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*Speaker: Honourable Wade Verge, MHA*

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The House met at 2:00 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Verge):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I would like to welcome to the public gallery today Ms Nellie Burke, daughter of Eva Blake. Ms Blake is being mentioned in a member's statement today by the Member for Bonavista North. Ms Burke is here with some friends and family, Smita Joshi and Linda Crocker.

Welcome to the House of Assembly.

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

### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today we will hear members' statements from members representing the Districts of Conception Bay South, Carbonear – Harbour Grace, Bonavista North, Port au Port, Labrador West, and Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. HILLIER:** Mr. Speaker, many of our communities has people or groups who are stewards of our environment. Today I stand in this hon. House to recognize a group in the District of Conception Bay South that goes by the acronym, KEEP. The Kelligrews Ecological Enhancement Program is a volunteer group of citizens who are concerned for the protection, conservation, and enhancement of the flora and fauna of Farrell's Grove, Kelligrews Pond and River, Gully Pond and River, and the Kelligrews wetlands, forests, and beaches.

Founded in 1999 by my good friend, the late Neil Tilley, KEEP has been a leader in environmental advocacy and education in our town. KEEP has spearheaded the development of boardwalks, rest areas, and an outdoor classroom around Kelligrews Pond. They have also developed several field guides that provide young students of our Province with visuals and practical information to identify common flora and fauna near and on our rivers, streams, coastlines, and wetlands.

KEEP also monitors the ever encroaching urban sprawl and subsequent industrialization that

threaten the ecology of the two river systems which are their primary focus.

Please join me in recognizing the work of the Kelligrews Ecological Enhancement Program and all those who work to maintain the pristine condition of our Province.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

**MR. SLADE:** Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate Shalyn Case, who is graduating from Carbonear Collegiate with a perfect attendance record having not missed a single day of school since she started kindergarten thirteen years ago.

After completing Grade 5 at Davis Elementary School, Shalyn was awarded a medal for her perfect attendance from kindergarten to 5. It was then she committed to keeping that record intact until completion of high school. She has succeeded. That means 2,535 straight school days in attendance.

Perfect attendance for a single year is nothing new – there are even students who can string together a couple of years, but to do it for thirteen years is nothing short of phenomenal.

Shalyn has also proven her determination and commitment with 589 Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron, where she has not missed a training night, parade night, or outing.

Shalyn is planning to continue her studies at the College of the North Atlantic, where she is determined to continue her perfect attendance discipline.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Shalyn on her perfect K to 12 attendance, and wish her the very best in her post-secondary studies.

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

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

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

**MR. CROSS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are all familiar with the jingle, “We Hope You Live to be 100.” Tomorrow, Thursday, June 18, 2015, Eva Blake, born Eva King at Victoria Cove in Gander Bay will receive Happy Birthday to you for the 100<sup>th</sup> time.

A great-great-great grandmother, Eva Blake, while raising seven children through a century of wars, depressions, confederation, rising and falling of iron curtains and the dawn of all our current technologies, has maintained a very positive attitude and a zest for life.

Eva also strongly focused on education for her family; viewing it as the means to escape poverty. She is admired by all who know her, and has been photographed in the *Guinness Book of Records* in recognition of her mother.

Local people remember Eva, a lady of monologues, filled with energy, excitement, and passion for family, for church for community. She possessed a great industrious spirit bottling preserves, raising animals, growing vegetables, and selling door-to-door mail-order products to provide for her family’s every necessity and comfort. She sewed, baked, hooked, knitted and entertained for family and for the community at large.

Eva Blake looked not for recognition, nor accolades; she did what she did because it was right and of necessity.

Let us stand, Mr. Speaker, to honour her for her milestone. Happy Birthday, Eva. We are glad you reached 100, and tomorrow you are the honorary queen of Bonavista North.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

**MR. CORNET:** I rise today in this House to congratulate Jillian Forsey of Kippens for being named the 2014 Provincial Senior Female Athlete of the Year by Sport Newfoundland and Labrador.

Earlier this month, Jillian was the youngest competitor at the annual Portland Track Festival in Portland, Oregon. She placed thirteenth in her event and this result moved her into ninth in Canada at the 5,000-metre distance.

In addition, Jillian Forsey was the first woman from Newfoundland and Labrador to be chosen to race at the International Association of Athletics Federations World Track and Field event, which was held in Oregon in July of 2014.

On her quest for the Worlds, Jillian ran the 8 kilometre senior race at the National Cross Country Championships, where she placed sixth out of sixty-four.

At the North American, Central American, and Caribbean Cross Country Championships, she placed second, helping her team win a gold medal.

Mr. Speaker, Jillian Forsey is an exceptional athlete and student with a tremendous work ethic. She is an honours student at the University of West Virginia.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Jillian for her successes and to wish her the very best with her athletic and academic pursuits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

**MR. MCGRATH:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On February 21, 2015 Shelley Kelly, the 911 dispatcher for Labrador West, received a call from Brandie Crant who was at her cabin with her son Max and husband Terry.

Brandie had stated that Max and Terry had passed out and they were all feeling sick. Immediately Shelley recognized symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and instructed Brandie to get some fresh air into the cabin.

For seventeen minutes Shelley talked to Brandie until she finally broke open the patio door letting fresh air into the cabin. Brandie managed to drag her husband and then returned again a second time for her nine-year-old son to the door so they could breathe fresh air. Shelley remained on the phone with Brandie until the first responders arrived at the cabin thirty-eight minutes later.

On June 11, 2015 Brandie and Shelley were both honoured by St. John Ambulance at a ceremony here in St. John's. Brandie received the Gold Life-Saving Award, risking your own life to save a life of another, for saving herself and her family. Shelley received a Provincial Certificate of Commendation for her role as dispatcher.

If not for the heroic efforts of both these individuals, this story would have a much different and sadder impact.

I ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing these heroic ladies.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

**MS MICHAEL:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

All of us here in the House know what an impact an extraordinary teacher can have on a young life.

Today, I rise to honour Margaret Rowe, who has been a music and band teacher for thirty incredible years. Margaret has spent her last five years at Bishop Field Elementary and her work, according to all hands, has been exemplary.

She has taught hundreds of Grade 5s and 6s to read, play, and love music. Her final concert had 200 Grade 5s and 6s from four schools perform together in an amazing harmony.

School staff were kind enough to share with me some comments her students made about Margaret, or Ms Rowe as they call her.

“She is so encouraging, the best of the best,” said one. Others said, “She told me I could do it, and I did.” “She is so patient and one of a kind.” “She doesn’t give up on you,” and – my favourite, as a musician myself – “Music without Ms Rowe would B flat.”

With that little touch of music humour from a student, I ask all hon. members to join me in wishing Margaret Rowe a wonderful retirement.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

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

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

**MR. KING:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last summer while on patrol along the shorelines of the Merasheen Islands and the Burin Peninsula, several Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Officers came across a dilapidated monument in the resettled community of Little Bona. Upon closer examination, the officers discovered that the monument was in commemoration of Private Michael John White of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

Private White was the son of Joseph and Evangeline White of South East Bight. During the First World War, he enlisted with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and was on the front lines early in the fall of 1918 near a town in Belgium called Ledeghem.

Between September 28 and October 26, when the Regiment was relieved of duty, ninety-three members were killed, including Private White who died on October 3 when he was just seventeen years old. The war ended several weeks later on November 11. After paying the ultimate sacrifice, Private Michael John White was buried in the New British Cemetery in Dadizele, Belgium.

Mr. Speaker, the 1921 census shows that Little Bona had a population of twenty-five residents. One can only imagine the devastating impact that Private White's death must have had on that community.

Almost 100 years later, after coming across the monument laid in memory of Private White, Officers Doug Hayes, Joseph Janes, and Gary Edwards notified officials of the Canadian Armed Forces who asked the officers to bring the monument to St. John's for repair.

Mr. Speaker, those repairs were completed and a few days ago, on June 14, representatives from the Canadian Armed Forces and the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division boarded a boat and left North Harbour in Placentia Bay, in possession of the refurbished monument to re-erect it.

On June 15, a wreath-laying and repatriation ceremony was led by Captain Glen Eagleson, the padre for the Canadian Armed Forces base in St. John's. The monument was respectfully placed again in the community along with a flag pole flying the Royal Newfoundland Regiment banner.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the initiative shown by Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Officers Hayes, Janes, and Edwards and their effort to ultimately determine the importance of that weather-worn monument from the community so that it could be properly restored. As well, acknowledgment is due to Officers Travis McDonald and Bradley Sparkes who helped with its reinstallation.

Private Michael John White now has a monument that is a fitting tribute to the important role he played in our history. A role that was so commonly filled by more than 6,000 young men from communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador during the First World War.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. The story of Michael John White is a compelling one and unfortunately all too common. Like thousands of others, Michael John White paid the supreme price for the freedoms that we enjoy today. The Wildlife and Fisheries Officers who found this abandoned monument and then did something about it are to be congratulated for taking this kind of an initiative.

Mr. Speaker, we are just one year away from the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a singular war tragedy that touched every cove and inlet in this Province. The loss of young lives at Beaumont Hamel is one we will never forget and which is why our Canada Day celebrations always follow our commemoration of those who gave their lives during the First World War.

I am sure there are such other monuments across this land which pays tribute to individuals who served their country so well, and I am equally sure that some of them are also in need of repair and renewal. I hope that as we approach this 100 anniversary of Beaumont Hamel that other people who may be aware of these monuments, like the one for Mr. White, will do as these officers did and restore these sites and honour the men who were brave beyond belief.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. White is one of the many local heroes deserving of our respect and honour. We are proud of them and the men and women who revitalized this monument.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. MURPHY:** I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement here today.

“Far and near and low and louder  
On the roads of earth go by,  
Dear to friends and food for powder,  
Soldiers marching, all to die.”

Congratulations, Mr. Speaker, to these fish and wildlife officers who took it upon themselves to remember in a community that lay almost forgotten to history.

Many a community in this Province has a small monument to our lost soldiers buried in faraway lands. Sometimes taking the time to remember and restore a monument restores your faith in human kind. I know all in this House today are truly touched by their efforts, and we offer our complete thanks and gratitude for their very touching work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. KENT:** It was a delayed reaction, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to rise in this hon. House to provide an update on the Strongest Families program. This past March, the provincial government announced a new partnership with the Strongest Families Institute to support the regional health authorities in providing children, youth, and families with increased access to mental health services. The Strongest Families Institute is a not-for-profit corporation that teaches skills and provides guidance for families through a distance-coaching approach, over the phone and online.

The institute's programming supports children and youth with behavioural difficulties, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, bullying, and other disruptive behaviours that can cause stress at school and at home with family.

Mr. Speaker, a key benefit of this new program is that it provides quicker access to services for families wait-listed in all regions across our Province. These families will now be able to connect with help in the comfort and privacy of their homes. The program reduces barriers to care as there is no need to travel, no cost to the

family for the program, and no lost time from work or school. The flexible and private aspects of the program make it an excellent solution for families who need it, and I am pleased to say that as of June 12, the Strongest Families Institute has begun contacting families wait-listed for services in our Province.

The institute was awarded the Ernest C. Manning Foundation Encana Principal Award in 2013. The only service of its kind in Canada, the program is being delivered in Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and by the Atlantic Military Family Resource Centre.

Mr. Speaker, we are very proud to be offering this unique program here in Newfoundland and Labrador. This program represents a provincial government investment of \$300,000 through our E-Mental Health and Addictions Awareness Program. We understand that many mental health issues begin in childhood and we are committed to ensuring children, youth, and families in our Province are supported.

No family should feel alone when they are trying to help a child deal with mental health concerns. That is why we have chosen to enter into this partnership with the Strongest Families Institute. Families in our Province deserve the most accessible, effective care we can deliver and our partnership with the Strongest Families Institute represents our commitment to providing just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The Strongest Families program provides an intervention service to families with children diagnosed with disruptive behaviour disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and anxiety. It can be incredibly daunting for families facing a mental health crisis in their home. When wait times to see a mental health professional are as unacceptable as they can be here in this Province, this

telephone-based intervention can help bridge the gap.

