I'm seeing evidence that the government have bought into doing the same thing. I know the discussions I've had with the Premier have been about sharing information as much as possible. I get – and we get – every piece of information can't be shared all the time. There are reasons why there's confidentiality in Cabinet; there are reasons why, even within line departments, things are not shared for a period of time. We get that.

We do ask that there are pieces of information that could be shared, because there's input from

the general public that we may not be aware of that would have pieces of information or some advice to give that could actually dictate or change our approach to certain things. We've welcomed that. I know that we've talked a lot about consultation and inclusion. That's very important in whatever decision-making process we engage ourselves in.

I'm glad to see, and as I said at the beginning, I'm very optimistic and hopeful that we're going to, over the next four years, have a good working relationship in the House of Assembly so that we make sure our financial situation is in play; we make sure that the next generation feels hopeful and optimistic, and decisions to leave Newfoundland and Labrador are based on wanting to see other things in the world, not because they don't think there are opportunities in this great province of ours. I also want to see how we grow our population here, how we engage expats to come back, how we make sure that our retention continues to move forward; but how we also openly welcome new immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador, as an open, engaging community and society that we are.

I think that can be achieved. We're very optimistic over here. I'll keep using that word "optimistic" because I'm a very optimistic individual. As I've said a number of times, I very seldom, if ever, have looked at the glass half empty. I think there's a solution to every challenge. Once, when I was minister of Transportation and Works, the only time I think – my colleague, the House Leader, was working with me at the time – that I actually lashed out at a civil servant in a manner that wouldn't be mine, but a little more assertive than not, it was an engineer who was telling me: Minister, it couldn't be done.

I give pure, 100 per cent respect to engineers because I spent my first year at MUN doing pre-engineering and realized I don't have the intelligence or the demeanour to be able to actually be a full-fledged engineer and solve those types of problems. So I moved out before they kicked me out, very quickly. I was smart enough to do that if nothing else.

I did remember saying, and my colleague would remember: Don't take out your notebook and tell

me again it can't be done. One, this is Newfoundland and Labrador; two, we have the resolve to be able to do anything; and three, you're a qualified and skilled individual. Tell me what needs to be done to make it happen. I'll decide if it's financially viable, if it's timely viable and if it's even politically viable. I said that because that still becomes my philosophy. There's absolutely nothing in this province that we can't achieve.

I think we need to set the template in this House of Assembly to reassure the people out there, the business community, the social community, the not-for-profit community and the municipal leaders that we have that there's nothing collectively we can't address and solve. There are going to be challenges. You're going to take a punch that you didn't see coming at the time; something is going to happen financially. Mother Nature may have an impact on it. Global situations may have happened. Look at what we're facing now: a pandemic.

You very seldom tie a health issue to an economic one, but because of the health pandemic, look at the impact that had on other industries, particularly the oil and gas industry, the tourism industry and a number of other industries, and the impact that has had on the financial cost of people just in the lumber, the cost of lumber and trying to find things. We can't work in silos now. I think if nothing else, the pandemic has made us all aware that we have to be cognizant and we have to be looking left, right, front and back constantly because we have to try to prepare for the inevitable, what may come. If you see one thing coming, plan five steps ahead.

I think we've become so creative. I've seen some businesses, some municipalities and some not-for-profits be very creative on how they couldn't do business the way they always did, but they're still providing services. I've seen a multitude of not-for-profits offer more services now than they did when they were going full fledged, they had a multitude of volunteers coming and they had additional monies coming in. That talks to our creativity in Newfoundland and Labrador and our resolve to actually want to be there for people, particularly in their hour of need.

We've seen the positive things that are happening in our industries here. The aerospace industry: I had a privilege of touring the PAL Aerospace industry and what they're doing and it was amazing. You would never have believed the contracts that they have with other countries in the Far East. How they would get a contract where they're retrofitting pieces of equipment, aircraft – they're purchasing aircraft here. All the maintenance is being done here. All the engineering design is done here; the modification. They they're flying them with their pilots there; training their people to do things around surveillance; to do things around fire prevention, water bombers and all these – it was amazing.

That's only one example. The same is happening in Gander with EVAS Air. So it just tells you the industries we very seldom think about. I think there are – between the collective two groups – 1,300 individuals working, just in that one sector that we barely even think of. That's just through two companies. We're talking hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. But they're putting Newfoundland and Labrador on the map from a global perspective.

So when I hear we have a \$20-million contract with the Malaysian government, I mean, just think of it, if that opens up one door for 10 other companies that could go meet with the Malaysian government. They have multi-billion dollar budgets to play with. The potential there is amazing.

I also had the privilege, with the Premier and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, to travel to the Hibernia platform and see the amazing work done by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I was fortunate enough as a civil servant many decades ago to see parts as the Hibernia rig when it was being built. But to see it first-hand, to see it operational and to see the commitment by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that, not only want to make it work from a financial point of view but to show their pride in the fact that we're world leaders.

Now, did we all agree? It's an aged piece of equipment. It's 24 years of age. It's been put out in the North Atlantic. It's taken hits on every potential worst scenario that Mother Nature could throw at it and it survived totally because

of the ingenuity, the creativity and the construction ability of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Does it need a few upgrades? One hundred per cent. Would I be totally supportive if we supported that in some manner? Without a doubt. Because I see the value from a financial point of view. But it's our cornerstone to our oil and gas industry. It solidified us as actually being trendsetters and being people who should be looked at from a global perspective on how we develop our oil and gas industry and what we're capable of doing. When they talked about technology 15 or 20 years ago about drilling wells directly down was the only way, to now being able to go out kilometres, laterally, to be able to access more oil and gas.

Again, that was a great eye-opener. Particularly, when we're talking there is more than a billion barrels still left on that rig. That rig is stationary. It's basically paid for. It's there. It's owned by the companies involved and basically by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. So let's use that, let's develop our oil and gas industry. Particularly, when you look at we have some of the cleanest oil production processes in the world. Let's improve on that and let's make that another part of how we move beyond the challenges we have now, financially.

We all know the oil industry will come back and I know there are all kinds of pro and con issues around: Do we move totally off of oil because we're into greener energies? We're all supportive of greener energies. We know that is coming and we know we're all moving towards that, but right now there's a need for the oil and gas industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's a valuable asset for us, it's a skill set that we have and it provides a very valuable service to the whole global network when it comes to the needs for people.

People forget – and it was made very clear to me talking to a number of the people out on the rig – that the oil industry is not just about the carbons that come off of cars and vehicles and this type of thing and the pollutants that they may have; a lot of the other things that we use, from our cellphones to everything we use for medical procedures to all kinds of other positive interventions and things that you must have for

life-saving and life interventions and supportive are, in most cases, petroleum based.

While we sometimes get too caught up or certain groups get too caught up on the negativity of the oil and gas industry, we have to look at some of the big positives they have, outside of the financial things, and the particular need and are we supportive. Yes, one day we will move to finding ways to do greener energy. Maybe the oil industry becomes a greener production process that has minimal or no impact on our environment and the ozone so we would look towards that.

I wanted to reiterate before I make some other points here, the positive attitude of the workers on that rig: it was amazing. From the helicopter pilots going out, to the safety trainers, but when you see the riggers, as I call them, the actual people who do the drilling – the pride on their faces and the role that they're playing. Are they well paid? Yes. Do they work hard for their money? One hundred per cent, yes. Do they contribute a lot to our society? Beyond what you can imagine by the general public here.

The fact is what they sacrifice when they go out there, it was very apprehensive for me, just getting ready to go out there; spending that day preparing, putting the suit on, suit off, all these things to go out there. That's fine, we knew we were going to be back in our bed that night, but these people are then out there weeks at a time; sometimes months at a time depending on the weather and that, and continue to work.

It's a camaraderie but it's a vocation that people take very seriously. What I want to exemplify here is the fact of what this means to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When you add that in to all the other potential we have in that industry, we have a very bright future. When I hear seniors – like I did yesterday – talk about can't wait for our oil industry to get back because then they can feel that we're on more stable ground. We know it will turn around. We know the price of oil is in the \$70-plus a barrel. We know things are trending in the right direction.

We need it to be stable enough so it doesn't have a major impact on the other costs for people

heating their homes, businesses driving their vehicles and the average person going and coming. There's a balance there. The monies that get generated through royalties and the employment tax and all these things become a benefit for government to be able to support those who may have some challenges, financially, in other ways, shape or form, to make it that there's an even balance across, generating money and ensuring that the impact of how that money is generated doesn't have a negative on certain parts of society.

That was a very positive opportunity. I do thank the premier, the minister, ExxonMobil, Cougar Helicopters for the invitation and, particularly, the 158 members who were on that rig that day for engaging us and being so open to explain it, explain it in layman's terms for somebody who doesn't understand the oil industry. Now I have a better appreciation; I have a 100 per cent better appreciation. I do have a little bit of an understanding of the complexity of what goes on, but the commitment to make it work.

That in itself was a very worthwhile experience. When people ask me down the road, when I'm out of politics: What were some of the things that you remember and that you were grateful that you got in politics that you probably wouldn't have got anywhere? That trip out there was one of those because it gave me a real understanding that our society is in a good place. Our economy is in a good place in the future. What we've developed here says something about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador; that our capabilities are limited by only our imagination as part of that process. I'm very pleased with that.

I want to also talk about – I'll move back and forth because there's a reason, there's a theme of what I want to talk about there – the decorum in the House of Assembly. I think we've learned – I'll go a step further, first.

We've heard the will of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Outside of issues around a winter election, a pandemic election, the challenges and all that; the challenges were equal for everybody. I understand that. I accept that. The will of the people put the government in play and it put the Opposition in play. We want to build on that.

Through adversity we managed to keep the democratic process going, even with challenges. Let's build on that. Let's make sure that we don't let the people of Newfoundland and Labrador down. Those who went out of their way to be able to cast their vote, who, in some cases, through anxiety and thoughts they might be jeopardizing their health, still wanted to exercise that right. We know there were people who stayed on the phone for six hours to make sure that their ballot was sent out to them.

Let's not let them down by not following decorum and have an open, honest and upfront debate so that we ensure the best legislation is put forward, that if it needs to be modified to reflect the needs of where people are and that it reflects the actual views of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, let's put aside – sometimes we get too caught up, and we're all guilty of it – petty politics. Sometimes our threshold for what may irk us or what we may take personally seems lower with some individuals and higher with others. That we need to be able to remember; we don't make it personal. Healthy debate, maybe even a little bit of banter, adds a little bit of excitement to the House when we go back and forth, but, at the end of the day, that we come to an operational consensus that what we're doing is in the best interest.

I've seen more evidence that we're at a point that what we put forward as an Opposition – and I think I can speak for my colleagues here and the Third Party and the independents – is based on what we're hearing from our constituents, what our knowledge is and what our experiences are. All we ask government: Take that into account when you're making decisions around financial accountability, when you're making it around how we best spend our money. I know there's not enough money to take care of every need for everybody, but a balanced approach to ensure we first prioritize where, who and what in society needs to be the key thing that we need to do.

We know we need to take care of our most vulnerable. That's a given. We know we have to keep our society healthy and educated. We know we need to set the framework for encouraging businesses and the economy to move forward. We need to know that we set the tone nationally

and internationally that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are open for business, but we're open for business when it's a benefit for us also. We have no problem in developing partnerships where everybody gains, but it can't be one-sided.

I would hope and would think that we would still be open to the fact of saying: Look, let's not look at the past. You can learn from the past; you can't ignore it, but let's not just harp on the past. Let's look to the present and the future. The present is our reality; the future is where we need to go and how we're going to get there. The ability in this House, the ability by the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador to achieve any of those goals is very obtainable. I know it's the one thing that most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians want.

There was a sense of pessimism for a number of months. I think it was because people had to change a whole lifestyle they had: when you no longer can see your grandkids, when you no longer can have a family member come visit you and when you no longer can pay your respects to somebody who has passed away. That has a mental affect on everybody. It makes people feel: Do you know what? Maybe I'm just going to stay in my own little hub, do my own little thing and maybe I'll just give up on the normal things I would do. But the feeling of the last couple of months is a little bit different.

While I have no illusions; the Greene report was an awakening document for people to have a discussion around exactly where we are and what are some of the situations; probably sold as a little bit more dire than I would look at it and some other people. I'm glad people look at it. Maybe it's the total optimist in me as the part there, but I have no qualms in explaining to people that we have to be realistic and honest on where things are.

Do I feel and do I think most people feel that's not a death sentence? What is written in that Greene report is not a death sentence for this province, by no stretch of the imagination. What it is, is an awareness that there are certain things we have to do. Not everything in that report do I think we need to do, would I support we do or do I believe would put us on the right path, but there are a number of things there that should set

the tone for how we approach our present fiscal situation and how we even approach our spending down the road.

Even if we had an abundance of money, there has to be a certain accountability on what we do and a return on how we're investing. A return doesn't have to be a financial return, it has to be that society is better off, people feel better about themselves and there is more access to certain things, or we've now opened up programs or services that people normally didn't have in the past, and we talk about things like that.

I see our objective over here is to assure the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, not just in our own districts but everyone out there, that do you know what? We will get to where we need to go. I do realize government has to take it to another step because they have to make the decisions, they have to make the first decisions on what are the first steps, and sometimes the first steps may have to be negative steps from people's perspective. There's an old cliché in life: Maybe sometimes you take a step backwards before you take two forward.

There are things there that we are willing to support. I will say there will be times that we will probably be adamantly upset and adamantly disagree with what's happening over there, and that may be based on a policy, a program or a spending process. I will say, right now, that the budget line there now, there are some challenges in it from our perspective, and we've outlined some of those, but it's not so detrimental at this point that the society will, that you're not at least starting to have that discussion around where we need to go.

We're going to try to guide you in the right direction. We're going to challenge you on some things that we don't agree with, without a doubt. We're going to try to clarify exactly what you mean. There is some discussion. You know the theme that we have over here is: We're still not quite sure what direction you're going in. You may be in the right direction. I know, I think through all sincerity that you want to put it in the right direction but the cliché of the devils in the detail is key for us over here. We're still trying to analyze it to know if we would 100 per cent agree; if we would be 75 per cent agree; if we'd

50 per cent; or we'd totally disagree on your approach.

I know it takes time to develop all the nuances of that and the implementation processes. Everything here is a living entity in the House of Assembly. I'm a former minister so I do know what you plan to do one day and what changes the next has to do with 50 factors or you're waiting on more information. I get that. We won't be cynical just for the sake of being cynical on that. We do ask, and I implore, that you share as much information as possible. So that when do ask questions, or we do challenge you, our challenges are based on facts.

We may not always agree on the outcome. We may not always agree that our approach is better than your approach or vice versa but we will agree that we all have the same facts when we decided what our approach would be or what stance we were going to take.

I wanted to set that tone on behalf of our caucus in the House of Assembly. Because, again, we have a responsibility and an obligation to the people of the province, that we need to have as much information shared so they can tell us what it is they want us to vote on in the House of Assembly – as I would suspect your constituents would say the same thing. And/or, if you're a minister, the agencies and organizations that you work with would tell you the same types of information that you want to do so you're making an informed decision that best reflects the needs of the majority.

I keep saying that word majority because I've had to have this explanation to somebody this weekend in my own district, that we can't do everything for everybody at the same level. There are reasons why certain programs are fitted for certain demographics, because there's a bigger need for it. There may be a better return on our money so we can take that money to put into some other program where there's no financial return but it does meet a social need as part of that.

I get it, we're all human beings; we're self-serving because, at the end of the day, the immediate things that we know are the things that affect us.

Part of the responsibility we have in this House, too, is to educate the general public and say: If you work with us on this side, you may not get something immediately, but what we're doing here is going to help your needs and your wants further down the road. I know that's hard to sell for anybody because, at the end of the day, you don't know where things are going to go from a financial point of view. You want to have as much stability as possible.

We have a responsibility to do that and educate. The best way we can educate people is with the right information. I do ask that we share everything. I know – and I get it. We may banter back and forth because it is part of what we do and it's part of Question Period that we need to be able to expose, if we think that there's not enough information being shared, or challenge. There are abilities to share information and there are responsibilities on government's side to be able to hold back information until it's pertinent to be able to share. We get that. Even when we may challenge it, we get it, too.

I want to clarify that to everybody in this House of Assembly, and those who may be watching at home, that there's a rationale behind what we do on this side of the House as Opposition and what government does when it comes to Question Period, back and forth. You'll know if both groups are adamantly in favour of each other because it will be very complimentary. You'll know if there's a total difference of opinion by how the debate goes as part of that process.

I want to talk about a couple of other things. I'll be very open on my support for certain things. I want to lighten it up a little bit, but getting into a very serious discussion here, which sets the tone but it also sets to, again, as I talked about, educating Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that it's not doom and gloom in this province.

I'll reference a saying by one of the best actors who's on television right now – and you may know him – Homer Simpson. Homer Simpson has a saying, as you may know, where he says: Beer – the cause of and solution to all of our problems. That's a philosophy I don't necessarily live by, nonetheless I read into it, presently, the conversation – and I say that I lead in tongue-in-cheek because I want to have a conversation about almost what's being

sometimes discussed and debated in the House of Assembly.

I reference Muskrat Falls, because sometimes it's played up in this House as the cause of and solution of all our problems in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: I want to talk a little bit about that. That's not in any way to diminish the situation that we're facing, but I do want to talk a little bit about Muskrat Falls.

I'm going to start it by saying that in my office there's a framed article that I gave three years ago when my colleagues, one of the local papers, would be doing the year-end: What are your objectives? Are you going to build a new school? You're going to get Route 60 done for the 15th time this year. Paved again? What you're going to do to benefit your constituents.

My whole conversation wasn't about the ferry service for Bell Island. It wasn't about a high school needed in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. It wasn't about the education system in Paradise. It was a discussion around Muskrat Falls. They generated the questions but the article came out. Everybody else was talking about – my colleagues who live in the same region; I think it was probably five and from different sides of the House. Mine read: Brazil confident Muskrat Falls will be a benefit to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador one day. I still wholeheartedly believe that.

