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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: Any speakers to the motion?

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Of course, it's a great honour to stand in this Chamber and represent the great people of our vast beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

Before I get started, I would like to acknowledge today is International Firefighters' Day throughout the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Throughout our province we have a lot of volunteer fire departments and firefighters and those men and women, whether they get a call today or not, obviously have their life on the line and they're probably adjusting how far they go fishing in the woods or anything like that to make sure that they're not too far from the call. So to them, on this day, I commend them for their service to our province.

It's also Mental Health Week for our nation and that needs to be acknowledged as well, because obviously with the way the economy is going and stuff like that, we noticed that there's an increase in the amount of people that are dealing with mental health issues, Speaker. Like I said, a lot of it is due to the economy because we hear about all these different initiatives and stuff like that with reports and where we're in health care and all that kind of stuff, yet I don't see in any of these reports where we're addressing the economy and improving our standard of living

through increasing the revenue coming into the province.

I have a very industrial district. I have Vale in Long Harbour; I have Bull Arm and the refinery there in the isthmus area; a state-of-the-art, world-renowned fish plant in Arnold's Cove that's been passed down through generation after generation, which are employing the beautiful people of Arnold's Cove for a long time. And not just Arnold's Cove, I know there are people from even Chance Cove that come over and work; Little Harbour East, places like that, that come over and work at the fish plant in Arnold's Cove.

To move down the Burin Peninsula from there, we have a lot of enterprises that are out fishing and bringing in revenue for their communities and the province. We have Grieg, which I would like to tout as – they just had their grand reopening and I'm very proud of the work that we've all done there to make sure that this company becomes a great success for our province as well.

On top of that, we have Kiewit that holds down the Cow Head facility in Spanish Room, in the Marystown area and, like I said, to see Bay du Nord get announced, that excited me for the simple fact that I do have that industrial footprint in my district. For all the things that I just named off, these are big operations. If we can get all those operations employed, then I think that would be, obviously, a greater benefit to everybody in the province, so that we don't have these cost-of-living issues that we're experiencing.

There are a couple of things, I guess, when it comes to our economy, we all have to be on board and we all have to be prepared to put in our five cents worth, I guess, because it's like any idea, a lot of ideas are not seen right to fruition, with that one initial idea, but with the right people around the table, everybody can weigh in on it and we can build it to a fruition idea. I think that it's very important that we do come together.

The way I see being elected by the beautiful people of Placentia West - Bellevue is that I'm here to represent them. Not that I have to agree all the time with the other 39 Members, but I

have to make sure that I'm putting the best foot forward for our district. That's what I'm trying to do here today, by letting the government know that we have assets in our province that we don't need to be farming out any work. We can do it right here.

When our facilities are shutdown and our workers have to go to Alberta and Guyana and Africa and all these places, they're world-renowned. They're the leaders in all these other operations. We can't do it right here ourselves, it just makes no sense to me. We have the state-of-the-art facilities, especially if you look at like Bull Arm. We didn't build that for one project. Let's make that something that we're proud of and we can draw the Equinors of the world and stuff like that and to convince them that what we have here is second to none.

So why would we get any platforms made anywhere else? Why would we get any infrastructure done anywhere else with topsides and stuff like that? I mean, if we're doing Bay du Nord, why wouldn't we do the topsides at Kiewit facility in Marystown? It just makes sense.

It's common sense. Obviously, it doesn't flow in every facet of elected representatives, but, like I said, I take things back from a common perspective because I feel that's who I am. I'm one of these people who have struggled to pay bills, have had to worry about credit ratings and all this kind of stuff. I'm no different than anybody else in my district and that's why they feel that I am their voice, for the simple fact that I'm realistic about the situation we're in. I'm also there to help them through their time of need and what they need.

Like I said, when you have a district the size of Placentia West - Bellevue that goes from seven kilometres outside of Whitbourne right to Marystown, then it is a pretty vast district and there are many needs. There are 36 towns, 16 fire departments. It's a busy district on top of that.

But the thing that I have noticed is that a lot of them all got the same needs, whether it is health care or seniors' care, whether it is the roads. These are things that are common to everybody. So these are things that we need to look at in our

economy to make sure that we are giving back to the people that are providing to have this province running. But we are not doing that right now. We are falling short of supporting the people that need the help.

You look at our blue-collar workers. These people are still getting up every morning to keep our economy going, yet it's doubled in price for them to get to work. It's probably gone up a fair bit, as groceries have gone up, to pack their lunch to be at work. Obviously, there's a five-step program and I guess somebody in my position I really can't wait, I guess, as I said in Estimates, to see what the other four steps are. Because the first step really didn't hit the mark, as far as I am concerned, for the people in my district.

It kind of fell short, for the simple fact that we helped a sector of the province, which I am happy to represent as well, to make their life better, but we didn't do it for everybody. In doing it for everybody, it probably wouldn't be the fact of introducing or putting in a carbon tax at this point in time. That might be good down the road but right now – today – fuel prices are not at a situation where adding tax to the fuel that we've already got is going to help us.

There were some small steps, like I said, to help the economy but in no way, shape or form did it actually hit the needs of our people. By taking some of the surcharges off fuel, we would have hit the mark right across the board for everybody in our province. It just seemed to me that that would be the no-brainer because the first step in anything is making sure that we are looking after everybody. But when you turn around and you pick out those vulnerable sectors and you help them then yes, that is a good thing. It is not a horrible thing, but it certainly wasn't enough to make a difference in the running of their households or being able to sustain the household that they already have.

So, like I said, there are the same issues. But a lot of the issues, when it comes to the roads – which is something that is a big part of our economy that people expect – is that, years ago, we laid roads but we haven't done anything to maintain them. Take Jean de Baie, for instance. They got a paved road probably 40 or 50 years

ago. Other than having a couple of collapsed culverts fixed, that road hasn't been touched.

Now there's economic activity down there that's going to bring millions of dollars to the local economy, yet we're falling short of letting the people peacefully enjoy getting in and out of their community. People don't buy a new rig, and it could be based on the fact that the roads are not fit to drive on. You may as well buy a second-hand rig and keep fixing it because you're going to break a new rig or a second-hand rig, then obviously a second-hand rig might give you a little bit more disposable dollars in your pocket in order to get that rig fixed. But either way, you're going to have issues. And cutting away from potholes is probably just as hard on your rig as it is to hit the pothole itself.

Sometimes what I find, especially this winter obviously was a bit of a strange winter with the freeze and thaw, freeze and thaw, but to say that we're hitting the mark on maintenance when it comes to roads, I would ask anybody to drive through my district. Like I said, go down the road in Jean de Baie, go down the road in Spanish Room and Rock Harbour and go down the road in Chance Cove.

Like I said before, we have a world-renowned trail in Chance Cove which is beautiful. I've been there and if anybody would like to go and check it out, I think you'd be quite impressed, because when you get out around the back out by Patrick's Cove part, it's just like you're in Costa Rica somewhere. The water is green. There are these beautiful archways and all this kind of stuff, beautiful beaches and stuff. We've been putting in some money to that trail.

But the problem is getting to the trail. We have a road there that's the branch from Route 1 to it's a bypass road if something happened on the highway is used as everybody would be rerouted through there to go to the old Cabot Highway. It's honestly not fit. We have a little bit of work done on it. Changed out a couple of culverts and a couple of guiderails over the last couple of years. But these are roads that are beyond maintenance now. They need to be replaced, completely replaced.

It's unfortunate because the money that we're spending is not going in the right areas to make it a fulsome fix. We can't fix, let's say, 50 metres here and then the next 100 metres is not fit to drive on it. Or the shoulders are gone or the sides of the pavement are eroded. These are things that are in our economy that people need.

One of the things that are in our Residential Tenancies Act is about peaceful enjoyment. That is what that whole sector of our government stands on: Making sure that not only the tenant but the landlord and everybody gets to peacefully enjoy the property that is at stake. Then why is that not the same conscience of people that are living in these communities? They need to peacefully enjoy their community. Right now, they are embarrassed to invite people for Come Home Year because there is nothing to drive on. People are going to come back and be like I can't believe that this is what we got invited to.

It might have been better to probably have a year of that lieu time because a lot of people that didn't get to travel over the last couple of years, they're coming anyway. Whether they're grandparents or they're bringing home their kids to see grandparents or whatever. But if we had that one-year delay, it would give us more time to prepare, more time to have our roads ready and it would have given us an opportunity to realize the price of fuel that we're looking at charging people while they're here.

People are still a little bit weary of what is the state of health care when they get here. They already know that there are 100,000 people in the province that don't have a primary care physician. What is the propensity for them to be able to get the right care when they come here if something happens to them? God forbid, I hope nothing happens to any of our visitors, but that is not realistic and common sense would tell us that there is going to be a percentage that is going to have to rely on our health care while they're here. The people of the province right now can't rely on our health care, so how can we invite visitors to come and have them rely on it as well?

I am very proud of our government that there are Ukrainian refugees coming here. But what are we offering them as a primary health care

opportunity? They're going to need these things. These are things that need to be in place in order to invite the world to come to us.

So what I am saying in saying this and about talking to this amendment is that if we don't start to realize that improving the economy is going to improve the peaceful enjoyment of not only our residents but our visitors, then we're out to lunch. We're missing the mark altogether. I'll take some of the blame for that, but I want to be heard and I want to be listened to and I want people to know what the issues are in my district. Not just pass it off as no big deal or I'm blowing hot air or anything like that.

I was very disappointed, actually, last week, I heard of a family in Twillingate – and a couple of sessions ago, one of the ministers said: you choose where you live. Well, these people are choosing not to live in our province anymore. And do you know what? It's for a very miniscule – something operational that I think could easily have been handled. They're leaving due to a bus not being able to pick up their son because of where they choose to live. It's no more than 50 or 100 metres for that bus to go that little bit further to pick up this young boy. Sorry, Speaker, for picking on your district, but the former minister said this family is choosing to leave our province. Such a simple request of our government. I think that's where we fall short.

When we look at the global big picture, yeah, there are some serious issues there. But until we address the economy and we improve the economy – and Bay du Nord is a good start, but we have to do a made-right-here solution. What's happening in the rest of Canada, we can't bring – we saw through COVID we adopted everything that other provinces were already after trying and stuff like that. But these are bigger urban centres. St. John's wouldn't even be considered an urban centre in another province.

So that's the whole thing that I'm trying to say. Until we take this common sense approach about A has to do with B and B has to do with C, but we can't get to C until we go through B after A. It's a linear approach, but we have to address the economy. We have the resources, let's utilize them for the benefit of our province and stop

having to sidle up to the federal government and going with cap in hand and all that stuff. Which is fine because they're supposed to be our partners, not our adversaries, they're supposed to be helping us get through this economy, as opposed to adding another Carbon Tax or adding – well, the sugar tax, I can't even get into that, that's just – I mean, we have to look at healthier outcomes.

Right now, we're spending the most money in health care, with the worst outcomes. That should speak volumes. I mean, we have a minister here that's been there for seven years.

If I had a CEO in my company that hadn't fixed things in seven years, he wouldn't be demoted, or she, they'd be let go. I wouldn't want anything else to do with them, for the simple fact that their ideas are either antiquated or not being listened to. There are lots of good ideas that are coming from this side, from all Members of the House; we're just not being listened to, the same as the rest of the people in the province.

The problem with our province is that we haven't focused on our economy for a made-right-here solution and for the people of our province. We've let the federal government come in and utilize all our natural resources for the benefit of the country, but not for the benefit of our province.

I don't understand why the price of fish in Nova Scotia would be a better price than here in Newfoundland. Just makes no sense. We definitely have just as clean a water and just as good a fish. That seems to be out to lunch to me.

But we're not going to tax our residents into having that peaceful enjoyment. But if we put them to work, I'll guarantee you, they'll have some peaceful enjoyment because they're contributing and they want to contribute. We need to have good paying jobs.

I see that my time is running short. I will talk to the state of our economy again soon and the cost of living. I have a lot more points to make. But the next time that I talk I will certainly be bringing up about our recruitment and retention to help our health care workers that have put so much on the line and now that they're burnt out,

we're still failing them. We've had a recruitment and retention program that says show up and we'll give you a job.

Anyway, thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to be able to stand again in the House of Assembly representing the District of Stephenville - Port au Port and talk about the budget and some of the adjustments that we have proposed.

But before I do, my hon. colleague from Cape St. Francis sent me a little reminder and I just want to read it out to you. In June of 2008, oil per barrel was trading at \$181.58. The gas prices in Newfoundland and Labrador were 118.6. March 2022: oil per barrel was trading at \$96.72. The gas prices are at 203.9. So that's quite a spread. Some of it, obviously, may be due to supply, but how much of it is due to tax? How much of it is due to changes in our tax structure forced upon us, some of it, by the federal government, but others by our failure to deal with a very difficult situation that people of Newfoundland and Labrador find themselves in right now? Whether it's heating their homes or filling their vehicles.

We have talked about this continuously; we will continue to talk about it because we believe that it deserves action. While lots has been done, there is lots more that can be done and there is enough flexibility in the budget to allow that to happen. So, again, we will continue to suggest that the budget needs to be amended to reflect the fact that so many people in our province today cannot afford to heat their homes.

When you think about all of the people who work in this great province of ours that have to commute to work. We don't have the public transportation systems, certainly in rural Newfoundland and Labrador so that they can take advantage of those. Carpooling is still going on, but at the same time, just think about the significant impact of someone who has to drive

an hour to work everyday and what that is doing on their disposable income. The amount of money that they actually have to spend on groceries. The amount of money that they actually have to spend on kids activities. That's direct impact. That is a direct impact on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and we have to find a way to do it.

The budget documents for the last two years talked about *CHANGE starts here*, that was last year's theme. This year: *CHANGE is in the air*. Unfortunately, while there have been some good things, the changes are having a significant impact on the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Let's talk health care for a second. Over the last seven years, we have seen a significant change in health care in this province. I would argue that it has not been for the betterment of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The fact that over 100,000 people do not have access to a family doctor is not a change that is welcomed by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is not a change that we are proud of, or should be proud of. It is not a change that simply happened overnight. It was forecasted; it was predicted. The NLMA predicted it would happen. So five or six years ago, we should have been addressing this issue. We should have been talking about how we increase recruitment.

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has a wonderful med school. It is part of the solution, but also part of the solution in our province and in the history of our province has been to recruit people, physicians to come from other countries and other provinces. Somehow or other, that stream has dried up. There are lots of reasons why that has happened, but the number one reason is because of lack of action by the Minister of Health in dealing with that issue upfront and acknowledging it five years ago when it was brought to his attention. Not by me, but by all the people in the regional health authorities, by the VPs of medical services, by the NLMA and others.

So again, there could have been, should have been a lot more action taken. So yeah, do we now find ourselves challenged to find physicians for 100,000 people? Absolutely we do. Part of the proposed solution, of course, is collaborative

health teams. We all welcome the opportunity for those. But when you're taking a family physician away from somebody who has one, to say they're going to be part of a collaborative team, how does that solve the problem?

My colleague from Terra Nova gave us yesterday the example of the person in the community of Charlottetown. I used to work in the hospital in Clarenville and people from Charlottetown, that's their hospital. But to turn around and say to this person that you can't be part of a collaborative team because you live in Charlottetown, so you now have to go through some 1-800 number? How is that even possible for that to happen?

In my own district, nurse practitioners have stepped up. They've stepped up in Corner Brook; they've stepped up in Stephenville, to offer their services. Not as part of the health authority, but as independent practitioners. So they have offered their services and they're filling up. They're filling up in fact so fast in Stephenville with the one nurse practitioner there, that you have to pay \$300 in advance to reserve your appointment times for the coming year.

This money is coming out of the hands of seniors. It's coming out of the hands of people on fixed income, and it's coming out of the hands of people all throughout my district, who have no option – who have no other option. At the same time our government says sorry, we didn't plan for that. We're thinking about how we might fix it. At the same time, there are significant savings in the salaried physicians' budget that could have paid or reimbursed the people of the province.

If you can't figure out a way for the health authorities to compensate the nurse practitioners for doing that work, then find a way to compensate the people and reimburse them. Because nobody, as I've said in this House before, nobody in this House would think that they would have to pay to see a primary care provider – nobody. And I would argue that if it was your mother or your father or your sister or your brother, you would certainly be upset about it. You know what? They are. They are your families. Because all of us in Newfoundland and Labrador should not be satisfied that people in

our province are having to pay to see a primary care provider. It's simply not good enough, and it can be fixed. We don't need to wait for long-term solutions. We need it fixed now.

In my district, we have a beautiful hospital. Fully equipped, capable of performing lots and lots of different types of procedures, but at the end of the day, people are worried. They're worried because they hear that the Health Accord is talking about what they're going to take away, not what they're going to add in. We have assets all over the province just like the Stephenville hospital, whether it's the hospital in Carbonear, whether it's the hospital in Burin.

At the end of the day, we shouldn't be talking about what can't be done there. We should simply be talking about what can be done there. Stephenville Hospital is not part of the problem; it's part of the solution. In the western part of the region we have the Corner Brook Regional Hospital and we have the Stephenville hospital. So when we talk about OR services or availability of ICUs, those two facilities should be seen as one. They should be used as one facility.

And when we talk about recruiting staff or specialists to those facilities, then we should talk about them as one, and find a way so that we can intertwine those facilities, so that it's not about whether you work at Western Health in Corner Brook or whether you work at Western Health in Stephenville. You work in Western Health. And whether we have six surgeons or eight surgeons, we have them for the region. We don't have them for a facility. Those are the things that need to happen. Those are the things that can happen, and should be done.

But here's another example for you. In my district recently, I had received an email from a nurse, a new graduate, who told me that him and seven other of his colleagues were only offered temporary call-in positions, not offered a permanent, full-time job. How is that even possible in today's environment when we have such a shortage of nursing staff in our province that new grads who want to stay in the area are not offered a permanent, full-time job? Try renting an apartment when you're on a casual call-in. You may be getting full-time hours, but you have no permanent job. Try going for a loan

to buy a vehicle if you're a casual call-in because you don't have a permanent, full-time job.

These are the problems that are becoming evident and they simply do not need to exist. There is absolutely no reason in this day in age when we have such a shortage and want to retain our health care workers that they should not be made permanent full-time. If there are challenges with working out schedules, so be it, make it work, but I would argue that we should be hiring every single person we can. Every single nurse should be hired on a permanent, full-time basis and let's figure out how we make the system work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That's just one simple thing that can be done.

We talk about sustainability; we've heard lots of that in the Health Accord. Is it sustainable? I would argue sustainability depends on whether or not you're prepared to sustain it. We talk about the fact that two surgeons in Burin aren't sustainable because they're on call one and two, or two surgeons in Stephenville aren't sustainable because they're on call one and two. There are lots of specialists in St. John's working at the Health Sciences that we have two of. Is that sustainable? Are they sustainable because they work in St. John's and they're on call one and two? Is that any different than Stephenville, Burin or anywhere else? I don't think so.

I believe that, at the end of the day, we have facilities that need to be utilized. People should not have to get in their vehicles and travel over highways, over roads. I would challenge anyone to travel over the highway in this province in the dead of winter trying to get to an emergency, or trying to get a service somewhere else because we don't have it available.

That, of course, brings me to another passion of mine, which I will continue to argue for and continue to lobby for and continue to demand, that is about medical transportation. Yes, we have a Medical Transportation Assistance Program, it has made improvements over the years, but, quite frankly, I believe it's not good

enough. I believe that nobody in this province should have to pay for travel for medical appointments.

Let's talk about affordability and accessibility because that's what that is about. Nobody should say I can't go to my medical appointment because I can't afford to travel. And if you think about today's environment with the cost of travel, it gets even worse. So whether you live five miles or 500 miles from a tertiary care centre – we only have one tertiary care centre, we'll only ever have one, but surely we can find a way, whether we're the payee of last resort, in other words your insurance pays upfront first and then government pays.

But people in this province deserve to have equal access. People in rural Newfoundland and Labrador deserve equality of access and deserve equality of affordability. Because if I live on Lemarchant Road and I have to go to the Health Sciences to see a specialist, no big deal. But if I live in Kippens, or Cape St. George, or anywhere else in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, it is a big deal. It's a significant cost for me to travel to St. John's.

Part of the other problem, not only have you got the additional cost when you get there, but your appointment is cancelled. That is one of the biggest challenges in the health system: communication, or should I say lack of. Because there is a lack of communication. I think there's a lack of communication between health authorities. It's great to say we're going to put them under one, but if you have no information system that people are able to communicate with each other, that's a problem.

As I highlighted earlier, we're going out for an RFP for a new health information system for Western hospital, because that hospital was designed to be paperless. So they have no choice but to do that. But why are you simply stopping at Western Memorial hospital? Why are you not going out for an RFP for a complete new health information system for the entire province? You can start with Western, but you need to get this done. This needs to be a priority. It's a much bigger priority than simply turning around and saying we're going to collapse four health authorities.