Clinical trials have concluded that the program is effective in treating mild to moderate pediatric mental health disorders; however, these children with more complex mental health needs still face the same barrier to treatment, unacceptable wait times. Lengthy waits can have serious health consequences for these children and their families.

The 2014 Wait Time Alliance report highlights that for the sixth consecutive year provincial governments across this country have made no progress in publicly releasing wait times for psychiatric care. This is unacceptable.

We need to be a leader in mental health care so certainly we welcome the Strongest Families program to the Province to help bridge the gap. I do hope that closing the gap remains a priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MS ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I congratulate the staff of Mental Health and Addictions for implementing innovative approaches to providing mental health services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am so impressed with the passion and compassion that they bring to their work.

The Strongest Families program is one tool that is pretty interesting. It can help with wait-lists for some services; however, we still have unacceptable and dangerously long wait-lists for psychiatric and diagnosis services for the children of our Province.

Research has proven that early intervention is crucial and most effective. The minister must address this very critical problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. CRUMMELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this past Friday, I had the pleasure of joining my hon. colleague, the Member for Grand Bank, residents, municipal leaders, school children, and representatives of the Wilderness and Ecological Reserve Advisory Council, or WERAC, in the beautiful community of Lord's Cove to officially announce the establishment of the Lawn Bay Ecological Reserve, the newest addition to the Province's parks and protected areas system.

Lawn Bay Ecological Reserve, located close to the communities of Lawn and Lord's Cove on the Burin Peninsula, provides a habitat for thousands of nestling seabirds. Of particular significance are the only recorded breeding records for Manx Shearwater in North America. The three islands in the reserve, together with the adjacent waters, also provide nesting habitat for at least seven other seabird species: Leach's storm-petrels, herring gulls, great black-backed gulls, black guillemots, black-legged kittiwakes, common murrelets and, from time to time, common and arctic terns.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador is home to globally significant seabird breeding colonies, most of them already protected as Seabird Ecological Reserves. This reserve, along with six other existing Seabird Ecological Reserves, protects internationally-significant seabird colonies including approximately 152 square kilometres of marine area around those colonies.

This government, through the Department of Environment and Conservation, remains committed to a clean, sustainable environment and healthy, resilient ecosystems for the social, physical, cultural, biological and economic well-being of the Province – now and into the future. We recognize the critical importance of protected areas as essential contributors to effective ecosystems conservation. We are also

committed to protecting provincially and nationally significant landscapes and contributing to a Canada-wide network of protected areas. This commitment is clearly evident through our network of eighteen Ecological Reserves, two Wilderness Reserves, thirteen Provincial Camping Parks, seven Natural and Scenic Attraction Parks, one Waterway Park, ten Provincial Park Reserves, the T'Railway Provincial Park and three National Parks.

This is a very impressive network, I am proud to say – but government cannot take sole credit for it. Rather, these achievements represent collaboration between the Province, through the dedicated staff of the department's Parks and Natural Areas division, residents in communities such as Lord's Cove and Lawn Bay, and the engaged and committed members of WERAC who give freely of their time and energy towards preserving the Province's natural heritage.

I ask all hon. members to join me now in thanking everyone involved in the establishment of the Lawn Bay Ecological Reserve for their dedication to protecting and preserving this incredible area for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The Lawn Bay Ecological Reserve is a very positive step and one that should be celebrated. The reserve protects the only known nesting colony of the Manx Shearwater in North America, as well as other seabirds; but this is the same government that has let WERAC lapse, and has an incredibly poor track record of protecting the environment, with no area systems plan, while the rest of the world, all the countries, have protected an amazing 15.4 per cent of the Earth's land mass, but in our Province we have only protected 4.6 per cent.

Budget 2013 saw Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve manager cut, which is responsible for 60,000 nesting seabirds; Witless Bay Ecological Reserve manager, which was responsible for a million seabirds nesting on four islands, cut; the Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve, which was established in 2000, supporting over thirty rare plants, about 10 per cent of all those on the Island, and the most significant, by sheer volume, in the Province. The Burnt Cape species are found in few other locations on the planet.

The real kicker here is that you could walk around Burnt Cape all day and not notice a single one, because they are smaller than your thumb. So that is why the reserve staff that were cut were so important, yet Budget 2015 saw interpreters added to Mistaken Point, but not added or put back to Burnt Cape – and that is a real problem here. We saw that Burnt Cape on the Northern Peninsula has been forgotten again.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

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

**MR. MURPHY:** I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement here today, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to everyone behind the establishment of the Lawn Bay Ecological Reserve. That is an achievement. It is most important to our environment that we protect nature when nature itself needs protection.

Mr. Speaker, is this the same government that cut staff in St. Mary's where gannets are in trouble? Is this the same government that cut the staff in the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve? Unbelievable. The Lawn Bay reserve will only be a true reserve when it is given the –

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. MURPHY:** – financial and the people resources to back it up and ensure its long-term protection.



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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. MURPHY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier caught the oil industry off guard by announcing a term sheet with Statoil will be finalized in the coming weeks. It appears that the Premier did not even give the company notice that he was going to make this announcement.

I ask the Premier: Did you let Statoil know you were going to make this announcement before the speech yesterday, yes or no?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

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

**MR. DALLEY:** Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised that they would have concern with the Premier's optimism. They are run by a leader who believes Newfoundland and Labrador is least, last, and lowest.

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

**MR. DALLEY:** They do not want a deal on CETA. They do not want Muskrat Falls to succeed, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you, they are afraid that we will get a deal with Statoil.

Make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker, we have reason to be optimistic. We have a valuable resource. We have a global leader in the oil company, Statoil, focused on Newfoundland and Labrador. We have success in building our oil industry. We have a fiscal regime that includes

equity royalty and benefits, and we are at the table discussing – every reason to be optimistic that we will continue to build a bright future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

It sounds like the minister was just as unaware as everybody else, including Statoil, the oil industry, and the rest of the Province.

I ask the minister: Did you let Statoil know before the speech yesterday whether it was yes, or no?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

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

**MR. DALLEY:** Mr. Speaker, we usually do not approve our speeches through Statoil. I can tell you, we are in negotiations. I met with Statoil executives personally in Houston. There have been ongoing discussions since. The focus is to get the right deal to develop the Bay du Nord discovery.

Let's be clear, as we go through this process, our government does not give away resources, Mr. Speaker. We have ten years of success in this Province. There have been no giveaways like the Liberals did in the past.

What we have done is we have committed to a principle. Our resources are to benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, or they will stay where they are. Whether it is Statoil or any other oil company, we are here to be fair and do business. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, be clear, the resources belong to the people and they will stay there if we cannot get the right deal.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

There was a bit of uncertainty yesterday because most of the people in the oil industry had no idea.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. A. PARSONS:** The paper on one day talks about an oil deal and the papers today are putting the brakes on it.

I ask the minister: Your Premier said yesterday, coming weeks; can you please elaborate for this House what does coming weeks mean, next week or two months later?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

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

**MR. DALLEY:** Mr. Speaker, again, I understand their concern that we might get a deal done. I understand that – purely political – but we will get a deal done that is in the best interests of the people of the Province. We will get a deal done where we do not give away our resources. We will get a deal done like we have done in the past ten years, where we make sure we get those benefits, whether it is for the government to share with the people of the Province, whether it is for the oil industry, whether it is for the 600 companies that we call Noia, whether it is to benefit the seniors, whether it is to benefit our youth, we will get a deal in the coming weeks.

Again, I have to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, so we are very clear, if Statoil do not do a deal that benefits the people of the Province – and I can tell you one, that we will respect Statoil in the process – then the oil can stay right where it is.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, what we are concerned about is this Premier making comments that nobody else in the industry has any idea about, and placing our deal in jeopardy and weakening our position.

The Premier has deal fever and he is rushing this process; we have seen it before from this government. Publicly stating your position in any negotiation weakens your position.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. A. PARSONS:** The Premier even mandated a deal with Statoil by the end of this year, months before the drilling process is even done.

So I ask the minister: Why are you weakening the Province's negotiating position by publicly saying you want a deal in the coming weeks? How is weakening your position bettering our Province?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

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

**MR. DALLEY:** Mr. Speaker, the strength of this deal will be in the deal itself. It is not about who is positioning in the media or anything else, it is about the deal that we will deliver for the people of the Province – and if it is not the right deal, there will be no deal. I can tell you, in the coming weeks we have an opportunity here to advance the oil industry; we have an opportunity to further the foundation that we have laid, to map out the next twenty-five years.

I can tell you, and I can tell the people of the Province, the best people to do that, the government with experience, the government with success, Mr. Speaker, is the people on this side of the House. We look forward to negotiating with Statoil, but Statoil is well aware that the resources belong to the people of the Province. They are going to get respect from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, but they are going to do a deal that benefit the

people of Newfoundland and Labrador, or there will be no deal.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, the minister says again, he uses that phrase, coming weeks, but it sounds like Statoil is not exactly on the same timeline. Their drilling will not even be done until May 2016.

So I ask the minister: How can you conclude a deal when we do not even know how the drilling is going to go ahead and what kind of position we are going to be in in May 2016?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

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

**MR. DALLEY:** Mr. Speaker, by comparison, Hibernia started twenty years ago, and not that long ago we announced new discoveries with the Hibernia deal. This is not a closed shop. They are going to continue to explore. They are going to continue to expand. We are going to find new discoveries out there.

Hibernia started with about 500 million barrels of oil. We are up to 1.6 billion. We have every reason to be optimistic and believe that there is a whole lot more oil out there, even with the Bay du Nord discovery.

Mr. Speaker, we are negotiating. We are laying out equity, royalty, and benefits, Mr. Speaker, the package that we have approached every other deal. We will get the right deal. We have experience. We have success. We have respect for companies, and we believe in the future of offshore Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. HILLIER:** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General sampled five of the twenty-five government run, long-term care facilities and found a troubling lack of oversight. Who knows what other stories remain untold in the other facilities. The department has committed to a performance-monitoring framework.

I ask the minister: In the interest of accountability and resident safety, will you commit to ensuring this monitoring is carried out and that the results are made public?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I will commit to ensuring that the monitoring is carried out, and I will commit to ensuring the results of that monitoring is publicly available as well, I say to the hon. member.

We have some work to do. We are reviewing the recommendations. We are working closely with the regional health authorities. We know that the regional health authorities need to improve monitoring activities. So that includes planning to review and revise our operational standards, which we will do this year. We are also looking at opportunities to strengthen these standards, which I think is really important as well.

We have already acted on a number of issues coming out of the Auditor General's report. I will be asking for regular updates, and this is something I will be watching very closely.

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

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

**MR. HILLIER:** Mr. Speaker, the operational standards for long-term care were developed in 2005. Government committed in those standards to review them every two years. The four reviews that should have taken place by now did not happen. The Department of Health said in its response to the AG that they work closely with regional health authorities to

address policy or procedural concerns on a regular basis.

I ask the minister: If you were working closely with regional health authorities, and clearly there are gross inconsistencies in long-term care, why did you fail to review the standards required four times over the past years?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that what has not been done is a comprehensive review of the operational standards governing our long-term care homes. What have been done are ongoing updates. Whenever the need has arisen within the regional health authorities or provincially, we have made updates to policies all along the way.

In many ways, these operational standards are more current than one would think. In fact, we have compared our standards with other jurisdictions in the country and we found they are comparable and we may not require major revisions. So we are making some amendments to ensure that expectations are clearly outlined, and we will continue to do this work in the next number of months.

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

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

**MR. EDMUNDS:** Mr. Speaker, shipping season has begun on the North and South Coast of Labrador. Residents of Labrador still need a port of call connecting the South Coast and the North Coast. Cartwright is the port of call for the *Northern Ranger* yet residents are unable to ship any goods to the North Coast and vice versa.