I do want to say unequivocally right now, so that I think we can move forward in the House of Assembly, so we can minimize the banter and the debate: I, and I alone, am the only person in the Official Opposition who was around during Muskrat Falls debate, who sat in Cabinet for a period of time on the tail end of Muskrat Falls and who adamantly defended the need for Muskrat Falls, the benefit for Muskrat Falls and the value for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador by building Muskrat Falls.

Do I, like my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, say and echo that we based it, and I based it, on the information I was given. I wholeheartedly hold my head up because I'm

probably one of the few people who asked questions, who in Cabinet asked pertinent questions; was given answers from the professionals, the skilled people, the trained people who reassured me. Even in a quasi-little bantering challenge, I was reassured. To this day, their answers made all the sense in the world after I dug it out. I am going on the premise that they believed they could achieve what they were saying, even when there were some challenges.

How it got to the point that it cost much more than it should have or we were led to believe is still up for debate. I know we've gone through a whole commission and there were a number of issues and challenges as part of the whole process. What I wanted to echo again is that I do feel – and as Homer Simpson says, the cause of and solution; we've talked about it – the Atlantic Loop could be a very positive thing for Newfoundland and Labrador, as long as we develop the partnerships that benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. For that to happen, Muskrat Falls would be one of the cornerstones of how we use hydroelectric power to not only generate financial support for Newfoundland and Labrador, but support our regional partners in this great Confederation of ours.

I do want to go back to some people. I know we've spent \$13 billion on Muskrat Falls, an exorbitant amount of money and nearly double what was projected. I'll be honest, as a minister who was responsible for infrastructure, I had a number of \$8.32 billion because I could gauge, through the staff I had, what overruns would be and the projected needed that you would on a project of that magnitude, and you were dealing with the terrain in Labrador and these types of things. It went beyond that from my perspective, which, no doubt, was of concern.

I want to echo it's our asset. It's there now. It's paid for. We talk about it equates, if you go by the Greene report, to 20 per cent of our debt load and that's not exactly accurate; you can spin numbers any way because we had an equity share. There are monies in that which we already paid for, that the government put in, us, as an administration. I suspect so did Nalcor and the Liberal administration because they inherited the

project, they moved it to the next level and the development went from there.

But the benefits – people forget too. We talk about what it costs but people can't dismiss the fact that nearly \$10 billion of that money came back to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in some way, shape or form. It came back in employment tax. It came back in cars being purchased in our HST. It came back in purchases in other ways, shapes or forms. There was a multitude of monies that came there.

Is it a concern because the costing went further than it would and there has to be money made up when we talk about the interest that has to be paid on it? Now, we're fortunate. Having the federal government sign on for the loan guarantee gave us an exorbitant, small, lowest interest rate that we could have ever gotten in our history when we borrowed.

I remember some economist saying at the time – and I asked the question – about going to the market. They said if you're ever going to do it, this is your window to do it because the interest rates are so low. Getting the federal government to get us that exorbitantly low – exorbitantly low and I have to emphasize that – very small interest rate to be able to make sure that we weren't paying extra debt as we are now paying an exorbitant amount of debt, just to handle our debt load to our creditors. I get that, in trying to pay that down.

This amount of money – plus I've talked to trades unions; I've talked to other agencies. There was over \$150 million from that project donated to charities in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's major input in helping people health-wise, youth organizations, things like the lunch program: all the things that still benefit our society.

I want to dismiss people thinking we threw \$13 billion out the door and it's gone – when I say we, collectively, all of us in the House of Assembly. Whether you voted for it or not, if you've been here the last period of time, we all get labelled with it. I'll be honest; I do want to put this out. I ask if there's any blame that anybody on that side wants to give about Muskrat Falls or responsibility, I solely take it from our perspective in caucus – because

nobody here had the opportunity to ask a question, nobody had the opportunity to voice their opinion, nobody had the opportunity to vote on it; I'm the only one.

If you want to direct a question or challenge or blame – which I would hope we don't get into the blame game on anything we do, because I would think, and I'm confident, we all make decisions based on what we think is the best way forward. That's part of it.

I had the opportunity in 1981 to interview Joey Smallwood for a history course I was doing at MUN. He was actually over on Portugal Cove Road doing the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*. He was finalizing them there. Anyway, we sat and had a good conversation. I asked him about Churchill Falls; that was what I was actually interviewing him on. And I think Joey, like all of us on any decision we make, if it's an infrastructure thing – but the two things that I remember now are the two massive things that have happened: Obviously, the Upper Churchill and the Lower Churchill and the development.

He said the advice he was given, the expert advice from all over the world, was that, do you know what? Maximize what you can get from an employment perspective now with Churchill Falls because hydroelectric will not be the mode that will get the heating for their homes or run businesses. The big world then was nuclear was going to be the big salvation of everything. The CANDU reactors out in Winnipeg and Montreal, billions of dollars going into it all over the world.

So he took the advice that he thought would be in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland. You can't fault anybody for that. But too often we blame Joey for what went on with the Upper Churchill. We'll blame Danny Williams or the PCs for the Lower Churchill. We'll blame the Liberals for something else. I think we need to move beyond that because I don't think, at the end of the day, any one individual or group of individuals deliberately did anything that benefited them more than what they were entitled to.

No matter what decisions were made, sometimes you would hope that people making those

decisions or giving you the advice are doing their homework enough that what they're suggesting and proposing has exactly been thought out and it's been looked at five and six steps down the road. Unfortunately, maybe people don't put the same due diligence into it that I would hope.

If nothing else, we've learned that from now on anything we do – unfortunately, it took 40 years and maybe 40 years between the two or almost 50 years – a bit of complacency, people forgot history. I said at the beginning here, you don't have to live in the past, but you have to learn from it.

We, hopefully, now have learned from the Upper Churchill and the Lower Churchill to be able to move to any other project. I think there's great potential in our hydroelectric energy in Labrador and being able to move it so that it benefits the people of Newfoundland and Labrador with the proper development as we do things forward.

I want to talk a little bit, too – and I want to dispel something; I'm taking my opportunity now. I'll get a chance to speak a couple of more times on the budget itself. But I wanted to use this to talk about three main themes. One, the decorum in the House of Assembly and the ability we have to actually achieve our goals here and do the right things for the people, and give people hope that, collectively, the leadership in this room, working with the leaders out in our society, can find the solutions to get us over the hump.

The second was to inform the people of Newfoundland and Labrador about some of the misnomers that they've heard, partial information, how we spin it – I can take a number six and make it a big number; somebody else can make it a small number – to try to get as accurate as possible so people understand that there isn't a conspiracy theory here that we're going to falter because somebody bigger than the people of Newfoundland and Labrador is controlling our destiny.

I want to talk a little bit about – we've heard it a number of times and it's been said in the House here – the PCs. I know it's when we banter, the monies that we had generated through the

heydays of the costing of oil or the major hundred-dollar-a-barrel oil, which was very lucrative for us and very welcomed, obviously, and very beneficial to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When we get labelled – and it came up more with the Greene report. It gave some of the proponents and, I guess, the cynics or the critics to say: We spent like drunken sailors. We spent, but I will guarantee you – and I was there for part of it – it wasn't like drunken sailors. It was actually temperate based on what the needs were. Our consultations on the yearly basis on the budget – and the Minister of Finance knows, there are a hundred billion dollars' worth of asks coming in. It's unbelievable.

I had one consultation one time in Transportation and Works: \$195 million, just to address bridges in one district – one district. It's phenomenal when you're talking \$70 million or \$80 million to do roads, ferries, bridges, everything that you would have to do as part of that process.

I want to talk about the monies that were, at the time, moved forward. There's been a debate; I've done my research. We were in the vicinity of about \$23 billion or \$24 billion generated through our oil costing or the additional monies that we would have received from the oil industry above and beyond and where that went.

I have to first clarify. People think that's a lot. Once before in the House a number of years ago I tried to outline some of the expenditures that were there that benefited the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. There were programs and services given back to the people based on what they had outlined to us were necessities to improve their lives and generate and support other industries, foster development around creating employment.

People forget; everybody talks in numbers and can never get the numbers to add up – they missed the point. When we did hit that threshold where we were no longer entitled to equalization, the monies that we always had in our budgets for the years – every year we were getting a billion dollars; we were getting \$900 million, \$1.3 billion. There were substantial amounts of money coming from Ottawa.

Regardless of what political party was there, the formula dictated based on our revenues and our demographics how much money we were getting.

The first thing that had to be taken into account, for those 10 years of not getting, say, a round number of a billion, but we still had our basic expenditures, there was \$10 billion that had to be made up. Out of that \$23 billion, there's \$10 billion automatically that came off our coffers, that had to be made up. People forget that when they look at the numbers, revenues that we would've had to be able to maintain our budget lines that no longer existed. So that had to come directly – that was a part of what we had to do.

We then looked at all kinds of other things. We increased our infrastructure strategy by \$6 billion because, as we know and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure would know, there is still billions on the books that would need to be done around bridges, roads and buildings that need to be done, and the former minister would attest to the same. It was a time to try to catch up, so there was a lot of money put into infrastructure. A lot of things were buildings that needed to be done up. The road network was to be done up. We started on the Trans-Labrador Highway and we made great inroads, and it's still continuing to go. In my day, there were even discussions about the North Coast roads and some of the planning for those types of things. So there was billions put into that part of the infrastructure.

At the same time, we were – and we probably still are – the highest taxed regime in this country. We had to find ways to relieve taxes on people so that we could help stimulate certain parts of the economy, people's spending, tax relief for businesses and new types of entities that would be set-up. So \$4 billion of that went into tax relief.

Public service sector wage benefits and growth in the public sector: There was always a waiting times for people to get access to services because there was only X number of civil servants; yet, there was such a demand on the services that people wanted. Plus, civil servants had gone nine years without an increase, and were the staple of what we do here.

I mean, let's be collectively supportive here – and we've seen it in Estimates – people who run the departments, the people who make sure we're doing what we're supposed to do, the people who account for it are those professionals, the civil servants. Some are at a senior-management level, some are front-line management, some you never hear or see, but the valuable work they do is very important in ensuring services are provided, our accountability is here and we get the best bang for the dollar.

They were rewarded for nine years of still diligently working for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and putting them up on what would be considered a decent wage for a civil servant who has all kinds of skill sets. That became another part of the \$1.5 billion that we invested.

Pension plan liability: One of the things that I am very proud of that I had a small role in was getting – the unfunded pension liability was a major issue. The former premier sent a letter to Ottawa at one point saying that he didn't think that he could make the payroll. I understand that because I was in Cabinet conversations where we felt we weren't going to be able to pay pensioners money. We don't have enough money to do it based on the uptake on it now. If we don't change something, in five or six years only the senior pensioners will be able to get the money. It was going to be a challenge. We sat down and looked at how we do that.

The collective approach: We brought in all the collective unions because we sat back and said: What skill set do we have that we could solve these issues? We knew we had minimal skill set to be able to do that, but we knew the union leaders, their rank and file, could come up with what would be the best approach that may put it on stable ground, put some security for the funded pension process for a long-term thing. We looked at a 30-year process.

They looked at what their members would be willing to absorb and changes they would make and even some sacrifices over a collective period of time. I give credit. We came up with a plan that would, in principle, secure the pension plan over a period of time. Part of that was it was a collective. It was between the union members,

rank and file. The government, which is the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador, would have to put in X number of dollars to start the process every year to get it to a stable process.

My understanding now is it is much more stable than it was before. It seems to have some longevity. There were a lot of changes made around access to health insurance, when you could pull down on a pension, that you had to work some extra years to do it so that so no one group of civil servants was so affected that it just wasn't workable for them to stay employed or that there was no hope for a pension down the road. It was spread out over everybody and the taxpayers took a bit of a hit to ensure every year X number of dollars would be invested to get it to a stable point. That was important to get done and that is where some of this money went.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy: We came up with a strategy at the time because we had some extra money. I say we had the extra money; we had the ability to do what we've talked about, not only the PC administration, but the former Liberal administration and back and forth wanted to do for people on low income, people with challenges, to stimulate the economy by helping eliminate poverty and give people opportunities for a hand up versus a handout.

We invested \$1.2 billion over a period of time, and we became the epitome of being the lowest when it came to programs and services for those in financial need to the best in the country. I remember going to other jurisdictions on their dime to speak about some of things in the poverty reduction when I was a civil servant. I was so proud to be able to boast that Newfoundland and Labrador was a trend leader. We did that.

Part of that was also about immigration strategy. Being able to tout that we have programs and services that were engaging. That costs money to do it right. The rate of return is tenfold. You get a more engaged society. You get people contributing more. You get people from other jurisdictions wanting to come here. And it becomes very much a sense of pride when Newfoundland and Labrador is looked at as an equal and actually are asked for their input.

I used to go to meetings years ago as a volunteer in different groups, and I do remember it and it was a bit demeaning. If the flight was 20 minutes delayed, nobody cared if the Newfoundland delegation didn't get there. They went on. I will tell you in the late 1990s, 2000s, but by the mid-2000s and the late 2010s, meetings didn't go ahead. They waited until the Newfoundland delegation got in there, because we had proven what we had done in this province, what our volunteers had done. Our professionals in every sector. If it was the health profession, if it was the infrastructure profession, if it was the education profession, they all waited. Now we're on national boards and agencies. People want to know what Newfoundland and Labrador thinks. They want to know how we're doing certain things. They want to know how we can suggest the rest of the country do it.

That's a testament. I still think that the support and respect is there. I do think we need to get back to being able to ensure that we get more creative; we think a little bit more outside the box, as we did in those days and we've been trying to in the last period of time.

I know some of that takes financial means. Sometimes maybe we need to find another way to be more creative with the same amount of money. One of the themes I did hear and I do appreciate and do like and I do support is that we need to find a way to do more with less. That's appreciative. I think it's a reality. I don't think there's one Newfoundlander and Labradorian – and I know us over here – who wouldn't aspire to that, wouldn't support that, and wouldn't want to work to find creative ways to be able to achieve those types of things, as long as it doesn't detrimentally affect supports and services that people need.

My colleague always keeps saying we need to get to a point – and I think Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are ready for that – where we need to start being able to find a way to give all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what they need versus what they want. That's a realistic thing. We're all individuals. We would all love to drive in the best car ever made, but you know what? We need a car that can get us to point A, get us to our employment, get us to our education institutes to pick up our kids, get us to

our hospital for our appointments, get us to wherever we need to go for our social engagement.

We're at a point there where that became a very important approach. I think it changed the mindset of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It had nothing to do with one administration over the other. I'm explaining this so when people think that we spent like drunken sailors, we spent and we spent in areas where the electorate, the taxpayers, the average citizen had told us was their priorities.

I think at the time it was a good job because it still resonates. Unfortunately sometimes to keep programs going, you need the same amount of money. When that financial pot dries up, to no fault of anybody in this House of Assembly – the oil industry goes down; COVID pops up; the mining industry changes; tourism changes, whatever it was – it changed. It changed under our administration. We had all kinds of plans.

In 2013-2014, so did the oil industry drop then, dramatically. Much less than it is now. At one time \$33.50 a barrel. I cringed sitting in Cabinet. What do you do when I've got \$8 billion worth of asks in infrastructure and I'm calling in every minister and saying: I'm sorry, this health clinic can't be built; this school has to be put on hold. We can't do this. This is not even on the queue and you've got your colleagues who adamantly, two years before, said these were slam dunks because they were needed.

At one point, I read out in this House of Assembly when I was minister the 35 schools that we built in Newfoundland and Labrador. Not one school was built in an area that it wasn't detrimentally needed of all those new schools. They still exist. They're still occupied. What they gave was that there was no losing five or six days because of mould in schools. There wasn't spending hundreds of thousands of dollars doing renovations to leaky windows and that. They were state-of-the-art schools that gave every Newfoundland and Labrador student access to at least a certain level of quality of education. If it meant labs or a gymnasium or it meant an area where they could go out and socialize out in a little garden area, a lot of the money was spent there.

One of the other big things that we did under our reign – and it's up for debate now; it's probably going to one of the biggest debates for post-secondary – was the tuition freeze. We spent \$350 million on the tuition freeze. Times may be different then. That's a decade ago. But as part of that, that stimulated the growth of our post-secondary education. It ensured that young students from any part of Newfoundland and Labrador could come in here and, financially, they shouldn't be burdened or that shouldn't be a reason why they make a decision on where they're going, as part of that.

With the evolution of time, everything needs to be reviewed and looked at. We're not beyond having those discussions. At the time, the benefit for that has been seen ever since. Every one of our institutions grew in enrolment when we were having a decline in the number of graduates coming out of high school. That tells you about the incentives. It tells you about our education system preparing people to go on to post-secondary. It tells you about the priority, that we made sure that our students were qualified and trained so they could drive the economy. They're the ones who are going to take care of the next level of society. We've done that.

Look what we've achieved over the last decade or so with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians being all over this world and being the best at everything that they're engaged in – second to none. We've seen it from civil servants who have gone on to do great things in other jurisdictions. We've seen civil servants come back to Newfoundland and Labrador who we had forgotten had excelled in other jurisdictions. Now, we're so privileged to be able to have them back on their home turf, being able to bring their expertise here.

Again, I talked about being on the Hibernia rig and I saw 25 years ago what our ability was. We've skyrocketed because now we're on a global market. We now, because of technology, have access to training. It doesn't necessarily have to take you away from your homeland. It can be done here.

The benefit that we've had and the thing that I want to emphasize the most: We, in this House, must find a way – I encourage Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to spread your wings. Your

skill set, you want to learn stuff; go wherever you want to go. But go based on the fact that it's your choice, not that you're forced out of here because our economy doesn't offer you anything, our social programs don't offer you anything or you feel it's doom and gloom.

That's not beneficial to anybody. It's definitely not beneficial to a younger generation. It's not beneficial to the present generation. I guarantee you it won't be beneficial to all of us when we get older, down the road. We're going to want people to be able to provide the same services that our parents had and, I would hope, even improved services.

