



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF  
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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Volume L

SECOND SESSION

Number 23

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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA*

Monday

April 3, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I rise on a point of privilege.

I rise at my earliest opportunity as I was waiting for the video or Hansard recording to be made available for the evening sitting of March 22, 2023. The point of privilege relates to two sets of comments made by the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port – statements misrepresenting what I said.

I left the Chamber because I was mad after the first set of statements and I later heard that there were further comments, so I was waiting for a record of the conversation to review prior to deciding whether or not to make this point of privilege here today, Speaker.

So why do I feel as though my privilege has been impacted? One of the five principles of privilege is freedom from obstruction, interference and intimidation. The House of Commons website talks about privilege including matters that have been found to be prima facie, including damaging of a Member's reputation and the provision of misleading information.

On March 22, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port provided misleading information to this House and in the public in his remarks related to statements he alleges I said in speaking to Bill 22. So the Member misled this House on two instances and I'm just going to handle them sequentially.

The first one, if you look in the video, is at 6:34 on the feed. The Member talked about, it started this morning with the minister

talking about housekeeping updates and said it's much more than housekeeping updates. The Member was suggesting that I was classifying all the changes to Bill 22 as housekeeping updates.

Speaker, in presenting legislation to this House, it's very important that I do tell Members and the public about all the changes we are making to an act. In addition to creating a very important legislative duty to document, I did say that we are making housekeeping amendments, but I categorically did not tell this House that all the amendments were housekeeping in nature nor did I suggest that the whole of the changes proposed were housekeeping in nature.

The second set of misleading comments, I think, are a more serious breach of my privilege, Speaker. At 10:11 on the morning of March 22, if you look in the video, I was explaining how we gave full and fair considerations to the Privacy Commissioner's feedback. The Privacy Commissioner asked for extra responsibilities and I was explaining that, firstly, it falls outside his mandate of ATIPPA, secondly that the Auditor General provides independent oversight and thirdly that we are also reviewing the statutory offices.

I said – I quote – we did not feel like it was necessary at the time. If you want to go have a look, it's at 10:11:55. I said: We did not feel like it was necessary at this time.

So then later that evening, we were continuing our debate and at 6:35, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port accused me of saying that I didn't follow all the Privacy Commissioner's recommendations because I didn't feel like it. The Member said I didn't feel like it, very enthusiastically and flippantly, Mr. Speaker, and he said it six times. I did not say I didn't feel like it. I said: We did not feel like it was necessary at the time.

This is very different from saying I didn't feel like it. You can go back and watch with the spirit that the Member said it; I encourage anyone to go and watch the video.

The Member proceeded to say if that's the attitude you have, no wonder – referring to the Privacy Commissioner's further discussions with us – insinuating that I have a flippant attitude towards the work the Privacy Commissioner, which could not be further from the truth.

So my purpose here is to correct the record. This is the second instance where Members opposite have fabricated things that I've said or done to portray them in a negative and malicious light. So if anyone is watching, don't take my word for it, review what I said on March 22 at 10:11:55 and have a look at what the Member said at 6:35 on that same day. You can watch the video online.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port is disrespecting the residents I represent when he is twisting and emphasizing my words, completely mischaracterizing what I said and how I said it. He's trying to negatively impact my reputation and spread misinformation.

I would prefer not to be holding up the House with this matter. I feel strongly, though, that it is important that as a House we recognize that this type of behaviour is not appropriate. Let's debate the policy, the legislation, the timing, absolutely; but we cannot allow the precedent to continue in this House that Members can so enthusiastically maliciously misrepresent what other Members say and spread misinformation.

Speaker, I ask that you review this matter. If you find my privilege has been breached, I ask that the Member apologize to this House and, if appropriate, that this matter be examined by the appropriate Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Speaker.

During the heat of debate, at that particular date, that evening I also looked directly at the Member which I'm not supposed to do. I apologized at that time and directed my comments back to you as Speaker.

I also want to stand here today and unequivocally and sincerely – if any of my actions or my words offended the minister opposite and the Member opposite, I want to apologize for them and withdraw my remarks.

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

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Today in the public gallery, I'd like to welcome Kelly Vodden's Masters Environmental Policy class from the Grenfell Campus, Memorial University.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** Also, in the public gallery, welcome to past and present members of the Outer Cove Marines. They are visiting us this afternoon, also for a Member's statement.

Welcome.

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

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today we will hear statements by the Members for the Districts of Terra Nova, Bonavista, Exploits, Ferryland and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I take great pleasure in standing today to congratulate White Hills Resort in Clarenville.

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

**L. PARROTT:** On Saturday, after a long process with a great team effort, they won the Mackenzie Top Peak top award of \$100,000. This process started in late January with the nomination process from the board, staff, a great group of volunteers, and continued from there to rally votes as a province and as a country. We all jumped into the process, voting daily, up until March 8.

On March 11, the top 10 were announced and White Hills was successful in their effort and continued on to the next round. This round, once again supported by the community, province, family and friends in other parts of Canada continued with voting and participation in social media challenges and posts for points.

Everyone jumped on the challenge and helped secure the top three ranking, which was announced on March 25. The team effort was tremendous. After a few weeks waiting, with the judges making the final decision, the announcement was exactly what we all joined in for: a win.

Please join and congratulating the staff, board, volunteers and supporters of White Hills Resort.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Shannon Holloway is a carpenter by trade from Bloomfield, Bonavista Bay. This is an area of the District of Bonavista that hosted many schooners back in the day for freight and fish transfer, as well as motor boats which were used primarily for the inshore fishery. It was a bustling bay in its day.

Shannon was determined to do his part to recapture history and showcase our heritage. He put his skills to the test and built a motor boat, an exact replica of the motor boat of the past with a 1940s make and break gas/kerosene engine, the putt-putt. When time came to launch in Holloways Cove in Bloomfield, over 200 locals showed up to view.

Shannon's wife, Bernice, says: "We have tourists stopping by there all the time admiring the view of our motor boat and the scenery." Shannon has constructed a wharf in the cove and is currently working on another fishing vessel to adorn the waters of Bloomfield, Bonavista Bay.

I ask the Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the skill set and passion of Shannon Holloway, who is determined to preserve our marine history and enhance tourism in the Bloomfield area.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize Mrs. Betty Saunders, a name everyone in the Town of Norris Arm will recognize, from young to the old. She is a member of the BGC Norris Arm and helps with the New Horizons for Seniors Program run by the club.

For many years she was the executive director with BGC Norris Arm and has volunteered with every community organization for over 60 years. She was a business owner in the town and was part of the town staff when incorporation happened. She was also the town manager and assisted with countless community events over the years.

Speaker, to this day, she still helps lead and consults for many organizations in the town including local churches and the BGC. She's a strong pillar in the community and now passes her knowledge and her expertise to younger generations who can continue providing services to children, youth and seniors in Norris Arm and the surrounding area.

Speaker, I ask all Members in the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Mrs. Betty Saunders of Norris Arm for her contributions to her community and surrounding area.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

I rise today in this hon. House to recognize two individuals of the Ferryland District who were selected to play wheelchair basketball and represent Newfoundland and Labrador in the Canada Winter Games in PEI from February 18 to March 5, 2023.

Brothers Alex and Jack Kennedy from Bay Bulls attended the first week of the Canada Winter Games as part of Team Newfoundland and Labrador wheelchair basketball team. The Kennedy brothers are avid basketball players since a young age and this is the first time they played together on the same team. Alex joined the team in 2017, attending the 2019 Winter Games in

Red Deer, and Jack joined the team in 2020.

Alex has mild cerebral palsy and Jack is an able-bodied player. There's a mix of both disabled players as well as able-bodied players on the team. They joined forces with Nova Scotia for these games as neither province had enough players to make a team. They played under the banner of TeamNL.

Please join me in congratulating Jack and Alex Kennedy for representing Newfoundland and Labrador in the Canada Winter Games.

Thank you.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the return of one of the original teams involved in the Avalon East Senior Hockey League from its inception in 1966, the Outer Cove Marines.

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

**J. WALL:** Now, the Wexford Estates Outer Cove Marines hockey club is a non-profit organization comprised of local players, coaches and volunteers who call the Jack Byrne Regional Sport and Entertainment Centre home. This franchise has a storied history in the senior hockey circuit in our province, with connections to individuals who paved the way for hockey and sport in my district, like Ronnie Cadigan, Leo Cole, Gerry Cadigan, Owen Devereux, the Roche brothers and Campbell Feehan.

The return of this team to the league in 2022 has focused on community, providing leadership and to support and celebrate youth involved in sports across the region.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this 50th General Assembly to join me in congratulating the players; coaches, Alex Snow, Jay Cole and Jason Powell; general manager, Tommy Beckett; and all volunteers of the Outer Cove Marines and wish them every success next season.

It's certainly great to see the blue and gold back on the ice.

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

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm hoping I have it here, Mr. Speaker, because I think I forgot it. I may have to do it tomorrow. I apologize.

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't imagine saying that I was almost saved by the Opposition.

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the amalgamation of four former regional health authorities and the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information into one health authority effective April 1.

Now known as the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, this new entity is aimed at streamlining programs and services, as well as associated corporate services such as human resources, payroll and finance. It was a recommendation in the Health Accord NL and it will help us ensure

consistent and quality health care delivery across Newfoundland and Labrador.

While there is now one health authority, a focus on specific regional issues will be maintained through the five regional health councils. These councils will be responsible for advising the provincial health authority on the particular needs of regions, informing health care delivery at the regional level. Work is underway to appoint these councils, using a merit-based appointments process.

While transition work continues, patients, clients and residents can continue to access care in the same way they always have. There are no immediate changes to health care services, facilities or contact information as a result of this step in the transition.

I would like to congratulate the individuals recently appointed to the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services Board of Trustees. Their effective governance will help support the new health organization moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you and I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, I join the minister in recognizing the amalgamation of the four former regional health authorities and the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information into a new singular entity.

As recommended in the Health Accord, the Official Opposition looks forward to the streamlining of services within the province's health care system, but more importantly to see how residents of this

province will have greater access to health care.

With a new amalgamated entity, much work still needs to be done and questions remain around the protection of individual medical records.

Our province continues to experience an unprecedented loss of health care workers that desperately needs to be fixed. Approximately 135,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are without a family doctor and there are currently 750 nursing vacancies, a 22 per cent increase over a six-month period.

We look forward to working collaboratively with the new amalgamated health authority and to provide real solutions for our worsening health care crisis.

Thank you.

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. This amalgamation lacks clarity and reflects failure to consult with stakeholders. New regional health councils have no real power or influence, muting, excluding expertise and experience from local regions.

This contradicts what was called for in the Health Accord. This framework doesn't improve rural health care and binds regions to the will of decision-makers in St. John's who lack the context and understanding of the realities local people face.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, I'm sure the Premier has taken the time to review the human rights decision involving systemic discrimination for Carter Churchill during a four-year period while the child attended school.

I ask the Premier: Would you stand and apologize to the Churchill family for the ordeal that they have had to endure?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course, it's a complex problem when it comes to human rights and certainly recognize the wrongs of the past. It was previous to my administration, Mr. Speaker, in 2020 and certainly we'll continue to work with the Churchills to ensure that their son gets the best education possible, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, the Churchills have endured significant legal costs during the six-year ordeal fighting for educational equality for their son.

Speaker, will the Premier order the Department of Education to cover the entire legal costs the family has to pay out?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

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

We have followed the case with interest. It is between the school district and the family concerned. My understanding is there was a settlement adjudicated by the Human Rights Tribunal. My understanding is the financial elements of that were stipulated and have been honoured or will be honoured over the course of coming weeks by the school district.

Thank you.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** What I read into that, Mr. Speaker, is that, at the end of the day, the Churchills have had to endure financial loss for something that has been proven was out of control from them and was the blame of government and the school district in this case here. That's not fair in our legal system, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, in 2019, the government established a steering committee on deaf and hard of hearing education which lacks parental representation of a deaf or hard of hearing child – truly remarkable.

Speaker, will the Premier correct this mistake and, in a gesture of good faith, appoint the Churchills as parent representatives?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

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

For clarity, the committee that the Member opposite refers to, as was undertaken by the Premier, does actually have parent representatives on it. We sought opinions from the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for the Deaf and the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and two representatives of families of people with

hearing impairment or deafness sit on that committee.

Thank you.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

After what we found out has happened through this ordeal here, I think it would only be appropriate that the particular situation that the Churchills found themselves in would be beneficial being members of this committee, for sure.

Speaker, the Seniors' Advocate released a report on the biggest challenges facing seniors. It is a sting revelation of the failures of the Liberal government to address the needs of seniors.

Why is the Premier content that seniors cannot afford food, to heat their homes or take their medication?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course seniors are an important element to society, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the most important because they have shared experiences to share with all of us and help make society better. That's why we've concentrated on seniors, whether it's with respect to increasing their Income Supplement, whether it's ensuring that they have a supplement for home heat or ensuring that we are looking after affordable housing through the announcement of last week with 850 new additional units, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Obviously, Speaker, this is not enough for what the seniors are facing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thirty-two per cent of seniors don't have enough income to meet their needs; 60 per cent are going without food; 57 per cent are not purchasing medical supplies or devices. The budget failed seniors.

Does the Premier agree with the Seniors' Advocate who says your government did not do enough?

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

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

Interestingly in reading through the Seniors' Advocate's report, many of the findings we certainly concur with. The interesting thing is, even based on recent reports that the office had done, we have implemented 90 per cent of those recommendations. So we will work with the Seniors' Advocate on each of those findings, particularly as she develops her recommendations for implementation.

In the meantime, the budget has addressed quite a number of issues in terms of cost of living, increasing the Seniors' Benefit, also providing further supports, as the Premier said, in terms of seniors housing. So we are very focused on making sure we address their needs because they need to be addressed.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** I would think if you're going to address the needs of seniors, you would listen to the representation from those seniors themselves.

The Seniors' Advocate stated that this year's budget failed seniors. She called for indexing of seniors benefits and help for seniors who do not have enough money to make ends meet. The Seniors' Advocate said the Liberals refused what she had asked for.

Can the minister or the Premier correct that, whether or not you listened to the Seniors' Advocate?

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

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

I am proud to say the amount of effort that we put into this budget to address the cost of living, including increasing – again, for the second year in a row – the Seniors' Benefit. Remember, Speaker, that this Seniors' Benefit, now increased by 15 per cent over last year's budget and this year's budget – 15 per cent – is stackable. So a senior may receive the Seniors' Benefit. They may receive the Income Supplement. As the Premier said, we have indicated in this year's budget, 850 new affordable houses with a special focus on seniors.

These are the types of things that we are doing, plus the \$500 we're able to give to support those that have oil heat.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, we're not hearing it from seniors that they're reassured from this budget that they're going to be better off next week, next month or next year for sure.

Let me quote the Seniors' Advocate: "Seniors in this province are struggling not just with accessing health care, but also financially." As the Advocate notes, a 5 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit will only provide a maximum \$72 per year.

Does the Premier believe \$6 a day will lift seniors out of poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I will say to the Member opposite, to the people of the province, we have put a tremendous number of measures in this budget to help with the cost of living, including increasing the Seniors' Benefit, including increasing the Income Supplement for the second year in a row, including having a \$500 home heat supplement, including adding \$70 million – \$70 million, Speaker – to ensure that there is affordable housing in this budget.

Speaker, I ask the Members opposite to vote in favour of this budget, to vote for seniors –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. COADY:** – to vote for the Income Supplement, to vote for the record investment that we're making in health care.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

I guarantee you we won't vote for this for two reasons. I just did my math again, it wasn't \$6 a day, it's \$6 a month. That's the increase for Newfoundland and Labrador seniors who've contributed so much to this province. That's what they're worth to the Liberal government over there, Mr. Speaker.

The Seniors' Advocate said: "... from a social determinants of health perspective, think about what that will mean for our

seniors as they age. They will be sicker if they don't have the resources they need."

We now have both the Seniors' Advocate and the Health Accord warning that this government has to take more action to support seniors financially with their health care and to find stable, affordable housing.

When does the government plan to get around to acting on the Seniors' Advocate's recommendations?

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

**S. COADY:** Speaker, I think I just heard from the Leader of the Opposition, the interim Leader of the Opposition, say he will not be voting for this budget. So he's going to be voting against record investments in health care. He's going to vote against record investments in provincial roads. He's going to vote against an increase to the Seniors' Benefit. He's going to vote against an increase in the Income Supplement.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. COADY:** He's going to vote –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, you have 20 seconds left.

**S. COADY:** He's going to vote against seniors receiving medicals, free medicals, to allow them to continue to drive. He's voting against Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, I tell you what I and my colleagues here won't be voting for is the value of the seniors only being –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**D. BRAZIL:** – \$6 a month. That's what that government puts on the value of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Over here, we feel –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I can't hear the Member speaking.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**D. BRAZIL:** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House seniors are worth more than \$6 a month. That might be their value of seniors, to us here they're worth unbelievable amounts of courage, what they've contribute to this province.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Mr. Speaker, I ask again: When are you going to really put a budget that really helps seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

**S. COADY:** I have to correct the Member opposite, Speaker. What he is voting against is he is voting against an increase in the Seniors' Benefit and that's stackable with the Income Supplement, with other things that are happening. He's voting against \$70 million to affordable housing, 850 new housing with emphasis on seniors.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**S. COADY:** He and his party are voting against \$500 assistance that will go to help seniors that use oil for their heat. He's voting against seniors receiving free medicals to ensure they continue to drive. He's voting against personal care home increases. He's voting against more supports than we've ever done, record levels of support –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'll tell you what I'm voting against. I'm voting against no plan for health care, to make sure emergency rooms are open, to make sure that paramedics are planned –

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

**D. BRAZIL:** – and that there are ambulance services. That family doctors are not available in this province here. That emergency rooms themselves are 24-7, that's one of the things we going to be voting against.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**D. BRAZIL:** We're also going to be voting against the fact that senior citizens are not given the value they should be by that administration here. We can talk about all the things.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** We're also not going to vote for three, four, five or 10 years down the road before there's any housing for seniors who now need it immediately and need interventions here. We're not voting for an administration or a budget that has no plan for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**S. COADY:** The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it. That's a Chinese proverb.

