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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin this afternoon, I would like to welcome a new Page, Portia Addo, to my left here, who will be joining us this afternoon in the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Portia's from Ghana and is completing her master's program in political science at Memorial University.

Welcome.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Humber - Bay of Islands, Labrador West, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Mount Pearl - Southlands and Burin - Grand Bank.

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, in 2019 planning began to erect a war memorial to honour those residents from the Town of McIvers that have served or continue to serve their country.

Students Chloe Lovell and Jordyn Parsons from Templeton Academy, along with their teacher, Shelley Lawrence, came up with the concept for a monument and worked with Heritage Memorials, who did the design.

With a contribution of \$25,000 from Veterans Affairs and monies from the Come Home Year fund, work began on the site in September 2021, and with the help of many volunteers, some giving up to 300 hours of their time, the idea became a reality.

While there is still groundwork to be finished and benches to install, the official dedication and unveiling of the monument took place this past Remembrance Day.

Located next to the Epiphany Anglican Church, this beautiful memorial is adorned with a soldier standing guard atop the monument and it includes the names of 14 soldiers, with additional names to be added this year.

I ask all Members to join me in extending congratulations to the town and the many dedicated volunteers who worked on this beautiful tribute honouring those brave men and women.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate the Labrador West Big Landers and the 10 athletes who participated in the Special Olympics Provincial Winter Games held in Grand Falls-Windsor this past March.

The outstanding athletes competed in snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and curling. Each athlete returned to Labrador West with a medal and they're all beyond proud of their accomplishments.

In cross-country skiing: Colin Rumbolt brought home three gold medals and Jody Lawrence, two silver and a bronze. In snowshoeing: Joey Dwyer brought home three gold medals; Sharon Manning, one bronze; Ethan Fry, one silver and two gold; and Brihanna Locke, one silver and one bronze medal.

The curling team: Junior Dumerasque, Christopher Gillam, Lenny Farnell and Deborah Baggs brought home bronze.

Of course, these athletes have a big support team behind them and I would like to congratulate all the coaches and volunteers who made it possible for these athletes to succeed. From fundraising to cheering on the sidelines, I know these athletes appreciate everything you do.

I'd like to ask all Members to join me in congratulating each of these athletes and the support team around them.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. WARR: Speaker, today I rise to recognize and congratulate a Grade 11 student at Indian River High in Springdale, Lucas Brooks, who is a recipient of the 2023 Rise Award which provides funding for tuition, accommodations and travel to participate in a world-class enriched program. Lucas will attend the Boston Leadership Institute in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

As a student, Lucas strives for excellence. He has received first place academic awards each year and the school award for the Cayley math competition. He is involved in the student leadership team, social justice club, team sports, Tutoring for Tuition program and volunteering with the breakfast program.

Each week he plays music for a local seniors' complex. He participates with the Salvation Army band program, worship team and volunteers with the Christmas Kettle.

Lucas's plans include achieving a science degree in the area of biochemistry, microbiology or immunology, followed by medical school. He is very aware of the health concerns of our province and, as such, he aims to become a general

practitioner to serve in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask my hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating Lucas Brooks on receiving this award and wish him continued success with his studies and future goals.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I am pleased to rise in this hon. House to recognize the accomplishments of 11 individuals who've given their time and talents to the sport of hockey in my community. Five of these individuals: Gerard Curtis, the late John Nolan, the late Richard – most well-known as Dick – Pearson, Ian Graham and the late Ron Penney, have been inducted into the Mount Pearl Minor Hockey Hall of Fame in the category of builder; four others: Jeff Anderson, Todd Moore, Paul Penney and Barry Taylor in the player category; as well as two others: Kevin Penney and the late Edmund Bailey in the official category.

Hockey, like many other sports, provide tremendous benefits to our youth, not only from a health and wellness perspective, but also in providing lifelong lessons such as the value of hard work and commitment and working as part of a team. Through the tireless efforts of these Hall of Fame inductees, many young people in my community have benefited from a physical and social point of view and have gone on to be very productive citizens.

Please join me in commending these individuals for their contribution to this great sport and in congratulating them on being inducted into the Mount Pearl Minor Hockey Hall of Fame.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, there are so many volunteer groups in the great District of Burin - Grand Bank that are making positive impacts on their communities and their region as a whole.

Sunshine Friends was established in St. Lawrence six years ago by friends Tracey Slaney and Amy Doyle in conjunction with social worker, Kim Edwards-Slaney. The group was formed in response to growing concerns of the number of issues with depression, anxiety and the rising numbers of suicides in the region. Since its inception, they have branched out to include other communities and meet on a regular basis.

Supporting each other by doing acts of kindness is key to the success of this group. They bring members and others together by offering soup kitchens, end-the-stigma walks, boil ups, hikes, mental health days and random displays of compassion and generosity for each other.

Membership is growing in this organization and, once again, we have an example of our resilience and ability to work together to ensure our residents and our communities remain strong and vibrant.

Thank you to the membership and founders of Sunshine Friends for their acts of humanity, selflessness and understanding.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, it takes courage and confidence to put your work on display for others to see, and especially to compete against your peers.

I rise today to congratulate the incredible young filmmakers who recently competed in the Newfoundland and Labrador High School Short Film Festival.

I was honoured to attend this year's event, and I am thrilled that the festival's top award winner is from my District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Thirteen-year-old Tristan Jenkins's documentary, *Dance Chose Me*, is a thoughtful and insightful look at how his younger brother Cameron challenges stereotypes by pursuing his passion for dance.

The calibre of entries at this year's festival are a testament to the amazing talent that is being developed right here in our province.

Speaker, we have taken significant steps to foster an environment where aspiring filmmakers can succeed.

Incentives like the all-spend tax credit and infrastructure like the \$10 million centre for television and film at College of the North Atlantic are positioning Newfoundland and Labrador as a sought-after destination for productions from around the world.

Today, there are 1,400 jobs in our local film and television industry, and with films like Disney's *Peter Pan and Wendy* showing the world that what we have to offer, future adventures await.

Please join me in congratulating the participants of this year's High School Short Film Festival.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to thank the hon. minister for the advance copy of his statement.

We, in the Official Opposition, congratulate these young filmmakers in our province to continue our long legacy of filmmaking. We also congratulate Tristan Jenkins on his award-winning documentary, *Dance Chose Me*, a film about his brother Cameron's passion for dance and overcoming stereotypes.

Incentives such as the all-spend tax credit has certainly helped the film industry create employment within the industry, but questions remain based on the PERT report. Congratulations to all those who participated in this year's High School Short Film Festival.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Fostering youth in the arts is vital to continuing the history and culture of this province for years to come and we congratulate all participants in the High School Short Film Festival.

I remind the minister that college-level funding doesn't directly apply to students in high school. Arts funding to schools is very important to increase (inaudible) and the province never gave any money to the provincial drama festival this past year as well. Such a grant and proper resourcing for arts schools is important and also for youth. It's much faster than a tax break for one large corporation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Question Period.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, there's a fire brewing in the fishery, the lobster and crab fisheries remain at a standstill and the Premier has been absent on the fishery altogether.

