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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin, I'd like to welcome in our public gallery, Mr. Chris Gardner and his father, Ben. Chris is the subject of a Member's statement this afternoon.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize a lady in my district that's celebrating her 105th birthday today.

Ms. Victoria Compton, who resides at the long-term care facility in Lewisporte.

Happy birthday, Ms. Compton.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Conception Bay South, Lake Melville, Placentia West - Bellevue, Torngat Mountains and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I want to congratulate the Goose-Happy Valley Kinettes Club that next week, on May 28, will celebrate 50 years of service to the community.

As part of Kin Canada, which recently marked 100 years, the Kinettes are a non-profit group that promotes community service, fellowship, positive values and national pride. Memberships is open to all persons regardless of race, colour or creed.

The local club has responded to a myriad of causes, both at the national level, such as cystic fibrosis, through to numerous individual appeals

for financial, physical, and/or emotional support and assistance.

On behalf of the 50th General Assembly, I extend heartfelt appreciation for a half-century of amazing service. As a long-time resident of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, I would also like to personally thank you for so much of what you do that happens below the public radar. I have come to know your organization as a place where things happen and as an important centre of service in our community.

Often the situations are difficult, time and resources are limited; however, the Kinettes step up constantly and dependably. I believe that your club is a special leader in your district and in the country.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge two Grade 12 students of Queen Elizabeth Regional High School in Conception Bay South: Kaitlyn Grandy and Stephanie Evans.

In 2018, as Grade 8 students at Frank Roberts Junior High, they were lead students of the Raven KASTER mini-boat project sponsored by teachers Mr. Thomas Sheppard and Ms. Shawna Walsh.

On November 8, 2018, the Raven KASTER mini-boat was launched off the Grand Banks. After 102 days in the North Atlantic Ocean, it landed in Achill Island, Western Ireland on February 18, 2019.

These two students have captured a global audience and the attention of His Excellency, Ambassador of Ireland, Eamonn McKee, where he met with Kaitlyn and Stephanie at a special luncheon in CBS on Tuesday, May 17, to hear their inspiring story and to learn more about the mini-boat's future relaunch plans set for 2023.

The mini-boat project has inspired many young people to learn more about science and technology, ocean currents, climate change and the ocean environment.

Conception Bay South is very proud of Kaitlyn and Stephanie and I wish them great success in their 2023 journey to Ireland as they relaunch the Raven KASTER. I look forward to following their adventure on educationpassages.org.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this hon. Chamber today to recognize two youth delegates from the 50th session of the Newfoundland and Labrador Youth Parliament, Mr. Jimmy Bonnell and Ms. Rachel Hawco, both from the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue. This was their first time attending this conference and both Jimmy and Rachel had a very successful and enjoyable experience.

Jimmy is a student at Memorial University and also our constituency assistant for the District of Placentia West - Bellevue. Jimmy won the Rookie of the Year at this year's conference.

Rachel is also student at Memorial University and has been elected by the NL Youth Parliament delegates to serve as the leader of the Official Opposition for the 51st session of the Newfoundland and Labrador Youth Parliament. It is great to see so many youth interested and involved with politics in our beautiful province.

I ask all hon. Members to join myself and the entire District of Placentia West - Bellevue in congratulating Jimmy and Rachel on a successful Newfoundland and Labrador Youth Parliament and wishing them all the best in their future endeavours.

Thank you Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Jim Lyall was the first president of Nunatsiavut. He later served as Nain's ordinary member in the Nunatsiavut Assembly until his death May 13, 2022.

Born in Nutak, Labrador, Jim and his family were forced to relocate south to Nain in 1956 at the age of 11 years.

Jim attended residential school and his early experience with forced resettlement gave him the personal knowledge and perspective that helped him become a tremendous advocate and leader for his people.

Jim's early years were working with the provincial government stores, a prestigious job reserved for outsiders and educated people.

In 1977, Jim started down another path as the executive director of the Labrador Inuit Association. Although he left in 1981 to work with Canada Post, he remained a tremendous advocate. He was a Justice of the Peace and a community leader. In 1998, he was appointed to the North Coast Transportation Committee.

In 2002, he returned as executive director of the Labrador Inuit Association serving until land claims were ratified in December 2005. Remaining with Nunatsiavut, Jim worked as budget analyst. He also served on the Minister's Advisory Committee on Labrador Transportation.

He has left a national legacy of passionate leadership.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Later this month, Chris Gardner will receive his Bachelor of Arts in history and political science

at Memorial University's spring convocation – a dream he never believed was an option for him. He loved academia but struggled academically and was years behind when he graduated high school.

For 31½ years, Chris worked with Memorial's cleaning services. In 1991, personal events inspired him to work up the courage to follow his dream. He availed of a program offered by Memorial allowing employees to take one course per term as part of a mandate to broaden a person's knowledge.

Chris began with foundation courses and was diagnosed with a learning disability – a revelation that hit home about what held him back. The diagnosis demonstrated his limitations and strengths, making him a better student. Teachers saw his potential and he took advantage of accommodations offered him.

Chris's struggle with mental health forced him to skip several semesters. Still, he persevered. When asked why, Chris said: "It was about personal fulfilment. A person climbs a mountain because it's there." Next on Chris's list: visiting Bonn, Beethoven's birthplace.

Please join me in congratulating Chris on his accomplishment and wishing him well in his future endeavours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Speaker, it is an honour for me today to recognize an educator, a historian and a friend.

Patricia Way is a distinguished Labradorian. She has made it her life's work to help people and communities learn and understand the branches that make up their family tree. If you wanted to know about your family history, you went to Patty.

Patty Way has spent literally thousands of hours pouring over historical records, journals, reading church documents and talking to people about their family connections.

It has been through her abiding devotion that she has pieced together the roots that run deep in Labrador and shared what she has learned through articles, presentations and kitchen table chats.

In recognition of her research in unravelling and honouring the stories of Labrador and its people over the past 50 years, Memorial University conferred upon Patty Way an honorary doctorate of laws during convocation ceremonies that took place this morning in Corner Brook.