I grew up in a society where every aspect – your grandmother, your great-grandmother, your mother all aspired to ensure whatever they had to do was beneficial and that you were going to have a better lifestyle than they did. I think that's still true. I'm hoping our society doesn't get so complacent that we say: Look, do you know what? Give me what I want right now; I'll let our kids and grandkids figure out their quality of life and how they pay for their bills.

I'm hoping, and I think we have a role and responsibility here in this House, to set that tone, to sort of say: We're a partnership, collectively, every generation. From those who are in elementary school to those who are challenging in post-secondary about costing and living arrangements and employment afterwards; to those employed right now in our society; those most vulnerable; but seniors, too, who are on fixed incomes, worrying about how they're going to deal with certain other expenditures that may be out of their control.

We need to set the tone in this House of Assembly; we as leaders. We're elected as leaders. Do you know what? People took faith in us. When they marked that X, they didn't just mark it because they liked the colour of your suit or the colour of your sweater or your hat. They marked an X based on the principle that they felt you, collectively, would be the best person to represent them and address the issues in Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that they, their kids, their grandkids and everybody in society would have a better life.

We have the ability to do that, I'm looking forward to the next number of weeks in our debate, but I'm also looking forward to the next number of years when we, collectively, find ways to make Newfoundland and Labrador the best place it can be for everybody who's here and anybody who wants to come here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, shall the subamendment carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

SPEAKER: Defeated.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Call in the Members.

Division

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

CLERK (Barnes): Mr. Brazil, Mr. Petten, Mr. Wakeham, Mr. Wall, Mr. O'Driscoll, Mr. Tibbs, Ms. Evans, Ms. Conway Ottenheimer, Mr. Parrott, Mr. Pardy, Mr. Paul Dinn, Mr. Forsey, Mr. James Dinn, Mr. Brown, Mr. Trimper, Mr. Lane.

SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Furey, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Haggie, Ms. Coady, Ms. Howell, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Loveless, Mr. Davis, Mr. Abbott, Ms. Dempster, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Hogan, Ms. Stoodley, Mr. Reid, Mr. Warr, Mr. Pike, Ms. Stoyles, Ms. Gambin-Walsh.

CLERK: Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 16; the nays: 21.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The subamendment has been defeated.

We will now move to the main amendment.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have many things I'd like to speak on today but I want to circle back to our leader, his commentary, when he had the phrase about spending back in time like drunken sailors. It brought to mind the story, a conversation that we had in my living with, then, NDP Member Gerry Rogers.

I had a call from a mutual friend, very close friends, they wondered if our council in George's Brook-Milton could meet with Ms. Rogers, which we did. I remember the wonderful conversation that we had. I have the utmost respect for her. One of the things she did mention was we, at that time, spent like drunken sailors.

I just want to qualify one thing, which I had said to Ms. Rogers in the living room with other council members present, is that I was the administrator at that time of Clarendville Middle School. In education, we were part of an administrative council that took in, then, the Bonavista Peninsula, Clarendville, as well as the Burin Peninsula. We couldn't afford to repair any computers that we had because our allocation we had was around \$26 per student. That's what we were supplied in order to operationalize our school, and we just couldn't do it.

When I say about the investment that came in education was greatly needed because we had such a deficit. When the money came to education, we then could repair computers and we could provide resources for students with exceptionalities that we could only wish on. At that point in time, we had parents who paid a school fee that we were harnessed with trying to get money from people that really couldn't afford it. We knew sometimes we would waive

it, but we needed the dollars in order to operationalize. We didn't after we received the money on this government's watch back in that time in education.

I know my time is going to be relatively short. I want to circle back, again, before our leader to the Member for Cape St. Francis. He sent out accolades for essential workers and teachers, and rightfully so. But one thing comes to mind with essential workers – and the assistance program that we had rolled out is commendable. Any time we assist, we honour and we support those that are out there on the front lines, it is highly commendable.

The only thing in the District of Bonavista, we had essential workers who made a marginal amount above the \$3,500 wage that was permitted within that particular month of gross earnings. The marginal amount was sometimes less than \$100 and they weren't entitled to the support. One would say that if we look at it totally linearly or on a linear basis and say they did make above the \$3,500, the reason for them making above the \$3,500 was that in Golden Heights Manor in Bonavista they never had employees to come in to do the shift; therefore, they really had to ask those who were willing, the essential workers, to come in during the pandemic and work extra time because they never had the staffing.

If they hadn't showed up to work, or if they declined to do that extra time, they would have been eligible for the support package. I know that many residents in the District of Bonavista look at that and say, that doesn't seem quite fair. You never had the staff, but then these essential workers had to step in and make a marginal amount above \$3,500, but they then no longer qualified.

On the teachers' side, before I move on to what I wish to discuss, I have a lot of colleagues in the education fraternity that were very anxious during COVID when they went in to work. One would say all essential workers had to go into work, what would be different about the teachers? Well, what was different about the teachers is that in many of those cases, especially in metro schools, they had to go in when the distancing between each other was at

best one metre, when the public was stressed that we would have two metres.

I know that the educators went in and they did the best they could in that environment, often with 34, 35 or 36 students per class in a poorly ventilated classroom, and we wonder about their mental well-being and the stress associated with that. I would think that was a unique experience for teachers that other groups may not have experienced.

I tip my hat and commend all those who reported to work under conditions of which they had quite an amount of stress and duress. So I do celebrate the teachers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: My topic brings us up to the closing of this session, Mr. Speaker. I just want to throw out two statistics: The World Health Organization would state that 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to live a healthy life. Approximately nine million die of starvation each year.

That's a segue when I go now, with the remaining time that I have, to look at the fishery. I'll spend the last eight minutes discussing the fishery. If we look at the Premier's Greene report, I quote: "The governance structure of the fisheries is not working for this province. Newfoundland and Labrador has seen a grossly mismanaged resource by the federal government, often with provincial participation, that resulted in the collapse of the once great northern cod stock."

When I asked a question to the Minister of Fisheries on April 20, I think he was more than willing to champion the cause of us rebuilding our fishery to the degree possible. The minister states in April 20 *Hansard*: "Whatever we can bring to the floor of this House or the House of Commons to bring some knowledge to the people of what the seals are causing to our environment and to our fishery, now is the time to do it."

The remaining limited amount of time I have, I'd like to focus on seal predation and I'd like to focus on the fishery. If anybody read the article that came in *The Telegram* yesterday – and it

was written by Barbara Dean-Simmons of Trinity Bay, native of Random Island, right next door to the District of Bonavista. The article was: Seal video going viral, prompting more debate.

The sealing vessel was *Gracie's Adventure*. It was out of Winterton, which I think is in the hon. Member's District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. Jason Branton claims, and with video, that he had a five-mile-wide inundated herd of seals that surrounded his vessel. They were going in the opposite direction towards St. John's, but he looked at, he stated, five miles. His sonar detected that they were many layers deep and they were underneath the vessel as well, but he claimed that in the years he's been fishing he has never seen that. He has never seen such a large herd of seals and a patch of about five-miles wide, just off of Bay de Verde.

"Branton and his crew rely mainly on crab, capelin and cod for their fishing income." A Fisheries and Oceans report in 2012 "estimated capelin consumption by harp seals on the province's north east coast" – and they named the zones 2J3KL. That's basically taking up from the Coast of Labrador right down the Eastern Coast of the Island of Newfoundland. They claimed that they take 1.6 million tons of capelin; we harvest 24,000 tons.

In 2019, DFO set up a Seal Science Task Team. They established it, but here are some of the reports or what comes out from the chair of that task force. Just let me read a few statements from him: "... 'Previous studies have shown that predation by seals was not found to have a significant impact on Northern cod stock levels' and 'scientific evidence does not support that harp seal populations are impacting the abundance of capelin populations....'"

"The marine ecosystem and changes in capelin abundance are primarily impacted by environmental conditions and ecosystem changes."

The task force has not presented a final report yet, but one member of that task force is a gentleman by the name of Bob Hardy. Bob has filed, put out and released a report. He released a report titled: "What's Wrong with the Fishery. The Impact of Seals." He put that out in April of

this year and he deemed it to be a common sense model that he had put out there.

Bob talks about the pristine waters off the Coast of Newfoundland, where we have the warm water of the Gulf Stream meeting the cold water of Labrador and what a habitat for fish. We have the largest coastline in the world, but we bring in \$1 billion of revenue in the fishery for the largest coastline and those two currents meeting with the pristine waters we have. I would say the Premier's Greene report has it right.

We have \$1 billion in the fishery. Canada brings in \$33 billion in related to its Gross Domestic Product. Norway brings in \$97 billion. If you think of the difference from where we are – us built for the fishery – in the Island of Newfoundland and Labrador and you think that we contribute \$1 billion – Canada contributes \$33 billion to the gross domestic product – I would say to you, knowing of all the coastline we have in Newfoundland and Labrador and the resources, that number is rather unsettling.

If we look at the species at risk, which is SARA, they state that the Atlantic cod and the Atlantic salmon are at risk. Two fishermen in Keels on the Bonavista Bay side of the District of Bonavista, Phonse Ducey and John Ducey, back in 1990, when they were asked to give up their wild Atlantic salmon licence, they opted not to do that, because as Phonse would say – he was young at the time – once fishing stopped, the stock would rebuild. At 50 to 60 years of age, he figures he could go back fishing wild Atlantic salmon. Today, he still has his licence. Today we say that the wild Atlantic salmon stock has not rebounded. We stopped fishing it, but it has not rebounded.

I stated before in the House that we have 7.6 million harp seal out there. They are sometimes deemed to be the sea wolf. I think my hon. colleague from St. John's Centre had stated that when we look at the ecosystem, there are always checks and balances that would occur in the ecosystem to look after the species. He is correct. The only thing is that humans were part of that chain. If you remove the humans from part of the chain, sometimes we get a disproportionate representation of a species because the humans have been removed from the fishery; in particular, the seal fishery.

I would say to you that we have 7.6 million, and one would say that we have global warming occurring everywhere over the world, and we know the reasons that we have, but we know that the Norway fishery is serving them quite well – \$97 billion. What they have, it is serving them quite well. They are facing global warming, much the same as we would be, in the Barents Sea.

Iceland is another that has a very productive fishery. They face all the factors that we do with one significant difference – seals. The difference between us here in Newfoundland and Labrador and Iceland, Russia, the Barents Sea and Norway is our seal population that we have. That's a common thread.

Keep in mind, again, when we look at the system, we removed the humans from that flow chart. The hunt was removed. In 1970, we had 1.5 million harp seals – 1970. In 2019, according to DFO, 7.6 million, as was stated. That's a fairly significant growth.

I shared with you the article. One thing that DFO would say is that seals do not hunt up in freshwater bodies of water. That's one thing that Bob Hardy had referenced there. He took numerous pictures in his study. One that he had taken was the Codroy Valley. He used pictures by Larry Moore. He had seals lined up on the bank five kilometres inland up to the salmon river. They were lined up like in military position along the bank waiting for. I would say to you it's because we don't have the science. We just don't have the science.

If we take the Norwegian science or if we take the science that would come on the Icelandic, it's proven. As I stated before in the House, in 2012 the Senate Committee that looked at – that was off Nova Scotia they looked at the seal population, but it was a seal population. They brought in 50 experts and 50 experts all concurred that seal predation is affecting the rebounding of our stock.

What some would say is that if we do nothing – and we think that we harvest now 200,000 metric tons, and I'm not sure exactly what we harvest in cod – it's quite possible that may hit the extinction level, even if we stop fishing it. I would say that is a concern for the District of

Bonavista and for the plants that would be in Newfoundland and Labrador that if we don't act, then we have a serious issue that we may lose the valuable resource that we can have. The valuable renewable resource, we could lose it. If we don't have a plan, like the MP in Labrador, Yvonne Jones, has stated, if we don't have a plan we have nothing.

I would say to you from the two years being in the House, I've heard no plan, other than the minister stated that he was talking to the federal minister on the telephone and looked forward to the next conversation. What that conversation was about and where we're going, I have no idea. The only thing is that we are onboard with any action plan that would focus on the fisheries in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, because we want to make sure that we do everything we can for that renewable industry; not just to exist, but we want it to thrive. We want it to thrive.

In the short amount of time I've got left, I want to give, from a Norwegian study – we don't have it as DFO, but a Norwegian study stated that harp seals need about 20 pounds of fish food a day in order to function. Every seal would need around 20 pounds. But they're fully aware that when the seals feed, they don't feed on the whole cod. They're belly eaters. They look for the fatty acids that would be in the cod. Usually they go for the liver. That's why it's often and well known that you'll see that cod had the belly removed from it from the seal, because that's what they're looking for to give them the calories.

How many calories does a harp seal need daily? Between 11,500 to 13,600. How many calories does an adult male need? Two to three thousand. So if you look at those numbers and multiply and extrapolate to 7.6, and you think that we don't have an issue off our shores, and if the gentleman, Mr. Branton, that saw the five-mile herd – anyway, I'll leave it for another time, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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 Deputy Government House Leader, that we do now recess.

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

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Baie Verte - Green Bay, Torngat Mountains, Labrador West, Harbour Main and St. John's Centre.

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

B. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the completion of the new Green Bay Health Care Centre on May 10, 2021, and, yes, I am thrilled. The hospital serves the entire Green Bay area, including 21 communities. This is an exciting day as a 69-year-old facility is laid to rest. This transition is a symbol of moving forward, one of positivity and new paths to better health care for the entire Green Bay area.

The new facility is 50 per cent larger than the former hospital and includes the same number of in-patient beds with individual washrooms and showers. Upon entering, residents are screened as per COVID-19 regulations. Access includes regular appointments, walk-in for outpatients and emergency department services.

The former Springdale cottage hospital opened in November 1952; the last hospital built by the Government of Newfoundland. The name was changed to Green Bay Community Health

Centre in 1977 and was in operation until May of this year.

I ask all my hon. colleagues to join me in thanking all of our health care workers for their continued efforts to keep all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians safe during this pandemic. We appreciate all that you do each and every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I pay tribute to the Nunatsiavut Health team who delivered the COVID-19 vaccinations in Nunatsiavut. They graciously acknowledge their success hinged on the tremendous collaboration and support of Labrador-Grenfell, Air Borealis and the Nunatsiavut communities.

First in the province, painstakingly planned with logistics of transporting and storing the vaccine. Nurses required to administer in five remote, isolated communities. Priceless and selfless commitment given from the director and nurses, right on down to each volunteer. Makeshift clinics established in each community to accommodate the large number of residents. Teams flying each day to communities supported by local Nunatsiavut Health and Social Development staff. Each community requiring centers with nurses' stations, reception areas and post-vaccine waiting areas, all with COVID protocols in place. Transportation and scheduling for appointments all arranged in the dead of winter, with contingency plans for weather delays. Nunatsiavut communities pitching in and supporting the team.

Proud moments for the Nunatsiavut government. First vaccination to Makkovik's oldest resident, Willie Ford, delivered by Public Health nurse Betty Sampson, the granddaughter of the late Boas Jararuse – a proud moment for NG. Air Borealis first officer, Kayla Torarak flying the team and the vaccine into her home community of Hopedale – a proud moment for Nunatsiavut. Each community had local Inuit nurses

vaccinating their own people – a proud moment for Nunatsiavut.

Please join me in applauding this tremendous Nunatsiavut health team on their tremendous feat.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I recognize Tanea Hynes, originally from Labrador West, whose work is being exhibited at The Rooms through the 2020 artist in residency series, and has a newly published book titled *Workhorse*. The experience of mine extraction and the life it offers to families can be hard to convey, and I think that Tanea has done an exceptional job showcasing this unique culture by telling her story through art.

Workhorse showcases the sheer size of the mining operations as well as the community and generations of families mining supported. Her father's lunch can is on display in the exhibit and underscores the human touch mining requires. It's no surprise that Tanea, like many other mining families, saw the symbolism of this lunch can. The sound the metal lunch can makes, as it gets set down by a loved one coming off shift, tells their family they came home safe.

I ask that all hon. Members join me in thanking Tanea Hynes for allowing everyone in this province a chance to catch a glimpse into what life is like growing up in Labrador West through her work. It's truly something unique and special.

Thank you everybody.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

Community gardens have become a popular trend over the last three to four years. In the District of Harbour Main, many community gardens have been created, like in the towns of North River, Clarke's Beach, Cupids, Holyrood and Harbour Main-Chapels Cove- Lakeview, just to name a few.

I would like to recognize what is happening at Her Majesty's Penitentiary. A collaboration between Memorial University faculty, students and staff, with community partners and the inmates at HMP are now offering a gardening program to the inmates.

The Phoenix Garden, a name created by the inmates, reflects the idea of new beginnings, of building a fresh new life. As an extra incentive, the inmates who complete the curriculum will receive a certificate certifying their vocational training as gardeners. Aiding in their own rehabilitation and mental health wellness, this incentive supports the concept that gardening and nature-based therapies have the potential to transform lives.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing the many towns in the Harbour Main District and the innovative initiative that MUN and other community partners have taken on to create a safer and healthier community for everyone.

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.

For 35 years, the Froude Avenue Community Centre has worked to build a strong neighbourhood for residents of Froude, Vimy, Vickers, Cashin and Campbell Avenues, plus St. Therasas Court, Pond View Court, Mundy Pond and surrounding areas.

The dedicated staff have helped improve the lives of residents through diverse programs, starting with the children. After-school programs offer homework assistance, one-on-one tutoring, a youth to achieve program, recreational activities, STEM activities, girls and boys

groups, computer experience and cooking and baking, but it's the centre's scholarship program that is most impressive.

Since 2006, in partnership with the Fry Family Foundation, 51 young people from the centre were awarded scholarships at different values: \$1,500, \$2,500 and \$5,000 for over \$110,000 in post-secondary scholarships. Most recently, Alison Yetman, a previous scholarship winner, just graduated with a bachelor of science with a major in biology and a minor in psychology. Alison has been accepted to Memorial University's medical program and will receive support again from the foundation to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor. All scholarship winners are eligible to apply for the Community Centre Alliance opportunity fund for support of their continuing education.

