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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Are the House Leaders ready?

MHA Brazil, are you ready?

Order, please!

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 4.

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

As Chair for the Privileges and Elections Committee –

SPEAKER: You need a mover and a seconder first, please.

B. DAVIS: I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, the following resolution, the Review of Harassment-Free Workplace Policy Applicable to Complaints Against Members – the report that was tabled yesterday.

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a bit early to get going with all the order on that kind of stuff, but thank you very much for the opportunity, as Chair for the Privileges and Elections Committee and pursuant to section 17 of the Harassment-Free Workplace Policy Applicable to Complaints Against Members, I have the responsibility, on behalf the Committee, to bring forward this report on behalf of our Committee.

The Harassment-Free Workplace Policy Applicable to Complaints Against Members was developed by the Privileges and Elections

Committee of the 48th General Assembly, on the order of the House, and was adopted in the House on December 2019 and came into effect on April 1, 2020. I might say it was unanimously accepted in this House.

The policy applies to complaints against a Member, the respondent can only be a Member and the complainants can either a Member, an employee of the Legislature or an employee of the Executive Branch of government.

The Privileges and Elections Committee has specific duties under this policy including the responsibility to review its provisions once each General Assembly, or as required in accordance with section 17.

By way of background, the Committee was notified by the Citizens' Representative who has the responsibility of oversight of the complaint and resolution process under this policy of a potential issue with respect to the confidentiality provision. The Citizens' Representative advised that the party to a complaint, which could be either a complainant, respondent or a witness, refuse to sign a confidentiality agreement as required by section 10 of the policy.

The Citizens' Representative concluded that his work could not proceed any further without clarity on this matter and asked the Committee to review this matter under section 17 of the provision. Our Committee met on four occasions in its review of this matter on the following dates: February 14, 28, March 7 and March 24. In addition, the Citizens' Representative appeared before the Committee during this review to provide further clarity on the identified issue and discuss potential ways to address this matter.

The Committee reviewed and analyzed this matter, as is outlined in the details that our outlined in this report that was presented to the House, as well as our recommendation for the amendments to the policy. These amendments may be minor in nature, but far reaching in impact.

The final report resulted in the adoption of the policy by the House and it is clear that confidentiality is the overarching principle. The policy stipulated confidentiality requirements

throughout; it does not only rely on the execution of the confidentiality agreement as set out in the confidentiality requirements.

Furthermore, amendments were also enacted in this *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* making confidentiality, as it relates to the matter under the policy, a requirement of law.

It is the Committee's view that the requirement for the confidentiality agreement is intended to be an added layer of protection in the policy, as it is not only a legal instrument requiring confidentiality. Our Committee has also taken the position that the process under the policy must proceed, regardless of whether the party to a complaint signs the confidentiality agreement.

The Committee proposes that section 10 of the policy be amended to include a refusal to sign the confidentiality agreement as a breach of the confidentiality provision of the policy.

The change is as follows, that section 10 of the Harassment-Free Workplace Policy Applicable to Complaints Against Members be amended to add immediately after the sentence "The complainant, respondent, and witness must sign a confidentiality agreement at the beginning of the process," the following: notwithstanding the refusal of the complainant, respondent or witness to sign a confidentiality agreement, processes under the policy including the investigation may proceed and are not affected by the refusal to sign. The Citizens' Representative shall report the refusal in accordance with the provision of section 10.1 as if it were a breach of confidentiality.

If this is adopted here today, and I hope it is, refusal by any party or the complainant to sign the confidentiality agreement would immediately be reported by the Citizens' Representative to the Privileges and Elections Committee in accordance with section 10.1. Section 10.1 of the policy states that Members and employees who breach confidentiality through the process under the policy may be subject to disciplinary actions.

This Committee is emphatic that the guiding principles of expectation articulated in the Harassment-Free Workplace Policy, which was

adopted unanimously by this House, must be embraced and upheld by all. That is, it is everyone's responsibility to foster a healthy work environment, to promote a culture of civility, to demonstrate respect and to recognize every person's right to be protected and supported. I think those are admirable.

The policies applicable to complaints against elected officials create a clear process, provides options for resolution in complaint-driven (inaudible) and protects confidentiality. This policy is intended to create a cultural shift, foster a better work environment and hold elected officials to a higher standard of behaviour.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee Members: the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, who is the Vice-Chair; the Member for St. John's Centre; the Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows; and the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, all of you were working hard on this for the past couple of months.

For all of the reasons highlighted, our Committee has brought forward this piece of work and it is why we're asking all hon. Members in this hon. House to unanimously support changes to section 10 for the Harassment-Free Workplace Policy Applicable to Complaints Against Members.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just add a couple things to this. First of all, thank you very much to this Committee for the work that it did; the House of Assembly staff for assisting us where we needed assistance and accompanying us; as well as the Citizens' Representative.

What we ran into here is a problem that needed mitigation immediately so any investigation could move forward –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. TIBBS: – and we want to ensure that the process is going to see fit and it holds all of us to a higher standard. We do hold ourselves to a higher standard within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador but when there is a complaint filed against a Member, we need a process to ensure that complainant has the courage to come forward.

With the old legislation, of course, we have seen that a confidentiality agreement had to be signed by both parties and it didn't have any mitigation there, once again, for if somebody refused to sign the confidentiality agreement. The importance of the confidentiality agreement is to ensure that the process is followed within the confines of the House and people's business isn't put outside the House which would, in turn, if there are names mentioned or whatnot, people may be hesitant later on down the road to come forward with a legitimate complaint against a Member. We wanted to make sure that everybody felt comfortable that worked throughout government to make a complaint if one was seen fit to be made.

That was the whole point of us meeting the four times that we did. I believe that we came up with a great piece of work here, with some great wording to mitigate that. It might seem simple in its words, but it will definitely work for the House and it will work for everybody throughout government in the future.

Again, we need to behold ourselves to a higher standard. This piece of legislation here – that I hope everybody votes yes on – does that to ensure that. It is an important process. The process that we have in place right now is a very important process. It allows us to stay at the higher standard that we are and it keeps us all at a higher standard. I think that is the biggest thing that we are getting at right now. To change this from having to sign a confidentiality agreement, which is still there, but now to continue to move forward nonetheless with a complaint or process is the most important part.

I'm going to ask everybody here to support this. It's important to a complainant, but it's important to all of us too, and it gives the public confidence in us outside of these walls to ensure

that we are held to the standard we should be held to. So everybody, if you could just give it a quick read. We know what it's all about now, but, in future, I would expect everybody to sign the confidentiality agreement. If you choose not to, the process will still go ahead and the complainant will still get their day of justice, whichever the House sees fit.

So I'll take my seat, Speaker, but I appreciate the Chair for the work he's done, and again, the House staff for the work they've done. They've certainly guided us through like they do here every day.

So thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I just want to thank the Committee for their work on this. Obviously, as an independent Member, we don't have any representation on any of these Committees, which is very unfortunate in a democratic society, considering the fact that we do represent three of the 40 districts and the people within those districts. But to the Members of the Committee who did this piece of work, I certainly want to commend them on it.

Obviously, I think it's fair to say that everybody in this House is going to agree with this. I think it's important that in every workplace – and I think we all recognize this – people, whoever they are, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. They should not have to be subject to any kind of bullying or harassment or anything else.

For far too long, I think that applied generally within every workplace, I guess, including within the public service, but there was nothing specific applying to the House of Assembly. Really when you think about it, we're the people who are making the laws. We are the people who should be leading by example. We're the people who should be, as others have said, held to that higher standard. Therefore, it's important, and that's why I was certainly supportive and I

know other Members were of bringing in a specific Workplace Harassment-Free Policy for MHAs. I think that happened – I don't know if it was last year or the year before, whenever it was that we brought it in.

I think that was a good move. Like any piece of legislation or any policy, it evolves over time. It is impossible to write a piece of legislation. That's why when we come to this House of Assembly, there's never a shortage of bills. There's never a shortage of bills to debate because by the time you get through all the existing legislation, things that you might have passed two years, three years, sometimes 10 years ago, all of a sudden everything is changed. Whether it be a technological change, or whether it just be a change in public attitude and what might have been acceptable 10 years ago is no longer acceptable now. So that's why this legislation and policies are evolving all of the time.

In the case of the Workplace Harassment-Free Policy, even though it was only passed about a year or so ago, already we've seen a circumstance now – I'm not sure exactly what the circumstance was but, obviously, something happened, I would suggest, that brought this issue to light around the signing of confidentiality agreements. There was some issue or loophole or something that hadn't been thought of that, obviously, found its way to the Committee.

Now the Committee has looked at that and they are putting a measure in place to ensure that all parties are protected, that there is confidentiality, but also that you cannot simply stall a process. Because at the end of the day, if the intent of this policy is to have a safe workplace where everybody feels respected and everyone has the ability to bring their concerns forward, if they have a concern, that process should not be cut short by some loophole in the policy. That's what this is meant to deal with.

In that regard, I certainly support it. I would say too, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment is part of a bigger picture as it relates, I guess, to the policy, how Members interact, how we deal with complaints, how we have the ability to appeal complaints – particularly if new information comes forward or if it's been determined that there's been some error made in a previous

decision. For example, if there was information given or a position taken in this House, perhaps by an Officer of the House – I don't want to delve into it too much, but at the end of the day we had one situation, I guess, that this could apply to. There was a dispute over what is an employee and the Officer of the House comes in here and says one thing –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

This bill is not about specific cases; it's dealing with the policy.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm talking to the policy and the fact that this is doing something specific around the whole idea of confidentiality, but it's not just about confidentiality; it's about making sure everybody within the complaint process is treated fair and square. I guess that's the point. The point of doing this is making sure that everybody is protected, on all sides of the argument. That's all I'm saying.

So we just have to be very careful and we need to, perhaps, as we reflect on what we're doing here today and reflect on the bigger picture, realizing that any one of us in this House, on either side of the House, at any time could be subject to a complaint. Whether that be legit or erroneous, it could happen. And anybody in this House – you're in public life long enough, I can guarantee you that nobody is going to go unscathed. At some point in time, your picture is going to be on the front page of *The Telegram* or something over some controversy. It's inevitable if you're here long enough, I think, for the majority of people; a few escape, but not many escape, I can tell you that.

As we consider these policies on a go-forward basis and the bigger picture, I just think it's important that we realize and be cognizant of the fact that this could impact any of us. We want to do it fair and square. We want to close all the loopholes. In this case, we want to protect confidentiality. But it's also important, I believe, in the bigger scheme of things that when a complaint is made that could apply to this piece of legislation, could be applied too that there should be the ability – I'm not taking sides or getting involved in any past things. I'm just

saying, from what I've seen, I think we really need to have a closer look at if new information comes forward, or if one thing is ruled on today and then something changes that conflicts with that tomorrow, that there needs to be a fair way for a Member or anyone else to be able to appeal that and get their fair day in court, so to speak. That's all I'm saying.

Now, we can surmise from what I'm saying that I'm referring to a specific issue; if you want to surmise that, you can surmise that. Again, I wasn't there. I wasn't involved in any of these past disputes – thank God I wasn't – but all I'm saying is this applies to all of us, and if any one of us got caught up in a situation where this was applying to us, I as one Member, and I would think every Member, would simply want to know and have confidence that they are getting a fair hearing.

If it's determined after the fact that there was some flaws in a ruling, or new information, that they have the ability to appeal it. And not be able to say every time it's brought up in the House, oh, we can't talk about it; you're cut off. Or I bring it to the Committee and we can't look at it and nobody can look at it. We just pretend it didn't happen, I guess. That's all I'm saying – for the future, for all of us, for any of us.

So with that said, on the bigger picture, back to the specifics of this bill, it's a good move as far as I'm concerned and I will support it 100 per cent.

Thank you.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I'm going to speak on this because, I'm making no bones about it, this is the part of the situation that myself and Dale Kirby were involved with.

I just want to give a bit of background here, Mr. Speaker, why this came up in the first place. Back in April 2018, there were complaints here against myself and Dale Kirby about bullying and harassment in the House of Assembly. That was the complaint; you could read the thing that

the House of Assembly was rocked by allegations of bullying and harassment.

So I went through part of the process with Dwight Ball who, again, had information he didn't release about it all – the coward. What happened? Here's what happened. I just want to give the House of Assembly the background on this. There was a meeting May 8: the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, there was a lawyer involved, and a third person. The third person who was involved with that meeting was Cathy Bennett, the former minister of Finance.

They met with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. After Cathy Bennett paid for that lawyer to meet with Bruce Chaulk, with the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, who made the complaint, it was found out that there was no bullying and harassment policy against any Member of the House of Assembly. That's how this came about.

There was none. You couldn't do it. You couldn't put in a bullying and harassment claim. That's where all of the complaints changed from bullying and harassment to Code of Conduct that my finances weren't in order and I shouldn't be in the House of Assembly. That was one of the complaints.

So that's how all of this came about, the bullying and harassment. Cathy Bennett paid for a lawyer to go sit down with Bruce Chaulk, with the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's. That's how all of this came about. So that's how this policy started developing. Because then, they realized, okay, we can't go with the bullying and harassment anymore. That's gone off the table. We got to go with Code of Conduct.

That's why I say to the Deputy Premier – I've got to give her credit. The Deputy Premier – one of the allegations against me with the Code of Conduct: the \$30 million from Vale, I took that and spent that on the West Coast. That's where the Code of Conduct came in. The problem I am going to have with this bill, and I say it to the Chairperson, the Minister of Environment: What's the penalty?

I'll give you an example. This is legitimate. I ask the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology: You went through a nine-month

police investigation; what's the penalty for someone who made a false text about you? None. Absolutely none. Do you know what the penalty is going to be if this is done? No, but seriously, though. This is very serious. Leaking a Cabinet document – that's up to the Liberal Party, what happened? Nothing. Now leaking the text and putting a police investigation, what's the penalty by the Liberals? None.

So I asked everybody on the Committee: What's the penalty? And I'll give you a good example. All of this bullying and harassment that was brought forward by the Member for Harbour Grace and the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, that was all out in the media before we even knew it. Do you know who was leaking most of the stuff in media? Fred Hutton, the same person who is up in the Premier's office right now: breaking news. That coward, Fred Hutton, never called me once on any of that information. Never called me once. It was out in the media before we even knew it.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: So my question, Mr. Speaker –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's not parliamentary language to call someone a coward.

E. JOYCE: It's not?

SPEAKER: No. I'll ask you to retract that, please.

E. JOYCE: I will withdraw the comment.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

E. JOYCE: Sorry.

But he never ever contacted us. So I know for a fact, coming from the staff at the Premier's office, that he used to joke around –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the Member to stay with the policy that we're discussing here today. The specifics of that have already been ruled on within this House.

E. JOYCE: I'm not talking about (inaudible). I'm talking about what happens when (inaudible). This is what's not in the policy. What happens if there's a complaint here today against any Member and it's all put out in the media before it happens? What is the result? This is not worth the paper it's written on because there are no penalties involved. Absolutely no penalties.

What is the penalty if someone made a complaint against any Member in this House of Assembly and it's false, and it's all out in the media before you even got a chance to defend yourself?

P. LANE: Reputation ruined.

E. JOYCE: Reputation is ruined, says the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

Well, you're lucky it's not, because the people knew me and knew the difference. My reputation wasn't ruined, but it could be out in the media and it would be carried on; you're right, it would be carried on.

That's the question I have to ask the Committee Members. It sounds great, oh, if we don't go ahead and do this here, then all of a sudden we have to go ahead with the Committee. But what if someone leaked it? I've been there.

How many people in this House of Assembly know how much stuff was leaked and there are no consequences? What are the consequences? I ask any Members of the Committee to stand up and say this is why this here should be taken back and it should be amended to put in penalties.

It's no good for me to make an amendment to it because it's going to be ruled out of order anyway. I know that. So it's no good to even to do it. I know some of the Committee Members, because the Liberals got the majority, they're going to do what they want to do anyway.

What is the penalty? Can anybody tell me? Can anybody in this House tell me what the penalty is? You can't do it.

I'll just give you a good example why you need a penalty. When all this was going on, before

this with the bullying and harassment – and this is to the bill, Mr. Speaker, I know you’re trying to keep it – I can understand that, I have no problem with that – I apparently released the name of a certain individual, the Member for Placentia - St. Mary’s who made the complaint.

I have 17 people on a list; I can start naming them over there, four or five of them. She walked into caucus the day before and said I just filed a complaint.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I have been giving the Member lenience.

E. JOYCE: It is relevant. It is relevant, I say, you should have went as a witness. You promised to go as a witness yourself; you wouldn’t go. Don’t you go starting, don’t you start.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: I can tell you –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Stay with policy.

E. JOYCE: I know, Mr. Speaker, you’re the one who backed out as a witness, too, as a minister had the information and wouldn’t bring it forward.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: Yes.

SPEAKER: We’re staying with policy, please.

E. JOYCE: I will, yes.

But anyway, Mr. Speaker, this is my point, it was out in the media – we’re talking about confidentiality – it was out in the media, there was 15 MHAs in the caucus who were ready to go as witness, that we were told, but it’s all out in the media. So what is the –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

You’re not being relevant to the bill right now.

E. JOYCE: But what is –

SPEAKER: You’re talking about a specific case, but we’re discussing the policy of this particular resolution and I ask you to stay relevant, please.

E. JOYCE: It is relevant. It is. You’re saying that you can’t release information, but when you release the information what’s the penalty? What is the penalty for it? Can anybody – none, there’s none.

This is the point – this is the flaw in this piece of legislation.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

AN HON. MEMBER: I’ll tell you (inaudible).

E. JOYCE: You’ll tell me. What are you going to tell me? I’ll tell you what you’re going to tell me right away. You’re going to say we’re going to bring it back to the House. Then here’s where the problem lies. You’re going to bring it back to the House that it didn’t – whatever the – but here’s the problem.

P. LANE: The House will do nothing.

E. JOYCE: If the House don’t do anything, if you’re a Liberal, we’ll find something else to do. If you’re on this side, it’s going to be a harsher penalty. It should be uniform for everybody. That’s why we should have it in this House, if someone leaked documents, have it somewhere in this House that he has to stand – him or her – stand, apologize, withdraw, not sit in the House for a day or two, have something that’s uniform.

That’s what you’re going to say is that we’ll bring it back to the House with a recommendation. So if you have a Liberal majority, and it happens to be a Cabinet minister who does it, do you think you’re going to get the same issue and the same judgment as you would if it was me? So say me, for example, or anybody else over here, this is the problem you’re going into. I’ve seen it. I’ve been there. I’ve seen it.

So this is why I'm asking the Committee now to take this back and put something in there with teeth. This has no teeth. I've been there with it. I've been through it. I've been through all the going out in the media on a regular basis; Fred Hutton on a regular basis, leaked stuff on a regular basis. Breaking news. It was all false. It was all false. So this is my point to the House – and I know you people are listening to me talk again – it could be anybody tomorrow.

It was the Minister of Energy one day, a nine-month police investigation. What happened? Nothing. Nothing. So this is why I'm saying to the Committee – and as people know, I went through the court thing, we're waiting for the decision on that, I'm not going to speak about that, because it's parliamentary privilege; I'm not.

But there are two things out of that that came out, Mr. Speaker, which is very relevant here, what the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said, if you get new information. Do you know the two things that came out right quick? The lawyers agreed. Members aren't government employees; the second thing, Bruce Chaulk's lawyer said, oh, it was a mistake that Members – he said Members – really aren't – it was an honest mistake. Those are the two things that came out in the court.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the Member to not use names.

E. JOYCE: I will. Thank you for that.

SPEAKER: Use the statutory officer by their title, please.

E. JOYCE: The Commissioner for Legislative Standards. Sorry about that.

But those are the two points that came out of that whole court thing, now we are not government employees, which I stood in this House and tried – and the second thing it says is Members and government employees at the beginning – the Commissioner for Legislative Standard's lawyer said it was an honest mistake where it said Members, he really thought it was; it was an honest mistake. So everything that myself and Dale Kirby went through in this

House of Assembly out in the general public, it was an honest mistake.

Then what the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said is that if there's new information you should bring it back. Under this policy, Mr. Speaker, what are the penalties?