So, again, these are the things that are happening: health care and the cost of living. I'm sure the Members opposite are all hearing those from their constituents, because I'm certainly hearing it from mine and everybody else on this side of the House is hearing it from theirs. So I cannot emphasize enough that we have to find ways to help people. We have to find ways to put more money back in people's pockets when it comes to the cost of living.

Some time ago, a few years back, the government opposite introduced a levy. We all remember the famous levy that was income based. The more money you made, the more you paid in the levy.

Let's talk about a new level. Let's talk about a reverse levy. Let's talk about a rebate levy that's based on the fact that the least amount of money you make, you get a bigger rebate back to help you with the cost of living.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: To help you with the price of gas. If you can bring in a levy to take money out of people's pockets, then bring one in to put money back into people's pockets. That to me is what we need to be looking at.

Short-term measures, yes, but these are extraordinary times. These are extraordinary times and the people of our province need your help. I believe that the government wants to help. I believe they've tried to help with some of the measures they've introduced. But they themselves, the government, has acknowledged it wasn't enough. So now we're asking to step up, to take some of the money that's currently in your budget and reallocate it back to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador through some type of rebate program.

It's possible to do it; it's very possible to do it. I'm hoping that, at the end of the day, the government will make sure that it happens. Before we leave this House in June, let us leave here with a budget that has been amended, not by the Opposition on this side of the House, but a budget that's been amended by the government, because you're the only ones who can make this happen. You are the ones that can make this happen. Do it, as I said yesterday, not

because we want it, but do it for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Do it for your constituents because your constituents are calling you. They are calling you and they're asking you for help.

They need help with the costs of home heat fuel. They need help with the price of fuel at the pumps. They need help with access to health care. They need help with being able to afford to go to their appointments. We all need that help. They need that help no matter what district of this province you live in.

Again, my plea to the government is to take another look. Take the change that's in the air and bring it down to the ground. Bring it down to the budget. Make a change in your budget. Make the amendment and make it happen so that we can have some relief for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's what we should be focused on this Chamber. That's what we should be focused on in our budget discussion. The focus is on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next speaker, I just want to remind everyone that at 10:55 the emergency alert system will go off, so I'm not sure if everybody have their phones on mute. Even if you do, it may still come on. So we may have a short interruption, but if we do we'll just pause for a few seconds.

I recognize the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll go back to and follow-up on my colleague when it comes to dealing with issues around poverty. It's about income, about putting money in people's pockets, if you want to solve the problem. We've put motions forward here and we've discussed the issues. There's a short-term approach and then there's the long-term approach to this. It's pulling people out of the water. There's also making sure that they don't fall into the water in the first place, into the river.

We would support anything along the lines that's going to provide temporary relief, but also I think we still have to start addressing the bigger issues here in this province.

In many ways, as I said last night, you can see a lot of the issues in microcosm in my district that we're facing, the social issues. I met this morning with the chief of police to layout some of the issues. There are things that the police can do and there are things that the provincial government can do. There are things that the municipal government can do, the City of St. John's, but in many ways we all need to be putting the resources there.

Because what is happening is that we might think we're saving money in one area, but we're going to pay the cost for it in some way. Whether it's incarceration; whether it is the health care system. Whether we're going to be putting people on long-term income support, whether there are mental health issues, drug addiction, you name it; we're going to be paying for it.

If we labour under the illusion that somehow we have zero-based budgeting, that we find efficiencies, that we're actually saving money, it's an illusion that we're living in. As much as I like to belabour that point as well, I will keep fighting for that. I'll keep fighting for the long-term solutions: a living minimum wage, a livable basic income, pay equity. All those things lift people out of poverty. If we're lifting people out of poverty and giving them an income that they can support their families in dignity, then that is helping everyone. That is an investment.

I have used this in the House of Assembly before, but my late brother used to say: Poor people like us can't afford to buy cheap. In other words, you buy the best service and you invest in what you need because you buy it once or you buy it multiple times. The same thing here, if you think that, as a budget, we're just looking at stopgap measures and we're not addressing the underlying causes, then we're going to pay the price in the long run.

I want to talk a little bit about schools and some of the issues and the education system because this is another area where investment is key. I

want to start talking about an issue when it comes to the shortage of teachers and replacement teachers and substitute teachers. I'll refer to an incident in Labrador West, but it very much applies to a lot of schools.

I can't begin to say how many teachers – and I'm sure my colleague, former educator would relate to this – who said: We pray for the day, Jim, when we don't have a prep period. When we can teach entirely within our subject area, where we deal with our own students. There have been schools, certainly since the beginning of this year, September, and before this, who don't have the substitutes, where they have been, basically, filling in. That is basically it. Each day, there is no prep period for a teacher and they are covering other people's classes. There was a promise at some point that board personnel would be there. That has never happened. Not to my knowledge. In any school that I have spoken to, that has never happened.

What does a prep period allow a teacher to do? I can tell you one thing, what you will not find them doing in a prep period is sitting in the staff room with their feet up on the desk reading a newspaper. Usually it means I am following up on a phone call to parents. I am trying to get photocopying done, because I don't have a secretary as a teacher. I can tell you that if there is PTSD for teachers, it is to do with photocopiers. That I can tell you.

I walk by the machine up there right now and the minute it starts to make – I go into shock and my colleague from Bonavista knows exactly what I am talking about. They are not designed for it. I am in the Third Party caucus, a small caucus, and I tell you the support staff around there, holy jumping, if a teacher had that. We don't. Or I am finishing off correcting or God knows what. That's the life of a teacher.

I know in the PERT report – I like this one – because it changed the opening and closing of school days so that teachers have an eight-hour day. Bring it on because I can tell you, I'll walk in and I'll walk out and my life will be so much easier. But it is obviously written by someone who has no idea of what goes on in the life of a teacher in the school system. Unbelievable that they would actually promote that.

Primary teachers, high school teachers – primary teachers, I can tell you, they are at it from the get-go. And high school teachers, a little bit different in who I am dealing with, but I can tell you my days were usually from 8 to 5 anyway, and then I'd go home and I would carry on with it as well. So I can tell you right here, this year has been especially traumatic and difficult on teachers because they are not even gaining that time to do the work.

In Labrador West, the high school has been down three teachers almost from the beginning. So they have been basically covering since the beginning of this year – as one retired teacher pointed out to me, it's a house of cards waiting to collapse. It is a long-term problem that should have been dealt with a long time ago.

I brought the issues to the minister and he's certainly working with regard to one and trying to deal with the housing issues. And to that, that's positive. But we have got to find some way to bring teachers to this area because what you are doing is you are burning out teachers. You are making it worse on the system.

We're still down teachers and we're coming into the busiest time of the year for a lot of teachers, in that area, but that's not the only school. So I can tell you that I have brought it there, I have been in contact with the school and the situation still needs to be resolved. It still needs to be dealt with. You still have the school administrators who, in addition to their duties, are now teaching in the class, as well.

That's a school of about 500. I can tell you that I was never an administrator, but I always needed a, administrator, full-time administrator, in any school I've been to because they are the ones you go to when you're running into difficulty; you need someone there. They have enough to do. So we've got to address that, but we also got to address that in the rest of the school system. Because it's great to have awards for teachers, but they want the resources in the classroom where they can deal with it.

Teachers are burning out. I spoke to a parent yesterday. Her child is in Grade 2. There are 28 children in Grade 2. I taught high school, where I might have had 30 students in an academic class and you could get through that. It was

actually decent and you had students who were engaged. But I can tell you 28 students in Grade 2, and let's assume for the minute, even if all students there had no diagnosed exceptionalities, even if all students were engaged, had the supports, academically competent, it would still be a challenge.

It's untenable; that's three over the cap. The cap is 25; that's three over the cap. I can tell you a lot of the primary grades, in addition to students that are academically competent; you could have up to half the class where a student has some diagnosed exceptionality. Some are violent and they need supports themselves. I've dealt with the outcome of that. Grade 2, you would think can't be a problem, but it is. The fact is you could have up to half the class of 28, up to 14 who have some diagnosed exceptionality and teachers will tell me now we still don't have the resources in place.

I don't know if I told this story before, but years ago when I was president, and the Minister of Education at the time, we were at the Education Week, and I remember this vividly, because it didn't surprise me, but I'm sure it opened the eyes of the Education Minister where a Grade 5 student proceeded to take his shoes and his socks off and then clean out between his toes in the auditorium. I'm thinking to myself, welcome to my world.

That's the nature, that's a Grade 5 who then proceeded to turn around and shake our hands. Now, I shook his hand, because guess what? That's part of the course. That's primary and elementary for you, okay.

My wife taught Grade 2 and I used to say to her: For God sake, honey, why don't you just pick them up body and bones when they're throwing desks around and take them out. She said: Jim, they're bigger than I am. Do you know what? She was right.

(Emergency Alert alarm.)

J. DINN: There is it.

SPEAKER: You can mute it.

J. DINN: So I can tell you that the issue I brought up here is because we've got the first Ukrainian refugee families coming next week.

Now, I have asked here in this Chamber what were the resources that were put in place and provided to schools where children of refugee families will attend? The minister assured me that the resources had been put in place. So like you normally do, I do follow up with the schools involved and I do have a lot of contacts from my days as a teacher and as NLTA president. I was told quite clearly that they hadn't seen any additional resources and didn't know what the minister was talking about.

There is a gulf between what is said here sometimes and the reality in the school system and it has to be addressed because I can tell you some of these schools where the children will attend, they're already exceeding the class cap. That might be acceptable if you had students who are academically competent; don't have a language barrier; haven't been traumatized in a war setting; in a brand new country, which is totally unfamiliar with them; probably just escaped with their lives; and probably have learning exceptionalities themselves.

To me, we should be doing everything we can to bring the class size down and give them, our newcomers, and the children there, every opportunity to succeed.

I'll go back a bit. I think it was *The Telegram* reporter Juanita Mercer had asked the Premier: Given that the rationale for returning to in-class learning was the concern about mental health of students, she asked if the Premier would commit to more counsellors to reach the recommended ratio of 1-250. The Premier dodged that question.

But I can tell you that if you want to look at helping students then put those resources in place, because, as a teacher, I depended on the guidance counsellor. I depended on the guidance counsellor in many cases to guide me, if I had a particularly difficult child or a child who was going through a rough time, or a child who's transitioning, or a child that was facing homelessness, addictions issues, mental health issues, they were gold. Yet, we do have guidance counsellors in this case who might, on

paper, have 250 or 500 students, but they're between three or four schools. As I used to say in my conversations with some of them, I guess if a student is going to have a crisis, they better have it on the day that you're actually in their school.

If you want to talk about putting resources in here – about priorities, I'm going to go back to this \$5 million for the Rothschild: What \$5 million could do in terms of helping people who are having trouble filling their oil tank; what \$5 million could do to help deal with the issues in our school system to make sure that children have every success.

I can tell you that primary teachers around now, three times a year they go through this, running records where they take every student out and you basically get them to read until they reach their frustration point, and you do an assessment.

Now, imagine doing that with 28 kids, how long that would take because to the children who are really good, you're going to have to do quite a bit before you get to that frustration level. Then trying to do that while, by the way, you have 27 other kids in the class who are – well, they're not independent learners, that much I can tell you. That's the reality we're asking.

So from my point of view, I don't know when it comes to the committee that's looking into the teacher allocation, but I'm hoping that what it will come out with is something that we're going to have find ways to reduce classes – even 25 at the primary level is just way too much.

I taught basic English at the high school, Speaker, and I had 15 in that class; 15 on a good day when they all showed up and I can tell you, at the end of an hour, I was more exhausted than I was in the three academic classes I had at 30. They challenge, and I had an instructional resource teacher in with me who would at least be able to say, yeah, Jim, you're doing all right. Because there are days when you walk out of there and say I'm obviously not a good teacher because it just wasn't making sense, I wasn't getting through.

But I can tell you that those resources – because you reach some, and that is the key thing. You always reach some and you often have more of

an impact on students than you think. Because you think you haven't done a good job and usually you run into a few and say, okay, am I going to have to duck a fist or something at this point in time or – but you find out that it's always a good relationship, and we do our best.

But I can tell you, from a teacher's point of view, as the former president of the Teachers' Association, as a husband and a father of a retired primary teacher and a current primary teacher, what they're looking for are the resources.

I can tell you the sick leave provisions that were brought in back in 2006 have not benefited teachers. In many ways what we have done, too, we have removed that benefit, we've removed the whole notion of severance pay; we've removed every incentive, really, for people to come to work there.

Now, I will be honest with you. When I started teaching, severance was the furthest thing from my mind. I didn't know if it was fit to eat. I didn't know if a pension was fit to eat. I was just happy to have a job. But I can tell you right now, why would I go in to the teaching profession, take on five years, six years or seven years of university, rack up debt, go into a job where I'm starting at maybe around \$70,000, probably try to pay off a mortgage and get ahead, when I can easily find a job that pays a lot better and a lot more quickly?

So I think in many ways, in my last few seconds here of this, let's look at putting a priority in terms of if we want to solve this problem, putting the resources in the school so that teachers aren't burning themselves out filling in for a lack of subs. Also, how do we make this more financially attractive so that we can attract the best and the brightest to the profession? Because, from my point of view, our children are the most valuable resource this province has, simply put.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you.

Always a pleasure to rise in this House and speak for the wonderful people of Topsail - Paradise who elected me and I'll continue to do that. Because it is Mental Health Week, I do want to mention the motto for this year's week. It's: This is empathy. Before you weigh in, tune in. I think we really need to keep the dialogue open on mental health and mental health issues here in the province. There's some work that has been done, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done. In particular, when we look at long-term continuity of care and treatment for those who struggle on a daily basis.

I also, like the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, want to send out my appreciation as we celebrate International Firefighters' Day. What they do on a daily basis for the many communities within our province is above outstanding. I have a little better understanding of what they do. A number of years ago, I participated in Fire Ops 101. The past premier was there and I believe the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville was also there and can probably attest to what we went through.

We did five drills in full gear, full outfit. We had to rescue a person from a car using the jaws of life. We had to drag a charged hose up three or four stories to rescue someone. We had to repel off the top of a building. We had to go into a smoke-filled tube to beat out a wall to rescue someone, again, in full gear. And it's really an eye opener. There are some people that actually opted out of some of the drills. I won't say who but there were some who opted out. Not the Member; I don't believe he opted out on any. But we were in a controlled environment doing those drills. I can't imagine what they do in real life.

There were some firefighters were slightly bigger than myself and the hon. Member across the way and going in full gear, with two tanks on your back and trying to get in through what seemed like a two-foot pipe. I don't know how they do it, but they do. So congratulations and appreciation goes out to our firefighters on International Firefighters' Day.

We are debating the budget and we're debating amendments and subamendments and trying to

do the best for our province. We all represent fantastic districts throughout the province. I look at government across the way and they represent some great districts: Waterford Valley, St. John's West, Humber - Gros Morne, Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, Gander, Corner Brook, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, Mount Scio, Burgeo - La Poile, Windsor Lake, Virginia Waters - Pleasantville –

B. DAVIS: It is a beautiful district also.

P. DINN: – the beautiful District of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, Fogo Island - Cape Freels, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, Burin - Grand Bank, St. George's - Humber, Placentia - St. Mary's and Mount Pearl North. So quite the list of wonderful districts throughout the province.

The reason I read that list out – and it is not to imply that the Members are not doing a good job; that is not what I am implying. But when we go through this debate and you have an opportunity through this debate to stand up and either defend the budget, speak to the budget, to either talk about the good things that are happening in your districts, it is disheartening that through this debate we don't see individuals standing on that. It could be for any reason, I guess. It could be that they've been told not to stand. It could be that there's no one in their district experiencing the hardships like our districts are. I don't think that's correct, because I know I've gotten calls from the other districts. Or is it because you can't defend the indefensible in terms of the budget? Or is it simply if we don't talk, we get out of the House earlier and we close her down earlier?

I don't know if I could do it. I say that not having to have gone through it. I don't know if I could, on this side of the House or any side of the House, not take the opportunity to stand up and either speak to the budget, or speak to the accomplishments of my district, or speak to the hardships of my district and work on solutions to make it easier on them. As I said last night, to make it less taxing on the members of our districts and of the province as a whole.

I've gone down through the list there last night when I was talking about just simply the gas

prices. Transportation: The gas prices are affecting our transportation, and it's affecting both sides of the House. It's affecting the whole province. So it's very difficult to be silent on those issues.

On the cost of food throughout this province, again I talked to it last night. It's very difficult to remain silent on the cost of food and how it is affecting all our districts. I spoke to the shelters and affordability of a home. I alluded to an incident last night of a young couple who just got engaged and have moved back in with their parents because they couldn't afford to pay the rent and feed themselves at the same time. That's in every district. I don't know how you can be silent on that.

Medications: Again, we spoke about seniors especially, splitting pills and trying to make medication go further than it is, and utilizing expired prescriptions and outdated insulin. That's not just happening over here; that's throughout the province. Again, I can't be silent on that – I can't.

Treatments: We talked about individuals who are trying to get treatments. The Member for Stephenville spoke to people who come in and then they're told, when they get here, it's been cancelled or postponed. Just the travel costs of doing that, I can't be silent on that. That's happening in every district.

Of course, heating your home, individuals who paid \$500 and \$600 a month are paying \$1,000 and upwards. That's happening in every district. I can't be silent on that. We spoke to the cost of rapid tests on individuals. Come Home Year: We're expecting individuals to come home – all good; don't have an issue with that. We need something like that. However, if you can't get a simple rapid test, there's still that anxiety of having loved ones come home and wanting to have gatherings – we're going to have lots of gatherings and different events throughout Come Home Year and people would like to have access to a rapid test. And again, that's throughout the province. I have to speak up; I can't be silent on that.

The health care issues throughout the province, especially when you talk about the smaller communities that we'll say are off the beaten

path, I will say some of the pathways to those communities are well beaten and in need of a lot of repair, but you have individuals down there who may need health care and may have emergencies. You have individuals coming in from out of province who want to see these beautiful nooks and crannies of our province. That's what they want to see. That's where they want to go. And they have to get there. They have to afford to fill the tank of whatever they're driving, if they can get a rental car and if this new program works. It's still a cost to get there. They get down there, and should they have an accident and require medical assistance, then I can't be silent on that. I have to speak up on that for individuals doing that.

We talk about, again, the mental health: This is empathy. Before you weigh in, tune in. Empathy is putting yourself in other people's shoes. All our districts, they are not all created equal. Some districts are a little better off than others, but as an elected Member I have to show empathy. I have to put myself in their shoes and I have to speak up on behalf of them.

They did not elect me to be silent. They did not elect me to sit back and hope to get out of the House earlier, or get up and try to defend the indefensible. They elected me to represent what is happening in my district and the province as a whole. I think it was on the news today that someone mentioned walk a mile in my shoes and that is what we have got to do. I say we got to walk it because, I guess, most of us cannot afford to drive it. So we are going to walk it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. DINN: But the point being is that if anyone walked in the door – if someone came in for Come Home Year and stood up here and watched this House of Assembly for the last couple of days, they would ask the question: Well, who is representing the rest of the province? They would ask that question. Again, I am not implying that there is not good representation, but going through this process, where you have an opportunity to stand and speak either on the benefits and what is good that is happening in your province, I'd take that opportunity. If I have an opportunity to get up and speak about the hardships of my district and

how we need to address it, I'll be up speaking on that.

It is too important not to stand up for the people who elected you. That is what we are here for. We all take an Oath of Office. We all sign a Code of Conduct. We've all signed the same documents. Look, I know it's a bit of theatrics here and there's a bit of a political game. I understand that, but I know, on this side of the House, we will stay in this House as long as it takes to get the people's work done. That's the way we are and that's the way we should be.

If we go an extra week or we run to July, not an issue. But I hope there are good reasons why individuals are not speaking up for their residents. I really do; I hope there is. I hope it's not to get through the process as quickly as possible and move on. I hope that's not it.

I know some Members over there probably would love to stand up and speak on behalf of their constituents. I know it's a team approach, and I know you have to follow along with the consensus or the majority of your caucus. I understand that. But something as important as the budget and something as important as the concerns and issues that are being brought forward, they are important. And to allow individuals to get up and speak to that is part of democracy; it's the heart and core of democracy for allowing us to do that.

I've received calls from other districts, districts here, all over when you take on a critic role. Health and Community Services is a very difficult portfolio, no doubt about it, with lots of hard-working, front-line workers who do over and above what's expected of them on a daily basis. So I know that's a difficult portfolio. But in a shadow minister's role I'm getting the calls from all over the province. I cannot say that they must've called their own Members first, and either their own Members referred them along or they just didn't get an answer, I don't know. I know the issues around cost of living, the issues around health care are in every district. Health care is life and death for people.

So if you can sit and not get up and speak on behalf of the people who've elected you and let them know that you're doing what you're elected to do and you care and you have

empathy, you know what they're going through and you want to let them know it and you want to let this House know it and you want to defend and speak up for them. Then stand up and do it.