Premier, are you just going to sit there and wait for rural Newfoundland and Labrador to disappear?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, as the hon. Member knows, we've been quite engaged with respect to the fishery. The Minister of Fisheries has been talking to both parties daily, Mr. Speaker. As the Member opposite knows, we can't control the market forces but we can try to encourage groups to come together for resolution, which is the tact that we have taken. As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, the lobster has been resolved and we're hopeful that crab will as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, this is too valuable of an asset to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, all parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, just to be dismissed and not seen as an important asset to the people.

Speaker, young people who work in the fishery are already looking to other provinces for work, just to keep afloat.

Premier, what do you say to the boatloads of young people who are planning to leave our province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, we recognize the value of the fishery to this province, Mr. Speaker. I am sure every single person sitting here recognizes the value historically and currently of the fishery to the people of this province.

To the people who are leaving, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the Member opposite knows, the population of Newfoundland and Labrador has increased and I'm happy to say that we would support anyone who wants to stay here to partake in our valuable fishery as any other industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately our skilled fishers are leaving Newfoundland and Labrador because there isn't an agreement here to promote and flourish the fishing industry in this province by that administration.

Speaker, it's a fishery fiasco. Did the Premier's friend Dominic LeBlanc provide any assurance on behalf of the prime

minister regarding support for rural Newfoundland and Labrador during the current fishery crisis? Or is it still the case that he wishes to remove the lifeline of rural Newfoundland and Labrador similar to when he attempted to wipe out the Arctic surf clam quota from Grand Bank in 2017 while serving as minister?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Blast from the past there, I'm sure, but once again –

AN HON. MEMBER: Muskrat.

A. FUREY: Yes, we can talk about the past: cucumbers, Muskrat. We can go on and on about things from the other side, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

A. FUREY: What is certain is that that surf clam decision was not a provincial decision, as they know, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: What is certain is that unlike the topics that we have brought up, which were exclusively in provincial domain, Mr. Speaker, surf clams was not ever in the provincial domain; it was a federal domain issue.

I will say that today the minister was here to ensure that there is proper transportation across this province, Mr. Speaker, so that when that valuable product comes out of the fish plants, it's able to be transported across

the province and around the world so that we can recognize the true value for everybody in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's very difficult to hear people speak when there are other Members shouting across the floor. I ask everyone to keep decorum.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

I remind the Premier that it's the same players at the table who've made past decisions that were detrimental to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The fishery is in a crisis and Marine Atlantic rates are skyrocketing thanks to the Premier's friends in Ottawa. Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador is speaking out, stating that this rate increase will hurt our tourism industry. Unbelievable – a province that is touted for its tourism is turning its back on its people that live here and want to come here.

Premier, did Dominic LeBlanc provide any reassurance on behalf of the prime minister for those who rely on Marine Atlantic?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unlike the previous administration when they went to Ottawa, the people in Ottawa do take our calls, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that when I phoned the minister of transportation this weekend, I expressed my extreme frustration and disappointment with respect to Marine Atlantic.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: This is not only an extension of the highway for people of this province; it's an essential service. Frankly, it's not fair when you look at how this is being applied across the country with respect to the Confederation Bridge. I assure you he heard loud and clear from me this weekend.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, it's good to have a conversation, but action is what people in Newfoundland and Labrador need here –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: – and we haven't seen it from either side (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

D. BRAZIL: Ferry rate increases, fishery turmoil and the carbon tax, all thanks to the Liberals provincially and federally. People in rural Newfoundland and Labrador already pay through the roof for gas, groceries and home heating fuel. A classic example of reactive versus proactive. The Premier only picks up the phone once there's a headline.

When will the provincial Liberals work with their cousins to ensure that they stop increasing the cost of living on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to say that we have worked with our federal cousins, as he suggested, to address the cost of living in this province, Mr. Speaker, by assuring that electricity rates don't double because of a project that they launched.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: If we had to continue with Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker, double – double – two times is what we would end up paying. But because of our relationship with Ottawa we were able to fix, fix, fix the mistakes of the past.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you.

The Liberals couldn't get back the money that the federal Liberals have up there belonged to us, and I say us, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Hibernia dividends that they gained up there. That's all we're asking for back, our fair share and they couldn't negotiate that properly there.

Speaker, there is a fire brewing in the – oh, sorry, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Got me so excited because I also wanted to mention about all the things they're doing for cost of living: the carbon tax, the gas tax, the sugar tax and now the Marine Atlantic tax. These are the things they're doing for their friends in Ottawa.

A 4 per cent increase on ferry rates will also impact the cost of food and other goods on our shelves. The Liberals keep saying that they aren't responsible for the rising cost of living, but just like the carbon tax, it will result in people paying more.

Will the Premier finally admit that people are paying more because of his failure to stand up to Ottawa?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

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

I can assure the Member opposite that our conversations with the federal government and Marine Atlantic date back a long ways before last week, Mr. Speaker. It was back in December, I think, when my colleague, the Minister of Energy, actually was in Ottawa and met with the federal transportation minister and made sure that, as this was coming, we would make sure that they would not do what they did, Mr. Speaker.

That's why we wrote the federal department of transportation back in, I think it was, December, outlining our concerns around Marine Atlantic increases, Mr. Speaker, because for the tourism industry it is extremely important. It is also extremely important for every other Newfoundlander and Labradorian.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Another great performance today. I think the Premier spent a little bit too much time on the Peter Pan set and now he is trying to audition for the next Disney film so he is off to a good start.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. PETTEN: And the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology auditioned last week so there are two of them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Move on with your question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: The NLTA has fired back at the minister who downplayed systemic teacher shortages in Labrador West.

Speaker, rather than dismissing and patronizing a legitimate concerns: Why doesn't the minister take action to address them?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The NLTA and I, personally, as well as at the staff level, have frequent discussions and Labrador West has come up. I am pleased to announce to the House the English School District positions. There are 101. There are currently two quarter-time positions and one half-time position vacant. For the Francophone school board, there is one quarter-time position vacant out of a total of 5¼.

We acknowledge there are some challenges with substitutes. There are 13 locally and that doesn't appear to be enough to cover absences and sickness. We're working with the school district to increase that recruitment and retention and acknowledge, also, that support staff are a challenge.

Teacher numbers are acceptable, as I have put out there just now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, déjà vu – very dismissive, deflected. We saw the same

things from this minister in Health with the nurses and doctors. Now look what happened today. Years ago, it was no crisis and now we're living it. So I guess the same thing is going to happen to education. It's terrible, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, the president of the NLTA said education is – quote – the forgotten portfolio under this minister. Mr. Langdon's words, Speaker, not mine.

After the stinging indictment of his leadership, how is the minister going to repair the relationship with the province's teachers?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

I make no apology for standing up in this House and delivering accurate facts and numbers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: That is the basis on which rational debate and rational discussion is founded. I will continue to do so. I'm not at all dismissive of their concerns. We have worked diligently together and continue to do so. He and I – Mr. Langdon and myself – enjoy a very good relationship face to face. What happens in the public and in the media, I have no control over.