I ask the minister: Why do you not allow freight to be shipped to and from Cartwright on board the *Northern Ranger*?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Mr. Speaker, the issue about freight being shipped from Cartwright to the North Coast came to my attention this week. The primary policy in government right now, Mr. Speaker, is about the service for passengers and freight to the North Coast of Labrador, particularly around these communities, is based on isolated and remote communities.

There is road access from Cartwright to the South Coast, further up to Goose Bay, and then on to Labrador City and Wabush, Mr. Speaker. What I am doing here now, I have asked my officials – and I made a commitment last week when I was in Labrador to the Joint Councils to review how we better service the people of Labrador. I have asked my officials, they are sitting down with me Friday morning, to look at this issue and see how we can address it and see what improvements can be made to address that particular issue.

It has been brought to my attention, Mr. Speaker, and my officials and I will look at how we better serve the people of Labrador.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

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

**MR. EDMUNDS:** Mr. Speaker, this is a double standard. Where else in this Province would communities with road and port access be denied the privilege of using either means of transport? Apparently, Cartwright is the only exception.

I ask the minister: Why are you treating the residents of the Labrador Coast differently from anywhere else in this Province? Where is your fair and open government, and will you revisit this decision very soon?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

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

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

We treat the people of Labrador no different than anywhere else, Mr. Speaker. What we have offered here is a service to a community that is no longer isolated or remote, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt about that, we know there are some challenges there.

What we are doing, as I noted earlier, we are reviewing the policy that has been enacted and entrusted with the proponent who offers the service to see is there a better way, what kind of a disruption would this be, is there additional costing, are there some infrastructure needs that we have to put in place. To be prudent here, to do due diligence and make sure if there is a service that we can provide to the people it is the proper service and meets their needs, Mr. Speaker. The best way to do that is to have dialogue with my officials and the company that provides the service to indeed find a service that works for the people of Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

**MR. SLADE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in 2011 this government promised a vital seafood marketing council and failed to deliver. It has been four years, and fish harvesters and processors have seen no action and no intention to follow through on the PC Blue Book promise.

I ask the minister: There is evidence that cod stocks are rebounding and now is the time to promote our cod as top quality on the world markets, will your government finally act to establish a seafood marketing council?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

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

**MR. GRANTER:** Mr. Speaker, as I have said numerous times in this House, the return of the cod fishery in the Province is an absolutely

remarkable thing that we are going to look forward to. The research that has been done by the *Celtic Explorer* this particular year, Mr. Speaker, with the signs of the return of the codfish on the Northeast Coast and off Labrador is absolutely profound. We are looking forward to a return of the codfish.

With regard to seafood marketing, we have put forth to companies and investors in the industry in the Province, Mr. Speaker, the ability to go out and research, put fish on the markets of the world, and we will look at that further, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

**MR. SLADE:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope what the minister just said that time, that document does not sit on the shelf for another four years.

Mr. Speaker, while the global demand for fish products is growing, per capita seafood consumption in our Province is still unknown. Memorial University Professor Barbara Neis recommended in her report, *Moving Forward*, that the government document per capita seafood consumption as its way to inform the seafood marketing.

I ask the minister: Will you commit to tracking seafood consumption and use that information to form a comprehensive seafood marketing strategy?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

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

**MR. GRANTER:** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier and a number of times in the House, we are doing a fair bit of research with regard to the Marine Institute associated with Memorial University as well. We are looking at the return to cod and the groundfish in the Province. We are working with CFER, the Marine Institute, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the

FFAW. We are looking at industry stakeholders, Mr. Speaker.

As we move back to a groundfish fishery, Mr. Speaker, if that is something that we need to do, we will take the advice of those who are involved with the industry, those who are the professionals in the industry, including those at the Marine Institute of fisheries. We will look at that in every possible way.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde.

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

Mr. Speaker, the people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador deserve cellphone coverage. The last time this government mentioned cellphone coverage was in the 2011 Blue Book.

I ask the minister: Why does your government continue to ignore the needs for cellphone coverage in rural Newfoundland and Labrador?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

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

**MR. KING:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the hon. member has missed a few years somewhere along the way. We have announced millions of dollars around support for broadband cellphone coverage on the whole strategy. Very clearly, let me first of all establish the parameters here. It is not the Government of Newfoundland's role to put cellphone coverage in the Province, Mr. Speaker.

We provide financial supports to entice private carriers like Bell Aliant, Rogers, Eastlink, and all kinds of companies, Mr. Speaker, companies that we are working with today, by the way, through the Connecting Canadians, which is a federal program. We also have a fund locally that we are trying to match up to try and double the coverage that we can find.

Very clearly, the member needs to understand that it is not the government's role, nor responsibility, to provide the infrastructure. We will provide supports to entice companies to provide the infrastructure.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde.

**MR. CROCKER:** Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly has an issue between broadband and cellphone coverage. His department's documents show that there is no plan from this government. We have seen that. Yes, government has a role to play. Look at the model of what the BC government has done.

Mr. Speaker, we need a strategy to provide cellphone coverage to every community along every highway in our Province. It is a safety need and it will stimulate rural economic development.

I ask the minister: When will your government recognize the importance of cellphone coverage and do something about it?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

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

**MR. KING:** Thank you.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite: Do your homework. It was about five months ago that we did the latest call for broadband and cellphone coverage in this Province. We are currently evaluating –

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KING:** We are currently evaluating projects, Mr. Speaker, that includes pilot projects for cellphone coverage in certain parts of the Province. The intention is, as I said a few moments ago, that we will partner up with the

Connecting Canadians funding program, along with the provincial government's opportunity to fund, as long as companies are prepared to provide the service and infrastructure.

We will support them in doing it. It is their role to step up to the plate on a business model and do the work. We will provide the incentives, as we did, I say to the member opposite, about four or five months ago in our latest call.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Humber East.

**MR. FLYNN:** In May, Kruger asked Corner Brook Pulp and Paper employees and retirees to approve a proposal for extra time to pay into the company's pension plan. The letter states that if the pension plan members support the proposal, they do not need to vote yes; but if they object, they have to send a notice of objection by July 8.

So, I ask the minister: Can you confirm that no action is interpreted as a yes vote for the proposal; and if this is the case, do our regulations support it?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

**MR. CRUMMELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are certainly very aware of the situation with Service NL. The Minister Responsible for Forestry and Agrifoods is also aware of it. We have been in consultations with the union, the pensioners, and as well the company.

Unless all parties reach an agreement, there will be no agreement. So we are very clear on that. So that is all that the people out there will need to know – we will take no action on this issue without the full support of pension plan members, and also the members of the union.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Humber East.

**MR. FLYNN:** Mr. Speaker, a very straightforward, simple question: Is it under the legislation? Yes or no.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

**MR. CRUMMELL:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot be any clearer than what I just said. There would be no action taken unless all parties agreed to this, including the pensioners, including the union members, including the company. That is the provincial government's position on this, and that will be the position going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Humber East.

**MR. FLYNN:** Mr. Speaker, the letter also states that Kruger will bring its proposal to government if more than one-third of the employees and retirees send in an objection notice.

I ask the minister: Can you confirm that government will assume members support this proposal if no more than one-third of the members object to it?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. CRUMMELL:** Mr. Speaker, there are regulations and there is legislation in place that governs circumstances like this; but once again I will reiterate, there will be no agreement – we will to participate in any agreement unless all three parties agree to this.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East.

**MR. REID:** Mr. Speaker, I have been presenting petitions and asking questions and advocating for improved health care in the Bay St. George area since I was elected to this

House. As most people in the House know, Jeffrey's has not had a doctor for about a year-and-a-half. St. George's has not had a doctor for about half a year.

I ask the Minister of Health: Can he give us an update on the situation at the clinic in Jeffrey's and St. George's, and how he sees the future of health care in these areas evolving?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, while the member opposite has been playing politics, we have been working with Western Health and working with those communities to find solutions for the people of Jeffrey's and St. George's. In fact, we have found resources – we have posted positions, and we are in the process of hiring nurse practitioners to assist.

Now, it is still absolutely our goal that everybody in the Province be connected with a family physician, and there will be family physicians involved in these communities as well, but we know that nurse practitioners are part of the solution. They can diagnose, they can order and interpret lab tests, they can prescribe medication, they can perform procedures, and they can monitor and treat a variety of illness and injuries.

This model is working well on the Southern Shore of the Avalon right now. It is a model that we believe will work very well for Jeffrey's and St. George's, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East.

**MR. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am not playing politics with this issue; I am just representing the interests of the constituents who sent me here.

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

**MR. REID:** Many concerns are being raised about the future of health care delivery in the Bay St. George area, including services offered at the hospital in Stephenville. Positions remain unfilled for a long time and, in other cases, services that were once offered there are not being offered anymore.

I ask the Minister of Health: Does he consider the situation in Bay St. George a crisis, and how do you justify failing to develop and implement a health care human resource plan over the last twelve years that your government has been in power?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, we have developed numerous human resource plans over time, but we live in a changing world and there is a need to continually update and modify those plans. In fact, over the next month or so, I will be unveiling a brand new comprehensive health care workforce plan for Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are very committed to meeting the health care needs of the people in the Bay St. George region. We have a good health care facility in Stephenville, as the member references. We are constantly working to fill vacancies.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if he is not interested in playing politics, why would he meet with me in that hallway right behind us and agree that nurse practitioners are the right solution and then stand in this House and suggest otherwise? That is playing politics, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

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

I ask the Member for Humber West this: Kruger is in negotiations with the union on their



pensions. Part of the concern of the pensioners is that there are many people who are away who cannot vote.

I ask the Member for Humber West: If you do not vote, is that, under the legislation, declared a yes vote? It is very important to the pensioners. It is their pension we are talking about. It is a clear question. Is it under the legislation, yes or no?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. CRUMMELL:** Mr. Speaker, the simple answer to this is there is no legislative requirement for what the member asked.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

**MS MICHAEL:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We have learned today that government is cancelling its plan for universally free flu vaccination that would include pharmacists, along with physicians, as providers. On October 29 past, government said more people should get the shot to protect those who are vulnerable, but this cost-cutting measure is doing the opposite.

I ask the minister: Why is he flip-flopping on a universal vaccine program at the expense of public health in this Province?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, we are maintaining our commitment to a universal flu vaccination program that will be available in hundreds of locations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. There will be clinics that are run by the regional health authorities, as there has been

in recent years. Family doctors will have a supply of flu vaccinations available.

For clients of the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, for clients of that program, pharmacists will be able to provide the flu vaccination free of charge to those clients through pharmacies in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So there will be no change in 2015-2016. We expanded the program last year. We are going to continue that in this current fiscal year.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

**MS MICHAEL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I point out to the minister there are many people who are not part of that drug plan.

An evaluation of Ontario's universally free flu vaccination program shows a reduction of flu cases by 61 per cent and mortality by 28 per cent. Health care costs due to the flu dropped by 52 per cent. It is a public health program that saves lives and makes economic sense.

I ask the minister: Why has this government chosen this petty short-term cut over significant savings in hospitalization costs?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, there has been absolutely no cut made. I will say again the program that was in place last year is the exact same program that will be available this year.

Last year, we allowed pharmacists to provide the flu vaccine. In addition to making them able to provide it to anybody who wants to go in and pay a fee for that service, we are subsidizing. We are paying for the vaccine for any client of the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program.

So we have improved access even further for those who are most vulnerable, Mr. Speaker. In addition to that, in every region of this Province we will continue to run clinics, and family doctors will be providing the vaccine as well. There is absolutely no change in this year's program.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

**MS MICHAEL:** A simple question to the minister: Is he denying that he has written a letter to pharmacists saying that the program is changing, that what they were promised in October is not happening?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that they struggle with fine print over there. The letter quite clearly states that we will not be able to expand the coverage further within pharmacies this year. The program is exactly the same. The program is exactly –

**MS MICHAEL:** (Inaudible) what you promised.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KENT:** The heckling from the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi is unreal today, Mr. Speaker. If she will allow me to answer her question – the program is exactly the same this year. There was no commitment to provide universal funding through pharmacies. It is something we would like to explore, it is something that we may do in future, and it is something that we will continue to evaluate. The program for this year is exactly the same as it was last year, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

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

**MS ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, the START Clinic was designed to deliver a fast, short-term response to people needing mental health services. Now that all mental health referrals are funnelled through adult central intake, the backlog has grown. It can take up to six weeks for central intake to do the mandatory forty-five minute review referral interview. Then once referred, the wait-list for the clinic itself can be two months. This is way too long.