Again, I say in advance, I don't think I could just sit and listen, I really don't. Now, in three years time, when I'm over here, that may be a different thing. We have to speak up on behalf of the individuals that elected us and for why they elected us. Maybe the government districts have it all in hand, I don't know, but I do get calls.

I was out to a town hall in Carbonear and Port de Grave last week. We had a great discussion – not my district but they wanted to speak to the critic for Health so we went out, myself and the leader went out to that one. They are doing similar things; they are asking to speak to the critic of Finance and Transportation. They want to talk to this side of the House and vent. I call it vent because a lot of them are unhappy and they used the comment: out of touch.

We go out. We answered the question; we had a good discussion. I will tell you – I know during the session that I was at – we didn't knock the current Member. We don't know what is going through in that district. We don't know if we just got a cluster of individuals. But the point being, there is discontent in every district based on the cost of living, based on our health care crisis we're in, based on a lot of issues.

I go back to Mental Health Week. This is empathy: "Before you weigh in, tune in." I think we have to continue to do that. We have to tune in. Part of tuning in is standing in this House, letting your district residents know and letting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know: We are hearing you. We are listening to you. We are walking in your shoes as best we can and we're going to continue to do so. You did not elect me to be silent.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege to stand here again today to speak to the amendment that we put forward to *Budget 2022*. It's always a privilege to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the fine constituents.

Before I get into my comments with respect to the amendment, several colleagues have recognized today as being International Firefighters' Day. I do want to recognize the two fine departments in my district: Torbay volunteer and Pouch Cove volunteer. Both departments are well equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and infrastructure. Both departments answer Code 4 medical calls, which is a huge benefit to the constituents of my district. We all know the parameters that Eastern Health ambulatory services are under and how stretched that they are, and the volunteers with Pouch Cove volunteer and Torbay volunteer do excellent work in providing that level of care to the constituents.

They do handle hundreds of calls, annually, from Code 4 medical calls to fire scenes, accident scenes, what have you. It is quite interesting to listen to what they have to say when it comes to their level of training, their level of commitment to the departments and, of course, to the municipalities.

Like my colleague said earlier from Topsail - Paradise with respect to, I think, he said about the Firefighter Challenge. As mayor I had the opportunity some years back to take back in the Firefighter Challenge with the full bunker gear, with the breathing apparatus, the helmet, the whole works. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I've been quite active all my life, in all kinds of sports, but when you put on that gear and you go through that course, it tests you to the limit. As it was said, it was done in a controlled setting. Put that into an emergency setting and you have a different quintal of fish all together, I can tell you that.

So I want to give a shout-out to all of the volunteer firefighters in my district. My son Zacharey is a seven-year member of the Pouch Cove volunteer. I'm very proud of him and the work that he does with his colleagues. But I would like to recognize two outgoing individuals from the Torbay volunteer fire department, retired Chief Mike McGrath with 47

years of service and 18 years of service as chief, retired just this past couple of months, and Deputy Chief Jerry Dunphy.

On behalf of, I'm sure everyone here in this hon. House, I do recognize and applaud their level of commitment, dedication and achievement in volunteer firefighting and the difference that they have made to my district as a whole. So I'd like to thank them for that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I know that there are many challenges that each of our districts face when it comes to what was in this budget. Now, I'd like to speak about Transportation and Infrastructure. I do know that the hon. minister has a heavy workload, a heavy responsibility for the province and I acknowledge that. We've had many conversations, myself and the minister, with respect to the work that he and his officials, his department, has to do throughout this province. There are many challenges that the minister is facing.

But I'd like to speak to Route 20 that runs through my district. My constituency assistant and I, a couple of weeks back, took one full day and we spent it driving the provincial roads in my district. I'm getting – as I'm sure other people are as well – dozens and dozens of phone calls, emails, conversations at the post office, at the grocery store with respect to the amount of work that's needed and, unfortunately, the damage that people are incurring on their vehicles with respect to the roadwork. I'm hearing it. I know the minister and his officials are hearing it. It's something that every district is dealing with.

As I said, my CA and I took the full day and went throughout the entire district on Route 20. I believe we had 102 – if I'm not mistaken – pictures of various areas throughout the district with respect to paving needs, potholes, guide rails, shoulders, bridges and signage. Everything that was forwarded to me – and, of course, I listened to my constituents – we took those areas, took all the pictures with the civic addresses as best we could and provided them to the department.

I'm very appreciative of the work that the minister's staff does in my district. They have a daunting job, but it's work that is necessary for the well-being of the residents who travel over the roads each day, those that have incurred particular damage to their vehicles, working towards better roadwork and network of travel for all of us here in the province, especially as I speak to the District of Cape St. Francis.

I'd also like to bring up the topic of Marine Drive in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. Again, we've had this conversation, the minister and I. I appreciate the Minister of Transportation reaching out to Mayor Denis Hickey of the Town of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove and his council with respect to the issue with Marine Drive. It's been in the media, of course.

I feel obligated to speak to that here today, not only to recognize the issue and to recognize the work that the council is doing, because, of course, they have the safety of the residents in mind, but to thank the minister for that particular scope of work. I know that it is a large piece of work when it comes to Marine Drive, but I do thank the minister and his officials for his attention to that with respect to correcting that issue in the Town of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove.

It is a concern. It is a safety concern. The mayor and council are very in tune with what is going on there and I do thank the minister for his attention to that. It is something that is not an overnight issue. It has been going on for quite some time. However, the issue has been recognized and I look forward to an update from the minister and his officials with respect to working with the Town of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the budget, I have spoken to it several times here with respect to seniors in my district. Seniors are the ones I am hearing from most, as I am sure most of my hon. colleagues are as well. I had a senior reach out to me with respect to what the budget was going to do for her – what *Budget 2022: CHANGE is in the air* is going to do with respect to this particular senior and the money that is going to be kept in her pocket with what was offered here. So she did the math and it was approximately \$350 with respect to the

reduction in her home insurance, her vehicle renewal and the Seniors' Benefit.

Mr. Speaker, \$350, no doubt, is a benefit in someone's pocket, but it doesn't make a huge difference when the fill-up on her oil tank was an extra \$600. So this \$350 per year is welcomed, but as I said when I spoke yesterday, we need to do more and we ought to do better. I realize the parameters that the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board is under. I have acknowledged that in this House. It is a difficult position, but collectively and collaboratively, as our leader has said many times, we need to work together to do better, to see what can we do more for our seniors, our aging demographic. Each district is becoming more and more heavy with seniors. The age limit is rising at all times and we need to be mindful of that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I spoke yesterday and I am sure everyone can remember what I said with respect to a young couple from Torbay that are moving out of province. It proves to show that people do watch the proceedings in this hon. House because I had another couple reach out to me this morning. I was in my office at 8 and I had a phone call from a young couple who are moving out, again. They're moving to Alberta.

This is not the same couple as yesterday; this is another couple who saw me speak yesterday in the House and who reached out to be again with respect to the level of taxation that we are faced with and what money they're keeping in their pockets. It is unfortunate. These are two people who've I've known for many years, who have two children, who were involved in programs – these people volunteered. This makes a difference to our communities. I know there are municipal leaders on the other side of the House, friends of mine, who've led their communities for many years, and they know the importance of these people in their communities to the level of volunteerism, to the level of taxation when they're running a home-based business and what that brings in to the municipal coffers.

Time and time again, this is happening. Time and time again, it's becoming more difficult to listen to it and to bring it to this House. We want the best for all our residents. I know the Minister of Finance does as well, and the Minister of

Transportation. All ministers here – all hon. Members want the same thing. But it is, Mr. Speaker, becoming more and more difficult to listen to these individual stories. It does – it hits you to the heart. I've said that before. It is more difficult to listen to time and time again.

I couldn't say a whole lot to this couple that reached out to me this morning, other than to wish them well, and that I hoped that they would have stayed here, but their plans are made and they are moving on. I fear that is going to become more and more common as we go forward. It's something that we have to do better on, no doubt about it.

Mr. Speaker, in my shadow Cabinet role for Municipal and Provincial Affairs, like my colleague from Topsail- Paradise said shortly ago, I'm getting many calls from across the province when it comes to municipalities, from municipal leaders who are finding it more difficult with respect to their municipal budgets, the services that these individual municipalities have to provide. I know the hon. minister spoke earlier this week in a minister's statement with respect to the money that's going to come from the department back to the municipalities. That's welcomed, no doubt. It's welcomed. But the municipalities are finding that it's not going far enough.

The level of responsibility that municipal leaders – and being a former leader, I know the importance of it, to have your boots on the ground as the first line of defence for any issue in government: municipal, provincial or federal. They come to the mayor, they come to your councillors and they come to your staff. The level of responsibility that these elected officials are faced with is becoming more and more each year.

Just let me fall back to the fire department for a moment. I had the privilege of sitting with my colleague from Harbour Main; we sat in Estimates with respect to Justice and Public Safety. When you look at fire and emergency services and the responsibility for the municipalities that they have with respect to their local fire departments and today being International Firefighters' Day, it ties in very well. They have to make sure that their volunteer firefighters are well protected, with the best

possible infrastructure and equipment that they can have. That is a daunting, heavy load when it comes to that budget in their line item for municipalities.

I can take an example from myself. We were faced with replacing our number one pumper in the Town of Pouch Cove. The town applied several years ongoing to the department for funding and we were turned down. The council saw the need to pay for that pumper ourselves. We saw that need and we did that, \$560,000 for a state-of-the-art pumper vehicle for the Town of Pouch Cove, which also provide service to the Town of Bauline.

There were no provincial or federal funds to pay for that fire truck. I know the Minister of Justice and Public Safety has said many times that it is not the department's responsibility to pay for fire trucks for all municipalities. I realize that. The minister has, again, \$60 million worth of want on his desk and he can give out \$1.8 million this year, down from \$2.7 million last year. That is concerning when you have the level of firefighting equipment in our province, which is being depleted year after year. There are many departments out there who have outdated fire equipment.

I have spoken to Members on both sides of this House who are faced with that with their local fire departments. That is an issue that is on the floor of this House when it comes from \$2.7 million down to \$1.8 million when you're looking at fire protection for our municipalities. That concerns me as a former municipal leader, as having family and friends who are in the volunteer fire service. It is our responsibility to do more and to do better.

When you look at the number of municipalities across the province who have outdated equipment – and it's on both sides of this House. I've spoken to elected officials on the municipal level across the province, from here to St. Lunaire-Griquet. It's a heavy weight on the shoulders of municipal elected officials.

I have to say, I was disappointed when I saw that reduction in that line item in the budget for Justice and Public Safety from \$2.7 million down to \$1.88 million. That does concern me because I know it's not the full responsibility of

the department to provide a truck to every municipality; however, we ought to do better when it comes to protecting our volunteer service, those brave men and women who do so much for all of us on a regular basis.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from St. John's Centre touched on the teachers with respect to what they have to do on a daily basis in our schools. My wife is a teacher, a kindergarten teacher at Cape St. Francis Elementary. I'm very proud of her for that. Teachers are a special breed, no doubt, when it comes to having the patience and providing the guidance for our young people. I spent 27 years in my former career as a counsellor with mentally delayed and autistic adults. You need a level of patience for that, as well.

I've said it many times that my training in the group home prepared me for politics. Do you know what? You might smirk, but it does give one a sense of having to listen, having to be a problem solver, having to put yourself in their shoes and come to their level to solve the issue that they're dealing with. So it has prepared me for municipal politics. I'm very grateful that I'm in this chair representing Cape St. Francis and dealing with the issue now that I have to deal with on a district basis.

But to get back to the teachers. I've witnessed first-hand that it's not an eight-hour school day. So whatever comes in the Premier's report with respect to teachers, I know that my wife would welcome an eight-hour school day. With respect to the point that he made of having prep periods: Prep periods are very beneficial if they're there, but now they're having to cover for other classes. This is becoming more and more common when it comes to teaching in the run of a day. Teachers are no doubt overwhelmed with the level of workload that they have, and, of course, the needs that are in individual classes as well, that they deal with, sometimes without the proper supports.

I know that the Minister of Education is listening. We have discussed teaching issues in my district in the past and the minister has been quite responsive. I do appreciate his attention to that; however, going forward, we need to keep in mind our teachers, the benefit that they pass

back to us with respect to teaching our children and our youth.

They'll be in this House one day. They will be in this House one day and they will be the leaders for our province. So we have to do the best that we can in order to make sure that they have a great education and, of course, to support our teachers at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity to speak on this amendment. It is always an honour to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. I look forward to the conversation going forward as we hear from other speakers. I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker, and your attention.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: I appreciate the standing ovation on the other side, I really do. I guess my mom had wisdom when she named me Elvis because I can say, thank you, thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I'll begin like all of us do and say thank you to the people of our districts that vote us, give us the honourable opportunity to stand here on behalf of them. I say to them thank you, but what's important as well is to thank my wife, my children and my family because my dad does watch the House of Assembly and he enjoys it. He gives me feedback on both sides. So I can share with you over there, if you want me to, some of the feedback

But do you know what he always says to me? Always walk with respect for whomever, whatever side you are on and if you giveth, you will receive it. I know politics sometimes here, we get heated and stuff, but I think it is paramount for all of us, when we do stand here, we stand as a voice for our seniors, our youth and everybody that's struggling right now. And

we know there is a lot of struggling going around.

I want to say at the beginning. Thank you to many in my district, like in other districts, when we talk about volunteers. We talk about the mayors, thank you; councillors, youth workers, firefighters, firettes and you've got recreation people. On the recreation theme, I spent a week of watching hockey and I met the Member across when he had some words to say out in his district, and teams from my district.

It was an absolute pleasure because I have a passion for hockey. My son is a hockey player as well, spent a lot of time in – but we don't realize, though, because the coaches coach these teams and they do take heat from parents, that's the nature of it because it's a competitive sport. So I don't think we thank them enough. Plus, growing up in small school, volleyball was a popular sport for me and coaches also take the time – their free time – to spend time in the gymnasiums preparing those for tournaments and stuff.

I want to recognize the Bay d'Espoir Academy, the middle of the month they're hosting the badminton provincial tournament. I think there are 150 athletes who will be coming to that area. So I'm going to go there and certainly be a part of it, be a part of the opening ceremonies and to certainly go through the school and have a chat with the teachers and administrators that are there.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the visit to my district last week when the Premier was with me. It was a very important visit. The Premier came out and we went directly to the hospital in Harbour Breton. We met with all the staff that were there and we met with seniors. I have to tell you, there was a guy, an older gentleman, Mr. Durnford that was playing the accordion in the other room and the seniors were dancing. I said to the Premier: I have to interrupt you. You can talk here, but I have to go and dance with the seniors.

Even though we were talking about a very serious matter here, but inside the seniors were having fun. I went and shook every hand because it's important. They had smiles on their faces. But we visited one senior and she made it

clear to us that the hospital in Harbour Breton: we need doctors. It's not a long-term care facility, it's a hospital; we need doctors. We reassured her that we're doing everything, and we are doing everything. We heard it from the nurses and we heard it from the nurse practitioners and we heard it from the administrators. They appreciated the visit, they appreciated the sincerity and it was important.

We left that and then went over to – and I'll say, many Members opposite say when you're on your feet it's not me, it's not my words. What I'm going to tell you right now were not my words either. We had 17 around a round table that included mayors, councillors and ambulance reps. I asked them to be there because their voice is paramount.

During the meeting, I said we don't have a lot of time but I'm going to limit the time because I want every voice heard because it represented all areas of the district. The mayors that couldn't be there in the isolated communities, we went to the communities, we went to them to hear their voice.

The very important message that came from that meeting that we had with those voices in those communities was the negativity has to stop. It's challenging enough as it is trying to get doctors to areas, medical professionals, but the negativity has to stop.

I'm not pointing finger at anybody in terms of the negativity, but we hear it on the media. One mayor described it as: I can't blame doctors not wanting to come to rural Newfoundland and Labrador because we're out there, those that are responsible that are trying to get doctors to come to the rural parts of the province are actually discouraging it in their words.

So I challenged all the mayors. They challenged us. We need to do better. I challenge the other side as well, when you're on your feet – because I take exception to the fact that government is to blame for the current state of the health care, I do. I'm over here; you're over there, yes.

Minister Haggie – I'm not supposed to say it but – the Minister of Health and I have had a very good relationship over the years and to be honest with you it hurts when someone calls for his

resignation. I'm going to be totally honest with you. Many of my constituents say the same thing, because it's not on his shoulders. He just went through 2½ years of the pandemic. We all faced those difficulties. It's not on that individual's shoulders and it's not on the Premier's shoulders. It's not on the shoulders over there.

We know where health care is, we know the challenges, but the messages that I got from my district is let's pull together – let's pull together. Social media is to the point where there's too much negativity. We need to stop, as a society. Each individual, we have a responsibility as individuals to make it right.

That's what I'm bringing back from my district as well. Absolutely, there are people that are challenging me, absolutely. I respect that, but that important word is respect. I don't mind people challenging me, but when you go outside the limits of being disrespectful, or when you stay within the limits of disrespectful, that's a problem for all of us. We're all doing our best and health care right now, the challenges around it, is beyond challenging, but we will get there.

We visited an isolated community and then we visited the school. The atmosphere in that school, I wish we all could walk through there. The Premier and I sang happy birthday to a young fellow that was there, Sam. But it was a very positive environment. And just seeing what the students were – because we all talk about rural Newfoundland and the challenges in isolated communities and what they are doing. This student was online with a student from Westport, I believe, Clarendville was there, but there was four different communities that were on.

The interaction was – I could have stayed there all day. But the students were positive. They were learning. The staff were learning and they appreciated the visit. One of the staff members said: We need to do more of this, because the students there had the Premier of the province there, they had their MHA there. It was important to them.

When we are being challenged by the other side, do you listen? Yeah, I do. I do listen. I listen to my own father who can be a critic sometimes

and your family, but it's difficult. We are over here to do a job and it's not an easy job.

I know there is only one Member over there that was in Cabinet and he said yesterday he recognized the challenges in Transportation and Infrastructure. There are many challenges, but we also have to remember – and I hear this from people in the province, too – you are spending our money. It is not our money. It is the taxpayer's money of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that we don't have a spending problem. I don't know if I agree with all of that because when we spend, we spend more money – we don't want to be just paying off the interest on our credit card. We need to go to the principle as well. It's no difference over here in terms of what we are doing because the more we spend, we are putting ourselves in harm's way in terms of the finances. We need to be able to support the seniors and the youth years to come, even when we are not here. There will be other people here. So that's the challenge. There's no difference in your own household.

Where should the future of rural Newfoundland and Labrador health care be? We had a big conversation about that and through my conversations with the Minister of Health and with the CEO of Central – and I am going to say here and I know it comes from across the way, that's your prerogative to say that, that the CEO is not in Newfoundland and Labrador. But I'm going to tell you, the conversations we have, she understands Newfoundland and Labrador, from my perspective in dealing with her, from the Coast of Bays perspective. Because the collaborative care clinic approach will be focused in my district, I appreciate that. I believe it was through the relationship that I had with her that she understood that. She understands rural parts of Nova Scotia. She understands rural parts of New Brunswick. She gets it and I support her leadership.

She could retire and move on, I've asked her, don't retire yet because we need important files dealt with for health care in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I believe she gets it.

I take exception when that is thrown at her. It's like, well, she's out of the province. That's you right to say it, but I don't agree with it. I say focus on working with her, in the other example of not working with her. I believe it's important.

The Premier – when we were around the table – he also talked and the message was received. When we left the hospital, we had the lady that was in charge of nursing and we had the administrators say that the visit and the reassuring words that doctors are required in that hospital in Harbour Breton, we will find them.

But the challenge, because I know years ago when I worked with the former MHA down in the same district, recruitment was always a challenge. Doctors had been coming in and going out. It's just we have not come to the point where there's been no doctors. I didn't think we would ever see it down there, but we have.

The clinic in Bay d'Espoir, in St. Alban's, they've dealt with that for two years now, the challenges, and it's been rough. It has been tough on the people, on the seniors, ambulances being called. There are stories that people are struggling. I get it and I'm listening, but because I'm listening doesn't mean I have the answers.

Somebody can tell me right now that they have a problem, I might not have the answers but I'm telling you, I might not be on with Paddy Daly, every day, I don't need to be on with Paddy Daly or any media. The Member who's the leader now was in Cabinet back years ago, he knows that lobbying is done behind closed doors. There are heated conversations behind closed doors and there are tough decisions behind closed doors. I leave that with everybody as well.

In terms of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, where it needs to be is a team approach. Doctors coming to rural parts of the province, I think, come there with the understanding – and the last doctor that left Harbour Breton made it very clear, it has nothing to do with money. It was the language barrier and it had to do with his children. He's a Muslim and the church is not out there. I respect that.