So I'm going to ask the Committee – I won't belabour this anymore – to withdraw this bill, withdraw this, bring it back and put some penalties in it, because I can guarantee you, and I'll say it again, it all depends on who it is, what degree of severity it's going to be brought back to the House about. I can guarantee it, as sure as I'm here, and if anybody knows me, I'll always try to be fair. I don't care if you're Liberal, NDP, independent, I try to be fair. Over time, my record shows I didn't care: If it's right, it's right; if it's wrong, it's wrong.

So if we're going to allow – whichever government, it may not be the Liberal government, may be the PC government, may be the NDP, you don't know, but you can't put that in the hands of whoever is in power, you can't do it. What you have to do is say if this is the act that's being brought forward here, you have to have some kind of penalty in here, which is uniform for everybody in this House of Assembly – everybody.

Then even if you're not the Member to move ahead because there's a complaint against you, what is the penalty? Mr. Speaker, this is the point. What is the penalty if someone who makes the complaint is out in the public talking? Does this continue? Does the investigation continue?

I ask the Chair of the Committee: Does it continue? If it's already out in the media, where it's supposed to be confidential, does it continue or does it stop? We say, oh, well, it's all out in the media; it would've got out anyway. So what are we going to do about it? Nothing.

There is no penalty in this here for even the person who makes the complaint. So if a person who makes the complaint against you, they can go talk to the media. There is nothing in it. There are absolutely no teeth in this here. Confidentiality agreements don't mean anything unless there are penalties attached to it, and we

all know that. I know it personally. Dale Kirby knows it personally. With all the leaks that were here, what is the penalty for it?

Now that there is a Code of Conduct brought in here for bullying and harassment against a Member – and I agree with it, by the way. If there is someone out here harassing an employee, they should be – I got no problem with it. I think it is great. I think it is all great. I got no problem with that whatsoever if you feel that you've been bullied, you've been harassed or someone is always after you. I got no problem whatsoever to bring this in. I agree with keeping us all accountable. I think the ones who keep us accountable are our electorates. They are the ones who keep us accountable.

I agree with the philosophy of the bill, but I ask again that they withdraw this here and bring it back so that when we come back here, if it is put out in the public media and it is leaked in any way whatsoever and it is shown that you did it, either the Member or whoever leaked it has got to pay consequences to it and the person whoever made the complaint, if they leaked it – which happened to me and Dale Kirby.

Everybody here, I can show you – I can tell you it was out in the media before I even knew what they were talking about. I didn't have a clue. Walked out here one day and the next thing you know (inaudible) –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I am trying to get this House back to a place of relevance when we speak to bills. We have a Member that is a naming people; that is not speaking to the policy here today. We have rules to follow in this House. At the end of the day, Speaker, we're just trying to get this Parliament to a better place, to entice other people to want to step up and run for whatever party. I would just ask you to please be mindful of relevancy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, how is that not relevant? How is that not relevant, Mr. Speaker? I am showing a full example where there was a

complaint of bullying and harassment that was out in the media before the people even knew about it. I am saying that it was done. Here is proof that it was done and there are no consequences. How is that not relevant? Explain to me how that is not relevant, Mr. Speaker.

I am trying to strengthen the legislation. I am actually trying to strengthen the legislation. I'm just glad that the Deputy House Leader is so concerned about bullying and harassment, she had her chance to go as a witness and she wouldn't do it, and I'll talk about that some day.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: Trust me on that.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Speak to the policy, not individual Members.

E. JOYCE: But that is part of the policy. What I'm saying is part of it.

I'll sit down. I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask that the bill be taken back to the Committee again and put in some penalties, not only for the Member, but also for the person who made the complaint that is put out in the public.

That's my concern here now. This is not worth the paper it's written on because there are no consequences for anybody if this is breached. If you don't believe me, ask the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology what it's like to have something leaked about him – a nine-month police investigation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers – sorry, the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Obviously, I will be speaking in support of this. And, in some ways, there are already safeguards that exist in 42.8, Confidentiality of identity and 42.11, Declaration. I would assume that all Members would be following that. In some ways this seems superfluous; however, the fact is it did create problems for the Office of the Citizens' Representative to do its investigation.

In many ways, this is about accountability; it's about ensuring transparency and confidence. It's also about protecting due process, especially with regard to complaint process. Anything that helps that process along is certainly going to be, Speaker, absolutely crucial to making sure that the public and the Members have confidence in the approach.

I do accept the fact that maybe there needs to be some stronger penalties on this, and that goes to one of my concerns in this. Because the one thing that I've clearly understood, that's been made clear to all of us when we first got elected and went through the orientation, is the power of freedom of speech that MHAs enjoy here. I often thought, too, if there is an issue indeed with whether names are mentioned or whatever else, as to what are, not so much the penalties, but what are the practicalities. Because names can be mentioned either deliberately or by accident, it doesn't make any difference. Since this is televised and in *Hansard*, whether an apology is offered or not, the name is there on record.

In some way I guess I would like to see – and I did bring this up in Committee – how do you make sure, whether it's then through a delayed transmission so that if it's – it's one thing to mention, I guess, the names of MHAs and so on and so forth, but I'm more or less concerned about people who – maybe it's an employee, for that matter. How do you make sure that name is protected, not only in terms of the measures – and certainly this is an attempt to further emphasize the whole notion of confidentiality, of driving home that point. But still, names can get mentioned here.

I would still like to see something that if a name is brought up that really shouldn't be, who is a vulnerable individual, that name is not on the record in some way, shape or form, or the transmission is stopped or it's blotted out, if you want, or redacted. In that case I still think, Speaker, we could go a little bit further into looking at that. That may not be within the realm of this report, but at the same time I think it's something we need to turn our attention to, especially since the modes of communication and the technology for communication has evolved significantly and we're no longer just dealing with paper copies.

So with that, certainly anything that enforces the notion of confidentiality, whether that is looking at stiffer penalties and penalties that are applied equally across the board, or in measures that we can to protect the names, I think that's all good, but this is a good start and something that we will support.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers if the Minister of Environment and Climate Change speaks now, we will close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd just like to thank the speakers today: the MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, the MHA for Mount Pearl - Southlands, the MHA for Bay of Islands and the MHA for St. John's Centre.

They all highlighted some good things with this piece of legislation that is going to be updating in the changes to the act. They're going to help us with bringing a higher standard; ensuring that the benefits of confidentiality were highlighted, which is important; and finding a process to make the process better.

I think individuals highlighted the fact that legislation is created to be changing and ever flowing when we see things that need to be updated and fixed. I thought that was very thought provoking. Our workplace and workers need to be treated with dignity and respect was a line that was used. I thought that was very good.

Closing the loopholes: You shouldn't be able to stall a process or cut short a process by a loophole that existed. We need protection on all sides was mentioned there.

The investigation: the accountability, the protecting due process was mentioned. I think all of us support all of those initiatives.

Parliamentary privilege: I'd like to highlight a point that the MHA for St. John's Centre mentioned. It did come up in our Committee and we have written the Standing Orders Committee

to look at some options that can come from that because I think there are some good ideas from that perspective.

Parliamentary privilege does not give you the privilege to put forward names of people without their consent on those things. It's for debate. It's to protect you so you feel the ability to open debate, but not to name people in processes that shouldn't be named. I think that's a good point that the hon. Member for St. John's Centre mentioned.

The talk of penalties is an important one and they do exist within the confines there now. Penalties can be an apology right now, suspensions, fines and vacating the seat would be one. But one of the things that happens, not within the legislation that we're talking about here today, but it does come up when there is a breach of that, the Committee will get together and discuss that and bring it forward, as the hon. Member said, for the people in this House to determine what the penalty would be; whether it be an apology, suspension, fine or vacating the seat in circumstances. I don't think we've seen those circumstances, not in my recent memory, anyway, of some of those, but we have seen apologies. We have seen suspensions. We have seen fines.

So I think there's no better place to put it than in the hands of the House of Assembly. There are four opportunities for penalties that currently exist within what we have and there could be ideas that we could look at others.

But that's not the role of this Committee right now, that's the role of the House of Assembly and maybe Standing Orders or something like that. I would push that to the Table Officers or the House itself to look at those options because there may be more penalties that could be brought in and maybe highlighted a little bit earlier.

So that's not problematic from my standpoint, but one of the things that I do want to say is that I'm glad that people see the urgency in fixing this loophole that existed. I don't think it was intended as a loophole or anything like that and I don't think it's being used as one. I just think that it's highlighting a fact that the Citizens' Representative brought forward a concern that

the Committee met on four different occasions to come up with the solution that could fix a potential problem that could exist, or may exist. I just hope people in the House of Assembly vote to move forward with this report that we've tabled here today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 14, Bill 53, An Act To Amend The Judicature Act.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

It is moved and seconded that Bill 53, An Act To Amend The Judicature Act, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 53 now be read a second time.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: That was seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Judicature Act." (Bill 53)

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm happy to speak here this morning on An Act to Amend the Judicature Act. This proposed bill is pretty straightforward. It will simply amend section 21(1)(c) of the *Judicature Act* to allow for the number of judges of the court to be set out in the regulations as opposed to be setting out specifically in the statute.

An Act to Amend the Judicature Act will remove the reference to the specific number of Supreme Court judges from the act and instead will authorize the Lieutenant-Governor in Council to prescribe the specific number of judges in regulation.

A little bit of background on this. In the 2018 federal budget, \$77.2 million was provided over four years and \$20.8 million ongoing per year to support the creation of 39 new Unified Family Court judicial positions in Canada. Of these positions, three were earmarked for Newfoundland and Labrador to support the expansion of the Unified Family Court model across the province.

These appointments will occur gradually and the Supreme Court will work with the Provincial Court and the Department of Justice and Public Safety to ensure the necessary administrative resources and a transition plan is in place before expansion occurs.

Supreme Court judges are paid by the federal government pursuant to the federal *Judges Act*. Section 21 of the provincial *Judicature Act* sets out the number of judges to be appointed in this province. The proposed amendments will simply set out the number of judges via regulations instead of being set out in the act.

The proposed amendment will allow for flexibility with respect to judicial appointments, appointments as needed, and not subject to the House of Assembly sitting schedule. Once the UFC model is expanded throughout the province, the Supreme Court will take on all family law matters in this province, taking over current Provincial Court jurisdiction in areas of the province where family law matters can be heard in Provincial Court. The Provincial Courts will continue to be operational once the UFC model rolls out.

The Provincial Courts are the busiest courts in this province with high numbers of litigants moving through the court each week in predominately criminal law matters. Expanding the UFC model in Newfoundland and Labrador will create a one-stop shop for family law matters in this province. It will promote a specialized family law bench that will be solely dedicated to family law matters. Additionally, expanding the UFC model will reduce any confusion surrounding what level of court matters should be filed in.

We have consulted with the judiciary on this and I personally met with Chief Justice Whalen of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador and Shelley Organ to discuss these matters. Certainly, I give credit to Chief Justice Whalen for advocating on behalf of the judiciary.

With that, Speaker, those are my comments.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

It is with great pleasure that I speak to this bill, Bill 53, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act.

I, first of all, want to say that I would be supporting and we would be supporting this. I think the main reason is because it does support access to justice. I think the minister has just referenced the fact that it will lessen confusion for potential individuals who want to have their matters heard before the Family Court. I think this is a welcomed amendment.

Just by way of background, I think for the benefit of any viewers, family law in the province is or has been the responsibility of both the Supreme and Provincial Court. If the matter involved divorce or the division of martial property, it must be heard in the Supreme Court. Additionally, St. John's and Corner Brook both have Family Courts – a division of the Supreme Court – thus, in these areas, the Supreme Court,

Family Division will hear all family matters and the Provincial Court will not hear any.

However, in areas where there is no Supreme Court, Family Division available, then an application can be filed in Provincial Court or the General Division of the Supreme Court. So now, the province will see three more Family Courts set up by the Supreme Court. As we know, the Supreme Court is funded fully by the federal government.

What we're going to see is more opportunities here to have cases heard in the Family Court. I think also, consequently, that it will reduce the number of people who have to choose between the two levels of court: Provincial and Supreme. The addition of these three Family Courts will reduce confusion, as has been stated by the minister, and I think what's really important to note here is that especially for those individuals who don't have lawyers, who are self-represented, this will help with them in terms of understanding the procedure that's in play.

Because we know that the law can be quite confusing and sometimes daunting, especially for those individuals who wish to represent themselves and may not understand the complexities in terms of appearing before the court. So I think this is a good thing, that it will now lessen that ambiguity, the conflict that may exist for individuals about what court they now would have to file an application in.

Because the province will see three more Family Court judges appointed – the current number that is stated in the legislation of 22 is not accurate. Now, as the minister has stated, they're going to prescribe the fact that you can basically have – that will be open in the regulations.

So I think, in its entirety, this is a good amendment and we would support it. It's straightforward. Also, there's reference to the gender-neutral language that it will be using; of course, that's always welcome as well. I like the idea that it's a one-stop shop for family law matters, and that will, again, increase access to justice. When we see access to justice being encouraged, I think this is such a basic principle of law, which really makes sure and ensures that citizens have equal access to the legal systems in their respective jurisdictions.

On that note, in conclusion, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and we support the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I am happy to speak to the *Judicature Act* and to talk about prescribing the specific number of judges of the Supreme Court. I am very happy to see that the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Public Safety have brought this in. I think this is absolutely a step in the right direction.

I don't think I need to repeat the points that the minister made or my colleague across the way. This is something I am very familiar with for multiple reason. Number one, being that this has been in the works for some time now. Back when I was in the role, I had some input into working with the federal government to increase the number of Supreme Court justices here in the province, to do more when it came to the separation of the divisions. Just when you talk about the different matters, talking about Provincial and Supreme, that has always been an issue when you had Supreme jurisdiction on the West Coast, something different in Central, similarities up in Labrador, change on the East Coast. So having that uniformity, I think, is going to be a good thing.

I am extremely happy that the Attorney General and his department continued on with this and ensured that it got done. So certainly kudos to the minister.

When you talk about some of the changes here, they are housekeeping in nature. But they are also what I would call a good housekeeping in the sense that when we talk about gender-neutral language, that is something that whenever we have to amend legislation to make changes, it is a good opportunity to refresh and to update and make legislation more in line with today's standards. I think we have seen that. Just looking at a lot of the changes here today, we're talking about taking out Grand Falls and putting in Grand Falls-Windsor. I mean, that is obviously

something that has been a long time coming. I will point out –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: A shout-out to the Member opposite and, again, a shout-out to the good people of Windsor for having their names included in the legislation.

I will say that having served the role, and I think I have spoken about it on a number of occasions, but the work that is done by Legislative Counsel on this piece of legislation or any other is absolutely necessary, important, and people truly have no idea about the difficult work that they do. When you look at legislation, to go through it, to comb it, to make updates, to make changes, it is really painstaking, timely work, difficult.

Again, it is not like we have a full army or division of people working at this: it is very few. I want to give credit to Legislative Counsel. I know we have a previous Legislative Counsel sitting here in the House of Assembly so they would have a lot of insight on the work that goes in to it. Certainly, those were very big shoes, difficult shoes to fill, and I wish the camera could show the individual to see if their face is reddening or not when you speak – oh yes, thank you, Speaker; that was my goal. But I mean it with sincerity that Legislative Counsel is a difficult role, a necessary one and one that benefits all of us here in the House of Assembly.

As a former lawyer myself in small-town rural Newfoundland and Labrador, having seen the difficulty when you have work being done in two levels of court, it could be difficult. Not knowing whether you bring application to the Provincial Court, to the Supreme Court. So to have that uniformity there is I think a necessary thing.

Again, to have three new federal judges here in the province is a big win for us I think. I think you're going to see improvement in the system. When it comes to family law, especially, it's a difficult task at the best of times. I know and I know the Attorney General knows there's work that still has to be done on that court and accessibility and getting it open to people. So he will continue that work and he'll certainly have mine and everybody's support, because it's

something that, regardless of where you are in the province, we all deal with that in terms of our constituencies and access to justice, access to courts.

So on that note, I will say thank you for the opportunity to speak to the *Judicature Act*, and I appreciate the opportunity here.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a few comments on this amendment to the *Judicature Act*. Just looking at this act now, it's being amended to incorporate gender-neutral language and to authorize the Lieutenant-Governor – sorry, accent; I've been up in Labrador for a week, so now a lot of people can't understand me again.

When there are any changes coming down, what I always look it is why are these changes happening, what's the positive, what's the negative and the rationale why. So one of the things is to incorporate gender-neutral language, which is a very, very positive thing, bringing our legislation into the modern day. We talk a lot about equality; it's good to see it actually being written now in our legislation. Also, the ability to authorize the Lieutenant-Governor in Council to increase the number of Supreme Court judges through the regulations. So, on the surface, that seems a positive thing as well, but we always have to ask why, and are there any negative impacts, any positive impacts.

Looking at the change that has come about through federal investment, which is a big positive, \$77 million for the expansion of the Family Courts across Canada. We're going to be getting three new justices with this increase in funding. It's very, very positive to see that the chief justice of the provincial Supreme Court approached the provincial government requesting that these changes would happen in a gradual transition, which would allow everything to be looked at and make sure the changes are positive and no pitfalls there.

Just looking at some of the issues now. As my fellow MHA for Harbour Main talked about consistency and making the transition easier for families who are in the justice system because, right now, we have family law cases heard either in the Supreme Court, the Provincial Courts, also in St. John's and western jurisdictions. They already have a Unified Family Court.

So this process would actually bring consistency, which is very important for families. Also, another thing that would be really positive is a lot of families don't have a lot of money and affording a lawyer is a barrier and then having to face which jurisdiction will actually hear their case.

So it brings consistency. It makes things much more simple, which is important. This process is supposed to take time, allowing for studies of the proposals and consultations between both branches of the court and the Department of Justice and Public Safety. That's a very positive thing.

But, of course, the positions in hiring are expected to take time with no current deadline. That's the rationale behind giving the power to set the number of justices on the Supreme Court from the act to the regulations. Now, in actual fact, that is a bit concerning to me when I was looking at changing it from the act to the regulations because it takes the ability for us to discuss it in the House of Assembly and to have the MHAs have their say and ask questions and discuss it. Going to the regulations, it goes to Cabinet.

One of the problems we always run into when things are in Cabinet is transparency. So that was a concern, but, like I said, on the surface it does seem to be concerning but, in actual fact, the fact that shifting the number from the Supreme Court justices from the act to the regulations is not really a major concern because, of course, it's all through the federal government.

Like I said, speaking after everybody else, I don't want to be repeating things, so this is something that we can support. I'm going to be voting to support it.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Justice and Public Safety speaks now he'll close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to thank the Members for speaking to this, this morning, the Member for Harbour Main, the Minister of IET and the Member for Torngat Mountains. I think they've all raised important points and spoke about the positivity of this legislation.

I certainly also want to thank the former minister of Justice and Attorney General, who did a lot of the heavy lifting behind the scenes and made it pretty easy for me to just simply bring some legislation here and get this done here this morning. So thanks very much, I appreciate it.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 53 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Judicature Act. (Bill 53)

SPEAKER: The bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Judicature Act,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 53)

SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I move that this House do now resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 53, An Act To Amend The Judicature Act.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Motion carried.

On motion, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, the Speaker left the Chair.

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 53, An Act To Amend The Judicature Act.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The Judicature Act.” (Bill 53)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Chair.

While I recognize that Supreme Court judges are paid by the federal government, does the

minister expect that the provincial government will incur any additional costs, in term of supporting this increase in the number of judges?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you.

When each new federal court or Supreme Court judge is appointed we will work with the Department of Justice and we will work with the judiciary as well, within their budget, to make sure that any necessary increase in cost for staffing or things like that, we will work through that with them.

There certainly may well be cost but I can’t say that for sure. When the time comes to discuss that, we’ll work through that within the department if there are savings to be found there or money within the budget for the courts.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Where will these three additional courts be located?

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

J. HOGAN: There is no decision yet on where the three courts will be located. That’s something that we will work with the chief justice and with the Supreme Court on. Of course, there are six locations throughout the province. There’s one in St. John’s, Corner Brook, Grand Bank, Grand Falls-Windsor, Gander and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Currently, there are UFC models in Corner Brook and St. John’s. So the three will be dispersed amongst the remaining four spots.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Chair.

Will there be an effort to appoint judges who have a background or experience in Indigenous

matters? Is there going to be any special focus or attention for that, Minister?

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

J. HOGAN: So the appointments are done by the federal government, by the minister of Justice for the Government of Canada. I will say that just from what I have seen over the last few years, the appointments have certainly made efforts to have varied backgrounds in the community. Certainly, a gender-based lens has been put on it with members from all kinds of communities and I am sure that they will continue to make those efforts there as they go forward to appoint new judges.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

Are there any wraparound supports provided with the Family Court?