Please join me in recognizing the Froude Avenue Community Centre, the Fry Family Foundation and the achievements of the young people who pursue their dreams.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to recognize June as Seniors Month in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Seniors are vital to the health of our communities and across our province. They inspire us with their resilience and tenacity, and they enrich our lives with their wisdom and insight.

From the vocal community leader who advocates for others, to the quiet, unassuming elder who gives of their time and talents within their community, older adults are a force for change in our province.

Today, I am pleased to announce that we are accepting nominations for the annual Seniors of Distinction Awards.

There are many outstanding seniors in our province, and I encourage everyone to consider nominating someone who deserves to be recognized for their contribution to their community.

It's easy to nominate a senior – the guidelines and nomination form are available on the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development website, or you can call us and we will send you a printed copy.

During Seniors Month we also recognize the many community partners who assist us in providing vital supports to seniors throughout our province. And we extend our sincere appreciation to our province's first Seniors' Advocate, Dr. Suzanne Brake, who retired on June 1.

Mr. Speaker, through *Budget 2021*, our government remains committed to creating a province where older adults can be healthy, active and engaged citizens who live in their own homes and are active in their own age-friendly communities.

I invite everyone to join me in celebrating our province's seniors and to nominate a senior of distinction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

I join with the minister in recognizing our seniors in June as Seniors Month. We recognized June 2020 during the pandemic, and in 2021 the pandemic continues. Our seniors residing in personal care homes, nursing homes and living in their own residences have shown so much resilience over the past year while

waiting to see loved ones. Many have not seen family members since early 2020.

Each and every community in our province can identify organizations, community groups, church groups – and the list goes on – which provide support to our seniors. Our shut-ins and our seniors' homes appreciate the visits from community groups. A big thank you to musicians and others entertaining residents on a weekly basis.

Let's everyone nominate a senior to receive a Seniors of Distinction Award, it identifies the spirit of thanks throughout the communities. Reach out to a senior living alone, a senior in a nursing home, a senior in a personal care home and seniors in your community and let them know we all care.

Thank you.

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 copy of his statement and join him in recognizing June as Seniors Month and recognizing the contribution of seniors to our province.

I'd also like to join with the minister in extending our appreciation to Dr. Suzanne Brake for her contribution as Seniors' Advocate and to wish her a happy retirement. Unfortunately, though, many of our seniors do not get to enjoy a stable or secure retirement, although they have contributed so much to our society, they often receive little in return.

In spite of our troubled economic times, we owe it to them to make sure that they can spend their golden years in dignity. For that reason, I call today on government to pledge that any remedies we seek to address our fiscal situation don't come at the expense of our seniors of this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A child's eye health is vital to ensure a positive start to their journey of learning. A new program that supports children as they prepare to start school, the Eye See Eye Learn Program, is designed to allow children to overcome potential barriers to eye exams. It contributes to a more positive learning experience, as well as an overall improvement to their quality of life. We encourage all parents to avail of this program and get your children's eyes checked by one of this province's optometrists.

With a commitment of \$250,000, the program will provide a free, comprehensive eye examination for every kindergarten-aged child resident in the province. It will also provide one pair of free prescription eyeglasses to children who require them. The program is open so that any child who needs a pair of glasses, gets a pair of glasses.

There are approximately 65 optometrists in the province, located in all four health authority regions. In areas of Newfoundland and Labrador where there is no direct access to an optometrist, the program will run in tandem with the Public Health Preschool Health Check eye screening.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Optometrists, which will be administering the program and the Essilor Foundation, who will be contributing the glasses for this important program. This joint solution will provide the best eye care for the children of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

I join with the minister in thanking the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Optometrists and the Essilor Foundation for their joint collaboration on the Eye See Eye Learn Program.

As children prepare to start school, it is critical that they have the supports that they need. A commitment of \$250,000 to ensure every kindergarten-aged child in our province will have a free, comprehensive eye examination is indeed welcome news.

In addition to an eye examination, it is also welcome news that any child who needs a pair of glasses will receive them. Collaboration and an open dialogue with all stakeholders is how we collectively make a difference right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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 thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I certainly agree with him very much in his assessment about the importance of children's eyesight health and their success at school.

We applaud the participation of the Essilor Foundation and the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Optometrists in this endeavour. Quality of eyesight is an important, though often overlooked determinant, not only of education but of quality of life, as the minister pointed out.

For that reason, I call on the government to work with our federal partners to explore ways of expanding this program and making access eye care truly universal in this process. Eye care, after all, is health care and for that reason it should be considered a basic component of our public system in addition to dental care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, mining, mineral exploration and quarrying are so important to the future of this province. Over \$4 billion in mineral shipments, \$82.6 million in exploration expenditures and employment of about 7,700 person-years are projected for 2021.

I am pleased to announce that yesterday, just over five months into the year, Newfoundland and Labrador has exceeded the total number of exploration approvals issued in all of last year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, this is a significant indication that the mining world has caught on to the mineral potential that exists here in our province. To date, there have been 400 exploration approvals and we have seven months to go. The increased demand for exploration approvals is on the heels of claim-staking activity that hasn't been seen in over 15 years. Over 60,000 claims have been staked so far in 2021, with nearly 32,000 claims staked last month alone.

As part of this increased exploration activity in the province, numerous new exploration companies have begun investing here this year – with many companies having optioned properties from local prospectors.

Mr. Speaker, our government is creating favourable conditions for mineral development within Newfoundland and Labrador. At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, we waived certain expenditure requirements under the *Mineral Act* and deferred selected fees and payments. These measures provided financial relief of over \$30 million, easing recovery for industries economically impacted by the pandemic. But our mineral exploration industry worked through the necessary health and safety constraints and they have gained momentum.

The Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada states that every dollar in government spending in public geoscience results in \$5 in private sector exploration. Recognizing this

importance and its role in helping attract new exploration investment in this province, this year we are investing an additional \$2.5 million for focused geoscience data collection and interpretation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: We are also investing \$1.7 million for the mineral exploration industry through the Prospector Assistance Program and the Junior Exploration Assistance Program.

Mr. Speaker, the burst of mining activity in this province brings with it increased administrative efforts. From processing applications, to managing and issuing licences, to handing confidential agreements; staff at the mining division need to be commended for their hard work and commitment to this additional workload being handled without any additional resources. I would like to thank Andrea Devereaux, Matt Snow, Kevin Sheppard, Stephen Hinchey, Justin Lake, Robyn Constantine and Alex Smith.

Mr. Speaker, we have seven months left to go and I look forward to many more positive developments during that time here in our thriving mining industry.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

I'm very glad to see the number of exploration approvals in the mining sector has already exceeded the total number of approvals from last year. This is a great signal, and hopefully foreshadows increased mining development and mineral exploration, which in turn will bring much-needed jobs to our province.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize the officials in the mining division for their hard work in promoting our province and our mineral deposits to many global companies. These

officials are to be acknowledged for their contribution to our province.

However, Mr. Speaker, while the minister spoke about exploration in the mining sector, he did not take the opportunity to acknowledge exploration in our offshore oil and gas industry. We need more exploration offshore. We need to do more to stimulate and encourage exploration offshore. We should be here today commenting on the high level of exploration in both mining and oil and gas.

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. As the minister can attest, no one is happier to hear positive news in the mining industry than I am. My constituents, and many others in this province, have built their lives around the mining industry.

I want to thank the staff at the department's mining division for their continued hard work, and various mining entities that have decided to invest in our province.

When the time comes to consider the process of extracting and processing these resources, I urge the government to do everything in its power to ensure that the people of this province reap the most benefit from our resources, including employment opportunities in the mining industry.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In her speech, the Minister of Finance noted that this year's budget has \$600 million for infrastructure. What was missing from her speech was a commitment that it will be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who get the jobs associated with this spending.

When will the Premier do the right thing and implement a community benefits policy ensuring that our workers are put to work on our projects?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course, it's an amazing amount of money to be spending in the province right now under these troubled times and we'll work to ensure that the benefits go to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Without a community or local benefits policy there is no certainty that local workers will be hired for public infrastructure or resource-based projects.

I ask the Premier: Why do you continue to delay implementing such a directive that would help the workers of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As the Member opposite knows, we are always looking to improve ways to make sure that the benefits of taxpayers' money go to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, including

throughout all the industries within the province, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to advancing that and we will certainly continue to work on that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is well aware that time is of the essence. Union and non-union workers need this work and need it immediately to stimulate our economy.

Local media is reporting that ExxonMobil may not be interested in moving ahead with the asset life extension on the Terra Nova FPSO.

I ask the Premier: When was the last time he spoke to the executives of ExxonMobil to make the case for the project?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As the Member opposite knows, he was with us when we toured the Hibernia platform, I spoke to Exxon officials during that time. We have had open conversations, as the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology has said, many times with Suncor as the chief operator to advance this project.

We have a healthy deal on the table. We're not going to negotiate in public but we are committed to the Terra Nova, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I remind the Premier that time is of the essence, particularly with this project.

ExxonMobil owns 19 per cent of the Terra Nova. We know government had asked to buy 15 per cent of Terra Nova.

If ExxonMobil is hesitant about the life extension project, I ask the Premier: Has he offered to buy their share of Terra Nova?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question.

As we have said all along here, this is an extremely complex and intricate negotiation, one that has been ongoing now for some time, certainly everyday since I have been in this role. We are dealing with multiple partners in the ownership group – seven, in fact. I think we have been doing everything that we can within our power.

I realize the public needs, especially the workers need for information, but I don't want to do anything that will jeopardize the negotiations. As the Premier said, I think we have put a very generous offer there made of numerous components and we look forward to, hopefully, getting a positive resolution. But, again, at the end of the day, I will be satisfied that the province has certainly done our part.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, the people of the province are also waiting and hoping as well.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we asked the Justice Minister about the cancelled 2021 recruitment process for the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary but got only piecemeal answers.

I'll ask the minister again today: Was it government's decision or the police force's decision to halt the 2021 cadet-training course for the RNC?

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

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

As with any decision of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, operational decisions of those police constituencies are made by them and them alone. The government doesn't interfere with operational decisions of police officers in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, we're not asking for interference; we're asking for information.

We remain concerned, Mr. Speaker, about what has unfolded at the police force under the government's watch. There is evidence of dissatisfaction amongst the rank-and-file members and we are seeing an exodus of leadership within the RNC, yet the minister seems satisfied with how things are going.

I ask the question, again, Minister: What concerns do you have about leadership at the RNC and what will you do to improve the situation?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question.

As I said yesterday, I have the utmost faith in all of the officers who put their lives on the line every day to protect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: As I'm sure everyone in this House can appreciate, it's a very difficult job and especially over the last year and a half with

COVID it hasn't stopped them, at all, from going out every day to serve everyone here in this province. I have faith in all of the officers down there and I want to thank them for their service to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: We, too, have the utmost faith in the officers at the RNC, but he still doesn't answer the question.

Mr. Speaker, just today we saw the chief of police directly engaging in political conversation online, targeting myself, and the PC caucus, specifically. This amounts to partisan behaviour by the chief of police, which is inappropriate.

I ask the Minister of Justice: Do you believe this is proper behaviour from a police chief?

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

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

I don't, and I haven't talked to the chief of police about Twitter. My office is focusing on important things that are going on with the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and other things in the Department of Justice and Public Safety.

I will say, my understanding of the tweet was that the chief wanted to clarify what he felt was misinformation provided by the Member opposite in the House of Assembly yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, these are very important and honest questions that need to be asked in the public interest and ought to be answered.

Mr. Speaker, according to First Voice, an Indigenous-led group here in St. John's, there are 67 police forces with direct civilian-led oversight in the country. No such civilian-led oversight body exists here in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Public Complaints Commission and SIRT are reactive to incidents; a civilian-led oversight body is proactive.

I ask the minister: Will he listen to the Indigenous voices and enact a civilian-led oversight body for the RNC?

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

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

I want to ensure everyone that this government and the Department of Justice and Public Safety are committed to accountability in dealing with serious incidents that involve our police agencies.

There are civilian-led complaints processes right now for the RNC, for the RCMP and, recently, there's the Serious Incident Response Team that deals with serious incidents involving police such as serious bodily harm and death.

I have been in touch with members of First Voice. My understanding is that they have a working group that is going to prepare a discussion paper. The important words there are that they are going to prepare it; it hasn't been prepared yet. I'm happy to meet with them if they want to discuss the discussion paper, when it is ready, to discuss how we can increase accountability and ensure that those incidents that the public is concerned about are looked after.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, the Final Report of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inquiry found that a lack of civilian-led police oversight

bodies in Canada is a major contributor to the systemic harm faced by Indigenous women and girls throughout the country and here at home.

I ask the minister: Why are you ignoring the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inquiry report by not enacting immediately a civilian-led police oversight board for the RNC?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for the question.

It is just the two-year anniversary very recently of the report on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. I believe the federal government only just recently announced its action plan. It is something that my department and other departments of this government have taken under advisement and look forward to working with our federal counterparts to deliver as many responses to the calls for justice as we can.

With regard to the question on the civilian oversight body, I just answered that question. I'm looking forward, when the discussion paper is presented by First Voice, to working with them to see how we can ensure that accountability is dealt with as best as possible by this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Surely, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice should be able to comment himself on his position with respect to civilian-led police oversight.

This is about strengthening the police force. We in the Opposition want to do exactly that. The people watching at home want a stronger police force. Civilian oversight is about being accountable to the public, which means more transparency, overall better police force for everyone in our province.

Minister, I ask you again: Could you please give us some information or direction or guidance on your position as to the importance of a civilian-led oversight board and body?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I thank the Member opposite for the question again. I'll say it again that this government and my department is committed to accountability in dealing with serious incidents involving our police agencies.

I will say I don't want to do this myself. I want to work with people. I think everyone in our government wants to work with people, and the people in this issue are First Voice. It's not for me to dictate how this is going to be done; it's for my department to work with First Voice when the discussion paper is ready, and that's what I'm going to do.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hopefully that gets done.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has indicated a full review – sorry.

I've been advised of at least three incidents where individuals on the Southern Shore had to wait over 90 minutes for an ambulance to arrive.

I ask the minister: When is he going to take action to address the availability of ambulances in the area?

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

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

The issue of ambulance availability is one that we try and keep a close eye on. We are not aware of any incidents recently that have fallen outside acceptable response times. We are aware of some incidents on the Southern Shore which were discussed in detail during the winter with the operators, who have taken remedial action.

If the Member opposite has some specific instances, I would be happy to look into them, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will certainly forward an email that I got the week from a constituent of an incident that happened the weekend and a couple of incidents that happened. I'll certainly forward them. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, people in my district and across this province want answers, not rhetoric. When emergency situations arise, timely responses are critical.

Will the minister commit to improving the ambulance response times?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

To develop my previous answer further, our ground ambulance and our air ambulance programs are both under review. We have brought provincial medical oversight into the Department of Health and Community Services to enable that to happen more easily. We're moving towards an electronic centralized dispatch system which will allow for accurate measurement of times.

Once again, we are not aware of any consistent or serious delays beyond response times that we would expect from the private providers. I

encourage the Member to send me his information on those specific cases and we'll look into it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education indicated –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: It's coming, at last.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. PETTEN: No, that's right.

He indicated a full review of the MUN act will be done and a new act will be brought before this House. We welcome this work; however, Mr. Speaker, I'm troubled at the executive compensation at MUN.

For example, I ask the minister: Why are students and taxpayers footing a \$517 bill for the president to get her taxes done?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Ferryland for the advance notice of the question.

Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers of the province are demanding greater accountability, and that's a part of the reason we're looking at a review of the *Memorial University Act*. It's part of the reason we've taken some of the actions that we've taken in this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, the issue raised by the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise, I'll certainly look into it. I ask him for any information that he has regarding this, and I'll certainly undertake a review.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've known each other for 25 years and he still can't figure out I'm from Conception Bay South. All of a sudden I have a new district. The Member for Topsail - Paradise, we share CBS, yes.

Mr. Speaker, if you're free with pennies, imagine how the dollars are being managed. Again, \$517 bill for income tax preparation, on top of a \$450,000 salary, a \$12,000 car allowance, \$18,000 housing allowance, \$4,000 for fitness equipment and a personal trainer.

I ask the minister: Will the new MUN act allow unfettered access for the Auditor General to examine the books at the university?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was trying to decide if it was the Member for Ferryland, the Member for Topsail - Paradise or the Member for Conception Bay South, but I finally got it right.

Mr. Speaker, these are important questions. The answer is absolutely. Part of greater autonomy for Memorial University is tied to greater accountability. The Auditor General will have unfettered access to Memorial University. In fact, the Premier has indicated, as well, that we'll be looking at the Estimates format for places like Memorial University and others.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My final question on that is will the minister commit that the AG conduct a full review of expenditures at MUN before a tuition hike is implemented?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I certainly have no issue with the AG looking into Memorial. Right now there are certain constraints. The *Memorial University Act* will resolve those constraints.

I understand, from Memorial University, they are reviewing the tuition issue. Whether or not that is done prior to November, when we're able to make changes to the *Memorial University Act*, I can't comment. That's entirely up to Memorial University to look at their tuition issue.

We are looking at as early as November to make changes to the *Memorial University Act* and give greater, unfettered access to the Auditor General.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Here we go again. Oh my.

I encourage the minister, though, in the meantime – waiting until November is fine, but it would be nice to get the pressure put on that now because I think it's alarming when we see those figures. Back in April, our party spoke about the lack of adequate helicopter service at the St. John's Regional Fire Department, contracted by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. Both the fire department and RNC say lives are at risk.

In Estimates, the minister's department blamed Transport Canada for delays. Mr. Speaker, this is too important of an issue for inaction.

I'm asking the minister: Will he personally get involved and find a solution?