How can I tell a man that – and his wife's family live in Hamilton, Ontario. Those are the reasons

he moved. That's not the Minister of Health's fault. That's not the Member for Baie Verte's fault. That's not the Member for Ferryland's fault. That's the reality. That's the reality around rural medicine and the delivery of.

But I believe – because I have them in my district – that paramedics want to live in rural Newfoundland. We need to support them, and the nurse practitioners. There needs to be a team environment. When a doctor knows they're going out to a team environment, I believe he's going to make a difference. And that was the message that we had at the meetings, and it was well received and they appreciated it.

And virtual care – virtual care is a reality, no matter who's governing wherever we are. It's not the only answer to medicine or delivery of health care, but it's a support. It's a layer of support. I'll use the words of one of my humble constituents that said it's not just about attracting a doctor; it's about attracting a family. I know the advocacy group in my district, one councillor in particular, she was mayor and they've done a great job. They've actually went themselves.

I even had my brother-in-law from Peterborough, Ontario who's got a doctor – I haven't told the Minister of Health yet – that wants to come to Newfoundland to practise. How do the doors open? We need to open up the doors. If there's such a thing as fast-tracking it, let's do it. I'm willing to have the conversation. So I reached out and said give me his contact information and I'll open up a door for him and his wife.

I've heard it said that government is taking doctors out of rural parts of the province. We have a responsibility to correct that message, though, whether you're in Opposition or you're in government. Government is not taking doctors out of rural parts of the province. And I gave an example why one of the doctors was leaving. I've said it before and I'll say it again that it's not government's fault. I referenced in terms of the Minister of Health and the challenges that he has. I asked for people to really support and not bring that person down who's in that role.

I listened to a lot of the Members opposite in terms of their speeches. So I want to say to the Member for Harbour Main, I was listening. The Member for Ferryland talked about a burden on taxpayers. And I'm not going to mention that project. I'm going to say what my constituents tell me as well. The unfortunate part about that project is its burden on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, where they feel that it should not have been. That is all I'm going to say on it. That is their words; it is not my words.

Both levels of government had to find \$500 million a year so rates wouldn't double. If we hadn't found that, the seniors' bill of – I'll use my parents – \$300 a month for heat would have been \$600. If we want to change what goes on in this House, acknowledge it. Show the respect to the people; they want to hear it. We can lead from both sides of the House.

I think I am getting near my time, but I am certainly going to use it because I have much more to say. The Member for Exploits: No voice in Central Newfoundland and Labrador. I take great exception to that. But –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: Hold on now, I take exception to that. The thing about the Premier's office, I support it because it is another layer of support for voices in Central. You over on the other side are not the only ones who have received phone calls. I have received calls from constituents as well that said they support it. They do. They can pick up the phone and call these individuals. I know these two individuals and they have experience federally and provincially. I know you have your opinions; I have mine, too.

I just want to say that Central Newfoundland is not just Grand Falls-Windsor and Exploits or even Gander, because we consider ourselves Central. The people from the South Coast, we buy lots of vehicles up in Central Newfoundland. But I listen to you.

The MHA for Terra Nova spoke yesterday and the other time, leaving the impression that no one cares. I know you're not going to agree with it over there, but I take exception to it. Standing on your feet to say no one cares and there is no hope and stuff. That is the negativity that leaders

in my district are asking that has to stop. There are realities around it; yes, we get it. But the sky is not falling. People in this province – seniors are listening to that and they feel there is no hope. Now, he has the right to do what he is doing and that is his choice.

I have so much more to say because I haven't even talked about Transportation and Infrastructure. Always a pleasure and I look forward to more (inaudible) –

SPEAKER (Bennett): The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

In my capacity as acting interim deputy Deputy Government House Leader I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, that this House stand in recess until 2 p.m.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In accordance with paragraph 9(1)(b), this House stands recessed until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Good afternoon, everyone.

In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Jayme Guy. Jayme is the subject of a Member's statement this afternoon and she is joined by her family members: Derrick, Betty, Courtney, Jessie, Elaine and Gerald.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Labrador West, Topsail - Paradise, Torngat Mountains, Exploits, Placentia West - Bellevue and St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, with leave.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to give recognition to a group of students who have created a group called The Be Kind Project. Their goal is simple: end the stereotype surrounding teens and show the community that being kind is cool.

The Be Kind Project has been encouraging residents to how one act of kindness per week and share it on social media. The Be Kind Project has been doing just that, and they have made an impression on the community by participating in a number of events that show random acts of kindness.

They have held presentations for school Grades 7 to 12 on the Pink Shirt Day, volunteered and helped with the 50-plus club, collected donations for the food bank, participated in Ronald McDonald House fundraisers and much, much more.

I want to thank The Be Kind Project for making our community a bright place and taking every opportunity to spread kindness throughout Labrador West.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking The Be Kind Project for flipping the narrative surrounding teens and encouraging anyone to always be kind.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

From April 4 to 10, 16 high school teams across the province played in the 2022 Royal

Newfoundland Regiment Memorial High School Hockey Tournament that was held in Topsail - Paradise. For six exciting days, top high school hockey teams hit the ice for a chance to win the Beaumont Hamel Centennial Cup.

The Royal Newfoundland Regiment Memorial High tournament is in memory of those who fought and died with the famous regiment during the First World War. The tournament began in 2016 as the Beaumont Hamel cup, designed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the devastating battle. Despite being nearly wiped out after Beaumont-Hamel, the regiment went on to earn the royal designation from the British Crown in recognition of its actions in battles at such places as Monchy-le-Preux, Courtrai, Masnières and Gueudecourt. Those battles are commemorated at the annual hockey tournament in the Trail of the Caribou championship and the final games are played for the Beaumont Hamel Centennial Cup.

I want to offer congratulations to all who played to honour the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the people who serve. Congratulations, as well, to the champions, the O'Donel Patriots, winners of the 2022 Beaumont Hamel Centennial Cup.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Inuit Elder John Jararuse passed away April 18, 2022, at the age of 74. My first thought was: "We will never get over this loss." Elder John was the greatest keeper of our knowledge and truth about Inuit history.

He was born in Hebron, Nunatsiavut. At the age of 11 years old, his entire community were gathered in the Moravian Church and told they would be moved south to other communities. His family were among the first Hebronimiut to move to Nain.

Witnessing such a detrimental act on his family and his community members, seeing the lasting

impacts over generations, he sought to strengthen and preserve his Inuktitut language, culture and history.

Nunatsiavut President Johannes Lampe stated: "John was very passionate about his roots, his culture and in promoting, enhancing and preserving Labrador Inuktitut – having served many years as the interpreter/translator for both the Labrador Inuit Association and the Nunatsiavut Government."

He served on the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement Ratification Committee and the Torngat Mountains National Park Co-Management Board. He assisted in archaeological research in Hebron over the years, providing very valuable information about the life history of his ancestors.

He was greatly loved by his family, especially his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

On April 27, Mr. Gordon Lannon of Bishop's Falls celebrated his 100th birthday.

He was born in Fermeuse in 1922 and grew up in Kilbride. He graduated from Holy Cross in St. John's and worked several jobs before joining the army. After leaving the army, he worked on the railroad for 44 years and retired in 1985.

In 1946, he married Marie Hannon and moved to Bishop's Falls and raised eight children. He has been an active member of the community and a long-time active member of the Royal Canadian Legion and Knights of Columbus. Last year, Gordon and Marie celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary.

Speaker, I would like all Members of this House of Assembly to join me in wishing Mr. Gordon Lannon a happy 100th birthday.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today, I recognize a young lady in our beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue, Ms. Jayme Guy of Arnold's Cove.

Jayme is very focused on academics and athletics. In 2019 she received a hockey scholarship with Rothesay High School, New Brunswick. After one semester of living her dream, she decided to return home to complete high school at Tricentia Academy due to COVID-19.

Jayme's had a very successful sports career, winning three AAA hockey championships. She represented our province twice at AAA Atlantics. She's a two-time AAA defensive player of the year, 2021 recipient of the AAA hockey player's choice award, and just this past month she won the U18 provincial minor hockey championship and, a week later, went on to win the Tier 1 high school volleyball championship. Jayme will also be travelling to New Brunswick as a member of Team Canada's U20 women's ball hockey team in July.

Jayme's the valedictorian for her graduating class of 2022, which gradates this Friday, and will be attending Memorial University with plans on becoming a doctor.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Ms. Jayme Guy of Arnold's Cove on her accomplishments to date and wish her great success with her future endeavours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, with leave.

K. HOWELL: Speaker, I ask leave of my colleagues to deliver a Member's statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

The hon. the Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows.

K. HOWELL: Thank you to my colleagues.

Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to a remarkable constituent, nurse, colleague and friend in the District of St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, Jeanette Hostetter. This lady passed away on January 30, 2022, just fourteen days shy of her 90th birthday. Ms. Hostetter came to St. Anthony in the mid 1950s as a young nurse through the Mennonite Central Committee, along with many other professionals who made remote Newfoundland and Labrador communities their home.

Fresh out of nursing school in Philadelphia, Jeanette joined the International Grenfell Association in 1956, working as an OR nurse, an outpatient supervisor and in the early 1970's, along with Dr. Gordon Johnson and team, created the first collaborative travelling eye clinic serving Northern Newfoundland and Labrador for 25 years. This crew often travelled and worked for weeks on end, doing clinics in all of the remote nursing stations.

Following her retirement in 1991, Jeannette operated a bed and breakfast, travelled extensively and through her faith was baptized in the River Jordan. She was an active church member, in the Hospital Auxiliary and supported many charities.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in honouring a life of dedicated service to others, the life of Jeannette Hostetter.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

D. BRAGG: Speaker, forest fire season has started for the Island and will begin in Labrador on May 15. The season remains in effect for the entire province until September 30.

I would like to remind everyone enjoying the province's beautiful outdoors this summer that you all have a role to play in protecting our forests from the threat of wildfire. Be cautious when lighting fires in and around forest areas, never leave one unattended and always ensure fires are completely extinguished.

I strongly encourage anyone planning a fire to learn the outdoor burning regulations and to check the Forest Fire Hazard Index Rating Maps on the on the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture website to determine the wildfire risk for the location in the province.

A permit to burn must be obtained from a provincial Forest Management District Office to burn vegetation, wood and paper during the forest fire season. However, recreational campfires, backyard fires and boil ups do not require a permit, provided they are conducted safely in accordance with provincial and municipal regulations.

Our fleet of water bombers and dedicated team of professional wild land firefighters are strategically positioned throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and are ready to take action to protect the public, property and forests. To report a wildfire, call 1-866-709-3473.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

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

The natural beauty of this province is all our responsibility to protect and must not be taken for granted. Every year because of a few careless acts, our forest is put at risk. Speaker, from now until September, it is forest fire season. If you have any questions and before lighting a fire, I

would encourage you to reach out to your local enforcement. They are here to help you and very knowledgeable.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I applaud the incredible work of our forest workers; they are on the front line of our forest at all times. I would also like to recognize the vigilance of everyday people in protecting our wilderness through responsibility, use and reporting fires.

In closing, I want to remind everyone that our duty, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, is to be stewards of this land and ensure our future forests are here for generations to come.

Have a great spring and please enjoy our beautiful forests responsibly.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. When it comes to preventing forest fires, everyone certainly plays a part. But individual efforts are not enough and we need government to step in when the sum of our actions fall short. That is why we are once again calling on government to restore the water bomber in Labrador West so that there are no gaps in our fire suppression services.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I am very fortunate to work with a great group of people in the Department of Justice and Public Safety, and today I would like to recognize the correctional staff for the important work that they do day in and day out.

Each year the first week of May is recognized as Corrections Week. It is a time to acknowledge the demanding and challenging job of correctional staff who work 24-7 to ensure that all correctional facilities in the province remain safe and secure for inmates, staff and members of the public.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional obstacles, but, through it all, staff remained committed to ensuring that the inmate population and those who provide services in the facilities stayed as safe as possible and connected to ensure the proper supports were delivered. Despite these extra demands, correctional staff arrived each day with compassion, empathy and enthusiasm.

This enthusiasm is also on display through the participation of corrections staff in many community activities that aim to make the province a better place to live and help some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge our government's investments in infrastructure for the construction of the new correctional facility that will replace Her Majesty's Penitentiary and the extension of the Labrador Correctional Facility. These projects will provide a better place of work for our correctional staff and more opportunities for rehabilitation of inmates through enhanced programs and services.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking our correctional staff for their service and contribution in their workplaces and in their communities to support the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize this week as Corrections Week. I would also like to thank our province's correctional offices for

their efforts in making our correctional facilities as safe as possible, especially correctional officers who work alongside community organizations to offer supports, rehabilitation programming and those who seek to improve the conditions within the facilities.

I have met with several organizations who seek to improve life within prison. A gentleman said to me that people should not come out of any prison system in worse condition and that supports should be in place so that when offenders are released they are ready to work and live responsibly in our province.

I urge the minister and the government to keep this in mind while we wait for a replacement for HMP. We still need to think about the programming in place for all our facilities and how we can help improve society and the working conditions for correctional officers by improving conditions within prison institutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The Third Party recognizes the need for greater supports for both correctional staff and inmates. We therefore take this opportunity to call for more psychological care and other wrap-around supports for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. With preventative measures such as these, fewer people will end up in the prison system in the first place and we will all benefit from safer, healthier communities.

Thank you, Speaker.

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.

On April 6, the Premier set the expectation that the Rothschild report would be released through the Access to Information, saying the report will be – and I quote – redacted accordingly and in accordance with the legislation. It was revealed yesterday the report will not be released at all, citing Cabinet confidence.

The Premier doesn't control the ATIPPA process, but he does control what is and what is not hidden behind Cabinet confidence.

I ask the Premier: Will you use your power and release the report publicly?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As the Member opposite is aware, as the minister has said many times, there's commercially sensitive information in the document. We will have full public debate on whatever we choose to do subsequent to the documentation and evaluation.

This is an important moment in Newfoundland and Labrador's history. We all recognize the substantial debt, but we don't really have a full grasp of the value of the assets that we own right now, Mr. Speaker. It would be unwise and frankly would be commercially wrong and not prudent to release that information, as we're trying to position our assets for the future, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

So we spent \$5 million of the taxpayers' money to do an overview of the assets owned by the taxpayers, yet we won't share that information

with the taxpayers of this province. Real problem with that, Mr. Speaker, and so do the people of this province.

Speaker, the Premier can do the right thing and be transparent with the people of this province, but he's choosing not to. He has to understand that the people of this province paid for the Rothschild report to review the assets that they own. I remind the Premier, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador own these assets, not the Liberal Cabinet.

I ask the Premier: Why don't you believe the people of the province deserve to know what is in the Rothschild report?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As the Member opposite is aware, there's been much public commentary on the advice that's being given by the Rothschild group. Many have said that it would be wrong, frankly, to release that commercial reports available to us, Mr. Speaker.

We want to get the best value and see what is the value of these assets and then how they are appropriately positioned in a Newfoundland and Labrador moving forward, Mr. Speaker. We're investing \$5 million to assess the value, unlike some other projects which invested \$5.2 billion, and ended up with – wait for it – \$13 billion in (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, the people of this province are telling us that they don't have faith that what will be done will be done in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it won't be taking care of Liberal friends in business as they have with other entities here in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, one individual who received the Income Supplement told me that they used the extra money to buy rapid tests. The money didn't go towards groceries. It didn't go towards medication. It didn't go towards heat. They were forced to spend it on rapid tests, available for free everywhere else in Canada.

I ask the Premier: Is this good enough?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We have a robust PCR testing program available, and there is a flow chart on the web. If you require a PCR test, rapid or otherwise, it is available at no charge through the RHA facilities. If you, on that flow chart, do not need a PCR we do not provide them because they are not recommended by Public Health and are deemed not medically necessary. They are there for those people who need them at no cost, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: So for months we were touting that we wanted people to use the rapid tests so that we would ensure that they would be safe and that they wouldn't pass on the virus to somebody else, so it was a safeguard in the tool box for our health care system here. Now, all of a sudden, it's swung 360 degrees, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, income support recipients are forced to spend their limited resources on things other provinces offer for free. This summer, when tens of thousands come to our shores for Come Home Year, instead of spending money on the local restaurants, they'll spend their money on rapid tests. This is an embarrassment for our province.

I ask the Premier again: Will free rapid tests finally be made available widely to avoid the national embarrassment?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

We take advice from Public Health. Public Health has best positioned us throughout this pandemic, I would argue the best in the country, and in fact the best in the world. And we will continue to take that advice, Mr. Speaker.

Because frankly, Dr. Fitzgerald understands that 360 comes back to the beginning, and not 180 which I think is what the Member opposite was trying to imply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER A. FUREY: What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is we recognize the importance and the use of rapid tests, Mr. Speaker. As the minister has explained, testing is available for the public if required; rapid tests are a special kind of test that need to be deployed appropriately, Mr. Speaker.

We're looking as we go through the school year and into the summer, as the minister has said publicly, to see how to better deploy those, but right now the advice comes from Public Health, as it should, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: It would be better if the Premier was upfront with the people of the province. We know what it's about; it's about monies. Monies that they haven't put in the right places in health care that has been detrimental; they're not willing to invest to keep people safe in Newfoundland and Labrador. We've seen evidence of that in this past budget also, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday we heard the sad news that since March of 2020, 13 people have died waiting for the necessary cardiac surgery, that the health care system needs to provide these surgeries faster and that the wait-list needs to be reduced by two-thirds.

I ask the Premier: When will you finally act to improve cardiac care in our province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

I certainly empathize with anyone waiting for cardiac services, but as Dr. Connors was publicly out yesterday stating, we've made great progress in a short period of time. We continue to work with him and the cardiac surgeons in the cardiology department to ensure that we're providing the best of care, Mr. Speaker.

He himself, Dr. Connors, said that the cardiac system is not in crisis, that patients can get access, when required, albeit sometimes a little slower. But we are – his words – moving in the right direction, Mr. Speaker. And he got a lot of positive things to say about the cardiac program and the hard-working women and men who work in that program in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can say that Dr. Connors and his team have made great strides to improve health care in Newfoundland and Labrador, unlike the Liberal Party over there –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: – and the minister responsible.

Speaker, when I asked in the fall how many people have died while on the cardiac wait-list, we found out that there was eight and now we learned, yesterday, that there were 13. The Premier said at the time: We can't ignore the situation but own it. Since then, three more cardiologists have left the Health Sciences Centre.

I ask the Premier: Your minister has ignored this issue and it has gotten worse; when will you do the right thing and ensure that enough cardiologists are here to meet the demand of the people of this province?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We have been working with the department of cardiology and the cardiac centre in St. John's since the beginning of my tenure here. Certainly, the issue around availability, recruitment and retention, we announced, very recently, a real focused attention on recruitment. We have recruited new cardiac surgeons. Indeed, one started within the last year. There is a turnover.

We are working with the Ottawa Heart Institute and they have skilled staff who wish to come and work here on a regular basis for medium-term locums. We have stabilized the perfusionist workforce. As Dr. Connors said, we are moving in the right direction. We will get there and we will get there as quickly as we possibly can, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I have been sent copies of correspondence from a violence prevention organization in this province with concerns about insufficient support and engagement from the department of Women and Gender Equality. The minister's office is not living up to their responsibilities as a partner in violence prevention.

Can the minister please explain why her department is failing to support the nine violence prevention offices, failing to even hold a monthly conference call with them?

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I certainly thank the hon. Member for the attention of these topics. I can certainly report to this House and to the hon. Member that we are indeed – the Office of Women and Gender Equality has an open door policy with all

organizations that we support and provide core funding to.

Our office has not been made aware until an email from a third party that was sent late yesterday. So it is the first that we are hearing of it. That said, staff has certainly reached out to our community stakeholders to make sure that they have everything that they need to move forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main,

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the open-door policy appears to be closed.

In these emails received from these organizations, there are concerns about funding inadequacy and uncertainty. These emails are full of phrases: funding is late; unpaid annual leave; others on the verge of closing; their clients are surely suffering; you folks disappeared; and we want to partner with you to ensure survivor victims of violence are actually being taken care of properly because right now they are not. These are just some quotes directly from a community advocate.

Will the minister acknowledge her department is failing to help provide the support that these organizations and women need?

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I thank the hon. Member and I must say that I really commend the dramatic theatrics that's here. I simply say that is not true.

We talk regularly with stakeholders from all communities, stakeholders from across Newfoundland and Labrador. We do indeed have an open-door policy but I have yet to see the Member walk through it recently to come over. The invitation is always there for her and any member of community who is interested in

equality seeking and violence prevention in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Again, \$3.2 million goes to core funding for organizations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Staff are in touch with community stakeholders on a weekly basis, if not more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, if we are dramatic it is because we're hearing from people that are feeling the inadequate support from the department.

The issues raised are concerning: outdated information online; the domestic hotline letting people down; changes being made to the Violence Prevention Initiative without soliciting input; and, perhaps worst of all, three of the nine offices have closed and others are in distress because they are not adequately supported by the minister and her department.