In terms of how we continue to repair our relationship, I'm meeting with him, again, for example, this Thursday when I very much hope, within the next couple of weeks, to be able to announce our co-created recruitment and retention plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: We'll hear it again, Speaker, dismissive and condescending. We're listening to the news. This is all over the news. The minister can live in denial all he likes but –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – he's very dismissive, Mr. Speaker. He's proven that to the people of this province and he continues to do there today.

Speaker, the minister is clearly in denial. Teachers are facing staff shortages, double classrooms and overcrowded rooms.

Mr. Langdon is asking on behalf of over 7,000 members: Where's the long-term vision and political will for education?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I think between all the rhetoric there, I still make no apologies for standing in this House and delivering accurate numbers. These are numbers that are accurate as of today. We have a recruitment and retention plan, co-created with the NLTA, which I had hoped to discuss with them last Wednesday, but, unfortunately, they couldn't make the meeting. That will take place this week.

There is, I would argue, 1.3 billion reasons why Education is valued and you'll see that in the Estimates when we come to do that on Wednesday night.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, violent crime is on the rise. Canadian premiers are calling for serious action to promote safer communities. They are also calling for efforts to address gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, yet the Liberal government has failed to release a violence prevention plan.

I ask the minister again: When will we see a violence prevention plan in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for raising this topic.

Again, I'm happy to say that recently our federal cousins in Ottawa have released the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. I'm happy to say that bilateral agreements are currently under way with each province and territory. I'm happy to say, as well, my team in the Office of Women and Gender Equality have met with multiple organizations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to find out ways that we can work together to enhance violence prevention.

Work is constantly ongoing; we know significant funding goes to these organizations every year from our government for their core funding. We're always having conversation any time to find ways that we can always improve services for the people here of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: As the minister acknowledges, the federal government has presented a violence prevention plan, yet this government, the provincial government, has failed to do so. That is simply inadequate and not good enough, Speaker.

The Premier is calling on the prime minister to fix an issue that the Premier has ignored in his own backyard. Police presence in our communities can serve as a deterrent for crime, but only if officers are actually and physically present.

Will the Premier commit to at least filling all of the vacant policing positions in our province?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

We've shown our commitment to policing and increasing policing resources over the last two years. Last year, we had an increase of \$17 million for the RCMP's budget. This budget, which it sounds like everyone is going to vote for on that side of the House now when – they're pleased to hear that there's an increase of 10 resources for 10 additional RNC officers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So certainly you'll see an increase of those 10 officers as soon as that budget is approved. We're working with the RNC on their cadet program.

I'd also like everybody to know in this House, and publicly as well, that the Justice and Public Safety Department has created a new unit of 10 new individuals that will be staffed within the department to work on things like policing contracts, to work on police policies and to work on, specifically, crime prevention. So we're very happy to work with the RCMP, the RNC and the

members of Justice and Public Safety as well.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, although the minister claims that his commitment is shown, I would beg to differ. When I hear from Holyrood detachment, for example, that says 50 per cent of their positions are vacant, that is very concerning and does not clearly show a commitment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the premiers also call for mental health and addictions support, noting supports will increase public safety. Our province has many vacancies, not only in policing, but mental health positions, which will increase wait times, whether it's for a robbery or a mental health crisis.

I ask the Premier: How can these supports be offered to the community without full staffing?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have been working diligently on recruitment. There is a health care shortage across the country, Mr. Speaker, and as I've said in the House on many occasions, globally. But it is something that this government is taking very seriously. We have been working diligently to recruit. We have a number of incentives and initiatives in place. Mental health and addictions is one of the areas that we have to focus on.

But we've done a great deal in mental health and addictions, Mr. Speaker. We

have a number of initiatives that are in place. We have *Towards Recovery*, which is a plan that's put in place; it's a five-year plan. The action items in that plan are all under way. We've been working very diligently on promoting mental health and addictions in this province as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, mobile crisis response teams include mental health care workers and police officers who work together to respond compassionately when people are in crisis. RCMP have reported that mental health and addiction calls for service are unfortunately on the rise in my District of Harbour Main and throughout our province.

Will the minister immediately commit to implementing a mobile crisis response team in the Conception Bay North area?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We will certainly take that away and look at it. We have mobile crisis response units in a number of areas of the province, Mr. Speaker. If there is a demonstrated need and we are able to staff that, we will certainly look at it. As I just committed, we will take it away and we'll look at the need in the area. I'd be happy to work with the MHA for that area in looking at the issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I believe my colleague here has already met with the stakeholders.

Speaker, this week is Mental Health Week. Oftentimes, mental health services have to be shouldered by community groups and organizations. The Jacob Puddister Memorial Foundation opened up bookings for youth with mental health issues and had 106 requests in just six hours.

I ask the minister: When will the obvious backlog in access to mental health services finally be addressed?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have the *Towards Recovery* plan, Mr. Speaker. We had an All-Party Committee in this House that looked at issues. We have the *Our Path of Resilience*, which is a five-year plan as well. There are 12 action items; four teams who are working on that plan. We've put in an additional \$5 million in this year's budget to go towards long-term mental health issues. We've got a new hospital that is opening in the very near future, Mr. Speaker, next to the Health Sciences complex to deal with mental health and addictions issues.

So while there is still much to be done, Mr. Speaker, between the All-Party Committee, the *Towards Recovery*, the promotion of life and prevention of suicide, the action plans that we've put in place, Mr. Speaker, we are making great progress.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

As I've said in this House many times, mental health doesn't do well on wait-lists and that's where we are with this. They're on wait-lists, waiting – stay tuned.

Speaker, last week, the Association of Psychology discussed a recent survey of members with almost half reporting moderate to severe burnout. With more mental health care professionals in the system to shoulder the load more and more are going to leave our province.

I ask the minister: When can we expect a recruitment and retention plan that specifically addresses mental health care professionals?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to recruit for all disciplines of health care. Under the Come Home Incentive, Mr. Speaker, there are mental health individuals and psychologists in the Come Home Incentive program. We've provided a market adjustment to our psychologists in the public sector and we are speaking with the. In fact, I had a meeting with officials today in looking at the workplace issues that will help retain them in the workplace.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

As noted by a psychologist at Memorial University, specialized mental health services are often not accessible in rural areas, thus, leaving many people at risk.

I ask the minister: Where are residents of rural Newfoundland and Labrador expected to turn without mental health supports in their community?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've got mobile crisis units in a number of areas. We've got FACT teams and ACT teams in a number of areas in the province. We've expanded Bridge the gapp. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this program is going across the country, other provinces – Quebec have just asked us to implement that program in their province because it is working so well.