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

E. LOVELESS: The answer to that is, yes, I will be involved. Any time that we can enhance the service for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians from a helicopter-service perspective, I absolutely will.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to sit idly by, and soon our historic landmarks, like the East Coast Trail, will have thousands of tourists hiking remote locations.

Without a properly equipped helicopter service, how does the minister expect the St. John's Regional Fire Department to respond to an emergency? Getting involved is one problem, but this problem is outstanding and action needs to be happening now. Obviously, it's still not happening. I appreciate where he's coming from, but we need something more concrete.

Thank you.

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

E. LOVELESS: I'm going to plead to the Member if he would repeat his question. Sorry, I apologize for that.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, that's two days in a row.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: It eats the clock.

Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to sit idly by, and soon our historic landmarks, like the East Coast Trail, will have thousands of tourists hiking remote locations.

Without a properly equipped helicopter service, how does the minister expect the St. John's Regional Fire Department to respond to an

emergency? This needs to happen sooner rather than later.

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

E. LOVELESS: I agree. It is a good question/statement by the Member, whatever we want to classify it as. It's a very important one and a discussion that I'm having and will continue to have to improve that service for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the real Member for Topsail - Paradise I want to note to the minister, nursing shortages have resulted in dozens of residents having to be moved and others unable to access long-term care services in St. John's. According to the Nurses' Union, the dire shortage in nurses has been building for years and has extended beyond the borders of Eastern Health, existing everywhere in health care in the province.

What is government doing to address this province-wide nursing shortage?

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

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

This is an important topic; one that I have discussed during the campaign and subsequently with Ms. Coffey, the president of the RNU. We're aware of their issues. We have a variety of mechanisms in place looking at the way they work, how they are spending their time and whether they are doing that appropriately and need some support, in terms of clerical, to free them up for nursing tasks, for example.

We have put in place – at their request and with our funding – workforce management software, which will allow staffing to acuity, to reflect the needs of the patients they have to look after and allow nursing to be more deployed

appropriately. We have the Health Accord membership and Ms. Coffey has presented on several occasions to Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to hear the minister is aware and they're working on a staffing app, but if there's nobody there to answer it, you have to deal with the shortage. Construction of two new 60-bed and one 20-bed long-term care facilities in Central Newfoundland are scheduled to be completed in 2021.

I ask the minister: How can we expect to open these facilities when we are unable to staff our current facilities?

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

J. HAGGIE: To continue, Mr. Speaker, we have a core staffing review organized with the RNU. That was delayed at their request to change its terms of reference slightly, and then was further delayed by COVID.

We have worked with them and continue to work with them around recruitment. Paradoxically, we're finding it's actually not difficult to recruit for the new facilities in Central or on the West Coast. The challenge is around existing staffing issues, which are as much around the way that nurses have been deployed and the right nursing skill mix, as it is around the numbers of nurses.

We continue to engage with them. We have at least four high-level committees between the RNU, the department and various health authorities. We are working towards –

SPEAKER: Time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In October 2020, gas on this Island was increased by five cents a litre, as per a request from North Atlantic Refining. They argued it was because of the increased cost to import fuel because the refinery was idle.

Has the minister asked the PUB to investigate the additional five cents per litre and is it still needed?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am certainly aware of that issue and I am aware of the PUB's mandate. This was a decision that, I would point out, was made by the independent Public Utilities Board upon request from North Atlantic Refining. It still remains in place. We are aware of it.

We are not supposed to make formal requests to the PUB, similar to the general power rate application that we discussed yesterday. They are an independent board. What I will say, though, it is top of mind. More importantly, right now, we are keeping an eye on the bigger issue regarding the refinery and trying to find a way forward and a future for that asset.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: It falls on deaf ears, Mr. Speaker. We already pay the highest rates of fuel in Eastern Canada and we need to find a way to get a grip on it.

Has the minister asked for any analysis to see exactly how much per litre it costs to import this gasoline and how this compares to the five cents which consumers are being charged?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would point out again how this board works: they are independent; they handle these matters to avoid political situations. I would point out – and, sorry, it's not falling on deaf ears, it's just that you can't go in and intervene and do what you want any way that you want.

To get the increase or to get the decrease there has to be analysis presented, but it is presented by the company that's seeking it. The Public Utilities Board would have used their experts and their people to review that and find that it was necessary. I may not like it, I may not think it's a great thing, but the reality is that we have to deal with it when we have a refinery that is not operating.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I will remind the minister that the province is putting a tax on top of this five cents, so it is partially our problem. North Atlantic is not the only importer of fuel on the Island, but they appear to be the only company who asked for this increase.

I ask the minister again: How much longer will this extra five cents per litre be charged to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've pointed out repeatedly, that would be up to the Public Utilities Board. The Member knows quite well that it's not up to government. I'm unsure if he has ever contacted the Public Utilities Board to discuss these matters with the Public Utilities Board.

I would again point out right now we're working on one big thing, which is the future of that

refinery. We have entered into an MOU with the company; we're doing our best. As it relates to gas prices, I don't like them, but the reality is that we do not directly control them. There are certainly a lot of outside factors influencing it, including OPEC and things like that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Monday, when I asked the minister about the removal of the water bomber from Labrador West, he mentioned it was mobile. Well, the water bomber crew house was demolished at Wabush Airport.

Can the minister confirm that the water bomber service has been removed from the Labrador West region?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question.

As the Member would know, the duty of making sure that these planes actually are ready and available to fly, gassed up and ready to go, falls under the Department of TI, but where they are positioned and where they're requested to be positioned falls under this department.

Currently, right now, we have positioned these water bombers, or water tankers, in a position that suits us for the best response. We have four: Three are in Gander; one is in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Should we want all four in Labrador in short notice, we will be there. Should we need more assistance, we will request our neighbouring provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Quebec to give us assistance. We have a mutual agreement.

I assure the people, if there's a fire it will be there, but practise safety in the forest, please.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are nearing the end of construction on Muskrat Falls, that albatross around our neck.

I ask the minister: What progress has been made on the recommendations from the Muskrat Falls report?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: The irony, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, literally yesterday in this House, the Member next to the Member that just asked that question said we should stop talking about Muskrat Falls. I'm getting mixed messages. They literally said don't talk about Muskrat Falls; we can't talk about Muskrat Falls, and today they talk about Muskrat Falls. Again, I'm getting a little confused.

The reality is that we do have an implementation –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: Again, I hear somebody from the Opposition talking there. You guys also said don't talk about it, so I'm trying to give you an answer.

Mr. Speaker, we're trying our best to move through and implement –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

A. PARSONS: Again, they –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I can't get an answer out about the recommendations of the report that was caused by the Members of the Opposition.

The reality is we continue to work on that and we will have more to report very soon.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, the Muskrat Falls report was also sent to law enforcement.

I ask the Minister of Justice: Is that still being investigated or has it been dropped?

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

A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I can point out and I know my colleague, the Minister of Justice, wanted to point out that obviously we do not interfere in operational matters or investigatory matters.

What I can say is that it was put forward to the RCMP for review. I think it was the RCMP –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: The RNC. That's ongoing, obviously.

Again, our biggest concern is dealing with, as the Member said, the albatross around our neck. Again, I apologize for talking about it because yesterday they told me not to talk about it, but I'll continue to talk about it as long as they continue asking me questions about the thing that they do not want to talk about.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

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

Two years ago, Route 520, the highway between Sheshatshiu, North West River and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, was added as an important

priority for the Provincial Roads Plan. Being objectively identified on this list means that the highway's condition requires immediate attention.

Can the minister provide an update on when the tender will be called this year to address the deplorable state of 520?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question because it's an important one, I know, to the Member because we've had a side conversation about it. He also asked about it in Estimates.

My answer has not changed. This route, along with many, many more routes in this province, is being discussed and looked at. It's a priority for me to certainly look at 520 as well, but it's very important to note that I must live within my means and I intend to do that, in terms of a budgetary perspective.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I would urge the minister to expedite the process as soon as possible. We have contractors there working now on federal and municipal contracts.

I next want to ask, Mr. Speaker, Happy Valley-Goose Bay is struggling, and frankly now overwhelmed with increasing numbers of individuals dealing with addictions and other mental health issues who are moving about the community without shelter, camping in the wooded areas of town. Their lives are at risk, as are the residents in the community, who are frustrated and afraid. There have been many moves to provide support; however, the challenges remain.

Can government please provide an update from the Senior Officials Working Group that is searching for solutions?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

I will remind him that the Senior Officials Working Group is no longer in place. It was determined a number of months ago by members that that table was ineffective. What we've actually put in place is a community-based action team. A number of additional supports, Mr. Speaker, are in place just over the last year.

When we're talking about supporting individuals that are homeless or transiently homeless, it's very complex. There are no quick solutions. The hub there has moved to 24 hours. That didn't used to be. We now actually have three different outreach workers that are in the area. We have the mobile crisis unit that has been set up, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to continue to have a presence with the vulnerable population. Those solutions don't rest with one organization. The community has to be engaged. Just last week, I say to the hon. Member, my officials did give the community an update. We'll continue to work collectively with several layers of people to support where we can, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the motion of referral of May 31, 2021, I hereby table the report of the Social Services Committee.

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

I recommend to the House that this report be concurred in.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Any further presenting of reports?

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In accordance with section 5.2 of the *Energy Corporation Act*, I hereby table Nalcor Energy's annual report.

SPEAKER: Any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice under Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, June 14, 2021.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice under Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 15, 2021.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm presenting a petition to this House. The reason for the petition: The need for senior accessible housing and home care services in Labrador West is steadily increasing. Lifelong residents of the region are facing the possibility of needing to leave their home in order to live and receive adequate care. Additional housing options, including assisted-living care facilities, like those found throughout the rest of the province, for seniors have become a requirement for Labrador West. That requirement is not currently being met.

WHEREAS the seniors of our province are entitled to peace and comfort in their homes where they have spent their lifetime contributing to its prosperity and growth; and

WHEREAS the means for the increasing number of senior residents of Labrador West to happily age in place are not currently available in the region;

WHEREUPON we, the undersigned, your petitioners, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to allow seniors in Labrador West to age in place by providing affordable housing options for seniors and assisted-living care facilities for those requiring care.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I present a petition to the House from the residents of Labrador West. This one has 272 signatures of residents who are looking for seniors' care and affordable seniors' housing. Once again, I would like to remind the

House that we have a seniors' issue in Labrador West where we have an increasing number of seniors, they don't want to leave the area; this is their home and many of them were actually born and raised there or came there as young children. So as the community continues to age, we continue to see that they need more assistance and it's not being met.

Like I said before, we do have a small long-term care wing of the hospital, but this is a different type of care. These are people that probably require smaller residences that they can afford to maintain, or home care and the like, or a small facility that people in level 2 or 3 care require.

These seniors don't want to leave, their kids are there and their grandkids are there. They want to watch their kids and grandkids enjoy the community that they helped build. Anywhere else in the province you go, they have some of the services that these people are looking for: affordable seniors' housing, care facilities and adequate access to home care. We just want the same for our region. Helping these seniors out is a good way that we continue to see the building upon of what we have.

I ask the House to take it into serious consideration and for government to take it into serious consideration of looking at the seniors of Labrador West and helping them to determine the needs that they require to continue to move forward.

Once again, these people just want to see their kids grow up, they just want to be there with their grandkids and, for some of them, great-grandkids now. They just want to enjoy their retirement, their quiet days in the place that they actually helped build. A lot of these seniors were there from day one, they watched every house go up, every business and every person come and go – they've seen it all.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

SPEAKER: We don't have time for another petition.

Orders of the DayPrivate Members' Day

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I call on the Member for Topsail - Paradise to introduce his resolution.

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To read into the record:

Be it resolved that the House urge the government to implement an approach to collaborate with stakeholders so as to directly deal with improving access and removing barriers to mental health and addictions services in response to the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I feel so privileged today –

SPEAKER: We need a seconder to that motion.

P. DINN: Seconded by the Member for CBS.

SPEAKER: CBS, okay.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I feel so privileged today to speak to this PMR. I do want to start by saying this is absolutely no reflection on the fine work of our health care providers and those who are front-line people who deal with the calls, who deal with the individuals, who come in and are dealing with mental health issues. I think they are doing an outstanding job within the programs and services that they currently have available; however, this goes a little deeper than that.

As we know, there are so many who suffer in silence. We, collectively, in this hon. House, need to be their voice and need to find solutions.

COVID has had many impacts on mental health. I just reiterate that this is not about government not doing anything. It's not about the current mental health programs. This is about the strain that COVID-19 and how it's highlighted other concerns, especially the need for long-term solutions.

As a country, we continue to struggle with the impacts of COVID-19. Concerns are growing about the so-called echo pandemic of mental health issues. Public health measures to control the spread of the virus have led to increased concerns about depression, isolation and anxiety.

According to the Consumers' Health Awareness Network of Newfoundland and Labrador, 68 per cent of those with mental health issues will not seek help because of the stigma they feel. That's a huge, huge number when you consider those that have identified themselves as needing mental health supports – 68 per cent do not come forward.

Mental health and mental illness is a growing problem in Newfoundland and Labrador, where youth are hospitalized for mental health reasons. That's at a higher rate than the national average, according to the new data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. In fact, we've been told that children as young as three years of age are experiencing mental health issues.

Just to run down some examples – and the list is long – in how people have been affected, on a daily basis, and it is more so by COVID-19.

We know for a very good reason, Public Health has done a fabulous job here in this province in discouraging people from socializing where physical distancing is not possible, especially when the pandemic was at its worst. We needed to do that; nobody is questioning that – nobody. But not being able to socialize normally has its mental health implications and impacts people.

COVID-19 has isolated people from one another, leading to loneliness and removing social supports for people who were coping when they had the support networks. I think about the seniors' clubs in our communities, how much it meant to them to get out on a weekly basis for a game of cards or to have a dart game and to no longer be able to do that; huge, huge impact.

Seniors in care have been especially isolated from loved ones because they are confined and immobile. This has been very hard on them and their loved ones. I know the many calls I received during the earlier parts of COVID when they could not get into a home to visit their

loved ones, again, understandably for the measures that had to be taken at that time.

I think of all the calls we've gotten on weddings, funerals, people who are sick, people who wondered if they were going to get the surgery they needed: all that is a huge mental strain on people. People have been discouraged from travelling during holidays, taking vacations and family members have been separated by distance.

Rotational workers – and I would suspect many people in this House have heard from rotational workers – who have been isolated from their families a number of times, and, of course, they have been taking the blame. People in the public blame them at times for any outbreak of COVID, but these are individuals who work away, do not see their family, come home expecting to see their family and cannot. Again, not questioning why, it's just an issue; it's an example of how COVID has added to the mental health strain that people experience on a daily basis.

People wanting or needing to travel to see loved ones have been denied permission, or had to jump through hoops to do so, or have been shamed for doing so. How many times on the radio do we hear people pointing out that's an out-of-province licence plate and the like?

Our education systems: Students have been out of school with their peers for long periods of time, which is exceptionally hard on students who are in the final year and do not get an opportunity at a normal graduation or a normal farewell. These kids look forward to that, look forward to moving on to post-secondary and they don't have the send-off that they had expected. We have to adjust, but that does create greater mental health issues not just for the students, but for the parents as well as the teachers.

Recreational venues and other places for socializing: These activities would allow you to be distracted and forget about COVID, but, of course, those events are closed. You're unable to have that game of soccer. You're unable to play rugby. You're unable to go out for a drink. I understand those are starting to ease now, but

it's the longer lasting mental health issues due to the strain of COVID that are continuing.

Think about your parents. Think about your grandparents. Think about those – my mother included – that never miss an opportunity to go to church. Churches have been closed. They've had their activities limited leaving people without the spiritual and community support they need on a regular basis, let alone during tough times. This is a mental strain on people.

People have lost their jobs. People have lost their homes, their income, their support networks at work and many are stressed out trying to make ends meet. This is unprecedented times, no doubt. As I said up front, there are programs that are in place. This is not a criticism of the current programming that's available. This is by no means any indication that our members of the health community who help these individuals are not doing their job, because I'm quite sure they are as professional as they can be and as competent as they can be. I suspect they're overwhelmed with some of the issues they're dealing with on a daily basis.

You even looked at people employed in certain sectors that have been impacted more than others, especially people, for example, in tourism and entertainment communities. They rely on social gatherings to make a living, to have fun. Of course, they were curtailed. That's stressful. If you're out on a weekly basis entertaining at a local bar or pub and you're no longer doing that, that's an effect on you as well as an effect on the individuals who would normally go out and view you, see it.

Choices for Youth surveyed 486 people between the ages of 16 and 29 across the province for their COVID experiences. They found that 61 per cent of them were unemployed with almost three-quarters saying it was due to the pandemic. I was asked a question earlier today: Are there any Canada student programs available? I'm not sure because I'm not sure how many are employing people. I'm not sure how the CERB program has affected the hiring of people. For many people, a job is not all about the dollar; it's also about the socialization aspect of it. So that's missing.

The report by Choices for Youth also went on. It notes that 77 per cent of its respondents feel that the pandemic will affect their earnings in the next six months and is shaping their future life choices. Think about parents who are worried about their kids who are graduating, those coming out of post-secondary, those coming out of Grade 12, wondering. Again, I'm sure the teachers and that have done a yeoman's job on getting people educated, but parents will worry: Will that affect my child's ability to proceed to get a higher education and potentially a job?

Those worries of uncertainty have been on a lot of young people's minds. Sixty-seven per cent of them said their mental health has taken a hit during the pandemic. Again, you think back to what I said earlier. There's a percentage out there that are identified. Now 67 per cent are saying the pandemic has – and that's the youth. We're not talking seniors; we're not talking adults at this point. Youth have been affected. Their mental health has been affected by the pandemic.