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

J. HOGAN: So the Family Court itself, it is my understanding it would just be the judiciary, but, of course, there are lots of support services that are offered by the Department of Justice and Public Safety. I think that more specifically with regard to things like Provincial Court jurisdiction, the Family Violence Intervention Court, the Drug Treatment Court and those sort of speciality courts, there are wraparound supports offered for those.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: The final question: I'm just wondering if there's going to be any expansion in terms of the jurisdiction of any of the courts. For example, the court in Gander, will there be any kind of new expansion of their jurisdiction or anything like that with respect to this new bill?

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

J. HOGAN: So the jurisdiction of the courts is set out in the Constitution right now, and this is one of the reasons why we want to deal with this and expand the UFC model. The federal government has jurisdiction over issues under the *Divorce Act* for married individuals, and the Provincial Courts have jurisdiction and the provincial government has jurisdiction over issues related to child support and child issues and things like that.

So what the *Judicature Act* does is allow for there to be a one-stop shop, to move some of the provincial jurisdiction into the federal jurisdiction to deal with this under the one-stop shop of the Unified Family Court. This is what we are working through. This is sort of the purpose of the Family Court is to blend some of the jurisdiction between federal and provincial matters so that individuals involved in family matters, whether getting a divorce or separation and dealing with child issues at the same time don't have to go to two different courts and have two different court matters at the same time. It can all be dealt with together.

CHAIR: I see no further questions.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 16 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 16 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 16 carried.

CLERK: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant-Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Judicature Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 53.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 53.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

B. WARR: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 53 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and has directed him to report Bill 53 without amendment.

When shall the bill be received?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: When shall the bill be read a third time?

L. DEMPSTER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 2, Bill 41, third reading, An Act Respecting A Province-Wide 911 Service For The Reporting Of Emergencies.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that Bill 41, An Act Respecting A Province-Wide 911 Service For The Reporting Of Emergencies, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that bill now be read a third time.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to take this opportunity just to provide an additional comment to the debate we had yesterday. I'd like to thank those who reached out to me last evening and this morning and continued to express their concern. They had a couple of interesting, new ideas and I'd like to read it into the record, if I may.

I want to underline, again, that the people that I'm hearing from – and I'm sure that many of us, on both sides of the House, are probably hearing from – we're talking about a bill that is making changes to what is probably one of the most important safety umbrellas in this province. It's so important that we listen to the experts. We listen to those who've been providing this service, who are very knowledgeable about the service, and their concerns.

As I said yesterday, there is a variety of issues here, and I'm still struggling to try to understand exactly the rationale. One of the key items or one of the new suggestions that I've heard – and I'd just like to read into the record – was that, again, everyone I've heard from the last 24 hours and less are still not convinced. I feel that myself, as an MHA, and every other MHA in this Legislature, we do need to listen to our constituents. When they're telling us to do something, they have concerns; it's our duty, our responsibility to bring those concerns to the floor.

One of the suggestions, and I'll go through yourself, Speaker, to the minister, was that – as I explained yesterday, there were a variety of

issues. Essentially, what's going to happen here is that we're going to be removing a very professional, very carefully appointed board, that's frankly been producing and performing very successfully. They've done their job well, they've built up a fund and we're removing them. I guess there's a financial saving associated with doing that, but I would argue that the minimal amounts of cost and the fact that it has been borne by the fund that they have been charged with overseeing, no cost to government, I really question the wisdom of that.

As I made a suggestion yesterday, if successful in passing this bill, I do believe that it would be appropriate for government to consider some mechanism where you can have that continued expertise, especially some of the key individuals on the board that have spent a great deal of the last several years involved in this.

So we have removed a board. We have increased the size of the Department of Justice and Public Safety. Core government has grown. I think just saying those words, Speaker, all of us here are realizing the challenges that we have with the size of the civil service. The importance, though, of continuing to provide that service but continuing to have an opportunity for good, professional people to excel in our core civil service. We have been careful not to try to grow it; here is a direct move in that direction.

We have taken a fund that has built up some \$20 million and it was set aside and it has been built up with a very specific, a very intended purpose. As I said yesterday, I was trying to find the right words, but the fact that it will be going into general revenue with commitments or promises or some kind of future hope that it will still remain a priority when the CRTC says it is time to move, there is a lot of trust involved here. As so many of my colleagues said yesterday: Why are we touching this? Why don't we just leave it alone?

I think a point I made yesterday was that if you look at that fee, that 75 cents, that has been collected on every single phone bill by every resident of this province, that fee was levied in exchange for the understanding that it would go towards a fund dedicated solely for the enhancement and the operation of the

Newfoundland and Labrador 911 service. We have taken that away. So, in many ways, we have defaulted as a result of passing this bill on that business transaction.

I guess, as I said, we have now turned a fee with a specific intended purpose, it is really now just a levied tax. It is a fee. Yes, it is collected in association with our phone bill, but now it will be going into general revenue without that intended specific purpose.

So with that preamble, I did want to introduce a new thought that was sent to me early this morning. It was suggested that – and I'll just paraphrase from a rather long email – if the minister wanted to find access to financial support to pay for the upgrades, for example, to the new radio communication system, it's suggested that he could've made a simple amendment to the current act to allow for the NL911 board to pay dividends back to government, as has occurred in past boards. That way, any deemed surplus could've been paid out while allowing sufficient reserve to be retained to manage, upgrade and expand the current system.

A lot of wisdom in that, a lot of wisdom in the expertise that we're now walking away from. Again, the different contacts I've had with search and rescue, I didn't speak to all the different authorities, but I have not had a single person tell me they had any concerns in terms of the rationale around why this needed to be done, but they certainly have concerns over Bill 41 and what its intent is.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to take just a few minutes to have a few more comments. Given the time is only 11:22, we have lots of time because we have about an hour, really.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: I don't have an hour, but we have an hour, based on our schedule there's no other legislation so I'll take my time.

Anyway, I don't want to belabour all the points and I don't want to repeat every point that my colleague made but he did make some very good points. I think for me I had some time to sort of think about this and reflect on this overnight and this morning about the discussion we had yesterday and so on. One of the things I heard mentioned a couple of times, and even after the House closed, I spoke to one of the ministers there and they talked about the radio system, and my colleague just referenced the radio system.

In terms of these new initiatives and so on, sometimes it's in the way you do it, how people view it and how it's communicated. I was saying to my colleague here for Humber - Bay of Islands earlier, if from the get-go government had come forward and said we're slightly changing the definition of the 911 system to get, not just phones but other related items, i.e. radio systems and so on, which is what he's doing.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: I did read it, I say to the minister. I did read it. You have a chance to speak after me.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. LANE: That's sort of what they're talking about there.

But if they had to have said from the get-go, look, the bottom line is we have \$20 million sitting in a fund over here that we can't get at and it's just sitting there, but part of that 911 system is not just telephones, it's the radio systems for the cars, for the ambulances, for the police cars and so on. Having that advanced technology that would be in the police cars, in the fire trucks, the ambulances and so on, that when you call 911, the Enhanced 911, you would have the appropriate radio systems and pairing available so it all works together as one system. Do you know what? That's something we need to do. It's not something that we've ever budgeted for per se, it's a new thing and it's something that we need to do, but it is part of this bigger picture.

So we've estimated that when the time comes for the Enhanced 911 it's going to be – I don't know – \$5 million. I don't know what the amount is. I think my colleague said during his day at it, it was \$2.5 million, so I don't imagine it's gone to \$20 million, but maybe it's \$5 million, maybe it's \$10 million, I don't know.

But if he had to say there's a portion of money here, so now after you subtract that, we have \$10 million or \$15 million left in the pot or whatever it is and that's growing by \$3 million a year. We've done some estimates about how much it's going to cost now to have the appropriate radio systems and so on in every police car and ambulance and fire truck and so on, and here's what it's going to cost.

We can take that \$20 million. We can set this much aside for the Enhanced 911 system, take this money here and put it in all of the emergency responding vehicles, because it's all part of it. We won't have enough to put it in every vehicle, but the \$3 million a year that's coming in, that \$3 million every single year, that surplus money is going to be able to get 10 more fire trucks or 20 more fire trucks or 20 more police cars, whatever the case might be and maintain it.

Now, every cent that's gone in on this is going to the 911 centre, it's going to Enhanced 911 and it's going to the radio systems and everything associated to that on the fire trucks. This is how much it's going to cost, here's what we're spending the money on and this is why we're doing it.

If that is what had come forward before this House of Assembly, I would have voted for it, because it makes sense to me. It makes sense to me. If there had been honesty about what it was all about, but that's not how it came down. It never came down that way.

We're talking about we're going to make the province safer. We're going to make the province safer by scrapping a 911 board and saying today you're reporting to the board and tomorrow you're reporting to the Minister of Justice, now it's safer all of a sudden.

P. TRIMPER: Oh, I feel better.

P. LANE: I feel better, I feel much safer.

Then we talked about efficiencies. What efficiencies in government? It's not costing a cent now, not a dime. You're taking on more work. So it's actually going to grow – as my colleague says it's going to grow core government. It's not going to save anything. It's going to grow core government. Because it's being paid for now by a separate fund and done by a separate entity. We all know that's another flimsy excuse. At the end of the day, let's just be honest.

Let's say there's a bigger picture here, guys. It's not just about that Enhanced 911 system. It's also about all the other related equipment that's going to be needed in police cars, ambulances, search and rescues, radio systems, all that. It's all one big package, which I think I would have certainly bought into that concept; it makes sense to me. No good to have an Enhanced 911 system that when you call 911 they can't communicate properly with the emergency responders. That would have all made sense.

Therefore, that \$20 million that's here, just sitting here, over here in some bank account, we want to take that money. Here's how much it's going to cost and the rest is going to be spent on this. Here's our list. Show us a list; this is the stuff we need, this is what it's going to cost, it's all going to be part of this. We're going to spend the money on that.

We're not going to just throw it in general revenues and over on this side we're just going to hope that you spend it on the right thing. As I said yesterday, I was being half saucy I suppose, talking about opening up another government office in an Opposition district or more couches for the – but the point is that's the stuff that people see and are very upset about. It's not even in my area, but I've had a lot of people come to me about that stuff.

So people feel that you're going to waste the money on unnecessary things, or political things, or whatever the case might be. But if you'd said from the get-go the money is here and this is what we want to spend it on. It all ties together, it's all part of the same picture. This is how we're going to spend it. Here's what we need and here's what it's going to cost. Then as we

upgrade it – there's not enough money in the pot to do all of it, that's why the \$3 million a year, extra money, it's going to be 20 more fire trucks this year, or ambulances, or whatever.

I would have supported it. I would say that makes sense, all good. But that's not what you did. That's where you've got the problem.

I think the lesson in all of this is just be upfront and honest with people. Tell people what you're doing and why you're doing it. If we did that, there would be no reason for people to be skeptical. But when it's all under this sort of shroud of secrecy and it's all just going to get thrown into the pot, we're not going to tell you what it's about and we're going to start making excuses about making the province safer and all of this kind of stuff, people look at it with a jaundiced eye. They don't believe you. That's what it comes down to.

At the end of the day, my vote still stands where it does because I don't like the way this was done. With what I am saying here about the radio systems, I'm not sure that's going to happen – I'm not sure that's going to happen. I have to trust you. That's what's going to happen. But I don't, because you weren't upfront and honest to begin with. If you had to come forward and say here's the list of stuff we're spending the money on and it made sense to me, and it tied into the 911 system, I'm on board, b'ys – I'm on board. You didn't do it. I'm sorry, no offence to anyone, but I can't trust you because I've been down that road before and got burned.

So again, I can't support the legislation as is, but I hope that that's your actual intent, even though you didn't state that as your intent, specifically. You might have somewhat alluded to it, to some degree. I would ask maybe if the minister, in his closing comments, could say to us – if he can say to me, I'd feel a lot better about it. If you could say yeah, that's what we're doing with the \$20 million. Here's our estimate for the Enhanced 911. Here's our estimate to put the radios in all of the emergency equipment and search and rescue. Here's their list. Here's what it is going to cost. Here's what we're going to spend the \$3 million on year over year on that same stuff.

I'd feel a lot better. I am sure the people of Newfoundland and Labrador would, too. But if you can't do that and it's just we're going to take the money, throw it into general revenues and trust you to spend it on what it was intended for, we can't do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am going to spend just a few minutes and I'm going to ask the minister in his closing statements – I have a lot of concerns because one of the stations – as you know, the 911 centre is in Corner Brook. I know what the minister said yesterday, that people are going to be brought in to the Department of Justice and Public Safety. There will be no layoffs.

So I just want the minister to confirm that, because it's in *Hansard*. I didn't want to respond to the people that contacted me until the minister spoke today and I was going to ask you to reiterate what you said yesterday. There won't be any layoffs. They'll be brought in to the Department of Justice and Public Safety. Because they are concerned about layoffs and the number of people out my way who have contacted me last night and today, since this, so I'll just confirm what was already said yesterday. I'll ask the minister to confirm that.

Just a little compromise here on this and I'm going to stick with my vote also with the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands. Mr. Speaker, here's a little compromise with this: 911 haven't been dissolved yet; this is part of the process to have it. I say to the minister as a bit of advice – you can just take it and listen to it or not take it; it's up to you – before 911 is dissolved, why don't you take the money and purchase the radios? Have the radios purchased.

So instead of bringing \$20 million – and it still hasn't been confirmed in this House yet. Are the radios for the ambulance services, police, RNC, fire departments, first responders around the province?

P. LANE: Search and rescue.

E. JOYCE: Search and rescue is another group.

And I understand the concept of having all the radio systems compatible so that everybody can communicate. I understand that, and upgrade the systems to that. I understand that, I'll say to the minister. But if there's some way that the minister, in his closing statement, could say here's the list of radio systems that we're going to make compatible to make search and rescue, to make first responders, to make 911 safer, that would help to alleviate a lot of the concerns.

I'll say to the minister – and I see him over there listening very attentively – make a commitment. When you close in third reading here, make a commitment that the radios will be purchased before you bring the money into general revenue. Even if the Next Generation 911 is \$2 million, make a commitment that you can put it in Department of Finance some way and put it as a deferred payment so that you can purchase the Next Generation system. It has been done where you can put funds aside. You could purchase the Next Generation. We know if it's \$5 million for the Next Generation, that is put in deferred revenue so that you can purchase it and we know that it's going to be done – of the 911 to buy the Next Generation.

And I'll say to the minister if you can in your closing, or we can even delay this – because it's going to get passed; we know that – and come back with a list; here's the list of radios and here's the list of entities that are going to be used by this fund to expand 911 across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

There are some friendly suggestions to the minister to help, because when you take the funds – again, I was there at the press conference, I was the critic, actually, for Municipal Affairs and Environment at the time – for the phone, people expect it to be used for that purpose. I won't get into it any further: people expect it.

I'll say to the minister, if you make a commitment here today that you would put the money, the \$5 million aside for the Next Generation and then also give a list of what telephone systems and what radio systems you're going to upgrade and make it compatible – which is a good idea, I'll say to the minister,

that is a good idea. If it is the ambulances, fire departments, search and rescue, all the first responders around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, take that and purchase it before you fold 911 so that we know the funds went where they were intended and the 75 cents per phone is used for the intent.

That is just some friendly suggestions to the minister to help get this resolved so that we can move ahead with a better 911 system, which everybody in this House wants. Everybody in this House wants it. So that is just some friendly suggestions to the minister to help with everybody.

I'll ask the minister – and I know he will – to address what he said yesterday that there will be no layoffs. That the people that are working at the 911 centres now, especially out in Corner Brook that I heard from – that's the only ones I heard from, the people in Corner Brook – they're concerned about losing their job. That is natural. That is normal. I know the minister said it yesterday and I know he will confirm it again today.

I'll sit down and take my seat.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety speaks now he'll close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank everyone for their comments this morning. I think it did bring some clarity to the long debate we had yesterday.

I will just make a couple of quick points. The value in this bill, as I see it, is in the integration of all aspects of Public Safety here at government, most specifically the radio program and the 911 program, which will work together. If you do a review of the old piece of legislation and the new one, I would submit that section, the change from emergency 911 telephone service to emergency service where it combines radio and 911, is really the main substantive change in that bill.

There were some comments made that if it had been presented differently that we would have a different discussion on it. The bill hasn't changed. The bill was presented, there have been no changes made: It is what it is. It is there for everybody to read and it is there to be interpreted and reviewed without any changes since we brought it forward.

Just to comment on the expertise related to the separate entity right now. The staff will be coming into the Department of Justice and Public Safety and it's the staff that has the expertise. The board exists for the purpose of governance of that entity. So the expertise is not being lost, it'll be brought into Justice and Public Safety. I look forward to working with them as we move forward with 911, the upgrades and the radio project.

Finally, there's a question there about the PSAPs in Corner Brook. There are no staff in Corner Brook related to the current 911 system, the 911 Bureau, but the PSAPs in Corner Brook and St. John's will remain the same.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting A Province-Wide 911 Service For The Reporting Of Emergencies. (Bill 41)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting A Province-Wide 911 Service For The Reporting Of Emergencies," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 41)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now recess until 2 o'clock.

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

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Lake Melville, Stephenville - Port au Port, Cape St. Francis, Baie Verte - Green Bay and Ferryland.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

Grace Voisey, of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, was beloved by her family and friends throughout Labrador. The brave and public battle this 16-year-old Inuk fought with leukemia was felt by everyone – a battle that she lost in July last year.

Even under adversity, Grace continued to spread the virtue of kindness on a daily basis. It was in this spirit that Mealy Mountain Collegiate recently held the first annual Grace Voisey Kindness Week in February. Each day, students and staff wore different clothing in support of the values Grace endorsed. Monday was purple day for violence prevention. Tuesday was jersey day for teamwork. Wednesday was pink shirt day to stand up against bullying. Thursday was tie-dye for peace, love and dye day. Friday, each grade wore a different colour to create a rainbow.

Grace would often say Kuviasuvunga – I am happy – in her pursuit of traditional activities and Inuit culture. She was an accomplished dancer, drum dancer and served as a Page in the Nunatsiavut Assembly.

I invite this House of Assembly to celebrate the remarkable young life of Grace Voisey, and to pass along your own act of kindness in her honour.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

It is my distinct honour and privilege to acknowledge a fantastic group of individuals in my District of Stephenville - Port au Port, who have been working tirelessly to raise funds to support Ukrainians who move to our province during this humanitarian crisis.

An organization was formed called West Coast Supports Ukraine, consisting of a large group of volunteers from the Codroy Valley, Bay St. George and Corner Brook areas. LouAnn Davis, owner of Nomad Stages, a performing and fine arts studio in Stephenville and the driving force behind the initiative, has two staff members from Ukraine, so this hits close to home for her.

The Bay St. George area is home to over a dozen Ukrainian speakers – the largest Ukrainian population on the Island portion of the province. Therefore, response was swift when the call was put out for help to organize events.

West Coast Supports Ukraine has raised close to \$19,000 thus far on a series of fundraisers, including two benefit concerts featuring local musicians, and donations from school fundraising initiatives. The group is continuing their efforts with an online silent auction planned for April 21 to 25.

Community support for the fundraisers has been phenomenal, which proves that community spirit is alive and well in Stephenville - Port au Port,

and they look forward to welcoming some Ukrainian families into their area.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, today I rise to recognize a reading program in my district that promotes literacy in our communities. Initiated by the interest of local citizens, the Killick Coast region is proud to partner with the Dollywood Foundation of Canada to administer Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

This library strives to instill a love for reading and literacy in children from birth to five years of age, and their families, as it's a book-gifting program that mails free, high-quality, age-appropriate books to children each month, at no cost to the child's family.

Ms. Megan Hibbs, an educator and community volunteer, is spearheading this wonderful program and currently 165 children are enrolled. Children are receiving their first books this month, and families are excited that the library is finally here in the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is open to all areas of our province, as it only takes one person in the area to take the responsibility of getting the program started.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members here today to join me in thanking Megan Hibbs for taking the leadership role in bringing Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to the Killick Coast.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. WARR: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the late Maurice Budgell, a well-known and respected advocate who passed away on March 17, 2022.