We've got the 811, which has mental health and addictions individuals, that can take calls from anywhere in the province, Mr. Speaker. Those services are available to anybody with a telephone. We've put a number of initiatives in place throughout the province to address mental health and addictions issues throughout the province. Is there more to be done? Absolutely, and we are focused on getting there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, construction of a new prison was supposed to start this spring; however, *Budget 2023* includes \$7.3 million to advance planning.

Can the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure tell this House what is going on?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you for the question, I say to the Member opposite. It is an important question and currently we are still going through the process of finding the option of moving this project forward. We know the importance of it; I know the other side knows the importance of it. Media reports show the importance of it. We have over \$7 million that is in the budget as part of that process and I am hoping that there will be more information on this in the near future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

Last year it was going ahead and now it is an option? That doesn't make much sense.

Speaker, according to government documents, \$325 million was allocated for a new prison. However, sources have confirmed the sole-source Liberal-friendly process has come back over \$520 million.

Will the minister finally admit a sole-source blank cheque procurement process has failed?

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

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, if we announced that it was happening today, he would be voting against it anyway. He says it is important to him but he would be voting against the budget. I go back to the importance of this and the importance of finding a way to do this project that is valuable to the workers, to the inmates and for the province in general.

We are going through a process and, as I said, we'll be making more announcements on this in the near future. I look forward to that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Stay tuned; another announcement.

Speaker, we warned government that going ahead with a process when all other bidders had backed out was a mistake. No

competition, no value for money except for Liberal cronies.

Speaker, if this was such a success story, why hasn't government awarded the contract?

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

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that we do due diligence for the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador and we will continue to do that. It is unfortunate that you're following the lead of your House Leader in terms of Liberal cronies and stuff, Mr. Speaker.

What's important here is a project that needs to happen in terms of a new penitentiary in this province. We're going to find a way; we're working towards that. I'm going to be happy to announce it at sometime in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

Millions of dollars being spent over is the best for the constituents. I think not.

Recently, a hotel in downtown St. John's had to be evacuated due to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. TIBBS: – a chemical leak.

Can the minister provide an update on the timeline for the Occupational Health and Safety investigation?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was an issue at the Delta Hotel a few weeks ago. It has been deemed to be safe. It is open at the moment. We are working with Environmental Health and working with Occupational Health and Safety and there is an investigation ongoing.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The mandate letter for the Minister of Digital Government calls for her “to explore the digitalization of government health services to reduce expenditures and improve outcomes.”

What actions has the minister taken on this?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very proud any day to talk about all of the digital things we're doing in this government, Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, it's difficult with all the chirping, Speaker.

I'm so excited with all of the digital services. We've significantly expanded the services available for licensing and financial services, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of health care, I know we're moving forward with a new health information system, which the regional health authority is leading.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: I encourage the Members opposite to support the budget, which supports investment in health care.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, in his interview, last week, on *Labrador Morning*, the minister not only managed to inflame and rile up teachers, but he also referenced there being only one half-time and two quarter-time teaching positions unfilled in the region. These fractional units are a major impediment to recruitment of teachers and lead to doubling of classes, internal coverage of classes and negatively impact the learning environment of students.

Imagine if the premiership was half time and the minister's position was quarter time, how difficult it would be to attract people to serve and how difficult it would be to serve constituents.

I ask the Premier: Will his government ensure that all fractional teaching units are converted to full-time positions in order to recruit and retain teachers and maximize the learning environment for our students?

The Premier regularly seeks solutions. Here is one.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course we value education in this province, Mr. Speaker, and as the minister has already said, and I support fully, we'll continue to work with the NLTA and different stakeholders to ensure that.

Perhaps that is a reasonable suggestion. We're happy to take it under advisement and work with the NLTA and others to make sure that we are providing sustainable education opportunities for children across this province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Teachers, school staff and students were appalled to hear the Minister of Education get on local radio and dismiss their concerns as unsubstantiated. Shortly after his interview, the minister announced that staff would be sent to look at the situation in Labrador West.

Which is it, are the people of Labrador West being untruthful or is the minister just not understanding what's going on in the district?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The department regularly sends senior members of the civil service around to meet with interested parties and stakeholders. It so happened that we have an assistant deputy minister who will be heading to Labrador, I believe at the beginning of next week. So it was suggested in the light of the different stories that we have heard from different sources that perhaps this would be a useful maneuver.

In terms of the concerns of the educators and parents in Lab West, happy to have representation from them at any stage, and the discussion will continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

With the move to just one school board, we've seen many problems emerge at the regional level in Labrador, a 2021 decision. Students in my district were forced to do all their online courses in Newfoundland time slots, forcing them to miss out on 30 minutes of lecture time for their in-class courses.

This year, we saw in Nain, Nain High School academic students were forced to do all online courses because the school board took away their core academic teachers to fill vacancies elsewhere. This harmful decision made in total ignorance erodes their quality of education or impact their academic prospects.

I ask the minister: Will he commit to at least reversing some of the harms done by his department caused to students on the North Coast and ensure that core academic courses will be taught in class like they were before? These are the minimum requirements to access a university (inaudible).

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker,

Curriculum development, curriculum delivery is an active area for our department at the moment. We've done K to 6. We're working on junior high as the next priority, before moving on to senior high. CDLI, who are responsible for the online section of the delivery of the curriculum, will, I hope, shortly, be moving into the department as part of our amalgamation. In the light of that,

happy to take the Member's consideration around time zones.

With regard to recruitment and retention, again, there are discussions as soon as this week to look at the challenge for rural and remote and isolated schools. Happy to continue those discussions with the NLTA.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, it's clear the Minister of Education doesn't have a grasp on how difficult successive governments have made it to retain and attract full-time staff and educators and support workers in Labrador. In less than a year on the job, he's lost the confidence of the education community.

I ask the Premier: Will he assign a new Education minister who will actually foster and support school communities and take education seriously for Labradorians?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Between some of the editorial comments, I take education very seriously. I take the education of any student, be they in Labrador West, Gander or Plum Point, very seriously.

The fact is, with regard to Labrador West, there are 101 teaching positions in the English School District; three are vacant. There is a quarter position vacant in the Francophone School District out of a total of 5¼.

We acknowledge there are challenges, with only 13 substitutes to cover all the sickness and absence in classrooms. We certainly acknowledge we cannot pay \$50 an hour for a cleaner in competition with IOC.

We'll work through these issues with the NLTA and the appropriate people.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Present Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Speaker, I move, the Member for Exploits, seconded by the Member for Bonavista, the following private Member's resolution for debate May 3, 2023:

WHEREAS Crown Lands' enforcement of the provisions of the *Lands Act* abolishing squatters' rights against the Crown has created undue hardship for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who honestly and in good faith have occupied and developed their lands; and

WHEREAS historical titles in Newfoundland and Labrador trace back centuries and are relied upon by the public but not by the Crown; and

WHEREAS people have occupied their lands for generations based on informal title without interference from the Crown; and

WHEREAS people have strong local community support for their claims of title and face opposition only from the Crown Lands division; and

WHEREAS municipalities maintain comprehensive records of land ownership, which are not considered by the Crown in determining title claims; and

WHEREAS applicants for Crown Lands access are frustrated by inordinately long waits of months or years for their applications to be resolved, even for land which has long been occupied; and

WHEREAS the policies and practices of the province's Crown Lands division are impeding economic development in Newfoundland and Labrador and imposing high costs upon the public; and

WHEREAS this issue impacts potentially thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, many of whom may not yet know it;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to move expeditiously to bring forward legislative amendments to ensure fair reconciliation of existing claims for people seeking title to the land they have occupied in good faith for generations and which is recognized within their communities, and to take steps, in the interim, to address Crown Lands's actions against occupied properties in the province.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This private Member's resolution just mentioned will be the resolution we will be debating this coming Wednesday afternoon on Private Members' Day.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, May 8, 2023.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 9, 2023.