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

**S. COADY:** Alexander the Great said: There is nothing impossible to those that do not try – nothing impossible, Speaker.

I'm saying to the Member opposite, when he says he's voting against this budget, he's voting against the implementation of the Health Accord. He's voting against a tremendous outpouring of support for the Health Accord. He's voting against it. He's voting against transformation and modernization of our health system. He's voting against family care centres. He's voting against acute-care centres. He's voting against new infrastructure.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

What we're voting against here, it's not stopping anybody over there with a plan to do anything good for Newfoundland and Labrador. For eight years, we didn't see a plan and there's no plan in this budget again as part of this whole process.

We're voting also against a sugar tax that's supposedly was going to increase and make people healthier –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**D. BRAZIL:** It hasn't done it. Do you know what they've done? They've taken money out of people's pockets to spend on some additional (inaudible) –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I can't hear the speakers. On both sides, I ask all Members to respect the Chair and keep the level of conversation back and forth.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

We'll be voting against the fact that there's no plan here to really address the needs of the people of this province. Putting a tax on sugar, that obviously takes more money out of people's pockets without doing anything to provide healthier food for people, but do nothing to help our industries around agriculture, the fishing industry and these types of things.

We're going to be voting against a number of things here. I'll get an opportunity for three hours to outline the couple of things that are good here but the many things that are missing, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

It gives me great privilege to be able to perhaps offer the evidence that we've been

asking you to look at so much with respect to the sugar-sweetened beverages, Mr. Speaker. Don't trust me; look at the University of Cambridge who studied recently in the UK. It prevented 5,000 cases of obesity in Grade 6 children.

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

**A. FUREY:** Those aren't my numbers, Mr. Speaker, evidence-based, the British medical journal, I didn't make that up. It comes straight from journals.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

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

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

**SPEAKER:** I can stand up all the rest of the afternoon. Either the level of the conversation is going to go down or I can start recognizing Members.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

It's obvious from the sugar tax, where they've gone up from \$9 million to \$12 million, it's not working. There are more people drinking sugar drinks.

Last week, the president of the Registered Nurses' Union, Yvette Coffey, compared retention incentives in this province to Nova Scotia. In comparison, she said that retention incentives here are – quote – a slap in the face of registered nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the minister: Why do nurses in our province continue to feel so disrespected and undervalued by this Liberal government?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, addressing the issues for registered nurses, part of it is about money and, yes, compensation is important. What's also important is getting at the workplace issues.

During the Nursing Think Tank, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of issues put forward by the Registered Nurses' Union and through consultations. We are acting on those.

We have the Health Human Resources Plan, Mr. Speaker, that is now through the RFP process and awarded. We're looking at a core staffing model, we're looking at mental health for registered nurses that are working and we're looking at early learning and child care for registered nurses as well as other health professionals.

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I was waiting to hear "stay tuned," which seems to be the answer to everything here.

Yvette Coffey also said that nurses are – quote – very upset with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Health Sciences emergency department has lost over 50 per cent of their staff in the last two years.

Why do nurses continue to flee the system under this Liberal government's watch?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, if you look at the statistics for five years ago, four years

ago, three years ago or today there are the same number of bodies working as registered nurses, but they're working differently. We have registered nurses who are going casual. We have nurses who've gone to the agencies. There is the same number of nurses working on the floor, but they're doing it in different ways.

We are working on recruitment, Mr. Speaker, because nurses are overworked; they are mandated overtime. That is something we're working on. The mission that we have to India and the interest that we have in India speaks to just one of the areas that we're looking at in terms of recruitment to help address those issues.

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I suggest to the Member to go back eight years in statistics when this group over here came into power. There's been nothing done – nothing done.

The Registered Nurses' Union also expected to see a retention strategy in this year's budget, but they were left disappointed again. Nursing vacancy rates increased 22 per cent between April and October of last year.

How can the minister continue to abandon nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador for so long?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure you we are not abandoning nurses. We are certainly working at recruiting registered nurses, practical nurses for this province. We've worked hard at recruitment of nursing to help deal with some of the issues in terms of staffing models. We are also

working on the Health Human Resources Plan, the core staffing review, mental health services for registered nurses, early learning and child care. We are focused on the issues that were raised during the Nursing Think Tank. It's not just about money, although money is an important aspect to respecting nurses.

I do know that the RNU is in the middle of collective bargaining now and some of those issues will be dealt with through that process.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** The inquiry into the mass shooting in Nova Scotia found: "Gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence is an epidemic. Like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is a public health emergency that warrants a meaningful, whole of society response."

I ask the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality: What funding increases were made in this year's budget to address the gender-based violence epidemic in our province?

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member, of course, for the question.

We, too, concur and our condolences, of course, and our thoughts go to the people of Nova Scotia for the horrific mass shooting that was experienced back in 2020 in the community of Portapique.

That said, we've also heard the calls that Ms. Breen, our lawyer, has been making. She's been part of that inquiry. I'm happy to say that this House, my colleague and I, we

have a meeting actually arranged to meet with Ms. Breen to work with her on ways that we can improve.

I'm also happy to say that more than \$3 million will be going to gender-based violence from my department alone. We're always looking for a way across government to do this to combat gender-based violence, as well as working with our federal counterparts.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, we need to see not nominal increases, but epidemic-level funding. That's exactly what the Nova Scotia inquiry called for, was epidemic-level funding to the anti-violence sector, which must include stable core funding for programs that support survivors of gender-based violence, as well as for preventative programs, including intervention for abusers.

Violence Prevention Avalon East is one of the many organizations in this province who work towards violence prevention. This organization, like others, has not received an increase in funding since 2012.

Will the minister commit to further funding the work of this very important organization?

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

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to sincerely thank our community stakeholders, the experts who are on the front line for the work that they do, working directly with the people who

need these supports. I'm also happy to say that there have been increases of about \$5 million in core government funding, across government actually, to help organizations in our community-based grants and programs such as this.

Again, we're always looking for ways where we can improve. As a matter of fact, my staff are constantly talking with our stakeholders. As a matter of fact, I have directed my staff, actually, to take a closer look on operations for community-based organizations to ensure that the funding is spent the way it is supposed to be to meet the needs of people who need these services.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Speaker, the current residents of Gaultois are dismayed that people who have already abandoned the community are now being allowed to vote on the fate of those who have stayed for a resettlement vote.

I ask the minister: Why are you allowing people who have already moved on from Gaultois the ability to vote in a resettlement vote?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss such a vibrant issue that's in the media and on the hearts and minds of the residents of Gaultois these last couple of days.

We certainly understand that this is a very difficult decision for the residents of Gaultois. It's a time in their community that they feel they're faced to make with making this decision. This was a community-driven initiative that came forward out of the

community of Gaultois where they had questions and an expression of interest on how government could be there to support the residents who chose at that time, or think at that time that they have to make a choice now whether or not they want to leave their community.

Right now, we're working with the residents. We have a vote that was initiated recently and our –

**SPEAKER:** The minister's time has expired.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Speaker.

The question was the residents who have moved on from Gaultois.

Speaker, one resident stated in local media there are – quote – too many questions surrounding the process – end quote – for them to have confidence in the outcome of this particular vote. They cannot even access a voting list to see who was eligible. There could be people who own part-time property in Gaultois determining the fate of that community.

Minister, do you feel that this is acceptable?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker.

As I was saying, the policy that was initiated by the community is it picks a particular date in time and the expression of interest vote came in on April 26, 2022. Our policy then indicates that the time frame for 365 days prior to that date in time are the residents who are considered permanent, full-time residents in that community. Everybody who was a permanent, full-time resident in that community, at that time, has a right to a

vote. It is their right as a citizen to be a participant in this voting process. That is the timeline that was specified.

In terms of speaking about information and releasing a voter's list. We are protected under the ATIPP legislation from releasing that information because it would compromise people's personal privacy.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Speaker.

In a newsletter to its members, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador have spoken out about its disappointment that regionalization was not specifically included in this year's budget.

I ask the minister: When can municipalities, unincorporated areas, Local Service Districts and others expect further consultation by your department on regionalization?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker.

A very timely question, just earlier today we had the opportunity to sit with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and discuss the many initiatives that they have in place and the ways they are working to advocate for communities all across this province. There were questions about regionalization that came up, but the biggest point that they were appreciative of and they kept resounding was the fact that our Municipal Operating Grants had increased this year.

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

**K. HOWELL:** In this year's budget, we've increased the Municipal Operating Grants, \$3 million this year and \$3 million next year

to continue to provide that support for municipalities who do the work on the front lines, who are the boots on the ground, as we say, in our communities and we certainly do appreciate all the work that it is they do.

With regard to the regionalization report, we've identified over the last few months that there are some challenges that we're looking at addressing in terms of population density and geography –

**SPEAKER:** The minister's time has expired.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Speaker.

These residents do deserve a platform to ask these very important questions. In the Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance states there will be funding projects for "a regional, shared-services approach." Many smaller communities and Local Service Districts have limited abilities to do so.

I ask the minister: Which programs will be funded under this shared-services approach, and how do smaller communities with limited services qualify for that?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker.

I have so much good stuff that I want to say today that I can't get it all out in time.

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

**K. HOWELL:** As mentioned, there are a number of initiatives that are highlighted in this year's budget that have regional service-sharing models. We have examples all across this province of how communities have come together, how they figured out how to make things work when they work

with their neighbours and we can support each other in community-based sharing services.

So that's an avenue that we're certainly interested in highlighting, interested in exploring and as we move forward we'll be there to work with communities to figure out what it is that makes sense for them and how they can better access the funding available from the government.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, government's retention announcements in health care seem praiseworthy at face value; however, we have heard from health care workers that the retention efforts fall short and are creating tension because workers do not feel valued.

I ask the Premier: Why does this government continue to leave our health care system in perpetual crisis by failing to take the retention of workers seriously?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

Certainly, we value the people who are on the front lines of the health care system, Mr. Speaker. We've been listening to them. We understand the anxiety that they face. It's not unique to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the health care professionals on the front line here.

That said, we are employing local solutions for what can be argued as an international problem, Mr. Speaker, whether that's a retention bonuses that have been offered to GPs, \$25,000, Mr. Speaker. We have offered a come home package to people, including nurse practitioners, \$50,000; RNs,

\$50,000; LPNs, \$50,000; paramedics, \$50,000; primary care paramedics, \$50,000.

We continue to encourage people to come to Newfoundland and Labrador. We encourage them to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador and we will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker, by not only offering incentives, but, unlike the Member opposite who doesn't want to create a modern facility for these people to work in, we will give them that too, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**J. DINN:** I think the people who work in the facility want actual people there.

April is Dental Health Month, Speaker. My office is managing multiple cases of people who are unable to access dental care in this province. Thankfully, the NDP federal initiative is going to bring relief at the end of this year.

At every turn, they're met with barriers and hoops they cannot jump through to satisfy the mess of approvals required by this government because these constituents lack money or to pay for examinations.

Will this government take immediate action to improve access to dental care and remove these barriers now?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a timely question. I know the federal government has announced their dental program; we don't have all of the details of that program, Mr. Speaker. We are awaiting those. Once we get those details we can evaluate, analyze and determine how it will have a positive impact on the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador across the spectrum of ages.

Mr. Speaker, I have had some discussion with the federal minister and I am looking forward to the details.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

The Liberals will always do the right thing when they have the NDP nipping at their toes and pushing them towards doing the right thing.

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

**J. DINN:** The social determinants of health account for the majority of a person's overall health. The government knows this, as it was outlined repeatedly in the Health Accord.

I ask the Minister of Health: When will his government focus on what needs to be done and prioritize treating the causes of poor health instead of the symptoms?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As outlined in our provincial budget, we are looking at the recommendations of the Health Accord, Mr. Speaker. It has been highlighted; we will continue to focus on the social determinants. There are a number of departments involved in looking at the social determinants of health, Mr. Speaker, whether it is housing or the Department of Health and Community Services, income support, other measures that this province is looking at to assist the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to improve the social determinants of health and to improve their overall health.

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

This government has merged the regional health authorities into one provincial health authority.

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

**L. EVANS:** Local regions are now left without any real power or influence, relying solely on appointed health councils who have no real decision-making powers.

How can the minister reassure people outside the Avalon Peninsula that their access to adequate and timely health care will not be further eroded?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, the board of trustees that have been put in place for the new provincial health authority have individuals from across the province on them. The health councils, Mr. Speaker, will have people from the local regions as part of the health councils and each health council will have a seat at the table on the provincial board, Mr. Speaker, so the local voices of each region of the province will be heard at the larger table by the provincial health authority.

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

**SPEAKER:** The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### Tabling of Documents

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand here today to table the '23-'25 activity plans for the Fish Processing Licensing Board, the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board, the Appeal Board of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board and the Chicken Farmers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

These activity plans are being submitted, along with the required written statement, as per section 16 of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*.

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

**SPEAKER:** Are there are further tabling of documents?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

In reaction to the press release the Information and Privacy Commissioner put out in relation to Bill 22, I table a letter that I sent to the Information and Privacy Commissioner as well as his response, particularly clarifying the debate around Cabinet records.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

### Notices of Motion

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion:

That notwithstanding Standing Order 8(3)(b), at the conclusion of proceedings on Wednesday, April 5, 2023, that this House do adjourn to Tuesday, April 25, 2023.

**SPEAKER:** Are there any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

**J. DINN:** Speaker, I give notice of the following private Member's motion, which would be seconded by the Member for Torngat Mountains:

WHEREAS our health care services are in crisis and government is making more space for private profit in our publicly funded, publicly administered system as a quick fix; and

WHEREAS US-style private health care draws workers and resources from our already strained public system, leading to a further erosion of service and patients' well-being; and

WHEREAS private deals for health services and infrastructure lack transparency, often come with significant strings and risks attached, and cost citizens more than a publicly provided and managed equivalent;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House urge the government to say no to any further privatization of our health care system, roll back current privatization, and invest in a publicly funded, publicly administered public health care system.

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

**J. BROWN:** Thank you Speaker.

This will be the private Member's motion that will be read this Wednesday from the Third Party.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Are there any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

**J. DWYER:** Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The closing off the Canning Bridge in Marystown has had a devastating impact on residents, fire and emergency services, and the local economy.

The department was well aware of the poor condition of the bridge, most recently documented in a bridge inspection report completed in January 2020 which confirmed the Canning Bridge was in poor condition.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately begin the process of replacing Canning Bridge.

Speaker, this particular petition that I'm presenting today is actually signed by His Worship, Mayor Keating and Deputy Mayor Walsh. There were a couple of things. The reason why we prepared this petition is because we came in, we had a meeting with the department and the officials and the minister, which was a very fruitful meeting, but the thing is that there have been some communication errors, I guess, out of the gates.

What I would like to ask of the minister now is that we have a look – and I think the mayor waited on seven days for a reply to

an email, which I don't think is good enough, especially the fact that this bridge has now been deemed impassable, type of thing, other than for an emergency. The thing is it's affecting a lot of things.

What I'm here to ask today and the reason why I'm presenting the petition today is to ask the minister and his department to be open and transparent but also to give us the hard copies of any reports that have been filed or anything like investigations so that the town and myself are very well aware of what the process is going to be. Then we can get some hard timelines on what the process is going to be. Right now, we're only a couple of months into this and the mental health anguish and the economic anguish that's been caused in Marystown because of the closure of this bridge is just unbelievable. It affects everybody on the Burin Peninsula, really, to be honest.

I will present this petition again and take it from another different angle, but today I am asking the minister to make sure that we're being open, transparent and very communicative with myself, the mayor and the council in Marystown so that we can all find a solution to this problem. We're not here to lay blame or anything like that. We just want this solution to be seen to fruition as quick as possible.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Mr. Speaker, I'm a little baffled by that petition today to be honest with you. And not understanding really what the Member is up talking about today in terms of that petition because the petition encourages government to do something. When we received the report about it, I believe – I can be corrected – within 48 hours I was talking to the mayor. The mayor was extremely pleased by the response from government and that same Member

that just stood there then was into a meeting and patted me on the back for the response that we were doing as a department. So I don't know where it's coming from, but in terms of a seven day no response to the mayor, I don't know what he's referring to because there has been constant contact. Plus, our officials even met this morning to clarify some of the comments that were made in the media by the mayor.

It's not to confuse or to leave the impression with the people of Marystown that something is going to happen sooner rather than later. I'm not going to make an apology to do due diligence to replace a bridge in Marystown. We're going to take our time and do what's necessary, but I have not received from the town that they're unhappy with the consultations that we've been doing to date. So I don't know where that's coming from in terms of the Member presenting that petition today. We are doing what's appropriate.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I have a petition here: Retention Bonus for Hospital Support Workers.

Reasons for the petition: Hospital support staff have been inexplicably passed over for retention bonus given to other classifications; and

WHEREAS other and varied classifications received their retention bonuses in January 2023; and

WHEREAS the glue that keeps the place together during the pandemic were passed over for a retention bonus because we do not fit into the parameters as defined by the Newfoundland and Labrador government; and

WHEREAS hospital support staff are unable to get holidays, days off because there is no one to cover them and it has been this way for at least three years; and

WHEREAS the Newfoundland and Labrador government made an unprecedented move for clerical by offering a 30-seat, two-year free tuition at Keyin Tech to address the shortages in clerical at Eastern Health.

THEREFORE we petition the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide a retention bonus to all eligible hospital support staff.

Speaker, I'm pleased to present this petition on behalf of the administrative group of workers who are employed by Eastern Health today. During COVID, these workers were described by the government as the glue that keeps the place together. I have here in my possession approximately 600 signatures and more are coming.

But now they feel that they are being treated as if their hard work doesn't count. They make up about 25 per cent of employees who did not receive a retention bonus. For years, government has ignored the looming crisis in health care and is now making a firehose of announcements to try and stop the bleeding of health care workers from our system.

Government has been announcing bonuses. We heard a litany of them here earlier. Obviously, they're not accomplishing what they set out to do because they're haphazard. What are they accomplishing other than creating strife and tension in the workplace?