Maurice was a very proud Newfoundlander and Labradorian who was a regular caller on VOCM's *Open Line* program, speaking passionately on countless issues. Most recently, he had been speaking to gain support for the fixed link to Labrador.

It was important to Maurice to advocate for those less fortunate and he worked tirelessly for the betterment of our great province. He worked on numerous boards, including the Heritage Society and the Whale Pavilion committee located in King's Point. Maurice had a great interest in the tourism industry and saw a great potential in the Green Bay region.

2022 has been designated as Newfoundland and Labrador's Come Home Year. The community of King's Point had been planning for their own Come Home Year since 2020, but due to the pandemic had to postpone. Maurice was so looking forward to playing his part as a historian and as well a musician. He was a very talented individual who went above and beyond to welcome all.

I ask all my hon. colleagues to join me in extending sincere condolences to Maurice's wife, Mavis; children: Dean, Dana, Dale, David and their families; and all the residents of King's Point and his friends across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I rise in this hon. House to recognize two communities in the District of Ferryland who stepped up to support physical activity in their communities.

With the latest COVID outbreak, the opportunities for families to socialize were limited. With this in mind, the Cape Broyle Recreation Committee came together and constructed two ice rinks, one for hockey and another just for skaters; as well, cleared and maintained an area around both rinks so that

walkers had a safe place to go for their daily walk. The Town of Ferryland also constructed a multi-use rink for their community to enjoy as well.

These recreation opportunities gave people many chances to get outdoors so they could enjoy physical activities and socialize with others. These community projects allowed for communities to come together at a time when everybody else was experiencing COVID fatigue.

Speaker, I ask all Members in this House to join me in recognizing Cape Broyle Recreation Committee and the Town of Ferryland and the many other volunteers for their time and dedication for taking on these community-building projects and supporting physical activity in our district.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased today to highlight the success of the Come Home Year Community Cleanup Project administered by the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board.

The Come Home Year Community Cleanup project is a new funding initiative to support the clean up of litter or improperly disposed of bulk items in areas such as roadsides, trails, beaches, parks, and outdoor recreational spaces. Funding was provided to municipalities, Local Service Districts, Indigenous community governments and organizations and non-profit community groups.

This program was so popular when it was launched that additional funding was committed to accommodate the influx of applications. Overall, the MMSB approved 256 projects with

a total cost of \$520,000 awarded during this funding period.

One community is using the funding for clean up of the popular walking and fishing area, which has been littered with large debris, like washing machines and water tanks. Their goal is to make the area beautiful again and to preserve the river habitat.

Speaker, these projects have a positive impact on protecting our environment and supporting people in our communities as we look toward welcoming home family and friends to celebrate Come Home Year 2022.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, I am delighted to speak today on the success of the Community Cleanup project administered by the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board.

Keeping our province and communities clean is the responsibility of each and every one of us but, certainly, some go above and beyond. It is encouraging to see 256 community projects awarded with over \$500,000 contributed towards this initiative.

Let's all continue to work together to keep our communities clean for this generation and, more importantly, the next.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

Sorry, the hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Both in the Big Land.

L. EVANS: I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

A cleanup helps the environment; I also encourage the government to take proactive measures to prevent illegal dumping and reduce littering within our beautiful province.

Government needs to be more proactive, strengthening environmental assessments and listening to our scientists when making decisions.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week, the Public Service Commission launched a graduate recruitment program to attract recent post-secondary graduates to the public service. This program provides an opportunity to work in various government departments, acquire diverse skill set and to develop a career path to management and executive roles.

The goal is to attract the best and the brightest to join the existing talent within the public service to guide Newfoundland and Labrador into the future; to bring a strong, skilful leadership team for the next generation.

The program is open to anyone who is eligible to work in Canada and has successfully completed a recognized post-secondary program with a minimum of a three-year diploma or bachelor's-level program within the last two years. Those accepted into the program will receive a competitive salary and benefits, mentorship and employment for two years.

Speaker, I am pleased to note that to date we've received well over a hundred applications. The graduate recruitment program will further

enhance our public service and help build the leaders of the future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

Speaker, we need the smartest, most innovative and creative graduates to join the public service. I think that all Members of the House will agree with that sentiment. I also think that we can all agree that our public service is full of diligent, hard-working professionals.

Before entering political life, I spent many years in the public service working alongside them. I have tremendous respect for our public service workers, whom I'd like to thank, from plow operators to social workers to processing clerks. Thank you.

Government was once an employer of choice. But now, with the number of vacant positions, I wonder if this is still the case. I urge the government to show appreciation to their public service and to ensure that working for the people of the province remains a sought-after profession.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. The institutions of this province continue to prove their investment value by attracting young minds from around the world. The problem seems to lie with the ability to retain graduates once they are here. The Third Party awaits the government's retention success as it rises to the challenge of retaining and keeping employees in the public service.

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, Speaker.

The cost of diesel fuel and stove oil in Labrador West and Churchill Falls has skyrocketed. Diesel now sits at over \$3 per litre and stove oil increased by 33 cents this week alone. Labrador already has to deal with higher prices due to the cost of shipping to the region. Now those costs continue to escalate, meaning a more difficult situation for consumers.

I ask the Premier: How high is he prepared to let fuel prices go before he finally takes action?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Thank you for the question. As we said before, we're taking a more holistic approach to the cost of living. We understand that the price of gas is one of the drivers in the cost-of-living equation, but not the only driver, Mr. Speaker.

We can't control the price of gas. If we were doing what the Opposition suggested, it would be up and down like a yo-yo, constantly. Unfortunately, that's largely driven by external factors beyond our control; externalities like a war in the Ukraine, Mr. Speaker; like a significant displacement of Russian oil and gas that's causing pressures on the supply chain, we can't control that.

What we can do and we will do in the budget is ensure that we're addressing the cost of living in a holistic approach for the people of the province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's already been noted that the Premier and his administration have many avenues to be able to address the increased cost of fuel, not only for the people of Labrador but for the people of all this province, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, we applaud the Registered Nurses' Union, its membership and all those at the front line of our health care system for their heroism, especially during the pandemic. Yesterday, it was suggested a potential solution to nurses' burnout means temporary shutdowns for surgery in some parts of our province.

I ask the minister: What does this mean for the estimated 6,000 surgeries backlogged in our province?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Yes, I would echo the Member opposite's comments about our gratitude and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the nursing profession and indeed health care workers in general in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: We know that we need to care for our caregivers. It is important that we look after the people that we have, as well as the population they serve. That is a balance. Currently, there are 580 individuals in health care who are off due to COVID. That number is slowly decreasing. As the strain on those resources diminishes, our focus now is to allow the workforce to recover, regain their strength and to address the challenges that we all face over the coming weeks.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear anything that addresses the immediate issue here: the backlog of surgeries.

We all recognize the dedication of our front-line health care professional staff and the sacrifice they have made. But the minister's answer is not more nurses, it's not more support staff; it closes operating rooms in this province. As other Atlantic provinces recruit our health care professionals to their provinces, again, we, in Newfoundland and Labrador, are being left behind.

I ask the minister: How will you balance shuttered operating rooms and the enormous backlog of surgeries in our province?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I would argue we're not being left behind with our recruitment efforts. We announced in October, I think it was, a \$30-million package aimed at primary care physicians. We have met with them on numerous occasions. There are bursaries. There are interest-free loans. There is guaranteed income. The new graduates coming off their family medicine residency program are being actively sought here.

We are looking at a marketing campaign for health care providers across this country and we'll be leaving the province to do that as well as, virtually. One could argue about the backlog numbers and Mr. Diamond has, to some extent, addressed that. Summer is normally a time to run these numbers down. We will have to see what we can do to balance both requirements, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

I have to disagree with the minister. We noted yesterday 11 communities that now do not have

doctors living in their communities to provide services. We talked about seven emergency rooms that had to shut down because we don't have health professionals to provide those services. So whatever your recruitment process is, it's not working; we have to come up with a new plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, the Information and Privacy Commissioner is an Officer of this House. Yesterday, he issued a statement accusing the Premier's administration of using the courts to undermine the legislative commitment to transparency and accountability. He said: "It stabs at the heart of the very purpose of having an access to information law – independent oversight."

I ask the Premier: Does he agree with the Information and Privacy Commissioner?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you for the question. And that matter now, as the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner stated yesterday, is going to the Court of Appeal. He's decided to appeal it because he feels that there's a public interest issue there. He hasn't spoken to the legalities of his appeal yet, but we'll see that when it comes forward.

But, of course, as Attorney General, I'm not going to speak to any matters before the court other than to say I practised law for 15 years as a litigator in this province and you go to court all the time, and sometimes you win and sometimes you lose and you respect the decisions of the court, no matter what it is. We'll respect the decision of the Supreme Court Trial Division and we'll respect the decision of the Court of Appeal when that decision comes out as well.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're not arguing the logistics of the legal argument here. What we're saying, a government that stood its platform on openness and transparency is refusing to be open and transparent, and an Officer of this House is calling them out on it. That's not good for the people of this province, it's not fair to this House of Assembly and it isn't what you campaigned on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, the Liberal government has a reputation for hiding information. Just this week, we learned that the \$5-million Rothschild report will not be released. The Premier even refused to ask the Commissioner to review the report and provide the public with a partially redacted version. The Commissioner has called on the Premier's government to "amend the statute to provide even greater certainty that government is not above the law, thereby reassuring the public of its commitment to transparency and accountability."

I ask the Premier: Will you bring forward changes in this House in line with the Commissioner's request?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As we have addressed those concerns in the past with respect to the report that the hon. Member is referring to, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has addressed that, recognizing that it's not prudent to release all commercial information. As the Member opposite is fully aware, an ATIPP request can go in and it can be redacted. That's normal course of business; we're not preventing that.

What we are saying is that this report is, for the first time, an evidence-based approach in evaluating our assets. There are obviously commercial sensitivities in there, as I'm sure everyone in this House can appreciate. The report, if ATIPPed, will be redacted accordingly and in accordance with the legislation and we'll move from there, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, it is disappointing to hear the Premier stand up and say that a report paid for by the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is not accessible to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the only way they can get access to the report is to apply through ATIPP legislation so that some of the report can be blackened out before anybody can see it. Speaker, that's just not good enough – that's just not good enough.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Tomorrow the Minister of Finance will bring down a budget and we'll get a second chance to bring in a real cost-of-living plan.

I ask the minister: Will you provide relief at the pumps and lower the taxes on gasoline?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

First, to the preamble, that is not what the Premier said. That is not an accurate reflection of what the Premier said at all. The Premier has been very clear that the report has sensitivities. We do not want to cause any unintended consequences. I know the Member opposite would not want the assets of the people of this province to be harmed in any way because of release of information that may have an impact. I'm sure the Member opposite would not want to do that.

With regard to the budget tomorrow, as I said in the media yesterday, what we tried to do on this side of the House was bring balance to this budget. Everyone knows the financial situation that we're in here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I think tomorrow the people of the province, and, indeed, I think all the Opposition, will feel that we did create that balance and address the concerns around the cost of living.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, what I heard was that the report will not be released. What I will not support is the fact that our assets of this province that belong to the people can be sold off without full disclosure. That is not good enough.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Again tomorrow, the minister has an opportunity once again to make changes to the cost-of-living plan.

So I ask the minister: Will you delay the implementation of your proposed sugar tax?

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

S. COADY: That was three questions in one, but let me start with, first of all, the Rothschild report. That is not what the Premier said. We are not prepared to put the peoples' assets at risk. That is why we're making sure that this important document is held for commercial sensitivities and that is important to the people of the province, and I think the people of the province understand that we're not playing politics.

The second question about what we'll be saying in the budget with regard to the cost of living. I have already indicated there will be balance in the budget tomorrow, that we are working very hard understanding the financial concerns of the province.

To the sugar-sweetened beverage tax, we announced that 10 months ago, Mr. Speaker. I can say that it was important for the health of the people of the province and the people now have choice.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I can assure the minister that maybe the people that she's talking to don't want the report released, but I can guarantee you the majority of people in Newfoundland and Labrador want to see what's in that report, deserve to see what's in that report –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – and know exactly what's the plan is for the assets of the province.

Mr. Speaker, diesel fuels our economy. It powers heavy equipment, fishery and all such other sorts of transportation. I recently had a fisher send me an invoice; the total on the invoice was \$2,000, of which \$550 was taxes. That's not sustainable. It's not sustainable for the small businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador who rely on transportation to get their goods.

I would ask the minister: What's your plan for small businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador tomorrow to help them with this economy?

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

S. COADY: I can't imagine that the Members opposite would want their government to put the assets belonged to the people of the province at risk. I cannot believe for one moment that there would be anyone elected to this House of Assembly that would call on us to release information that could put those assets at risk. I'm actually shocked, Speaker. I actually am shocked that they – and they're chirping across the hall again –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: – interrupting me when I'm saying that I am confused by why they don't understand that we want to ensure the commercial sensitivities that we discussed are protected.

I will say to the Member opposite that the budget will be tomorrow afternoon. I'm sure he

will take the time to review it and then he can give his analysis of the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

Normally we have to ask the question three times to get one answer, not three questions in one.

In August, there were 127 applications waiting to be heard by a residential tenancies adjudicator. By February, this number has grown to 185 applications.

I ask the minister: How many applications are now waiting to be heard?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Our residential tenancies process is a very important for both landlords and tenants, and it provides kind of an independent, quasi-judicial means to make decisions about landlord-tenant disputes. It's a very important process. We've had a challenge recruiting residential tenancies adjudicators, which is why we had a backlog unfortunately.

I'm very pleased, as of about two weeks ago we have our third of three residential tenancies adjudicators. So we're expecting our backlog to be very quickly diminished and get back to more acceptable time frame.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

All of the Liberal Members, they all must be filled with Liberal jobs, you can't fill them

anymore, they're all gone. They're all taken up, are they?

Tenants and landlords both need quick resolutions when disagreements arise, yet the minister continues to allow three adjudicator positions to remain vacant, the cost of living continues to increase and places for rent are more and more scarce, especially on the northeast Avalon. That means more disputes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. O'DRISCOLL: – which need attention from government to ensure fairness.

I ask the minister: Why are you letting these disputes go unheard for so long?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I disagree completely with the preamble. I can confirm we have all three residential tenancies adjudicators in place. We had two out of three for a while, the final one started just a few weeks ago and has moved from out of province. So we're doing our part to increase the population in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Bringing Liberals in from outside now to fill the other job, is that the way it's going to go?

The minister has a growing waiting list in her department. Some tenants and landlords could be waiting up to six months to get a resolution. Does the minister think this wait-list is acceptable?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, you know, unfortunately, we weren't at our full slate of residential tenancies adjudicators. I'm very pleased, as of two weeks ago; we now have a full slate so we have three residential tenancies adjudicators. They're working virtually, which is a bit more efficient, we get to see more people at a time, actually.

So while we do have more people waiting, we've actually been able to reduce the wait time this year, Speaker, and the amount of time from hearing to decision is reduced as well. We've reduced that from 63 days in 2019 to 26 days in 2021.

So when we do hear those, Mr. Speaker, which is speeding up now that we have a full slate of residential tenancies adjudicators, both landlords and tenants will get their decisions three times as fast.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I've been contacted by a senior in my district, whose pension cheque only covers the cost of home heating fuel. After filling up her tank, she told me she doesn't have any money left to pay for groceries, her light bill or medication.

Given that women, especially seniors, are disproportionately impacted by the rising cost of essentials, what is the department of Women and Gender Equality doing to help women afford to live in this province?

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly thank my hon. colleague for always raising issues about women. As we know, we don't hear about it enough and I'm happy that she asks these questions.

I'm happy to say that we have a number of policies in place. In particular, what was implemented in 2021, of course, by this

government and this Premier, is the GBA+ lens. Of course, that puts policy on every bit of legislation, program, budgets, everything, to show how it's impacted by gender, to mitigate, of course, negative impacts.

That's just one thing that we're doing. Also, as we know, the review of the minimum wage, which, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say was just raised last week here in our province. So we're certainly committed to doing everything we can for women and gender-diverse individuals and every Newfoundlander and Labradorian here in our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Sadly, Speaker, this is disappointing, telling us about a gender-based analysis lens. Although it's good, it's nothing concrete to address these pressing issues for women today. Reviewing policies is not enough. It's not going to help these people who are suffering right now.

I've also heard from single mothers who are now struggling to provide healthy food to their growing children and are rationing their money. It means mothers have to think twice about getting groceries, knowing the increased cost of driving their children to school and other activities is at risk. We don't have public transit in my district.

So I ask the minister, again: What will she do to help mothers who are just trying to stay afloat?

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I really appreciate the Member bringing up these very important issues. The Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement is something that we just also provided an increase in last year's budget.

I'm happy to say, in working with our federal government, of course, and my colleague, the Minister of Education, that we've brought in \$25-a-day daycare in January, moving to \$15-a-day daycare in January '22.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: And, of course, next year, Mr. Speaker, by January, we're aiming to bring in \$10-a-day daycare.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: So these are just some of the initiatives that we're doing.

I'm also happy to say I had a great meeting as well with the skilled trades just last week, as well as the Office to Advance Women Apprentices with actual concrete employment plans to help women in the skilled trades and all sectors in this great province. We'll continue doing everything that we can, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest rates of diabetes in the country. Complications from diabetes results in 30 per cent of our strokes, 40 per cent of our heart attacks, 50 per cent of our kidney failures requiring dialysis, 70 per cent of our non-traumatic leg and foot amputation and is a leading cause of blindness.

I ask the minister: When will he bring in a program to help those people who can't obtain continuous glucose monitoring devices?

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

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

Indeed, we do have one of the highest incidences of diabetes in the Western world. The bulk of

our patients have what's called Type 2 diabetes, and the Member opposite listed off a catalogue of issues that these individuals have.

Continuous glucose monitoring is a new technology that has been suggested as suitable for people who are Type 1 diabetics and who are using insulin pumps. From our point of view, we rely on clinical recommendations and evidence-base supplied by the clinicians in Eastern Health who run our insulin pump program. I have not received a recommendation supporting their funding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It would be wonderful to learn from people of lived experiences.

Now, either the minister is misinformed or he's misinforming us. His own staff have indicated to me that the department has already completed a thorough review of continuous glucose monitoring devices.

I ask the minister: Will he table that review in this House?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We have indeed commissioned experts in Eastern Health to look at the wisdom of funding continuous glucose monitoring. That work is done and there is no recommendation suggesting such should be done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

The evidence is there. This glucose monitoring will save us money in the long run; we all know that. The evidence has been there for quite some time.

Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador families are among the highest taxed groups in the entire country.

I ask the minister: Has the department studied the effect of family taxation rates on immigration to our province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we can boast in Newfoundland and Labrador is that our population has been growing and has been growing very well for the last year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: Clearly, with immigration being a major component of that growth, our immigration efforts have been successful.

Mr. Speaker, what I will also say is that I have appreciated the support of all Members of this House as we embark upon a new venture for Newfoundland and Labrador, growing our population, growing our diversity, growing our inclusion and growing the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador through the efforts of immigrants. It is working for each and every one of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

Though I appreciate the minister's answer, it's about retention as well. The past year, it's a great start but when we think about MTV – Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver – that's where a lot of our immigrants end up to over the years. I'd like to see them stay here.

Speaker, the other provinces with lower overall taxes for families see a much higher immigration rate than we do.

I ask the minister: Are the high taxes in our province slowing our efforts to attract newcomers and to retain them in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador over a longer period of time?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the preamble or the premise of the question is wrong, because, of course, we are seeing increased numbers of immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador and we're doing so within the fiscal environments that we face.

One of the greatest impediments to immigration, I would suggest to the hon. Member, may be the incredibly disastrous fiscal performance that we have inherited that we must now fix. But despite that fiscal performance, we are providing services to immigrants that are not being offered to other immigrants.

For example, our coverage under public medicare, our MCP program which we just recently announced.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: This is what is attracting new people, newcomers to Newfoundland and Labrador and we're doing it through targeted, key investments. Immigration, again, is working for each and every one of us.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The rise in fertilizer costs for farmers has been passed directly on to the people who can least can afford it. Staple goods like milk costs are 23 per cent more than they were in 2020 and now unaffordable for the average family. A secure food supply is needed.

I ask the minister: Where is your plan for food security?