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That notwithstanding Standing Order 63, this House shall not proceed with Private Members' Day on Wednesday, May 10, 2023, but shall instead meet at 2 p.m. on that day for Routine Proceedings and the conduct of Government Business. And that if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall then adjourn the House at midnight.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 11, 2023.

SPEAKER: Are there any further notices of motion?

Answer to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition:

All schools in Labrador West are dealing with massive substitute teacher shortfalls. They need more teachers, IRTs, guidance counsellors, school psychologists, support staff, maintenance workers, bus drivers and custodians.

We regularly hear about the potential teachers who could fill some of these vacant positions but cannot accept the jobs because they cannot find affordable housing. Government assured residents it would work on the existing teachers' apartments and add units to the empty first floor of the former Labrador School Board building. The work has never been carried out. Potential teachers cannot take these jobs and there is no affordable housing in the area.

The CSFP has an extra challenge as, unlike the NLESD, it does not own housing in Labrador West. Labrador West's affordable housing shortage has caused a recruitment hurdle.

Maintenance on all schools has fallen behind, leading to poor learning environments.

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 meet with Labrador West teachers, support staff and create a solid plan to address the issues of staffing, maintenance and teacher housing in Labrador West.

Speaker, I get up here today to talk about this because we have a teacher shortage in Labrador West. Now, I'll start with this one.

There was a posting for a guidance counsellor in Wabush for a little while but instead of filling it with an actual guidance counsellor, they have a part-time guidance counsellor who comes in over Zoom every now and then. Then they took down the job ad for the guidance counsellor and said this is the solution; this is what we're going to say to this. Yet, there are students on wait-lists in a school to speak to a guidance counsellor. That is not filling a position; that is not addressing the issue.

Then they turn around and say there are no vacancies. They're just pulling the job ads off the website and then making teachers do more and more and more duty.

This is what they're doing up in Lab West. There is a teacher shortage. There are students falling behind in Labrador West right now because they are not addressing the actual issues; they're putting Band-Aids over everything. That is what's going on in Labrador West. The people of Labrador West are fed up. Within one day, I've had hundreds of signatures on petitions like this to ask the government to do something about it, to actually address this issue.

This didn't come out of the blue today, yesterday or the day before; this has been ongoing for four years and nothing has been done to address any of it and it's just getting worse and worse. I have been informed that multiple teachers have passed in their resignations at the end of this school year. We'll have about six, seven teachers resigning from Labrador West because they are fed up. They are tired of how things are going, they are fed up and they're actually leaving a profession that they love because they just cannot deal with this anymore. They cannot deal with the situations in these schools.

I call upon the minister to listen to the motion of this petition and to actually go to Labrador West and meet with the teachers and listen to what they have to say because clearly it's not working, what's doing there

now. It's not working, what's going on there now and needs to be changed.

SPEAKER: Order!

The Member's time is expired.

The hon. the Minister of Education for response?

The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, I appreciate it.

Again, just to inject a little bit of clarity, I believe I discussed teacher numbers in Question Period, Speaker. With regard to the housing accommodation situation, all those teachers who wished for accommodation have been accommodated. No one was unable to take a post because accommodation was unavailable. Yes, there are units that we own that are in need of renovation and we have issued an RFP to upgrade those to further enhance recruitment for Labrador West.

I hope that helps, thank you.

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, these are the reasons for this petition:

Approximately 100,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador live with mental illness.

Only about 40 per cent of those people affected by mental illness and addictions seek help. Seventy per cent of mental illness develops during childhood and adolescence and most go undiagnosed. Less than 20 per cent actually receive proper treatment.

Emergency and short-term care isn't enough and it is essential more long-term treatment options are readily available.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide access to long-term mental health care and ensure continuity of care, beginning with psychiatric and neuropsychological assessments being more accessible to the public so they can access proper mental health treatment and supports on a regular and continuous basis.

Speaker, this is a petition that has become appropriate to present this just about every week, every day until we get some action here. But at the start of Mental Health Week, it is even more appropriate to present this. Of course the hashtag for this week is MyStory.

If you go on the Canadian Mental Health Association site, it will talk about: "Within our stories is the *mental health care* we all need." We've talked about that so many times in this House. That is essentially talking about individuals with lived experiences. The minister today alluded to there is much to be done; he agreed to that. But I will also mention that mental health and addictions does not do well on wait-lists.

We have a young lobbyist, young advocate here every Monday for 126 weeks now. Young Kristi Allan out there, advocating on behalf of those who need mental health care assistance, long-term continuity of care.

So I beg government, I implore government to have a closer look, a more urgent look at this. It is needed. But in the meantime, I do ask people to reach out if you're in need and for those, if you know someone in need, reach out to them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I present this petition to call reinstate the marine shipping service between the Island portion of our province and Northern Labrador communities.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to return the marine shipping service between the Island portion of our province to our Northern Labrador communities.

This freight service was removed in the spring of 2019, resulting in freight having to be trucked to the port of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and then shipped to our northern communities. Since then, additional shipping has directly impacted the prices of food, building materials, vehicles, including trucks and off-road vehicles, household goods and many essential services for our communities.

Our Northern Labrador communities are totally isolated with no road access and marine transportation services are limited to five summer months on average. With the cancellation of the direct marine freight service from the Island portion of our province to our communities, residents are witnessing exorbitant price increases of basic needs impacting overall quality of life.

This petition is really, really important. The people in my district are still calling for a return to the marine shipping from the Island because of the exorbitant costs, not just for food, but for building materials and such.

I did ask a question last week for a call for the marine shipping service from the Island and the minister did say – and I'm quoting from *Hansard* – "I tell the hon. Member that in my consultations with stakeholders in Labrador and with MHAs that represent this side, that great work has been done; strides

have been made in terms of improving the systems in Labrador." That was what the Minister of Transportation said in my question.

Now, for me, I'd like to know what consultations were done. Did he consult with my people? The people on the street, the people who actually use the service, the people who pay the high prices for food, high prices to get their boats, their snowmobiles, their ATVs, building materials, into our North Coast communities. Did he consult with the Inuit Community governments recently on the return of their freight boat? Did he consult with Nunatsiavut Government on the return of the freight boat? Did he consult with the Innu Nation on the return of the freight boat? Because, in actual fact, no one who I've listed have told me otherwise, because they're all telling me to keep advocating for a return of their freight boat. So I would like to know what consultations were done.