Today is truly a special and proud moment for Patty and indeed for all of Labrador. I am so filled with pride myself, Speaker, as I reflect upon my time sitting around board tables with Patty as we discussed the great issues of the day. I thank this tremendously proud Labradorian for the mentorship that she has provided to me and many others.

I ask my hon. colleagues to join me in extending congratulations to Dr. Patty Way. Enjoy, my friend. This recognition is so well deserved.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Speaker, I join with the minister in recognizing educator and historian Patty Way. She was born in Labrador and has been a significant educator and historian for more than 50 years, establishing the groundwork for comprehensive genealogies for many in Southern, Central and Northern Labrador; her lifetime dedicated to unravelling and honouring the stories of the Labrador people.

Patricia – Patty – Way received the degree of doctor of laws from Memorial University this morning. The Official Opposition wishes to

congratulate Patty Way, now Dr. Patty Way, on a lifetime of dedication to the people of Labrador. Congratulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

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

Our sincere congratulations and thanks to Dr. Patty Way for her contributions to our Labrador regions over the last 50 years. I can tell you, your dedication as educator and historian is admired throughout Labrador's vast regions. Your honorary doctorate is truly deserved. Your kindness and generosity of your time to collect family stories and history over such a vast period is something to be respected and admired.

Thank you very much.

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.

Speaker, media has indicated that a report involving a statutory Officer of the House of Assembly is out there.

Will the Premier join our call for transparency on this report?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Again, this question is out of line. It's not to fall within the competence of the Executive Branch.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: One media outlet is reporting the province is working on a way to avoid being penalized for reducing the gas tax. For months, we, on this side of the House, have been calling on the Liberals to do something about the rising cost of gasoline at \$2.30 a litre. People are suffering.

Is the price of gasoline finally high enough for the Premier to take action?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As we've said many times in this House, we are always looking at creative ways to help address the cost of living, some of which were addressed in the \$142 million that was announced earlier this year, and we're always talking with our federal partners about how to further advance other initiatives to look after Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

We recognize the price of gas is high. We recognize the stress and strain that that is playing on collectively everybody in this House and who we represent. We are trying our best, within the fiscal envelope of this province and the fiscal challenges that we face, to address them responsibly, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

We all realize that people do need some action immediately.

Premier, a simple yes or no: Did the prime minister give the Premier permission to lower the taxes on gasoline for the province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As we suggested yesterday, this is an active discussion with respect to the flexibility and the

gas tax. We continue to have discussions and I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that discussions like this, with collaborations, have led to good results for the people of the province in the past. I'm confident that they will further lead to better results going forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Again, we'll reiterate: Action is needed now, immediately.

Why is it that the Premier found money for NASCAR to open a political office in Central Newfoundland, to support a royal visit, yet he has not found money to lower fuel prices for the people of this province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As we've already suggested, we're continuing to look at ways to be creative in helping us address the cost of living. I would suggest that those are solid investments, Mr. Speaker. NASCAR happens to be in the Member opposite's district; the office in Grand Falls-Windsor happens to be in a different district. We recognize the importance of those districts and the people in those districts, and we want to support their voices moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

This is not outside the realm of normal investments of any government, Mr. Speaker. What the Minister of Finance has done in the past, being creative in looking at the \$142 million on top of the \$500 million that we pay for rate mitigation, are yet further examples of how we're moving forward with a creative plan. Once again, we understand and appreciate the stress and strain on all families of the province, and will continue to work on their behalf.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

If you want to listen to the voices of the people, listen to their needs right now. Do something that offsets the cost of living for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Unlike the Liberals, we have listened to the people. We have heard their stories, and we will continue to bring attention to how the soaring price of food and fuel has impacted people's ability to provide for their families. The Premier must take action in this province to lower the cost of fuel.

Yes or no, will the Premier finally bring an end to the soaring gasoline prices?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

As the Member opposite knows, the price of fuel is not exclusively controlled by the provincial government, Mr. Speaker. This is a problem being tackled by every jurisdiction in the world, Mr. Speaker. The president of the United States is struggling with levers to reduce the price of fuel. It's not unique to us; there are externalities beyond our control.

We are doing what we can, and we're continuing to look at levers that we can pull, realizing that it won't fully address the price of fuel, Mr. Speaker. That is largely controlled by externalities beyond our control, including, unfortunately, a significant war in Europe right now. We can't control that, or the supply chains associated with it, nor can we control the externalities of the push and pull of inflation, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, you better soon pull a lever, because people can't handle much more in this province.

Speaker, we finally saw the minister's long-awaited roads plan on Monday, which continues the Liberal pork-barrelling of pavement. If you exclude highway work and bridges, some 85 per cent of the minister's plan will be in Liberal districts.

Speaker, when will this government truly take the politics out of paving?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An important question, but I'll say to the Member across that in Liberal districts there are seniors and there are buses that carry children. So I make no apologies for investments in what he perceives as Liberal districts.

This year we did due diligence in terms of the roads plan. We struck a balance, where there is a need for bridgework in this province. We're doing it, through the advice of engineers that are in the department. We're considering climate change, which is a very important aspect of it as well.

So we feel that we struck a good balance, and I believe it is a good balance.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I remind the minister Opposition districts have seniors and children as well, so I guess they're not as important as them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Fair point?

AN HON. MEMBER: We also have bridges.

B. PETTEN: We also have bridges, yeah, of course.

Speaker, I'll say no more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: Thank you.

The minister talks about not making apologies and performing his due diligence.

But why is Terra Nova Road, the CAA Atlantic rated worst road in Canada, omitted from this plan? I assume because it's represented by a PC Member.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't govern by CAA. If you want to talk about politics I'll go back a few years. When you guys were in government leading into 2015, you spent \$458,000 out in Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. Going into the election, you spent \$5.8 million. You want to talk about politics, that's politics right there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, I live in the present, not in the past. And I wasn't the minister in 2015.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. PETTEN: It wasn't me, Mr. Speaker. I encourage government to get new material, because some of their old material is getting old. Muskrat Falls and what we done. Get on with (inaudible). It's 2022 and it's time to answer questions related to 2022.

Speaker, a senior in my district who is also a four-time cancer survivor had recently discontinued therapy for a skin condition because he couldn't afford it. The senior is on a fixed income and is struggling with a high cost of living.