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

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

It is good to know and great to report, actually, when we started out at this game about four, five, six, seven years ago, we were at less than 10 per cent food sustainability in this province for fruits and vegetables. This year, we will double that and we will have 20 per cent sustainability in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAGG: What a great news story, Mr. Speaker!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's no question that having jobs help people combat the cost of living. I'd like to know if the minister can update the House on when the West White Rose will return to construction and when will the Terra Nova return to our waters and get men and women back out on that rig?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to speak to this question. Certainly, any of this type is very important to this province. So what I can report about Cenovus and West White Rose is that it is a conversation that we're actively involved in, working with them to get this project back up and running.

I know I've visited the site myself to see the work that's been done and, again, I'm optimistic that we will get to where we need to. I cannot report on a timeline, but it is actively being discussed is what I can say.

As it relates to Terra Nova, what I can say is my understanding is that it's supposed to back and in production later this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: So that's absolutely fantastic news. Again, we are very anxious to get that up and running and happy to see that on the way.

I can say – and again this is may be additional to what the Member asked, but I know he is interested. After meeting with Braya yesterday in Come By Chance, I'm happy to report that they also will be in production later in Q4 and hope to have up to 700 jobs when it comes to completing the work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Labrador West has provided roughly \$55 billion to \$60 billion in royalties to the province through iron ore mining since 1960. Right now, the people of Labrador West who generated that wealth are looking for help to age in place. Labrador West Pioneer Living has been turned down multiple times for housing seniors' projects.

I ask the Premier: When will this government recognize the contributions of Labrador to this province and invest in the community and the seniors? When is it our turn to get an investment in seniors?

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond.

We have been working with the community in Lab West to look at housing needs and housing solutions. We are committed to doing that. There have been various proposals put forward. Some have been costly and, as a result, haven't been funded by the federal government. We will be working continuously with Labrador West to make sure their housing solutions are funded and put in place and particularly for the seniors in Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

COVID is currently spreading through our communities. Rapid tests are not available in many communities, including every community in my district. When they are available in the province, many people can't afford them. Testing is proven to prevent the spread of COVID.

I ask the minister: What is the province doing to ensure equal access to testing kits throughout the province?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We made special inroads with the assistance of the federal government at the beginning of COVID to ensure rapid PCR is available in each clinic on the coastal communities. There are GeneXperts, which are gold-standard PCR machines, located in several locations in Labrador and in Labrador-Grenfell.

The algorithm – the flow chart is quite clear. If you fall into a high-risk category, you can get a PCR test and that is no charge to anyone. If you do not fall into those categories, the advice from Public Health is you do not need a test.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

What are government's plans for the former Grace General Hospital site? It is a public asset.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That property, as I have said before during an interview, is a very valuable property and we're looking at different options from social housing to other opportunities there, and we'll continue to look at options that is best suited for that property.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Mr. Speaker, for the past number of years, I have stood in this hon. House and requested that we get a look under the hood of various ABCs, including Memorial University. To my delight, this government has taken some action by first bringing forth legislation in this House to allow the Auditor General full access to the books at MUN, and most recently, announcing that the AG has been asked by government to conduct an audit of this institution. Kudos to the government on this one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. LANE: With that said, as of today, it's been five years, four months –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order!

P. LANE: – twenty-five days since former AG, Terry Paddon, committed to conduct an audit of Nalcor. Three-and-a-half Auditors General later and we're still awaiting the report.

So I ask the Minister of Education: Can you advise this hon. House if you have discussed any timelines with the Auditor General, and can you give us some idea as to when we can expect to see a report on Memorial University?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Speaker.

I can say to the Member opposite that the Auditor General is independent. I do not and would not dictate to the Auditor General a timeline involved. My understanding is that

when the Auditor General goes into Memorial University, she has unfettered access. She will make a determination as to where she goes, and as she investigates at the university that may take her on different paths. So a timeline is entirely up to the Auditor General.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: I thank the minister for the answer. Based on the experience at Nalcor, I guess we'll see a report by around 2030.

Mr. Speaker, keeping within the same vein of openness and transparency as it relates to government agencies, boards and commissions, I was also very pleased during the last sitting of the House when the Minister of Finance agreed we could either, as part of the budgetary process or a separate process, have the opportunity to question senior staff of some of the agencies, boards and commissions on their budgets, similar to what we do in the Estimates process for core government.

So I ask the minister: Can she please reaffirm that commitment and advise this hon. House which ABC or ABCs will we be questioning this year, and how and when will that process occur?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

I think scrutiny and the Estimates process is very valuable to this House and to the people of the province. That's why we did step forward and say that we would implement a process. That is with the Government House Leaders. They'll determine how best to make that arrangement and I'll leave it to their discourse and their arrangements of how best to proceed.

But we certainly will be bringing it in, and I would imagine it would be discussed amongst House Leaders as to who should be brought forward for that analysis and discussion in an Estimates process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, by leave, I'll table a document.

There's some dispute here in this House and I just want to table this document about if cataract surgeries could be, as said by some people on the government side, started in Stephenville. I'm going to table a document from Western Health, which clearly states there hasn't been a surgery done since January 2021.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Sorry, my apologies, a private Member would need consent for –

E. JOYCE: That's why I asked by leave.

SPEAKER: Does the Member have consent?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Okay, carry on.

E. JOYCE: That's what I asked by leave.

This document will show that there have been no surgeries and, as of today, they're still trying to get the packs ready and there is no way that they can have a surgery in Stephenville at the Sir Thomas Roddick Hospital, as I've been saying for the last three or four months. This document is confirmation of what I was saying. That facility cannot – has not been doing cataract surgeries in Western Newfoundland for a period of time and is still not able to do them as we speak today.

This is a very serious issue, Mr. Speaker. This is 800 people, mainly seniors. I just want it done. I'm just tabling this document just to show that

I'm not just upset, I'm up defending the 800 people, many of them who have contacted me. I'm just tabling this document to confirm what I've been saying in this House that they cannot do them at Stephenville.

So, please, Government, please, give back the seniors their eyesight, please.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 o'clock on Monday, April 11, 2022.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons for this petition:

WHEREAS each day I have constituents who are very concerned about the uncertain future surrounding the oil and gas industry and, in recent weeks, more particularly, the Bay du Nord Project.

Many tradespeople in the District of Harbour Main depend on the oil and gas industry for work and the survival of their families. If the Bay du Nord Project is not approved the

consequences for our province will be devastating, but the Atlantic region and Canada as a whole will be negatively impacted as well.

This is a project, which undeniably will provide the lowest emission oil in the country and subsequently will allow us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while funding our transition to greener sources of energy.

THEREFORE we petition this hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to approve the Bay du Nord Project in view of its critical importance to the economic survival of the people of this province.

Speaker, we know just from research surveys that the majority of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians support the Bay du Nord Project. Not only do they support it, 68 per cent of respondents have expressed concern with the delay in the federal environmental assessment approval of the project. Even a Noia survey recently said that 84 per cent of respondents support the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore oil and gas industry.

But, Speaker, people are nervous, they're very apprehensive. We know that we're close to a decision; this is a watershed moment. We have to make sure every possible effort, advocacy, action is being made by our provincial government and our federal Members of Parliament to put all the necessary pressure to encourage the federal government to make the right decision and approve this oil and gas project.

Many thousands of Newfoundlanders rely on the oil and gas industry. In my own District of Harbour Main, perhaps the home of the greatest number of individual tradeswomen and men in the oil and gas industry. We have a great opportunity here with this oil and gas project to use the tremendous resource wealth that we have.

The Bay du Nord Project, actually, is expected to provide approximately \$3.5 billion in government revenues; 11,000 person years of employment; and \$300 million in research and development. So this is an opportunity to give us

the ability to invest in social programs, to pay for public services that our people desperately need like health care, schools, roads and to also deal with our crippling debt.

Speaker, so many people in Newfoundland and Labrador are looking forward to what I hope is a positive outcome here. The future of our province rests on this decision.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The list for the number of people in need of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in the Central Region has increased significantly in the past couple of years. This leaves people in vulnerable situations and many times individuals are outside in the cold and homeless while waiting for placement.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to encourage the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to repair and increase the number of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units in Central Newfoundland to meet the present need throughout the region.

Mr. Speaker, this has become a growing need in Central Newfoundland. Right now, there are housing applications in there – I think there are about over 300 applications just for housing alone in the Central Region. This is very, very unfortunate. It leaves people out in the cold; people with nowhere to go.

I'm getting calls from single parents, single mothers with children, minimum-wage earners who need affordable housing, somewhere to go. We need units. We need more housing to accommodate those people. We have people who are falling through the cracks in the past couple of years, because of COVID, because of employment, because of income. They need affordable housing. They need Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to step up and to accommodate those people.

Like I say, 300 applications, we do need to support those people. We need to put in

initiatives and have those units fixed up and more put in place, actually, to accommodate those people. They're just out in the cold. In November, I had a person living in a shed that we had to try and find housing for him; there wasn't anywhere, right up until February. It's ridiculous. I'm getting those stories all the time. I'm sure everybody else are getting them, too. It's a problem throughout the province, but in Central, it's becoming an increased problem in the past couple of years. We call upon government to fix up those units.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, if I may respond to the petition.

On behalf of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, I just wanted to let the House know that in terms of the work we do, in terms of the units we have across the province; we have a very extensive repair program. Obviously, the budget will be tabled tomorrow and we'll find out exactly how much more money we will have to spend.

We have the Canadian Housing Benefit to help people who are looking to rent in the private market. We have housing shelters and the like across the province.

So if there is anybody out in the cold, as the Member suggests, then I'd like to know about that because we need to make sure their housing needs are addressed immediately.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

WHEREAS Route 60 through Topsail is a heavily populated area with physically active residents; and

WHEREAS residents and young children who walk daily to school are finding it very unsafe with the deplorable state of erosion along the shoulders of Route 60 through Topsail.

THEREFORE we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to find a more permanent solution and install curb and gutter to the areas affected by erosion.

Speaker, I've presented this numerous times to the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, when he was minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, when he was minister of Infrastructure as well, and also the current minister.

The area through Topsail – it's not the full length of Route 60, but there are areas there that are in extreme need of a permanent solution and repair. Each year, erosion takes away the shoulder of the road and individuals walking, especially children to and from school, have no safe way of getting there. With more and more people becoming more physically active, to walk those roads in the night or at any time you're looking for someone to break an ankle. In fact, maybe six or seven weeks ago one individual did.

I understand the minister has a big portfolio and there are lots of requests on this. I guess everyone's banging on the door. But I'm not looking at the full length of Route 60 through Topsail; I'm looking at the areas that are in dire need.

I hope in the budget, or this year, some attention will be given to that section.

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

E. LOVELESS: Just to respond to that, I only had a discussion on that particular area just several days ago, as the Member had sent photos. I've even driven out there myself to have a look, so I'll just say it's an active conversation that's ongoing in my office on that particular area.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll read out the background:

WHEREAS there are approximately 750 to 800 people, mainly seniors, who are wait-listed for cataract surgery; and

WHEREAS it will take almost 14 months for those seniors to have the procedures carried out; and

WHEREAS many of those seniors have their driver's licence suspended, they can't read instructions for their medication, they can't read a book or watch TV due to cataract problems; and

WHEREAS a one-time allotment of funds will eliminate the wait-list for cataract surgery in Western Newfoundland and Labrador and give these seniors and others awaiting surgery a better quality of life.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide the necessary funds required to carry out these life-changing surgeries in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, I've been presenting petitions in the House, I've been in the public domain, and, again, I'm fighting on behalf of the seniors, which is an easy fix. It's an easy fix. There are personalities involved here, it's not the seniors; the seniors are taken out of this now, which is so sad.

The Minister of Health and Community Service made comments yesterday. One of the comments he made yesterday was it's nice that they're doing it – I'll read it from Hansard "... in favour of a more lucrative approach."

Mr. Speaker, there's a report that the minister has access to and the report will show that to do it in a public facility it costs \$1,205 per surgery. When you do it at the Apex building, it is \$945. So the minister, again, is making statements in this House – it's easy to show the difference, it's

easy. It's documentation. His department was involved with it.

The second thing the minister said – and I can't let this go unchallenged – in *The Telegram*, he said the reason why they want to do it at Apex is because they get a premium. That is absolutely, totally false. They do not get any bonuses for what they do. They get the \$945. They do not get a premium. For the Minister of Health and Community Services to put that in the public domain to try to disparage the three specialists is just wrong.

What he's forgetting – and I'll say it to the Minister of Health and Community Services – is by the time you're attacking those three medical specialists, which we try to get in Newfoundland, the time you're attacking me, there are 800 seniors who haven't got their eyesight.

If anybody wants to go – ask the minister about the Grant Thornton report, it will show the statements he made in the House yesterday are easy to be shown are false.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the government and the Members opposite, get this straightened out for the seniors, please.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains, you have 90 seconds.

L. EVANS: We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that vacant Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units in Nunatsiavut are repaired and made available to those in need in a consistent timely fashion.

Nunatsiavut Government is dealing with a housing crisis and facing huge financial barriers to building new houses; a single-serviced building lot now costs \$250,000 without the house.

Inadequate housing negatively affects our Inuit populations in a variety of ways, including child welfare, families, health and justice. These areas were highlighted in the Canadian Government's Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation final report. Further, in 2016, the federal and provincial governments committed to follow the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Now, 90 seconds is not enough time to read this full petition and talk on it. But one of the things I want to say, Speaker, is we're not asking for anything special. We're not asking for extra Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units. We're not asking for extra capacity.

Right now, we have seven houses vacant in Nain. We have four to six houses vacant in Hopedale.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Your time has expired.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, 3 o'clock, I call upon the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to present the PMR.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I move the following private Member's resolution, seconded by the Member for Harbour Main:

WHEREAS Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are urging the government to provide some relief from escalating high prices which are leaving many people in dire straits; and

WHEREAS government decisions, such as lowering certain tax rates or offering home heating rebates would provide relief that many people urgently need; and

WHEREAS the Health Accord says the social determinants of health such as income for food, medicine and housing have an even greater impact on health outcomes than the health system.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House urge the government to consider providing some much needed relief from escalating high prices in the 2022 budget.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

This year is a unique year and unique circumstances and we're all hurting. People in this province in all different categories are hurting. They're hurting because of the things that are happening, not only in our own province but of course around the country and the world.

Inflation is rising in Canada. It's now at 5.7 per cent in February, a 30-year high and the 11th straight month above 3 per cent. Interest rates are rising and are expected to continue to rise for the remaining 2022 fiscal year. That's going to have a significant impact on people with existing debt.

Oil prices are up, as we know, and while that's great for the coffers of the government, it's certainly hurting people's wallets. Fuel prices are up, actually making a significant impact on people who rely on their personal vehicles for transportation to and from work, to get to medical appointments and all those other things that are required. Of course, food prices are up and that is having a significant impact on people's ability to be able to eat healthy.

All of those things are brought on by these high prices that we see in our stores and at the pumps. It's fine to sit here and think, well, you know, it's only \$20 extra when you fill up every week. There are a lot of people in this province – and I know I speak for everyone – that live day to day, paycheque to paycheque. So when you have to take an extra \$20 a week to put in your gas tank because you need that gas to get to and from work, that means you have \$20 less for buying food or paying your heat bill. Or the fact that you have to spend \$300 or \$400 or \$500 to fill up your oil tank every month. That's money that a lot of people don't have. Their disposable income is being disposed of because of these high prices for food and high prices for heating oil, high prices at the pumps.

Government has an obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to help and they need to do that by showing leadership and talking about making adjustments to some of the areas that they have control of. The fact that there's over 57 cents, I think it is now, of taxes on a litre of gas and to say that there's nothing we can do, that's not good enough. We have to be able to do something.

I want to talk for a second and read out about the social determinants of health. The Health Accord says we must do something about affordability. So let's talk about it. Page 52: "Income is one of the most important social determinants of health. It shapes overall living conditions, affects psychological functioning, and influences health-related behaviours. It determines the quality of other SDC such as food security, housing, and other basic requirements of health."

Page 59 of the accord: "Research shows social, economic, and environmental factors account for a greater impact on health outcomes than does the health system."

Page 61: "The World Health Organization states that poverty is the largest determinant of health...."

"There are many people living just above the poverty line who are also at risk."

Page 62-63: "Food security and housing security are among the many social determinants of health. They are also two markers of poverty. Food insecure households have poorer self-rated health, poorer mental and physical health, poorer oral health, greater stress, and are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and mood and anxiety disorders. Our province has the highest rates of diet-related chronic disease in Canada, and St. John's has been named as the city having the highest level of food insecurity in Canada." Food insecurity also makes it difficult to manage existing chronic conditions such as diabetes.

"Children and youth who experience hunger are more likely to have poorer health, and children who face hunger repeatedly are more likely than others to develop several chronic health conditions, including asthma."

I bring that up for the simple matter of talking about the fact that many people in our province can't afford to buy food. We're seeing an increase in the food banks and these high costs of living are driving that. But I also want to talk about health care for a second and people will ask: How is that related to the cost of living? Well, for the first time in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have gone to an American-style health care system.

People talk about our health care system in crisis; I would say it is in shambles. For the first time in the history of this province, people in Newfoundland and Labrador have to pay to see a primary care provider. Who in this House would have ever thought that you would have to pay to see a primary care provider? That is simply not good enough. There is an onus on government to fix that. It is not good enough to say: Nurse practitioners, oh, we'll hire them under a regional health authority.

We've asked nurse practitioners to step up as we deal with this enormous lack of family physicians, and that problem just didn't happen overnight. That has been a problem that has been ongoing, I would suggest, for the last seven years because the Minister of Health and Community Services failed in his duty and responsibility to do anything about it.

That is not just coming now. Four years to get a new agreement with the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association; a report that the Health Accord talks about transportation that has been sitting on his desk on air ambulance and road ambulance for five years and the Health Accord is now talking about it; an information system for the health care that maybe if we had implemented five years ago when the recommendation was made, we wouldn't have had the crisis on the cyberattack that we're currently going through.

But to think that people in our province, in my district, and I am sure it is happening in yours, right now people are paying \$300 upfront to a nurse practitioner so they can get in the queue to be guaranteed an appointment if they need it. Where are we? Where is the government to help those people?

If nurse practitioners are part of the solution, then nurse practitioners practising outside of a health authority have to be part of the solution. But the solution cannot be simply to bill the individual. Government has a responsibility to find a way to make that payment happen, to get that nurse practitioner paid, but not by the patient.

We do not need American-style health care. We need the principles of universal health care to be in our province, and that is just another piece of the cost of living that has now been thrust upon the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am sure that it is not just the District of Stephenville - Port au Port that are seeing this type of problem or this type of challenges. So tomorrow, when you bring down your budget – and if you haven't already done it, postpone it, because right now the people of our province need help. We really need help.

They need help with high fuel prices; they need help with high gas prices; they need help with high food prices. We all want to see tomorrow's budget talk about the people in Newfoundland and Labrador and how we can all put more money back in their pockets. I look forward to hearing what people have to say about it, and I thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you to the Member.

The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Speaker.

This is an important topic. There is absolutely no question. I don't think you'll see any argument from either side of the House on the importance of this topic and the strain that individuals in the province are feeling.

We've seen substantial increases in the cost of gasoline and home heating fuel. That's been brought about as a result of global shortages, in part due to the war in Ukraine. Nonetheless, providing that explanation doesn't make it easier for families. We've seen increased food prices and even automobile prices as a result of shortages related to the pandemic and supply

issues. It doesn't make it any easier because you provide that definition or that explanation.

It is impacting families; it's impacting people provincially, nationally, globally. People throughout the country are feeling the same pressures, and it's a pressing issue for government. I know that government just recently, March 15, released the five-point plan to assist with the cost of living, and I understand that it's the most vulnerable. It doesn't hit necessarily the lower middle incomes. It certainly doesn't impact the middle income. It is the most vulnerable that that plan at the time was designed to assist.

It included a \$22.2-million investment from government, and it impacted the Income Supplement, which will be increased by 10 per cent – a total for government of \$74 million. It will provide \$1,000 per year for a family or four or over \$700 for individuals with a disability. It will help approximately 162,000 individuals and families.

The Seniors' Benefit, as well, we've increased by 10 per cent. The total funding of \$63 million and eligible individuals there will receive \$1,444, annually. That supports 50,000 seniors and their families. Over \$5 million will be provided as a one-time benefit to those currently receiving income support. The first week of April, which is this week, single individuals should get \$200 and families, \$400. The investment in income support in this province is \$200 million annually to 20,000 individuals and families.