So support for these workers is long past due. Front-line workers and unions have raised the problems with retention and recruitment for years, government is scrambling to try to compete regionally and globally for health care workers. What would we do here in our party? Certainly what

needs to happen and the only way to find a solution is start talking with front-line workers, Speaker.

We would have listened to them, they're the ones that know the health care system intimately and they will be the ones finding the innovative solutions to the health care system.

So, if anything here, we believe that everyone has their role to play in health care and workers should be treated with the respect and all should be recognized for being the glue to hold the system together.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

The list of the number of people in need of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in the Central area has increased in the past couple of years. This leaves people in vulnerable situations and most time out in the cold while waiting for placement.

Therefore we, the undersigned, encourage the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to upgrade and increase the number of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units in the Central area.

Speaker, I'm still getting calls, actually more this year and beyond. I know there are over 300 people on the list of housing for units in Central Newfoundland; the list is getting longer and longer. Only this past week when I was home I had to deal with a couple that are left out in the cold. I'm getting calls from single moms with children needing places to stay. The situation is getting dire. There are some housing units out there that desperately need repair that probably we could utilize to get some of

those people off the street and into the housing units.

We need more housing units. I did hear the minister get up and talk about some money getting into the budget, but my problem is what do they do at the immediate time? I'd like for the minister to address that, to let me know. What would I tell people who need housing in the immediate time? Where do they go? What do they do?

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, this is a petition for adequate health care for Postville.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that residents of the Northern Labrador community of Postville have access to adequate health care.

The community of Postville, Labrador, has only one Labrador-Grenfell Health nursing position in Postville at the single community nursing clinic. This means there is only one clinic nurse physically present in the community. This nurse does not have access to RCMP support services during a medical emergency because the community does not have RCMP stationed in their community.

The community of Postville is isolated with no road access to the outside world. The only means of year-round transportation is by aircraft. Often inclement weather prevents air services, including medevac, medical evacuation services, from getting to Postville. Also, if the lone nurse becomes ill and inclement weather prevents nursing relief from reaching the community, Postville will be without a nurse.

Speaker, this petition is really, really important because the community of

Postville is a law-abiding community, but it's very, very vulnerable. In actual fact, the signatures on this particular petition that I'm presenting on behalf of Postville is signed by the residents in Nain, in the community of Nain, our most northern community and they too see the merit in actually expanding the clinic in Postville to two nurses so we would ensure that the nurse has support.

Right now, there is only one nurse. So in the middle of the night, if there's a big fire and there are a lot of people injured, who would you call? People in this House of Assembly would automatically think, okay, that nurse, if she doesn't have nursing backup she could call the RCMP because they're professionally trained in crisis management. They have resources available. But in Postville, they don't even have an RCMP officer for that single nurse and it really, really does a lot of damage to recruitment.

We talk about recruitment all the time, but for a nurse to go into a northern community that doesn't have road access. In an emergency, if the nurse needs backup, automatically you would think RCMP supports. I already told you no, but in actual fact what about adjacent communities say, for example, Makkovik? Makkovik has a RCMP officer and has nursing. Could they go over to the community of Postville? No because there's no road access.

In an emergency, that lone nurse has to rely on herself, her own skills. A lot of time the AngajukKâk of Postville, that's the mayor, actually gets called out to support the nurse. I mean, that's backward. That was actually things that happened back in the '70s and now we're into what, 2023.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, this is an important petition.

Thank you very much.

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

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I gladly present this petition on behalf of 700 residents from the Bonavista Bay side of the district I serve.

Many residents on Route 235 in the District of Bonavista are concerned about the condition of this major highway. Residents from 17 communities petition the government to repair the numerous washouts, replace damaged safety railing and keep the Amherst Cove depot open year round to better serve the roadways on the lower part of the Bonavista Peninsula.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide the required maintenance and implement a better operational plan to bring Route 235 up to a safe standard.

In talking about roads in the District of Bonavista, I had a conversation with a colleague and I challenged him, saying that I thought that the District of Bonavista's roads may be in greatest need of attention of the districts in the province. It was a discussion and one that I feel strongly that we need attention.

Just this past weekend we had a family of four, Neil White and his wife, Samantha, from Princeton, whose roadway going through their town is atrocious; it's terrible, as are many others. It was their five-year-old daughter, Irelyn, who suggested that they go out and fix the potholes and fix the road because Dad is a contractor.

With her suggestion and with her older sister by one year of age, Saylor, they went out and spent the day on Saturday repairing the street that goes through their community. I wouldn't espouse that we do that because immediately here in the House we deem to say there's a safety issue that is shrouded in that. But all I would say to you is that they had the pylons up and this one was in low-traffic. As bad as the road was,

there was very little traffic. I do give a big shout-out to the White family and know that there is a cautionary note to work on our roads in the district.

Route 235 last year had potholes that were not addressed until October, but not all addressed in October. We have washouts on the shoulder of the roads in 235 which are now breaking away pavement on that same road that we have those potholes. We need a better operational plan in 235.

The petitioners ask that the Amherst Cove depot stay open. Instead of transporting employees from the upper part of the district to the lower, their time will be more spent in the depot down in the lower part being able to address the areas with less travel time.

We ask the minister to take note of Route 235.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's: That in accordance with Standing Order 65, the Public Accounts Committee comprise the following Members: MHA for Harbour Main; MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's; MHA for Baie Verte - Green Bay; MHA for Exploits; MHA for Labrador West; MHA for Mount Pearl North; MHA for St. George's - Humber.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

It's an honour to stand in this House and for the next period of time have what I would hope will be an open and frank discussion around the needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the budget that has been put forward by the Minister of Finance and the Liberal administration this past week.

This is my 41st budget as a civil servant, being able to watch and dilute what's happening and hopefully seeing the benefits to the people of this province. It will be my 14th one of speaking in this House of Assembly to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador about the budget. I've been on both sides in a government position, as a backbencher and a government position as a minister and as a Member of caucus in the Opposition and as leader for the last number of years in this side of the Opposition itself.

I want to outline to people in Newfoundland and Labrador the role of the Opposition here, so people understand that it's not solely about opposing for the sake of opposing. We had a fairly robust discussion during Question Period, myself and the

Minister of Finance, and that's healthy because we're always going to have differing of opinion on the approach. I don't think there's a difference of opinion on wanting to have the right outcome. The approach, how we do it and the priorities are obviously going to be some of the challenges that we have from a different perspective.

That comes from a different philosophy on how it's to be done or outlining where the priorities are, or the timelines that should be put in play as part of that. I've made it fairly clear on this side, and my colleagues have done it and shown through true respect for the House and for the responsibilities of the minister and other ministers and the government themselves about acknowledging, when there's something good being done, we want to acknowledge that. I'll note some of the good things in this budget as I go through my discussion over the next period of time.

There are things there that we like, very much so. While myself and the minister had a discussion back and forth during Question Period, this isn't about that we don't agree or don't support certain things in the budget – opposite, 100 per cent. What we're saying in certain cases, if you're going to spend nearly \$10 billion, we want to make sure that the best outcomes, the best way to improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and that the priority issues are being addressed so every Newfoundlander and Labradorian can feel reassured that their challenges that they're facing are going to be addressed.

I know we can't be everything to everybody, but we do need to find ways of prioritizing the approach, coming up with a plan of action that addresses that and having it in timely fashion that people can feel confident that there is going to be a solution to what they're doing.

I also want to talk about our objective and our role and the role before us when the

Liberals were in Opposition with the Third Party and even my independent colleagues, our objective is to scrutinize policies, procedures, programs and, particularly in this case, a budget that outlines the fiscal support for our citizens, outlines the plan of action that would secure economic viability for our province and outlines what should be the blueprint for future development in Newfoundland and Labrador as part of that.

So if we see things we don't like, our objective here is to hold government to account, to ask for clarification, to challenge us to why that was a priority, to challenge why or how other entities are involved in this and who will be the pure benefactor of this as we move forward.

It's also to offer alternatives and not that we always got all of the answers here but the luxury that the Opposition has, it has the ability to openly have discussions with those who feel they're not getting the ear of government or that the programs or services being provided are not in direct benefit to those people.

So we get the chance to sit with another side to have a discussion on what their challenges are, what their issues are or what they see are some shortcomings in a particular program or a particular policy being put forward. It doesn't necessarily mean we're always going to agree with these individuals. Maybe 100 per cent will agree with government. Maybe we'll agree that there has to be some manoeuvring or some tweaking. Maybe we'll agree 100 per cent with the individuals that government missed the mark on providing a program and a service. But I will guarantee you, when we have those discussions over here, we will be open, we'll be transparent about it and we will ensure that what we're putting forward is from our belief and the discussion we had with people in the best interests in the people that we represent.

In principle, when we speak in this House, we hope that we speak for all

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They may not all agree with our approach to it nor would they all agree with the government's approach also as part of that.

We'll offer a constructive criticism here. I would hope we go a little bit further than some of the past Opposition parties. When we do talk about what we feel is not being done, we'll give an alternative and we'll outline why we think that alternative is viable. We'll even outline what we think is the financial plan to make that viable and we'll also outline what we feel would be the benefits, short term, medium term and long term for the people of this province as part of that.

So there are a number of things here that the Opposition has a responsibility, has a privilege, but more particularly in the House has right to ensure that the voice of the individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador who feel it may not be getting directly to government officials or to ministers or to the delivery of a program, is given that opportunity that we can bring it to the forefront of the House here.

Also, I want to note that people in Newfoundland and Labrador, all of us, need to be reassured that we're not being dismissed. That no matter how insignificant we may think, or somebody may think, a government Member may think, or a bureaucrat may think, or a minister think is not a priority or important to that individual, it is to the people who bring it forward. Everybody has a whole dynamic of different needs and responsibilities and priorities.

We may not be able to relate to them all because none of us have had full life experiences that we have experienced everything that somebody may experience, no matter what their situation is. We need to be cognizant of those issues in not dismissing when people bring something forward. Even if it sounds outlandish, even if it sounds financially not viable, but there are merits in listening because in every

conversation, in my opinion, there is information that could be beneficial to solving an issue down the road. So I think there are merits in that.

For the most part, I think this House of Assembly has been fairly open and I'll note some of those issues around how the government in this budget has listened to the people, has listened to the Opposition here, in some of the things that they have implemented and we'll acknowledge those as we move forward.

Our objective over here, even as we debate this budget for the next number of weeks, is about ensuring that government listens to find ways to improve on what we're saying. There may be immediate things that can be done. There may be medium timelines and there may be long-term timelines, but our objective here is to bring forward what we felt was beneficial and acknowledge you and say please, continue to do that. Enhance it if you can. As matter of fact, expedite it because what you brought forward is beneficial to the people and we agree with it.

If there are gaps in services or if there are only half measures, we want to encourage you to move that in a different manner and make that a bigger priority. If there is a full missed opportunity here, we're going to bring that to the forefront. We're going to challenge you to make sure it becomes a priority. Because if we're labeling it as a priority from our prospective, I can guarantee you it didn't come from just the people here. It came from the thousands and the tens of thousands of people that we've spoken to, the emails the we've gotten, the organizations we've met with as they outline exactly what they feel are their priorities necessary for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to have a sustainable income, to have hope in this province and ensure that their lives are better in the future than they are right now.

To accept we have unique challenges that we probably haven't faced to the same degree in our past that we're facing now. Access to health care has never been in the same category as it is right now, we understand that and we understand it is not just our jurisdiction, but we do want to emphasize our priority is about addressing the particular issue here in Newfoundland and Labrador, to address that particular issue.

Our objective here also is to make sure we all aim in the House of Assembly to do better. To do better for the people of the province, to do better from a financial point of view, to do better for the future Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and to make sure that the next generation themselves feel comfortable, welcomed and want to stay here. Be open for immigration, be open for expats to come back to Newfoundland and Labrador, be open for business so the global world understands that we're open, we have a lot of resources. We have the most skill set people anywhere. We have the most beautiful scenery in the world. But if you want to come and do business, you do business with us on our terms.

We're fair. One thing about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we're fair with people, we're fair as long as we're being treated fairly also. That maybe unfortunately in the past, and that's not a slight on any government, but in the past maybe we've been taken advantage too often. I would have hoped and think and I'm cautiously optimistic that we have learned from our past mistakes and that we dig a little bit deeper. We do a little bit more research.

We've become a little skeptical until we're really comfortable that people are negotiating in good faith with us here in Newfoundland and Labrador and that the federal government owes us a responsibility here of being better stewards and better partners with us in Newfoundland and

Labrador. Again, I want to make this clear, that's no slight to any administration anywhere at this point. This is about us correcting the wrongs so that we have a brighter future for everybody involved and that starts with our budget process here, so that it reflects exactly what we're looking for here.

I want to have quick chat about some of the things here that we like. One of the headlines noted that the Leader of the Opposition says he's optimistically hopeful that this budget will improve people's lives. I still stand by that. I'm not convinced of it at this point because I don't know exactly what the plan is to address that. But at least when I heard the budget and the minister presented it, there were heading there that were in tune with what we were hearing from people. A lot of the same issues were being brought to the forefront. Maybe not being addressed to the degree we would like or I would think the people we're hearing from would like. Maybe not prioritized in the same manner that we would have liked, but at least it's a starting point.

I said it to one of the media outlets: when a budget doesn't have tax increases and layoffs, it's a good start. It's a good start. So I'm willing to give credit there. It's a good start. I'm probably one of the few who would say around fiscal responsibility, it's a responsibility and we have to take it seriously, but I'm also a believer people need to be serviced, they need to be taken care of. You need to spend money to ensure you're going to have a healthy society, an engaged society, a productive society, a taxpaying society and a society that is very diverse when it comes to its ability to generate revenue.

I think to do that we need to invest in the right areas. The first thing we need to invest in is people and people's health, people's education, people's well-being, people's sustainability, people's social development. They're key things that we need to do in

Newfoundland and Labrador or any jurisdiction, but our concentration needs to be in our uniqueness that we have here: our demographics, our geographics, our health challenges, our aging population as part of that.

But I do want to touch on a few things here and talk about them. The amount of money put into health funding, I think it's a good start. It's a good start. The fact that there are additional monies put in from a budgetary point of view to start addressing the health issues here, that's welcomed. People could challenge and say now more than a third of your budget is going to health care. But do you know what? Health care is our biggest crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador; it has to be resourced properly. It has to be done a manner that's going to work for the people of this province. We'll debate the plan of action here, whether or not it goes far enough, or its outline. But the fact that there are additional monies invested is welcomed from this side of the House as part of this.

We will have weeks to debate, and I know my shadow minister, my colleague here, will have a multitude of questions about how are things going to be implemented? How is this going to improve access as we move forward in the near future?

I want to reassure the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and those in the medical profession, we will be asking questions to get clarification. No doubt, in Estimates those questions will be asked, they'll generate questions then in Question Period so that way it can be clear for the whole of the province and every Newfoundlander and Labradorian if they want to tune in here should get a clear, precise understanding of what's happening in the budget.

I know they'll get a clear, precise question being asked. I'm hopeful they'll get the answers. That's all we're asking. We're very hopeful they'll get the answers. It doesn't

necessarily mean everybody's going to agree with them, but if they get an answer they'll know what almost \$10 billion means to improving their lifestyle.

Medical transportation, another welcome investment. We've been lobbying for this for a number of years over here. See the value from somebody in Labrador, the additional costs that it costs there, to somebody on Bell Island, what it means, or anywhere else in Newfoundland and Labrador, the medical transportation.

People shouldn't be burdened with trying to figure out how they can handle or the costing to get to a medical appointment from a financial point of view; having to borrow money from family members, from friends; having to try to arrange rides because they don't have the money upfront; if it's an airline ticket from one of our more remote places, the thousands of dollars that are tied up for periods of time and then only part reimbursement as part of those things; the bureaucratic nightmare in a lot of it in being able to access that. A lot of people may have some challenges about understanding the bureaucracy and the red-tape process. They may have challenges in having access to viable Internet as part of that process. So we want to make sure that is streamlined and it's in the best interests of people being able to access it.

We welcome the improvements, or at least the commitment to improve the medical transportation. As we go through the next number of months in the House, hopefully we'll get clarification so that Aunt Jane who's in Nain, Labrador will know exactly what it is that she's entitled to when, in her hour of need, needing medical attention and having to fly out to be able to access the medical transportation funding. The same way as anybody if they're in the Connaigre Peninsula, the Baie Verte Peninsula or out on the West Coast of Newfoundland, wherever they are, that they would know here's the clarification on how to access it. So if they need supports from their

neighbour or their grandson or granddaughter, whoever, that can be done very easily.

Glucose monitoring: It's been in our Blue Book for four years, at least; two elections that I know of, for sure. We've asked a multitude of questions. My colleague only recently asked questions about glucose monitoring. We had hoped, in the last budget, it would be there and the budget before that, but it wasn't a priority as part of it. We welcome it here now.

I am a bit dismayed that the rationale is because we have sugar tax money to spend on that. I would have hoped this would have been a priority prior to that, but I'm not going to go down that road right now. I'm going to talk about the fact that it's a glucose monitoring program there that's beneficial to the people of this province. As you know, anybody who goes through challenges like diabetics and some of the other challenges around those health conditions understands the value, the financial costing or just the stability of knowing that you now have access to this resource.

We welcome that. I'm proud to say that we didn't let it go. For four years, we did not let it go. Members on this side, for four years, advocated for it, met with a multitude of organizations. We lobbied on particular days for it. We put petitions into the House of Assembly to outline why we thought this should be a priority and I'm glad, through people who've lobbied for us, that we could be their voice in the House of Assembly and convince government to do what's in the best interest from a health point of view and using some of your money for the right investment here.

So that's another thing that we do welcome and acknowledge that it should be a benefit to the people of this province in this budget. Hopefully, again, and in timely fashion that administrative processes are not so encumbering that people can't access it and people get frustrated. We're hoping it's

clean, it's clear, it's precise and it's quick. That's what people need in this province right now from program services and from the whole of society.