I ask the minister: What is he going to do to ensure people get timely treatment?

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, we are very much committed to improving mental health and addiction services for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is why we voted in this House unanimously, with a spirit of co-operation, to establish an All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions.

It is unfortunate that some of the issues that are arising through our consultations are being cherry-picked and used for random questions from both parties, but I am happy to be accountable, I am happy to answer whatever questions members have, even if they are choosing to play politics within that process, Mr. Speaker.

Central intake has represented a major improvement for our mental health services, but there are wait-lists, they need to be addressed, and that is exactly why we are working hard to make the system better, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde.

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

To the hon. House of Assembly in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the Cemetery Road in Grates Cove is the main access road, servicing three cemeteries within the community; and

WHEREAS for years of neglect and disregard of routine maintenance, the road has become deplorable; and

WHEREAS the condition of Cemetery Road in Grates Cove has made travelling it virtually impossible;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide regular maintenance to the Cemetery Road to alleviate the unacceptable conditions of the road.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is on behalf of the residents of Grates Cove, and I have also had a very similar issue raised by residents of New Melbourne and also residents of Western Bay. There are over 100 signatures on this petition from the people of Grates Cove. The problem with the road maintenance is when government made some changes a few years back, one of the roads that they excluded from their inventory list was Cemetery Road.

When you look at church groups in our communities such as Grates Cove, Western Bay, or New Melbourne, the church groups play a very important role. There is no reason why church groups should have to take money that they raised from their fundraisers to try to keep their churches going in small communities to maintain roads to cemeteries.

I do not think these communities are asking for a lot. Churches give a lot back to their communities in many ways in these communities. It is very important, I think, that government look at this issue in small rural communities.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I call upon the department to revisit the decision to exclude roads that lead to church cemeteries from the inventory from the Department of Transportation and Works.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** It being Private Members' Day and 3:00 p.m., I go to the Member for Conception Bay South to begin debate on his private member's motion.

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

**MR. HILLIER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is my privilege to stand today and bring forward this private member's motion on behalf of the Official Opposition Party, and my colleagues here in the House.

Mr. Speaker, this motion deals with the Seniors Poverty Reduction Strategy, and I will read the motion as I read into the record on Monday past. It says:

WHEREAS seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador have the lowest median income amongst all provinces; and

WHEREAS seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador have remained at the very bottom in

median after-tax income amongst provinces since 2003 despite billions in oil revenue and a poverty reduction strategy;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** this hon. House urge government to commit to a poverty reduction strategy designed specifically to target seniors' poverty.

Mr. Speaker, this is the second private member's resolution that our party has brought forward dealing with seniors, and we are bringing forward this second one at this particular time for several reasons. First of all, Mr. Speaker, we have been dealing with the Auditor General's report, and obviously the Auditor General had some significant issues with long-term care, nutrition for some of our seniors in long-term care, and safety in some of our personal care homes.

Mr. Speaker, on Monday we recognized, both sides of the House, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. The media certainly picked up on it from both sides of the House, and it is something we want to move forward with in this resolution. I have been asking questions in the House for some time on the median income, dealing with income of seniors in the Province and where we relate in the rest of the country.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn):** Order, please!

**MR. HILLIER:** Sometimes I get answers, sometimes I do not. Sometimes answers are a little bit stretched, but we want to speak to that in a little bit more detail today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we did not get very far with our private member's resolution regarding a seniors' advocate back in April. We want to continue speaking on behalf of seniors, and let's see where we go with that seniors' advocate at another time.

Mr. Speaker, we did get some traction on the seniors' advocate in that the Premier is now using the term seniors' advocate inaccurately, but at least he now has the term in common usage. The difference in his seniors' advocate is that his seniors' advocate is actually a collection agent clawing back overpayments made to

pensioners – a clerical mistake that is now hitting seniors in the pocketbook. So while he is using that term, I would like the public to know that the seniors' advocate the Premier is referring to is not the seniors' advocate that we are referring to.

Mr. Speaker, we generally associate this whole issue of seniors' abuse with – I guess with criminal intent, with the criminal justice system, assault, financial abuse, what have you.

Monday, the awareness day on seniors' abuse, on elder abuse, comes out of the United Nations Charter of days going back to 2006. They treat this whole issue of elder abuse from a human rights point of view as opposed to a criminal point of view. They are establishing the right of our seniors to live free of abuse, free of neglect, free of discrimination, and free of poverty. It is this right to live free of poverty that we want to follow up on today in calling for a seniors poverty reduction strategy from this government.

Mr. Speaker, in this House we have used a bunch of demographics over time. We talk about currently 18 per cent of our population are seniors, 93,000 people, and by 2025 that number will reach 25 per cent of our population. Overall, people are living longer. The savings they had, the pensions they had do not go as far as they did at one point in time.

On top of that, one of the issues here in our Province is we have lost a lot of our young people moving as a result of out-migration, a downturn in the fishery, a downturn in the economy. So what we are seeing is a very, very significant issue in that we do not have the number of young people here, first of all, to support their parents, our seniors, but also we do not have them working here so that our economy can be strong enough to support this segment of our population as they go into their older years.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read into the record the definition of poverty as set down by World Health Organizations so we have some idea of where we are going today. "Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear

for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways.

“So poverty is a call to action – for the poor and the wealthy alike – a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.”

Mr. Speaker, seniors’ poverty is both a social and a fiscal problem that will be exacerbated as higher percentages of populations move into that over sixty-five demographic that I referenced a few moments ago. Poverty rates among the elderly tend to be highest among women, particularly widows over the age of seventy-five. This is generally due to pension allowances that have traditionally been linked to employment history.

Mr. Speaker, what does this poverty look like? If we want to talk about poverty, what does this poverty look like? Here in Newfoundland, if we want to see what poverty looks like we can go to the mall and see what poverty looks like. We can see people who go to the mall because they chose to be at the mall on a daily basis rather than turn on the heat in their home, particularly on real cold days, particularly during cold weather in the wintertime. If you talk to people who spend a lot of time at the mall, people who work at the mall, they can identify these people.

Poverty is people who are seniors living alone but living in their big homes. Homes they raised families in. Homes they can no longer now support. I will give you an example. It is an issue in my town, in Conception Bay South, where property assessments have risen so high in past years that property tax has gone up. We had one lady who could not believe she would ever owe anything to anybody, and came in to work out her tax bill with our staff. She said: I am prepared to pay it off a month at a time, \$100 a month.

Mr. Speaker, what she did not work out was \$100 a month would only give her \$1,200 in taxes, where her taxes every year were \$2,000, but the staff made a condition. They chose to accept it, and every month this lady – because

she cannot afford to be in her house – drops in with that \$100 bill, pays her taxes, the staff say thank you, and she goes on. Her taxes will never be paid off.

Mr. Speaker, try to heat some of these homes, try to maintain these homes, try to find alternate living arrangements because a lot of people say to me: Rex, I do not want to be in my big home anymore, I cannot afford to be in my big home anymore, but I do not have the alternative to move.

Mr. Speaker, in the past ten years, government has collected some \$20 billion. We have argued about it here. We have talked about wasting \$20 billion, we have talked about blowing \$20 billion, we have talked about squandering \$20 billion, and we have had some interesting debate back and forth. Today, I just want to talk about collecting \$20 billion. I do not think anybody can dispute that over the last X number of years, this Province has collected some \$20 billion.

Mr. Speaker, while government was collecting this \$20 billion, we have seen more and more of our seniors slipping into poverty. Our economy has boomed. We are into big houses. We are into big vehicles. We are into \$30 steaks at Costco. With a booming economy and wages increased, the cost of living is going up, but most of our seniors are on a fixed income and they are slipping more and more into poverty.

I know we will debate this, this afternoon and members opposite will get up and talk about all the things that they have dealt with, all the things they have put in place over the last ten, twelve, fourteen years, thirteen years in terms of helping out our seniors. They will talk about the HST rebate. They will talk about the Provincial Home Repair Program. They will talk about the new seniors department. They will talk about the home – no, they will not talk about the home heat.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No.

**MR. HILLIER:** No, they will not talk about the tax exemptions. They will talk about the Low Income Seniors’ Benefit, Mr. Speaker.

Let’s create a baseline, Mr. Speaker. We have heard this government talk about the mess that

they inherited. There is no doubt when this government came into the House in 2003, there was a mess. They tell us that the government was almost bankrupt, and that was the first thing to try and come out of that bankruptcy.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003, if we talk about our seniors – and this is the median after-tax income among seniors by family, type, and province 2003 – Newfoundland and Labrador was the lowest in terms of elderly married couples. We were the lowest in terms of income. We were the second lowest for unattached females in terms of income. We were the lowest in unattached elderly males in terms of income. That is the baseline I want to work from. There is no doubt that we had seniors in poverty and on the verge of poverty when this government took power in 2003.

I have taken some time to have a look at the Budget document. A lot of it talks about what has happened in this Province since 2003. If we look at household income, that is total provincially, it has gone from \$13 billion a year to \$24 billion a year. Compensation for government employees has gone from \$8 billion to \$15 billion a year. Capital investment has gone from \$4 billion a year to \$13 billion a year.

Mr. Speaker, retail sales have gone from \$5 billion a year to \$8 billion a year. Average weekly earnings in this Province since 2003 have gone from \$600 a week to \$1,000 a week. Mr. Speaker, if this government had anything to do with this, kudos to them. Great looking graphs, all going upward, all shown the growth in our economy since 2003.

I set the baseline for 2003 in terms of poverty, in terms of various sectors of our population. If you go back to it, we said that elderly married couples were the lowest in the country. We said that unattached elderly females were the second lowest in the country, and we said that unattached elderly males were the lowest in the country in terms of median after tax.

Mr. Speaker, having gone through the \$20 billion that we have collected and all of the economic indicators that have grown so much since 2003, now we come to 2014 – I am sorry, the latest statistics is 2012. We will use the

2012 statistics, and we are using the same sectors of the population.

Here we go again, elderly married couples, lowest in the country in terms of poverty, in terms of income; elderly males, second lowest in the country in terms of income; elderly females, lowest in the country in terms of income.

Mr. Speaker, 2003-2012, given everything that went through this book that we saw in the Budget this week, nothing has changed in terms of poverty in this Province for our seniors, and I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you very much.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. CRUMMELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly have the pleasure to speak to the private member's motion today. It certainly is close to my heart and the hearts of everybody here in the House of Assembly. We all have seniors in our lives that we deal with every day, and we want to make sure that we do what we think is best for them going forward and support them in every way we can, in so many ways.

The member opposite referenced some statistics that I will refer to as well, just to show how far we have come as a Province in the last little while. Mr. Speaker, specifically, what have we been doing for seniors over the last ten years? What has this government been investing in to make sure that seniors live out their golden years with respect, dignity, and in a safe and caring environment?

There is a lot of work that we have done, and we recognize that there is work to be done yet as well. We have not yet reached that ideal goal in our lives, in our Province, in our communities to where we want to get to, but we are all moving forward to that good place.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the poverty reduction strategy – a poverty reduction strategy is a place to reduce and alleviate and ultimately eliminate poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador. That has been a goal of this government since we took power in 2003.

When we are looking at poverty reduction for this Province, we are talking about reduction in poverty for all people of the Province, including seniors, and especially seniors. We know this, and we have been working very hard through our poverty reduction strategy to address how do we support low-income seniors through our income tax system and other ways as well – we have been doing that.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talked about the measurements of poverty and how we compare with the rest of Canada. There are a few stats around that that we need to get out there to have a full conversation. How you measure poverty must be compared to both income and the cost of living. That is important, Mr. Speaker, and there are measurements around that.