We've also put \$2 million to help with the transitioning of homes from heating with oil to heating with electricity, a \$5,000 grant or up to \$5,000 per household. I know that this has been a topic for government; it's been a topic with our caucus and with our Cabinet. I can say that with the budget being delivered tomorrow, the cost of living has been utmost on the minds of those in our government. So I do anticipate seeing some measures in tomorrow's budget.

I know that in the Department of Education, Speaker, we've made significant strides in early learning and child care, as an example. We've reduced early learning to \$25 a day last year,

this year we reduced it to \$15 a day and next year it's going to \$10 a day.

I know that with that, making it more affordable, it creates challenges. We talked about that in Question Period today. It does create challenges, because it's more affordable means that there are more people who can afford early learning and child care, it puts additional demand on the spaces that are available. We need to focus on that. That has been our next focus is increasing the number of spaces that are available.

But when you compare a family with children in regulated child care today, that same family just two years ago, on average, it would've cost them \$5,000 a year more. That is significant. That is a significant savings to families. The previous rates were based on age of the child in early learning and child care. They were as high as \$44 a day for infants, \$33 for toddlers or \$30 for preschoolers. The savings next year will increase again, when it goes from \$15 a day to \$10 a day across the board. It's not age-based anymore, so \$5 a day is \$25 a week per child. When you add that up over the 52 weeks a year, that is a significant savings for families, especially with more than one child in early learning and child care.

So government has recognized that there are some families as well who simply can't afford the \$15 a day or next year the \$10 a day. No matter how low the cost goes, there are families who can't afford it. So with the changes that we've made and the agreement that we've signed with the federal government, included in that, we've put thresholds in place for the Child Care Subsidy Program so that lower-income families who qualify can access regulated child care at no cost.

So it's not \$15 a day or \$10 a day, it is no cost. The thresholds are based on a sliding scale, based not only on family income but the number of children in regulated child care. So families with an income that ranges from \$41,000 to \$77,000 based on the number of children, that sliding scale means that it's not \$15 or \$10 a day – some families in our province, in fact a considerable number of families in our province, are getting early learning and child care at no cost today.

Again, that has put additional pressure on the availability of spaces, but we had to make early learning and child care more affordable. So for the families who already had early learning and child care, it is considerably more affordable today than it was two years ago. Again, it puts pressure on creating more spaces because of that affordability, but that is something that we're working on.

So while we work on continuing to increase the number of spaces, Mr. Speaker, we've done a number of initiatives, as we outlined just two or three weeks ago in a news conference, that will increase the number of spaces. We'll see the number of spaces throughout the province increase this year in the magnitude of in the hundreds and again next year and in the following year. By 2025-26, we'll have 5,800 additional spaces in the province.

Mr. Speaker, again, I know that 10 minutes to speak in these debates is not a lot of time, but I did want to indicate to Members and those who are viewing the broadcast of the House of Assembly that we all hear the concerns. We get calls from constituents. We do understand that the global pressures due to the pandemic, due to the war in Ukraine and others are increasing the demand for oil and there are shortages of a number of products. Even something as simple as your cellphone, the microprocessors that go in those; there's a shortage. Cellphone prices have increased because of that shortage, and while that doesn't seem significant, there are very few families today without a cellphone. It's in fact a necessity.

So it doesn't matter what product you look at, the cost of all products have increased. It's cold comfort to say that next year or the year after when the global shortages of some products is corrected that prices will decrease; families need to be helped today.

So I look forward to tomorrow's budget to see what else is in there that will assist with families. I know that, as I said, it is a topic that is important to this government, as it should be.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you to the Member for Waterford Valley.

Next, I call on the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, this is a very important resolution that we're speaking to today. I just note some words in here when it talks about people in dire straits, people in urgent need. It talks about social determinants of health and a greater impact on health outcomes.

If we're looking at the budget, I mean, we can all be asking for this and that and looking for solutions on our cost of living. Seniors who are paying \$300 and \$400 more to fill up their oil tank, people who are driving trucks that require diesel are paying huge amounts now and it was only today on the radio I heard a section on the price of airline fuel: all skyrocketing.

We all know we're in a difficult fiscal situation. We all know that. So to really look at it, to really do a fulsome review, you've got to look at some innovative ways to make more money available or use money more efficiently.

Since becoming the shadow minister for Health – health is a big expenditure for the province: 36-plus per cent. It's the biggest. So looking at the health care budget, it's probably a nice place to start. I've presented an issue here in this house for over two years now and I've raised it again today on continuous glucose monitoring devices. So I'll use that as an example.

Over one-third of our population have issues with diabetes – one-third. As I said, there are huge complications that come from diabetes when it's not properly monitored: 30 per cent of our strokes; 40 per cent of our heart attacks; 50 per cent of kidney failure requiring dialysis; 70 per cent of non-traumatic foot and leg amputations; and it's the leading cause of blindness.

And here we are, we also hear of the nurses who are overworked; there's a backlog of surgeries. You look at reviews that have been done on these continuous monitoring devices. They'll tell you that there are hundreds and hundreds of calls made each year in this province for diabetic emergencies. There are studies that will tell you that people using these devices will reduce their

emergency room visits by half. Now if you look at those, that's an automatic savings. Freeing up that space for an investment that will have a huge return on investment.

The medical students – last year on the provincial day of action, they presented on the diabetic boots – our youngest and our brightest of our medical schools. The investment in the diabetic boot makes a huge difference. It prevents an amputation; an amputation that, by their estimates, would cost alone somewhere upwards of \$75,000.

Now, the minister can respond and talk to clinicians and what they say, and that's part of the equation, no doubt about it. But when we look at the Health Accord – and it was already mentioned here today, the Health Accord speaks very clearly about taking into account people with lived experiences. Now, clinicians can tell you if this works or doesn't work, but what it won't tell you is the cost on our economy and on the person who has a stroke, who has a heart attack, who requires dialysis, who goes blind. These people may never work again. These people may become income support recipients. These are issues we need to look at.

We talked about sinking funds the other day and getting a return on investment, dollars and cents. This is an investment in people. This is an investment in health. This frees up some of that 36 per cent of our budget that goes into health to be utilized elsewhere – the social determinants to health, keeping people working longer, keeping people involved in society longer.

We have a program out there, Medical Transportation Assistance Program, that pays individuals who don't have access to specialized services within a 50-kilometre range – I stand to be corrected on that, but they have to go distances to get that service, like dialysis. We pay them for using their own private vehicle: 20 cents. That is the same amount from last year and the year before. So you talk about the cost of living. We just saw the gas prices go up how much. That 20 cents certainly is not getting you as far this time.

My point goes back to if we invested in these devices, that would save our population from requiring dialysis. Not only are you keeping the

person healthier and keeping them in full involvement in the society, they don't have to be travelling back and forth as much. If there has been a thorough review done of this – and I find it hard to believe that there was no recommendation. But if there is a thorough review done of this, you're looking at the dollars and cents. You're looking at how much it costs. Every Cabinet paper has a financial analysis – every one.

So if you are really looking at this in a thorough analysis, you're going to look at not just what the clinicians have said. That is part of the equation. You're looking at what those with lived experiences have incurred. Think of the cost of a stroke in dollars and cents; not only that, but on the person. The cost of a heart attack; the cost of dialysis; going blind. This is more than something that is just in a doctor's office; you have to talk to those people outside.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands speaks about the cataract surgeries. The things an individual could do if we did the proper investment and prevented these ailments from happening and prevented them from being a greater cost on society. And there are people out there will tell you, they'll pay anything to prevent going on dialysis or going blind or having a heart attack.

We just came in with a sugar tax because we want to have healthier people and healthier outcomes. This is a no-brainer investment. I don't understand it. I, a one-person show, with one assistant, over the last two years, have gathered tons of information on these devices and how they can save and how they are smart investment. I don't understand why we're not gone down this road.

An amputation would get you about 10 of these devices. One amputation would get you 10 of these. It's not a direct cost because people aren't spending on the little tabs to prick their fingers all the time. This is not rocket science and diabetes happens in a huge percentage of our under-14 age group. And I had parents call me and say let's continue to push for these devices; has a three-year-old, every day fighting with her to prick her finger and test her.

Then you talk about virtual health care. These devices, you could be monitored from Timbuktu by your physician in terms of your health care and your diabetes levels. This makes perfect sense as an investment that will give a huge return on investment for the health and the economy in this province and I hope to see this in the budget tomorrow.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I next call on the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I will be supporting this motion. My only concern or critique of it is that it doesn't go far enough. But it's a start in the right place. It's about recognizing the fact that we need to do something for people who are suffering. Look, it's interesting. We talk about interest rates. I do remember the house I live in, when we first bought that, I think the rates were 16 per cent. It was double digits.

I listened to interest rates and where they're heading up, and how young families with good jobs are going to weather it once they start to climb, especially if they're carrying homes that are significantly more expensive than what I paid for mine. But their income has not necessarily kept up with the cost of living, Speaker. So I'm sympathetic.

The Health Accord is probably one of the guides we should follow because it talks about income as one of the most important social determinants of poverty. Food insecurity – let's call food insecurity what it is: hunger. Housing insecurity: not having a place to call your own with a roof over your head that's your own, that's stable and that's secure.

This is the issue. In giving breaks, I guess, it's piecemeal. If it's about reducing taxes, it's piecemeal. There are better ways, if we want to reduce taxes, where we can benefit people more broadly. But if wanted to start talking about reducing poverty and income, let's take a look at the fact that there are cleaning staff in this building who are not unionized, who get very

few in the way of benefits, who are basically working for poverty wages.

If want to talk about addressing the issue of poverty and making sure that people have a guaranteed income, well, let's take a look at basic income, because that's one of the things that was addressed in the Health Accord NL that was very clear, a guaranteed or some form of guaranteed or universal basic income.

Now, we passed a motion in this House, unanimously, it costs nothing to strike a Committee. Let's take a look at that, Speaker, but that's one of the key things, it's not a piecemeal approach, it's holistic.

I heard the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality talk about the fact that we raised the minimum wage. What we have is a legislated poverty wage, simply put. It's doing nothing to address the issue of affordability, especially if people have to work two or three jobs, 50 hours a week just to make ends meet.

But here's a practical solution: Let's raise that. But if we're concerned about small, local businesses being able to absorb that, then let's start looking at giving them a break on their small business tax so that they can afford it without passing it on to the consumer, without bankrupting their own business. If you want to look at a broader tax, let's take a look at that. Hopefully, what that's going to do is it's going to create further employment, but also make a wage – give the smaller businesses the opportunity to pay a living wage.

Now, in my district – I'm hearing it from the Members on this side as well – we've been helping people, not only in our district but from abroad, from other districts as well, who end up here, people who've been living in a tent, that was in December. Emergency shelters: a mother who is basically expecting, she's sleeping on a couch, but she's adequately housed; people who are facing what I would call untenable and unacceptable living conditions, people who are basically facing eviction. We have one of my constituents who, this week, could very well find herself on the street.

The fact is, let's take a look at housing. What is it that we're doing to address the housing issue?

How many more new units of affordable housing that will not only address income support but those who are on fixed incomes, or those whose housings is determined by their income so that they have something affordable and safe and secure?

If we look at the way we plan cities, our cities are not – even in St. John's – conducive to providing services at a cost effective. It sprawls. It works to the developer's bottom line and profit, but it's not helping the city in helping the people who need it most.

How about improving public transit. One of the suggestions we made was to extend the road tax rebate offered to the City of St. John's fleet so that it applies to Metrobus and GoBus so that they can improve the public transit system so that the people who are on fixed incomes or low incomes have affordable transportation. That's the broader solutions that we are seeking.

We have houses in the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing that are in desperate need of repair. We have people who are in rental units who are living in substandard conditions and we're paying out good money without setting any minimum standards for these landlords.

But if we want to talk about government policy, too, and how government policy basically kicks people when they're down, let's take a look at the Skills Development Program for students accessing post-secondary education. I did a little bit of digging. Under the Skills Development Program, 124 people were approved through that funding; 84 of them out of the 124 are female. Through Children, Seniors and Social Development, a total of 101 applied: 90 of them were female, 11 were male; 69 female were approved, that is 89 per cent. Most of the people that we are dealing with here who are affected by poverty are females, are women, often women with children.

But instead of looking at how do we make sure they have all the supports in place; we remove one of the key supports that many of them need. That is access to the provincial drug plan. When you are a person who is a diabetic – I have mentioned this person's name in the House – who depends on it to maintain her eyesight. She depends on it to provide healthy food to make

sure here diabetes is looked after. We take away those supports to people who are making that first crucial step. They're panicked and they're afraid. Most of the people we're penalizing are women and probably single women, single mothers. Unacceptable.

So if we want to change, if we want to start addressing the whole issue of poverty and about lifting people up, let's start looking at, not just piecemeal approaches.

I will support this and I think it is a good idea. We help people out where we can, but let's start looking at the broader issues that will get at the root of it.

It's about income. It's about giving the people who want to get out of, in this case, income support so that they can earn income, so that they can pay their way, so that they can give back to the province that supported them when they needed it. But it becomes increasingly difficult to do that if government policies are such that it actually hampers you.

Yes, there may be a little bit more that comes out of the income, but if you have to now pay extra for your rent that's no longer subsidized fully or your heat that's no longer subsidized fully and, by the way, we're taking away your medical coverage and we'll come up with some kind of a co-pay approach. Well, do your best.

That's something that I hope the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality will take up and make sure that the people who are trying to avail of these programs are treated with the respect and given the leg-up and given the support they need.

But, Speaker, I'll finish with this: Any resolution that helps people is great, but in the end, we have to make sure we have broader solutions that get at the systemic issues.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm always happy to speak in this House and represent the people of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, of course, and also happy to speak to issues as it pertains to the office that I'm responsible for: the Office of Women and Gender Equality.

First of all, I want to thank the people – the middle class, in particular. We know at this point and we heard our five-point plan, which are certainly good initiatives and will help our most vulnerable and seniors in this province with regard to the cost of living. But I want to give a big shout-out to the middle class because, as we know, they work hard; they're the engine, ultimately, of not just our province, but the country. So it's not lost on any of us how hard they work and I also look forward to budget tomorrow to see what updates will be in that budget to support the middle class during this time.

I guess every Member in this hon. House, all 40 of us, we're all hearing from our constituents about the challenges. We're hearing about the cost of gas, and we know that. Unfortunately, it's very volatile and it can't be controlled by a government; we know that. It's not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador; we're seeing it across the country, Atlantic Canada, and across North America of what's happening.

It's not lost on any of us. We hear it on a daily basis. I sympathize and I appreciate and certainly, as the Member, I'm committed to doing everything I can and working with my colleagues on all sides of the House to do everything that we can for the people of the province.

I'm going to speak a bit from points from my department as it pertains to women and gender equality. For example, to address the gender wage gap – and this pertains and is relevant to women in the workforce and to get more women in the workforce. We know that women are the dominant earners for minimum wage. We know that here in Newfoundland and Labrador, ultimately I would say across the world, Mr. Speaker.

For example, to address the gender wage gap, which I will read into the record now, our government certainly has taken steps to increase

women and gender-diverse individuals' participation in the economy and advancement within the workforce by mandating the Gender-Based Analysis Plus lens on all new policies, legislation, which was implemented in '21, which assesses systemic inequalities and brings a gender and diversified sensitive approach to all work.

Earlier – this was reflected in Question Period today – the Member said it's a policy and we need action, but this is indeed action. This is mandated to go on every policy. Every piece of legislation that's produced by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, this lens is put there as a safeguard to mitigate the traditional negative impacts on gender-diverse people and women when it comes to the workforce and wages, et cetera.

Also, using Women's Employment Plans, WEPs as they're known, and Gender Equity and Diversity Plans, which aim to reduce the gender wage gap and increase participation of women in our economy, specifically in the resource sector. As we know, we're rich in our resource sector here in the province. I had a great meeting just last week with Trades NL and also the Office to Advance Women Apprentices. We support them and the good work that they do, and these are the sorts of initiatives that we have to do.

A review of the minimum wage – the Member just referenced the minimum wage. As we do know, we did see an increase in the minimum wage to \$13.20 an hour. In a great world, we'd love to see – I personally would like to see it higher, but I guess that ultimately we have to work within our fiscal reality.

I think every Member in this House wants to see more done, wants to see a higher minimum wage and wants to see much more initiatives and the best that we can offer. Because we have a beautiful province, we have a great province, we have a lot to be proud of, but we have to work within our reality. I mean, my parents would say to me when I was a child, money doesn't grow on trees. I didn't really get it then, but it's a reality. We have to work without our fiscal reality.

We're doing that. We're doing that on a daily basis, to implement policy and to influence

policy. Implementing \$25-a-day daycare – we saw that in January '21, and then moving to \$15-a-day daycare for '22, and of course with the aim of \$10 in '23. We also heard the Minister of Education say those most vulnerable to get it free of charge, who need it.

Those are all initiatives that certainly contribute to help the cost of living, and I know this because I get that feedback in my district as well – those initiatives with child care – and it goes a long way. Our children are our most valuable resources; they're our future, and everything that we can do to invest in them and to provide the best quality care for them is of utmost importance.

Also, in what we're doing, we want to see more women in leadership, and getting more women back in the workforce. In 2021 – I'd be remiss if I didn't reflect on the historic number of women and gender-diverse people who put their names forward in all elections at all levels, municipal and provincial. This is also a positive step forward that we're seeing. Our office continues to collaborate with the local chapter of Equal Voice to find innovative ways to encourage women and gender-diverse people who are interested in running for elected office.

Also a great initiative that we saw, as well, Sandpiper Ventures for venture capital, an investment from this government of \$750,000. That goes to support organizations who are strictly working with women and gender-diverse people and entrepreneurs. So it's these sort of initiatives that are important.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs, known as NLOWE, they help women create jobs for themselves by starting a business, and approximately \$568,000 in funding for self-employed assistance program. Women in Resource Development: That office coaches and employs assistance to women who are interested in the trades, and approximately \$475,500 in funding for that. It also works with employers to create consultation services and customized training options that develop equitable and inclusive recruitment and retention practices.

Women in Science and Engineering, the Office to Advance Women Apprentices, which I talked

about earlier, they help women who want to work with the trades to find and maintain employment. Also, they coordinate and manage wage subsidy agreements. Our office is involved directly with negotiating wages and women's employment projects for public projects that are coming in to the province.

So there are a number of initiatives, of course, that are being taken but, again, I also look forward to the budget tomorrow to see because every bit helps. But I definitely want to say on the record that it's not lost on anyone the challenging times that we are facing. There are many contributing factors that are out of control and we'd be remiss if we didn't reflect on what's happening in Russia right now. We know that this is contributing to what we're seeing in the fuel prices worldwide.

With that said, too, I also want to recognize what we're doing to help and support the people of Ukraine to come here, because it's important that we do our part. I'm really proud of the initiatives from the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills. He is passionate about this and I'm happy to see those. I'm also happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that my constituent in Harbour Grace, her mom came here from Ukraine. She has arrived here safely.

I have people from Ukraine who have escaped what is happening and who are now living in the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. So I certainly want to extend a warm welcome and extend the invitation to reach out if there is anything I can do to support that family. But again, I just want to reiterate to the people of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave and across our province that we're certainly committed to doing everything that we can to support them. I want to thank them for their contributions they make to our local economy. It's very important.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. I look forward to the updates that we will see in the budget tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Always an honour to stand and speak in this House. My colleague and friend from Stephenville - Port au Port gave us some interesting statistics. Those statistics were pretty clear. They simply said that Newfoundland has the highest rate of everything negative. When you think about the highest rate of heart disease, the highest rates of certain types of cancer, the highest rate of obesity, the highest rates of diabetes, the highest taxes, it's kind of a scary thought. That is the world we live in.

What it amounts to is quite simple: the cost of living is going up and our chances of living are doing down. Think about that: the cost of living is going up and our chances of living are going down, and we're doing nothing about it.

Now, we talk about the five-point plan that came out a couple of weeks ago. Listen, there's no question that our most vulnerable need support, but this is a time in history in this province when it's not our most vulnerable, it's the fact that most people are vulnerable. It's not just low income that are vulnerable now. Everybody knows it and nobody is saying anything about it.

When we talk about vulnerabilities in Newfoundland and people's inability to pay, I'd love for somebody from the Liberal government to explain to me how a low-income individual is going to replace oil heat with electric heat: part of the five-point plan. I'd love for somebody from the Liberal government to explain to me how somebody on low income is going to buy an electric car: part of the five-point plan.