Gas tax relief: As you know, we've been lobbying. I'll go back seven, eight years when gas tax was dramatically burdened on the people of this province here, the travellers of this province and what that meant. As we lobbied and as the general public protested and challenged it, as trucking companies and suppliers, the general public and cab owners and all them talked about the impact it was having on them, how we needed to do something to alleviate that extra pressure. I'm glad, through lobbying again, that government listened to this side of the House, listened to the general public here, and have continued to do something for gas tax relief.

I still think there is maneuverability there to do more. We're cognizant of the fact you need to have a certain tax regime to generate revenue. You have to have that; we get that. So there are people who would say there should be no taxes on anything. That's not a realistic way in the society that we have right now. I would hope one day, with the resources we have in Newfoundland and Labrador, if we can generate the right partnerships, get the right deals that benefit the people of this province, we could be at a point where taxation is minimal in this province and it only goes on to certain things that, perhaps, we're trying to force your hand to live a better lifestyle versus needing it just for money in the pocket.

So things like that, the gas tax relief, good. I'm hoping to see maybe next budget it doesn't exist. It's gone, not necessary. Particularly the amounts of money that were put on it a number of years ago.

Home heating relief, I accept that. We know what people are facing now. We know what they're facing when it comes to how dramatic the last 16, 18 months have been in the cost of home heat fuel, what that

meant. I get that nobody in Newfoundland and Labrador could control that. I get that that was set and done by entities outside of here, but we can control the taxation on that or we can control some supports to get people over the hump as we try to transition away from fossil fuels and away from that costly way of heating people's homes as part of that. So home heating relief, it's accepted.

I think in some cases, unfortunately, it's not enough for certain people, depending on where they live, the age of their home, the issues around what's needed for heating as part of that; but at least it's a start to offset some of the pressures financially that people themselves are facing as we go through that.

Investment in seismic activity: The minister will know himself and I had debates about it last year – I acknowledge this year that it's back in there. I met with the industry over the last couple of years about the value of it. I saw the value of it when we brought it in as an administration decades ago or a decade and a half ago and saw the value of it. We saw how it changed the value of the parcels of land that would be up for auction because we now knew, to a fairly accurate degree, that no company could come in and underbid. We knew the values of parcels of land. We knew what the potential would be for the return on their investments. That became a very important process.

It is a bit disappointing it was taken out. I'm hopeful it didn't do much damage. I'm hopeful that there was enough seismic information on file that it still kept the parcels up. But I did notice that it looked like we weren't getting the bidding last year because we didn't have it. Back here now I think it's a valuable tool for government to be able to negotiate and for the industry themselves to know exactly what the value is here and that this is an asset that we have and it should not be dismissed or undersold because people can speculate that it may or may not be of a certain value.

Well, in this case, we'll know that it's of a certain value.

Tax off home insurance, another valued thing. While it may be a small proportion of people, it puts money back in people's pockets. There's already enough stress and financial burden when you look at your insurance bills, but it's stability, it's a piece of mind, it's a support mechanism you have to have. Even taking that 15 per cent off is a valued asset for the people of this province. People need a bit of sense of hope.

We all know – I mean, how many people wait until Wednesday evening to see what's going to happen with gas the next day? It might be minor if you only have to put in a quarter of a tank of gas or half a tank, depending on what you have left. But from a financial point of view, we all would like to know that we have a few extra dollars or we're saving. Because, at the end of the day, you're knowing that's your money that you now can spend on something else that's beneficial to you or beneficial to somebody else that you're connected to. Any savings like that is very much welcomed in this budget. I won't be criticizing those. As a matter of fact, I'm hoping to get clarification on a lot of it.

Some of the things I don't like and I'm still hopeful – and I say cautiously, optimistically hopeful that I'll get clarification over the next month or so and my colleagues here as we ask questions, go through Estimates, that some of the concerns we have, some of the things we didn't see taken care of or prioritized to the level we want or a plan of action put in play that would be beneficial and would outline strategically what's going to be done may be clarified. Maybe this may be an exercise in information distribution and clarification as we have that open debate and open dialogue. I'm very much hopeful that we'll have those discussions.

But some things, not that we didn't like, we didn't think there was enough emphasis and we're not clear that there's a plan of action

that will be beneficial in addressing particular important issues or additional important issues. Some I've just talked about are very important: putting money in people's pockets, medical transportation, glucose monitoring. All the things there that are very important to the people are just as a priority to individuals who are facing that particular dilemma.

The lack of support and almost, as we saw it here, from what we're hearing from industry people, neglect of education from an investment point of view. A substantial investment with a plan of action of how you're going to improve it. Because we're hearing the challenges from leaders in the education system. We're hearing it from the front-line providers of education. We're hearing it from parents. We're hearing it from parent organizations about the challenges that we have around education. And I'm talking all levels. I'm talking early childhood development and education. I'm talking about primary education. We're talking about secondary education. We're talking about post-secondary education. A number of issues here, we're not really clear that the investments that were put in this budget are going to go anywhere to address the particular challenges that we've had. These are areas that we have challenges, and I outlined at the beginning of this key areas of challenges that we have.

We have a multitude of challenges across the board. Any small issue for somebody, if it's a pothole in somebody's driveway as they're coming out on a main road and it's a hindrance for them, that's a priority for them. And it is a challenge; I get that. But what I'm talking about are the bigger things that generally affect us all in some way, shape or form and that's, as I've outlined, education. I've outlined health care, cost of living, the economy, growth.

All these other things are very important here. Housing, for example, the last number of years housing has become a dramatic thing. One time housing would only be a

challenge in urban areas. It's a challenge now – affordable housing in rural areas has become a massive challenge as we expand our population. That's a good thing, as we expand our population, but we better have the infrastructure and the resources to do it properly so we don't put people at dismay, or people have to be disillusioned about why certain monies are being spent in one area while they still have challenges.

Neglect of nurses: Unfortunately I couldn't find a lot of good things in my discussions with leaders from the nursing profession, front-line nurses, those who work in the health care who support the plight of nurses. Particularly around how we're going to recruit and retain nurses here. Now I'm hopeful as we get in – and I've been around Estimates long enough to know that sometimes the devil is in the detail. Maybe what's presented on Budget Day and what's outlined in the budget itself and the documents may not explicitly outline how the priorities are going to be put in play and that there are certain other priorities that may not have been noticed when they were spoken to because you can't speak to everything in any detail on one particular afternoon.

But we all know the value, the necessity, the importance of having the numbers of nurses we need to train nurses, healthy nurses, engaged nurses and rewarded nurses so that they stay in Newfoundland and Labrador, that they're willing to go to remote and isolated areas, that they're willing to change and upgrade on their discipline so that their skill is transferrable and that the scope of practice for nurses can be expanded because we'll support them financially in training. We'll support them in child care so that there isn't a burden on them that's more than anybody else. Or when, as mothers, they want to come back to work in the workforce, or as fathers that we support that, that we have that mechanism as health professionals. Keeping in mind they work a different process than a lot of others: longer shifts,

nighttime shifts, weekend shifts. It is the whole different process that we've got to be cognizant of that maybe if you work in a different environment, you don't see some of the challenges that they would face.

As we go through the next number of weeks in debate and discussion and even as I talk over the next period of time, I'll refer back to nurses because we feel and I think they feel and I know I'm hearing it from the general public that there wasn't enough emphasis on how we are going to ensure that the 750-plus nursing positions that are vacant are going to be filled. I don't mean filled over the next 10 years. I mean be filled over the next 10 months because that's the crisis we're in that we need them now to provide the services so that the other thousands of nurses who are in the system are not getting burnt out having worked, you know, two and three direct shifts, not having to change their scope in a day's change because there's nobody to fill in in emergency and they've got to do that and that's not their most comfortable area because they haven't done it in a period of time.

So we need to find a mechanism here to ensure that's done – and we ask the questions in the House and we ask Estimates and I am very hopeful. I hope when I sit in our caucus room and my shadow minister comes back and says, with our staff, here's what we've learned from the respective minister. Here's how we're going to address a particular issue and our concerns are going to be addressed because here's what they're going to do. We'll all smile and say good. Now let's move on to the next issue that we can bring to the forefront for government to address as part of that process.

Lack of solid growth plan: From an economic point of view, what we want to see here and what we would hope is a solid plan that's outlined from an economic point of view. Solid plans from an economic point of view is stimulating the economy, directing

the tax revenue on a downward swing when it comes to coming out of people's pockets but an upward swing as we develop industries and royalties. So our tax regime has increased but less burden on the individual citizen in Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's what we want to see in solid growth. A plan about how you grow the agriculture business, the fishing business, the tourism business, the IT business, the aerospace business, the security business, all the things that we do in Newfoundland and Labrador and a multitude of others like the skilled tradespeople. Our commodity with the skill set that we have is international. How do we make that work even more so for the people of this province?

Also, we want to look at where is Ottawa? I'm still convinced we're not getting our fair share. There are announcements every now and then, but when we look at it, based on what Ottawa receives from Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to our natural resources, when it comes to our strategic position, when it comes to all the things that they have managed to be able to get from our province over the decades. Why is it we are still not getting our fair share and considered a fair member of this Confederation and this great country of ours?

So we want to know. What does it mean? You can't just base it on a demographic of population, that's not fair for a number of reasons. One, our geography dictates that we're as large as the top two or three provinces in the country and much more diverse because we have a land mass as an island and then we have another massive land mass that is in the northern part of this country of ours with a multitude of other challenges on both sides of it.

So there has to be a collaborative discussion here about some of the challenges: our aging population and our health situations. That should be taken into

account when you look at all the other positives. The natural resources, the stuff that we have here that doesn't exist anywhere else in Canada. In some cases, nowhere else in the world. The readily available workforces, the skilled, trained workers that we have; the men and women in Newfoundland and Labrador, what value that is?

How do we promote that? How do we make sure that what is getting produced in Newfoundland and Labrador or what should be produced is done here? Let's not go sending oil rigs over to some other European country and then have them come back here a year later. Now it will be sidelined another six months because we have to fix what wasn't done over there.

We have the expertise here and we've proven that. We've proven it time and time again. Let's take advantage of that. Let's celebrate that. Let's sell it to the world. If it means that we have to force certain entities or countries or businesses to do business here because we want it our way because we know our way is going to be the best way, not only for the people of this province but for the companies that we're partnering with.

Sometimes it's not that bad to be a little bit heavy handed when you're representing your own people and you see the value of doing it right the first time and not having to correct it after the fact.

There are a number of things there that we feel Ottawa can take a stake in and stand up a little bit stronger to support what we're doing. Not counting all the other financial needs that I feel they can be responsible for and show good stewardship and good citizenship by supporting what we're doing here.

The Budget Speech was grand, but a lot of it we had heard before because there were a lot of announcements in advance. I've been criticized previously by commentators

on open-line shows years ago when we were in government about well, you're announcing things in advance. It's just part of the budget process. Fair enough, it is. Part of it is you want to get people to understand there are things coming that may be beneficial.

From our perspective, I like it when there are advanced ones because then we can start diluting down exactly what's engaged in it. We can also start dividing exactly what we think is going to be medium-, short- and long-term benefits to people, or we can automatically dismiss it after we look at it and say this is not going to really be a benefit for the people of this province. I'm not one who's adverse to those. I do get the value from a political point of view as part of it. Again, I do understand. You can't sit here for eight or 10 hours to explain every program and have the media be able to ask you 200 questions at any given time. I see that. But, again, a lot of it was re-announcements of stuff that already existed.

Keep in mind, yeah, we're spending at the highest level we ever had, almost \$10 billion, but we're always at the \$8-billion-plus in the last number of years, so there's always money that's being spent continuously anyway. There are programs that have existed for 30 and 40 years here and will continue forever and a day as part of that.

So some of it was re-announcements. Some of it is old funding that's been kicking around just regenerated again. Some of it is repetition, but that's part of the process. When people say there's a lot of extra money being spent there. Well, it's a lot of the same money that's been out there. So I just want to make people aware of that. Do we welcome additional money? Sure, but it's got to be done in a fiscally responsible manner so that the people of this province are going to really see the benefits in the long term.

Some of the other things here, we talk about choices. I remember the minister mentioned it a couple of times: it's about choices. We know you can't do everything at once. I was fortunate enough to be on both sides here. I know while you come in ready to go and you want to solve everything overnight, it's not that simple. There are a lot of other moving parts that have to be considered. But to do it, there still has to be a priority list and you have to have the will, the desire and a plan of action that is going to move the priority issues as quick as possible. Because the longer things sit, the longer they're neglected, the more serious the consequences. So if we're going to do things in Newfoundland and Labrador, we need to pick the things that are going to have the most detrimental effect on people and solve those immediately.

If it means we prioritize that and we put as much of our resources, human and financial to it, we do it. Particularly if it's part of the bigger business plan. I continue to say it, and we've said it on this side, if you have a healthy society, you have an engaged society, you have a productive society, you have a working society, you have the tax generating society. Simple plan. You start at one where people are engaged. At the end of it, you have money then to put it back into the programs and services to keep them further engaged as part of that.

I've already mentioned this. We're going to talk about, as we go through, whether or not we're confident that this budget is going to meet the needs here. I've already stated, one thing you'll hear from me, I'll be fairly frank and upfront, right now I'm not convinced. I'm not convinced because it hasn't gone where it needs to go for education. It hasn't gone where it needs to go for health care, particularly around nursing issues. It hasn't gone enough around a plan for economic viable growth. It hasn't gone far enough for cost of living for our society, particularly our most vulnerable.

So there are still going to be a lot of questions to ask and a lot of convincing before myself and my colleagues here are going to be confident that this budget is going to help people and that we would put an x supporting that at this point.

The real question is going to be over the next five or six weeks: Are the people confident that this budget is going to improve their lives? I'm again optimistically hopeful that the questions we ask, that are reflective of what people have sent us the multitude of emails and questions in the general public when people stop you: Can you find this out? That the minister and the respective ministers answer it, that maybe we can say, maybe we will be confident or at least we can share the information with the general public and let them decide whether or not they're confident that this is going to improve their lives. Again, I would hope it does, but, at this point, I'm very cautiously waiting to see what the answers are.

In any society, in any entity, no matter what you do, but particularly in politics, people can't have confidence in you unless you earn it. To earn confidence, you have to show that you have a solid plan, a well thought out plan, a meticulous plan that addresses particular needs and has a timely fashion that people can see at the end of the day how it's going to improve and move forward. Then they can decide whether or not it's on the right track as part of that.

Right now, we haven't seen a lot of that in the previous budgets. Again, haven't quite seen it in this one, but until we go through Estimates, until we get clarification, until we know exactly how the priorities are going to be implemented and the time frames, as I keep saying the devil is in the details. So we'll be at least open enough to consider what's coming, and if those answers are given that we feel represents what the concerns of the people of this province are, well then that changes again what I've said

previously about our outlook on how we move on this.

We know a number of things here. We have to focus. One thing hasn't been said a lot here about young people. For a number of budgets here, I remember budgets were focused on young people, keeping them in Newfoundland and Labrador, retaining them, educating them, getting them engaged, making them be proud to be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as part of that process. We, for years, invested – the first thing you can invest the best in young people is in their education, their safety and well-being, their social development. There were a number of budgets that did that for decades.

As a matter of fact, I'll go back to give credit to previous Liberal administrations, going back a couple of administrations ago. I was a civil servant, getting the nod from a premier of the day to help develop a strategy around affordable education when it came to post-secondary. I was fortunate enough to be part of a great group of bureaucrats, academics, social agencies, outside entities and students who came up with a student aid process that we felt would make it more engaging. Part of that was tuition relief and a tuition freeze; as a matter of fact, there were a couple of rollbacks in a period of time.

I give credit. A former premier as a former educator was one of the ones who saw the value in it. I still see the value in it. Do I think there has to be a happy medium here, that there has to be a cost associated for education? There have to be other mechanisms, too, to ensure it doesn't dispel people, or neglect to be able to open it up and encourage all people who want to go on to some level of post-secondary would have access to it and are not refrained from doing it because of financial burdens as part of that.

While I understand certain institutions have challenges economically, I'm not quite sure

things were handled right here with the tuition freeze coming off MUN, because, obviously, now the burden is on the students again. I get there have been some changes around the student aid regime as part of that process, but talking to some students in the Students' Union, they still have a lot of challenges.

I'll give the minister the ability over the next period of time to clarify how this could be beneficial. If you're taking \$10 out of somebody's pocket and putting \$10 back, okay, we're open minded here. It balances out; we're still in a good place. But if you take \$10 out and it's going to cost them \$25 more, then, obviously, we've got a challenge here that's not in the best benefit of access to education as we go through that.

We've talked about being clear and precise of what we're doing here. Again, I'll concentrate a little bit on the university because that has an impact from an international perspective. We were getting, and still are getting, a good reputation for drawing some of the brightest minds from all over the world to come here to study certain disciplines. Who become some of our greatest ambassadors from an economic point of view, from an education point of view, but also choose to live here and use the skills that they got to benefit our own society. Not counting the multitude of millions of dollars that get invested here through housing and through day-to-day lifestyles as part of that process. But if we start putting a financial burden on them, the choices then would be harder for them to make to come to Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm not saying we need to give away anything, but if we're going to cut funding to an institution, and if there's not a clear business plan with that institution or an agreement that the institution is not going to put the burden then 100 per cent on the students, I don't see how we're enhancing education or access to education. There

needed to be a better-planned process here. I'm hoping there are some answers coming to that over the next number of weeks and months about how those industries can still sustain their costing without it being a massive financial burden on the particular post-secondary students as part of that. It's our post-secondary institutions, our college system and the university system here.

One of the other things – and, again, it's a business plan and I won't blame this administration. I will criticize you a bit for touting it too high on the totem pole right now when it comes to the fact about early childhood education access; \$10-a-day daycare. In theory, it's wonderful. As I said about this budget, in theory it sounds like a good budget, but in practicality I've got to see the implementation plan.