I ask the minister again: What will she do to rectify this situation and to ensure that individuals who are victims of violence have somewhere to turn?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Again, the Domestic Violence Help Line, not a hotline, of course, is done in conjunction with Transition Houses of Newfoundland and Labrador. The feedback that we've received, along with the Minister of CSSD, is that service is working and it is certainly adequate to help the people that need those front-line services.

Also, the organizations that we support are not-for-profit organizations. They are not government entities, but we do so support them with core funding. I can't get into the details on

the daily on goings within that organization because they are controlled at that level.

That said, \$3.2 million in funding; our door is always open. I have weekly, monthly meetings with all community stakeholders. The first time that we were made aware of this was from a third party, not the actual organization itself, and staff are in touch with those organizations now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, my constituent, Rhonda Watkins, has spoken out publicly about her desperate attempts to get lifesaving insulin covered under the Prescription Drug Program. Unfortunately, she's been forced to use expired medication and samples. Ms. Watkins gut-wrenching story last night is a plea for help.

What is the minister going to do?

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

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

There are financial and medical eligibility criteria that need to be met. There's documentation to support that that is required to access these programs. The Assurance Plan was put in place to make sure that there was less in the way of a significant impact from expensive drugs.

I would encourage anybody who has applied for those programs to reach out to the department and we would be happy to assist them with any issues they may have, but we do need the supporting material to be able to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I remind the minister that program is outdated, as a lot of these income-threshold programs are. This is creating a big problem, not only for my district and constituents but right throughout the province. It's time for that stuff to be addressed right across the board.

Speaker, Ms. Watkins has cashed in her savings, maxed out her credit cards and dipped into her child's education savings. She's hit a wall. With the soaring cost of fuel, food and cost of living, combined with the fact she's not actually buying her critical medication, she will never qualify under this plan.

Speaker, how many more unfortunate people like Ms. Watkins are falling through the cracks?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Once again, this program has been successful in reducing the expenditure and the cost for those people with co-pays who do not meet other criteria.

From the point of view of the program and its administration there are financial documents, there are clinical documents and supporting evidence that needs to be submitted so that claims can be assessed. We would encourage anybody who has had challenges or feels they have been unreasonably treated to reach out to the department and we would be happy to assist them. If the Member opposite wishes to provide further detail, happy to look into it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's wonderful to hear that red tape is preventing people from getting critical medication.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sad.

P. DINN: Sad.

Speaker, on Monday, the Minister of Health promised to bring the Mental Health Crisis Line to 811. Speaker, 811 is a stellar resource; however, it's already facing extraordinary volume.

I ask the minister: How will the mental health calls be prioritized to ensure people get the support they need?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Health and Community Services.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Towards Recovery process created only the second Recovery Council in Canada and it's here in Newfoundland and Labrador. These are people with lived experience and direct experience of the health care system. The Mental Health Crisis Line has been run for many years of the PAU, the Psychiatric Assessment Unit, at the Waterford.

Because of workload there, a decision was made last August to bring this in, on the advice of the Recovery Council and the Ministerial Advisory Council for Mental Health.

If you ring 811, the first thing you will hear is: Is this a Mental Health Crisis Line call? If you answer in the affirmative, your call is the next one answered. There is no wait. Resources have been added, extra training has been provided in the last six months to allow this to happen.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: On the contrary to that, Speaker, the 811 line frequently requires a wait before getting a call back, contrary to what he just said.

That's fine for non-emergency care, but when someone is in a mental health crisis they need immediate attention. Before there was a dedicated, specific line for immediate care. Now, emergency mental health calls are at risk of being lost among other health issues.

I ask the minister: How specifically will the mental health emergencies be prioritized in the 811 system?

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

J. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, I'm reluctant to call this fear mongering, but it is something of an exaggeration.

If you call 811 and identify, on the keypad, at the request that you have a mental health crisis, your call is the next one answered. It's not a matter of callback. It's not a matter of waiting. The next person there will answer it. Extra people have been put on. We began the training last August to do this. It was included in the RFP. It was asked for by the mental health community. It was asked for by the mental health providers. It will alleviate the workload of the PAU, and it is working.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Speaker, on Monday the minister said that prior to the change, the Mental Health Crisis Line was – and I quote – essentially a cordless handset stuck in the pocket of an RN on duty at the Psychiatric Assessment Unit of the Waterford. His quote.

Minister, the Mental Health Crisis Line doesn't operate out of the PAU, as he said earlier, and there isn't even a cordless phone anywhere in their office.

How can the public have faith in the minister when he doesn't have his basic facts straight?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The workload at the PAU has increased over the years; this decision was made in consultation with the minister's advisory council on mental health, with the staff, the PAU, with consumers of the Mental Health Crisis Line.

The system as I have outlined is efficient, it is streamlined, it prioritizes mental health and it is a one-stop shop. It integrates in a way that has not been done before, mental health calls and physical health calls totally in line with the recommendations of *Towards Recovery*.

Really, Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite ought to tone it down a little bit and stop frightening people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Mr. Speaker, I've heard from everyone in this province on health care. If anyone is frightening these people, it's everyone on that side of the House – every one of them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Talk about fear mongering. We're talking about a mental health crisis here. Fear mongering – we are hearing from front-line workers with the Mental Health Crisis Line. They feel disrespected by this minister's comments, and they believe he is out of touch with how the program actually works.

I ask the minister: Will he apologize to the front-line health care workers for his misinformed and insensitive comments?

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

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

The issue about workload at the PAU was brought to us by the staff at the PAU through *Towards Recovery*, met with them on more than one occasion. This is now back at the time of the *Towards Recovery* report, which Members

opposite also sat on, and I think we actually had a tour together. The previous Member for Topsail - Paradise might also have been on that Committee at the time.

This was in response to their concerns. They have provided yeoman service for 20 years, it is time to pass the baton now and bring it into an integrated care system, which integrates physical and mental health crises, and is doing so successfully, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Well, I guess that's not an apology.

Speaker, mental health supports in our province are stretched to the breaking point. Wait-lists for long-term health are years long – years long. Dedicated help lines are being phased out; staff are overworked and feeling stressed and burdened by a broken system.

I ask the minister: When will he access long-term mental health supports to become a priority on his watch?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Towards Recovery describes a groundbreaking model called Stepped Care, going from 1 to 5. At 5, the Premier and I, in conjunction with staff from Eastern Health and the project team, went through some mock-ups of the new adult mental health and addictions facility. That is step 5.

The Member opposite refers to those steps in the middle. We have RFPs out and being evaluated for community crisis beds. We are putting acute mental health beds in Goose Bay in places where traditionally they have not had any.

In terms of the demand for mental health services, we are aware that that has risen. There's been a 40 per cent rise in requests for counselling and a 43 per cent reduction in the

number of people waiting for that service, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

What's frightening is you don't know how bad the situation is.

Speaker, the Jacob Puddister Memorial Foundation honours the legacy of Jacob Puddister, a young man from Bay Bulls who took his own life in 2016 at the age of 21. This foundation seeks to give access to long-term mental health supports to marginalized youth. Recently they had to suspend their wait-list for services due to the erroneous demand for long-term mental health services in our province.

I ask the minister: How long are the current wait-lists for long-term mental health services in this province?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It gives me an opportunity to continue where I left off. A 40 per cent increase in the number of people accessing mental health and addictions services, and a 43 per cent reduction at the same time for those individuals who are waiting for those services.

We know that we have challenges, particularly around psychiatry, and we are working with the psychiatrists – as we have done from the beginning – to identify those clients who are in need of more urgent care and work with them to reduce wait-lists in the same way as we met with the NLMA on surgical wait-lists today, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

We've been waiting seven years to get this ironed out and it's going to continue to be pushed down the road, so it's time to get action on this.

Speaker, the wait-list for services at the Jacob Puddister Memorial has grown rapidly, especially due to the pandemic, and despite the best efforts to accommodate those in need of service, the foundation has suspended the wait-list after reaching 200 people on a waiting list.

I ask the minister: Wait-lists continue to grow with no end in sight; why have you forgotten long-term mental health support in our health care system?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Stepped Care model developed and pioneered here at Memorial University and now accepted by the federal minister of mental health and addictions as a potential national standard speaks to those middle grounds of steps for those people who require more support than intermittent counselling and yet don't require inpatient treatment.

We know that we have a shortage of psychologists here. Recently an intern program was set up in Eastern Health so that we can convert those people with degrees in psychology into practising psychologists. That is a first. That has happened in the last seven years. In addition, we now have an ADM of recruitment and retention for health care providers.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, right now nurse practitioners cannot bill MCP in private clinic settings like family physicians are able to do.

With the massive shortage of family physicians in this province, will the minister induce legislation to allow nurse practitioners to bill MCP and create a greater access to primary care across this entire province?

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

J. HAGGIE: I thought you were forgetting me there for a minute, Mr. Speaker.

Nurse practitioners provide a crucial service for primary care in this province. We know that there is a demand for them. We actually have more nurse practitioners per capita than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We led the way in the '90s and we lead the country now.

In terms of how nurse practitioners are compensated, that is an active discussion with the RNU, who are their legal collective bargaining group, as well as the Nurse Practitioners Association, who are a subgroup of that.

What we want and what they want is collaborative care publicly funded in a team environment. We're all on the same page, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Speaker, the cost of living is spiralling out of control and more and more people are falling behind.

I ask the minister: Will she look at removing tax from electrical bills, even temporarily, to put more money back in the pockets of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

We do recognize, Speaker, how difficult and serious the situation is for people not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, indeed in the country and around the world, with the rising

costs of living and with the challenges around fuel prices.

I can say that we have a harmonized sales tax; it applies on a broad range of things. There is only a small amount that we can do within the harmonized sales tax. For example, we have removed it from books, just to give an example. But you only have so much of a span, the wiggle room, within that band called HST because it is harmonized federally. It might be something to consider as we move forward, but we are providing quite a substantive amount of money for rate mitigation, so we are spending a tremendous amount of money on that.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, open door policies work only if people feel they are welcome to cross the threshold.

Today, in a *SaltWire* article, the executive director of the St. John's Status of Women Council says, and I quote: Avoiding pay equity legislation while conflating with other issues will continue to perpetuate and legitimize conditions for discrimination for workers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality: Is she comfortable with the message she has been sending?

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I thank the hon. Member for the question. I can only talk about the information that I have and the facts that are available to me. As you can appreciate, I took this office a year ago and I'm certainly doing the best I can with all the tools I have available for me.

I want to remind the hon. Member, and, of course, everybody in this House, as well as

members of the media, pay equity is only one measure to close the gender wage gap. Unfortunately, we've lost the definition of the gender wage gap versus pay equity.

We see in Ontario and Quebec, who have pay-equity legislation in both private and public sector, they have the largest gender wage gaps. It has not solved their problem. We are taking concrete measures such as investing in women venture capitals, child care, all of these things help support women get in to get those high paying jobs –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

In 1965, and to the consternation of those in Labrador, Joey Smallwood decided to name the longest river in Atlantic Canada after Winston Churchill. There was no consultation with the local people, particularly the Innu who referred to this impressive waterway as Patshishetshuanau-shipu or the more widely known and recognized Mishtashipu.

As part of the important reconciliation happening in our province, would this government work with Innu leadership to return an original name to this grandest of rivers?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Certainly, it's something that we would entertain and something that I'm willing to bring up in the weekly Indigenous leaders' call and see how it goes from there. But, obviously, we'd be interested in hearing the Innu and the other Indigenous groups in Labrador, their opinions on the name and the move forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you.

I thank the Premier for that answer.

If we want to provide relief for people affected by high fuel prices, one should examine the record earnings being celebrated by major petroleum companies, as a result of those increasing fuel prices.

Will government follow other jurisdictions and bring in windfall profit tax legislation that, if in place with for Hibernia, for example, would support low- and middle-income residents to the tune of \$2.3 million per day, right now.

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much for that question.

It's a very important question, one which we will take under consideration. Extraordinary profits, of course, is something that we've seen the federal government moving towards with a 15 per cent tax over a billion dollars for banks, for example – an extraordinary measure.

But I will say that we have a common tax base across the country for corporations because, of course, corporations may have activities in multiple jurisdictions.

I will point out, because I think this is important as well, last year we raised about \$250 million more in corporate income tax and we are anticipating that help, not only provide the relief that we are seeing in terms of what we will be able to provide in this budget but also in terms of our deficit.

So thank you for the question.

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons for this petition or the background of this petition is as follows:

The rising cost of fuel is having a dramatic effect on truck drivers in our province. Drivers are finding it increasingly difficult to pay their bills, maintain their machines and paying for every increasing fuel cost. This means for many that they must spend more time on the road with smaller margins of survival and for those with families, more time away from home.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to consider a fuel rebate for truckers so that they can continue to supply those essential services to many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that depend on them each day.

Speaker, this petition is signed by people in Arnold's Cove, Sunnyside and Chance Cove and you know that's a pretty clear crosscut of the fact that this is affecting everybody. You know, when COVID first hit it was our truck drivers and our support people in the services industries that kept the economy going and kept looking out for us and keeping groceries on the shelves of our grocery stores.

Now that they need our people, we don't have any made-right-here programs ready for them, which I think is a travesty really. Because if we realize that we represent everybody in the province, all 40 Members here, then it's not just this side that's being affected, it's both sides. It needs to be acknowledged and it needs to be taken into consideration.

I just heard today that we have another accolade that we – I'm certainly not proud of it – but another accolade we got today is that we're the

highest price for diesel in the country. Now that's something to hang our hat on, isn't it? After all these people went over and above. We are an island, we have to realize that Marine Atlantic and all this stuff, all comes into effect, which is making the price of our goods go up, but if we took off some of these surcharges and taxes off our diesel and gasoline, it would help everybody in the province. It might even help the fact that the store shelves will be fuller and less expensive. So, like I said, it's a trickle-down effect.

If we're not going to help the people in the province, then tell them. Don't hide behind smoke and mirrors and think that you're doing something great.

I see on the budget document that it's called *CHANGE is in the air*. Well, there are certainly no dollars in the air, I can tell you that because everybody is pinching every penny that they can.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I once again bring this petition to the House floor, a petition to increase the supports for Labrador West seniors. The reason for the petition:

The need for senior accessible housing and home care services in Labrador West is steadily increasing. Lifelong residents of the region are facing the possibility of needing to leave their homes in order to afford to live or receive adequate care. Additional housing options, including long-term care facilities for seniors have become a requirement for Labrador West. That requirement is currently not being met.

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

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, I bring this petition forward to the House on behalf of the seniors and residents of Labrador West. Once again, we currently do not have the same level of seniors care as other regions of this province. We were, as a community, created differently than most communities in the region and in the province as a whole. Therefore, the requirements are very unique and different, but at the same time more and more seniors are choosing to spend the entirety of their lives in the community that they helped build. They have their children there, their grandchildren, and, actually in a couple of cases, great-grandchildren.

We do have a lovely senior, Aunt Blanche, who is 96 years old and currently resides in the community. She has been a lifelong resident of the region. She came there with her husband as a young couple and raised a family and has a massive extended family that basically is related to almost everyone in Labrador West at this point. So Aunt Blanche is there and a lot of other seniors.

Then we have Joan Stamp, another senior, 95 years old. She spent the entirety of her adult life raising her family in Labrador West and contributed greatly to the community. Actually, when the Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs was in CSSD she actually had the privilege of giving Ms. Stamp an award for Seniors of Distinction.

So the Labrador West senior population is growing. We have a very vibrant senior population and they need access to care and to other opportunities as every other region of this province already has.

So, once again, I'm encouraging the government to look at this, take it very seriously and have a look at how we can make sure that seniors in Labrador West have the same opportunities as every other senior in this province. We're just asking for the same; we're not asking for anything special. We're just asking to be treated exactly the same.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

The reason for this petition:

With a population in excess of 8,000 people being served by the Bonavista hospital, there appears to be a two-week wait time, on average, to avail of blood work. Prior to COVID-19, it was generally a 20-minute wait. The residents in the area feel that these blood services should return to pre-COVID levels immediately.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately address the delay in accessing laboratory services in Bonavista by allowing the residents much quicker access.

We spend a lot of time in the House talking about health care, and rightfully so. We appreciate the professionalism of those that are working in the system. I think we've made that clear, they are good people. But residents in Bonavista and other areas – I would think maybe not a lot different in the Clarenville area – wonder why we are not returning close to normal of what the blood services were prior to COVID.

Every one of us will know how important an early diagnosis would be or the return of blood work and if it puts us in the queue for services much quicker, then that's not something that we should be delaying or having it delayed for any greater length of time than what it is absolutely necessary.

We all realize COVID is part of our world in the last two years and I'm sure that was a significant

part of the delay on accessing blood work, but we've come a long way with COVID now and our knowledge of COVID. We have a lot of offices open. All of our office are open. What people would ask is if it was 20 minutes, maybe they would understand that if it was 40 or 45 minutes now, but if it's two weeks that's much too long.

That is what the residents of the Bonavista area are concerned about, and often they have trouble getting through in order to book an appointment that is two weeks out.

I would ask that we have a look into this to see if we can let the residents access blood services much quicker than what they currently are.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains. You have 1½ minutes.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to return affordable travel to the region of Northern Labrador. Unlike other communities in this province, our Northern Labrador communities of Nain, Natuashish, Hopedale, Postville and Rigolet are land based and are not connected to the provincial highway system.

Our Northern Labrador communities are totally isolated with no road access and marine transportation is limited to five months or less each summer.

The cost of travel for residents living in Northern Labrador is grossly disproportionate to the available income, thereby restricting travel, increasing the cost of living and contributing to isolation.

Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the hon. House of Assembly to call upon the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide reliable and affordable transportation between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Northern Labrador communities.

This past week, it wasn't only about affordable travel, it was about reliable travel. I always talk

about from Nain to Goose Bay can cost up to \$1,000 for one person return, but we had patients stuck for six days.

We had the Makkovik badminton team almost never got out to the regionals. They won gold. The males, first, second and third place. The Rigolet Eagles, who actually won the last tournament before COVID, they never got to go. There was a volleyball team from Nain who –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I move the following private Member's resolution:

WHEREAS the cost-of-living crisis that is making life unbearable for countless Newfoundland and Labrador individuals and families is worsening by the day, to such a degree that it requires urgent relief measures beyond those included in the government's 2022 budget plan; and

WHEREAS during this Mental Health Week we must recognize that the cost-of-living crisis is causing stress, anxiety and mental health issues for many people, and action must be taken with greater urgency to ensure people get financial relief as well as improved access to the long-term mental health care they need without enduring excessive wait times;

BE IT RESOLVED that this House urge the government to provide immediate relief measures beyond those included in the government's 2022 budget plan, including financial relief along with measures to improve access to mental health care.

The motion is seconded by the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

SPEAKER: I just wish to advise the House that I did receive a proposed amendment for today's private Member's motion, for advance ruling, under Standing Order 63(9). I've ruled that the amendment is not in order, as it changes the scope of the motion.

I'd like to recognize the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

And now, for those in attendance in this Chamber, and the thousands who are watching at home, let's start talking about change – change in the air. But one of the first things before you can change something is to recognize that you have a problem, and that is part of what's happening here.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador have a problem. They have a problem with the fact, as my colleague alluded to, we have just set another record as a province that we now can boast that we have the highest diesel and home heating fuel prices in North America. I don't believe that's anything to be celebrating.

I really believe that in the secrecy of the government caucus room and the Cabinet room, most Members and ministers would agree that we have a problem. They would also agree that the actions put forward to date, while beneficial, have not been enough. More needs to be done. Clearly, they are hearing from their residents, just as we are hearing from ours. Their constituents are telling them they need help.

Today, we talk about financial relief and how we can do it. Well, I'm going to tell you today how you can do it. I'm going to tell you how you can change this budget right now. I'm going to direct you to the back, in Appendix II, under the Summary of Salary Costs by Department. This year, the government projects to spend an extra \$67 million in salaries for government department employees – \$67 million extra over last year's expenditure for government salaried employees. Is that a priority?

Now, one could argue that these were vacant positions because last year government had a savings of \$68 million in government service departments. But they have chose to add back

\$67 million of that in this year's expenditure. So one could say, well, they're going to fill the positions so they need to budget that money. But what is interesting is that if you go back to the year before, you'll find that they had again a significant savings. In 2021, they had a savings of \$63 million.

So again, a whole bunch of savings, budgeted salaries, but use the savings for what? Then if you want to go back another year to 2020, you'll find the same thing: \$50 million in savings. So what is going on? Are we failing to hire people? Do people no longer want to work for government? Or are we simply padding our expenditures so that at the end of the day, in other areas, we can spend more where we want to spend it as a government, but we'll use this surplus to pay for it?