What we have been doing in other supports as well, what we do to advocate, what we are doing in terms of our research, compare that to what other provinces and territories are doing, the investments in that area are important as well to help alleviate that problem that we have here in this Province.

Mr. Speaker, there is a stat that jumps out at me the most of all the stats that we can throw around, and we can throw them back and forth across the floor here today. The most important one, I think, that we could look at is we are proud to say that we have moved from having 9.1 per cent of seniors living in poverty in 2003 to 3 per cent in 2012. That is a significant number to look at. When we look at that, it is a huge accomplishment. The median incomes for seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador have increased by 50 per cent since 2003 – 50 per cent. That is significant as well.

When we compare what we are doing here in this Province to other provinces, we are moving in the right direction. That is exactly where we want to move. We are not to the place that we

want to get to. We are on the way there and we are well on the way there.

Our Poverty Reduction Strategy that we put in place for Newfoundland and Labrador in 2003 resonates throughout this country. It is held up in high esteem. Our people go to conferences, our civil servants and the politicians here on this side go to conferences up in the mainland, and they call us out everywhere they go. How did you guys get to this place? Wow, what are you doing? We want examples of how you have gotten to this place within your Province.

We are on a pedestal, Mr. Speaker, with regard to other provinces and how we have come so far in so short a time. Ten years is a short period of time. We are not going to get everywhere in ten years what we want to do in this Province, but we are getting there and we are getting there, I would consider, very rapidly.

As we focus on a poverty reduction strategy for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, it does not mean that we do not have to focus on seniors because, Mr. Speaker, we have focused on seniors. There are special programs out there that address the needs of seniors in this Province.

We recognize there are still a number of seniors who live in poverty. Mr. Speaker, we recognize that. People's circumstances in their lives that end up in the positions later in life like that, it is difficult to get into. They are complex issues in many instances. We have to be there as a government to support people who find themselves – seniors living in today's day and age in this Province where we see high incomes, the second-highest incomes in all of Canada. So we need to address that and we are doing that.

We have a range of initiatives and we have implemented a range of initiatives to support seniors. I think we have every reason to be proud of the progress we have made. I think we made responsible decisions, responsible investments, and recognizing again, Mr. Speaker, that there is work to be done. We are right now currently working on developing a new action plan for a poverty reduction strategy. That is coming out later this year. We are continuing to implement the Provincial Healthy

Aging Policy Framework, so our work continues.

Let's just go back and frame this up a little bit more, and get some real stats out there that I think have teeth. In 2003, 18.9 per cent of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians were in low income, and 9.1 per cent of seniors sixty-five plus were in low income. The most recent data, which is 2012, showed that 11.6 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are living in low income and only 3 per cent of seniors, Mr. Speaker. That is real progress.

That means about 6,000 seniors were in low income back in 2003 compared to 2,600 today. We do recognize there are seniors who are in the borderline area; they are in that cut-off point. A lot of our programs address the seniors who are just above that poverty line, Mr. Speaker, and beyond that.

Stats Canada indicates our seniors are better off than the rest of Canada when it comes to homeownership. That is a real important part of understanding how much money do you need to live off. If you own your own home, the income you have coming in, you can use for your daily necessities without having to pay your rent or your mortgage.

We have about 83 per cent of people in this Province over the age of sixty-five owning their own home. So looking at median incomes, compared to the rest of Canada, does not do justice when you are comparing who is living in poverty and who is not – 83 per cent, by far the highest in all of Canada. That is a huge number.

When we look at what Newfoundland and Labrador Housing does and the suite of programs in place to help low-income seniors: the Provincial Home Repair Program and the Residential Energy Efficiency Program to modify homes for accessibility, should people have an issue when they get older. We invest millions and millions and millions of dollars every single year in these programs. We are proud of the progress we have made in these areas. We are very proud.

So we talked specifically around seniors and poverty reduction, but what are we doing? What exactly are we doing? Why do we need to have a

strategy that is separate from an overall strategy? I would suggest to the member opposite that you could say that people who are sixty consider themselves seniors because you can avail of old age security when you turn the age of sixty. So where are the thresholds? What are we talking about here?

When you do a targeted poverty reduction strategy for a certain demographic of the population, you have thresholds and something gets lost. That is the reason why we focus on an overall poverty reduction strategy. When we do target that overall population, we do have a special focus on seniors, Mr. Speaker. That is where we are going here now, with a few numbers that I am going to throw out at you.

When you look at Budget 2015 and increasing the Low Income Seniors' Benefit, we are increasing it by \$1.7 million for a total of \$42.1 million. As a result of that, about 45,000 households will receive this benefit in October 2015. So they will be getting about \$1,000 in their pockets in October, money in their pockets, 45,000 households in this Province. That is significant, Mr. Speaker. That is a great investment. I do not think anybody in this Province would have any problem with that and we are talking targeted towards seniors.

Long-Term Care and Community Support Services; over 20,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians avail of the Long-Term Care and Community Support Services each and every year. Budget 2015 allocates about \$700 million for these services including about \$180 million for the Provincial Home Support Program, which last year assisted 9,000 individuals in this Province, the vast majority were seniors. These are programs that target seniors but also capture people who are on that cusp as well, Mr. Speaker, for whatever reason.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program; when we look at that as part of one of the key cornerstones for our poverty reduction strategy, there are five different plans that we have eligibility for in this Province. One is the 65Plus Plan; this plan provides coverage to residents sixty-five and over who receive Old Age Security benefits and Guaranteed Income Support. Individuals under this program pay a



maximum dispensing fee of \$6 per prescription for covered drugs.

In 2014-2015, the 65Plus Plan served more than 41,500 people at a cost of \$45 million. We are talking about a separate poverty reduction strategy. There are two plans there together: the Low Income Seniors' Benefit and the Prescription Drug Program, almost \$100 million targeted directly to seniors sixty-five years and older.

Mr. Speaker, again, we are doing the work that needs to be done. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. How far we have come in the last ten years, again I say to you, it is amazing. We are proud of that progress, and I will say that again, and I will say it again before I am finished four minutes from now.

Seniors' discounts; my father, I call him Wally because he is one of my best buddies. He is eighty-four years old and he lives by himself in a seniors' complex. Actually, my brother just moved back from the mainland so he is with him now, but he lived by himself for many years after my mother passed away. He lives on a fixed income, a very small pension. He does not have a lot of money to play with like a lot of seniors in the Province. He fishes and he is in good health. He fishes, he hunts, and he drives his car. He was in Nova Scotia last year. He drove to Nova Scotia and back again to visit my sister.

I tell you what, he is not afraid to talk about what is right and wrong. This fellow here, when you see him coming – he is a guy who writes the letters to the editor. The apple does not fall far from the tree, Mr. Speaker. He is the guy who is writing letters to the editor, an outdoors rights guy. When he shows up at community meetings he speaks his mind. He does not mind telling me what is up and down in his mind. I tell you what, I have conversations with him all the time. He enjoys those benefits, the 30 per cent discounts he gets on his automobile registration, on his licence when he gets his motor vehicle licensed.

When he applies for a moose licence – he got his moose last year, Mr. Speaker. I still have moose meat in my freezer. He got his moose last year. Up the pond in the boat, up over the bog, up

over a hill and got his moose, Mr. Speaker. He enjoyed that seniors' discount.

He is living a healthy lifestyle, and we know that nothing is perfect. I tell you what, when I talk to him about what is up and down he tells me how things have changed. He knows in the last ten years what the difference has been. He knows when his father and his mother were elderly years ago, the supports they had – which were almost non-existent.

So we have come a long way in the last twenty, thirty years, but in particular in the last ten years. I only have to look to my father and ask some questions, and hard questions, because he is not afraid to tell me, Mr. Speaker. He had a licence plate that said, here comes trouble on it. Any community meeting he went to, he was there, and here comes trouble.

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

**MR. CRUMMELL:** He is a fellow who speaks his mind. I tell you what, when I have conversations about politics, I hear it every now and again. He does not agree with everything that is going on, but for one thing he does agree, he knows, and I have asked these questions: Are you better off today than you were ten years ago or twenty years ago or thirty years ago? The answer, unequivocally, when it comes to my father, unfiltered, is absolutely yes. Can it be better? He says yes, as well – and that is what we are moving towards.

Mr. Speaker, at this moment in time I would like to propose an amendment. I move, seconded by the Member for Terra Nova, that the resolution above be amended by adding immediately after the word "Government" the words "to continue" and by deleting the words "specifically to target" and substituting the words "to include."

I put that forward, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** We are stopping for recess to consider the amendment as presented.

### Recess

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

After consideration, the amendment is in order.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador, to continue.

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

**MR. CRUMMELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is good to see the amendment is in order. I do not think the amendment takes away from the resolution. I think it recognizes what we are doing, the path that we are on, and the path that we are on is a good path. I said in the fifteen minutes prior to now that what this government is doing, how far we have come – our Poverty Reduction Strategy is absolutely working. There are less people in this Province on Income Support, Mr. Speaker. We have the highest rates of employment. We have the lowest rates of people on Income Support ever in our history, and that includes seniors.

Seniors are benefiting from this strategy. We have targeted programs for seniors. In the last year, we took the Poverty Reduction Strategy and we combined it with the Seniors and Aging Division of government. We combined them together. The Poverty Reduction Strategy works hand in hand with our Seniors, Wellness and Social Development department. Working hand in hand with the Poverty Reduction Strategy, underneath that umbrella, it speaks volumes of our focus of what we are trying to do in terms of making sure seniors in this Province enjoy the benefits of their golden years, that they can enjoy it as best as they possibly can, to make them healthy and happy, and they deserve that. We will be there to support them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was quite happy to second the original motion by the Member for Conception Bay South, put forward by the Official Opposition, so that

government would commit to a clearly focused target when it comes to poverty around seniors. When you are looking at reducing poverty, you really do need to invest in the right type of support because poverty is a very complex issue.

When you look at resources that exist within government and the community, there are limitations. So making the most effective investments based on evidence and best practices is really more important than ever, especially when you look at the critical time that we face here in the Province with the number of people and the way the demographics are shifting and aging.

The minister got up and pointed out that side of the House really looks at a one-size-fits-all approach to tackling an issue or a problem. This side of the House certainly does not see it that way. They think that there needs to be clear direction and focus in tackling areas, and putting support in those areas so that you can actually measure, find out outcomes, and evaluate.

One only has to look at the Auditor General's findings when it comes to monitoring and evaluation of various government programs. It said that they "could not always demonstrate that they were monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the effectiveness of government financial assistance ... ." I want to point out – because obviously the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador, we are looking at very similar statistics, but he is interpreting them certainly in a different way.

While the provincial government reported in 2005 that seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest poverty rate amongst provinces when they took power in 2003, seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador now have the highest to the third-highest rate of poverty amongst provinces. This depends on the measurement that you use and particularly the population that you look at, for example, a married elderly couple versus the single elderly person.

Seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador remain at the bottom of median after-tax income amongst all provinces since 2003, despite \$25 billion in oil money and a poverty reduction strategy. We really do need to look at poverty of

seniors living alone as they are the most vulnerable households in the Province overall.

Mr. Speaker, 70 per cent of seniors living alone are women. So it is important that the Province not only look at the overall poverty rate but the poverty rate of seniors specifically. For those who are living alone at home, that population tends to be more vulnerable financially.

My colleague talked about demographics. They talked about impacts on poverty and about how many of our seniors are finding it difficult to make ends meet. Government in 2005 – its discussion paper on *Reducing Poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador: Working Towards a Solution*, which was drafted in preparation for their 2006 Poverty Reduction Strategy, indicated that as of 2003, Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest rate of seniors in poverty compared to other provinces.

Government launched their Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2006; they released their inaugural progress report on poverty reduction in 2009 and committed to release a progress report every two years. A progress report was expected in 2011, but their actual progress report was released in 2014, three years later than expected; that is five years after the fact. Interestingly then at that time, they did not indicate the poverty rate of seniors. They committed to implementing a new strategy in 2011-2012, and we still have not seen it.