This gentleman said – and I quote – on behalf of all seniors on fixed incomes and the unfortunate people who require ongoing medical treatment, please do something about this.

I ask the minister: What will you do?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We certainly hear the same kind of calls in our constituency offices as the Members opposite. There is a variety of assistance plans through the NLPDP, one of which is the Assurance Plan, which is designed to deal with expensive medications and is based on someone's income. It is simply a matter of them making the appropriate application.

If the Member opposite has details, I would be happy to look into it for him and steer them in the right direction.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I know of lots of people who have made those applications and have been denied for different reasons. You really have to take a passionate look at some of these individual situations, because not everybody fits in the same box.

Speaker, there was a senior recently reached out to me and said: We soon cannot afford to drive to Corner Brook to see our grandchildren. Gas taxes have to go.

I ask the minister: What do you say to that senior? What help can you offer that senior so they will continue to be able to go see their grandchildren and others who are struggling with the high cost of gasoline?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

Indeed, we want their grandparents to see their grandchildren. Of course, we do. We understand how difficult this situation is about the global increases in the price of fuel.

I will say to the Member opposite, as I have said before, that is why we, in the budget, did \$142 million to put money back in the people's pocket. We are continuing to look at what we are going to be able to do as we move forward to relieve some of the pressures that people are feeling because of the cost of living.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, our office received an email from an individual who stated: I cannot afford to keep oil in the furnace anymore. I have already borrowed \$500 from friends to keep enough oil in my tank to try and stay warm. I am embarrassed to ask them for more money and I do not qualify for any government programs.

I ask the minister the same question this person asked us: Can you please do something to help?

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

S. COADY: Absolutely, Speaker, these are difficult times; we recognize that. That is why we increased the Income Supplement. That is why we increased the Seniors' Benefit, but I would suggest the Member opposite reach out to my colleague, the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development. It sounds like that family needs help.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

These people have been reaching out, but unfortunately they haven't been heard.

Speaker, the minister has heard story after story from this side, from the PC caucus over the last three weeks talking about people in our districts who have been significantly impacted by the high cost of living.

I ask the minister: Can you give us an example of a story from a constituent in your district about their difficulties with the cost of living?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

These are indeed difficult times. We all recognize that. I can tell you that colleagues across the country and various governments across the country have tried to help their constituents as well. We have provided \$142 million in relief this spring. I can tell you that compares with, in Nova Scotia, \$13 million.

We have stepped forward, we have returned the entire amount that we collect in provincial gas tax back to the people of the province and I have said, and the Premier said repeatedly, we're going to try and do more. We're very focused on trying to do more.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the people of the province desperately need the governments help now. Please do something now.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, two forest fires in the District of Harbour Main, one in Brigus and one in Harbour Main, had forest fires in their district. I have spoken to fire chiefs and town officials from the district. They are concerned that there were serious response time delays from both forestry firefighters and from water bombers.

I ask the minister: Why did it take so long for provincial firefighting support to arrive?

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

D. BRAGG: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess it is unfortunate that forest fire season came earlier – it is getting earlier, it seems like,

every year. I'm not aware of any delay in the response time. I do know there were personnel on the ground, I do know there was a water bomber dispatched to the area and I know it was extinguished in a relatively quick time. It was two very close together. I think one was in Harbour Main area and the other one was in Brigus area.

I like to thank the crews that came out, everyone came home that went out for that response that day and I think that is very important to remember, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Yes, the local fire departments were amazing with respect to the work they did. But in Brigus, there response time for the water bomber was approximately one hour and 20 minutes; in Harbour Main, one hour and a half. So, Mr. Speaker, I have also been told by a local official that there was a breakdown in communication. I was told that by the time the water bomber showed up, the local area fire departments had the fire under control.

Can the minister please update the people: What is being done to improve forest fire response times?

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

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I think the times, if you look at where the water bombers are located and the time response to get there and to get staff – I mean everybody is waiting – 90 minutes is not unreasonable. It is great – I really appreciate the help of the volunteer fire departments. They help so many times, because most times these fires start with the careless use of a grass fire. That's usually what starts most of our – and it is in a municipality, so the first response would be the fire department and I can't thank these guys enough for that.

Our people come in. We have the resources. We have great staff throughout the province. We probably have 30 or 40 different positions that we're in throughout the province. We have a forest fire crew that's ready, trained and able to come. We actually get responses to go outside the province so we have a great staff for this.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully disagree that those response times are adequate, especially when they pose serious safety risks to the public. It is my understanding that there is not a full complement of forestry firefighters on the Avalon.

Can the minister responsible for Forestry outline how many firefighters are currently not on the job?

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

D. BRAGG: Obviously, Speaker, I do not have these numbers at my fingertips, but I do know that we are staffed up; we are ready throughout this province. If there's anything, any shortage anywhere, my staff would bring that to my attention.

We actively recruit. We have an ongoing training program so that we meet and exceed national standards for our firefighters. So I'm very proud of the team we have out there committed to forest fires.

Again, I thank the volunteer fire departments for their response because, of course, the best response is having no response with no fire. But when there is, it's great to know that the volunteer firefighters are there. They are actively on the scene. Sometimes we're located an hour from the fire so it would take us at least an hour to get there, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, tomorrow marks the first long weekend of the summer and the official kickoff to the camping season. A quick check reveals availability in many provincial parks and Terra Nova National Park is mostly empty.

Is the minister cognizant that skyrocketing gas prices is the reason for this situation?

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

S. COADY: Thank you.

I'm pleased to inform the Member that I understand that renovations are under way in Terra Nova National Park, and that they are actively trying to get a lot of their lots open so that people can enjoy their summers. I understand in provincial parks – I think they will really be well visited this summer.

I wish everyone a happy and enjoyable first long weekend of summer. I know that we're all excited about that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: The bookings don't indicate that it's going to be a good summer on the camping season.

Speaker, one avid camper told me a return trip from St. John's to Terra Nova with his trailer in tow would be over \$300 just in gas.

While the Premier had stated a little earlier to a question, the price of fuel is not exclusively controlled by our government, this \$300 cost, cost \$83 in taxes. He and a lot more, it seems, have decided to stay home – this camper.