Debt loads have risen, stressing people about their finances. Business owners have been pushed to the brink and are worried about losing everything because the bridge to normal times is too long to cross. We all know the simple wearing of a mask and physical distancing have made life colder for many. I'm in this House today and I don't know if anyone is smiling at what I said or if anyone is frowning at what I said. That's a part of your everyday life: looking at individuals, reading their face and finding out. We could have a great poker game here today because no one sees. That's a stressful thing on people.

Normally, walking in a mall or somewhere and being able to smile at someone or say hi – that's a stressful thing on people. We see the child care program that has been offered and we applaud that, but many parents in isolation, working at home with kids at home, that puts a tremendous strain on parents – a tremendous strain. Some people have been virtually prisoners in their own homes because of loss of supports.

I have only a few seconds before other speakers speak to this, but I'm quite proud to bring this forward and proud of my colleagues here with this PMR. I think it's overdue. COVID has

perhaps pushed this along and brought it to the forefront more than probably before, and I will talk to this more when I finish this later today. I think we really need to be the voice for those who are struggling in silence, are crying out in silence and wanting us to offer more supports, more long-term supports to help them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

It's certainly my pleasure to contribute to this debate in the hon. House today. It's the first time that a Liberal has taken and spoken from this side of the House since 1949 representing the District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. I'm truly honoured to be that representative in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: Just a little bit of history, if I may, for one second. The first Liberal to represent St. John's East in this House was in 1832 and that was Mr. John Kent. For those who are again interested in a bit of history, his portrait hangs just behind the Speaker's Chair because he was Speaker in the 1852-53 period and later went on to be prime minister of the colony/dominion later that decade.

Let me turn my attention to the resolution at hand. It is certainly very timely and appropriate for this House to debate the resolution calling for improved services and removing barriers to mental health. I applaud the Member opposite for bringing the motion to the floor because we need to find the right solution at all times to deal with our population when it comes to any emerging health issues, particularly when it comes to a pandemic.

Coincidentally, this afternoon, I was to be involved in a discussion with my federal, provincial, territorial colleagues around this issue when it comes to the subject of social isolation among older adults during a pandemic. My deputy minister is standing in for me this afternoon while I participate in the discussion here this afternoon.

What I want to also say is that this issue was flagged by my, now, constituents during the recent election campaign. They were particularly focused on the impact of COVID-19 and the impact it was having on mental and emotional health of our seniors: especially those living in long-term care facilities, which I have many in my district; obviously, what's going on in seniors' apartments during the pandemic and what was going on in seniors' own homes. I thought for today's discussion, being Seniors' Month, that I would focus on that component of the resolution.

During the campaign itself, I flagged this issue as a matter I felt the House should turn its attention to. So, again, I compliment the Member for bringing this forward. I was listening to my constituents, as well as monitoring what was happening across the province and across the country. There had been various studies talking about the impact of COVID on the population, generally. We see increased anxiety right across the age spectrum from children, to youth, to adults and our seniors' community. We see increased stress; we see violence. We certainly see social isolation. Unfortunately, we see suicides and we see substance abuse; the degree which was really not known or predicted or planned for at the outset of, obviously, the pandemic.

I think it's fair to say neither did the All-Party Committee really appreciate those issues when it was doing its work and filed its report. So we have an opportunity to document what we've learned and are learning during this period so that future generations can learn from what we've experienced.

It's fair to say our health system in the province was not fully prepared for the impacts; however, they responded and we have responded quickly where it could. We had such components as Bridge the gApp and other online tools that really helped to get us through some very difficult situations early in the pandemic, and continue.

We also have the Vulnerable Populations Task Group on seniors, which was set up by the Department of Health and Community Services. It was and continues to be a forum to clearly identify the issues and explore solutions to

support our seniors through the pandemic. It remains active, which is great, and I'm glad to see that.

Now, unfortunately many people, particularly seniors, were and have been feeling isolated and without supports at the most critical time in their lives. Many of us could not reach in to help.

This isolation was made worse in some cases because of the digital divide. Now, as we embrace technology and move to more virtual services, we must be mindful of those seniors in our province who do not have access to online services, either because of choice, circumstance or cost. Low tech and no tech ways of reaching people obviously have to be maintained.

Now, with the opening up of our economy and the reduction of COVID-19 restrictions, we hope to see people in isolation feeling a greater sense of relief.

Mr. Speaker, what have we learned? As the minister responsible for seniors, I want to restrict my remarks to the impact of COVID on the mental health of our seniors' community across the province. I will draw on some recent work completed by the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health and the Canadian Academy of Geriatric Psychiatry, some recent work that has been published.

They've identified that several factors have contributed to the mental health of seniors, especially those living in long-term care facilities. They talk about ageism. They talk about staffing. They talk about staff education and their familiarity about dementia and mental health. They talk about access to ongoing psychiatric services and the like.

I think it's fair to say here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we were able to mitigate many of these factors, but social isolation remained. The research study outlined a series of position statements that we can consider as we move forward through the pandemic. We have to look at mental health in long-term care facilities, as it should be seen as an essential service.

We also know that seniors should have continued access to the full suite of health system emergency services and in-patient

services, and not be denied because of their age. Again, in Newfoundland, I don't think that's a factor that has crept in but it's certainly has in other jurisdictions, we know that in terms of the number of deaths through the COVID-pandemic period. In several provinces, we see that it was in long-term care facilities that these deaths happened.

We need to make sure there is no unnecessary restriction on in-person visits to long-term care facilities. That's something we certainly need to research and analyze more closely. That was certainly one of the things that people identified as a particular challenge for families wanting to visit with their loved ones and vice versa.

We also need to make sure, as mentioned, we have access to virtual communications in our long-term facilities and in our seniors' homes. If that's the way we're going to communicate, particularly in emergencies, particularly in future pandemics, then we have to make sure seniors have those services.

Now, we saw some significant advances in a very short period of time of seniors who didn't know what an iPad was, an iPhone was and who adapted quite quickly. I've learned you can engage and teach all ages, particularly our seniors in our communities to adapt to new technologies; we just have to give them that opportunity.

Again, lifting restrictions on visits by family and friend, particularly caregivers, the soulmates, the daughter, the son, the niece or nephew who was the primary caregiver. They have to be recognized as part of the health care team in our long-term care facilities going forward.

We need more training and supports for our staff in our long-term care facilities and seniors' complexes because they are the first point of reference for the senior and for their families.

We need to make sure that our staff are kept well and supported. We can only imagine the stress that many of them felt working very long shifts, again, having to go home and also isolate very often and then go back to work. That can only be something that they can really tell that story and we need to learn from them. We need

to measure the impact of all these measures on a go-forward basis.

We saw that continuously in the province throughout COVID. As a result, we were able to limit the number of deaths in our province and really avoided that through our long-term care facilities. That being said, I certainly want to extend my condolences to the family of the gentleman who passed away earlier this week. My thoughts are with his family.

Those elements that were identified by the research are equally relevant, I think, for those obviously who live outside a long-term care facility or seniors' home. We need to extend our knowledge and supports to people – and seniors, in particular – who are living in isolation in their own homes, many of them right in our own neighbourhoods.

Going into the pandemic, we had the advantage of the *Towards Recovery* action plan on mental health and addictions. Many of the initiatives that it featured and fostered helped our situation quite significantly. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, we know the plan did not contemplate the consequences of a pandemic on our mental health. So the resolution brings attention to the gap and challenges government, the minister, the health authorities, the province and the community at large to have to step up and embrace the challenges and opportunities for our health care system.

Now, as the former CEO of the Newfoundland and Labrador division of the Canadian Mental Health Association, I know all too well the challenges many of our fellow citizens experienced and are experiencing through this pandemic. As an organization, we were both advocates for improvements and catalysts for change, and we saw a lot of new, exciting initiatives being implemented almost overnight. We saw the minister and his staff respond positively to these proposals, many targeted to the most vulnerable in our province, many of whom, again, were seniors.

Now I can bring these experiences, and the knowledge it brings, to my role as minister, namely, that things can be improved when the need is great and the will to change is there. As Minister of Seniors, it is incumbent on me to

engage with our community agencies working on seniors issues, which is at the heart, I think, of the resolution.

I've met and continue to meet with SeniorsNL, Connections for Seniors, the 50-plus clubs association and the Provincial Advisory Council. I've also met and discussed these issues with community advocates and private citizens. They all agree that social isolation felt by seniors and, consequently, their families and close friends during the pandemic was, in itself, a mental health pandemic, one that we now are getting a better understanding of its implications. The more we talk about these issues, the more success we will have in finding solutions.

There have been some promising practices introduced across Canada during the pandemic. They helped seniors, families and staff in long-term care facilities to bridge the social isolation experienced by them. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we can adapt them so that in any future pandemic we are prepared. As an example, SeniorsNL introduced a warm line for seniors experiencing isolation. My department targeted its Seniors' Social Inclusion grants to organizations working with seniors known to be experiencing isolation wherever they lived in the province.

I'm confident that the intent of today's private Member's resolution is just that. I'm also confident of our Minister of Health and Community Services in leading the charge in addressing the service issues that have arisen through the COVID-19 pandemic. The collaboration he has fostered with the stakeholder community through *Towards Recovery* will hold him and his department in good stead as the province moves ahead with improving the province's mental health and addictions system.

One of the things I've been watching, because of a lot of downtime, through Netflix and the like are documentaries around the last pandemic in the 1918-1920 period. If we could document what they learned and bring that forward, I think we would be in a better position. I'm hoping that as a government, as a province and as a health care system, we can document what we've learned going forward so that future generations can learn from this period.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I support the resolution and will vote in its favour.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

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

I appreciate the chance to speak today on this PMR. It's a very important one. I'm sure it touches every one of us in our own personal ways.

There's not a person in this Legislature, in this building or in this province that doesn't know somebody that's affected in some way by the mental health crisis that we're going through as a province, as a country and as a globe, in my opinion. I've said it before and I'll say it again: No matter how sick people are of listening to it, the mental health pandemic is going to claim more lives than the COVID pandemic – I'm convinced of that – here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would like to start off first by talking about our young people. I interact with our young people quite a bit in the Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans District. Some of it, of course, is because I have my own two young sons that are 13 and 16, so it's very easy for me to get access to seeing how these kids feel going through each and every day. Young people, 67 per cent of them, say their mental health has suffered a hit during the pandemic. That's a huge number, especially when you're talking about young people. You're laying a foundation for trouble right away, as they get older.

Schools – this up and down, they didn't know if they were going to go to school or if they were staying home. When you mess with a kid's routine like that, after so long it really affects their mental health, and some kids more than others, of course. When you look at their school grades, I've had many children that got 90s going up through. Then, when they moved to the model of coming home, their grades suffered.

They got down into the 70s sometimes and that was a big deal to them. That was a huge deal to a lot of kids back in Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans District. I know that. I've spoken to many of them. To us right now looking backwards, it's not the end of the world; you want to reassure them that there's still time. This is not a reflection of who they are, but a lot of them take it quite personally. That's just one aspect of it.

Another aspect is socialization, the fact that they couldn't be with their peers. I've seen a video just the other day; it shows a two-year-old child at a park. The amazement in her eyes was absolutely phenomenal because she saw other children playing at a park. You stop for a sec and it's like, holy cow, that doesn't make any sense to us, but with the pandemic and stuff, you can tell that the socialization definitely takes a big hit as well and kids certainly miss that.

It gets me to thinking when it comes to school, teachers have their issues as well when it comes to the pandemic and trying to make sure everything is okay. My colleague from Bonavista alluded to it earlier about teachers didn't know how to - not that they didn't know how to handle, but they did the best they could with what they were given, the information they were given. When you have to handle 35 students with one metre of distance and trying to keep people's face masks on and ventilation, my God, it's certainly a challenge for the teachers. So, yeah, I definitely want to give praise to the teachers there.

I just wonder about preventative measures when it comes to our children and our adults. I don't think there are enough preventative measures in Newfoundland and Labrador before somebody reaches a mental health crisis. Diet and exercise is one thing, of course. It helps. It might be a small help, but it definitely helps. Also, there's a communication factor there that doesn't get talked about, and that is how hard it is for somebody to say the words: I am not okay.

They are simple words but for somebody to say that, the stigma that is still there about weakness and whatnot, it's absolutely horrendous. You wouldn't tell somebody if they had diabetes or cancer that they were weak, so why would you tell somebody who has a mental health issue that

they are weak? Some people would think that anyway, that they are weak or whatnot, but you're not at all. You suffer day in and day out. You don't have to suffer in silence; you too can say I am not okay. They are very important words.

The services and resources that are out there, there are tons of them. I think as MHAs and ministers it is incumbent on us to reach out to our constituents and constantly remind them of the services and the resources that are out there for them. Whether it be mental health illness, addictions, our seniors, our most vulnerable, be proactive. Let's all be proactive here. Reach out to them and let them know that our doors are open. You can come on in. We can take a look at the programs that are there. There's tons of stuff that everybody can avail of. I encourage all the MHAs to do that, or anybody else that may be a leader within your community.

In Central Health in Grand Falls-Windsor, we have two pediatricians - great pediatricians - who deal with all mental health when it comes to children. These two doctors are great, but they are simply not trained to deal with the complex mental health issues in children. The two of them are in Grand Falls-Windsor and they are given the task of taking on all of the children that have mental health issues, even though they are not mental health doctors. They are just simply pediatricians. These physicians and the parents in my district need more support and it's just not there. We need to make sure that it's there throughout the province.

Instead of the support, of course, they are met with a six-to-12-month wait-list for their children to get to St. John's to see a specialist. Those children, they can't wait. The families that these children are part of, they can't wait. They need a little bit more support. That's not just in my district; that's all over the Island, especially off the Avalon. In the rural areas, we definitely have more challenges when it comes to that. We need to catch the children as soon as we can and start working with them. Some of these children are four and five years old. You can see the behavioural issues and the mental health issues coming up through them. We have to make sure we give them the best treatment that we possibly can at an early age and catch it as soon as we can.

From there, in order to have healthy children, the healthy children need to see their parents have a healthy lifestyle as well, when it comes to mental health. In order to do that, the resources have to be there for the parents as well. Right now, some of the biggest issues I see throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, when it comes to mental health, are financial issues, of course. The financial issues can be a burden that most parents bear, but they don't realize that they don't have to. They can reach out as well and say, I am not okay. They can reach out for financial assistance or just to speak with somebody. All these things need to be in place.

When you look at parents – especially coming off COVID here – that may have had their hours diminished or decreased or afraid to go back to work, that just accumulates and snowballs out of control sometimes. These parents have to say no to their children, that they can't get in certain sports or they can't buy the healthiest food. You can see the Catch-22; it's a continuous cycle that eventually can break a man or woman. Unfortunately, that's what happens to a lot of us in society. If you want to get raw about it, the suicide rate, of course, is gone up as well. This is sometimes the path it leads to.

When you feel trapped like that, when you feel as though you have no way out – I have never been there myself. I pray to God I never get there, I pray to God none of us get there, but I can't imagine how that feels. All the resources in the world you can say can be there, but at the end of the day if you can't see a specialist or if you can't get a second or third appointment in due time, it's not much good; the resources are not much good.

I think that we need to look at the long-term benefits of taking on parents and children, taking on their issues and concerns and getting in to see a second or third appointment when it comes to a specialist. Like I say, a phone call on a hotline is great, but when you're in an emergency situation that you want that mental health wellness down the road, then I think that we need to get some more supports there as well.

Addictions, especially going through the pandemic – I'm sure everybody knows somebody, where people are smoking more

marijuana, they're having more drinks. Again, it's not a reflection of who you are. It doesn't define who you are. You're not a failure by any means, but there are resources out there for you to avail of. But the addictions have gone up; we've seen them across the country. Opioid addictions are the same thing. This is how people deal with it.

This is how people deal with their mental health when there's no other way to deal with it. A lot of people will take on some extra drinks or, like I say, smoke or smoke marijuana. The kids are seeing it. Again, it's a never-ending cycle. It's an escape for a little bit but it's not the way to go. I encourage everybody out there to reach out if you do need some help.

You want to talk about some people that really had some mental health issues over this pandemic 16 months now: our rotational workers. I have rotational workers that over the past 16 months have seen their family for four months. I was a rotational worker for 17 years. I didn't mind putting in my 20, 30 days at a time; it was 12-hour days and they were hard days. But just the fact of I know I got to see my family for 10 or 12 days at the end of the month, that's what kept me going. I know rotational workers now that have gone four or five months without seeing their families once. You can imagine it. Lots of us in here, we travel from outside. You leave your family for a week – and, by God, I hate leaving my wife and kids now for just a week. It kills me. I can't imagine having to go back drilling, as much as I miss it, for 30 or 40 days at a time.

So the rotational workers, I tip my hat to you once again. What you do for this province is great and I want to make sure that you are taken care of as well when it comes to your mental health. We see the light at the end of the tunnel, but you deserve the best of the best too, because some of these men and women pay some of the highest taxes in Newfoundland and Labrador. That goes back into our coffers to give services to the people that need it. Well, they definitely need it.

The stigma that's there about mental health and your mental health not being okay or not to have a bad day, that's prevalent in rotational workers too. The tough-guy attitude comes on sometimes

and it's the stigma that's been around forever. It's still here. It's not gone away yet. We need to remove it as a society. That needs to be stripped away as a society. We need to make sure that we tell people that, again, it's okay to not be okay. We need to make sure that gets out there to young people, parents, middle-aged people, older folks – everybody.

Our own health workers – Dr. Lynette Powell, a physician in Grand Falls-Windsor, is quoted as saying: “We’re not always super-attentive to our own needs. We sometimes make the worst patients.” When it comes to the physicians that are supposed to be taking care of us, their mental health must get battered too. You think about it, they have their own issues, I’m sure, and then they take on eight, 10, 12 patients a day, sometimes, and take on their issues. As much as you want to lay it down at the end of the day, we all know in here the same thing; it doesn’t get just laid down and dropped just like that.