I would argue that there is an opportunity here to take some of this \$67 million in additional salary cost and use it to give back to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador through a rebate program and adjustments on fuel costs and home heating fuel.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: I'm not suggesting that there aren't positions that need to be filled, but I have also asked the minister in Estimates how many of those positions have been vacant for more than six months. How many have been vacant for more than one year? One could argue that they are different positions, but the fact remains, for three years in a row, we have had significant savings in the salary budget year over year, yet we continue to budget at the same level as if they were going to spend it.

So it is time to make an adjustment. I would suggest that part of that adjustment should go back to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in a one-time rebate program, as I talked about this morning. You want to talk it through any kind of a rebate, it could be one-time but it needs to happen. The people need our help and they need it now.

The minister, earlier, gave us some hope in the fact that she alluded to potential changes to HST. When asked a question, there was potential for some changes to be made to HST. I

would hope that one of those considerations might be the tax that we pay on tax. The HST that we pay on tax on tax, whether or not that's something she can negotiate with her federal counterparts, I don't know, but that's a question. I think, obviously, the federal government has to be part of that discussion. And the federal government certainly has a role to play when it comes to the carbon tax and that fact that that's been imposed on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and right across the country.

But again, there are opportunities. That's only one area in this budget document. There are other areas. There are other funds in here that are unallocated that could be used, if you really wanted to, to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So as we go through this, today, I think it is important to remind ourselves of why we are here. We are here to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We recognize that things have been done by government to help, but they themselves have acknowledged that their five-step plan didn't go far enough. The people of the province are telling them that the initiatives in the budget when it comes to relief on fuel prices and home heating fuel don't go far enough and they are looking for your help.

Again, as I said, we all agree in this House of Assembly that people need our help and they need government to step up and find those solutions. So, again, I would suggest before this hon. House closes, I would ask the government to make the amendments that are necessary to adjust some of the expenditure in this particular budget – not increase it, simply adjust it and find a way to put money back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians by way of a rebate program, especially our seniors, those on fixed incomes, those who are really hurting. As the minister alluded to, a lot of times say we can't control the price of fuel; however, we can control some of our taxes and we certainly can control how we spend our money.

So I would ask again that consideration be given. That's the whole purpose of the PMR today, I think, and I'm looking forward to people on the opposite side and hearing from them, what their constituents are telling them. Because maybe if their constituents are telling

them that everything is perfect, maybe it's only on this side of the House that we have the problems. I don't believe that. I believe your constituents are telling you the same thing. I'm looking forward to hearing from people on the opposite side.

Again, I congratulate you on the things you've done to date but I believe sincerely that there's opportunity to do more and I look forward to it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the Member opposite for his acknowledgement of what we've done so far. I think it's important for the people of the province to understand that, as a government, we are trying to ensure a very important balance here. So we recognize fully and with our hearts – and I have listened to the debate and I have listened to the Members opposite, and some of them say that we don't care and things of that nature, which affects me deeply, quite frankly, Speaker, because on this side of the House, and I believe every Member in this House, cares deeply. We wouldn't be sitting in the chairs that we're sitting in, doing the work that we do, the many hours that we spend at it, if we didn't care deeply about the people of this province. If we didn't care deeply about the future of this province, and we have a good future ahead of us.

I will say that despite the very challenging and difficult times that we've come through, despite the over two years of a pandemic and then to start to see the light coming out of a pandemic, and to have a war that's having an impact, globally. Of course, people are facing very serious and difficult times and the impact is felt here at home, daily.

People go to get fuel, if they go to the grocery store; they feel these things. That's why we worked so hard in the budget to do what we could do. So let me remind the people of the province, the Members opposite, how far we've come and where we're hoping to go.

I think everyone in this room today – I believe everyone in the province wants a stronger, smarter, self-sufficient, sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador. I have not had one person say to me they don't want that. Everybody wants that: a stronger, smarter, self-sufficient, sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador. We want the best future we can have here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's why when I became the Minister of Finance 18 months ago – it's my third budget in 18 months – we really focused on that balance. So you go back 18 months ago we were \$1.8 billion in deficit. What that means is we had to borrow \$1.8 billion just to see us through that year. We were able, through really hard work, to bring that down. Last year in my budget, I said we're going to be \$826 million. Horrific. We still had borrow \$826 million, only 525,000 of us. But we were able to bring that down. Thankfully, our economy sustained and rebounded from COVID.

As I said in Question Period earlier, Speaker, we were able to have a better year and we were able to bring that deficit down to about \$400 million. Now we're down in this budget to just over \$350 million.

Speaker, why is that important? That's about sustainability for our future. When I woke up on the morning of budget, I knew that a billion dollars was gone. I knew a billion dollars was gone before I got out of bed that morning just to pay for the cost of borrowing. Imagine if we could bring that down, cut it in half; bring it down.

So I will say, Speaker, that while I hear the Members opposite talk about how can we do more and how can we do better, it's in that context: We have to balance it. Nobody wants to spend their children's money and cause us to not be sustainable in the future.

I heard last night Members opposite talk about how a former premier had to write the prime minister and say we have a liquidity issue and this is very serious. We don't want to be in that position again. So we have taken extraordinary measures. I'm happy to go over it again how we have a really good strategic financial plan to address the financial concerns that we have in

the province, the debt concerns that we have in this province. We already know that we have been able to refinance and improve Muskrat Falls so that we don't double electricity rates in this province.

So let me just say first of all that, again, we have ensured that your electricity rates are not going to double. Up until the point where we had a rate mitigation plan and we were able to make arrangements with the federal government, unfortunately, because of the constructs of Muskrat Falls, your electricity rates were going to double. So we have been able to mitigate that, we have been able to ensure that.

So that is saving your household \$2,400 a year on average – \$2,400 a year. If you go back 18 months ago, I announced that we were going to take the price of child care down to \$25. Then we moved it down to \$15. In January, it goes to \$10. Affordable child care, finally. I've been working on this for 25 years. When I was president of the Board of Trade back in 1993, I was talking about affordable child care. That is saving tens of thousands of dollars. I think it's \$6,700 per child a year.

My friend has three small children. She and her husband are teachers. Think about that, think about the impact, putting that money back in their pockets: two young teachers, three babies, all under the age of 3. Those are a couple of things we have done. We have made sure in this budget.

I will also say, and I'm going to run out of time so I going to have to be very quick, we've also done things to put money back in people's pockets, but the first thing we talked about was helping the most vulnerable. A 10 per cent increase in the income supplement and a 10 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit. This is money that we send quarterly to those that are less advantaged, those that are vulnerable. We just send money in the form of a cheque; they get it quarterly. We've increased that: Helpful.

We sent – very quickly, within a week – a cheque to income-support clients: \$200 if you're single, \$400 if you're a family, just to help them. Now, in this budget, we're also putting money back, for example, in your pocket by lowering the fees that we charge on motor vehicle

registration. We looked for how do we get the most money in people's pockets right away? That 15 per cent, the retail sales tax on insurances, we took that off. There are so many more things.

At the same time, we were lowering and putting that money back in people's pockets. We increased the budget for health. The last two years we've increased it by \$400 million. Education this year is getting an additional, I think it's \$67 million. Safety and security, I think, if memory serves me, it's probably around \$30 million or \$40 million dollars we've put in additional services. We've put additional money in connectivity. We've put \$10 million more – I heard it multiple times here in the House – in roads. We put \$5 million more towards community groups. All of those things are needs in our community.

We have struck the balance. We recognize how important it is to put money back in people's pockets. These are difficult, difficult times. At the same time, continuing to lower our deficit. I think, Speaker, in anyone's terms – and I have a list of people who've spoken very highly of our budget: Scotiabank: this budget is a step in the right direction. RBC: the fog is starting to lift. CIBC –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

S. COADY: I ask for respect in this House.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

CIBC: seeing a quicker recovery in the fiscal position. BMO: seeing more favourable fiscal fortunes. Canadian manufacturers when they ask for jobs. Canadian Manufacturers and Exports: this is a big win in our sector. TD Economics: debt burden is much lower than anticipated. I can go on, Speaker, but I'm going to move an amendment.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that the private Member's resolution currently before House be amended as follows: In the clause beginning with the word WHEREAS, delete the words "beyond those included" and substitute the words "including

but not limited to those." And in the clause beginning with the words BE IT RESOLVED, by deleting the words "urge the government" and substituting the words "continue to support the government's efforts." And by deleting the words "measures beyond those included in the government's 2022 budget plan including" and substituting "including but not limited to those outlined in *Budget 2022*, which include."

I will table this motion, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: We also received an advance copy of this amendment, and this amendment was ruled in order.

B. PETTEN: How come we never seen the amendment before now?

SPEAKER: Because it has to be presented to the House first. She has to read it into the documents.

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

And on that, I will allow the debate to continue.

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We get up and we talk about cost of living. I've heard a lot of people talking the last two days. I've sat and listened intently. There's been a lot of good debate and probably a lot of not so good answers; a lot of good questions, not so good answers. Ultimately, it's a level of frustration, I suppose, too, when you sit and listen to this stuff. We sat late last night and listened to a lot. Again, a lot of good debate and not much in the way of answers.

But people of the province, they are looking to us for solutions. We don't have all the answers, they don't have the answers, but they're pleading with us for answers. They're pleading with us for help. That's what we're elected to do. We're supposed to help people.

Your Code of Conduct, recently I read it, we're supposed to help the people who we represent. There is a clear line in that message. When we get elected we sign off on our Oath of Office and our role is, no matter what stripe you are, you're supposed to help the people in need in this province. That's the roll of 40 of us in this House of Assembly to help all members of this province, not matter what they do. Whether they vote or don't vote; who they vote for; whatever their beliefs are, we're supposed to help those people – full stop.

That's not happening, Mr. Speaker. That is a huge failure. This government can sit there, they can answer these questions and I am a bit annoyed. I try to keep that under control, it annoys me.

I got up today and I asked a serious question about a lady in my district who I spoke to. We did everything we could to try to help that lady. The people we spoke to that work within the programs sympathize, but their hands were literally tied because it's government policy. They can't go outside the policy and break the rules. They would lose their own job, and rightfully so. That is what we all sign up for. They have no choice, but did they say that they sympathize with this lady? You betcha. I sympathize with her very much. She has a very valid situation, without getting into every part of her medical problems; she has a very valid argument.

So the minister can stand in his place and act smarter than me and everyone else in this House, if he wants to, and say that certain criteria need to be met and certain financial things. If you're a layman and you're out there listening, the minister is giving a valid answer. But that is right from the book. That's wrote on a piece of paper. That's in his briefing binder. He gets prepped, he knows; he's a doctor, he probably knows the answer.

But what he's not saying is that one of her biggest expenses is because of one flaw in the policy, not even insulin, it is another issue that is not covered until you hit 65. But this problem don't affect people at 65, it affects people all through their life. It is very expensive medical equipment, that's not said, but she can't survive without that. She cannot survive without this

other expensive. At 65 she'll get a break and she maybe able to get her insulin covered. Is that satisfactory?

So continue to use the expired insulin – that's appalling. That's banana republic stuff. That's stuff you hear about down in those developing countries that people are using that. That's when you go down and you recycle hearing aids for people because they can't afford to buy their own hearing aids. If you're in Cuba, you walk down the streets of Cuba and you got hearing aids, you're a rock star because they can't afford them. Is that what we have become? Is that what this government wants to hang their hat on? It is appalling. It is disgusting.

If we debate this budget – and I know politics as well as anyone in this House and I'll debate it with anyone all day long, and I understand what that side of the House and this side of the House, no matter what colour you are, but to watch this stuff in action.

The Premier of the province looks over when I asked this question about a lady in my district and I said, respectfully, the system is flawed. Not that you've done anything wrong. Tell me it's flawed. Look at me. Do you know what? It's flawed. We have to work to make that better because tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, anyone in this House is going to run into the same person. That same man or woman is going to come to your door and you're going to tell them you have the same answer that I have, and it's not good enough.

Then you get all these other people and these emails and messages coming in. They can't afford to fill their oil tank. They can't afford to put gas in their car. They can't afford to buy groceries. We're hearing that over and over and over again. The media are not covering it all the time because it's getting old. They're getting tired of hearing the same thing. They're getting tired of hearing the same answers. It's not news anymore.

That's what we've become. If it's not a headline story that it's a disaster, the sky is falling, they're not reporting it. But people are suffering. People are suffering in this province under our watch, and I say our watch, it's 40 of us. When I go back to my district, it's me; the PC Member

represents that area, no one else here. I have to try to answer their questions. I have to try to console them. I have to show empathy.

We just went through the Volunteer Week, and it was Empathy in Action. Now, we get paid for what we do, but I feel sometimes that's what we're all missing. There's no empathy anymore. It seems like nobody cares, Speaker.

Like I say, I've had the opportunity, I spoke on a lot of the budget before our break, so I've had time to sit here and listen to all my colleagues and the independents and the Third Party. We're all saying the same thing, every one of us are. We're trying to put personal circumstances in there. We're trying to tell personal stories. We're trying to tell how it's affecting individual people, but, ultimately, it could be either one of us who could stand up and take each other's story and it will fit into your district. I don't say that from this side, I say that from any side, every Member in this House.

But we just had this budget, and coming into the budget it was the Rothschild report, it was the Moya Greene report, people were nervous of what's coming. But when you're not getting the messages, it was really quiet, so it's either we're going to get hammered or there's nothing going to happen.

Budget day here, we were rich; we were full of riches. It was great. Good news budget. We had the outreach program. There was a crowd going around with red coats on. I couldn't identify them all; some looked familiar. Knocking on the doors, spreading the message: we've got this budget and it was all over social media. The Premier is out in his district. There was big push on it.

Who did that? Who is the orchestrator behind that? If there was time, Mr. Speaker, I could for about two hours but I only got about three minutes left.

There was a time when we were in government, previous, people would say: Who's advising the Premier? Who's advising the 8th floor? And I sometimes would shrugged my own shoulders and said: B'y, I don't know. I questioned it myself.

Well, I guess the shoe is on the other foot now and I ask you: Who is advising you? Who is advising you to go out and do that stuff? Because all I'm hearing on the other side is: Sweet God, you got to be kidding me. While they are trying to keep their oil barrels filled and keep their cars full of gas and wondering how they are going to get to pay their next bill, we got his crowd out praising up this great budget they just gave. No home oil rebate in it; no heating rebate that my colleagues have been hammering and asking and asking and asking day in day out. No, nothing for that.

A few dollars for this and something for that. They are like: What are you giving us? It's pittance. They are out spreading this message the world is good. So if you turn off all of the lights and you close your eyes, you'd think you are in an alternate universe. Open your eyes and say: What happened? What happened in the last four or five years? This is not reality. This didn't happen. Everything is wonderful. There are bowls of cherries. There are butterflies flying around. There are photo ops. We're happy and life is great.

I tell you, life is not great in my district and I don't know if life is great in any of your districts, are they? There's no doctors out – my colleagues in Central, they got no doctors; they got people in their waiting rooms; people are waiting for weeks and weeks and weeks for life-threatening heart operations. That don't look like – but on top of that, add insult to injury, you got a lot of seniors out in that area. Two long-term care facilities out in the region – seniors waiting to get in.

March 25, I believe, roughly, maybe 28, photo op, ribbon cutting, glossy pictures, big smiles on everyone's faces. Today is May 2, May 3, we're into another delay, but a month later we are told, oh, we got another delay. We don't know when it's going to end. Could be the end of May; it could be June. Seniors are waiting. People can't get in the hospital. But we had the photo op. What did you open?

Deficiencies that were identified last year – what did you go out there for? We had to change the conversation, the strategy, that's what the advisors told them. Get out and change the conversation. Get a picture. It'll take the

pressure off. And me there listening to it and I read it and said, yeah, do you know what? Good on them. It's going to open. I'd be the first to compliment them, if it's a good thing, I will compliment it. And I did. Yeah, it was good to see.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, it's smoke and mirrors; it's an alternate universe, it's not what it appears. It's cut the ribbon, look really sharp, all is good, take a few pictures, get in the rig and get out of Dodge. That's what happened.

Is it open today? No. They're out there tearing up all the showers again now. But everything's under control; rest assured, everything is under control, Speaker. We're in good hands.

SPEAKER: The hon. Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I look forward to making my contribution to this debate this afternoon. I want to obviously call out and recognize that this is Mental Health Week, and the theme is empathy. It's also Maternal Mental Health Day, for those who monitor these things. It's an important day in the life of mothers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. ABBOTT: Where I want to focus my –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Where I wanted to focus my comments today was on the, I guess, the second prayer of the resolution, which talks about this being Mental

Health Week, the need to make sure we recognize that there is increased stress, there is increased anxiety in our province and in the country, in the world all over, if we look at what's going on right now.

We have the issues of cost of living and what that's contributing to many households. We have those with COVID and the concerns about COVID still throughout the province and people are still very anxious about that. Of course, we have events over in Europe with the Russian war on Ukraine and the impact that it's having, I think, subconsciously for many of us. It is contributing to a wide spectrum of stress and anxiety for all of us.

I think one of the things that we were trying to do through the budget is recognize that where we can as a province and as a government we need to support individuals and individual households with some aspects of the increased cost of living. Can we factor in all those elements and cover all those cost factors? No, we can't. We don't have the resources to do that. So we've had to pick different elements and focus our financial efforts on those.

But what I wanted to bring to your attention is around what the government is doing on mental health services to support individuals, whether it's because of cost of living or other factors in their lives that the government is spending a significant amount of resources around mental health services and will continue to do so.

The Minister of Health in Question Period today talked about Towards Recovery and the plan that was tabled here in the House a couple of years ago as a result of the All-Party Committee. And to a credit, I think, to the legislators at the time recognizing that mental health has to be and must be a priority within this province, within government funding for when it comes to health programming.

Right now, we are spending close to \$250 million on mental health and addictions services here in the province. And we've increased our spending. It was around 5.7 per cent in 2017 and we're now about 7 per cent. The All-Party Committee had recommended that we get to 9 per cent of total health spending on mental

health services. So we are on the road to doing that.

We are looking at the full spectrum of services. Again, the Minister of Health talked about the stepped care model, which is really paying dividends in how we design and deliver services. Not all individuals will need to see a psychiatrist. At the same time, we want to make sure that when mental health issues arise that an individual can immediately get access to services.

We've introduced Doorways across the province and that is being well received. Our wait times have gone down and the level and amount of services delivered continues to increase. So that's very good news.

We also, again, are building the new adult mental health facility, and as those who drive along the Parkway here in St. John's will see, it is well under way and on time and, hopefully, will be in budget. But that's going to be a game changer in how we deliver acute mental health services here in the province.

It'll be a state-of-the-art facility providing state-of-the-art services, something that's long overdue. We're replacing a facility that was built and opened in 1855. So I think you will see that the government is on the right path when it's addressing these issues.

We're providing and now spending over \$1.5 million in eMental health services. Many people today rely on and use eServices for a broad spectrum of services, including their health services. So we are working to keep up with the need and the demand in that area. Again, we are seen as one of the leaders in the country around those services.

We're providing \$750,000 to support social, emotional learning curriculum, to support curriculum in our schools. Again, recognizing that we have to work with children, at the earliest possibility, so that they can be supported and that, as mental health issues arise, they can be addressed with the children, with their families, within the school environment where that can happen.

Again, in Labrador, we've got \$300,000 set aside for land-based programming to foster mental health wellness in connection to culture and Indigenous communities. Something, again, that was recognized by the All-Party Committee, based on representations from our Indigenous citizens and communities, particularly in Labrador.

In terms of some statistics that we're keeping and monitoring this very closely – and that's certainly one of the benefits of the *Towards Recovery* plan; it is being monitored for its implementation and success in meeting the goals and objectives in the plan. Where we can and how we can build on that plan, we will continue to do so.

As I've said in a previous debate around mental health services and COVID that, hopefully and realistically, we can learn from the current experience, and that will inform our policies and programs going forward. The same as what's happening now around cost of living, there is some literature out that talks about the impact of stress because of low incomes, because of increased prices on goods and services that people depend on, how that affects their mental health. We need to learn from that and how we build better services and counselling services to help individuals. At the same time, where the government can, then we'll put money into the hands and pockets of individuals.

Right now, we have 43 per cent fewer people that are waiting for mental health and addiction counselling services. That's a significant improvement over where we were three to four years ago. Again, we are seeing an increase in referrals, but we're able to accommodate those because wait times are being reduced. For example, Labrador-Grenfell has no wait-list for counselling services. That's a significant improvement, and other areas in the province can say the same thing.

The transition from the Mental Health Crisis Line to the 811 HealthLine, I know there was some bantering back and forth on that earlier today. But for me, who's been involved in that issue in the past, this is long overdue. It's the right thing. Not to say there won't be some bugs to be worked out in the transition, but it is definitely the right thing to do because it is now

a 24-hour service, 365 days a year, and it is around the clock.

That wasn't always the case with the previous Mental Health Crisis Line, just the way it was funded and managed. And we've got the resources in place to make sure that all calls are addressed and that services are provided, and referrals made to the appropriate service.