We know the conversations we've had with parents who can't get in, who, all of a sudden, thought this was going to be an affordable process here. No longer do I need Nan, who's older and the kids are getting a little bit more energetic and it's harder on them, that they could now afford – particularly people on fixed incomes, the working poor, could afford to send their kids to a daycare, but there are no spots there. That's so frustrating for people.

Now, all of a sudden, they sort of have that plan with Nan or Mom, or Aunt Jane or whoever to take care of them, or Dad – now, all of a sudden, those people were thinking, okay, now I'll have some more free time; I can do other things. Now, all of a sudden, they're back in the same quandary because they're saying we don't have a spot; we can't find one.

We're hearing the child care providers saying we weren't engaged here. This is not helping us to be able to provide more spots. It's doing very little for that. As a matter of fact, it's pitting one family against another. There are people coming in offering them money who can afford it, so that they

guarantee a seat, at the expense of somebody who's probably making middle or lower income who needs to have that employment. There's no ability that both parents can't be working for them to sustain any lifestyle as part of that process.

So there are a lot of challenges here, a lot of questions. We're going to have a multitude of questions on early childhood education. We're going to have it on post-secondary education. There are extra monies put in the budget, which sounds good in principle, but if it's not concentrated around retention and attracting of teachers and the resources they need and the other special support mechanisms that they need, teachers' aids and that, then it's not going to be beneficial. It's not going to improve our education system.

I know conversations I've had from the union leaders, from administrators, from teachers, from parents who volunteer in schools and chairs of school councils, what was announced, they're seeing that it's going to do very little – while everything is welcome, every dollar that's put into a particular program is welcome but they're not seeing any real value of how this is going to improve access for their children when it comes to education around this process. Now, add in some of the other challenges, special needs students, some of the other challenges around that, what are the challenges around that?

In the House of Assembly recently, I asked questions around deaf and hard of hearing children and the lack of supports that are there for them. One particular family's plight for the last number of years, to have to fight to try to get accessible education for their son.

So we need to have a plan here. The plan has to be explicitly outlined of how you're going to resource something, the time frames and what are the expected outcomes that are going to be beneficial at the end of the day. There are a number of things – again, we're going to have quite a

robust discussion over in the next period of time and I know my colleagues here will be doing the same in asking questions in Question Period and in Estimates as we go through.

Again, the K-to-12 system, for a number of years, it's been neglected here. It's just flowing through, concentrating on preschool or concentrating on post-secondary. But none of this works. It's a continuum here. If you don't have a proper preschool process and early childhood education, you can't continue in to have a sustainable, good K-to-12 system, which then can sustain into having a post-secondary which trains our people then to be productive citizens in providing the services and expertise that we need in our society.

So ignoring concerns of teachers is not a benefit to anybody. It's a frustration for everybody engaged, and that's the unfortunate thing as part of this process. So I encourage you, start listening. I know you're hearing it in the same districts that we're hearing it. Teachers have challenges: classroom sizes, not being able to get substitutes because of the process is not in play that works beneficial to them. Not having other resources, if it's teachers' assistants with integration of special needs children. Some of the other resources that are necessary there.

You have to start listening to the concerns of teachers. Too long it was ignored not listening to the concerns of nurses and now look what we have, 750 positions not filled. People leaving the industry constantly. Nursing burnout. It's starting now with teachers also. We have to address it. That has to be addressed and it needs to be addressed through this budget here by showing priorities that are going to be beneficial to people in this province and address what we've heard too often.

There are teachers being driven away from the teaching industry because they don't feel valued and they don't feel the resources

are there. They're overburdened with certain programs and services that need to be resourced better to provide those types of services. That needs to be taken care of.

I'm hoping there are answers in the budget. I'm hoping certain other programs may be beneficial to the education system. If it's supports for deaf and hard of hearing children, if it's supports for special needs children, if it's supports for administrators being able to do their things, if it's additional supports for recruiting substitute teachers, if it's a change in policy and being able to bring back retired teachers to fill in. Whatever those things are, I'm hopeful we're going to hear the answers that we're going to have on the multitude of questions we're going to ask.

Again, outlining an effective policy that's easily implemented across the province. Roncalli school in Airport Heights should have just the same access or should have no more beneficial access than a school in Nain, Labrador. The policy should be reflective based on the ability and the knowledge of what's happening there and putting in a strategic plan that would recruit and retain teachers in those particular areas.

Also, there has to be a process here around affecting teachers' learning time. They need some prep time in addition to what's going on. Education has changed dramatically. I know we all hear stories and we all joked about our grandfathers and grandmothers would tell us about walking to school barefoot with a cord of wood so they'd be able to heat the woodstove in the thing. But we know things have changed dramatically. The needs of children, the needs of parents, the supports that are not there from a home environment because of all kinds of things. The family network now with grandma and grandpa are not what it was with 10 or 12 or 15 siblings and uncles and aunts who could support it. It doesn't exist.

The fact that the majority of people now are two members in the family employed, so the timelines are not there. There are a lot of other things that need to be done there as we look at that.

When we look at things, we talk about – and I'll stay on the theme of the education process here and I mentioned it earlier – international students, the value of that. Wherever I travel I hear from people about the value of international students wanting to come to Newfoundland and Labrador because of the quality of education in all of our post-secondary institutions here. So that's a value there.

Plus, when you look into it now, as we're putting on a very vigorous immigration strategy, which is very necessary for this province. It's necessary for our sustainability, it's necessary to bring in a new cultural diversification process here where people are engaged as a society. So we're bringing in international students. What a way also to promote, encourage and enhance our immigration strategy. Because once they get attached here, once they feel comfortable in the education system, once they graduate, once they're offered positions here with companies and their work terms, it's much easier then to retain them to stay here. They may have other family members, they may have other friends, they may have people in other areas that would come here, so there's all kinds of potential there.

I want to get back to the primary education system here. One of the conversations that I had with the president of the NLTA, Trent Langdon – and it was ironic, when we're out doing these scrums during the budget debate day, I could tell by his body language, I could tell by how he was engaged out there, he wasn't pleased with it. He didn't see that this government had valued the education system, particularly, the primary education system here.

These are a couple of things that he said, and I quote: "... the budget didn't include the necessary funding to improve learning and working conditions." We've been hearing it. There was a shot across the bow of this administration six years ago to the minister of the day about health care and what was happening. That wasn't taken seriously. Now we know the crisis we're in. Now it's all trying to make up for mistakes that weren't addressed, try to make up and recruit people to come back. That's a faulty way of doing things. If we don't continue to do things in the right manner and address them early, you're going to have the same thing in education.

He also goes on to say: "The current difficulties in teacher recruitment and retention have long been looming." We've been saying it in here. We've been saying it about what's happening with retaining teachers, training teachers, encouraging them to go into a specific discipline we need and having substitutes so these teachers can have quality of life. When they get ill, they can recover, or when they need to go for training, that can happen. So it's not a surprise to anybody. He said this and he's only the new president.

I've known former presidents have said it. We've got a former president here in the House of Assembly and I know he said it many years ago about what was coming, what was looming and it wasn't taken seriously, unfortunately. So we need now to have an opportunity in this budget to address it. It hasn't been outlined from a financial point of view but, again, I'll keep using it, I'm hopeful somewhere along there that we missed one part of it that says here is where we're also investing in education that will address these particular needs.

There has to be a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges in education. There wasn't one in health care, we asked for it. I know seven years ago I was the Health critic, I asked for it. I know my colleagues since then have asked for it and

it still isn't in play. So unless something happens dramatically, our education system, which is now in a challenge – I give full credit to those professional teachers and administrators and support staff and that who keep our education system afloat, but they are having challenges now that we saw in the health care system four years ago. Now we see a health care system that's broken and in crisis.

Every day there's a challenge about what's not open and what's needed, what people don't have access to. We see the frustration if it's nurses, doctors, respiratory therapists, paramedics, pharmacists. Every other health professional there are having the same challenges.

So we've giving a heads up here. The NLTA president has given a heads up. If you don't start addressing the challenges that are facing the education system now, you're going to have a crisis in education the same way as you have one now in health care.

I want to talk, too, about Memorial University Students' Union and some of the challenges they have. I alluded to that earlier but now I'm going to talk specifically about some of it. The president, John Harris says, and this is directed at the Liberal administration here and this particular budget: "It's clear that education is not a priority .... Despite saying what a great financial situation we're in, they're continuing with a cut that they made because of a poor financial situation, so it does seem like they're talking out of both sides of their mouths when it comes to education. There is the money to reverse the tuition hike. There is the money to make education more affordable. They just don't see it as a priority." This is the president of the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador Students' Union.

Again, you can sense frustration and dismay here and disbelief because only a few months ago the touting was we can't be everything to everybody. We can't afford

certain things. Education is going to have to go back as a burden on the families and the individual students and they're going to have to be debt ridden or they're going to have to find another process to be able to fund their education, because we have a financial challenge. Fair enough. You can't make all the decisions when you only have x-number of dollars to spend. I get that. I understand it. I even support the approach. You'd like not to be in it, but now all of a sudden when we hear – and this is this young gentleman here who's outlining this. He touts, but all of a sudden we were touting we were balancing a budget of \$10 billion – \$10 billion. The most in our province's history. We were even putting money into a Future Fund.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not against the Future Fund. Not at all against the Future Fund. I'm not against it. I do think it needs to be thought out as to when it becomes the priority, when you can do it, when a lot of the other issues are addressed, when your priority issues are being taken care of, but more importantly when your crisis issues are being addressed, then you take additional revenues or you put a proportion away for that rainy-day fund that you're going to need for down the road. We're not there, by any stretch.

I just talked about the crisis we have in health care. We're now talking about we have a massive challenge and we've very close to a crisis in education. We already know we've a crisis in cost of living in this province here and affordability. It doesn't seem to be a path forward that's going to get us out of that. It's not about food security. It's not about the transportation costs. There's no plans there that's going to address the particular issues that have an impact on it. So we need to get a little bit more cognizant of how we're going to solve some of these.

It's ironic because a little over a year, a year and a half ago, this administration was

touting some really key reports – the Greene report and we were all, through anticipation, waiting to see what the Greene report was going to bring in play, very competent individuals had input into it. I even got to present on certain things from certain background agencies about what could be beneficial here.

Even they said additional funds should be allocated to classrooms to support teaching of math, technology, science and computer science, and to promote entrepreneurship. I didn't agree with a lot in the Greene report, but that was one of the particular sentences that I did agree with because I keep saying if you're going to invest your money, invest it in areas where you're going to get a bigger return. What's the best return you can get? Trained, skilled, engaged, ready-to-go workforce. That starts through your primary education process.

So the Greene report outlined that and then went on to a multitude of other things, how you stimulate the economy as part of that process. But that was one of the primary objectives and that seems to be neglected from a report that was commissioned by your administration and that you touted was going to be part of the framework of the economic revitalization of Newfoundland and Labrador.

All of a sudden you're shelving that, you're not heeding any of the recommendations, particularly ones that outline exactly how it would stimulate the other four or five components of a healthy society: technology, education, health care, engagement and cost of living.

We talk about education, too. I keep concentrating on this because I did ask the question today about disabilities. Where does this budget here provide adequate, new support for the deaf and hard of hearing students? In light of the conversation I had, the questions I asked today about the Churchill family's plight and the fact that the Human Rights Commission

ruled government and the school district had not been doing its legal responsibility to provide adequate education for this individual.

I get that a tribunal will decide that but then government should, once they realize there is a mistake being made, acknowledge it and then solve it. I haven't seen that in this budget. Now, I could be wrong again. That is why I am hopeful that when we speak to the respective line departments, there may be some outline on how the Churchills and the thousands of other individuals who have some challenges when it comes to access to education can see where they can get supports. And how the education system can see the supports that they have so that there is not additional burdens put there; there are burdens that are eliminated and support relief so that they can feel confident that everybody in our education system will get access to the proper education, no matter what their challenges may be as part of the process.

I want to talk a little bit now about health care. Again, the theme that we'll ask on this side of the House will be continuously education, health care, cost of living and stimulating the economy. Normally, on this side of the House, in a new budget you would criticize the government for overspending, spending too much as part of this process; I am not criticizing at this point right now. That is not it. Because I feel that you need to invest money here in the right areas to solve some of the issues.

So as I said before, I always welcome new health care funding – always. I see it as a value, I see it as a necessity and I see it as one of the key things that we have to invest in. I have to give credit to the minister for trying to address the health care crisis here by putting money there, so I'll give her credit for trying that. Again, I need to see the plan of action to make sure it is going to work for us. It is different – and I get the current Minister of Health is at least out there and engaged with the communities and making

a number of announcements, something that should have been done a number of years ago.

We wouldn't have been in this situation had the right health professionals been engaged in solutions and the right investments at the time. It would have been beneficial, so I hope we've learned from that not being done in the past that it continues to be done the right way in the future.

The other issue here and we've been saying it and there are a number of reports that have said it, for us to really get control of our health situation and challenge here, we need Ottawa's support. We are all hopeful – I know I was hopeful here, and when you get rooting for the other team, sometimes that's not the way it's supposed to be, but in politics and in doing what's right for the people of this province, I have no qualms in cheering for the other team if they're going to do the right thing.

When the Premier went to Ottawa and the other premiers went to Ottawa to negotiate health care transfer payments and what they looked for, which was a sustainable, realistic, major increase. Keeping in mind what's happened since COVID and all that and the burdens on it but, particularly, in Newfoundland and Labrador, going there to argue and advocate that we can't base it on the old formula of just a demographic population as part of that.

I'll give credit. I heard the Premier and I even listened to when they were in debate in Ottawa, that he advocated for that. But it's disappointing that the Liberal government in Ottawa didn't see the value – it's spending hundreds of billions of dollars – hundreds of billions of dollars – and couldn't see the value of investing additional billions of dollars, a small proportion of their budget in the health care for this country, particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador with some of the additional challenges that we have here. Keeping in mind, we know that they're generating hundreds of millions,

billions of dollars, over the last number of years from our natural resources in this province.

Nobody was going asking for a handout, what we were asking for was just support and it didn't happen. Obviously, that has an impact on how we can address the challenges we have here with health care. We need a louder voice, and we've said it a multitude of times here. If you want to go to Ottawa and challenge the federal government, we'll support you. If you want a unified front in this House of Assembly on a particular issue that we feel – when I say, we, collectively the House of Assembly – Ottawa is not supporting us justly on, we'll be unified. I have no qualms. If the Premier wants to go to Ottawa to lobby and he wants Members of our caucus to go too, we're more than willing, as long as we've advocating for the rights of the people of this province and showing that Ottawa owes us more than what we're getting at this point.

We also want to know at the end of the day – and I've said it a multitude of times and I don't understand why we can't get it clear. I'm hoping there's more clarity. The Premier tells me sometimes there is a hybrid potential of not just basing our health transfers on the population demographic. If that happens, we'll never get ahead; our crisis will just continue to be out of hand. It will only continue to be worsening the health access to people in Newfoundland and Labrador. So that has to be one of the priority things.

Maybe we all beat that. Maybe we do a petition from the House of Assembly here to Ottawa, that somebody goes and has it – one of the MPs puts it in the House of Assembly saying health transfers have to be done differently, particularly, for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Again, for a couple of years there were all kinds of hype about the federal mental health transfer payments to the provinces.

Where are they now? We've heard very little talking about mental health. Mental health and physical health is so important and social health, financial health: all continuums here that have an impact. One has an impact on the other, yet there's nothing happening here that would be beneficial to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador at the level it should have been.

For a few years there, there were great investments. I was hopeful and I know the former minister of Health, there was some new initiatives put in play. I was fortunate enough to be able to access some, even in my own district, but they were pilots. Now we need a commitment that every Newfoundlander and Labradorian has access to health care no matter where you live in this province, particularly at a certain level.

Again, the Liberal administration in Ottawa have been in eight years. Have we really reaped the value, particularly around health care? No, we haven't. We've got a few tidbits here and there and a few announcements to justify trips here as part of that and a few extra photo ops. But have we really benefited from what we've paid in to this Confederation, from this administration?

So there are a lot of challenges here that still have to be talked about when it comes to our fair share in Confederation. Had we gotten more money earlier – and that should have been what should have been advocated by this administration here – we would have averted some of the crisis that we face right now when it comes to health care, education, cost of living and stimulating the economy. We still need more funding now.

We accept the fact that resources are necessary if we're going to address some of the challenges we have. We need to find a way to advocate. The Liberal administration needs to talk to their Liberal cousins and do

a selling job on why Newfoundland and Labrador and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are entitled to extra supports from Ottawa.

Again, I keep saying, we're not asking for something that nobody couldn't justify we're entitled to, based on what we've done for this Confederation and based on the revenues that are being generated from our natural resources.

I also want to talk about why we have some challenges with this budget. Again, I mentioned it earlier, I mentioned my questions earlier and I'll mention it again now. Nurses have been neglected for too long and they've been neglected in this budget and what's been seen, just the response since last Thursday, it's been overwhelming by the Nurses' Union and nurses themselves about not feeling comfortable or not feeling wanted or supported or valued when it came to this budget here.

So, I mean, you can't ignore a key component of our health care system and expect our health care system to improve. No health system without all professionals at full capacity. That means you can't have vacant positions. The burden is on somebody else or you don't then deliver quality health care. You're putting off too many surgeries and that's why we have wait times that are highest in the country. You've got long-term care patients in a tertiary care facility. The bed should be there for somebody who should be getting an intervention and then recovering and being able to get out and be active in society. Because, again, you don't have enough positions filled and no plan of action to address that.

Overwork, overtime burdens, injuries: my sister is a 35-year veteran nurse and years ago you'd welcome an extra shift or two because it was some extra revenue and that. Now, nurses are so burnt out that they

cringe when their phone rings, because they're so committed, they've got to go in. Even my situation, I had a young nurse who had been there – was halfway through her second 18-hour shift. Now, I don't care who are or what you do, I will guarantee you she wasn't sitting around resting during those 18 hours, when she had 16 or 18 patients that had to be dealt with in emerg. She had to fill in, she felt obligated. I asked her and she said I felt obligated to come back because I knew the patients that I've been caring for yesterday wouldn't get the same quality of care because there was no nurse to take care of them. That's a burden you're putting on people there that shouldn't be. Physically, mentally, even socially, that has an impact on their social life and their family life as part of that.