We need these things in place to let everybody know that you need some time away. The world’s going to keep spinning, everything’s going to keep going, but we need to make sure that at the end of the day you leave it all aside, you leave it all here; you leave it all at your workplace. It’ll be there waiting for you again tomorrow. But when you go home with your families at the end of your day, it doesn’t matter which job you work, whether you’re stocking shelves or you’re an ambulance driver or you’re a politician, a police officer – doesn’t matter – nurse, doctor, you need to be able to put that down at the end of the day. But with the lifestyle we lead right now and trying to keep up on our finances, people working 40, 50, 60, 70 or 80 hours a week, it’s absolutely insane. I think it’s a contributing factor to our mental health illnesses that we have today.

We’re not supposed to be living to work; we’re supposed to be working so we can live. Unfortunately, a lot of us here in Newfoundland and Labrador are surviving. I’ll say it over and over again: Survival is not living. I really hope one day we get to that point – it’s going to take some time – where we live again, and I look forward to that.

First responders, of course, are another group of people. I worked as a paramedic in Whitbourne

for about a year. It was the last year I worked as a paramedic, actually. The first call I got in Whitbourne was a head-on collision on the Trans-Canada, just west of the Bellevue turnoff there. As soon as I got there, there were two people deceased and a third one died along the way. I’ll never forget that, that stayed with me for a long, long time.

I eventually put it down because I said that I wasn’t okay. I didn’t like it; it stayed with me. I recognized that it stayed with me so I had to change professions. That doesn’t make me weak and it doesn’t make me bad at my job, I just recognized that I couldn’t give the best care to the patients that I had because I wasn’t in a good place at the time and I suffered at the time. It was okay for me to say that I wasn’t okay. I want everybody else out there to know that it’s okay to say, again, that you’re not okay, because we are here to help and we’ll do everything in our power to do that.

Again, I just want to reiterate that when it comes to mental health, that stigma that’s there, we need to strip it away. I know it seems like this is taking up quite a bit of my time here, but until we strip away that stigma, it will never ever be okay for people to come forward.

We talk about the people that come forward right now looking for mental health solutions or some care for mental health – those are the people we know about, by the way. There’s a bigger majority out there that we don’t know about, that don’t come forward, that don’t express how they feel that day and that feel shameful to keep it inside. The pressures they have as a mom or dad to do the best they can as a family and to know they can’t show any weakness and they can’t break.

Well, that’s not the way society is. We just want you to know that, again, there are resources there, but those resources can’t be given to you or they can’t help you unless they know you’re not okay. I encourage everybody out there, ask each other if we’re okay, tear down that stigma and let’s get to work getting ourselves a healthier society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

The hon. the MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond to this extremely important motion. Thank you to the Member for Topsail - Paradise for raising it.

Our government's position is to vote in favour of this motion. I certainly agree with that. It's a very important motion. In my District of Burin - Grand Bank, a national suicide project was launched in 2018 after a drastic spike in suicides in the region. I remember back then, as mayor of a small community in my District of Burin - Grand Bank, the mayors and community leaders, we all got together to talk about this situation and what we were going to do about it. There seemed to be a panic in the area with six suicides in a very short period of time. During that time as well, we had the opportunity to meet with some of the families involved and the impact it was having on them.

In response to that crisis, a national suicide prevention project was launched. The Roots of Hope community suicide prevention project is a national initiative led by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. This program was offered in partnership with Eastern Health and advocacy groups from the region. The Roots of Hope program aims to create public awareness about mental health and supports, train health care professionals in the area and offer supports, such as crisis lines and support groups to people who need them.

The components of the Roots of Hope include specialized supports, a range of possible prevention, intervention and postvention services as support groups and coordinated planning and access; training and networks, training and learning opportunities for gatekeepers, physicians, first responders, nurses, HR staff, managers and teachers, etcetera.

Public awareness campaigns locally driven; I remember seeing a lot of posters by school students, brochures and social media posts. There was a means restriction with the identification of hot spots and, of course, research. At that time – and maybe some of my colleagues in the House were part of the

community advisory boards that were setup in each region – mayors, community leaders, health professionals and so on, all got together representing each town in the district and we certainly talked about the problems and issues we were having in the region; how we could improve health care; how we could improve mental health supports.

I have to say, our residents and health care professionals responded enthusiastically and collaboration between all agencies and groups providing positive results. Through this engagement, communities did many things on their own. In St. Lawrence and surrounding communities, a local group was formed called Sunshine Friends. I knew most of the members of this group. I walk with this group on occasion. They offered supports and activities through locally raised funding. I went on walkathons with them. They had gatherings, meals and they were there for anybody who needed them and who was having difficulty.

Mr. Speaker, in my district the Doorways program was also doing well and is doing well now. "Doorways provides rapid access to mental health and addictions counselling services 'one session at a time'. While most locations offer walk-in services, some locations provide same-day, next day services, or appointments by phone. Walk-in counselling services are available without an appointment or referral."

There was a huge take-up in this. It wasn't at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, but after a while people felt comfortable in going and speaking about the issues that they had. As days went on, we could see that there were a lot of issues out there, more than we had anticipated. More people were using the helplines. They could walk into their local hospital or walk into other areas in the community and there would be someone there to speak to them – health professionals. It wasn't every day, but it was at least a couple of days a week.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening on the Burin Peninsula will hopefully help people in this province, and, indeed, our country, as the crisis faced is not unique. People need a place to go. They need to talk. They need people to listen to them and that's key. Our communities need this program. In addition to offering services to

people in crisis, the program will also offer family and friends support who have been affected by suicides. That's very important.

Again, I attended some sessions on the Burin Peninsula where I heard family members talking about losing loved ones to suicide. Really, it had an impact not only on me, but on everyone in the room. It's important, Mr. Speaker, for healing, for the family, for the communities and for all that we do organize in our communities, and especially in rural Newfoundland where there are a lot of services that aren't readily available. In 2017, 4,000 Canadians died by suicide. That's a huge number. In Newfoundland and Labrador, programs such as Roots of Hope are really helpful and bring these numbers down for our province.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador was the first province to sign on to this national program. I was so proud when I learned that. We were the first. Our province committed to spend \$1.98 million over five years for this program. Three years into this demonstration project, the Burin Peninsula has made great strides. Community partnerships, which are the heart of this program, have resulted in vast networks of people working to advance tailor-made suicide-prevention initiatives. It's because we get together. It's because we meet regularly. It's because we talk about the issues facing our community and the various people that make up our community: the young, the adults and the seniors.

As well, Mr. Speaker, it has done a lot to bring the stigma associated with mental health to a point where people are not apprehensive about talking about it. I've talked to people who have said: Sure, I have issues; sure, I have problems. My mother has problems. My father has problems. People are free and they're talking about it. That's so different than what it was before.

People now understand what we are doing. They understand the value of what is being done on the Burin Peninsula and they want to be part of it. No longer are they afraid to talk about it. Communities themselves, Mr. Speaker, are sharing knowledge and learning from each other. Again, that spirit of co-operation wasn't always

there, but it is now. They feel the need and they get on board.

Mr. Speaker, one challenge that none of us could have expected was the impact of the pandemic on mental health. We could see it during the election. It was really noticeable for me as I went around visiting people. As Minister Abbott said, our seniors were very vulnerable. I walked into homes and sometimes if you knew the person: Can I give you a hug today? Come in, me dear. Come in, me ducky. Sit down, have a cup of tea. They were lonely. They needed people. They hadn't gotten out. Their groceries were dropped off.

But I think that after, when we realized what was happening to some, the groups that were formed certainly took initiative and went and did some wonderful things. There were groups in some towns that did food drives and dropped off food. There were groups that went and sang songs, Christmas carols and so on, outside the windows of the senior cottages and their homes. There were lots of good things done, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has been working to identify potential risk and protective factors in the monitoring and identifying of current opportunities to influence trends in mental health. Suicide prevention is everyone's business. We can all play a part to make a difference and save a life.

Mr. Speaker, once again, we certainly support this motion. We already have made great strides in this province regarding consultations around mental health and addictions.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Mental health and addictions have been something that's always been on my mind, even since high school and that. Growing up in Lab

West, we've had our challenges with mental health and addictions. It's pretty obvious, especially in 2014 into 2016; we had a very hard time with that.

I myself have lost people I knew and friends to it, both addictions and mental health issues, and many lost to suicide. It's hard. It's really hard. Talking about it now, I'm reflecting on people I grew up with that are no longer with me. It's very challenging and it plays a lot even on my mind that they're gone. It's something else, but we persevered.

The day before I flew up here for this sitting, I met with the Mental Health and Wellness Coalition, a group that was formed in response to the mental health crisis that we had in Labrador West in 2014-15, talking about activities, things that we could do now that we would normally do in person to bring up the topic of mental health and addictions and get people talking about it. We talked about a drive-through soup kitchen where you get your soup and your bun and also a package of information on resources and stuff that are available to people and talk about the conversations and that.

I know I spoke with the unions that represent the two mines. It's over 2,500 people that they represent. Every time we meet, one of the discussion topics we always have is about mental health and addictions in the workplace; how we can better support workers. Even more so now with COVID, a lot of people are feeling isolated and trapped. The normal outlets they would have like travelling and things like that, they don't have anymore. That also don't really help right now.

We do need to talk about it. We do need to address it. We need to find any route or avenue that we can to have these discussions and to better improve the well-being of people of this province.

Another good example is the young lady who was sitting out on the steps the other day to raise awareness for long-term needs. That's something that always comes up, too, is we always have people looking for long-term strategies.

I know a mother reached out not that long ago talking about the needs for her teenager. He just graduated high school but he was struggling. He was really, really struggling with depression; 19 years old and having that challenge on top of you, then on top of that with all the stuff that's going on in the world. It's really hard for an individual to stop and think; a 19 year old, someone who is just about to step out into the world and carve their own path is struggling so hard. It plays a lot, you think about it a lot.

I know my colleague, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, talked about being a first responder. I, too, was a first responder. In my tenure as a volunteer firefighter, I've been to four fatalities; I witnessed four fatalities. It's not easy. It's really hard. My father was a firefighter with me and after the first fatality we sat down in the garage after and he told me about his first fatality he showed up to. A dad being a dad trying to – that bridge of understanding. In the end, we both realized that we both had a hard time dealing with it together.

It's not easy and then you think of all the other first responders: the nurses, the doctors, the paramedics and all those people in this world right now that are struggling as we go through this pandemic.

What resources – what can we do to help them because this pandemic could be over like that. But this is going to be years and years and years afterwards lingering and these individuals will have to live with it. Then they're going to need help and we have to be there to help them, because we all have the struggles that we see now but we're going to compound it. It is going to be difficult but we have to be there for them. We have to do everything that we have the power to do, to stand side by side with these people and help them through this and make sure the resources and counselling and anything else that we can do for them is available.

We also have to talk about that, but also the long-term effects of it. Some people will struggle differently than others. It is not like a broken foot or anything like that, this is something that you can't see. It is something you can't just look at and see; it's something that each individual struggles with differently. What might help one person but you might not help

another and we have to be conscious of that. We have to be aware that every single person struggles differently in this province.

Then on top of that, some people struggle with addictions on top of mental health issues. That, in itself, is another struggle that everyone struggles with differently. This is something that we really need to take into serious consideration, take stock of what we can do to help these people.

I will commend the minister on the Doorways program. I know Lab West was one of the first regions to implement it and it did help and it did reduce wait times, but we still do struggle with long-term issues and people who require long-term care.

Another thing that's reared its head up is the availability of psychiatrists, psychologists and child psychologists and psychiatrists. We do have a huge need in this province. I know for psychiatrists, they are very hard to recruit but we need more of them. If anyone outside of this province is listening, we need you, please consider moving to Newfoundland and Labrador because we need you. We need these professionals as much as possible.

Recruitment is very important, making sure that we have the staff available to help with these issues that we struggle with. My heart goes out to everyone that is out there struggling. I know so many people in my life that are affected by mental illness. I've lost people in my life that were affected by mental illness and I've lost people in my life that were affected by addictions. It touches every single person. I bet every single person in this room right now has been touched by it in some shape or form.

It's not easy, but we need to do every single thing in our power to help those people and to make sure that we are caring and compassionate as much as possible as these people struggle, to help them. We can do it. We have the ability to do it and we should do it. It's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to help everybody because it's something that no one talked about. It's always been around.

Forever and a day mental health issues have been around in this world but it was something

that we just never talked about, but now we need to talk about it. We need to end the stigma of it, we need to bring it out into the light of day and talk about it. The world has changed and this is something that needs to change and we need to do better.

I just stop and think, I'm just thinking about certain individuals in my life that I've lost. It's so hard, but it's something we need to talk about. If anyone wants to talk about it, I'll talk about it because we need to do better.

With that, my friends, I support this motion because this is the right thing to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to speak to my support on the PMR, especially because of the wording. In the wording it says: it deals "with improving access and removing barriers to mental health and addition services in response to the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic."

We all know, just listening to my fellow Labrador MHA speak, of the impacts that we're all feeling. COVID has had many, many impacts on people's health. Being typical Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, you meet somebody on the road or you meet somebody in a store: How are you? Fine, best kind. Somebody answers: Good, okay. But really that's not the truth about how we're feeling.

When somebody is suffering: stress, anxiety, mental health issues, whatever falls under that category, the answer usually is: I'm fine, best kind, thank you.

We don't communicate well about our mental health, especially with the stigma, and a lot of people are impacted by negative stigma. As my fellow MHA from Topsail - Paradise said: 68 per cent of people suffering with mental health issues don't seek help. That's really, really

startling. Physical ailments are harder to hide. As my fellow MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor talked about, when somebody has a physical ailment people usually see it, they notice it and also there's a lot more compassion and understanding.

You'd never shame somebody for having diabetes. You'd never blame somebody for being weak, for having diabetes or some other physical ailment, but mental health issues we still have to work on the stigma that's attached. We really need to reverse the large statistics that people are hiding their mental health issues. To me, mental health issues in Newfoundland and Labrador and across Canada is like a huge iceberg. Usually you just see the tip of the iceberg and what's hidden underneath is huge. I think what we're going to see after COVID is over is really how huge the impact COVID has had on our mental health issues.

On a community level, isolation and separation was a means to protect people from COVID. We went to a single bubble, a single household. You weren't allowed even to go out unless it was to shop. There were restrictions in our nursing homes; basically, travel was locked down. Socialization was frowned upon. In some communities, the newest trend was actually reporting somebody for being suspected of breaking the COVID restrictions or protocols.

It's had a huge impact on us, but it's very, very important to recognize the harm done, that COVID has done to us. In aid of protecting ourselves, we isolated ourselves. That actually increased loneliness. It removed social supports that many people relied on. People who didn't have any type of mental illness developed a type of mental illness. Those that were suffering already got much, much worse. We need to recognize it and that's why this PMR is so important to us.

Another thing that most people can relate to is – I was talking to somebody I was working with the other day and I said: When you're really, really stressed, the little things that never bother you all of a sudden really bother you. It changes your reaction. Also, when you're really stressed, your ability to do things that normally you would find easy becomes a challenge. This just compounds the impact of stress.

That's something we need to recognize, because one of the consequences or one of the results that happen with social isolation and compounding of stress and isolation really is domestic violence. Across the province, we've seen a rise in domestic violence due to the isolation of COVID, due to the lack of social supports. Due to the lack of releases like sporting activities and just being able to socialize, domestic violence has increased.

When we think of domestic violence, mostly we think of women being abused in relationships, but we also need to be aware that also impacted are our elders. Our elders are very vulnerable to domestic violence. Also, young children. It's important when people are isolated, when people are stressed, that we actually have supports there to help them. If you ask somebody who's actually been involved in domestic violence – the offender that's hurt or harmed somebody – even if it's chronic, one of the first things they will tell you is that they didn't want to do that; they didn't mean to do that; they're sorry that they did it. A lot of times they don't even understand why they do it.

It's very, very important for us to realize that COVID has changed our lives, not for the better. We need to make sure that there are supports there to deal with the social isolation and the resulting mental illness that's become a pandemic. As my fellow MHA for Topsail - Paradise said, it's going to be the echo pandemic, mental health issues.

Just moving on, I mentioned our seniors are vulnerable, but when we look at our seniors in care, when COVID struck, we didn't know what we were dealing with. Across the province, across Canada, across the world, our health professionals really were struggling because this was the first time they were dealing with it. When we look at our seniors in the nursing homes, our loved ones, they were isolated; they were shut off. Restrictions – you couldn't go in or go out. That really created a lot of issues for our seniors in care.

One of the things that really help your mental health and your ability to fend off dementia and other diseases when you're in the home is actually being able to socialize, being able to talk, being able to communicate, being able to

feel that warmth and that correspondence that you have in person. That was taken from our seniors. I notice it. I notice it with my loved ones that are in the home. I notice a deterioration in them.

Even greater impacted was our seniors who were in the homes that were actually not mobile – so really, really greatly impacted. At the beginning of the pandemic, there were a few weeks where our seniors in care in the nursing homes were actually restricted to their rooms. For me, I can speak from personal experience. My grandmother was 102 at the beginning of the pandemic. She was a social butterfly. If you went into the nursing home from the coast to visit your parent or your grandparent, you usually dropped in and visited Aunt Muriel, which was my grandmother. You usually dropped in and saw her.

She had visitors every day practically, every evening throughout the year. That was all taken from her. So she went from actually – and most people in the home went from having visitors, seeing people and saying hi even to people who passed you in the hall, to being locked in your room. Not physically locked, but you were isolated in a way that you were locked in your room, not seeing anyone, day in and day out.

That actually created a lot of harm, so we need to make sure that there is help for our seniors. Also, what a lot of people don't realize is that it's not only our seniors in care who were impacted by this. If you had a mother or a grandmother or a relative in a nursing home and they were there and you couldn't visit them, you worried about them every day. It really impacted you and your mental health. I know that from my mother, I know that from my sisters and my cousins. Everybody was concerned about our relatives. That was stress. That was put on top of the stress that they had basically managing the mental health and welfare of their households and their extended families. It actually created a lot of harm, this social isolation.