So, Speaker, really what I wanted to say here is, in terms of the resolution, I think in some aspects it is on the right track, but I think the Opposition and others have to recognize that the government has invested in addressing the cost of living factors here in the province. We recognize on this side of the House that more can be done, and will be done. But we need to monitor where we are at this point in time. The caucus is continuing to talk about these issues, the Cabinet continues to talk about these issues, and individual ministers in their departments are talking with staff and what are other things that we can and should be considering.

And if one department is close to the action, it's mine, and we're monitoring things on the ground and will be ready to respond as needed.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's a privilege to get up here and talk on the PMR and the budget from the constituents of my district. Mr. Speaker, I think maybe on their slogan this time they just may have things right. I think they just might have it right this time. They brought down *The Way Forward*. There was no way forward; that didn't work. So they went with a better way forward; we never seen a better way forward. So now they might have the slogan right this time: *CHANGE is in the air*. I think there might be a change in the air, Mr. Speaker, there just might be. It is going to take three years for that change, but a change might be in the air, yes.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, again when we talk about the budget, there's nothing in there for medium-

income people who right now are having struggles to support their families, even to get to work so that they can support their families. The seniors, again being able to afford food, afford heat, to keep warm in their houses – it's not there.

When we talk about mental illness, this alone is causing many, many stresses. Mentally and everything else combined with it, it is. When people are not comfortable to be able to buy gas to get to work, be able to afford to feed their children, mentally they become concerned. They really do. Their child has to do without. They have to do without themselves, but knowing that your children have to do without – they going to school hungry. They're going to school without the necessities that they need. That causes very serious illness, mentally and otherwise. Not only mentally, that moves to other things. So then that turns to, probably, addictions and more stress and drugs – try to handle some of those addictions, try to deal with some of their complications they got. That is very, very unfortunate.

When there is funding that can be provided to those people to help deal with some of that but they're not getting it, that is where we're losing and that is where they are falling through the cracks. We need to do more to support those people in those conditions, in those situations.

The unfortunate fact then, Speaker, is those addictions, those stresses lead to the ultimate, I guess, and that is suicide, which we don't want to talk about. We shouldn't be here talking about it. I know it happens. Do we get rid of it completely? Probably not. There probably will always be problems out there with that sort of thing, but we do need to deal with those situations. I know in the budget that they need to look after those situations with regard to funding for some of those programs.

I know even in Central Newfoundland, in our area, in our region, we have reached out for mental health crisis lines. We've reached out to facilities, especially – again, females in abusive situations in their homes, they've had to go to the shelters. There is not much there to help them along their way. There really is not.

I know I've heard a few times actually that when they try to get some mental health help, where are they are shown to? Right up into the emergency departments in Grand Falls-Windsor, basically, or James Paton, fed some medication, probably, and sent back to the same situation that they just ran away from. You're sending them right back in that situation that they just ran away from. What are we trying to do? What are we showing? There are lots more things we can be doing with regard to helping those people to try to control the mental illness that's affecting those people because of that.

Housing, another big stress. People can't afford to have housing. I know in our area, in our district – and I know the minister just got up and talked about some of the things they were doing for seniors and housing, but the unfortunate fact is just in our area alone, there are 300 applications of people on the wait-list for housing in the Central region.

I'm sorry, I don't buy it. I just don't buy it to have that many people in our region looking for housing or some sort of home supports that they can't get. Seniors doing the same thing, calling me to say: Can I get some housing? Can I get some help? Even if I can't get housing, some home support, extra hours, extra help in my own home that I can stay here. Can't even get that. It's just not there to get.

I know they're trying. They've said they've tried, but that's what we get out of this: We're trying. We're going to do. We will. What we have and what we've already done don't seem to be coming. What they've already done in our area – and I know that financially, money-wise, they're a bit tight. Yes, they are, I agree, 100 per cent. But we need some funding to help support those needs.

In Central Newfoundland, the unfortunate fact is when you see the Premier, and the Premier solely, spending \$250,000 on an office in Grand Falls-Windsor, when I just mentioned all those needs – not wants, they're needs. So when I just mentioned that, you could have took some of that money to help alleviate some of this pain. I don't buy it. I don't agree with it. I know the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune this morning got up here, but he agrees with the office, and that's fine. That's his prerogative. He

can agree with it and a couple of people that he talked to, they can agree with it as well.

But the people that I'm actually talking to, I tell you when they see that the Premier can spend \$250,000 on an office that's not needed, and when they're looking at all this that is needed, then I tell you there's more than a couple of people that don't agree with it. I'm getting this all around the region, and again I'll say, all our region in Central Health – that's Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, that's Baie Verte - Green Bay, that's Exploits, Grand Falls-Windsor, Fogo Island - Cape Freels, Gander – am I missing one?

AN HON. MEMBER: Twillingate.

P. FORSEY: Fogo - Twillingate, the Speaker's district. That's the Chair there now, Fogo - Twillingate. And Lewisporte - Twillingate, sorry. Fogo Island - Cape Freels is over there, our Minister of Fisheries.

But anyway, then the Premier can say that he needs a voice in Central Newfoundland. He needs a voice in Central Newfoundland. With five Members of his own caucus in Central Newfoundland and he needs a voice? The Premier said it, not me. The Premier said that. So if you can agree with the office being there and agree that he needs a voice there, hey, go ahead and agree with it. But those people that are on that list – if you're listening over there, Central Health contains Fogo Island - Cape Freels. That's part of Central Health. If you're in that one, you can have it. If you're not, you don't have to be there.

So anyway, when those needs that are there, and you fellows can supply an office like that, agree to an office like that, on \$250,000 that could have been spent on somebody to help with a little bit of health care, to help with some other ways, some other means of getting their stresses away, be able to find a pocket of money for them – not a pocket of money for the office in Grand Falls-Windsor that we really don't need. Find some pockets of money for those people. That's where we need the change.

And whatever you're doing there that you have done, will do, can do, let's get something done and help those people that really, really need it.

Let's get this budget changed; let's put something back for them. Take away the office in Grand Falls-Windsor and put it in this budget for those people.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, this PMR that was put forward by the MHA for Stephenville - Port au Port, it does talk about the cost of living. It talks about urging the government to provide some relief for escalating high prices which are leaving many people in dire straits – I'm quoting from the PMR – and they're asking for decisions such as lowering certain taxes, or offering home heating rebates; talks about the social determinants of health such as income. Income is very important and if the cost of living goes up, it does impact what you can spend your income on – food, medicine and housing.

It talks about these having an even greater impact on health outcomes in the health system. So it is very important and I am here and I know and my party, the NDP, knows that the people of the province do need help right now. A lot of this has been caused by the high prices of fuel at the pumps. Fuel for heating your house, for driving cars, for transportation, for airlines, for marine. When those costs went up, it impacted everything. It impacted the cost of the price of the food at the stores. It impacted your transportation. It impacted your ability to heat your house. It really is impacting everyone. When you talk about who is the greatest impacted, it is the people who are on fixed incomes like our seniors, our elders.

This is a big problem – low-income people, people on income support. The thing is there is only so much money to go around for a lot of people. It is all right if you have a high-paying job with a large disposable income, you can adjust. You might be inconvenienced. But what we are seeing now is people are making decisions. It was in the news about a lady having to use expired insulin – insulin that is critical to

her survival, her ability to live and her ability to be a healthy person. Those crises that people are facing that makes them actually have to face these decisions is concerning. So I do understand the rationale behind this PMR.

With us, we advocate for a living wage so the people can have some quality of life. And we also advocate for affordable daycare. We are so glad that the federal government now is stepping up so that families can afford to work and have a safe place, an affordable place that their children can be looked after.

We also talk about pay equity. That's been a huge topic in the House of Assembly. So when families are being faced with major decisions and if the family is made up of a male and a female, the decision doesn't have to be, well, the man is making more money so the woman will actually be the one to stay home. Because when people are making decisions about whether or not they're going to be able to afford insulin or have to use outdated insulin, they're not given much choice, there's not much flexibility there. So it's really important.

Of course, with me, my role as an MHA is to advocate for my people. I just want to say I have five minutes left, so I'm going to talk a little bit about the ability to actually have quality of life and the impacts of high costs have impacted my people for generations, not just this year, not just recently since the price of fuel has gone up, not since Russia has invaded Ukraine.

So one of my petitions is for affordable travel and I actually talked about that in the House of Assembly earlier today. And in this petition it talks about affordable travel, but down here it says the cost of air travel for residents living in Northern Labrador is grossly disproportionate to their available income, thereby restricting travel, increasing the cost of living and contributing to isolation.

So one of the things that we want is we want access to affordable travel, whether as a patient going out to a hospital visit or whether it's somebody who wants to go and visit their parent or loved one who is actually in the nursing home in Goose Bay.

Petition for fair electricity rates for Northern Labrador communities: Right now, we're paying 19 cents a kilowatt-hour over the 1,000-kilowatt life block. So no one on the North Coast can actually afford electric heat. People do have electric heat – not a lot of people – but really they can't afford it. They're sacrificing somewhere else, because we have that limited amount of income – 19 cents a kilowatt-hour.

I've talked about that in the House of Assembly where everybody was in uproar. Back last year we were paying 18.5 cents a kilowatt hour and the rest of the province, the highest they were paying was 12.2 cents a kilowatt, and everyone was so upset that because of the so-called Muskrat Falls might go up, didn't know how much it was going to go up to. But we were already there. We were already paying cost-prohibitive prices of being able to heat our homes. And who's impacted by that?

The thing about it is if you can't afford electric heat, what are your other options, to haul wood? Well, not everyone can haul wood on the North Coast of Labrador. First off, in Nain and Hopedale, you have to travel hours to actually be able to get the wood and then hours back. Well, what about our seniors, our elders? What about single parents? What about the physical ability, the strength? Unless you're a big strapping person, usually that's a male who can go in and haul and cut the wood and haul it out and put it aboard the Kamutik box and bring it all the way back to Nain or Hopedale, which is several hours.

If you have family supports, or you can pay somebody to actually haul the wood so you can heat your house, if you can do that, you still have to chop it up, you still have to bring it in. Even when it's in the house, you still have to physically put it in the stove. Do you know something? There are people that are impacted by health conditions, where they actually can't do that. What you're doing is you're taking away their independence.

Right now, we're all in a crisis again. The price of fuel has gone up. It's impacting everything. It's impacting the price at the stores. It's impacting your ability to drive. But on the North Coast of Labrador, that's our reality. That's been our reality since we joined Confederation.

One thing that really bothers me is there has been a lot of money made available that we should have been able to access. It goes back to where did that money go? It was stolen from us. There should actually be an inquiry as to what happened to the monies that were designated for the North Coast of Labrador, because we certainly didn't see it.

That's electricity. Let's look at Newfoundland and Labrador vacant housing. Housing is a huge crisis, because in Northern Labrador right now it costs \$250,000 for the building lot. Do you know something, too? The misinformation, the fallacy is that we are there with our hand out asking for a lot of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I talked about it in the past; we don't actually have, on the North Coast in my communities, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units.

But I do have to say in all fairness for this minister that's responsible for Housing; he's actually working to get something done. It may not be as fast as we want, there may be some delays, but I have to say, I went over across to his desk earlier today and I told him, I said I can't help but have respect for you, Minister, the Minister of CSSD who's responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, because, I tell you something, he actually is trying to get something done.

I would have liked to have seen him be the Minister of CSSD since this Liberal government got elected in 2015, because I think we probably wouldn't even have to have that inquiry that we're going to have now for the Innu children. I don't even think it would have went through all the things that the Child and Youth Advocate had to do on behalf of the Inuit children. Because if we had a minister over there that was actually working to solve problems, it may have made a difference, honestly. I'm not going to even bother to continue on with that one.

But what is impacting housing is the ability to get the materials up.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that her time has expired.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to stand in this hon. House today and as well to be part of this debate. It is also a pleasure to be here representing the beautiful District of Burin - Grand Bank.

Cost of living is an issue for all of us, Mr. Speaker. Some of the Members over on the other side are saying we're not hearing it, but we are. When we go to our districts, we hear it. We hear about the price of food, the price of gas and so on.

As a matter of fact, yesterday, I went into a local gas station on the Burin Peninsula, I happened to be out for a funeral of a friend of mine, and the boys were there chatting, as you do. As soon as I went in they said, there he is, give him the gears on the gas. I mean, that's the reality of it. We take it. It's having an impact on everyone. But we also have to realize that it's a global issue and that's hard to explain. It's a global issue. There's a crisis in Ukraine, and supply and demand for gas and oil is, certainly, at an all-time high.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the cost of living has also been a priority for this government. This government has done a lot, within their means, to address this issue. You have to acknowledge the fact that we are doing so – and I am not going to poke any fingers or try to get any brownie points for us over here or poke fun at you, but there is a \$500-million bill each year that we have to take care of.

I was really surprised with the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, in listening to his address to the House today. He always does an excellent job, but today he mentioned that he would take the \$67 million for jobs in the provincial government and pass that money out. I find that troubling, because we need those jobs filled and we need people working in them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. PIKE: We have done a lot with the Income Supplement, and we've done the Seniors' Benefit. We're helping 160,000 in the Income Supplement; 150,000 individuals and families and 50,000 seniors for the Seniors' Benefit. To me, that has gone a long way. As you say, when you go out to the district and you're listening to people, you'll get that feedback as well. So it's not all negative.

I wanted to touch on mental health, because we are doing a lot of work in that area through Bridging the Gap, 811 and in-person visits and so on through Doorways.

Back a few years ago, three years ago, there was a crisis in the District of Burin - Grand Bank. At that time, the Grand Bank mayor was on the airwaves and on TV talking about the fact that they had a number of suicides in their community. People were actually scared; the town didn't know where to turn. So from that, government was able to do pilot projects on the Burin Peninsula. I'm happy to say that on the Burin Peninsula now Doorways operates in St. Lawrence, Grand Bank, Burin-Marystown and down north in Placentia West. A wonderful program, walk-ins are welcome and it's open daily.

There are great things happening in the province. I just wanted to say that because if there are problems in your area, there are people out there and government support, as well, to establish these types of programs. Again, the 811, from people in my district, it's working. So I'm pleased to say that as well.

I had a number of topics that I wanted to talk about; one of them was Come Home Year. I think we all agree – or probably not – that Come Home Year is a great thing. For rural Newfoundland – my district is all rural – we are certainly looking forward to welcoming home people that haven't been able to get home in the last three years.

Towns are planning events; if you want to look at some examples of what's going on in the province, just look at my hometown, St. Lawrence, and look at what events they have planned. Ten days, with something every day. There's a town in my district as well, St. Bernard's, that want to put infrastructure in

place for Come Home Year, but this infrastructure will be there forever and a day. It's a campground, concert area, located on a pond, a beautiful thing. All part of us taking the initiative – and I mean us, both sides – to invite people home, to put money into these Come Home Year celebrations, to develop trails, to do all these things.

One of my favourite Come Home Year activities, and we have them in my hometown, every four to five years, is we close off the main street in town and we have a walkabout for a couple of hours every day. So no vehicles permitted, and the downtown area in St. Lawrence, people walk up and down, greeting each other. It's a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful event. You see people you haven't seen in years.

It certainly brings a lot of money into the province, but as well, in communities on the South Coast where my district is, the population doubles for that 10 days. It actually doubles. So the last Come Home Year, I think we went from 1,200 to 2,400 and what that did for local businesses was fantastic. And it will bring millions of dollars into our provincial economy, and also will help the local businesses.

The other item I just wanted to touch briefly on today was the sugar tax. Now, I know a lot of people disagree with that, but I agree with it. Personally, I am not saying I agree with it because you agree with it or you agree with it or you agree with it. I agree with it because I was an educator. I spent 41 years in education and I remember back 20 years ago in school cafeterias trying to bring in healthy food choices for menus and so on. It was a battle – it was a battle. But to try and get rid of french fries, french fries, french fries, french fries and sugar-enhanced drinks was something that was tough to do, but we did manage to do it. It took a year, but we did manage to do it.

AN HON. MEMBER: Without a tax.

P. PIKE: Oh yeah, without a tax. But I think – let me finish – that a tax will discourage people from buying sugary drinks because if you can get a non-sugary drink at a cheaper price. That's all. I see that as something very positive and I

think it is important to create a culture of healthy foods and so on.

I'll end by saying that from the sugar tax, if we are all hearing correctly, we're going to put that back into school programs, like the breakfast programs and so on. We are going to do that with it. Let me tell you, I was a volunteer in my community for years serving breakfast to children, and I tell you they come in, they're hungry and they want to eat.

Anyway my time is up.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Excited to be able, again, to have 10 minutes to speak on behalf of the residents of the District of Bonavista. I have a lot to pack in in 10 minutes, so I am going to speak as quickly and succinctly as I possibly could, and I know that may be new for me.

Stronger, smarter and more sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador – 100 per cent. I agree wholeheartedly. That is all our goal is to make that. I want to speak specifically to Bonavista, the District of Bonavista, but I want to follow up on a couple of comments that were made by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure when he spoke this morning. He had a good address this morning and he will have no problem that I would disagree with some of the things that he had stated.

Number one would be, as my colleague from Exploits has said, I strongly disagree with the Premier opening an office in Central Newfoundland for around a quarter of a million dollars, and I'm sure it's not only one year, it's probably three years. So while my colleague from Exploits says that we've got \$250,000. I would assume that this office is in place for 2025, which would be three years. Again, we're talking about \$1 million as opposed to \$250,000.

Another thing I would say with very little experience, if I read the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Assembly, number 8: “In performing their official duties, Members will apply public resources prudently and only for the purposes for which they are intended.” And number 10: “Members should have regard to the duty of public service employees to remain politically impartial while carrying out their duties.” Enough said on that office.

The hon. minister also said government is not taking doctors out of rural Newfoundland – not government’s fault. Let me give you an example and just see if you would see a point of view that might be, respectfully, other than that.

Bonavista hospital serves about 8,000 people. Quality of Care NL does statistics on health in Newfoundland and Labrador and it’s compiled and led under the mentorship and leadership of Dr. Pat Parfrey. So he compiles all this medical data. In that publication, it states that the regions with the highest proportions of persons greater than 65 years of age – one of the four mentioned is the Bonavista Peninsula. Those are the residents which I serve.

If I add another statistic on the hospital in Bonavista, because some of you may be thinking now, well, you can’t keep health care in areas that there’s no need, or there’s low population. Well, it serves 8,000 people. Of all the health care centres in Newfoundland and Labrador, the emergency in Bonavista saw 156 Level 1, Level 2 situations, which Level 1 would be resuscitation and Level 2 would be emergent. The highest number in health care centres. Now, keep in mind, not hospitals but health care centres. The amount of visitations to the emergency in health care centres was second only to Twillingate at 10,443.

When the minister says government does not take out doctors from rural Newfoundland, but let me tell you one stipulation that happened. They changed that hospital in Bonavista, with those statistics that are provided by Dr. Parfrey, they changed the emerg from a category A to a category B. You might say what difference does that make? The difference in the emergency room for an emergency physician would be a loss of 60 per cent of their wages in Bonavista

compared to neighbouring Clarenville or other A hospitals.

So if we realize the impact that making Bonavista which would be the indicators through Dr. Parfrey’s Quality of Care NL statistics, that made a significant difference to maintaining doctors in Bonavista, that one decision by government. Did it effect physicians in Bonavista? It sure did.

I would say, there are people in Bonavista looking and saying there are lens of which we make decisions and choices in our budget and in our government that sometimes does not always reflect rural Newfoundland well. It may be urban Newfoundland but it may not represent rural Newfoundland well.

An example, in 2019, the current government decided to close the Advanced Education, Skills and Labour office in Bonavista. Cost saving: they moved the employees to Clarenville, an hour and a half away. Statistics would show that the greatest number of residents visiting any AESL office in the province was in Bonavista. So we pulled the office out of Bonavista, we moved it to Clarenville, which would be a two hours and forty-five minutes round trip.

People cannot now access, because their goal was to do it via technology, move into technology, which is a noble pursuit, but many of these people don’t have technology. They need an office to visit. So what they do now, with space available at the College of North Atlantic in Bonavista, lots of available space which is already being covered by the government, we send down these workers now to Bonavista once every two weeks to serve the constituents of the office that closed up.

These are the decisions, I would think, that government has to be accountable for and what our job would be is to raise them in the House of Assembly in order to debate them and discuss them.

So two decisions that greatly affect the residents in the District of Bonavista, in an area where, once you leave the top of the district to the bottom of the district, the household income drops by 40 per cent. The people can least afford it. We’ve impacted and made two decisions that

greatly impact the residents of the District of Bonavista – two decisions. So when we say they're not causing the removal of doctors or impacting rural Newfoundland, then they certainly are.

Just to clue up in the last couple of minutes. For the thousands watching now in the District of Bonavista, they're going to look and they may have missed the late-night talk last night where I talked about the fishery. We had a good debate and a good discussion where we stated that if we only controlled the seal predation problem, we can grow the fishery, earn more money for government and be able to supply and give people a break and improve our bottom line. And I would think most people listened. I think all listened. But I think most people probably particularly tuned in that they may want to hear more or to explore more.