Again, I ask the minister: Will Come Home Year mean stay home year?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not often do I get an opportunity to field a question on Come Home Year, but I certainly would like to take advantage because, given where I live, it is the gateway to Newfoundland with Marine Atlantic.

What I can say to the Member is that we all feel these concerns, as it relates to gas prices, but when it comes to bookings right now, I can tell you that Marine Atlantic has surpassed the number of bookings that they had in 2019. That number has gone up. That bodes well for this province, all these people coming in, in their vehicles.

I can also say that the numbers at Burgeo Sandbanks Provincial Park have also surpassed the numbers from last summer. I would extend an invitation to all Members of the House to come to Burgeo Sandbanks Park this summer.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

This morning the Atlantic Provinces Trucking Association spoke out about the high cost of diesel and said that the costs will have to be pushed on the customers.

Why has the minister responsible for customer protection ignored the people's concerns about skyrocketing prices of food and other goods?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

We certainly regulate the transportation industry and we recognize the concerns of the trucking industry and the high price of gas. It's very unfortunate; it does have a significant impact on

the cost of goods. We know the price of gas is extremely high.

I was very pleased this past week, we had third reading of the *Petroleum Products Act*, which increases transparency of the Public Utilities Board, so that we'll better understand things like how they use the interruption formula. I'm going to be directing the Public Utilities Board on that shortly, as soon as we get Royal Assent on the bill. I look forward to making those reports and information public.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

That report is going to be done in six months' time; people need help today, not later. They need it today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: As fuel prices rise, so, too, will the cost of food. Food is up 9 per cent since last year. A package of bacon costs \$9 in Labrador West. One green pepper is \$3 in Gander.

Why has the minister allowed residents of this province to suffer with high food prices?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess what I can speak to is, in our consumer protection legislation, we do have rules around unconscionable acts. So we do get price gouging complaints to our department. Anyone who thinks that they've been price gouged is welcome to make a complaint to our office and we'll do an investigation.

It is difficult because the price of everything is going up, the price of gas and everything is going up globally. This isn't a Newfoundland and Labrador problem. In our budget, we did

have \$140 million support for people and we are looking to see what else we could do.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: It may not be just a Newfoundland and Labrador problem, but that's what we're worried about mostly here today.

Speaker, a woman in my district featured on the front page of *The Telegram* is unsure if she can afford to travel to St. John's for specialized appointments. While she may get reimbursed from the Medical Transportation Assistance Program, she will still be out thousands of dollars to receive the health care that she truly needs.

I ask the minister: Why is this Liberal government making people choose between urgent medical appointments and being able to afford to survive?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Again, we recognize that these are challenging times, and the Minister of Finance has referenced the \$142 million we've put back in people's pockets, in addition to the ability to avoid doubling your electricity rates.

With specifics to the Medical Transportation Assistance Program, Mr. Speaker, we have made significant changes to that prior to Christmas –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HAGGIE: – with removing of deductibles and increasing the flexibility about people's stay and their meal allowance and such. I am pleased to report to the House that this is an active discussion as we are looking at ways to improve that program yet further. I hope to be able to

bring something back for public consumption in the not-too-distant future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: We've heard the \$142 million, and it's appreciated, it is a step in the right direction, but obviously as you can tell from the stories, it doesn't go far enough and that's what we're asking for right now.

A small business owner in my district told me that because of the high price of gas people are not driving or spending the little bit of money that they have left. As a result, their business is suffering. She has \$25 left in her bank account to buy food.

What does the minister say to the small business owners who may have to give up on their livelihood or any future small business owners that wish to start a small business here in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Indeed, as I said, these are very difficult times, globally. I know that small business owners have worked very, very hard in their businesses; I was one of them. I can appreciate that these are difficult times for them. But we are in a situation in Newfoundland and Labrador where our retail sales are up – up over inflation, up over last year, doing better. So, hopefully, the products and services that the Member opposite refers to, the small business, is getting some of that increased activity in our economy.

In addition to that, our restaurants are booming and are back to 2019 levels, Speaker. So the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador, while there are difficult times, the economy is improving.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: What they're taking out of people is going to be more than \$142 million.

Mr. Speaker, a constituent from my district reached out to my office stating that they were recently scheduled for a medical procedure in St. John's, only to travel 400 kilometres and be told that their appointment had been cancelled because there was no bed available and to go home and reschedule the appointment. Mr. Speaker, this is simply not good enough with gas at \$2 per litre.

How does government expect this individual to be able to afford to travel back to St. John's for a rescheduled appointment?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We know, as with other jurisdictions, that COVID has produced an increase in backlogs and an increase in wait times. We have, through good management of COVID, managed to reduce that as far as is practicable for cancer surgeries, urgencies, radiation, chemotherapy and those kinds of things.

We know that this still remains a challenge. Last week we announced an initiative with the Ottawa Heart Institute, which will significantly improve the availability of cardiac care at home and elsewhere.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HAGGIE: We have also today announced a further initiative which will increase access to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HAGGIE: – hip and joint replacements, possibly one of the largest numerical problems in the province.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I see my –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: He wasn't lying when he said he could go on and on, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, a constituent of mine recently moved from the G. B. Cross Memorial Hospital in Clarendville to a long-term care facility in Bonavista. Due to an outbreak and lack of staff in Bonavista, the move was delayed.

Once he made it to the long-term care facility, he received a bill from Eastern Health for almost \$900. Speaker, the man had a feeding tube and was still being medically treated.

I ask the minister: Is this Liberal government now charging patients for feeding tubes?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

There is a copay required for long-term care, depending on the income of the individual concerned. This has been in place for many years, and in actual fact I think was instituted originally under a previous Conservative government.

In terms of payment, once alternate level of care has been introduced for an individual in an acute care facility, there is a small per diem which is actually less than that copay.

Obviously, if there are issues of financial hardship, there is an exemption policy. I would urge the Member opposite to supply my department with details should he feel that's the case.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: The patient was still under care, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday I heard from a small business operator in my district who said, quote: I had an employee call me to say that due to steep rising costs of fuel he will no longer be able to pay for heat, groceries and personal items, such as insurance and fuel. He then told me that the man was crying on the phone saying he doesn't know what to do anymore.