This is where the important piece of having targeted goals for vulnerable segments of the population – overall, sixty-five plus, those in the Province, 24 per cent, have an after-tax income lower than half that for all economic families. Single seniors, 27 per cent cannot afford to purchase the typical goods and services others purchase in their community. Many of them are at a point where they have to make decisions between choosing between heat and food, and that is really unfortunate that we live in a society where we cannot look after those who are most vulnerable.

Fifty per cent of those single seniors have an after-tax income lower than half that for all economic families. Elderly women living alone, 57 per cent have an after-tax income lower than half that for all other economic families, and 29

per cent cannot afford to purchase the typical goods and services others purchase in their community. That is a really real challenge; those are the statistics that are there. This is factual information that presents the need to have a specific focus on those who are aged sixty-five plus.

One of the things we need to look at, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to look at the evidence-based policies, we need to look at those in the community, and we need to have greater collaboration. A strategy needs to provide the adequate supports to seniors to help them live with dignity and enjoy continued income security into retirement. If we look at some of the other provinces and what they have done to help alleviate some of the burden – because whenever we talk to seniors in the region – the minister talked about one of the positive things is that seniors have a greater degree of home ownership in the Province, but there are many seniors in the Province who are finding it very difficult to maintain the home they own. They are struggling to find affordable housing or to downsize, to have that adequate comfortable level.

With the rising cost of living, when it comes to putting the tax back on home heat in July by this government, when it comes to all the other fee increases that are there on HST and other things, that is going to have an impact on these seniors. The cost of living is going up.

Seniors in Ontario have the ability to receive up to \$500 a year through an Ontario Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant. This helps seniors who are living in municipalities. Because we hear it all the time about municipalities that are struggling financially when it comes to – and with the aging population that are there, seniors who are living in their homes struggle quite a bit sometimes, especially those who are in the lower-income bracket, to be able to afford and pay for property taxes. Towns must be providing services to those who live there.

So this type of program that is there can help them afford to remain living in their homes. Over a five-year period the grant in Ontario is expected to help 600,000 seniors with about \$1

billion in property tax alleviation. This is taking a housing first approach to helping.

When it comes to low-income seniors in Ontario, they qualify for a guaranteed minimum income through monthly payments from the Guaranteed Annual Income System, GAINS. The monthly GAINS payment is in addition to the federal government's Old Age Security pension and benefits, including the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

So this is above and beyond the programs that exist to help support additional income, a guaranteed threshold to help alleviate and ensure that seniors are able to live in dignity and enjoy additional security in retirement. We want to introduce policy and have good policy when it comes to seniors and affordability long into their retirement years because seniors represent a very big segment of the Newfoundland and Labrador population.

The importance and the purchasing power of a senior when it comes to sustaining a community and the economy is very important, but we cannot have all that locked up in trying to maintain and heat a large home. There really does need to be a plan that will help, as well, our working families build a more secure retirement into the future. So planning now for the senior of tomorrow as well is very important so that we can return long-term economic benefits to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have to think big. We have to plan strategies that are actually going to be implemented, be measureable, followed up on, and evaluated. This is why targeting a specific segment of the population – and we are not saying that you would not do a poverty reduction strategy. There are many groups that need focus and that need clear objectives and outcomes, whether that be youth, whether it be those who are homeless, or those suffering from mental health and addictions.

Home ownership is a big issue that needs to be talked about and needs to be dealt with. It cannot be just dealt with by looking at the provincial-federal shared housing agreement that comes up every three years when it comes to affordable housing that puts 1,000 or 1,200 units over that time period. That is part of a solution,

but it is not the answer. There needs to be a real serious discussion around home ownership, around affordability of homes, and around keeping and finding that balance of seniors being able to unlock their actual equity that they may have there.

Looking at dealing with cost of living, long-term affordable housing and keeping that momentum is really important so that people will have jobs, be able to raise families, and build strong communities. We certainly need that type of legislation for local communities and municipalities to deliver on those housing and homelessness services that are tailored to specific needs. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Urban economies, rural economies, and regional economies all have different types of answers and different types of supports and solutions that are there. That is why real collaboration, continued dialogue, looking at all the community supports that are there and bringing them together, and collaborating so that we can have a meaningful, measurable approach to making sure that seniors and those who are more vulnerable in society are given the care that they need – that they are well looked after.

That is why we need to have focus so that we can have those long-term solutions and we can experience those cost savings down the road. We do need to have that real planned economy. We do. We need to coordinate a good service delivery model, one that has measureable outcomes for all who are involved. I believe if we can come together and look at seniors and the poverty issue that exists around that segment of the population, if that political will is there, we can tackle issues surrounding poverty in the communities. It all starts from the ground up, but there needs to be leadership put forward looking at this.

I am surprised why government would prefer to water down this particular motion and not look specifically at seniors, giving them real focus. I guess it should not come as any surprise to the people who are watching and listening because this is the same government, the same members on the other side who completely voted against having a seniors' advocate, having an

independent office with somebody who would advocate for them and their issues.

Certainly, an advocate would be looking at ways to advance seniors issues, deal with poverty issues. Look at things and get the information out there when it comes to things like an HST Credit and see if it is actually a valuable credit; that it actually mitigates against all of the higher burdens that are there in Budget 2015. How Budget 2015, passed by this government, makes life a whole lot less affordable for the everyday person, specifically seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Budget 2015, the Progressive Conservative Budget they put forward in this House makes life less affordable for everyday seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador. With a 35 per cent fee thing that is there in terms of a discount – well, if you are increasing the fees, 261 of them, putting them up, you are still going to end up paying more. The fees are not stagnant, and things are not stagnant.

We really do need to figure things out a little better. We need to have more effective ways to assist people who are marginalized in society. I am really happy that the Member for Conception Bay South has put this motion to the floor.

Thank you.

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

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

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

**MR. MCGRATH:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very pleased to be able to stand today and speak on this private member's resolution. I am glad the amendment was put forward because I think the amendment clarifies exactly what this government is doing, and has been doing when it comes to poverty reduction strategies, that we are continuing, and we plan on continuing and including seniors in our strategy. I think that is very important.

I do not think there is a member in the House of Assembly who does not have seniors in their

district. Every one of us have seniors in our districts. I know for myself, with my upbringing, being the tenth child of eleven, my parents were seniors when I was born, or close to it. I was taught from a very young age that if there is one thing seniors deserve it is respect. I have carried that with me all of my life. I guess to some of the ones here in the House now I am even considered a young senior now. I am at that age now where I can get a seniors discount.

I think the important thing we have to look at is that giving that respect to our seniors and keeping them a very active part of our population is what this government focuses on. This government focuses on making sure that we have programs, we have policies, and we have funding in place to help our seniors.

I listened to the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador. He certainly detailed quite a few of the programs and policies that we have in place. I just listened to the Member for The Straits – White Bay North. One of the comments he made was that this government has a one-size-fits-all policy. We have one-size-fits-all programs.

You can take those words and he – during his talk, in the fifteen minutes that he was up speaking, he put a spin on things, that it is all doom and gloom. I am sitting here and I am thinking, my God, if anybody from outside the Province is listening to him and planning on coming to Newfoundland and Labrador to retire – which we have quite a few people who do.

We have an awful lot of people who have moved away from Newfoundland and Labrador and who are now coming back to spend their golden years in Newfoundland and Labrador. If they were listening to him, my God, they would be going for Vancouver Island because everything was doom and gloom. The difference with us over here, with our government, is that we include our seniors. They are part of our population. We do not start when they are in trouble; we start with programs that will blend them in.

For example, in my district I was at an elder abuse seminar just last week. I scanned the room. There were maybe fifty or sixty people in the room. As I scanned the room they were

based in age from fifty, and the oldest one there, I think, was eighty-nine. That eighty-nine-year-old in my district is a prime example. I am sure she does not mind me using her as an example because she is very proud of what she does. At eighty-nine years old she swims for an hour a day. She has done that now for about twenty-five years. She still bowls. She makes sure whenever there is a dance she gets out because she loves to dance. So she is not eighty-nine years old, she is eighty-nine years young. That in itself helps the seniors and it helps the poverty of seniors.

She has her own home. She has a daughter who is also a senior citizen living with her, living in her own home. She has maintained her own home. I am there thirty-eight years and she was a widow when I moved there. So she has been a widow for a long, long time. She has maintained her own home and done quite well for herself. I can guarantee you she has done it on a fixed income because she is a lady who has never worked as such. She had her pension when her husband passed away, but she maintained a very good lifestyle. It is all about being inclusive.

I just want to touch on a couple of the things that the minister did talk about. He talked about the stats of 18.9 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians being in low income, and 9.1 per cent of them senior citizens. Now it is 3 per cent. That was in 2003, and eleven years later it was at 3 per cent.

He also spoke about the 6,000 seniors who were in low income. You take that 9.1 per cent and the 3 per cent – it was 6,000 and now it is only 2,600. So are we doing everything right? No, we are certainly not doing everything right. Can we do better? Yes, we can do better. Are we progressing? You can be sure we are progressing and we are progressing in the right ways. I think that is what is important. Do we realize our seniors still need help? Yes, we certainly do.

I heard the Member for The Straits – White Bay North talk about housing, and comment on how the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador said that 83 per cent of our seniors own their own homes. Well, guess what? They worked really hard all of their life to make sure

they own their own homes. As many of us here present today, and many of the ones who are listening, they are working really hard to make sure that when they get to that age they own their own home so they do not have that liability hanging over their heads.

This government has programs in place that can help them such as the Home Repair Program, the energy rebate program, and the accessibility program. When you get to a certain age and you need modifications made to your home, we have programs in place for that. So it is not all about taking the dollars and cents and putting it into someone's hand. It is having those programs and funding accessibility in place so that everybody can benefit from it. I think this government has done a very good job in doing that over the last decade. We have done a very good job in addressing the problem and reducing the problem. That is what makes a difference.

I just mentioned three programs there. What the Provincial Home Repair Program does is help people to retrofit their homes. A large amount of our seniors are the ones who take advantage of that Home Repair Program. They are allowed, over a period of years, to avail of a certain amount of money.

Even though they do own their own home, we realize the home may need some major modification such as new windows. If you have insurance on your home, we all know that the shingles on your roof, after twenty-five years they have to be replaced or you cannot get insurance on your home. So it is very important that these seniors can avail of some funding to make those repairs, put in their new windows, put in their new doors, replacing insulation, replacing the shingles on the roof. That is what makes a difference, so we are putting those programs in place.

The Residential Energy Efficiency Program, when they have to make repairs to their energy efficiency. There are different ways that they will get into that. We have that program in place. We have the Home Modification Program. I am working for a senior in my district right now, for example, who has her eighty-three-year-old mother living with her. She is a senior, a widow. Her eighty-three-year-

old mother, who is also a widow, lives with her and does not want to go into a home.

She is there and I am working on a program for her now where I am trying to get a lift put into her home. That lift will be paid for through one of our programs. That keeps another bed available in our long-term care. If you cannot get that done, then that is another person going into the long-term care home. Our government realizes that. That is why we work with them.

Some of the other programs that we have: the seniors' benefit. You heard the Minister of Finance comment on it – the Low Income Seniors' Benefit. We are increasing it this year in this Budget by \$1.7 million. That brings it up to a total of \$42.1 million that is going into the Low Income Seniors' Benefit program. That can give all of those seniors an annual maximum of \$1,059. That is a big increase to a low-income person. That is a big help to those.

The Close to Home program, A Strategy for Long-Term Care and Community Support Services was released in June 2012. It is a ten-year strategy. That is helping to guide and transform the delivery of long-term care in Newfoundland and Labrador. I listened to the Minister of Health and Community Services stand on his feet almost every day in this House and talk about programs such as the Close to Home program.

Our long-term care and community support services, we just opened the long-term care here in St. John's. I know the one in Happy Valley-Goose Bay – I spoke with the member the other day and I spoke with the CEO of Labrador-Grenfell Health. This government is ahead of schedule on that long-term care. They are hoping to have that open this fall. That is how fast they are moving on that. So this government is listening. We realize what we need for the seniors. We are moving forward.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, you heard the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador talk about the 65Plus program. I remember when we were putting that program together. That was a very detailed piece of legislation there, that one was, the 65Plus program for the prescription drugs, putting that one together.