I just want to share with you some statistics from DFO that I didn't get to last night. In 1994, 4.8 million harp seals consumed approximately 1.1 million metric tons of capelin and 142,000 metric tons of Atlantic cod. Keep in mind, we're around 14,000 metric tons is what we harvest. Just think of that. But those were figures back in 1994.

The 2019 census says now there are 7.6 million harp seals, DFO states, and those numbers are estimated that they consume 1.7 million metric tons of capelin each year and 224,000 metric tons of cod. What a difference from 1994 to 2019. Think of the seven years of inaction, how much of marketable product that we didn't land in our plants that ought to have been landed. We ought to have been able to get some financial reprieve from it.

I look forward to my next speaking time, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Speaker.

I am going to stand and have a few words on this very important PMR here today just to raise the issue. There is a thing that is a bit concerning to me, and I have been around for a while with it, is that the Opposition and I am sure a couple of Members does it also – they may do it quietly, but the Opposition are here to raise issues. And the issues that are being raised are what they hear from their constituents to pass on.

What is concerning to me is that when the government changes the PMR, which will be approved because they have the majority, it's going to change it to reflect that we all support it after changing the PMR. So they don't want to hear it. The minister stood up and made some amendments and it goes "beyond those included" to "including but not limited to those." What the Opposition, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, put in there was "urge the government" and the government got substituted "support the government's efforts." They don't even want to hear it.

And when you do that kind of thing it is almost like saying, okay, let's just close her down. Everybody in this House has got to support what is happening. Why do you need to do that – why do you need to do that? The role of the Opposition is to bring up some very serious issues. Like, I know, myself – if there's no one in this House not hearing about the high cost of gas, oil, they are just living in a dream world. When you bring it up and when you got the cost of heating oil, then you've got the cost of food that has gone up, then you have got many other costs that's gone up to get it here – your medication and other things.

This is what this PMR was for: to have a debate and what else we can do as a government – as the Legislature. Not as a government. We are not government but, as the Legislature, what else can we do?

So instead of standing up and saying, okay, nothing we can do and here are the reasons why or, yes, there are things we can do, what suggestions do you have that we could bring forth to change the PMR to say we all support what government is doing – there is no one criticizing government saying that you're not in a tough bind – absolutely. I haven't heard that on this side. I haven't heard anyone from the

government side say that, but what we are saying is: Are there any other solutions to help people out in Newfoundland and Labrador? \

That is what you are asking. That is what this PMR is for: to have a debate on issues. Have debate on some issues that we're going to bring forth that are going to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what PMRs are for. There are some things that can be done. There are definitely some things that can be done. I know the minister's in a tough bind; I don't doubt that one bit.

But when we had COVID – and I'll just go back to the COVID days – and everything was uncertain, we always found funds that we could help out to keep things moving. Now, mainly because the war in Ukraine – and God bless the people in Ukraine – the price of oil has gone up which brings everything else up.

So if we're into extraordinary circumstances around the world, which is affecting Newfoundland and Labrador and which is affecting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, why can't we look at something extraordinary to help out the residents? We did it during COVID. The federal government did it on a regular basis. The provincial government did it on a regular basis.

So the question is: Why can't we have a healthy debate on that in this Legislature instead of trying to change it? Because if you think that people aren't affected by the gas prices, oil prices, food prices, medical, there is just something wrong. By not acknowledging that, there is a problem.

Rent is another thing. For example, there are people with low income who are in a rental unit who have to pay for the heat and light and rent has gone up, heat and light are going to go up. It is getting to a point of crisis; I'm serious. I'm not going to harp on government and say, b'ys, you have to do this and this, but I hear it on a regular basis.

We're fortunate. The people in this Legislature are fortunate. We do make a half-decent living and, over the years, some of us are a bit older, but we did find ways. I can say there are a lot of people struggling. There are a lot of people

struggling and that is what we have to recognize here. By changing the PMR to say that we support the government initiative, when in fact we're trying to give suggestions of what we can do.

We did it back in 2016, when we had a very drastic budget. I was part of it; I take ownership of it, no problem. But we found some way then to bring in funds that would help the low income; we did it then. I'm sure we could do more now. I'm sure we could do it now. We did it back in 2016, even with that drastic budget that we brought in. But we made sure that we took a certain amount of funds and that we put it to the low-income earners of the province, and seniors, of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have a lot more funds now than we had in 2016 to be able to do that. We do.

So this is the idea of the PMR, is that oil and gas and other things – I can see that there's going to be other speakers trying to get up also to speak on the PMR. What I'm going to do, I'm going to sit down and let one or two of the Members from the Opposition, where the PMR came from, so they can have time, to sit down and give them the courtesy of having a few words to support their own PMR.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in this House and represent the people of the beautiful District of Gander, as well as the Department and portfolio of Health and Community Services.

I think the issue of the cost of living has been addressed during Question Period, and on other occasions in budget debate thus far very ably by my colleague from the Department of Finance and President of Treasury Board. But I think it is only fair to say on record that there is significant investment in this budget and prior to the budget that addresses the issue of the cost of living.

Everyone naturally is exercised by the fluctuating price of gasoline. I think one of the things that is always difficult to convey, and

indeed I didn't understand it fully until a couple of years ago, is that oil prices and gasoline prices are not directly connected.

One is the raw material for the other, but the pricing of one doesn't rise and fall in concert with the price of oil. I think it's very difficult for people to kind of understand that, but the other piece around that is people feel that because we have our own oil field sitting off the coast, that somehow we should be in a better position. We do get significant revenues from that, and indeed have had even greater revenues, a fact I addressed in the scrum area earlier on today, and how they were spent or not spent over the course of previous years.

In terms of the oil and gasoline market, it's a global market. It's vertically integrated; the same people who own the wells actually own the oil refineries. Oil refineries are highly specialized and each requires a certain type of crude oil, and the products that they produce depend on the products that go in. So that is the disconnect.

The budget as presented and some initiatives of the five-point plan go some way to address the challenges over the short term and indeed the equivalent of the gasoline tax, the province levies, the provincial portion, has more than been repatriated through budget initiatives this year. The Minister of Finance has outlined those in some detail.

Challenges remain: food; my colleague to my left as well as the current incumbent in Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture have been great stimulators through their department of a homegrown agricultural industry. The land under cultivation here has doubled in a short period of time. It's on its way back to the heights that one would have seen 30 or 40 years ago. Certainly, that will make supply more reliable. Cost and quality will come along, too.

My own interest in the PMR was really around the concept of mental health that was raised in light of the strains and stresses of the cost of living. I think one of the things we have to be aware of is the language that we use in this House. There is a difference between mental health, as we understand it in the Department of Health, and mental wellness.

Mental wellness is something for all of us. Mental health is not necessarily a challenge for all of us. It is that wellness, it is that resilience; it's that ability to cope with day-to-day stresses that is baked in, to a large extent, to the DNA of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We always talk about how resilient we are as a province.

I think one of the challenges that we see in youth is – particularly with the advent of social media – that resilience is worn away. Parenting styles have changed; families are more nuclear, often single. There's no extended family to provide support for parents or children or grandchildren in the direct way that perhaps when I grew up, albeit in a different culture with a different heritage, the extended family was an integral part of that. That support is missing.

Because of that, we have to use other tools and we have worked very closely, for example, with the Department of Education. We have a transitioning youth group, by transitioning I mean from 16 to 25 in terms of age, that awkward time when you move from children to adult services, for example, should you require health care. We are working closely to try and get an integrated service delivery model for that.

Part of that will be about resilience. We have Roots of Empathy, which the department has funded for some years now, which is widespread in the school system. That is to teach empathy, it is also to provide children and youth with tools to combat the adverse effects of bullying, which has always been there. It was there in my day, it was just a little bit more in your face and a bit more physical. Now, it's on the phone and you can't escape it. It's an era that, in some respects, I'm grateful I don't have to parent through directly. It's a real challenge.

And so those elements of resilience and mental wellness have also received focus from the Department of Health and Community Services. They were highlighted in *Towards Recovery*. Given the fact that a lot of youth, particularly, and a lot of us, spend our lives on our phones, we have taken advice from experts such as New Zealand about electronic and virtual ways of providing wellness.

Indeed, I remember trying to promote here among my own colleagues a mindfulness app

that we purchased through the Department of Health, which is free to any Newfoundlander and Labradorian. It's a 30-day mindfulness challenge and it teaches things like relaxation, it teaches things like stress management, box breathing and all that kind of good stuff. You have an exercise a day. I remember doing it through the budget of 2016 or 2017, if I'm not mistaken, as we sat into the evenings. And it was really – I found – very helpful.

What we did was we've moved that into a suite and it's called Bridge the gapp. Those were app based when it was originally brought out. It's now web based through a portal. We have developed that way beyond its initial offerings. So there's a whole suite there, it has a child area, it's got a youth area, it's got an adult area and it's got ways to move further beyond that for virtual support and the like.

We had gone to New Zealand in 2015-2016 to see how they did it. Last year, in New Zealand they invited us to tell them how it was done. That's the progress we've made in virtual mental health in three years, Mr. Speaker. Not only did they invite my team to go to New Zealand, who went and presented; they came away with an international award from the eMental Health International Collaborative. A first for Canada, done by Newfoundland and Labrador in the field of mental wellness and step zero, step one of mental health.

I think this again shows the focus that was brought with the *Towards Recovery* report and then the 54-point action plan. I reference some of the actions around that in earlier questions around the adult mental health facility and these kind of things. There are no doubt challenges that remain.

But for the last little while I want to tie things together. We talk about mental health and wellness as if somehow it is separate. It is not. You go back to the days of Rome and Greece: *mens sana in corpore sano* is a Latin phrase, which is: a healthy mind in a healthy body.

We have long promoted physical activity. We have long promoted wellness. And we need that link to be re-established between physical well-being as a means to mental well-being, too.

Colleagues across the way have berated the sugar tax; you can get healthier drinks at a cheaper price and that will help you. It's a cost-of-living initiative in reverse. You get the cheaper drink, which is better for you, than the more expensive drink that is not.

I see my time winds down, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues here have known over the past and probably suffered, I can talk on these matters far longer than the 10 minutes allocated. It's a pleasure to get up and show what we have done with mental wellness, not just mental health, and also to use this opportunity to congratulate the director of mental health and addictions in the department for winning an international award, the first in Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to say, do you know what? People watching at home, they see us back and forth sort of thing. I'd like to say, there's no ill will in this House towards anybody at all. In fact, we do work together sometimes. There's not a person over on that side that I wouldn't sit down and have a beer with any day of the week, and many Members I have and I enjoyed it and I enjoyed our conversation.

When my colleague from Port au Port stood up earlier and talked about the \$67 million that is set aside each year trying to fill positions, do you know what? We hope those positions get filled that need to get filled. But if we take 25 per cent of that money – just 25 per cent by my calculations – and we put that back into some sort of a home heating rebate, that would give 17,000 families \$1,000 each to help with their home heating over the winter. And I guarantee you that 25 per cent and more will be there in the next budget. So it can be done. I love my job, but the one thing I hate about my job and being a politician is the politics. I really do hate it sometimes. I know a lot of people hate it here as well.

There's not a minister over there that doesn't work hard; I know that they do. There's not a

Member over here that doesn't work hard; I know all of us work as hard as we possibly can. I get that. But I sit back and I think to myself, the people at home that watch us every single day, that follow it in the media, want to give you a scenario. What if the Minister of Finance said this afternoon we are going to amend this budget? Because 17,000 families that could get \$1,000 each over a year for their home heating rebate, that's a fantastic idea. We are going to amend our budget and we're going to ensure that those 17,000 families get that \$1,000 home heating rebate. That would show the people of the province that we worked together and they would be shocked, but they would be happy, I guarantee you.

I don't see any reason why we can't do that. Why the government can't say that's a fantastic idea, let's do that; let's try that this year, because I guarantee you that money will be there again next year.

The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, today, he talked about when he went down to his district and he talked to some people that are A-okay; they're doing fine. In Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, I have people that are A-okay, doing fine. I don't talk to them; they don't talk to me. They're okay. Everybody here have those people in their districts, too.

On International Firefighters' Day – I'll use a firefighter as an example – you never see a firefighter going into a house that's not on fire, doesn't have any smoke, because there's no reason for them to be there. So we're not running towards people that A-okay, they're doing fine, their everyday life is hunky-dory sort of thing. Just as a firefighter would run towards smoke and fire, politicians should be running towards where the most help is needed at the time. The pictures, the photographs, the ribbon cuttings, you know what? I get it; it's all part of it probably. But how Preston Parady sat on a stretcher for nine days in Grand Falls-Windsor hospital and then sat out to the Health Sciences for another 14 days without any help, and he's been in the media for the past month, not a minister, not a Premier, nobody reached out to that young man to say we're doing the best that we can. Our thoughts are with you; maybe I'll even come down and visit you.

I talk to the man every second day. Now, I know there are time constraints and stuff like that; I get it. But maybe we need to start running towards the smoke and fire a little bit more as politicians, not away from it, because that seems to be the way it is sometimes, and it's not good enough.

Again, we all have people in our districts that are doing A-okay. We don't hear from those people and I am glad. The more of those people that I have in my district the happier I would be because I know they are happy as well. But we have got to start running towards the smoke and the fire because that is where we are needed. We are not needed for the photo ops. We are not needed for the ribbon cuttings, and I get it. And you know what? If we sit over there one day, I'll be doing it too, but you've got to pick up the slack on the other end as well, and that is what we are asking for.

The Member for Burin - Grand Bank, first of all, I want to thank him for his 41 years in the education system. Thank you very much, Sir. That is absolutely amazing. That deserves a round of applause, definitely.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: He talked about 811 and Doorways, of course, for mental health. Fantastic programs and they have helped a lot of people in my district as well and I thank those people who work in those programs. Unfortunately, those are for emergencies, unless they are going to go to the ER or they are for the one-time visit. The follow-ups are what we are talking about.

So, unfortunately, a lot of people who are using these systems and these programs, the follow-ups can be two years out. That's not good enough because, of course, your mental health can absolutely nosedive within two years, or a year or a month or sort of thing.

It is definitely something that needs to be addressed. The one-time visit it is great and we want to save as many lives as we possibly can but as the cost of living rises, the mental illness will rise with it as well and that is exactly what we are talking about.

I know that the fiscal restraints are in place and I get it. It's not an easy job for anybody here. Do you know what? I empathize with the ministers and trying to do their job. I really, really do, but at the end of the day when the Member for Port au Port raises this number and gives an awesome, fantastic idea, I would expect the Minister of Finance to at least dig into her department and say: Can this be done? Can we take 25 per cent of this money, this slush fund or whatever anybody wants to call it – I heard that term thrown around today – can we take 25 per cent of that, re-evaluate it back into the budget and give 17,000 families that truly need it in this province a home heating rebate? I think it can be done and if can't be done, then maybe the Minister of Finance can come back and say, I am sorry it can't be done but we looked into the department and we tried.

I think it is ideas like that that we need to start including and if we show the people of the province that we can work together, especially with things like this, my God, they would be shocked. But it would be a start and it would be a great start.

My colleague from Exploits spoke a little while ago about the Premier's office. Are we done in five seconds?

AN HON. MEMBER: No, just keep going.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

You are going to give back some of your time?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

SPEAKER: Okay.

C. TIBBS: Two minutes.

Talked about the Premier's office. Listen guys, I think that we all do the best job that we possibly can. I'm going to call it for like it is. A lot of people throughout our districts think it's two things: It's myself and the Member for Exploits is there, and now we have a Conservative MP there as well. You know what? We can do a great job out there. We've been doing a great job. I know the Member for Exploits is doing a great job. I try to do the best job I can as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: So we get together, we do these jobs. At any given time, the Premier can reach out to me. He truly can. He has my phone number. If he reached out to me, I know that we can work together. I truly believe that we can. I would love to work with the government to get as many things for my district as I possibly can and I know they're needed here.

I'll just touch on one more thing: the amendment. The amendment is to support instead of urge. There are some thing there we support. When you register your car, they cut that in half \$180 to \$90, fantastic.

AN HON. MEMBER: Motor vehicle registration.

C. TIBBS: Sorry, motor vehicle registration, thank you. They cut that in half. Fantastic idea, it's going to help a lot of people, and we're really happy about that. But what we are urging are things like, one again the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port said, to get out there, to look for more money to be allocated in different areas, which will really help the people of the province. Because this budget does little to nothing to really help the people of the province. Remember, the people of the province have to live with this for another year. There are people in this province that can't go on for another month and they have to swallow this for another year.

I'm not saying it's all bad because it's not, but if we could work together and this is just one small example of what possibly can be done. Well, you know what? I think we could show the people of the province that we are here to work together, because these are unprecedented times of people hurting and people suffering. We need to work together and we need to come up with new ideas.

I commend the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port for bringing it up today, and I thank him very much. I truly hope that the Minister of Finance goes back to her department and says this can be done. They can take all the credit; I don't care about that. But if we can do that, I think it will be a great time for the people of the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll close out the debate. I want to thank everybody for their comments today. I do want to make reference to some comments by my colleague from Burin - Grand Bank when it comes to the public service. I spent more than 30 years working in the public service. I have a great appreciation for the hard work that people in the public service do. When we talk about the fact that there's \$67 million not spent last year, and \$63 million not spent the year before and \$50 million not spent the year before in terms of recruitment, then that is a concern. That is a concern as to why people do not want to join the public service.

I will certainly have more questions for the Minister of Finance as to how she plans on spending that \$67 million this year, because I truly believe that will not be spent and there are opportunities there to use that money in a purpose that will help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I also want to talk about the amendment. So the amendment that has been put forward – I understand it's government's right to amend this PMR and, in some ways, it's good. I'm not opposed to this amendment. Because I want to read you out some of the things with the new amended PMR.

It now says: WHEREAS the cost-of-living crisis that is making life unbearable for countless Newfoundland and Labrador individuals and families is worsening by the day, to such a degree that it requires urgent relief measures. So the Members on that side of the House agree with the Members on this side of the House. That is good to see and I am pleased to see that.

And it goes on to say: including but not limited to those in the government's 2022 budget plan. That gives me a sense that perhaps there is more to come. That gives me a great anticipation that there's more to come. That's what it says right

here in your amended PMR and I look forward to it.

And then it goes on: And WHEREAS during this Mental Health Week we must recognize that the cost-of-living crisis is causing stress, anxiety and mental health issues for many people, and action must be taken with greater urgency to ensure people get financial relief as well as improved access to the long-term mental health care they need without enduring excessive wait times.

I want to thank the Member opposite for this amendment, because that's exactly what we've been asking for. That's exactly what we've been talking about. So I'm glad to see that you, on that side of the House, agree with us on this side of the House.

And finally: BE IT RESOLVED that this House continue to support the government's efforts. We have always supported the government's efforts; we will continue to support the government's efforts when they are good, when they do the right things.

However, let's keep going. These are your words.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. WAKEHAM: To continue to support the government's efforts to provide immediate – highlight that word – relief measures, including but not limited to – again, what an outcome today. To hear the government opposite say that their measures that they have in the current budget are not limited to – there is more to come and so there is hope in this Chamber this evening that there is more measures – we're not limited to what's in the budget. There is more to come.

I want to make sure that I get his title right, let me see if I can find him. The hon. Member for Corner Brook – the hon. Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, so now we can take his words he said on *Open Line* the other day and say: everything is on the table. Everything is on the table and now we have the PMR that government amended that says not

limited to what's in the budget. I am so delighted to hear that because that, at the end of the day, gives us some idea that there will be more to come: Including financial relief along with measures to improve access to mental health care.

We couldn't have written it better. Thank you that we now have hope. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador have hope that government has recognized that more needs to be done; that by supporting and amending this PMR, you have given the people of Newfoundland and Labrador hope that there is more to come; that you indeed are listening; that you will do something so that we're not going to be known as having the highest fuel prices in North America or the highest home heating fuel prices in North America. You are going to do something else.

Before this budget gets passed, let us make that happen. You have the power to do it. The people in Newfoundland and Labrador are waiting anxiously for things to happen. So let's all agree: measures in the 2022 budget but not limited to. There is more to come. So let's hope. Let's all have hope that you live up to the words, to the written word that you put forward today; as you put it forward, bring it home.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: *CHANGE is in the air.*

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: *CHANGE is in the air.*

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: You are going to change your budget to reflect the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. *CHANGE is in the air.* Amen, brother.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Amen to that.

On that note, I will sit down.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

All those in favour of the amendment, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The amendment is carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

SPEAKER: All those in favour of the amended resolution, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, resolution, as amended, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, to the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port for his arousing speech this afternoon. I'm sure we will hear more about today's PMR.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now recess until 5:30 p.m.

SPEAKER: This House do stand recessed until 5:30 p.m. this evening.