I ask the minister: How do small businesses with modest incomes stay in business today with the astronomical rising cost of fuel and goods?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to answer this question from the Member. Small business is something that we're always concerned with. Again, we've had some challenging years over the last couple of years when we deal with COVID. What I will say is that during that time we have gone out of our way using funding to try to help businesses get through the challenges that we all face.

I believe we put in well over \$20 million to \$30 million as it related to small business supports and did so in a very quick turnaround time. So what I would say is that we're always willing to work with businesses on innovative options and solutions, and we acknowledge the challenges that small business faces right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

This Liberal government talks about climate change but has no solid plan to deal with the current realities putting the future of workers and communities at risk. We have roads and

homes about to wash away here on the Island, loss of sea ice in our North affecting the way of life for Indigenous communities and stronger and more frequent storms hitting our shores.

I ask the Premier: Why has he chosen to bury his head in the sand rather than plan for the fast-approaching future and take action to provide a plan for all residents of this province?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. It is very important.

Obviously, we all in this House share the same concerns about climate change. We understand that. That is why we put in place the Climate Change Action Plan.

We have moved on all 45 recommendations of that plan. We haven't got them all completed. I think we have some 70 per cent of them completed and some of the others are in various stages of completion.

Obviously, we're working on trying to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We have developed, in this budget alone, two initiatives: one from oil to electric and EV support program, rebate program. Those are things that we are working on. There is going to be more to come.

We look forward to supporting the House for any initiatives that we do look forward for with respect to climate change initiatives. It is an important issue for not just this province, the globe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, residents of Northern Labrador are already impacted by climate change. The loss of sea ice and snow cover are robbing us of our ability to hunt, fish and travel.

I ask the Premier: How does his government plan to mitigate these impacts to the people in the communities that are impacted?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. I know that we have spoken in the House on many occasions about this very issue. Climate change is negatively impacting the north of – not just our province but in Canada, more negatively than other parts of the province. We see this; we understand the impacts of it. That's why we're sitting here today debating issues about climate change and talking about it. That's the first step.

I think the action that we're doing now is a good first step. There is much more that has to be done. We're committed as a government to do what we can. We have established the Net-Zero Advisory Council that's going to bring forward fantastic ideas from around the world. We'll look at ways we can either foundationally improve on our aspects or look at aspects that we haven't done for the future to make those climate change initiatives happen.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Climate change in Northern Labrador serves as an early warning for the rest of our province.

Will the Premier come with me to my district so he can see and hear the accounts first-hand of the people that are impacted in my communities?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the invitation. I look forward to visiting her district with her on a regular occasion.

In all seriousness, it is really, really important for us to have this conversation. Many departments across government – I think some

11 departments – are working on climate change initiatives as we speak, which is important. I know the Minister of IET is working very hard with SmartICE and technology firms that are going to help provide the best, advanced information to those experiencing changes in the North through their patterns.

We want to make sure we're working with the leadership of our Indigenous organizations and governments to find solutions that we can find as fast as we possibly can, because we understand how important it is.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: I'd remind the minister to save some breath for my question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: In yesterday's debate on our PMR, there was no shortage of acknowledgment of the impact of climate change on our province. Even the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture today acknowledged that forest fire season is getting earlier and earlier.

I ask the Minister of Environment and Climate Change if his department has done a risk assessment of projected – or project the costs of the financial impact of climate change on public infrastructure and private property?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for another great climate change question.

One of the things that I would talk about is revisionist history, but we all talked in this House about supporting a just transition, looking at ways we can support our communities. Many of the things that we have, whether it be coastal erosion or changes in making sure our

infrastructure fits the changing needs of climate change: those are all things we're working on.

Flood risk mapping is one of the key things that we're looking at. We've invested \$1.2 million in this budget, shared with the federal government. There is going to be more coming for that. Every community needs that information to make decisions based on the availability of infrastructure to protect that infrastructure, both municipalities and residential.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

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

SPEAKER: Further 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. I appreciate the acknowledgement.

The background for this petition is as follows: With the rising cost of fuel and having a dramatic effect on our truck drivers in our province, drivers are finding it increasingly difficult to pay their bills, maintain their machines and pay for ever-increasing fuel costs. This means that for many 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 so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that depend on it daily.

This is several times I've introduced this, but I keep getting calls on it every day, Speaker. This one here for more people in different parts of my district, and another district actually, from Parker's Cove and from – this one's from St. Bernard's-Jacques Fontaine, so it affects us all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's hard to hear the Member speak.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you Speaker.

I'll conclude with saying I'm getting these calls daily. Like I said, truck drivers are at a point now, as we can see with some of the bigger operations, their costs – are better off not making any money and parking their trucks as opposed to fueling them up and not realizing any profit margins.

So we really have to step up and help the people that kept our economy going. These are the essential workers that we touted for two years and now that they need us, we can't turn our backs on them, Speaker. I think we really need to step up and help out everybody in the province with the rising cost of fuel.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Residents on Route 350, 351A and 352 in the Exploits District are concerned about the road conditions on these routes causing safety issues and damages to vehicles.

We, the undersigned, urge the government to immediately have roadwork contracted to upgrade and improve road conditions on these routes.

Mr. Speaker, I've had three meetings with three different ministers on these routes three years past and we haven't had any new pavement or anything on those routes. I've mentioned to the current minister on different occasions of these routes. We have buses, we have pedestrians and we have people walking there, some leading to communities.

The roads are in real poor condition, Mr. Speaker, and we'd like to have some upgrades; we'd like to have some new pavement there. But for this year we'd also like to see some faster improvements in regard to the upgrades of the roads and getting them fixed up.

According to the roads plan this year we're left out again, so at least get the roads fixed up as soon as they can, so we can ensure some safety on those roadways, Mr. Speaker. So we'd like to see that addressed right away.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows: The Witless Bay Line is a significant piece of infrastructure. Whereas many commute outside the Avalon on a daily basis for work, as well, commercial, residential and tourism growth in the region has increased the volume of traffic on this highway.

Therefore we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to upgrade this significant piece of infrastructure to enhance and improve the flow of traffic to and from the Trans-Canada Highway.