Retention bonuses: I get that government patted themselves and said oh, look, we've offered nurses a retention bonus. But it's laughable when it's a third of what your Atlantic counterparts are offering. How do you expect to retain and attract the same quality of professionals in this province if you're not going to say that they're valued equally, particularly in Atlantic Canada? They should be equal anywhere else in the world, but again if your competition is Atlantic Canada, well then you better be on par with Atlantic Canada. So that speaks volumes about what the value of nurses are by that administration over there.

Need to value the expertise we have, experience is hard to replace. When you have a 20-year nurse who all of a sudden says I'm getting out of the industry, I can't do this anymore. I can't work 80 hours a week. It's too much on me. I'll go take a job using my health skills but in a different manner. Look at the burden, look at the gap in services we have. Look at the expertise that we've lost there. So there has to be a plan of action on how you entice them to stay. How you encourage them to stay, but, more importantly, how you reward them to stay.

Nurse vacancies means closed beds, delayed procedures, patient suffering. We've seen that continuously. We've seen it in long-term care facilities. We've seen it in delayed surgeries and the backlogs. We've seen it in the fact that emergency rooms are hours, sometimes days, before you can get in to see a doctor.

Simple, listen to nurses. I went to a nurses' rally just after I got out of hospital and it was amazing to see the support that they had for a patient who had come out. But it was amazing to see how they rallied together, how they all have the same common challenges but their common desire to provide health care for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. They spoke very eloquently, members, national members, provincial members, emergency nurses, males, females, they all spoke about the value that they have for health care and what they want to provide. But the value they said was missing from government in supporting what they're doing. Listen to them, there wasn't one government Member there. That was disheartening to notice that. I think there were five or six of my colleagues there and a Member from the Third Party there.

That speaks volumes when it comes to where they are on the support chain? Where they are on the value chains? It had to be demoralizing for them. But do you know what? It wasn't because they were so hyped about what they were there for. They were there to show they support health care. They're the ones who provide this. They help keep us alive. They nurture us. They support us and they want to continue doing that. But to do that, we better make sure that we value that expertise.

At the end of the day, make sure that nurses do not leave the province, particularly if you get older and if you have children and they're already settled in their way or they're moving. It's a lot easier to be enticed away, particularly if you feel you're not valued here after 25 or 30 years of

service and if somebody else comes in with a financial package that's much more valuable. Yet, you say there are incentives being offered for one part of the industry, why isn't it for another? Then you start thinking and you start feeling segregated and you start feeling that you're undervalued and that you're underprivileged when it comes to the fact that this administration is not seeing the value of what you're doing. It doesn't take long before people leave. When they leave, they leave financially because they're probably already established, they have some financial worth in this province and we're losing that. But we lose their expertise, their engagement.

You look at a lot of professionals; they're also great volunteers in sports. They're volunteers with community groups, service organizations and school councils and all these type of things. We lose that expertise that we can't afford to lose in Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly with an aging population who can't volunteer like they used to for all kinds of reasons. Mobility reasons, it could be cost-of-living reasons, it could be transportation reasons as part of that process. We'll have a real problem here in our health care system if we don't start addressing it.

I just talked about the nursing challenges here. I've talked about the education challenges and feeling that they're undervalued. Let's now talk about doctors because we've been screaming from the top of the mountain for the last six years there's a crisis. If you don't admit it's a crisis, well admit there's one coming. We could not get anybody on that side to admit there was a crisis coming and now we have it.

Now they're scrambling, they're scrambling 24-7. There are announcements everywhere. They're listening to everybody that they didn't listen to for the last six years where they could've dealt with it, addressed it, had it not been as much of an embarrassment, had it not been as much as

a hindrance and an impact on people's health as it has been, had they listened. So we're asking again, listen now. Listen now to what needs to be done.

Recruitment efforts, I give credit. At least it's going after what we've said, the general public said, the health professional unions and that have said, the representatives have said, about what needs to be done here. I give credit around recruitment. Finally, municipalities said we can't rely on government to solve this anymore; they just don't have a plan of action. So they've started taking steps to recruit physicians to come to their communities.

Heads up for them and hats off – government should be setting the policies, the procedures, the template, the environment to make things happen here and they haven't done that. So that's shame on you for not doing that, but kudos to municipal leaders for taking the lead to try to recruit doctors to come to their communities with their challenges.

I know people keep saying it's a national problem. Sure it is, but not too long ago we didn't have those problems in Newfoundland and Labrador. We didn't have a doctor shortage. Every community had a doctor, two or three. My small community of Bell Island had four. We have none now. We're offering an exorbitant amount of money for a doctor to go there and still can't do it, because there's been no retention, no attraction plan in the last number of years that people have just got disillusioned, doctors, the professionals. Now we're trying to scramble.

As the rest of the world started to have that challenge, they started to recruit away from us, because the doctors here didn't feel valued and had to go kicking and screaming and, over periods of time, putting report after report after report out to the minister of Health, saying here's what we need as supports and getting nothing in return. Obviously now, their members feel no

loyalty to stay here because they feel defeated. So they'd rather go somewhere else where they're appreciated and they're obligated then, because they're getting the supports they need financially and in their structure of their offices and their work life balance is better in tune to be able to handle what they want to do.

So they ignored doctors for a period of time. They antagonized them. How often did we have the president of the Medical Association be upset and irate with the Liberal administration and the minister of the day about not taking their issues seriously? Now we know it has been taken seriously because they have been forced to take it seriously. I give credit to the present Minister of Health. He's at least making an effort to try to find approaches that will encourage doctors to stay here and make them feel more valued.

I'm glad that they started listening, finally. It's too bad it may be an uphill battle to get to where we need to go but at least, at the end of the day, there is some discussion happening. We're all doing our part here. We continue to meet with them and encourage them. I've put stuff out nationally, internationally to try to recruit doctors to come here, former expatriates to come back home and outline the incentives that are here, and hopefully explain that there will be some other changes that would make the work life balance much more attractive to them as part of that process.

Now we're hearing the same thing, what happened to doctors and we know where we are. Nurses and teachers, the same situation. Can we not learn from the past mistakes and solve them now? My issue here is I'm not seeing that solution in this budget from a financial remuneration point of view or from a support mechanism to show the value of nurses and teachers as we have tried to do now with doctors by making all kinds of incentive programs and services outlined to them.

We also need an immediate plan for surgical backlog. I mean there are thousands of people waiting to get some minor procedures up to some serious procedures done, because the lack of nurses in the system, the lack of doctors, the lack of hospital beds being prepared, the lack of paramedics, the lack of respiratory therapists, all the other components that go hand in hand when needing somebody to be assessed to get in for an intervention and then to recover are not being put in play here. We don't have a happy continuum in health care like we should and like we had for decades. I mean only up a recent number of years, we had what I felt, and I think most people would feel, was a very adequate, engaging, accessible health care system in Newfoundland and Labrador that you felt confident that you would get in, on a timely fashion, get the proper intervention and be able to recover and then have supports after for follow-up.

I just want to talk about the president of the NLMA explained that they've been working with government over the last year to look at what he calls significant surgical backlogs that have grown over the last few years due in part to COVID – and we all accept COVID was a unique situation that blindsided everybody and there had to be a new approach. It was something we weren't familiar with. So I don't criticize anybody for what went on during that period. I do criticize for not having a plan when we moved out of that to address those issues. A lack of beds and support services in hospitals and he did not see much investment into reducing those backlogs.

When the president of the Medical Association says that the minister doesn't seem to see that as a priority, doesn't seem to have a strategy on that, then I think we've got a real serious issue here on how we're going to address some of the other things. Again, it goes back to retention and attraction. If doctors don't feel that these immediate things are going to be

addressed, even if they're only minor, then obviously they're not going to feel confident that the bigger issues are going to be addressed in the near future either.

Family Care Teams are good in principle. We applauded the concept but we wanted to see the business plan. What was this about new recruited health care professionals, doctors, nurses? We need to ensure creating these does not orphan patients of existing family physicians. If you're just changing the players in the game and not expanding the number of players, you're not going to be able to actually enhance the game itself.

In this case, if you don't have more people to be able to provide the resource, you're only actually putting more damage to the process because you're taking somebody out of a comfortable situation, who was comfortable with a particular physician and now moving them into a Family Care Team that they now have to learn all over again how their colleagues will work and new patients coming in will have to then be reassessed in a different environment.

We need to also ensure that nurses are not taken out of hospitals to do these Family Care Teams because that only backlogs more surgical issues, more needs for some of the challenges we have there and less access for people in our health care system. We've talked to it a multitude of times here about enhancing the scope of work for nurses, RNs, paramedics, pharmacists, a multitude of things here that would offset some of the challenges and expedite access to particularly in that expertise that those health professionals have.

We didn't think that was that encompassing of a process to do, but apparently the administration over there seems to pick at it at a very slow pace. I don't know if you're against it or don't have a plan to make it happen but if you listen to the professionals, they have outlined the plan and how this could work. If it's changing the MCP

process so that, at the end of the day, certain health professionals can bill – it's the same amount of money we're spending anyway; only now you're taking the burden off one particular health professional who can then concentrate on their particular expertise and provide that service and giving more access to individuals.

My colleague, the independent, has mentioned about cataract surgeries, particularly on the West Coast, west, northern, and even parts of Labrador, why that couldn't be addressed in a very quick manner. So it gets confusing as to where the priorities are here or who's driving the ship here when it comes to if you can do it for one discipline, there's no reason it can't be implemented for a number of other ones, particularly if it becomes a priority.

Let's talk about the other big challenge we have here, and it's getting worse and worse and worse because there's been nothing here done that would dramatically solve it. Rural ERs – let's talk about what we would have thought was a state access in rural and remote Newfoundland and Labrador no matter, you understood a serious, serious intervention you have to go to your main tertiary care facilities in whatever region you were in to get the intervention you needed, but you could always rely on the emergency room to do the first intervention, to do the assessment so you could be stable enough that then the intervention could be done to move from there.

Just think of it, what we're losing here. We continue to see rural ERs close. One time it was very rare, for a day or so if somebody got sick was all. Now, it's weeks, months at a time or it's three days every week, continuously.

You know, let's talk about Bonavista. I notice their whole recruitment thing and I give credit to the community for trying to recruit and I give credit that the minister announced all kinds of incentives and that,

but, again, we're still in a crisis process here to see when that ER is open.

It should be open 24-7. That should be the process. That's what ERs were meant to be, emergency rooms, particularly afterhours when people's particular health needs are that dramatic. Bonavista is one and St. Lawrence. I say this because they're all over this province here so it says there's no plan for even one region that's workable.

New-Wes-Valley, Harbour Breton, Springdale, Baie Verte, Fogo, Bell Island just to name a few. We know that list is going to get longer and longer as the weeks go on and go on, unless we get a strategy that's going to address retaining and attracting physicians, immediately, who are willing to go to some of these rural areas and practice with the supports and, again, seeing how communities are coming on side to support enhancement for physicians who may be interested in going to those areas.

I noticed some announcements in the budget and my question on that is: How soon will the budget measures address these issues? We'll ask those questions. My colleague will ask it to the Minister of Health. I'll ask the Minister of Finance to find out exactly what's the implementation plan here. Are we three weeks out? Are we three months out? Are we three years out? That's what needs to be done. The people of this province need to know what access they're going to have for health care and is it going to get worse before it gets better? That becomes a challenge here as part of that.

Urgent care centres are Band-Aids. While they're welcome, they are Band-Aids, particularly, where we're just moving the chess pieces around on the game board. We're not really solving any of the issues here. It sounds good in theory. It's a new approach. We've got a collaborative team. They're all coming together. But it's the same people now they're taking from the areas that they were comfortable and had

an engaged patient list, now into one collaborative team, which, from our perspective trying to look at it, we're not quite sure it's going to exploit any or give more access for people.

We've done this and it is sad to say, people have died in this province because they didn't have access to timely ERs. We know that. It's documented. I don't want to bring it up because of the impact on families and that, but it's a reality so we have to be cognizant. Every minute we delay doing something, particularly access to ER, health care interventions, it's having a detrimental effect on people and, unfortunately, in some cases, it's death. We know the impact that has on families. The impact it has on the whole of our society.

Here's another challenge; we all know this. I know when ERs would close down or hospital wings would close in the summertime, health professional need to take holidays. They've worked diligently all year long and they've worked extra time. They, like anybody else, need a quality of life also. So if we have a crisis now and we have so many gaps in service and we have so many vacant spots, what's going to happen this summer? What's going to happen to the quality of life for those people who can't get vacations? What is going to happen when those people say I'm sorry, I have to attend my son or daughter's graduation? I have got to go to Nan's 90th birthday. There are certain things I have to do for my own mental and social well-being so I am calling in sick. Now it is a burden on other people to have to fill in for those positions.

What's the strategy here? I know there is a whole approach here and we're at a point now where we have one health authority, but I want to know what the plan is for all the health facilities we have in Newfoundland and Labrador. What is the human resource strategy as part of that process? We've asked this for a number of years: Tell us your HR strategy for health

care in Newfoundland and Labrador. Now there's an RFP or there's a contract ready to go seven years later. I checked, the first question I asked was seven years ago. I know my colleagues have been asking it continuously since then. So what is your HR plan when it comes to, not only the recruitment and retention, but the whole delivery of the health care system?

It is not only about those health care professionals who fit in certain categories. There is a multitude, there are all kinds of administrative things; there are all kinds of other integral parts, the dietary process. All the integral parts of somebody getting an intervention, being in hospital, getting good care, getting recovery care and then getting follow-up care. So what is happening as part of that process?

Will people see access to ERs erode over the summer? I just mentioned 10 immediately that we know of that are going to be closed – they're closed continuously. Mine on Bell Island has been closed the last three days. We've got ice in, we can't get an icebreaker to get – we have to get SARs to fly in from Gander. What happens if somebody is having a heart attack? What happens if somebody is in a critical injury situation in a car accident? What happens in those situations?

So there are a lot of challenges here. Is it going to get worse as people need to take their vacation time? They're entitled to it. What other issues that happens as part of that? So it is another challenge around what is happening with our health care system.

I'm going to continue on the theme of health care. Let's talk about ambulances because that has been a major issue for the last number of months here. The Health Accord recommended a provincial service; I'm not adverse to that at all. I'm thinking, do you know what? There is power in numbers. There is continuity in numbers. There is a better ability to provide services and training when you're collaboratively under one

environment as part of that process. So we look forward to that, but we've been calling for that for, I think, five years now. Five years, we've been asking for what was going to be the ambulance strategy here.

I know the former minister of Health, I got into a debate one day here with him and kept asking when are you going to do it? Oh, we have a report; a report's coming out. Then we'd find out no, it's not, what we're going to do is we're going to get an RFP for a report. Three years later, finally in this budget, it's announced now, this is what we're going to do. We're now going to put out a company from an RFP to look at what kind of an ambulance process we should have in Newfoundland and Labrador, seven years later.

So, again, late in the system, not going to say we told you so because that would be only not helping solve the problem. But what we are saying is expedite this. The industry knows it, the paramedics who provide the health care, the owners know it, the health care professionals know it, the health authorities, prior to the one health authority being done, have known that this has been a challenge so we eliminate red alerts. We eliminate problems with supply, training, ambulance services. We know what my colleague has talked about up the Southern Shore trying to get a provided service up in that area also. We need to have this expedited.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel. There are a number of reports. The Fitch report goes back to our day. I remember reading the Fitch report back in 2011-2012 when it first came out and saw the value of what they recommended there. I know there were some discussions of moving that forward and there were some small things implemented. I would have hoped it would have got done quicker, but when government changed in 2015, I was confident it was going to move even quicker and it didn't, it stalled. As a matter of fact, it got shelved.

We've seen regions without timely access to ambulance services. So much so that it's had a detrimental effect on people's health. We've seen it where people have had to take their loved ones and drive 150 kilometres to get them to a health facility because there was no ambulance available. That's not fair. That's not the way our health care system was developed. It's not the way it should be as we go through what we're doing here.

Now we know government has a court challenge through one of the operators. That tells me about not having a good working relationship with the industry. Unfortunately, it's more common with this administration than it should be in a lot of disciplines, in a lot of areas, in a lot of providers. That speaks volumes. You're going to have to change your business plan if you want to address the issues of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The question is going to be, and I know my colleague is going to ask it: How quick can we get the new system up and running? If it's going to be one central dispatch system, how quick can that be done so that everybody has timely access to an ambulance service? If that means you've got to start recruiting now new paramedics, new ambulance providers, whatever it may be, start doing it now. It's no good waiting for the end of the report that we all know is coming.

We all know at least five or six recommendations are already going to be in it because they've been in four or five other reports that we've seen for the last number of years. Why not start addressing them in advance so that when a report comes in, in a year, you've already knocked off four of five of the 10 recommendations because you were proactive versus reactive.

You'll start to hear a theme – I'll mention that many more times as we go through over the next hour, hour and a half, about being proactive versus reactive.

Is this government prepared for a smooth transition without hiccups? I don't know if they had the conversation with the industry. I know there is some dismay between some industry providers and the government officials, or the department itself, on the providing of some of the services there. I would hope you're going to try to mend those fences and get all of that in play so that when a report comes back and here's your plan of action, it is easily implemented. Cautiously optimistic – if history repeats itself, it very unlikely it's going to happen.

Let's talk a little bit more about some of the other providers here when we talk about the needs in health care. The president of CUPE, Sherry Hillier: "The budget promised \$23 million to Health Care workers, but none of that will go to essential workers who are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and changing and caring for residents." Something I said earlier – the continuum doesn't only end or start with those who have particular titles attached to their names when they deliver health care, very important. Everybody is important in this continuum. That's what we keep saying here.

There's a continuum in health care that has to engage all those involved. When CUPE says this, they're speaking volumes because you may have nurses. You may eventually solve the issue on doctors. You may get paramedics done. You may get respiratory therapists. You may get pharmacists doing other things. But if you don't have the other key workers who are part and parcel of delivering quality health care, you're still going to have another challenge. You're no further ahead. So you've got to be thinking proactively not reactively.