I'd actually like for you guys to explain to me how the residents who call me are going to buy milk tomorrow. It's not about other plans that are out there, but I get calls every day. It is growing on a daily basis and it's shocking. People are suffering in ways that we have never seen and I can guarantee you they're suffering in ways that most of us never imagined. Some of us may have had it a little tough growing up. Some of us may have had to fight for scrapes at the kitchen table sometimes, but I can tell you that's not what's happening in Newfoundland right now. People are hungry. People are cold. People are scared.

I talked to an individual who works for an oil company delivering home heating oil. He told me he's never seen it before, they've had hundreds of people call in – hundreds, think about that – this is my district, this isn't the province and I can guarantee you I have a pretty prosperous district compared to some of the districts in this province – hundreds of people calling in saying they don't want automatic refill. They can't do it. They can't afford it so they're gambling with their oil, trying to drag it out, waiting for costs to drop and then they're calling the oil companies and they're saying can you please deliver \$150 or \$200. They're not filling their tanks because if they fill their tanks, the next day they don't eat.

I got a text while I was sitting here today, the question was: Do I choose between oil or a snowsuit? It's happening and we're not seeing it. It's not St. John's. These people can't leave their houses and go walk around the mall in the daytime to stay warm. Not everybody has that luxury. As a matter of fact, most of them can't afford to get into their car and drive to the mall. This is what is happening.

Now, we talk about the five-point plan. There is a serious question about the five-point plan that nobody has said. If we have a senior who is close to the income threshold, think of the consequences. This five-point plan could make them lose their drug card. It could make them lose their GIS. I guarantee you nobody has thought about it.

The reality is that people aren't asking for more money. They are asking for a lower cost of living. They are asking for lower taxes. We have seen the results of one-time payments, CERB payments, all of this stuff to people during COVID – they were a necessity. But the fallout was people lost their drug cards and that could be the fallout from this.

It is a very important point. We've gotten calls from our constituents saying: I'm on the threshold, is this going to mean I lose my drug card? I can tell you that a drug card for a lot of these people is far more important than \$65 or \$75, whatever it works out to be. They can't afford to go buy their drugs.

That is, I guess, why I am always so bewildered by policies that are supposed to be holistic. That's the key word here: we have a holistic approach. But it is not a holistic approach if you don't understand the situations of the people that need it the most. How is that holistic? You're actually forgetting about them. You're not taking anything into consideration with how these people live their lives.

I said it here before, you go to the grocery stores in my district and the shelves are empty where there are beans. It's not because there is a shortage of beans. It is because that is all people can afford to eat. It is because they are eating white boiled beans or Kraft Dinner or white rice. If you don't believe me then come out to my office. I invite every one of you, come out and sit down for a day and answer the phones. You're welcome to it. Because if you guys aren't getting these calls, then there are big issues in this province because these calls are happening to everyone on this side, I can guarantee you, the independents, the NDP, everyone.

It always blows me away how detached sometimes things are. That is not a slight against the Liberal government; it's just that I find it hard to believe that you're not getting the calls. So you're either not getting the calls, which I doubt, or you're not answering the calls, which wouldn't surprise me because I've made calls that don't get answered. It's just time for us to step up for the people that put us here and not just the most vulnerable.

Because, like I said, this is a point in history when everybody in this province is vulnerable. People who were making piles of money are vulnerable. People who were working in our offshore – which there's a good announcement coming today folks, the cat's out of the bag – they're unemployed for a long period of time. People that are working in our natural resources: unemployed.

It's great to say we've got these projects coming, but they're not here. These projects haven't happened. And they're not going to happen today; they might get announced today – 4 o'clock, 5:30 Eastern Time – but it's going to take a while for them to get off the ground. It's going to take a while for people to get back to

work and it's going to take a long time for us to get control of the cost of living, certainly the cost of fuels. There have been missed opportunities. I can tell you, there's no such thing as a holistic approach, contrary to what people think, there's been no holistic approach.

My district has 43 communities, 11 LSDs and 11 municipalities. Take into consideration what a holistic approach looks like. There were 300 fees and taxes introduced in 2016. In 2016, '17, '18 and '19, promises of a balanced budget in 2021. In 2020 and 2021, we're nowhere close. I guarantee you tomorrow we'll be no closer.

Now, we can blame it on COVID, but COVID had nothing to do with '16 to '20. We can blame it on Muskrat Falls, but Muskrat Falls was there in '15 when you took over and started making the promises. Here we are today with people who can't afford milk; people who can't afford heat.

We can offer them \$1,000 for an electric car, but we can't offer them lower grocery prices. We can offer them \$5,000 to put in electric heat; nobody's saying how they're going to pay for the electric heat once they've got it there. I've got electric heat; I pay for electric heat no different than someone pays for oil. I don't know how the anticipation is that people on low incomes can do this type of thing. As a matter of fact, people in medium incomes and high incomes are struggling. So, at some point, we need to look at that and understand it.

This government has had the opportunity, I really hope that they take an opportunity tomorrow to actually live up to their words and come forward with a holistic approach that helps everyone, but I'm somehow skeptical. We haven't seen it to date, and I'll remind you guys that to date is seven years: three administrations, seven years.

If one person on that side of the House can look me in the eyes and say that we're better off today than we were in 2015, '16, '17, '18, or '19 – I'd love to hear you say it, because we're not. This is the worst that this province has ever been, medically, financially and mental health issues, it's absolutely ridiculous. But here we are and our holistic approach has failed.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that people are struggling in ways that most of us don't understand. I'm certain that we've all gotten the phone calls and it's time for this government to step up and look after the entire province – the entire province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Just looking at the PMR, there are lots of good things in here. I actually really like this PMR; it talks about providing relief from escalating prices that's impacting our people in the province. We look around and we see escalating prices everywhere. You go to the supermarket, you go to the gas station and you get your light bill, everything is going up these days.

Just looking at how would we get relief. It talks about lowering certain tax rates, offering home heating rebates. This is a solution, but one of the problems I find with this is: Are you robbing Peter to pay Paul? In actual fact, I think you're robbing Paul to pay Paul. You're just not telling him that you're actually taking the money from him. It's a slippery slope.

As the PC Member for Stephenville - Port au Port talked about, the extra burden of people having to put the cost of \$20 more to get their tank filled, that extra \$20 so they can drive somewhere. But what happens if you can't afford a car? What happens to people who can't afford cars, people who can't afford means of transportation?

If you can't access transportation, your whole life is impacted. We have to look at, for example, if you're a family and your children are in activities: ice hockey, basketball, music, swimming, dance. What happens is when prices go up and you have to decide where your money is going and the price at the pumps is expensive, or you can't afford a car, you can't afford the maintenance of a car, your children don't get to go. Your children don't get to play hockey. Your children don't get to go swimming. Your

children don't get to be enrolled in music. Another thing, it's not only getting to those activities; it's the cost of the activities.

Low-income families have to make choices, because they're limited in their amount of money. People who actually have large incomes – I'll be careful in my language, Speaker – they can complain all they want, but at the end of the day they can afford it. What they have to compromise on is the luxury things that they want to do: going on the trips, going to movies or buying something bigger or better. Families have to decide if their children are actually going to be able to go to an activity that all their friends are going to. Are they going to be able to buy things that they need?

I remember the 2016 budget. Back in the day when I never ever thought I would sitting here in the House of Assembly, the biggest problem I had, honestly, with the 2016 budget is they were cutting libraries. I know this government regrets that because they've been beat up so much about it. Cutting libraries, do you know what the defence was? Well, we're going to make sure that there's a library within so many minutes of driving.

But what happens if you can't drive there? What happens if public transportation can't get you there? Your kids and you don't have access to libraries. And that's a big thing: free internet, free books and free things that's actually in the library that gives your children the ability to be able to compete with other children on an academic level, on a social level.

These things are really important and I think, as good as this PMR is, we should have looked at also including regional public access to transportation. We should have looked at access to housing as well. Because it's not only the ability to heat a house that can give older people some sense of security, that can give families some sense of security. Not only the ability to heat their house, but to actually be able to access housing. That's another huge crisis that we're dealing with in this province.

So on the scale of equity and equality, those two things are brought up a lot now because we have to look at the overall province and making sure that everybody is looked after. When you look at

those things, in actual fact, tax relief is not going to really help our most vulnerable people. We have to find ways to make sure that we're helping everybody, and that's very, very important.

Also, I'd like to just take a few minutes to talk about decision-making. How did we get here? There is a history – I wrote this down – of short-sighted decisions, often to improve the fortunes of big business. I tell you, since 2016, there's been a lot of evidence to that. Where decisions have been made and really, who's benefiting. Even look at Muskrat Falls; billions and billions of dollars over debt but I tell you, businesses made a fortune, made a killing. A few people might have had good-paying jobs for a short period of time, but that reminded me of the Joey days when we were building Churchill Falls. Remember when Peckford got in government? They sold the shop. They sold it. They didn't sell the shop. They gave the shop away.

So decisions need to be made for the best interest of the province, not just big business. We've got to make sure that we look after everybody. My district is a perfect example of decisions being made that benefit big business, or only big business benefits. Taking off that boat, we call the Lewisporte ferry, the Lewisporte freight boat – that's what the people on the North Coast call it. That freight boat went from the Island to the North Coast – marine shipping, the cheapest form of shipping. The communities in my district benefited, but I tell you something that shipping route wasn't just for the North Coast; it also went to communities on the South Coast and it went to Lake Melville region. Once the road was built, that freight boat was taken off. No consideration for the North Coast.

In actual fact, I got elected in May 2019 and I had a meeting with the Department of Transportation in June 2019. The reason given to me why that freight boat was taken off: Well, it was agreed upon that when the Trans-Labrador Highway was nearing completion, that the freight boat would be taken off. I tell you, anybody that goes down to North West River and looks out toward Postville, looks out towards Rigolet, there is no Trans-Labrador Highway.

It's not just about my district; it's about all rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It's about people who live downtown St. John's. The thing about what's important, that should be important to the province, is making sure that people don't fall through the cracks. Also, the thing is, don't allow them to fall through the cracks, knowing it. I can't get over that.

Looking at the price of gasoline, we started hearing people talking about the price of gasoline in March when it got up to \$1.77. I can remember seeing people on both sides talking about it on the TV, March. Well, all summer we were paying \$1.80 a litre. I tell you, people need to be able to actually go out in speedboat and hunt because the cost of food on the North Coast is so expensive. We have to be able to actually drive, either in speedboat or on snowmobile in the winter, to gather food.

People say, oh, you're not hunters and gatherers anymore. That lifestyle is gone now. That's more like just a cultural novelty for you on the North Coast. In actual fact, it's practically a huge thing for survival. One thing that people don't know in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is in my district the main staple for food, for meat, for protein, for a balanced diet on the North Coast was the caribou. The caribou is gone. If we do see a caribou, we're not allowed to hunt it, we're not allowed to kill it and we're not allowed to eat it. It's actually creating a new form of poverty in my district.

Looking at this PMR now, lots of value there talking about the social determinants identified by the Health Accord: Income for food, medicine and housing have an even greater impact on health outcomes than health systems. That's true, that's actually a valid statement.

That's one of the reason why I'll support this PMR because we need to have relief, because people need to be able to afford food, people have to be able to afford medicine and access to medicine, people have to be able to afford housing and to be able to heat their houses. At the end of the day, we have to make sure our most vulnerable don't slip through the cracks, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak in the House today on a very important PMR that we've put forward. I just want to go back to last week or the week before when one of the ministers across the way referred to me as earning the title of doom and gloom. I'm going to wear that title like a patch of pride, because doom and gloom is the voice of most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians out there right now. Doom and gloom is what we hear every single day.

It may not exist outside of these walls because there's not one person inside these walls that go without a meal. There's not one person inside these walls that don't have gas in their gas tank to get to work. There's not one person inside these walls that sit inside their house cold. Not one person. So, of course, it's very easy to lose sight of that and to keep your head up high and move forward when you go home in your nice vehicle to a nice supper and a nice warm house.

That's not indicative of what people outside these walls are going through right now. We really have to take a look at ourselves and the messages that we're putting out there. Everything is not okay. It's nowhere near okay.

I've struggled with this for some time now, what I was going to say today. I can't stand here and say it's all government's fault. I can't stand here and say it's all Opposition's fault or it's COVID's fault. But what I can say is that we have a unique opportunity now to dig in, all 40 Members together, and speak for the people outside of these walls because they're not being represented the way they should be. They're truly not.

We'll take seniors for a moment. We all have seniors in our district. When you talk to a senior – and there are so many of them out there and I'm using specific examples, Speaker – they turn on one electric heater in their house or they turn off their furnaces at certain hours and they bundle up with jackets and coats and blankets and try to stay in one room. That's horrible. That's horrendous.

Again, no blame, you're not going to see any blame coming from me right now. I'm just going to stand here and speak on behalf of the people that we're supposed to be representing. It's horrendous.

For me, personally, I have to get out there and I have to see it. I've got to see it in the grocery stores. I've got to visit with these people. It's just so sad to see, but I see it so often. I know that many other Members in the House see it as well.

One lady in my district, she couldn't keep up with her home care hours. She fell back on her payments. The home care company let her go eight or 10 months, God bless them, but she couldn't keep up with those supports to pay her portion. They cut her home care hours. They did. I tried to fight for more hours for her. This lady, she's 80 years old, she has a little car. Her one joy in life is to drive to Grand Falls-Windsor and pick up some groceries once a week and drive back again, her and her little dog.

I was told that the recommendation and advice that's been given to her is sell her car so she can try to make up those payments and try to get some more home support. It's just a sad day because that's the norm now. Like, that's our normal: Sell your car to try to have some sort of heat or food in your fridge.

I know tough decisions have got to be made, but it's just horrible when you see it, it's terrible when you see it. I just feel so bad for so many people out there and so many people are struggling right now.

The seniors, especially on a fixed income, their fuel bills have doubled. They've doubled. How are they supposed to keep up with it? The average person that makes a good wage out there, they're working 50 and 60 hours a week and they can't keep up. They really can't keep up. That's sad to see. When you work 50 and 60 hours a week, you shouldn't roll around in bed at 2:30 in the morning thinking about how you're going to pay your light bill. Because you've got to go to work the next day.

We see the single moms – I was at a gas station a couple of weeks ago and I saw a mom come in. I know she's a single mom. She got \$7 worth

of gas. She handed over a \$10 bill because she needed the other \$3 for bread. This is the normal that we're living with now. So when I'm called with the title of doom and gloom, again, I'll wear it right here as a patch, a patch of honour, because I will speak for the people that need to be spoken for.

Speaker, we talk about the single moms, but I want to take a moment and talk about dads for a second. All those dads that you see out there, the majority of them, you'll see them at a red light and they're rubbing their head and everything else, or you'll see them at the grocery store. The majority of those dads out there that have a big smile on their face, that smile doesn't carry with them when they go home in the evening and they're alone. The demons that these dads fight every single day, because they feel like a failure. They feel like they failed their wives. They feel like they failed their children and their families. You'll see the smiles, because they want to put up that front, but they are dying on the inside. I talked to them every day.

I'll never be the smartest guy in the world, but I've always had a knack for people to open up to me, and people do open up to me. I'm so grateful for that. I've had people call me and tell me that they're going to take their lives. I've sat on the phone with people until an ambulance got there. I've done that several times in my community. This is the normal that we face right now.

This is not a 10-minute speech about blame. It's a 10-minute speech about recognition, for all of us to recognize what's happening outside these walls.

I know that we carry on in here a little bit, we laugh and stuff like that and bark back and forth at each other, but to think that everything out there is hunky dory or okay, it's not. It's not even close. The majority of this province is hurting.

They dig down deep to try to find something a little bit more inside themselves to make it another day. Unfortunately, some people just don't make it to that next day. We've seen people take their lives. The mental health crisis in this province is at a brink, it is.

I encourage everybody out there, not just the MHAs here, but anybody who may be tuned in at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, talk to each other, talk to your neighbours; talk to your families. If you see somebody and they just need an ear, probably, a five-minute conversation, ask them if they're okay. If you know they're not okay and they say they're okay, don't accept that answer. Dig a little bit deeper, let them know it is okay to talk.

You wouldn't believe a conversation could save somebody's life. I've seen it. I was proud to be a part of it and I'll continue to do it. We need to talk to our constituents. I don't know what the role in government is when it comes to talking face with their constituents. Because stuff that's on paper, that's not the real world out there. It's not.

We need to come out of our offices; we need to get out in our communities – not our liaisons, not our ADMs, not our deputy ministers, our ministers that sit with us each day. I know you guys care over there as well, because I've talked to you about it many times, all of you, you all do. We've got to get out of our offices, we've got to get out of these four walls and we've got to get out and start talking to people and ask them the tough questions and hopefully, hopefully all of us can come together and find an answer.

Young families nowadays, they have so much pressure on them, and we want to keep these young families right here. Without these young families – you think this province is in hard shape now? If these young families start to leave, Folks, we are on the verge of the brink of disaster – absolute disaster. They are leaving; trust me, they are leaving. I see it every day. We welcome immigrants, and I look forward to having them here and making a great life in Newfoundland and Labrador. But I also want my neighbour that has been there all my life, to stay right next to me, in my community.

Because these are the people, these are the future generations of tomorrow, these young families, and they want to stay here. They truly do. So I would encourage all of us to get together, get out there, talk to our constituents and let's come up with a reason to keep them here. I know we can do it. I'll serve my constituents and the rest of

Newfoundland and Labrador to the best of my abilities. They always said that my heart was much bigger than my head; I'll take that as a compliment, too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always an honour to speak in this House. Today provides us with an opportunity to discuss some of the things that we're hearing in the district. And we've heard a lot today; we've heard what people were saying in the grocery stores, the hardware stores, at the pharmacies. Wherever we go, really, we hear talk from people that things are rough, things are tough, putting off projects because they can't do them and so on. We all hear that. That's been said here so many times today, Speaker.

But the whole idea and the whole premise is that we're losing a lot of our population. We're living in communities now where we're seeing 40 per cent of the people that were living in these communities have left. We're seeing regions that have 70 per cent fewer children, which has an impact on schools and learning, among other things. We're seeing a lot of multi-graded classrooms. We're seeing school closures. These are tough times. But, on the other end, the number of people 65 and older has doubled, causing a whole new set of problems for us. How do we deal with this? Are we doing enough?

The Member for Terra Nova, I take issue with what he said, when he said that we don't answer our phones and we're not listening to people. I don't know anybody in this House that don't answer their phones in their district offices, or their home phones when people are calling, or they're not listening to people in their district. I think we're all doing that. The reason why I think that is because we're all here. If we weren't doing that, we wouldn't be here. I take issue with that because I think in this hon. House everybody is working hard and doing the best they can for their constituents.

When I was looking at why I would speak here today and what I would speak about, I wanted some research done into what we've done, because I think we've been on the right track since last March. If we look at the five-point plan that was announced, which I was very pleased with, 230,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have been helped with this five-point plan. That's through the Income Supplement, through the Seniors' Benefit and through income support.

I'm not going to go through the five-point plan because my colleague has already done that. But if you look at the bottom line in those, the Income Supplement has provided approximately 162,000 individuals and families with \$1,000 a year for a family of four; individuals with disabilities, \$715,000. The Seniors' Benefit rose by 10 per cent and we talked today a lot about that, about seniors. Yes, we all have seniors. I'm very lucky, at my age, to have a mother who is still living. She is 90 years old. She lives in her own house; stubborn she is.

AN HON. MEMBER: She's watching.

P. PIKE: Oh, yes, she's watching. There's no doubt I'll get a phone call – my boy.

Anyway, she lives in a bungalow by herself, 90 years old; still drives her own car but she's feeling the pinch – she's feeling the pinch. We, as a family, have to help her. She has an oil furnace but the cost of transitioning that over would be too great for her to do. Of course, you know, she's quite comfortable, by the way. The heat is on 22, day and night.

But, anyway, we all feel it and it's personal to some of us. It's personal to all of us. We have \$5 million spent in a one-time benefit for those currently receiving income support, which will be issued by the first week of April: \$200 for single people and \$400 for families. An additional \$1.9 for electric cars. Now, we're hearing, why are we talking about electric cars; people can't afford them. But this is federal support that we're receiving and it's great for us to reach zero emissions by 2050.