He goes on to say, "We get it from stakeholders who are in Labrador. The only one that I know that looks at it from the glass as half full is the Member opposite." That's me. In actual fact, I have to say, the glass is not half empty. The glass is empty. Really, we have people now who can't afford to buy food. We have people who can't afford to actually build, to make repairs –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

The residents on the Bonavista Peninsula, served by the Bonavista hospital, who are in need of physiotherapy, have the opportunity to call the hospital during a 15-minute

period on Thursday mornings for appointments the following week. Unsuccessful candidates in attaining an appointment have to wait until the following Thursday, during the same 15-minute window, to try again. A Bonavista senior, who was discharged from the Miller Centre over five weeks ago, still has not won the lottery for such an appointment, despite attempts to call in for the past five weeks.

Therefore we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to conduct an immediate review of this physiotherapy booking process at the Bonavista hospital and initiate a much more accessible system of bookings for those in need.

To give a little more evidence on that, if you're deemed urgent and you come out, urgent is looked after and you don't need to be calling in because only those calling in would be routine. But I'd like to say that residents like Dolores Whiffen in Bonavista, who suffered a stroke, released from the Miller Centre, who was very determined to have their full functionality back in two to three months, she needs those physio appointments.

What she's left to do is at 9 o'clock on Thursday mornings the window opens, the line opens, they know the number to call. She needs to continuously call until she receives a message that all the appointments are filled, try again next week at 9.

I would say if we've gone through five weeks of trying to get appointment for physiotherapy, one would say that something is wrong with the system delivery and it needs to be looked into and tweaked.

I would say the jest of the petition is this is an impediment for Dolores Whiffen in Bonavista and others. I would ask that the minister look into the situation, the booking system, or the lack of adequate staffing to

supply or meet the need. Otherwise, look into the situation to make sure that we have this critical service available and as accessible for those like Dolores Whiffen who needs the service in order to remediate and get back on good stead in walking.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure was well aware of the poor condition of this 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 to replace Canning Bridge.

The people that have signed this one, Mr. Speaker, are business owners. There needs to be some contingencies put in place while we wait for this bridge to be replaced. Whether that's a GoBus or it's assistance with taxi fares or anything like that. What's happening is businesses are noticing that people are making, let's say, one trip into the business district of Marystown a day or every couple of days and getting what they need, as opposed to being there more frequent.

Being they're more frequent, we know that a disposable dollar is easily spent when, let's say if you're out doing your errands or whatever, you feel hungry; you might pop into a fast food or local restaurant. Without having some contingencies in place to support the people of Marystown while they're inconvenienced with this bridge closure, albeit they can go up around, but that extra 27 kilometres round trip is certainly going to be impactful on people that are employed, people that are going for personal needs, doctor's appointments, seniors.

The thing is, I think we need, sooner rather than later, to get something in there in a transportation infrastructure situation that can alleviate the pressures off the people of Marystown that find themselves marginalized because the bridge is down and they have to go all the way up around.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by Deputy Government House Leader, that pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, May 1, 2023.

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.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to get up here and speak on behalf of the constituents of Labrador West and to continue to have discussions around budget policy.

I'll start with this one and with the earlier discussions of education. It was disheartening to see the lack thereof of expansion in the sense that to go back to where it was at one time because, you know, it's been chipped away, chipped away, chipped away and chipped away. Now, it's to the point where we're now having these discussions and the minister saying there earlier that we can't pay custodians \$50 an hour to compete with the mines. No one asked to pay \$50 an hour; we asked that you actually look at it and come up with a plan going forward.

This is the kind of conversation that we need to have. How do we deliver services in a rural area and also make sure that we have maximized it, without actually cutting actual services? My take-away from that is, oh, I'm not going to have custodians in Lab West now, because that's what it seems to imply. I'm sure it's not 100 per cent that, but, at the same time, this is where we're going.

Another line item that really brought me some concern on that too was libraries. We haven't improved library services in decades. At one point, they actually tried to get rid of libraries. We saved them, but, at the same time, there are no improvements in library services.

Libraries are very important to small communities. They provide service. They provide an education service. They also provide resources for people trying to do different things. They do a lot of stuff with small children in rural communities, yet we didn't see any increase to their budget. Actually, technically, with inflation and stuff, libraries actually got a cut because they didn't increase their funding to go with the rise of inflation, because books are going to cost more, services are going to cost more, wages cost more. So, in reality, they got a cut because of inflation.

This is the thing that's really important. We have to have a conversation about education. We have to have a conversation about libraries and actually improving services to rural communities. I know the library home does a lot of work with small children. They actually now also do a lot of extra things with different people trying to access the Internet, for seniors trying to figure out how to use computers, things like that. These are vital services that help a lot of people in the day to day. It's one of those things where small help to multiple people creates a big thing. This is where we're going.

I have parents reaching out to me constantly about IRT services in schools, about guidance counsellors, and other services like this. But we haven't seen anything in this budget to actually help improve those situations.

We have a lot of parents that are very concerned about these kind of deliveries of services. We're talking about the success of children here. We're talking about the success of those who want to move forward, who actually want to pursue careers and higher education, things like this. But there are too many roadblocks in their formative years. This is where we really have to have a really big conversation about what do we want to see as an education system? What do we actually want to see going forward?

What I'm seeing right now is death of the education system by a thousand cuts. I grew up in Labrador West; I went to school in Labrador West, the entirety of it. When we were under just the Labrador School Board, it was fantastic. Anything I wanted to do, anything I could dream of, the school did it. Now, they can't even get enough teachers available because of so many infilling and so many internal coverages and stuff to actually pull off a lot of things that I took for granted going to school. It's just one cut after cut after cut.

At the same time as all this, the region is very prosperous. A lot of optimism in the mining industry. A lot of optimism going forward of more production and more job opportunities. Parents see that the mine is doing well, businesses are doing well, but the education system is not doing well.

This is what brings great concern. How are we going to attract people to work in the industry? How are we going to better the region? How are we going to do that if the education system is underfunded and unable to do the jobs that it's required to do? How am I to attract more, get the services and get people who want to come to work there? It's really concerning. It's a serious problem that needs a serious lens on it.

It's the same thing again; I can't get sheriff's officers, occupational health and safety officers full time, even all the other auxiliary services are struggling to attract anybody. How do you attract anybody if the first thing a family looks at and goes: What are the schools like up there? That's always the question a family asks when they move to a new region: What are the schools like up there? This is it. This is a very concerning thing that needs to be dealt with.

It's not just here, really; it's more prominent right now there. But there are other small communities and other areas too that have very similar situations. When we talk about prosperity, talk about this budgetary policy,

a good way to measure the health of the province is the education system. That's how you measure the health and success; it's how well the students are doing. How well is the next generation behind us doing? Also in my region, there are always ads out for higher education professionals; mines are trying to attract engineers; HR professionals; different disciplines like that. Then on top of that, health care workers.