Proactively here is, when you're doing your budget, you should have allocated monies to retain, train, recruit people who do the other services that are necessary, the dietary stuff, the cleaning, the changing the caring for residents, all the things that are

necessary in any system should be important.

So let's talk about that. I tie something into health care now from a different perspective, but let's talk about the cyberattack and data security. I mean Threat Assessment 2020 was done and we know the impact. We were in the midst of just coming through COVID. People were already very apprehensive. Health care system was already in turmoil. We were just trying to figure a way to get the backlog done and all that. Then what happens? A cyberattack. Then we learn, we were warned about it. We literally knew it was coming. We weren't warned that it could happen; we were told it was coming and that we should prepare for it and here are ways we could prepare for it; 2020 Threat Assessment warned of significant vulnerabilities in personal data security. But how do you address it?

The minister, by his own admission, says I didn't read it. I got the Coles Notes version. That's not good enough. That's why we keep saying you need to start being proactive and not reactive because the reaction now has caused turmoil for people. It's slowed down our health care system. I don't know what it's cost us financially because we can't get that transparency and openness, but I suspect it's millions of dollars, maybe tens of millions of dollars as part of that.

So when are we going to start seeing a proactive approach versus reactive? Now, we're hoping it's in this budget. Don't get me wrong, I'm hoping the minister – we'll go through Estimates and she updates, to me, what she's doing from a financial and the same in Health, in Education and Infrastructure, Fisheries, the securities and all the other ones, Natural Resources. I'm hoping that there's a plan of action there.

I've seen one so far: the seismic back. I've seen that. I see that as a positive. Let's hope that can generate then. Hopefully, it's

done in the same method that it was prior, because we fixed something that wasn't broken a couple of years ago. So we need to go back to doing what makes sense and fixing what is broken. We could have spared thousands of people turmoil as part of it and could have prevented government from spending tens of millions of dollars.

So let's look at where we are now. It's 2023, not 1973, when data security and that was minimal; everything was done – files in cabinets as part of this. We need to take this seriously. This is people's financial, health and social information that needs to be protected and there are ways to do it. So you need to invest properly into that to have it done.

I haven't seen the plan of action. Again, hopeful it's going to be outlined over the next number of weeks. We're hoping to see what's going on. A little dismayed that the government is fighting the Privacy Commissioner over what role his office would play in ensuring that information is done and protected in the right manner. A bit dismayed over that. Still not quite sure why government decided to go that route as part of it. But I'm hoping again they'll be proactive, get past that, rectify that and start doing things that are in the best interests of protection of people's data information, particularly around health and financial information.

Again, I want to know does the budget now provide enough supports to protect people's personal data in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm not quite sure if they do. Hopeful but, again, that has to be shown. It has to be shown where it is, how it's going to be implemented, the time frames, who's going to do it and how and what are the checks and balances to ensure it's going to work for the people of this province.

I want to talk a little bit more – I'm still on the theme of health care in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Health Accord, something that the Premier touted was going to be the

cornerstone for addressing our health care immediately in the short term and the long term. We, on this side, embellished it, embellished the fact that we wanted to be engaged with them. We were totally engaged.

I think we met on six different occasions with the Health Accord senior officials. I had two other personal meetings with them to talk about our views. They outlined some of their concerns. We gave feedback. At the end of it, I was thankful of the professional work they did, but I was thankful that they really hit all the key issues around all the things when it comes to delivery of health care: immediate health care, intermediate, long term but also social determinants of health care. If you're going to have a healthy society, you've got to invest in certain things to keep them healthy and continue that healthy environment as part of that process.

So I was kind of hopeful, you know, from a political point of view I was thinking they've got a template over there now that can start addressing health care, but it does acknowledge the fact that one of the key issues that were brought forward to the Premier and to his officials by the committee was this needs to be resourced properly. Meaning it needs to have support from Ottawa because some of the programs and services are going to have to be funded on a certain level for catch-up. We were so far behind, certain things need to be done.

Social determinants financially needed to have supports from Ottawa. Again, the Premier went to Ottawa, I would think, with an agenda, hopeful that he would get what would be beneficial to implementing a lot of the recommendations of the Health Accord but fell very short of what's needed to do that. Then I was hopeful, we're going to spend an extra \$2 billion, let's make sure a lot of it addresses directly the Health Accord initiatives, and we haven't seen that.

Again, hopeful that when it's explained that I've missed something, our staff missed

something, my colleagues missed something here. How often do you hear politicians say he's hopeful that he hasn't done his homework well? Very unlikely that is going to happen because we've done our homework well. We know what's missing in that budget and that's why we've been asking these questions. That's why we're going to continue to ask them over the next month or so.

I also want to know – we now have a plan. There's a plan outlined. Perfect, let's not divert from it. Let's not confuse people. Now we've got the first time this administration, since they've been in government, have a chance to be proactive – the Health Accord, be proactive. Start implementing recommendations immediately – immediately. The ones who take a certain period of time, start now investing in them. Have a plan of action on what the timelines are going to be. A plan is better than bouncing back and forth from one crisis intervention to another, then realizing oh, that didn't work because we can't resource that in the right manner or that's not attractive to the patient level or the health professionals don't see that as a value of what they're going to be doing from a health point of view.

Sister Elizabeth Davis warned: The Accord is a complete whole and cannot be divided. I'm hearing people saying – I've heard it a couple of times from the government side here – oh, yeah, we're working on this, we're working on that. Again, she has said, as one of the architects – and I know Dr. Parfrey is part and parcel. I know his objective, too, is to move these things as quick as possible. He wants the objective to be done, that the Health Accord is implemented so it can address the challenges that we have here. But you can't divide it and say, well, this year we're going to just do these two, but those two have a major impact on the next five. If you don't do the next five immediately, these two will have no bearing on being able to actually

improve what those five challenges are all about.

So you've got to be cognizant of the fact of doing it in a continuum. I'll keep saying that. Proactive versus reactive and keep health care in a continuum. Every key player has a role. If you're going to do it, you got to do it in the right sequence as part of this.

The Accord said that the Premier has to get federal supports to implement it. Well, we've already realized that didn't happen. It's unfortunate. I give him credit for a valiant effort. It's unfortunate that it couldn't be delivered and it wasn't delivered from the federal Liberal administration.

I'm kind of surprised. It's one of the few times I've seen all First Ministers go to Ottawa with the same agenda and supporting each other and the federal government dismissed them all. Maybe it's because there are not a lot of Liberal governments in Canada, other than the one in Newfoundland and Labrador. Maybe they see the writing on the wall federally and they just want to dismiss it. I don't know.

I try not to play politics at that level when it's about people's health, but, at this point, I can come up with no other justification, a rational thought process, as to why they wouldn't support something when they're spending, again, hundreds of billions of dollars. We're looking for a small proportion. The First Ministers were looking for a small proportion to make health care accessible and equal across this great country of ours. That got dismissed by the federal Liberal government here.

Social determinants of health need action now to get results down the road. It's a given. You got to invest in people's physical well-being now, financial well-being, their mental health well-being if you want them to stay healthy in a continuum. That has to be done, but we're not seeing that. We're seeing little piecemeal things and we're going to help pay extra for the fuel or we're

going to take a few dollars off this and all that. There has to be a strategic plan here that guarantees people's social development and their social well-being is supported and they know that it is there in play and there is a safety net there as part of it.

We're not seeing a comprehensive implementation strategy here; again, we're seeing piecemeal as part of it. I'm hopeful somebody will come back and say here's our plan, here's as it widens out. If we look at it and there's a continuum and all the key players have a role and they've all bought into that role and they're all supported, then we'll nod and say well done, 2023-24 budget. This now starts to address the particular issues that we see as major challenges in Newfoundland and Labrador. We're hearing from the tens of thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are hurting right now in different particulars whether it's education, health care, cost of living, heating their homes, getting their medications, being socially active or being able to be sustainable in their employment.

We went from the highest to the lowest child poverty rates in a decade. You know, again, we had the template that not only the rest of this country but the world was following, a poverty reduction strategy, second to none, well thought out. If you want to see a proactive document, that was set out based on – and it wasn't one administration taking credit for it. It was one administration did particularly one thing right, engaged the right people. Engaged the front-line workers, engaged the communities, engaged the bureaucratic professionals, engaged the academics and came up with a strategy. Then said do you know what? We're going to resource it. We're going to spend money upfront to save money on the back end, but, more importantly, while we're saving money on the back end, we're going to give people a better quality of life. We're going to put Newfoundland and Labrador on the map because we're going to show, regardless of the demographics, regardless

of what Stats Canada says about economics, regardless of what it says about chronic diseases, regardless of what it says about out-migration, we're going to put together something here that's beneficial to the people.

What did we gain from it? A higher quality of life, less child poverty, more engagement in education, less demand on health care, more migration back to Newfoundland and Labrador, a higher retention strategy staying here in Newfoundland and Labrador and a better quality of life for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who, prior to that, were struggling because they were on the poverty threshold as part of that.

That got thrown out the window for whatever reason. Nobody was touting that it was owned by any other administration other than it was owned by the people of this province, administered by the bureaucracy. So why wouldn't we continue to do it? Now they're scrambling. Now they're spending five times as much and getting one-tenth of the rewards back when it comes to actually solving some of the issues that people are facing here. We've gone backward instead of forward with this process. Again, talking about being proactive versus reactive.

It took planning and action, not just words and good intentions, I said that. I was fortunate, and I think there are a couple of my colleagues in the House of Assembly who were engaged in the poverty reduction in different components of that over the years. We were the bureaucrats then. We saw the value of having the right people engaged and not segregating it to only one priority. It was everything from immigration – the immigration process started through there and it's flourished because of that. It started about child poverty, about access to education. It started around post-secondary. It started about equality, single parents getting access to the workforce; supports for early childhood development. It talked about senior supports, integration, social

development, all the important things, special needs individuals. All the things that were very important to what it was doing. We had it at a point and we let it fall. We let it fall because for some reason the Liberal's didn't see the value in it, yet the whole world saw the value of it.

Again, I would've thought, do you know what? Let's dust it off again. There are still three-quarters of the bureaucrats around who implemented that one, same agencies who gave input. Let's do a quick refresh, let's reinstate the poverty reduction strategy and in five years we would address all these issues again and we have a proactive plan as part of that. Unfortunately, it's not happening and I haven't seen it in this budget. I'll be asking the question: Why isn't it in this budget?

Let's talk about one of the other serious issues that is going to become a crisis if we don't deal with it. I'm glad, I will say, and I mentioned it earlier, there was some acknowledgement of that. But again the devil's in the detail when it comes about it. I'm hopeful that the minister responsible will outline how this is going to be done about housing. The housing crisis we have here, affordable housing, access to clean, safe housing. An increase is welcome. Well done, I already acknowledged that. Well done on acknowledging that it's a serious issue as part of it. But, right now, we're hearing from agencies who are front liners. That's why I keep continuing to say if the front liners are saying these, you need to engage them on a continuous basis to find the quickest way to implement the solutions here.

Doug Pawson of End Homelessness St. John's said much of the money is tied up in long-term plans. Planning is important but must lead to timely action. If you're talking we're going to go out to an RFP and we're going to have developers develop housing units that are 10 units each and there's a subsidy of this and they have to be built over five years and rent control for a period

of time. That's fine and dandy for down the road, but that doesn't solve the immediate people now who go to the Wiseman Centre or go to The Gathering Place on a continuous basis because they have nowhere to live as part of that process. There has to be an immediate action plan that looks at that.

Do you know what? The poverty reduction strategy had that. It had housing, affordable housing; it had action plans in there that would be beneficial. It's time to go back, dust it off, have another look and start looking at how this is going to be done. Housing is, again I just said, needed now and as soon as it can be done.

Maybe we change the approach here. We're already talking about there are a number of abandoned government buildings here that haven't been used in year. It's a lot quicker to renovate one of those into something that's apartment related for people. It could be single people, individuals, families, seniors, whatever it maybe, at least you have some immediate supports while you're working on your long-term plan as part of that. We'll take some of the burden off The Gathering Place and the valuable work that they do in their shelters, and a number of other shelters that we have in Newfoundland and Labrador as part of that.

When we start seeing homelessness becoming an issue in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, where we always had an amazing support mechanism, family or community, then that tells me this is becoming a crisis also. If we don't address it immediately, it's going to become like health care and like education is going down the road and cost of living, a crisis that is going to cost us much more to try to get at it than it should have been had we been proactive on it.

Let's just look at what's happening. I welcomed the announcement in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, but the issues that are

happening up there is indicative of what's happening across all of Newfoundland and Labrador. So it has to be addressed immediately. I know my colleagues for Labrador have asked that: What are the timelines here? We can't wait four or five years. That's going to make the problem even worse and worse. It's going to segregate certain parts of society, particularly, in some of those remote areas and it's going to have a detrimental effect health-wise on a lot of people.

There are local concerns that have to be done. There's no one approach that is uniquely going to work across the board. Labrador has special challenges up there: the environment, cold weather. Things have to be approached – the cultural differences, it has to be done immediately. Government needs to start listening now and take immediate actions.

I was in Goose Bay last summer to Expo Labrador; I had a grand conversation with the mayor of Goose Bay. He was outlining then to me – that's a year ago almost now – what he had outlined four months earlier to the government about what was needed in Labrador. Why we're 18 months later and only now doing an announcement of something that they're going to do, there could have been a very proactive approach to that well in advance of where we are now. We could be three-quarters of the way there and knowing this time next year there are accommodations for 30, 40, 50, however many people need those services in Labrador. That hasn't been done. So, again, start being proactive versus reactive.

Let's talk about the cost of living, the next big crisis that people are facing here. A year ago, the government offered hardly anything in cost-of-living relief. That was disappointing because we had said it. We were calling for it. Even the \$500 cheques, we were calling why can they not come out the season before when people need it, when they were in the midst of having to borrow money from loved ones and that to

pay their extreme lights bills, their extreme heat bills and all the other challenges they had with the additional cost of food and all the challenges as part of that process. Why didn't they come out then?

The same money there. You're spending the same amount of money. What was the difference? You spent it that year. Was it political advantage? Again, it's about being proactive versus reactive. That had an impact on people and a very detrimental impact on people.

We stood for people because we heard it from individuals. We knew the process wasn't that encompassing. That could have been done very quickly and put out in a timely manner that would have been beneficial to the people of this province.

Government gave a little and then said it was enough, no. We even argued over here, at the end of the day, there was certain people who were impacted more than the others, why not give them extra supports? Other people, yes – was it not an impact on everybody and could everybody use some extra? Yes, but you've got to take care of the most vulnerable, those who are in more demand and the ones who are more affected by the downturn in the economy or the cost-of-living increase.

So there wasn't a strategy here. It was a political strategy. Everybody is going to get a cheque and say look, how wonderful we are over here; we gave everybody money. Gave them back their own money, not in a manner that's really going to be beneficial to people. People are still facing hardship; they're no better off. As a matter of fact, now, are even more disappointed because they thought there was going to be another \$500 cheque coming here to offset what they had to borrow from loved ones to put oil in their furnace or to buy food or to pay for their medication as part of that.

Gas tax freeze: We welcome that, as I said earlier. We pushed for it. We would like it to

be eliminated as part of those processes. The one thing that we didn't see and all the media asked me, well, what would you have done different to help people out? I would have put more money, through a tax regime, in people's pockets, particularly the working poor, by changing the tax regime. People put money in your pocket; do you know where that money is going? Back into society.

Do you know how gets it back? Government gets it back in a tax regime. Do you know what government does then? Put it back into other programs and services, so it's a continuum. But people are more positive then. They have more disposable income to use for the things that they prioritize, if it's heating their home, if it's their health care, if it's upgrading their employability, whatever it may be, as part of that process. We talked about that's what strategy (inaudible). Every time we make a recommendation here or every time we question what government is doing, and maybe even if we're cynical that it's not going to be that beneficial, we always offer an alternative. You may disagree with it. You may want to challenge on how we would implement it, but I would guarantee if you challenge on how we would implement it, we will explain.

I understand you'll say well, if I give you a change to tax regime and we lose \$100 million, how does that benefit our bottom line? We'll outline exactly where that money is coming from and how it's going to come back and how, more importantly, it's still going to be a positive influence on people spending and being more productive in our society. So there are simple things there that need to be thought out about being proactive versus reactive.

We understand here inflation is increasing across the country, but there are mitigated issues and services and things, interventions we could be doing here to do it. I mean obviously groceries are one of the big key things. That's the biggest hike. Fuel adjusts up and down. Some taxes you can

adjust that accordingly, but groceries because of the cost to get it here and the availability is a big issue. Food security, promoting local industries, providing incentives, training, encouraging people to get into the industry, giving them tax relief processes there that would get that industry going, would be key because if we don't address it now we're going to continue to deal with it next year, five years, 10 years down the road. It doesn't change anything.

If more relief is needed for certain categories, financially, people with income, start listening to them. Do it. I'd have no qualms – and I have had constituents who say to me, I make \$95,000. Do you know what? I'd welcome \$500, but I really didn't need it when I know Nancy, who is a single parent, or John who is a single parent down the road or another family, they're on a fixed income and they could have used \$1,500. It would have went a lot further for them to have a better winter, less stress on them, less financial burdens. They could have been more engaged. The family could have been more united, whatever it may have been that they needed that money for it would have been beneficial to offset the cost of additional services that they're having to pay for.

An issue I still have, and we've been calling out loudly, is about the carbon increase that's coming July 1. The impact that's going to mean for people. I applaud, yes, announce the mini-splits, heat pumps, money and all that for it; but I know in my own district, a senior citizen, fixed income, by herself in her family home, her home all her life, cast iron radiators, furnace in a different area, for her to put it in, it would cost \$37,000. So the \$5,000, \$10,000, even if you get up to \$15,000 if everything got combined is still going to go nowhere for her to be able to change her heating process in her home.