Of course, the program, which provides \$2 million to help transition homes into a sole source of heat, again, another great step towards

us helping people get through these tough times. Doubling the rebate for 20 per cent of Newfoundland and Labrador homes to switch from oil heat to electric heat – again, a good item for us to be dealing with.

Government recently increased eligibility for the Home Energy Savings Program. And this is one that I really like: The household income limit was raised from \$32,500 to \$52,500, and that makes a big difference to a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. This program allows eligible homeowners of single row and semi-detached housing who heat their homes with oil to receive that non-repayable benefit of \$5,000. Since March 15, 2022, there have been roughly 500 emails asking for information on the program and an estimate of 200 phone calls, which is great. It means people are taking us up on this.

One of the things that, I guess, we have to talk about is the rate mitigation. Through rate mitigation, we were able to save people money on their energy costs. Doing the rough math, this represents about \$5 a day or \$1,800 per year. I don't think enough has been said about that. We did this as a government. I think it was a great initiative and it made a big difference to the province, especially our seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Again, I am just going down through reasons why I'm thinking what we're doing – I'm not saying we don't need to do more, I'm saying what we're doing, just in case there is anybody out there listening.

The government continues to work with the Government of Canada. We're not confrontational with the Government of Canada and the programs. We're approaching it the way we should be. This has allowed us to negotiate what we'll do to tackle climate change.

One of the things that we did negotiate was home heating fuel being exempt from the carbon tax. The Department of Environment and Climate Change is administering an \$89.4 million Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund, a federal cost-shared agreement.

Of course, the last thing brought up today was home care and child care. Child care being mostly talked about today because of the initiatives that we will soon be living with the \$10-a-day child care, which is absolutely wonderful. It is saving thousands of families thousands of dollars.

I only have 37 seconds, so we're looking at further ways to help people. Of course, we're all excited about the budget tomorrow. Let's hope there are lots of things in it. Like you, I don't know what's in it. Like anybody else here, we don't know what is in it except the minister. But let's hope it is a good news budget and it does focus on the cost of living. Hopefully, in the budget we'll look at a way of lowering the cost of fuels.

I guess, the last thing is that if you –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, I get up and speak on this issue and we discuss it at great length every day here in the House of Assembly. Every place you go in your district or around the community, around the province, the biggest issue people talk about is the price of gas, the price of home heating fuel, the cost of living, how they can't afford, seniors struggling to keep making ends meet. You go to the supermarket and there are people in there asking how do they afford to pay for the food on the shelves. We all see it day to day. We go into any supermarket, we all do it ourselves and we look around. It's a common theme. I talk about it daily. The cost of living: How can we afford to live in this economy?

It's not a secret and it should be no secret in this House, I've been here long enough now that, I guess, I see and – but one thing that's always played on me and I understand when you're in government, you have a prepared message and you have to stay on course. But how any Member can come in this House of Assembly and not speak about their districts, the people that they represent, the people that voted for

them – a lot do but a lot don't – instead of reading from prepared text and trying to credit the government of the day with the decisions they've made and good things they've done and talking about good news budgets, it astounds me. To each their own and that's their own prerogative. People are only going to do that and that's fine.

How you can come in here as an elected official and stand and not speak about your district and the people that you represent and their struggles and strife. I hear about it daily, Mr. Speaker, daily. The price of home heating fuel now is \$1.83 a litre. I have a bill on my phone, I shared with my colleague the shadow minister for Finance yesterday, \$1.83 a litre was almost \$1,500 for the oil barrel refill. That's not imaginary money. That is real money.

You have people that can afford to make that payment. There are a lot of people who can't afford it, Mr. Speaker. There's a small percentage of people in this province who can actually afford that and sustain it and move on and hope when the summer comes things will dye down and the price of fuel will dip off. That's crisis for a lot of families in this province. That's one bill. That's just one issue, that's just turning the heat on in your house. That could bring a family to its knees. That's serious. That is really serious.

You can talk about the good things you've done. We're looking for a good news budget or we're talking about the rate mitigation and the good news, and the claps for this and claps for that. We seen a five-point plan. This five-point plan really was – there was a lot of ridicule about it, and rightfully so. It didn't meet any of the needs. It was done under pressure; there was a lot of pressure applied to the government at the time to do something.

So what has happened, they've come up with this five-point plan that really didn't answer any of the questions. It's trying to buy time to get to a budget. That's all you've done.

We're hearing some good news things are coming in the budget: fair enough. I don't know if they're still going to address the needs, but isn't it about time, when you've got gas at \$2 a litre and home heating fuel's going to be over

two bucks coming any time soon. Diesel fuels – people can't afford to live like this.

So you're buying time to get to tomorrow to make this announcement. People are falling along the way, people are – it's too late for a lot of families in this province. Because it's all about keeping the message strong, keeping the government's message out there.

I suppose smoke and mirrors; I'll say it again, it's smoke and mirrors. That's all I've seen is smoke and mirrors. I see giggles and I've seen laughter and joking across the way, a lot of people find it really humorous.

We stood in this House yesterday and we debated the 911. On the surface of that, you know, I saw it on the Order Paper, we weren't really too – what's government doing? There was a lot of uncertainty. No one really knew. People on the inside didn't really understand, the people who are really affected by it, firefighters and first responders were wondering what's going on. People that knew people in the industry – it was kind of kept a bit guarded: what's happening?

I've been around long before I was elected, I understand the way budgets are done, I get it, I understand. I go back to 2012 and 2013 when there was 3 per cent that had to be found within government departments. Not a lot of people who are here. I know the Minister of Education would probably remember that, or would probably have some recollection. That was the message that was given: Try to find 3 per cent savings in your department.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that was painful. It was absolutely painful, to the point you were counting up how much coffee you bought in an office. Everyone were coming back nickel and diming because no one had the, I guess, desire, the results of trying to find that savings. It hurts. It's usually a job lost, a program cut and people will hurt because of it. It's just the way governments are structured. This government is no different from any other government, that'll always be a problem.

So you get the 911 service into the \$20 million pot of money, someone on the inside – and more than likely it probably wasn't the minister – said

I have a solution. I see this money, this is set-up, people pay a fee and it will replenish itself.

You know, I'll be totally frank, from someone that was in that room before when people were struggling, a lot of people were struggling trying to find the dollars, that would be the lowest-hanging fruit. I'm not saying I wouldn't do that myself. I'm not saying that, but be transparent about it. Tell the people of the province what you're doing.

We stood here yesterday, sat in our place and asked question after question to the minister. And it was just disregard. It was flippant responses. Why? Tell the people of the province you're taking it in as a revenue stream. This will be a revenue stream. After repeated questions, we find the Minister of Finance finally says that it is going in Fines Administration and don't know – there'll be several million to fund this program. But the 75 cents people will pay – well, 68, it will go to government. It's a revenue stream. It's meant to offset some other spending – general revenues.

Where we are – we got my colleague who is the shadow the minister for Finance has been repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly asking for a home oil rebate. Now we are almost over two dollars a barrel. You're going to need a fine rebate now. I know the government doesn't set those prices but you're taking the \$20 million from the 911 right now and that's going to go into government revenue – we were told that yesterday. That's confirmed. Use that.

You find that, but then you can't get a clear answer on that until you pry and pry and get it out. But then when one little good news comes out, one little thing, they will all be out jumping and clapping and patting their backs. I mean, they need long arms. It's a lot of back-patting going on. I don't know what the back-patting is. A lot of this stuff, though, doesn't resonate with the average person.

I've said this in this House repeatedly for years, and I'll never fail it. It'll never leave me. I'll stand by it until the day I die, not in politics. Go to the people. Go to the coffee shops. Go to the supermarket. That's where you've got to go. That's where you hear the real stories. That should be governing the politics in here, not

dinner parties, not \$500-plate fundraisers. Go to the supermarket. Go down to Tim Hortons when you've got seniors that come in regularly and buy their coffee. I'll stand by that for as long as I stand in this House, as long as I stand in my boots, anywhere.

They are enlightening. They will tell you what they think. No matter what the issue is, they will tell you what they really think. That's what we should be using when we make a lot of decisions and especially these bread-and-butter issues: the price of gas, the price of home heating fuel, the price of groceries, a senior getting their medication, a senior paying for their dental. That's where it's to.

I said this in the House a few weeks ago: Why do I hear from an oil company that said seniors are struggling with how much food to put on the table and how much oil to put in the barrel? Someone's calling an oil delivery company for \$50 worth of oil. Now, we all know that's hardly enough to light your furnace. That's sad. I know you all get that. But we have to be more straightforward with the people. That's what they want. They don't care what stripe we are. They want to know what you are telling us. They don't want to know about these smoke and mirrors. They don't care about that. I don't and they don't. And I don't think anyone here in this room does.

When you get in government – and I've said this over the years before, it's a bubble effect. It's a bubble. Everyone gets in this bubble and they think that, in their world, everything is fine. Oh, we're up in the polls, things are good and getting good comments here and getting good comments there. But you're nowhere near where the boots on the ground in this province are in your districts. You're nowhere in touch, so out of touch with reality. That's where the problems are to; that's what you need to address.

I'm not saying anything that anyone in this House doesn't agree with or hasn't heard before. But when you're in this bubble – and it happens to everybody – you don't see the forest for the trees. You look at the totally different picture. It's about the photo op, it's about the smile, the big announcements and it's about look how good we did. Yet, these people still struggle and they'll struggle after tomorrow. They'll continue

to struggle. Until you do something that's substantial and structural to fix the problems of the long term, we'll stay in the situation forever and a day. And that's a sad statement, Mr. Speaker, but that's the way I feel.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to take a couple of minutes here now because I think I have seven or eight minutes, whatever. Mr. Speaker, this is a very timely private Member's motion, obviously. And Members are right. I know I'm getting calls from people from all over the province. Although I have to say the days of the telephone calls are starting to die down to some degree. A lot of what I get now, not even emails, it's Facebook Messenger. That's the big one: Facebook Messenger. Or messages on Twitter and so on. The world is changing. But either way, I'm getting contacted by lots of people about these affordability issues. It's impacting, no doubt, everybody in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I don't envy the government, I really don't, because I'm sure everybody wants to do the best they can. They really do. I know they do. There are certain things, certain elements that are out of government's control. We can't blame the war on Ukraine on the Premier. We can't blame skyrocketing oil prices on the Premier, as much as maybe politically some of us might want to. But it's really not their fault. There are things that are out of their control. But I guess the argument is, is that there are some things that can be done to try to alleviate some of the pain on people.

Of course, the other reality that government has to try to balance – it's very easy for me to stand over here and say we need to cut taxes on this and cut taxes on that and give rebates on this and rebates on that. That's easy to do. But there's also a reality that government has to face as well around our fiscal situation as a province. I

understand they have to try to balance all those things.

So whether they're on that side of the House or – I can't say we're on the other side of the House, but if they are on the other side of the House, it would be the same thing. They would have the same issues; they would be wrestling with the same issues.

It would be pretty disingenuous of me to stand here and just basically bash them over everything and say they're doing a horrible job, that they don't care, because we all know it's a tough situation. Regardless who's on that side, it is what it is in the sense of where we're to fiscally as a province and of world events that are driven the costs of goods and services and the price of oil and home heating oil where it is. I guess the debate is, in achieving that balance, what levers can government reasonably pull to help people that are perhaps impacted the hardest with what's going on. I guess that's really the challenge that government has, and that's where the debate comes into play.

My colleague talked about the five-point plan and how there are a lot of people who didn't really benefit from the five-point plan, and it's true. There are people who did benefit. But when you think about it – and here's where it gets challenging, and this is where I find it challenging myself in talking to a lot of people perhaps in my district. As the Member said, the person at Tim Hortons or at the grocery store. This is the group that never seems to get represented, unfortunately, by this government, by any government. That's what the average person would say – the average working person.

Now if somebody is making salaries like we're making in this House of Assembly, we can suck it up. We might not like it. As the Member for Torngat said, maybe that's going to impact some of your discretionary spending and maybe I can't go on a trip this year. I'll have to go next year or whatever. That's important for those people too though, because they work hard. They take in risks in business. They gone and paid a lot for an education. So if they're making a decent living, they would say to you why should I be penalized for that. But, nonetheless, there is the group on the higher end that can suck it up, to a degree.

But then there's this other group who are also the working class people, who are the lower end. It is like they never seem to get looked after. They're always making just enough that they don't qualify for any help from government. The only thing they qualify for is paying for everything. So when the government announced the five-point plan, as an example, they gave the money for the seniors. Now, I'm not knocking giving the money for seniors. I don't want it to be twisted or construed as I'm saying that; I'm not. But the reality of it is that when you gave that money to the seniors, it was the seniors that are only on your basic OAS and CPP getting the supplement. Those are the only ones that qualified.

If I was a senior and I worked my whole life and now I have a little bit of a work pension from the government or from my former employer and I have a few RRSPs or whatever, I don't qualify for anything. I didn't get anything. I'm not getting a drug card. I don't qualify for none of the different government programs. I didn't benefit from that money.

Again, I'm not knocking it. But a lot of seniors who just got that increase are seniors who are living in personal care homes and are in long-term care and so on. They don't have the oil bills or anything like that to pay for, but they got the extra money anyway. Now, God love them, a few extra dollars for a few things. I'm not knocking that, but the reality of it is that a lot of people who got that money don't really need it to pay for their heat. They're not the ones that are going cold, because they're in a personal care home, long-term care.

What about the senior, if you will, who, like I said, they worked their whole life, they're not getting the supplement and maybe they're getting an extra \$10,000 or \$15,000 a year or whatever from a pension and they don't qualify for anything. Well, guess what? They're living home and the price of home heating oil has gone through the roof, the price for gas gone through the roof and so on and that plan did nothing at all, absolutely zero to help them.

What about the families? What about a young family where you're got whether it be one person – I know people in this boat. They're working two minimum wage jobs or two jobs

just above minimum wage, trying to struggle just to pay the bills. Or a husband and wife that are each making minimum wage or lower income – let's say their income is like \$40,000 a year between them, \$40,000 or so, but they have two kids. They have a small mortgage and everything else. Who's helping them? How are they getting assistance? They're not getting any help. That's a lot of the people that you hear from.

I really feel for those people. Those people are getting up out of bed every morning and going to work and working hard to support themselves and their families. They're not making a lot of money so they can't suck it up. They don't have any extras, per se. It's not like for them, well, I won't go to The Keg this weekend; I'll go next weekend. They're lucky if they can take their kids to McDonald's once a month for a treat, and now they can't do that. They can't even live; they can't even pay for their heat.

I think that's a group, that lower working class and so on, or the seniors that's got a little bit of money from pension that are not getting looked after, and they keep getting forgotten and I don't think we should be forgetting them.

I think the federal government are getting off the hook with the seniors, too. When you think about this supplement that the government is paying now, we're really propping up the federal government. Because the OAS and CPP for these seniors the amount is not adequate –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

It being 4:45 on Private Member's Day, I recognize the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to close debate.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, I want to thank all of the Members who actually got a chance to speak today, and for those who didn't get a chance to speak today who were so passionate about wanting to speak today. We certainly look forward to your comments in future in the House.

I think we all agree on one thing in this House, in all seriousness. One, people are facing extraordinary pressures; many people in this province are suffering and are having a difficult time making ends meet. We believe there are things that government can be doing to ease that pressure, and finally we need more than the five-point plan that was announced.

Hearing Members talk about their issues and stuff, we can look forward to some optimism, that there will be things in tomorrow's budget that will make a difference, and I hope it certainly contains measures that the people need right now. But there are some things, of course, in this House that's – since we've been back, there's been a lot of rhetoric of blame, I'll call it, in a lot of speaking notes that have come forward. Any time government starts talking about blame, it usually means they're poised to make deep cuts, and they want to look to someone else to blame it on.

There's been a lot of eagerness to paint the previous Tories as villains, and your negativity has shaped everything you do. And so that comes down to whether or not there's austerity coming – austerity measures coming. Any time we talk about austerity, it usually means that the people of the Province of Newfoundland are going to pay for it. So I think tomorrow's budget needs to be light on blame, heavy on confidence and investment in a brighter future and a brighter economy.

We all know that if you want to improve an economy, to make it grow, then you need to put more money in people's pockets. If you want to stifle it, then simply add more taxes and take it out. So, tomorrow, the government has an opportunity not to add more taxes, to defer this sugar tax that they talk about bringing in and certainly to take a different approach on some of the taxes that they now charge.

We have gone through two years of a COVID environment and while that has certainly played an impact on everyone, it also opened up something to people: the real opportunity to work from home. To work in a different environment so that you don't have to go to a big building. The government has had employees working from home; businesses have had a lot of people that have worked from home.

The reason I bring it up is because if we're going to recruit people to come to Newfoundland and Labrador or recruit young professionals to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador, then that ability to be able to work from home is enticing. People can come and live in Newfoundland and Labrador no matter whether their head office is located in Toronto or Vancouver, so there is a real opportunity to do that.

But one of the things that will keep them from moving to Newfoundland and Labrador, as a young professional, if you've got a young family that makes \$100,000 a year, why would you move to Newfoundland and Labrador to pay some of the highest tax rates in the country? Why would you move to Newfoundland and Labrador if you know your family can't get a primary health care provider?

So there are barriers that exist and while the minister talks about the increased numbers, that's great, but how many more could we have

—
SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The level of chatter is getting too loud.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: How many more people could we be recruiting and, just as important, how do we retain our young professionals in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador? I truly believe that if we really want to keep people here and we want to bring people to move here, then part of that solution has to be about our tax structure and what we charge for those people who are going to want to make \$100,000 a year or more. Let's not be ashamed of that. That should be a goal.

I think the goal of government, of any government, should not be about having less people pay more tax. It should always be about more people paying less tax. That has to be the ultimate goal for all of us and we have to find a way to make that happen, but it has to start with competitiveness. Being competitive on that tax

bracket. Being competitive so that we know if you want to move here, you can have an opportunity to find a family care provider. I would say it is great that we have \$10 a day daycare, as long as you could find a space or you could find someone to work in the daycare, because that's been part of the challenge. It's not just about how much you charge, it's about finding that space; young professionals trying to find a space for child care. So that's the key to this, it's not just about one thing.

We talk about the health care budget all the time and we talk about the cost of health care. The fact that our health authorities pay payroll tax. So let's call it what it is: the government giveth and the government taketh away. Yet, it shows up as an expense of health care. Millions of dollars given to the health care system, millions of dollars given back to government because it's payroll tax. Yet, it shows up as a cost to the health care system. That's just money in and out. That has nothing to do with the cost of health care.

On the subject of payroll tax, what a unique opportunity we have. We have a lot of companies in this province who pay payroll tax. Let's reward the companies that are actually hiring people full time. If you've got over 80 per cent of your employees that are working full time and you're giving them benefits to go along with it, then, hey, have we got a deal for you. Let's lower your payroll tax.

But guess what? On the other side of that coin, you have a lot of big corporations – and we know who they are, I'm not going to name them – in this province who refuse to hire people full time, who refuse to hire full-time workers, who refuse to pay benefits. So let's say to those, guess what? We're going to nail you, you're going to have to pay a little more payroll tax, whether you like it or not.

But I really believe if we're truly going to encourage – if you want to see wages go up, find ways to help businesses, find ways to help them attract employees, find ways for them to want to pay their employees more. I think every business would love to pay their employees more, but it can't simply be about coming out of their bottom line. It has to be shared with government through tax deductions.

So tomorrow, there's a real opportunity here for government to take a step forward, to take advantage of the fact that there's a new way of working so that people don't have to live in a high-rise in Toronto to work. They can live in a rural outpost in Newfoundland and actually do the same job, but our tax regime has to be competitive. We have to be competitive if we want to attract those people.

I truly believe that if people have a choice of living in a high-rise in downtown Toronto or living in rural Newfoundland – and those of us who live out in rural Newfoundland, we just love it and we know how good it is. We have to find a way to bring more people there.

Let's talk about Come Home Year: great. Let's not just focus on bringing people home for a visit. Let's bring them home to stay. Let's make that our mantra. More people paying less tax and let's bring them home to stay. Let's look forward to see what's in the budget tomorrow to make that happen.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I just want to remind everyone on the Public Accounts Committee, that there will be a Committee meeting held at 5:30 p.m. this afternoon in the Committee Room. All those on the Public Accounts Committee, 5:30 in the Committee Room.

This being Wednesday, in accordance with Standing Order 9(3), the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.