I have parents telling me that their child requires the help of an IRT or other special needs or anything like that. I have a lot of parents telling me now that they're going to leave Labrador West and their spouse is going to become fly-in and fly out because the school system won't work with them to actually help their child. So I am going to lose professionals. Actually, one person that actually messaged me to tell me that was a teacher in the school system who quit because of that. So this is the situation we're in. We're having teachers just quit the profession they love because they're just that fed up. They are just that tired of it.

So how do we measure the health of something? Your education system. That's how you measure the health of something. It is worrisome because I have such a great opportunity; I have great prospects for my district but between this and the health care, how am I going to attract people to work in the mining industry? How am I going to attract people to come back to this province and work? How am I going to attract people to do the things and continue the prosperity of my region when they look at education, they look at health and they say, no, we don't want to deal with that? We don't want to be a part of that. It is disheartening because I have so much going for the lovely people of Labrador.

I know it is a mining region and it comes with its challenges and things like that, but those challenges can be overcome with the political will, with the want to do something about it. But right now, clearly, it is not going that way. It's becoming more difficult.

I went out to get the names for this petition; it took an afternoon to get hundreds of names from parents and concerned citizens who want something done about this, who want something done about the education system, who want some changes made to improve it, to actually have access to resources, to have access to individuals, access to people who want to do these things. It's concerning.

I think that this is important, on top of health care, and I'll touch on that. Once again, I have people reaching out to my office. They can't get into a bed. Waiting for weeks in the hospital to go and see the cardiac specialist – waiting, waiting, waiting and waiting. People waiting hours in an emerg because there's no primary care. I got people who are waiting for test results. People waiting to get in to see about test results. I got people waiting to get their referrals signed off to go and actually get to see their specialist. People waiting to get paperwork filled out so they can apply for their MTAP. The backlog, the waiting, people are very tired of it. People are very tired and frustrated that they just continue to have to wait and wait and wait. I keep asking, when will we get more nurse practitioners? When will we see more doctors? When will we actually see some of the changes that people keep talking about?

Once again, in my district, people are frustrated about it. When people ask, should I move to the region? What's the health care like? People on Facebook really like to give their opinion on it. It's hard because then it adds another layer of hardness when we want to talk about recruitment and retention of other professionals and other professions that we so desperately need.

This is where we're at. This is where we're finding, are we going to have great opportunity in the mining industry passed over because we can't get other things worked on? The other things that we're waiting on and want work done are the responsibility of government. We hope and

we want to see some of these great opportunities come to the region but if we can't get the staff to do it, we can't get the people to come to the area to do it, then prosperity passes by us, once again.

I don't want to see that happen. I want to see my region grow and take advantage of some of the great opportunities that is coming its way. I want my region to continue to be as prosperous as it was. This July, it will be 69 years of continuous iron mining. For 69 years, continuously, Labrador West has produced iron ore and produced royalties for this province and produced taxes and jobs and all the great things that come with it. Not many regions get to celebrate going on 70 years of mining in one area, but we get to do that.

Labrador West was one of the greatest post-war projects ever done in Canada. It continues to provide. It continues to have great opportunity for people. There are multiple generations of people who have worked and retired out of that mine. Like I said, my grandfather was there, my dad was there, I'm there and my kids are there. So that's four generations of people in one area that got to experience and enjoy the region and what prosperity it brings.

But at the same time now, we're faced with such great challenges when it comes to education delivery and with health care delivery. Even just the services of government we're challenged there again. There doesn't seem to be much addressing a lot of those issues and this is what brings me concern: How are we to continue if we're going to step on our own feet when it comes to providing services for our residents? At the same time, we're hoping that a lot of these great things get to move forward. So this is where we find the concerns of Labrador. We find the concerns that are overlooked. Are we passed over or what is it? Why is it taking such great strides for any of these issues to be addressed?

I will say once again, though, when it came to the housing thing, I'll say of one shimmering light, I'll thank the minister, again, responsible for Housing. He did meet with us; we did get some units repaired. We did have another great meeting with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing this past week about some of the housing. So I will give one bouquet, but at the same time, I've got a few other great challenges that are not being addressed at this time. We're doing what we can and I don't think enough is being done. But I want to see that certain priorities and certain things are added.

Another thing, too, we've been finding when it comes to a lot of service delivery is that we don't look at all the issues when it comes to retention. I'll go back to Occupational Health and Safety. I know that every time we've had this discussion with anybody about Occupational Health and Safety officers is that they apply for the job and they can't find any housing. Then the department won't even look at housing for them. It keeps putting the responsibility on them. But the precedent is already set in the other departments that there's housing available. The RNC went ahead and purchased a lot of houses for their officers so they would never, ever face a retention and recruitment problem like they did at one period of time. So they went and did that.

The teachers own housing. The health district had housing but the Occupational Health and Safety don't seem to want to go down that route of looking at actual housing for these officers, to stem the exorbitant cost of housing that is in Labrador West.

So it's one of these things that, you know, the precedent is already set by government and the other departments on other issues but it was never, ever bothered to be done in this case. So, once again, now we have sporadic times – we have some fly-in, fly-out officers but the consistency is not there like it used to be. I know it's a little bit better than when we just didn't have officers, but at the same time it's something I think that

the department needs to take back and look at is a unit for an officer that's provided for an officer so that we have one stationed in the region as much as possible to deal with a lot of the stuff. We are a very heavily industrialized area and occupational health and safety is a very core value of Labrador West. They take it very seriously, especially the kind of work that's done in the area.

It's a suggestion that we can get something done about the recruitment and retention. Like I said, it's not just health care workers, not just teachers; it's all over government when it comes to actually providing services to a region, especially a place like Labrador West. We should be actually looking at ways to keep people there.

Right now, we're having issues with sheriff's officers. It's like the same thing. We're short sheriff's officers in Labrador West right now. The reason that they're looking at it is that they're having a hard time dealing with the recruitment and retention of these members. I know that their unions have brought it forward. I know that their other advocates, even internally, they've brought it forward that these are issues when it comes to providing services. It's important that we do this and not go the other way of removing services altogether.

The Minister of Education said, oh, we don't want to pay custodians \$50 an hour. There are other ways to deal with the situation than that kind of extreme but, at the same time, that's Labrador West. It's a unique part of this province. It has its challenges, but it brings great prosperity to the province in the form of royalties and lots and lots of them.

We just want to be treated like the rest of the province. We want to have access to the same services as the rest of the province. We do understand there are some things – we're not going to get everything. Like I said, I tell people we're not going to have a cardiac surgeon on every corner, but at the same time, we'd like to have the ability to carry out the normal daily activities of this

province and receive the services that every other region of this province enjoys. At the same time, we'll continue to be a great contributor to this province, economically. We do have a very bright future in Labrador West. We have a bright future when it comes to mining, but we also have a great future in all other kinds of things.