Speaker, I presented this petition on numerous occasions. The condition of the Witless Bay Line is really bad; there's a section of eight or 10 kilometres – we did have one side done two years ago of four kilometres, and probably eight or nine years ago on the other side another three or four kilometres done. But there's a section in the middle of that that's really bad. It's used for transportation during this time of the year for crab plants and truckers trucking crab across Witless Bay Line to go from all the communities along the Ferryland District, to go to all the processing plants to truck the crab away.

I get a lot of calls on the conditions of the roads. This time of the year, campers now, instead of going along the Witless Bay Line on the May 24 weekend, most of those people will drive out to Bay Bulls and go out around the Trans-Canada instead of taking the Witless Bay Line. It's too hard on their equipment. Also gets mentioned motorcyclists, the same thing. They're zigzagging around portions of the road and big potholes there, so they haven't got a chance on a motorcycle. They hit one pothole they're done.

I've also had constituents call me that they've lost two tires, a rim and a tire both on the same side. Struck a pothole, no chance to get away from it. It's just something that needs to be looked at; it needs to be fixed, so hopefully the minister can see it in his roads plan for next year to be able to get done.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

With the release of the Atlantic Seal Science Task Team report and the significance of the commercial harvest to the fishers and plant workers in the District of Bonavista, we feel that the seal population is far greater than the ecosystem can sustain. As a result, the large

population is certainly preventing the rebuilding of our valuable groundfish stock and the very significant landed value of our commercial harvest.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately address the seal population by taking proactive measures on fulfilling our current provincial quota of seals and enhancing the markets of seal products within our province and other jurisdictions. Action is long overdue.

The report of the team was supposed to be one year but it took over two years to complete. A well-known seal researcher in the province had stated where is our provincial government on this long-term unaddressed issue? Well, I know that if you checked under the department's seal science or seal industry website, you would find that there has not been a news release under seals since 2015. So when this person asked what has our government done in relation to the seals and the inordinate number of seals, then all you need to do is look at the government web page under sealing and find there are no news releases. If there are no news releases, chances are there is not much happening with the seal situation in our ecosystem.

I went through Estimates and the only section in the Estimates under the FFA was section 2.1.06. 2.1.06 is the Seal Product Inventory Financing. I'd like to inform all the people who are viewing this afternoon that in the budget there is zero dollars in that section for anything to do with the seal product inventory.

I stated last time and to conclude, the report states that the diet and the consumption by harp seals in 2014 was estimated at 3.2-million metric tons, and in that same year, 2014, we harvested 256,000. The reality being we have one aspect of our fishery that is viable, that is the snow crab. We know that with the stomachs released that they do eat snow crab too.

Thank you, Minister.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Children, Seniors and Social Development:

WHEREAS section 4 of the *Seniors Advocate Act* provides that on resolution of the House of Assembly, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council shall appoint a Seniors' Advocate;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Susan Walsh be appointed as the Seniors' Advocate.

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker.

It is both my honour and my pleasure to recommend Susan Walsh as the next Seniors' Advocate.

AN HON. MEMBER: An excellent choice.

J. ABBOTT: I agree.

Susan Walsh began her career in 1991 as a social worker in mental health services at the Waterford Hospital working with seniors, people with disabilities and the community at large. She progressed through front-line management, policy analysis, program development, project management, director/senior management and executive positions in the public sector.

Susan Walsh held these progressive leadership roles within the former Department of Social Services; Eastern Regional Health Authority; Department of Health and Community Services, where I first met Susan; the former Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. She has worked in the Cabinet Secretariat; on the Core Mandate Office of Executive Council. She has

worked with the Labour Relations Agency; Municipal Affairs Fire and Emergency Services; and currently as the deputy minister of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development since January of 2019.

Susan has held firm to her social work roots and the importance of community and is a registered social worker with the College of Social Workers in the province. Susan Walsh holds a Master of Social Work degree, specializing in policy and administration, from the University of Toronto, and has a Bachelor of Social Work degree from our Memorial University. Susan is married and has two young adult children who are completing post-secondary studies.

Speaker, and hon. Members, I have known Susan Walsh since 2004; she is highly regarded within her profession, within the public service and within the political leadership here, in government, on both sides of the House. It is, I think, to our credit that Susan put her name forward for this position and I know she will excel in it. But more importantly, she will work fully and absolutely in the interests of seniors of this province – obviously – for which the Advocate is responsible. So I will be looking forward to working with her, should this resolution pass.

Speaker, I move, now, seconded by the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, that the resolution respecting the appointment of the Seniors' Advocate be amended as follows: By adding immediately after the last recital the following: AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the said appointment be effective June 15, 2022.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

This House is going recess to review the proposed amendment.

Recess

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

Order, please!

After review of the proposed amendment, I do find that the amendment is in order. We will now debate the amendment.

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I now ask that the Members consider the resolution.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

It is the pleasure of the Official Opposition caucus to support this resolution to appoint Susan Walsh as Newfoundland and Labrador's Seniors' Advocate.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the great work our former Seniors' Advocate, Dr. Suzanne Brake, has done. This is a resolution a long time coming, and we are looking forward to Ms. Walsh starting in her new role right away so the important work of this statutory office can proceed in the best interests of the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The purpose and function of the Seniors' Advocate is laid out in the *Seniors Advocate Act*, section 3, which reads as follows: "The Office of the Seniors' Advocate is established to (a) identify, review and analyze systemic issues related to seniors;(b) work collaboratively with seniors' organizations, service providers and others to identify and address systemic issues related to seniors; and (c) make recommendations to government and government agencies respecting changes to improve seniors' services."

The statutory office of the House of Assembly was established and the first Seniors' Advocate, Dr. Suzanne Brake, was appointed in November of 2017. As the statutory office, this office shares the standing of the other statutory offices of the House of Assembly: the Auditor General, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Citizens' Representative, the Information and Privacy

Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

Statutory offices are established by statute law and report to the people's House of Assembly through the Speaker. They are independent of the Executive Branch of government and are not directed by Cabinet ministers. In fact, they can function in an oversight capacity to review the work of Cabinet and the actions and decisions of government departments.

They serve in watchdog roles as well to safeguard the public interests and to bring accountability. This is why they are vitally important and should never be impeded from carrying out their vital functions. Having a trusted leader at the helm of each of these offices is paramount.