But it's not only the seniors in care, in homes, that were impacted. All our seniors across the province were impacted, because a lot of their mental health is related to their social health. The ability to go out – and as one of my fellow MHAs was talking about – playing card games

and visiting and going places and doing different things. Mental health is tied to social interaction. We have a lot of seniors out there that's greatly impacted by COVID.

The impact of all that stress and loneliness is going to be long lasting, past this pandemic; like we talked about the echo pandemic. So we need to make sure that people get the supports they need and they get the help they need. That goes back to this PMR about improving access and removing barriers to services. We need to make sure those services are available.

Like I said, the impact went far beyond just seniors, but also to our own families. In our province alone, we saw in the news almost everyday rotational workers being stigmatized; taking the blame, taking a lot of heat because of when COVID was coming into the province. Like I said, it was very, very difficult. It impacted our rotational workers. Isolated – not only were rotational workers at many times throughout the pandemic isolated from their families, they were isolated from their community. Also, they have to carry the burden of being stigmatized.

That's something that needs to be looked at, because that really wasn't fair to rotational workers. I was a rotational worker for 19 years. I still wake up at 5 a.m. Newfoundland time, 5:30 Labrador time. I'm up, I can't sleep past it because after 19 years of being at work by 6 a.m. your body just wakes up regardless.

Rotational workers were stigmatized. They're vilified; their children were vilified. So that has a huge impact. Not only that, when they came home they couldn't go to funerals, they couldn't go to see loved ones that were sick that may be dying. There were huge, huge consequences to, not just the rotational workers but their extended families.

I do have to take a minute and just talk about rotational workers in my district. I have to actually thank Vale Newfoundland and Labrador for stepping up in a tremendous, tremendous way. The rotational workers from Voisey's Bay, from Vale, that lived in my district were actually paid to stay home.

Honestly, the reason why that was done was to prevent COVID from getting into the communities. Now, they weren't paid 100 per cent. As time went by the amount of money that they were paid was less. What it was, was to try and keep the workers in the community so they weren't actually in the workplace, and preventing the spread of COVID. I cannot stress how important that was. It really took the pressure of the communities. It took the pressure of the workers. It took the pressure of the health care system. It was more than just a positive support to the workers that were supported.

Basically, they supported my entire district in the battle against COVID. I, as the MHA, really can't place a value on that. However, for the rest of the province, rotational workers and their families lived with the added burden of being blamed. That's going to have lasting impacts, not only to the workers but to their families.

Looking at provincial impacts overall: graduations and weddings. I felt so bad for the two graduation classes that never had a prom. The year of planning, actually – anyway, I must clue up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I welcome the opportunity to speak to this PMR. I'm just going to read out a section of the wording here. It says: "... urge the Government to implement an approach to collaborate with stakeholders so as to directly deal with improving access ... in response to the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic."

I'm going to deal with each of those in turn. I'm going to go backwards before I go forwards. I know there's been some reluctance in the House for people to go backwards and look, but this is a really good story. It actually started in this

Chamber on a Wednesday afternoon, prior to my time, with a private Member's resolution by the, I think, the then Leader of the Third Party, to form an All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions.

There are a few of us still left here who sat on that original Committee. I'm not sure, maybe the Member for Conception Bay South did briefly at one stage. A lot of the other Members from the opposite side have moved on to other things. The Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville was on it in the role of parliamentary secretary, I think the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair also sat on it from time to time and the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi had a slightly different role, but was heavily involved with the All-Party Committee, and that produced the report.

It was built ground up and it was built with stakeholder engagement; the stakeholders we referred to as persons' with lived experience. They were vocal, they were engaged and they were interested and excited at the prospect of having their voice heard and also then, in turn, as time went on, of shaping the report and the process by which it was formed.

So roll forward a couple of years and the *Towards Recovery* report came out with its 54 recommendations. As part of that structure that was formed under there, there were no less than eight teams and each of those had stakeholder representation, and there was the minister's Advisory Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, which was a mix of stakeholder organizations and providers.

One of the things that I'm particularly proud of is we actually went one step further and we became only the second province – second jurisdiction in Canada – to constitute what was called a Recovery Council. The sole criterion for membership on this Recovery Council – other than an interest of being on it – was that you had to be a person with lived experience. That could be direct in the sense of you yourself had difficulties with mental health and mental wellness, or alternatively you had been a caregiver or a supporter for someone in that situation. The difference is, in the organizational chart, that Committee reports to the minister – unfiltered, directly.

Now, it has been in a little bit of an abeyance because of COVID. We're looking forward to getting them back together again. There are some reappointments that need to be made and so on and so forth because of the passage of time.

On a side note, in terms of the motion itself, but highly relevant, is this whole area of stigma. I have said in the past that stigma leads to silence and silence kills. I've also likened the situation with mental health and addictions to the situation I encountered as a medical student and resident some years ago now, when relating to malignant disease and cancer.

There was a time when people would not talk about it. There are still lingering problems with the language around cancer. It only takes one patient who is terminally ill with no prospective cure to say, Doctor, did I not fight hard enough, to realize that the whole idea of fighting cancer is not actually the best way of describing it to a patient. Yet it's used in common parlance and nobody now seems to place a great emphasis on that, unless you're on the wrong end of the deal.

We do need to be careful about our language. Even the casual comment, what's wrong with you, is actually totally the wrong thing to say to someone who is looking upset. How about, how are you feeling? Or what happened to you? Those are better ways of addressing the same problem. Now, me, being a surgeon, knew none of that until five years ago when I picked that up from people with lived experience. The approach that we have taken is inherent. It's understood in this motion.

We have 54 recommendations from *Towards Recovery*. There are some that are not yet complete. We don't have all the mobile crisis response teams there yet, but we have a lot more than we had. We have 11 FACT teams out of the total of 12. Labrador is the next one up and there will be a second one in St. John's. We're nearly there and I think it's fair to characterize those as substantially complete. The other ones, in terms of the structural ones like community crisis beds, we haven't done that. We have sod turned and Moss Development hard at it in Goose Bay, putting the extension on to the Labrador Health Centre there for in-patient services for people with mental health. We have more ODT hubs

and spokes than we've had before, so it's a work in progress.

One of the triggers, though, from COVID was a realization within Mental Health and Addictions that we had vulnerable people in the province. Those could be seniors living at home, the chronically ill, the homeless, people we've heard about in other directions. Interestingly enough, we were the only jurisdiction to include new Canadians in that group. Again, that made us pretty well unique in the country.

What also then happened was we realized that this didn't live in one particular portfolio, and so myself and the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, with his portfolio, kind of shared it. In some respects, elements of that have transitioned more to his shop than mine, because under this umbrella of the vulnerable person's task group, we actually have a variety of focused groups.

These groups still meet, even though our case numbers are low and have no intention of dissolving. We're quite happy to support them. They meet once a month to discuss operational issues and challenges related often to particular individuals rather than more systemic things. They meet a second time each month to exchange knowledge, to educate each other on some element of what their work in homelessness might be, or what their work in addictions might be, or what their work with the gay or the queer community might be. There's this interchange.

What I have failed to mention is the vast membership here of people with lived experience. They are not the psychiatrist. They are not the psychologist. They may have been and they may have been there by virtue of both having lived experience as well as therapeutic skills.

Everything that is done by those groups is also viewed through the lenses of social determinants of health, which we heard Members opposite talk about in terms of income, housing, security, food security and the like. It's also done through a mental health lens with the aim of providing support for these individuals. That speaks to the latter part. This group is sitting, if you like, in warm idle, ready to kick into higher gear for

demand that may appear immediately after the lifting of some or all of our restrictions with our stepped approach. It may come gradually. It may come suddenly. They're ready and so are we.

I think it is not an understatement to say going back and looking at the big picture, that if you look back at the time since I was first sworn in on the 14th of December 2015, mental health and addictions has consumed an enormous part of my professional life as a minister and as an MHA, which was really quite a change from my clinical work from years before.

There is this steady thread through the entire program, which is now provincially; it doesn't rest solely with one regional health authority. It's coordinated by a director who is based in the Department of Health who has consultants who liaise with regional health authorities, with community groups, with community stakeholders and community support agencies to make sure the system is as seamless as it can be. It is not foolproof, it's not there yet and it will continue to need work. It is probably going to need tweaking, adjusting and fine-tuning every year or so simply because of the nature of health care in general.

What it has done, though, is it's proved itself an approach. What I would like to do now is to build on what is an enormous success. It's not just said by me that, it's said by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, it is said by the eHealth Collaborative – that's global, currently based in New Zealand. We have this stepped-care model that is unrivalled in the world. We have some steps that need a bit more support and a bit more struts. We'll get there but we're not there all the way yet.

In terms of what I would really like to do – and I've spoken to Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth – is this lived experience. This patient centricity needs to be baked in from the very beginning in all aspects of health. I think what we have done with *Towards Recovery* is make mental health and addictions a leader in that regard. It is not generic endemic within some other realms of health care and it needs to be emphasized and reinforced.

I think the opening up, as it were, of the issues that have been mentioned about isolation,

visiting restrictions and these kinds of things, will lend itself to reintroducing that with some vigour because there is a pent-up demand for that kind of an approach and a pent-up demand, that you've all described, around isolation, socialization and these kinds of things.

Going back to the motion – which is what our job is as legislators. We have a motion before the House to debate and we need to speak relevant to that particularly. In terms of the wording, the government has an approach to collaborate with stakeholders. It is dealing directly with improving access. I'm certainly enthused about removing barriers to mental health and addictions care. We've made great strides in that with things like Doorways, which my colleague from Burin - Grand Bank referenced in some detail.

The response to whatever the impacts of COVID are is potentially baked in. We won't know whether it's enough or whether it's too much until the day comes. How big the bottom of the iceberg is and whether it's a growler or not, we'll find out. But we have a system that can respond to that and react to it and deal with the issue. We still need people to come forward and tell us what we're doing wrong because we learn from that.

One of the things that we have seen, for example, with Doorways, is that there are an enormous number of people who attend a Doorways session who feel that that has managed their issue. But for those it isn't, it's a gateway. Even if you are on treatment or on therapy or having a crisis just outside of that, you can go back to Doorways. It's not one-time use, fire once, forget and you can never do it again.

We're not there yet and I won't pretend that we are. But compared with where we were in 2015 or 2016, I would argue we have made huge leaps and strides.

The fact that others are recognizing this and other jurisdictions are coming to us; other jurisdictions are sending us patients to look after because of our complex, coordinated care approach on the very top steps, I would argue that we are heading in the right direction.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I cannot fault this motion. I support it.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): If the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise speaks now, he will close the debate.

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly pleased with the responses heard today, starting with the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi who focused on seniors; spoke to the increase in anxiety, stress, violence, social isolation, suicides and substance abuse. He spoke to that. He spoke to the issue with seniors in terms of isolation and in terms of the technology that sometimes seniors don't have available to them.

He also spoke about the long-term care supports and the isolation that remains for those who are in the homes. He acknowledged that the resolution brings attention to gaps in the system. I think we all realize that as well. That's not that we're not doing a good job, but you move on and you get there.

I'll paraphrase what he said, he can correct me. He made a comment about things can be improved when there is a need and there is a will to act. I get a sense from all that spoke here in the House today that there certainly is a will to act. I appreciate that.

Jumping from seniors, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans spoke to the issues on young people in particular and how it's affected those in the schools and how kids who were A students were less than A students during COVID, and the pressure on teachers. Also, a common theme that I heard was that there were not enough preventative measures. He spoke very much about the stigma attached to this and how admitting you have a mental health issue is a sign of weakness, and how hard it is to say: I am not okay; how hard that is for people dealing with mental health to say: I am not okay. Yet, you wouldn't ask that of a cancer patient; you wouldn't ask that of another person dealing with

a physical ailment. That was a very strong point there, to say that you're not okay.

It's almost like we organized this, because we covered all topics. We talked about seniors; we talked about the youth. The Member for Burin - Grand Bank talked about a community response. In particular, he talked about a situation in his area where they had a number of suicides and how they worked together with community leaders and came up with a list of supports, created awareness campaigns and showed what could be achieved by communities working together.

He mentioned some of the programs government currently have that are working. He mentioned a group called the Sunshine Friends. He did say – which is something we hear all the time when we're talking about mental health – you need to talk about the issues. I was glad to hear that from the Member for Grand Bank.

We then moved on. I had some comments from the Member for Labrador West. He spoke about issues that were closer to home. I do appreciate him for doing that. He spoke about friends and people he knew or are no longer here because they resulted in suicide; they're no longer here. He talked about youth that are struggling with depression, a 19-year-old that has the world ahead of him and is dealing with immense depression.

He talked about we need some long-term solutions here, some long-term issues. Again, the Minister of Health and Community Services talked about it's a work-in-progress and we realize that, but long-term measures are needed. Another point that he pointed out is we need to stand side by side with these people who are struggling. I was glad to hear that and I appreciate his comments.

My colleague from Torngat Mountains, she started talking about the classic Newfoundlander who's walking along the road and says: How are you getting on? Fine, b'y. I mean, how many times does the person say: I'm fine, I'm great, number one? Are they really fine? Sometimes when we ask that question it's just something we say. But if you ask it and you really mean it, then you're going to stop, figure it out and find out if that person is really fine.

She touched on a similar issue that was mentioned earlier. We never shame anyone who has a physical ailment. I've never heard tell of anyone say: Gee, you've got a broken leg. Oh, you're dying of cancer. You know, we never do that. Yet, it's a shame when you say you've got a mental illness, depression or a bit of anxiety. It's a shame; we shame people for that.

The point that she made as well, she said COVID has done more harm to us than just the virus, and that is so true when we look at the number of people that are suffering from different issues, mental health issues as a result. Of course, in her district she spoke to the increased domestic violence and that has increased multifold because of the isolation. Again, it was not just women; it's youth and it's elders that are being affected. Certainly, she spoke to close at home with her aunt, 102-year-old aunt, and so I appreciate those comments.

Last, but not least, is our Minister of Health and Community Services, and as the Health critic in the House I always appreciate his responses. He does actually have a response most times, there's no doubt about it. As I said at the start, this is not about the programs we have and not about the staff not doing their job. I think the programs we have and the staff are working to their utmost. I appreciate the minister for talking to those issues, what's happening, what his staff have done and I applaud them for that and what they have done during COVID.

He talked about the All-Party Committee on Mental Health; he talked about building from the ground up, which is something that you have to do here. He also talked about stigma and this quote stuck in my head: Stigma leads to silence and silence kills. That is, unfortunately, so true when you're talking about mental health.

How you ask people – I'll go back. It's similar to what the Member for Torngat Mountains spoke to, when you ask someone, what's wrong with you? No, you need to change the narrative there. How are you feeling? Let's have a chat about something. We put that stigma right there when you ask the question: What's wrong with you? There is nothing wrong with you. I would say a huge percentage of this House of Assembly have, at some point, experienced anxiety, depression or know people who have.

There is nothing wrong with that and nothing wrong with admitting it.

The minister spoke to it's a work in progress, we're in warm idle and we have to build on that. That's all true. We have to do that. Lived experiences need to be baked in through all health care. We need people to come forward and tell us what we're doing wrong. So I was very glad to hear the Minister of Health and Community Services say that. I am not surprised because he is a respected professional and I certainly see us moving forward there.

I'll just talk about the individuals that have spoken to me. As I said, we have a number of initiatives, apps and phone lines out there that are working for some. I wouldn't be able to guess on stats but it's obvious there are people there that are still suffering. When you're struggling, when you're down, when you have nowhere to turn, when you're desperate, when you're curled up in that corner with the drapes drawn in the fetal position rocking back and forth, as some people have told me, an app doesn't do it.

I know it's more than an app that we have, I know we have lines you can call, but this is just what people are saying. I can't imagine it. You try to have empathy and you try to put yourself in someone else's shoes, but I can't imagine. I can't imagine you being in a place where you feel you have nowhere to go and nowhere to help, despite there being lots of opportunities out there. But you're not going to pick up the phone. All I can imagine is your mindset is just not there to make that call, to go on and use an app. Now, it's helping some, there's no doubt about it.

The Member for Burin - Grand Bank said – and I agree with him – people need to talk. We need to talk. There is a young lady, I think her name is Kristi. She's been doing her own campaigning or picketing at the Waterford Hospital and I think she's also out here on days. Maybe it's time, if we haven't, for us to stop and have a talk. Ask her about her lived experiences. Ask her about what's missing. Ask her about how we can improve it.

There are a lot of supports out there. Again, I'm not arguing that. We have a lot of well-trained,

professional, competent staff. I don't know how they do it. I don't know how someone can be on the end of that phone line for a full shift taking calls from individuals who are in desperate need. I don't know how you can do it, but it's there. As the Minister of Health and Community Services said, we're going to build on what we have. So that's good to hear. If COVID has done anything, it's certainly highlighted the needs we have and what's coming down the road for us to deal with this. My understanding is there are many people out there who are looking for long-term supports. The COVID situation has exacerbated the mental health issues here. I am really, really glad of the comments here today, so there is hope. There is always hope. We have to act and we have to act now.

I don't look at this as, certainly, not my PMR. You may say it's the Opposition's PMR or this side of the House's PMR. Because health touches all of us, this is our PMR, collectively. Because everyone in this House, regardless, in some way or form has come in contact, knows someone either personally or through a friend, or knows someone who has not identified as having a mental health issue. We all have. If you haven't, then you're one lucky person.

My time is nearing the end. I'm glad we got this out. I'm glad it looks like we're getting support on it. But, really, it's not a political piece; it's just something to bring it to the forefront. On a daily basis, let's start working towards this. Let's talk to the people with lived experiences. Let's find out what we can do to build on what we already have and to be proactive in looking at what COVID is going to give us. We need to treat mental health now in a COVID-like style. Knowing the figures and knowing the numbers that people have, in terms of mental health issues, this is going to be a huge, huge thing for us to deal with.

I won't take any more time. I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Now that the debate has concluded, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

It being Wednesday, in accordance with Standing Order 9(3), this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.