That's the difference. It's got to be thought out here. That's fine if you've just got a brand, new home wherever it is you're live

in some small subdivision and you happen to have a small modern, furnace in it with just hot air or whatever process, it is probably easier transferrable or easier modified. Older homes – who is normally affected by older homes? Senior citizens living in family homes. Where are they more? Remote, rural areas of Newfoundland and Labrador. Where is it most costly to get parts and that done? In those areas.

So while it's welcomed, it's going to do very little, at the end of the day, to offset people's costs because it's either going to be not accessible because of the cost for them to get it done, or with the timelines for them to get it done, it would have cost them even more than they would have thought and there'd be no savings in the long run. So there's another issue there.

The carbon tax in this province is going to be detrimental to seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's a given. We know that now. We know the impact it's going to have. So there has to be a way. I would have hoped that there would have been a different made-in-Newfoundland one that would have not have impacted, particularly, seniors in rural Newfoundland and Labrador as much as it did but, unfortunately, because there wasn't a plan here, there wasn't a strategic, negotiated plan with Ottawa that reflected the needs of Newfoundland and Labrador, we're being punished here and, unfortunately, a certain demographic of our society is going to be punished more on July 1 unless we come up with something else.

Again, I'm hopeful that when the minister goes through her line department finances that there are some other areas there where those people are not going to be burdened with that 17 per cent increase for those who heat their homes with furnace oil or stove oil. I'm hopeful. I don't see it, but I'm very much hopeful.

The claim of no new taxes is not quite true. I say that because the carbon tax is coming in. Regardless if you implemented it or not, it's still part and parcel of you're the government here. A society in Newfoundland, your residents, your constituents as my constituents are going to be hit particularly for those who, no fault of their own – don't forget now. They're not doing their part against (inaudible). They didn't choose to put in a furnace last year. This is something that's been in some houses 75 years when that was the only heating mechanism you had. Much more efficient than coal-burning furnaces or wood burning as it would be in the environment as part of this process now. They're being punished for what was a standard way of life. There needs to be more incentives. If you're going to expect people to come off it, you need to do it.

But now what's happening? Seventeen per cent more they're going to pay; they'll never be able to even afford to save some money to offset doing the renovations if they were able to get mini-splits or some other heat source put in their homes.

Sugar tax – I said it earlier, and myself and the Premier had a little banter back and forth, I still don't get it. I do not get it. You can quote everything from Cambridge University in England, because that's the only one I've ever heard or seen that shows any justification. I'm convinced – I know it's different over there because it's partially on the manufacturers as part of it, so I'm quite not sure. But I know, when I just read an article a few weeks ago, that pineapple juice is on the most nutritious ingredients or sustenance to drink for all kinds of ailments and diseases, particularly things related to COVID if somebody had COVID. Then when I look at, it there's 20 per cent tax on it – a pure juice, 20 per cent.

Now, I went and bought a bag of sugar. I didn't pay 20 cents. I'm baffled, purely baffled; I don't understand it. Orange juice, I'm paying 20 per cent. I still can't rationalize

in my own mind – I am not a physician, not a health professional, but cannot rationalize how that in any way is going to keep people healthier. People still have to buy something. You didn't lower milk, not five cents off milk. As a matter of fact, I buy milk every week, as you know, the little business I have, it's gone up again. For the third straight week, milk has gone up. So they're not helping anybody who are on fixed incomes or anybody.

Those people who, in their own mind, if they did say we're going off soft drinks, I'll give you a little bit of a nod because the sugar content in soft drinks is dramatically higher than juices. I read the packages, as I do on other things. I give credit to the industry because they're trying to do their part where I'll read 25 per cent less sugar, 30 per cent less sugar, all these other things that they'll note. They understand the value. We all understand the value of trying to be healthy and taking away the negative things that may impact our health. I see that.

In our day – I was former president of Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada – we banned soft drinks. Do you know what we brought in? We worked a deal with the fruit companies: orange juice, apple juice; pineapple juice was way too expensive then. We knew the value of the nutrition. That was put in every Boys and Girls Club, 242 Boys and Girls Clubs, largest youth organization in Canada, has 1.7 million members, from a healthy perspective.

We did that so that we would try to get them to get their parents to buy more juices. It is healthier than buying soft drinks and then we found all kinds of incentives. The companies would give us coupons that families and that could use. All kinds of incentives to do that. Just as they're getting into it, when they're finding the way that Mom or Dad are saying I'm willing to pay the extra 60 cents for them to eat healthier, now all of a sudden, it's not that because this is on a litre. It is 20 per cent on every litre. So if you've got three, four or five kids

and you like to drink and you're active and you're thirsty and all that, now all of a sudden look at what that costs you on a fixed income. And it is still considered a healthy drink, outside of the sugar content.

I'm convinced from what I have read, because I've seen it in the food guide, juices were always labelled there. I was in hospital after having heart attacks and surgeries and they brought me up juice every day. So there has to be some health benefit to it. Why are you now putting more burden by expense on people who know is going to be forced – because you know what the beverage groups can do? Coca-Cola and Pepsi and all them, they can reduce theirs. Don't forget, with global market they have, they can reduce their soft drinks to make that even more attractive. The 20 cents on it, they'll absorb that because they know Mom or Dad can't afford the extra cost on the juices that would have been healthier at the end of the day.

Until the day I leave here, I'll have to ask that question and I am hopeful somebody brings me over something, after 25 reports, that says Newfoundlanders and Labradorians diabetes is down 65 per cent because the 20 per cent tax on apple juice or pineapple juice solved that issue. I'd love to because then I'd say how do I sign on to help you do all the other things because you got the answers to everything that is valuable when it comes to health care.

But in that one I am baffled. I will never understand it. I see it as a burden. So when you try to tout that there is no new taxes or no taxes on people, this was the tax that came in that serves absolutely no value and the intent that you try to sell it on that it would help low-income families eat healthier has done the opposite. You are forcing low-income families to choose a more harsher, more sugar-laden beverage by companies that can absorb the cost a little bit better because they are an international, global thing and they do it. Particularly, their marketing strategy is about getting you

hooked on their produce as part of the process.

Again, I don't see the value. I don't see the understanding. That is what worries me. So if that's your rationale over there for how you are going to approach solving the issues, health care, education, cost of living, then I think we need to even be more vocal over here on this side of the House of Assembly to ensure that mistakes that were made like that are not made on other things that are going to have even a more dramatic impact on people's lives as we go forward.

Tongue and cheek, I laughed at it, but I did welcome it. We've gone after the minister and the Premier over the last year about sugar-tax money. Where's it going? Are you putting it into lowering the cost of milk or other healthy products, if it's readily available eggs, the price of eggs could be reduced or whatever for families to be healthier or any other products? There was no answer there. I think the pressure got to them that eventually they were saying but we're giving to the school lunch program or the breakfast program so that's a healthy part. All welcomed things that should be, in my opinion, and I think our opinion, because we have advocated for it, should be things that government should be supporting. They see the value.

Talk about an early intervention in health care and healthy living, what a better way to do it than invest in those programs and services that already exist and are ran by the not-for-profit sector. And we know how frugal and fluent they are. They can recruit volunteers. They can leverage a 10-1 ratio on any money that's invested. What an easy way for someone else to administer your money and send it to them and make that work.

But then when I hear all of a sudden here what we are doing with the money from the sugar tax: glucose monitoring. A piece of health equipment that should have been in for years. We have argued for it. It was in

our Blue Book for years, a common-sense thing, no different than medications you get. Something that would keep people healthier, but, actually, for the few dollars that had to be invested, you would save 10 times that in a couple of interventions if people could monitor their levels earlier in the day or earlier in their weekly activities. To say this is where it's going now, all that tells me is that you were embarrassed into doing something that you should have been doing all along and you are now trying to justify monies that you know are coming out of the pockets of the most vulnerable and serving no purpose from a health perspective here. On that case, I'm going to have to say shame on you for that. Because I still don't understand why that's being done. Shame on you for that.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Now I'm going to change a little bit of the approach here. Now I'm going to talk a little bit more about stimulating our economy, where we need to go as part of this process here. I've had conversations with the minister here about it. Industries here that we have been neglecting, that we need to get back to, was our meat and potatoes, tongue and cheek, when I say that: agriculture, the fishing industry, now even the newest one, aquaculture, and these types of things.

We're talking about healthy eating. Well, we cannot have healthy eating if you don't tie into the agricultural industry here and put incentives in play that are going to get more into the industry, going to free up lands – we know the mess we have in Crown lands. How we get farmers to be able to access more Crown land, to be able to expand their entities, be able to provide employment, food stability, food sustainability and start producing products here that we never had in the past. Hydroponics – we have advanced so much, there is nothing that we can't be growing in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have the geographic ability to do it. We have the expertise: farmers.

We've been doing it for 500-plus years. Fishing got us here; farming is what kept up here. Think about it. That's what fed us for hundreds and hundreds of years. I have no illusion about that.

We need to come up with a strategy here where we really support it. I didn't see anything in this budget that strategically outlines how we are going to support the agricultural industry, which would have been about food security, food accessibility. It would have kept the costing down because if you are producing it, you minimize your cost for freight and trucking here. It would have put less burden on Marine Atlantic. If you were trying to enhance our tourism industry, well, there are not 200 tractor-trailers, there are only 100 because the other 100 are producing in Newfoundland, the products we need, that would have been a benefit to everybody.

What I hear from farmers is the bureaucracy, the red tape, the lack of support for a number of farmers is encouraging them to get out of the industry, not get into it. Supports for the young people – because it's not one of your traditional things. It's like the fishing industry. It was a traditional thing you did 35 or 40 years ago. You're not encouraging it. Nobody mentions they are going into farming in school when you do career development day. But why not? Very lucrative, very rewarding and if you get the right supports, talk about making a contribution to our society. Just as good as any of the other professional careers anywhere in the world. Look at the skill set you learn. Look at the science that you are engaged in as part of this process.

It's disappointing that we didn't see anything in there that would have been of any real benefit when it comes to that. Because do you know what agriculture can do? What a way to sustain rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We're looking for ways of how do we sustain rural Newfoundland – I shouldn't say that. I know we are looking for ways to

sustain rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I am not quite sure, from what I see in policies, that that side of the House are really sold on that.

I'm hopeful. Again, when we have this conversation with the budget, I am hopeful that at the end of the day I will see stuff that I didn't read into it. Maybe I only did what the former minister of Health did. I just got the Coles Notes version, but I guarantee you before this budget process is voted on, I will have a guaranteed understanding of what goes on here. I will not leave anything – if I'm going to speak to something and so are my colleagues over there, we're going to be informed about it. And if we're not informed, we're going to ask you to inform us. If we're ill informed on what we're doing here, I want to make sure that we know what is going on here.

It is too often that, flippantly, people are making decisions without having all the facts. It is time that all the facts were put on table so we all can make an informed decision here. That's my legacy and I know my colleagues here and I would think everybody's here would be about the decisions we made were based on the information we had, that we felt was accurate and honest in what we are doing.

So we need to start sharing that information with people and we need to be open and transparent. We need to start listening to the people who have the expertise. The expertise comes in a multitude of facets, in a multitude of generational things and it comes from all over our province: agriculture, fishing industry. I would prefer to sit on a dock and talk to a younger fisherman and an older fishermen or fisherperson about what the fishing industry has to offer, what is still out there, what are the challenges and, more importantly, what are the potential rewards.

I think when we listen to them, you will find the solutions, very much, are right in front of us. We saw last week, the protests by the

harvesters here on the challenges. Because they outlined what they felt was an equitable agreement and what needed to be done to sustain the fishery – and they were challenging the scientists. Now these are people who on a daily basis, some have been doing it for 50 years. I think they get a flow of what's natural. You don't necessarily just need a seismic thing to be able to say yes, I know where the best fishing is, or I know the wind velocities, what that means for migration. People know this. Experience is as good as any education – better, totally better.

Now we have seen that their information, their lobbying and their outlining has now got the Department of Fisheries and Oceans changing on the crab quotas in certain areas because they're saying maybe they are not in despair as they were before. People started listening to people saying oh, we've been out here. Here's what our catch quotas have been for the last period of time. We're seeing that they're either at the same sustainability or they're better, so people started to listen here.

I've said it about a few things and I will say it about this one, too, we need to seriously start having a mature conversation about our fishing industry and our agricultural industry here.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** We need to start having that here in Newfoundland and Labrador. They are too valuable to sustainability to all of society, but particularly what an opportunity for rural Newfoundland and Labrador, to continue to keep that afloat if we do it right.

Why would we not do it? I mean, your own reports have outlined the value of the fishing industry, the agricultural industry, aquaculture industry, the tourism industry. Your own reports that you commissioned, that you've since shelved that when they came through, I was so thankful, I said, do you know what? The government will now

have a template of what to do because the reports that they commissioned, that I might have been weary about it at the beginning because I probably felt there was already enough there that we could dust off and do, but a new perspective, a fresh set of eyes on it, a new discussion always enhances it and we've had them.

Look at some of the reports that have come out here: the McKinsey report, the Greene report, just to name a couple that outlines exactly strategic plans and what our priorities should be, what we should be investing in as part of the whole process.

The Rothschild report, why is that buried? We were not adverse to looking at the assets we have in Newfoundland and Labrador and making a valued assessment on which ones are better kept, owned by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and which are better value, if the private sector owned them and operated them. We weren't adverse to that. All of a sudden, that was going to be the be-all and end-all, it went into the most privacy oriented, secret service report ever seen, as part of the process, and now it's been buried. Not even talked about.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** That was Muskrat.

**D. BRAZIL:** No, no, no that wasn't Muskrat. This is the one. This is about \$100 billion worth of assets that we have in Newfoundland. Every asset that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians own, which are beyond \$100 billion, we know that, beyond that. Yet, we're not even having a discussion about it. Why is that? I don't know. Even *The Way Forward* has been forgotten. I mean, don't forget, *The Way Forward*, the road was going that way. We were all shiny; it was going to be wonderful times ahead. Even what was outlined in that hasn't been discussed anymore.

So I don't know. Is there a rational reason why it hasn't been? I'm going to dust off my

copies – with the exception of the Rothschild report, I couldn't get one of them, but I'm going to dust off the copies of the other stuff to find out, God forbid a Newfoundlander and Labradorian would know what the assets that are owned by Newfoundland and Labrador are worth. God forbid we'd know that to see if we're getting a deal. If we want to dispose of some or if there are certain things that could be more value, God forbid we'd know that.

I will tell you, I'm going to start dusting off and I know my colleagues will do the same and we'll have a good discussion about what particular parts of the Greene report we thought were in the best interest of the people of this province, the McKinsey report, what was there, *The Way Forward*, the Mills report – I forgot all about the Mills report, too, talking about red tape reduction. I mentioned earlier about the mess that is in Crown lands and trying to get farmers to get land.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**D. BRAZIL:** I'm not even going to go there. I'm saving them for later on in the debate. There are a number of other ones.

But there has been a lot of information already compiled, with a lot of good recommendations. We don't necessarily have to take them all. Some I agree with; some I don't. I think collaboratively, between all of those, we could solve a lot of problems in here that would make the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians much brighter and have a strategic plan going forward.

What I also want to say here is we have an opportunity, over the next six weeks or so, for the people who are listening, we will spend six more weeks in the House of Assembly in debate. We will ask, I suspect, in those six weeks, 500 questions, just in Question Period and maybe another 1,000 in Estimates, depending on how detailed the information is that we get or some

challenges we may have as part of the process.

Before I conclude for this part of it, I'm going to get to speak, I suspect, a few other times for an hour at a time. I want to talk about one of our other industries: the tourism industry. Just think about it. Last year, it was not quite sold, with everything that was going on, that we were going to tout a come home year, but I see the value of getting people encouraged. Now, was it a success? Yes. Was it going to be a success no matter what you did? Yes. Because people could not wait to get home to see loved ones. But at least it put us on the map.

I think it could be the predecessor for what could go forward. I would have one every year because I think selling the wares of Newfoundland and Labrador, from a tourism industry point of view, what a wonderful way to do it.

I was fortunate; I was out to the Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador's AGM. What an amazing group of people. What an amazing group of entrepreneurs and not-for-profit sector people there. Frightening what we have in Newfoundland and Labrador. What an amazing – but do you know what I didn't see? Very little supports for their sector – very little supports, and that got echoed.

Now the federal minister of Tourism was there. I had a grand chat with him. He talked about what the value would be in Newfoundland and Labrador, but I did not see a lot of cheques being passed out. I did not see a lot of program applications where they could get supports, unfortunately. He probably could be one of our best ambassadors because he was so knowledgeable of Newfoundland and Labrador and he actually gave suggestions or recommendations that would enhance the tourism industry from a selling point of view, nationally and internationally. So when the federal minister of Tourism is responsible – and he is one of the up and

comers with the Liberal Party, I give him credit, and we had a grand conversation.

He was knowledgeable enough to know the different sectors in the tourism industry and the value of rural, urban, isolated and all the cultural, historic things that we have here. But I did not see a distinct plan from Newfoundland and Labrador on how we were going to enhance that industry. I have said it before. The fishing industry is at \$1.2 billion or \$1.3 billion. It could be \$5 billion for what we have here. I think the tourism industry could be the same way, at the \$5 billion. I think the agricultural industry could be in the billions also. I think all of our industries, IT, securities industry, aerospace, all the things we're doing here, but you have to have a plan that entices businesses, encourages businesses, but also encourages Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, who traditionally wouldn't go into those industries, to start thinking about going into those industries.

I will have an opportunity to speak later on about our other big industry, our mining industry. Just look at what the potential, not the potential, look at the billions that were generated from it. Look at the potential to come if we do it right. If we show we're open for business, but here is how we are going to benefit while we work with national, international, other levels of government, whoever it is. We're willing to partner with the right people, who have the right philosophy, who want to do the right things for the people of this province and for the shareholders, we all benefit from that.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take a seat for now and look forward to probably debate tomorrow.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of DGSNL, that the House do now adjourn.

**SPEAKER:** Before we take a vote, I just want to remind Members that Estimates will take place at 6 p.m. this evening with the Resource Committee debating the Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills. Then at 9 a.m. tomorrow, the Resource Committee will be back again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

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