It is imperative that the seniors in this province have an Advocate whose sole responsibility is to be their voice and their champion vis-à-vis the system. We are overjoyed to see someone of the caliber of Susan Walsh step forward to serve in this capacity. She is someone who knows the system intricately and will have no learning curve.

She has held firm to her social work roots and the importance of community and is a registered social worker with the College of Social Workers in the province. Ms. Walsh holds a Master of Social Work degree, specializing in policy and administration from the University of Toronto and a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Memorial University.

She has worked under governments of various stripes, leaders and approaches. She has seen it all and it was my honour to go through Estimates three times with her with the Department of CSSD, and now she is bringing her insights and formidable expertise to a brand new role which will free her to investigate, report and recommend changes that will light a fire under whichever government happens to be in place during her term.

The act provides for a term of six years, followed by the option of reappointment for

another six years for a maximum of 12 years. Terms of this length provide stability to give the Seniors' Advocate the ability to monitor things over a long period of time and follow through on recommendations to ensure they are implemented properly and deliver positive outcomes.

With the Health Accord just reporting with far-reaching recommendations impacting seniors, it is vital that the Seniors' Advocate be instrumental in monitoring the implementation of the accord's recommendations to ensure seniors are well served.

None in our society rely on the health system more than seniors, so they have a vested interest in ensuring change happens properly. Seniors are not just our great-grandparents, grandparents, moms and dads, they are also all of us on a path to becoming seniors, if we are fortunate enough to see our golden years. Even our youngest children are on that path. It is incumbent on us as a society to change the way we view aging and seniors so we become more understanding of the changing needs of people as they age. So we approach their care with compassion and so we always respect a senior's need to be in control of their lives to the greatest extent possible.

Autonomy is about basic human dignity, and seniors, informed by lifetimes of lived experience, are usually the best ones to be able to make choices with the wisdom and knowledge that experience brings. Our society should honour our seniors and treat their needs with the utmost concern. We need to learn from cultures that respect the importance of honouring the community elders, particularly the Indigenous communities of Newfoundland and Labrador. We need to be humble enough to acknowledge that as a society we do not always get it right. Our policies sometimes leave a lot to be desired. We need to be told how to do things better and we need to listen and act accordingly.

So we all trust that our new Seniors' Advocate will give us hard lessons in what is being done wrong and needs to be improved. We don't just nod our heads, we truly listen and we act and we take the concerns of Newfoundland and Labrador seniors seriously.

Good luck, Ms. Walsh; may you spare no effort in holding our feet to the fire.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, does the amendment carry?

The hon. the Member for Torn gat Mountains.

L. EVANS: We, the Third Party, also support this appointment of Susan Walsh to the role as Seniors' Advocate. We do agree that she brings a vast knowledge and experience with her previous role in CSSD. We think that she'll have no trouble transitioning to the role as Seniors' Advocate.

The role of Seniors' Advocate is actually very, very important. They are tasked with being able to bring a delicate balance to advocacy and protection, advancing seniors' rights and quality of life in the province. So, we, the Third Party support this appointment.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Any further speakers?

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I am going to move on to the next one on the Order Paper, but I wanted to chime my voice in with what's already been said here today and send a bouquet up in the gallery to Susan Walsh.

For 3½ years I had the tremendous privilege of working very closely with this lady. I can tell you that she is a hard worker; I would put her work ethic next to anyone that I have worked with in government. She is capable, she is competent; she was an instrument of change in many of the challenges that we dealt with, in particular in child welfare and she stood out and did very, very well. I have no doubt that she is going to do a great job as the Seniors' Advocate.

Seniors are something that are very near and dear to my heart. Most know my story; my

grandparents were already raising nine children when they took me in and finished raising me from four years old onward. I have much love and respect for seniors.

On behalf of all Members of the Legislature, we wish you very well in what will be a challenging portfolio but I'm sure rewarding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

We haven't voted on the amendment.

Seeing no other speakers, I call for the question.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The amendment is carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any speakers to the main motion?

Seeing no speakers, shall the amended motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Getting ahead of myself, Speaker. It's been a long week.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 3, Bill 61.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Fishery, Forestry and Aquaculture, that Bill 61, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third time.

Seeing no other speakers, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act. (Bill 61)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Forestry Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 61)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 12, second reading of Bill 62.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, that Bill 62, An Act To Amend The Child and Youth Advocate Act, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 62 – sorry, we don't need a seconder; we already started debate on that bill.

Any speakers to the bill?

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the work of the Child and Youth Advocate is extremely important to the children and youth of our province. I will preamble my comments directly relating to the bill in identifying some of the Advocate's recommendations to the department. This clearly identifies the importance of the Child and Youth Advocate and my direct comments will follow, pertaining to the bill.

It is very important that the social well-being of children and efforts to combat poverty be a priority. Today, with escalating food prices, and more and more children facing challenges, it is important for the government to pay attention to all recommendations of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. In addition to the recommendations already implemented, the recommendations partially implemented should be completed, and the government must also move forward to finalize the recommendations that have not yet been implemented at all.

Out-of-community placements for children in Labrador is a topic that has great impact on children and families. Has the department considered all options pertaining to placing children outside the community and ensuring full consultation with each child's family and Advocate and, secondly, with the Nunatsiavut Government? Has the audit been finalized pertaining to all out-of-community placements?

The Child and Youth Advocate stresses the importance of following through on these recommendations and we must recognize the importance of all recommendations coming from the statutory officer filling this crucial position.

Speaker, with the minister, the safe placement of Indigenous children is critical. The Child and Youth Advocate emphasizes the importance of safe-placement options for Indigenous children and youth. A visitation centre, emergency placements, a parent-coaching centre, a healing facility, a transition home placement centre for children and parents, these are vitally important. We need to be certain the minister appreciates the importance of each of these centres and can explain what is being done to ensure the centres are improving the lives of children. All this work must be a top priority of the government.

Since COVID struck, and now because of global inflation, the cost of goods and services in Labrador is escalating. It is extremely important that the government review and increase the financial supports to Indigenous children, families and caregivers. The people of Labrador are seeing higher prices than elsewhere so the urgency is greater and needed immediately.