Over \$45 million is invested into that now. That program helps seniors over sixty-five with their prescription drugs. As we all know, as we get older, we use more drugs. That is a fact of life. In order to try and live a comfortable lifestyle, quite often we have to resort to prescription drugs with some of the ailments that come with getting older. Government, through their 65Plus program, realizes that a lot of people who are on low income, cannot afford those drugs. So the 65Plus program, I think, is an excellent program and it helps.

With the enhanced care in personal care program, that project is \$1.5 million. It is an eighteen-month project and it helps improve the growing demands for the safe, quality living arrangements and accommodations of older adults. What it does is it keeps people in their own homes longer. When they cannot afford to stay in their own homes, that is a program that will help keep them in their own homes longer. Quite often it is through assisted living that they need to have someone come in and help them. We have the programs in place for that.

When you talk about all of these different programs that we are doing, I think what we are doing through our Poverty Reduction Strategy; we are addressing the needs of seniors. We are addressing the needs of seniors on a low income. We have done that all along. We will continue to do that. We will continue to work with our seniors.

The Community Rapid Response Team is another program the government is investing in; \$3.1 million over a two-year pilot program. We have four different Community Rapid Response Teams, two of those are here in St. John's, one is in Grand Falls and one is in Corner Brook, and that is a pilot project. If we feel that program is working and it is working effectively, you keep investing in those programs.

The age-friendly grants, government has allocated \$1.1 million into that and that is for healthy aging. I think one of the best examples I can use there is when I first was elected back in 2011, I spoke to a group out in Springdale and it was a seniors' group that I spoke to in Springdale and they were called the 55 Plus Club. Sixty-five, seventy percent of them were female, the others were males, and the group

was based between the age of fifty-five and seventy, the majority of them, but they were all about aging gracefully.

They were all about when they aged, they did not want to sit down in a rocking chair and just grow old. They wanted to be healthy, they wanted to live a good lifestyle and they were working on that through their physical activity, through their mental activity, and also through their financial activity. That was the three topics – when I went out and I actually spoke to that group, the three things they were focused on were physical, mental, and financial.

That group felt that the government of the day, which is this government, was working with seniors. They certainly advocated for more; they wanted more. They felt there was more that government could be doing, but they were very pleased with what government was doing. They felt that government was addressing many of the needs of the seniors, especially the low-income seniors, because quite often they cannot afford to avail of many of those programs. This government was committed to those people; we are still committed to them. We are still committed to our seniors.

I do not think there is anybody on this side of the House or on the Opposition side for that matter that does not have a high respect for our seniors, and to me, as I stated in my opening comments, they do not –

**MR. SPEAKER (Cross):** Order, please!

I remind the member his time has expired.

**MR. MCGRATH:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MS ROGERS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am very happy to stand here on behalf of my caucus and to speak to this private member's motion. Mr. Speaker, I am not in favour of a motion that is a poverty reduction strategy. We are looking for poverty elimination, and that is

different. It is poverty elimination that have to be looking for in terms of not only seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador, but poverty elimination for all people in this Province. It can be done, and it is not about spending more and more money. It is about spending our money wisely. It is about investing in our people. We are talking about poverty elimination, not simply reducing poverty. We want to eliminate it altogether.

Also, I would like to thank all the good people who are working on our poverty reductions, although I am sure they too would be much happier working on a poverty elimination strategy rather than a poverty reduction strategy. Those who work so passionately and with expertise looking at this area on how we can deal with the poverty we are experiencing in our Province because we know it is on the up rise, Mr. Speaker, because of our current economic situation, because of certain types of cutbacks in government services, people are feeling the pinch.

I would also like to thank all those who work with seniors across Newfoundland and Labrador; particularly our non-government volunteer organizations that are doing really incredible work, sometimes lifesaving work, with seniors Province-wide.

It is not easy work because the funding to maintain these groups is not enough. We have groups who do not know whether they are going to get funded from year to year or how much funding they will get. They often do not know until the eleventh hour. Sometimes they lose staff because the staff does not know whether or not their contracts will be renewed. That is no way to eliminate poverty, Mr. Speaker. That is just tinkering. We need more than tinkering. We need a good, solid strategy that is meaningful and, again, not reducing poverty but eliminating poverty. That should be our goal. Nothing short of that; that should be our goal to eliminate poverty altogether.

Mr. Speaker, we know from research that has been done, good, solid empirical research, that one of the social deterrents of pushing people into poverty is the issue of housing. We know that is affecting seniors in our Province, Province-wide. Whether you are a senior who



does not own your own home, or even if you are a senior who does own your own home, particularly if you are living alone or if you have been widowed. It is odd because someone might think, well, if someone owns their own home, how could housing push them into poverty?

We will talk a little bit about that in terms of what are the costs of owning your own home, but besides that, seniors who want to downsize.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS ROGERS:** We know many seniors – because of the type of community, the culture that we have in Newfoundland and Labrador in our outport communities, we all helped each other build our homes, build our sheds, build our businesses.

So there are a lot of seniors who are in two-storey homes. Who are in homes that are way too big for them, but in order to downsize they may sell their home that was built fifty years ago, sixty years ago, or it is a home they have inherited from their family. So the home may be older than that. They may not get a whole lot of money for it, but in order to downsize, to move into a smaller unit, they end up paying way more than what they would get for their current unit, the current home that they are in.

If they do not buy, they may end up renting, and we all know, whether you are in Come By Chance, whether you are in Red Bay, whether you are in St. John's or on the Burin, whether you are anywhere in Labrador, we know that housing is at a crunch everywhere, because our mayors and our municipal leaders have told us that as well. It is not just housing advocates. We are hearing it from everywhere.

It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, as we go across the Province with the All-Party Committee on Mental Health we are hearing that as well. We are hearing it from social workers. We are hearing it from individuals. We are hearing it from doctors. We are hearing it from psychiatrists. We are hearing it constantly that the high cost of housing is such a problem. It is a social determinant of your health. It is also a

social determinant as to whether or not you are pushed over the edge into poverty.

So that is a big problem for our people, but it is one, I believe, we can tackle. Mr. Speaker, I believe we can tackle that problem. I believe there are solutions. The solutions come from working together. So our poverty elimination strategy – because, again, we want to eliminate poverty, we do not simply want to reduce it – is about collaboration. It is about working together. It is about our different departments working together. It is about governments on the municipal, the provincial, and the federal level working together looking at housing issues. It is also about communities and it is about business as well. How can business be a part of looking at the issue of housing for seniors?

Mr. Speaker, I have raised this issue in the House a number of times. One of the things that touches my heart the most is when I visit seniors, either in my own district or in other places, and how many seniors – no exaggerations – how many times have I gone into a home, sat down, had a cup of tea while a senior takes out an envelope. They have their envelope where their cheque comes in, because maybe they are getting OAS and GIS, and they show me how much they get, and then they write on the back of the envelope. It is really kind of heartbreaking – they write down on the back of the envelope what their expenses are and what their cheques are.

We have the highest percentage in the whole country – in the whole country we have the highest percentage of seniors on OAS and GIS, the highest percentage of seniors who are receiving GIS. These are people who worked hard all their lives, who have built our Province.

They write on the back of that envelope. They will write down, well, my rent is \$750 a month. My heat and light is \$150 a month. My phone and cable – because I have to have a little bit of TV and I need a phone – that is another \$100 a month. Then that leaves them with about \$300 a month maximum.

Now out of \$300 a month they have to buy food. They have to maybe pay a little bit on their medications. You know the types of medications that may not be covered under our

provincial drug program. For instance, maybe some antacids, maybe some TUMS, maybe some cream, maybe – I do not know – shampoo, personal products. Maybe there are a few other little medical things that they have to have that are not covered under the drug program.

Then their food – we all know – I get a shock almost every time I go to the grocery store how the price of food is going up. Maybe they have a car. Maybe they need a car, too. If you are in some communities where the transportation system is not so great, without a car they are totally isolated. I know that this government has done some really interesting programs with volunteer organizations providing transportation programs for seniors. They are very good programs, but let's get back to this \$300 a month.

Mr. Speaker, I am sitting there at the kitchen table and I know many of us have done this. Many of us in this House have done this; sit down with that senior, with that on the back of that envelope, writing out how much life is costing them.

Then maybe you need a new pair of winter boots because the pair of winter boots that you have had for the last ten years are wearing out. Maybe you need a few other pieces of clothing. Maybe your granddaughter or your great-granddaughter is graduating from high school or from university and you want to get them a card and a little gift. There is no room. There is no room to get your hair cut. There is no room for any of that stuff.

Maybe you have a cat or a dog. Maybe all of your family is gone away working, they are up in Fort McMurray and there are not that many of your family around anymore. So you have a pet and that costs money. If you have a cat, it is cat litter and cat food. If you have a dog, there is dog food.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think any of us want this. I know that none of us want this. This is not how we want seniors who have worked hard all their lives, whether it is in the paid economy or not – because a lot of these seniors too, the highest percentage are women. None of us want this.

None of us want that experience of having to sit down with somebody in their kitchen with a cup of tea as they write down and show you, because that is what they do. They say I do not know what else I can do. I do not know what I can cut back. Well there is nothing to cut back. So we have to be looking at the housing issue. That is one of the major costs, the absolute major cost of pushing seniors into poverty.

The Province of British Columbia has a wonderful – and I have had a number of conversations with the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, who is also the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, about the issue of rent supplements for seniors and having a special rent assistance program for seniors. BC has done this. They do it in a really fine way because a lot of our seniors also have incredible pride. What BC does is they have this program called SAFER and it is specifically set up for seniors. A senior will get a rent supplement that nobody should be spending over 30 per cent of their income on shelter.

The rent supplement goes directly to the senior. There are people working in this program who will help seniors find accommodations. The rent supplement does not go directly to the landlord, it goes to the senior. So the senior, the rent supplement goes with them wherever they go. If they want to find a place that is close to their church, or close to their family or friends, or their community groups, the rent supplement goes with them rather than staying with a unit, which is how Newfoundland and Labrador Housing works here which is very difficult for seniors.

What happens if you and your spouse – if there are two seniors, a couple, and one of them dies and the other one cannot afford to live where they are living and they need a rent sup, then they have to leave their apartment and go somewhere else to live. It does not make sense to me, Mr. Speaker. There are other ways of doing it.

It is my hope, Mr. Speaker, that when we look at poverty elimination, we really look at programs that respond to the reality of the lives of seniors, that we listen to seniors. People like the Seniors Resource Centre which has done such incredible

work, a lot of research around the needs of seniors; they have their ear to the ground. They know what some of the difficulties are. That is what we have to be listening to. We have to base our programs on the reality of people's lives.

I know there is an intention to do that, but sometimes our programs do not keep up to the reality of people's lives; for instance, the high level of inflation that we have experienced over the years. Sometimes the threshold for being eligible for a program does not rise enough to meet the realities. Also, when we look at the Provincial Home Repair Program, it is mostly seniors who take advantage of that program. What happens is that they are eligible to apply for that once every seven years. If your roof is leaking and you need it done one year and three years later the windows need to be done, you cannot wait for seven years. What is the point in waiting? What is the point? What happens is that things just deteriorate.

We need to make our programs more nimble and more responsive to the needs of people's lives. Mr. Speaker, we know that we have the fastest growing proportion of seniors in the country, and we have the highest proportion of seniors living in poverty. I know that is not what we want as a society for seniors who have built our Province. We have to look at doing better because we have no choice.

We know stories of seniors who cannot afford to live in their homes and end up in personal care homes, which costs way more, because they do not have the supports that they need and the assistance that they need in order to live independently. Seniors are telling us, for the most part, most of them want to stay in their homes, but they just need a little bit of help. It is far more economical and it is far better on human suffering. It is less human suffering.

We need to listen to what seniors are telling us. We have to make our programs more nimble and more responsive to the reality of people's lives. I believe we can do that. Mr. Speaker, I am aiming for poverty elimination, not poverty reduction.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I remind the member her time has expired.