It's important that we continue to hear from the Child and Youth Advocate and just as important for the government to implement all measures recommended.

The incorporation of gender-neutral language is also important. I am pleased to see the amendment in the act.

The Advocate is an officer of this House. The Independent Appointments Commission identifies the person they believe is most capable of filling the role and the House of Assembly makes the decision based on merit. The term of office of six years is reasonable and reappointing for another additional six years is also reasonable, on the condition that the office is performing its duties as outlined in its mandate. To date, the Advocate's office has been doing stellar work. We have every confidence this will continue.

I see no issue with the Management Commission approving a person in an acting position; however, I believe it is important there be a timeline agreed to appoint a permanent Advocate. This is not to say the person performing the role in an acting capacity is not

the best person for the job or the most qualified, but it is a matter of transparency.

If an Advocate resigns, retires or passes away, the Management Commission will ensure the work of this office is not interrupted by immediately appointing an acting Advocate. However, a reasonable time frame to fill the person permanently should be identified in the act. As the Official Opposition, we support this bill and look forward to continuing the work of this crucial office.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any other speakers to the bill?

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Yes, Speaker, just a few thoughts on the amendment. It's very straightforward. It allows for the extension of the interim appointment, allowing the interim Advocate to remain in place until a permanent Advocate can be secured.

However, sometimes, as was mentioned by my hon. colleague, it's not the best solution, but we do have to find balance. I think maybe, to help out further thought should be put into the recruitment process. Advocates, like the Seniors' Advocate and the Child and Youth Advocate, play critical roles in our province.

It's understandable the position of the Child and Youth Advocate demands a person of high qualifications and experience to take it on and have much knowledge of the files they'll be dealing with. So time needs to be taken to secure such a qualified person. So we do understand that.

Having the interim Advocate sit until a permanent one can be secured is the best solution, so therefore we support this amendment as well.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers if the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development speaks now, we will close debate.

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to conclude the debate on this bill. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue and from the Member for Torngat Mountains.

I agree with their comments. This is a very important office and one that has a high respect, certainly of this House and the community and the province at large. So it's incumbent upon us to make sure we get – quote, unquote – the right person in this position. And we're going through that process and I'm very confident that when we come back next session that we will be in a position to bring a name forward.

In the meantime, I just want to assure the House and the province that the office is working through the acting Advocate. Their work continues, the reports are still being prepared and it will be filed. My department in particular is working on the recommendations from the former Advocate – plural – and we're making significant progress on those recommendations. We have people assigned specifically to address those recommendations to ensure that they are addressed and implemented as soon as we can.

When it comes to the issue around the relationship my department has and the Advocate has with the Indigenous communities, that's working very well and there's definitely a very high degree of mutual respect, both at the political level and at the professional level. And as a result we're seeing significant improvements in the care arrangements for Indigenous children, particularly in Labrador.

So, Speaker, I will conclude on that and I look forward to support of the bill.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 62 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Child And Youth Advocate Act. (Bill 62)

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

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

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Child And Youth Advocate Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole presently, by leave. (Bill 62)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister for Children, Seniors and Social Development, that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 62.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 62, An Act To Amend The Child And Youth Advocate Act.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The Child And Youth Advocate Act.” (Bill 62)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

It is good to be able to stand in Committee to speak to Bill 62. I would say to the minister to pass along our thanks to your staff for the technical briefing that we attended.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: You’re only as good as the staff around you, so I can tell you that.

Mr. Chair, we do support the bill; however, we do have a couple of questions. The first one is: How does a timeline to approve the appointment of the acting Child and Youth Advocate compare to that of other acting statutory Officers, for example, the acting Seniors’ Advocate or AG?

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Chair.

I don’t know if I can give a retrospective in terms of what the experience has been in recent years. I know, right now, having the acting Advocate in place since the retirement of the

former Advocate has worked well, and we’re looking at now, roughly, a five-month period of acting. The Seniors’ Advocate office actually doesn’t have an acting Seniors’ Advocate at the moment, but the work is being done at the staff level. So they’re the only two that I can speak to at present.

Obviously, you’d like to limit that acting period as short as possible but we think it is, given the nature of the position, making sure we get the right skill set and the right person in place: that’s why it has taken the time it has.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

You answered my second question, so I will move on to my third one.

Ms. Gray was appointed as the Child and Youth Advocate on January 14 of this year. Is there any date for a permanent Advocate to be appointed, and where in the Independent Appointments Commission process is this file?

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

J. ABBOTT: I know the recruitment process is going along quite well and there has been a fair bit of interest in the position, as I have been told. It will be up to the Cabinet, in due course, to review any of the recommendations from the Independent Appointments Commission and we, collectively, are not ready for this session but working on the premise that we will be ready for the next session.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

I, too, on behalf of the Official Opposition, would like to thank our former Child and Youth Advocates, Carol Chafe, Jacqueline Lake Kavanagh and wish Ms. Karen Gray all success in this office.

The question I have is around confidentiality. When a client signs a confidentiality agreement

with the Child and Youth Advocate, if that office is then vacated, can the confidentiality agreement be parlayed into the next Advocate or does a new confidentiality agreement have to be signed?

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, thank you.

The legislation speaks to both the confidentiality and privacy of the office of any of the files. So they would remain within the office. But anybody leaving the office is held to their oath and to the legislation not to reveal anything that they have learned, obviously, in the office.

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

J. DWYER: So just for clarity, one Advocate can utilize a confidentiality to the next incoming?

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

J. ABBOTT: I think that is fair to say, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: And my last question on this is: Will the interim Advocate have to prepare an annual report?

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

J. ABBOTT: Under the *Transparency and Accountability Act* that office would prepare their annual report. At the same time – but I don't know this for certain – I understand she would be working on particular reviews of files and investigations and then would report out. If that work is not completed, then the new Advocate would pick up that work from there.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Any further questions?

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 28 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 28 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 28 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Child And Youth Advocate Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 62.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 62.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

B. WARR: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 62 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed him to report Bill 62 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time.

L. DEMPSTER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

SPEAKER: Motion carried.

The House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on May 30. I wish everyone a safe and enjoyable long weekend.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Monday, May 30, at 1:30 p.m.