**MS ROGERS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I think he has about twelve minutes.

**MR. LITTLE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am honoured to stand in this House today and be able to speak to the amendment of the private member's resolution in relation to seniors, Mr. Speaker. In my past work life, I have worked around senior citizens. I have learned a lot from senior citizens. I have the highest respect for senior citizens so I am delighted to be able to speak on this private member's resolution today.

We, as a government, have invested in several initiatives to allow seniors to age gracefully, to remain with their families, and to live in their own homes for longer periods of time, Mr. Speaker. Every year more than 20,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians avail of the long-term care and community support services programs offered across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Since 2008, the provincial government has built five new long-term care facilities across the Province from Happy Valley-Goose Bay to St. John's, as well as Protective Community Residences in Corner Brook, Lewisporte, and Bonavista.

Mr. Speaker, I remember the day I saw many smiles on many people in the Town of Bonavista when the Minister of Health and Community Services came to the town with officials from the Town of Bonavista, the regional health care authority, Eastern Health committee members, and seniors in particular, for the official opening of a new Protective Community Residence. That was quite a wonderful day, I must say. The people in the District of Bonavista South were delighted with that official opening.

Then most recently, Mr. Speaker, this government invested again in the community of Bonavista and for the region of Bonavista South as a whole, with a new dialysis satellite unit

open, up and running, and operational. The people availed of that great service, mostly senior citizens.

What I am talking about is not only in my District of Bonavista South, but many, many sites all around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. So this government certainly takes the issues that seniors have, very important issues, as I said earlier. We will continue to invest in senior initiatives as a government, Mr. Speaker.

Through Budget 2015, our Premier, and the Minister of Health and Community Services announced, through a partnership, that we will provide another 360 long-term care beds throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. So we are moving in the right direction. Other provinces and jurisdictions are looking at what we are doing as a government and they are paying close attention to what is happening here in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This particular announcement was very creative and a sustainable way to provide long-term care to those residents and seniors who require that type of care.

The creation of 360 new beds across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador will help to address the growing long-term care need, and allow those who require long-term care to live close to their families. I know that is a very important issue in all the communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. I, for one, certainly talk to seniors on a regular basis. They enjoy when they can interact with seniors, people they grew up all of their lives, and be able to stay in the communities or in the regions that they were part of and help build this Province, Mr. Speaker.

That is why I do have the highest respect for senior citizens. They are the ones who have allowed us to continue to speak in this House of Assembly in a most democratic process, Mr. Speaker. Some of our seniors paved the way to give us the great opportunities that we have today in our society. We have no other choice as a government to show our respect to the seniors. We as a government will continue to show that respect to our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2015 includes a series of investments to benefit seniors which includes the Provincial Home Support Program, the Low Income Seniors' Tax Benefit, the Provincial Home Repair Program, affordable Prescription Drug Program, and age-friendly transportation services. Along with our investments in long-term care, our Progressive Conservative government will continue to support seniors through these and other programs.

In Budget 2015, there was approximately \$180 million for the Provincial Home Support Program, representing an increase of over \$6 million from last year. Last year's program provided support to about 9,000 seniors. Mr. Speaker, 9,000 seniors benefited from this program last year and will continue to benefit again this year.

Mr. Speaker, we are on the right track. I am glad that our government continued this program and continues to recognize that we can provide assistance to seniors through this program.

Mr. Speaker, there will be \$42.1 million for Low Income Seniors' Tax Benefits, which is estimated to result in approximately 44,800 households receiving a tax benefit to a maximum of \$1,059 in October 2015 – another 44,800 households being helped through Budget 2015. Our government makes continuous improvements to the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program. In 2014-2015, the 65Plus Plan served more than 41,500 seniors at a cost of over \$45 million. That is a substantial amount of investment, and this year we will provide \$2.6 million to implement new drug therapies in the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program.

Mr. Speaker, I must also comment on age-friendly transportation services, Budget 2015 contains \$400,000 for these services.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**MR. LITTLE:** It is \$400,000. Undoubtedly, they will assist seniors to maintain their independence and quality of life, this type of service.

I also wanted to touch on the Home Heating Rebate Program. This is of vital importance to

many low- and fixed-income seniors in my district. I am particularly proud that we will continue to support the Home Heating Rebate Program, as this rebate program provides seniors with financial assistance, especially in the cold winter months when most needed. In Budget 2015 increases, the HST Credit for low-income families also raises the eligible income threshold from \$15,000 to \$30,000. This means that this program will have a larger impact on more families and more seniors.

This government also supports many other important initiatives, including our commitment to support affordable housing requirements for those people who need it most. Through the 2014-2019 Affordable Housing Agreement, \$41 million will fund the Provincial Home Repair Program; 86 per cent of applicants served are seniors with low incomes – seniors with low income.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation owns and operates over 5,000 social housing units Province-wide, and 34 per cent of those properties house seniors. The Home Modification Program provides up to \$3 million annually to low-income homeowners to make accessibility modifications to their homes. In 2014-2015, 83 per cent of clients were seniors, Mr. Speaker. We are definitely working hard on behalf of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Rent Supplement Program, \$9.4 million which enabled Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to provide 150 more rent supplement units for a total of 1,882 Province-wide, about 54 per cent of the units are occupied by seniors, Mr. Speaker. The Residential Energy Efficiency Program applicants are 85 per cent seniors, Mr. Speaker.

As you can see, most of the accomplishments of Budget 2015 are that to provide \$185 million for our Poverty Reduction Strategy. This brings our total investment since 2006 to over \$1.2 billion, Mr. Speaker. Our government has invested into health, and age-friendly, inclusive communities and we will continue to do this.

I should hope that the Opposition across the way would applaud this funding for poverty reduction. As their leader said in this very

House on May 7, 2012, “One of the things this government has done is the Poverty Reduction program. It has been very successful and we have seen the benefits of this. We are not quite there, there is still some work to be done, but there will always be work to be done.”

We are continuing to do this work. As the Leader of the Official Opposition noted, we have done good work and now we are continuing this good work.

Mr. Speaker, I will close with this: The social initiatives which benefit our seniors and all residents of our Province have always been a priority for this government – always been a priority. They are vital to the well-being of our people, Mr. Speaker, and will remain –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

It being 4:45 p.m., the member’s time has expired, and I have to recognize the Member for CBS to close.

**MR. LITTLE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HILLIER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I would like to thank the hon. members who participated in debate today: the Member for St. John’s West, the Member for Labrador West, my colleague for The Straits – White Bay North, the Member for St. John’s Centre, and finally our colleague for Bonavista South opposite.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of material here and I am not sure if I will get a chance to work my way through it. We will start with the Member for St. John’s West who tied seniors to the cost of living. He talked about depending on the cost of living will depend on how much poverty seniors would find themselves in. That is exactly the point I am trying to make. As our economy has boomed, as the cost of living has gone up, people who have been on fixed incomes for a long, long time are very much sliding into poverty.

Mr. Speaker, he talks about a significant increase in income, but all our wealth has

increased least in the country. He talks about almost doubling since 2003 the median wealth of seniors. Certainly, that is a time of twelve years. What we are saying is that over that period of time, having collected \$20 billion, we are still the lowest in the country. The wealth that we have brought into this Province and our seniors have not seen, we are still the lowest in the country.

He talks about special programs, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Labrador West talked about special programs. The Member for Bonavista South talked about special programs. I talked about special programs because when I talked earlier I said they are going to speak about special programs. I was also correct in saying they would not speak about the Residential Energy Rebate, and nobody did. We are working through this.

We get to the Member for Labrador West, again he talks about special programs. It is hard to believe he is moving into his senior years, as sharp as he looks over there today. Mr. Speaker, he talks about moving in and out of Newfoundland and moving to Vancouver Island. I say very few seniors on the low end in this Province will be able to go and live on Vancouver Island.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Brian Peckford was the last one.

**MR. HILLIER:** Brian Peckford may have been the last one.

Mr. Speaker, he also talks about – I believe it was his aunt who swims regularly in her eighties. She is obviously not swimming in one of the pools in Newfoundland and Labrador as our seniors' rates have gone so high. There is one thing he said that I most certainly agree with, and I believe everyone who spoke today, is that we are all committed to the seniors in this Province.

Mr. Speaker, I always love to hear the Member for St. John's Centre speak on social justice. She speaks with passion and so on. She talks about poverty elimination. It is a sound ambition, but I say to her, we have an uphill battle here in this House to eliminate poverty.

In April, government opposite stood and voted against our seniors' advocate. Today, Mr. Speaker, in another instance of self-serving, they have watered down this motion which we have brought forward. So I guess we look at it as a little bit at a time. Three steps forward, two steps back, three steps forward, two steps back. At this rate, it is going to be a long, long time before we eliminate poverty at any level here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Member for St. John's West talked a whole bunch about statistics. I am not interested in getting into arguing statistics because we just get ourselves bogged down. I just want to try and keep this simple.

On one hand, Mr. Speaker, we have \$20 billion collected from oil revenue over the last twelve years. Over that period of time seniors living alone in this Province got an extra \$130 a day to live on. That is for each of the past nine years; \$130 a day for each of the past nine years.

Between 2003 and 2012, a period of nine years –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** A dollar thirty.

**MR. HILLIER:** A dollar thirty – a period of unprecedented wealth, the median after tax income of a senior living alone in this Province increased by \$12 a day. We collected \$20 billion over that period, and over that period our seniors' wealth increased by \$12 a day. Mr. Speaker, \$12 a day.

Members opposite will talk about, yes, but do not forget about the HST rebate and all that money we are putting back into seniors' pockets. Mr. Speaker, that is seventy-one cents a day. That works out to seventy-one cents a day that we are putting into seniors' pockets. If we go back to the Residential Energy Rebate, which nobody talked about, within two weeks we are going to put 8 per cent on that, another 2 per cent on it in January. Where is that seventy-one cents going to be? Wiped out.

So the statistics that I just want to bring forward, and the question I want to ask is: Did the seniors of this Province get their share of that \$20 billion? That is a question that very few of us can answer.

Mr. Speaker, there has been some talk about poverty reduction and whether this poverty reduction should be a general poverty reduction or just a seniors' poverty reduction. One of the reasons we brought this forward was because we have a concern of where poverty reduction went in the first place. Let's go down through a timeline.

It says: Government launched their Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2006; another strategy, another plan in 2006. They released their inaugural progress report on poverty reduction in 2009 and committed therein to release a progress report every two years. Their second progress report was released in 2014 – three years late. Interestingly, they did not include the poverty rate of seniors at that time. They committed to implementing a new strategy in 2011-2012. We still have not seen it.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we felt it was incumbent on us to bring forward a resolution today to challenge government to bring forward a poverty reduction strategy for seniors, because the Poverty Reduction Strategy that they committed to in 2006, like many of the other plans, many of the other studies, many of the other strategies, we still have not seen.

To go back to that list that we talked about and the fact that all of these programs that we talk about that we have never seen, we talk about: What are you doing for seniors? We have a program. We have a plan. We have this. We have that. Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General, money out the door is not a measure of success. That is the problem we have seen here with our seniors.

The Member for Bonavista South just went through his speaking notes a few moments ago with a long list of programs for seniors. Absolutely, I recognize all of those programs that you have for seniors, but as the Auditor General said, money out the door is not a measure of success. I go back to that \$20 billion. Did the seniors of this Province get their fair share of that \$20 billion?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation talks about all the infrastructure that came out of that \$20 billion – and there is no doubt that a lot of that – \$6 billion I believe is the figure that he

talks about. That is brick and mortar. We are talking today about flesh and blood. We are talking about dignity. We are talking about health. We are talking about our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, with that in mind, I will ask everyone here to please stand and vote on this, and vote on it positively.

Thank you very much.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Verge):** Order, please!

Shall the amendment carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The amendment is carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Shall the resolution, as amended, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, resolution, as amended, carried.

**MR. SPEAKER:** This being Wednesday, Private Members' Day, and the business of the House concluded, the House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.