We're a region where we've produced a lot of great and amazing talent from mining to the arts and culture to engineering, even to academia. A lot of great things have come out of Labrador West and we continue to do that. We've done it for 70 years, I'm pretty sure we'll do it for another 70 more for sure. As the markets change for mining and critical minerals, we're probably going to be one of the biggest players in the game.

We're really looking forward to that. I really hope that at some point in time I'm going to come back again and maybe I can come back and talk about, hopefully, some of the stuff that I've mentioned and brought forward that does get addressed. We can come back and have a great conversation about how we successfully did that.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Are there further speakers to the amendment?

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To begin, as always, it's a pleasure to stand here in this House of Assembly and represent the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. I'm honoured and privileged to be here to do that.

I'm hoping I'll get an opportunity to speak of the exemplary service that was provided last night in Harbour Breton due to a fire. I will hopefully get an opportunity to speak to it later in the week through another

opportunity. But I think it's a really good news story.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to, even province wide, congratulate all students who've been studying at our post-secondary institutions and moving into the summer to either study or work in their communities. I just want to say congratulations to all of them. They're in all kinds of fields. I know we have Pages here who are studying as well and I wish them all the best in their future studies and endeavours. Even my own daughter is finishing third year of nursing studies. One more year and she'll be a nurse and she's going to stay in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly happy to speak to budget '23-'24 because I believe it is a real plan, despite what has been said across the way. I'd like to say congratulations to the lady in front of me who is Minister of Finance who has done a real good job. I spend time with her in my role in budget preps; we're in good hands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: We're in good hands with this Minister of Finance and certainly with the Premier of the province with their directions.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we hear more good news on roadwork. Investments in our highways are always important. This is our main vein through the province. It was a great announcement today. I figured I would have a question from the Opposition but I guess it's good news and my critic cannot handle good news. I know that, I understand, he struggles with it. I understand that, but it is good news.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) the media.

E. LOVELESS: I don't need to go see the media.

But certainly indeed a good announcement.

I listened to the Opposition Members get up and speak and I want to just target some of them in terms of what they said, because the Member for Harbour Main always says I don't listen. Well, I do listen. Sometimes it's painful listening because of some of the stuff that's being said. It's painful, but I do listen. You have a job to do and I understand and respect that.

The Member for Stephenville - Port au Port likes to talk about taxes. There is a price on pollution. I believe we talk way too much about taxes instead of talking about what we should be talking about, what we're going to do about climate change.

Nobody likes taxes. It is a reality in the government world. In governing, taxes are a part of it. Nobody likes taxes and I can tell you I witnessed first hand with the Premier when we visited Port aux Basques and other communities, nobody likes disaster either. We need to target that collectively, not on this side or at this level, but all levels of government.

The Member for CBS, I was going to target him a little bit more aggressive, but I won't because do you know what? His team, the Boston Bruins, who were touted to be the Stanley Cup winners, are gone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: They are gone. They are gone.

So I won't be too difficult on him, but, anyways, I think it's paved the way for made a Canadian cup, Edmonton or Toronto. You never know, right. I know the Member for Ferryland is cringing there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: I listened to the Member for CBS and he started one of speeches by sunshine in CBS. He talked about the

sunshine in CBS and all the good things in CBS. Then he talked about all the problems he was having in CBS. So I classified it as the political House of Assembly gospel according to the Member for CBS because he references doing things differently and working together. I agree totally. He used individual stories, whether it's health care and everything else.

We get that, there's no government that's responsible for these individual stories. I was around as a researcher way back when, when there were PC governments, that these individual stories, unfortunately, they still happened back then. They still happen now. No matter what colour the government is over here. But do we strive to do better to not allow those situations to happen? Absolutely. We need to work towards that.

He talked about the 2016 budget; a difficult budget. Pictures on poles. Believe me, I was here, I saw it. No matter who the leader is, when you're targeted that way, it's not fun to watch, it's difficult. But let's put it in perspective that the government previously, before that in 2015, was a PC government and they would not tell what the deficit was. We didn't know. Then we realized it was a \$2.7 billion deficit and some tough choices had to be made. So they were tough choices and not easy for any government to go through.

He also referenced, too, the prime minister in Ottawa, a shed party where he's on stage with –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

E. LOVELESS: Hold on, now. He was on stage with Newfoundland and Labrador talent. Which any time we can get a chance to promote our talent, why not? But we know the prime minister and the Progressive Conservative Premier in this province, what stage they were on and what it resulted in: an ABC campaign, which was not good for this province. I believe in the

big scheme of things, we're still paying for it these days.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go to the budget document and I know they're listening over there because I'm getting taunted a little bit. So I'm striking some nerve, I like that.

But *Your Health. Our Priority* is a plan and I'll just make some notes – I'll make it clear to those who are listening, it's not being supported by the crowd opposite. The PCs are not supporting this great budget. I've heard from a lot of people that this is a great budget.

Health Care – but you need to listen now. I've been accused of not listening so you need to listen, right? Because there's something coming about Central Newfoundland that you need to listen to. Under the Health Care, \$21 million for 10 new Family Care Teams across the province – very important. That's benefiting rural Newfoundland and Labrador and my district.

Fifteen million dollars for a new Health Information System – good news. Nine million dollars to begin to consolidate 60 separate road ambulance services into a single integrated service with centralized dispatch. That is very important to my district, where you have community-based ambulance services and you have the public and they're worried about where it's all going. We have more than \$23 million for recruitment and retention of health care professionals. A lot of investments in health care that they're not supporting.

So I think that's a very strong message that the people of this province realize. We have 12 new drugs to the provincial drug program – very important. All of them are supports, Mr. Speaker, to rural parts of the province. Listen to this: No new taxes or fee increases – very important. Elimination of the retail sales tax on home insurance – very important.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: The Member for Terra Nova saw it differently.

The over eight cents on gasoline, taken off – very important – that the PCs are not supporting. They are voting against it. We also have \$140 million for housing, including construction of more than 850 rental homes – very important.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: I listened to the Member for Terra Nova when he spoke. I would ask for the same respect when I'm speaking, Mr. Speaker.

Education: We have \$64 million to increase wages for early childhood educators and improve accessibility to \$10 per day for child care. That's helping, for the Member for CBS.

Communities: The announcement we did today are great for all communities in Newfoundland and Labrador and the increase in MOGs is very important. They asked for it, they're getting it and we are listening, I say to the Member for Harbour Main.

Reimagining health care: There is \$9 million to begin to consolidate the road ambulance. I said this is critical and I repeat it again: It is critical. I look forward to what the service will bring in terms of results.

I say to the two Members from Central: There are \$1.2 million annually is allocated for the Lionel Kelland Hospice in Grand Falls-Windsor; \$1.2 million annually that they're voting against. But every day they're on their feet talking about, oh, there's nothing for – they talk about the Premier's office. Well, I'm glad there's a Premier's office because they worked to get this done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: So it is very important.

AN HON. MEMBER: So where were they to?

E. LOVELESS: They're right here, and I'm going to say about those individuals – I know I touched –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you for the protection, Mr. Speaker.

I realize I touched a nerve over there and I'm going to tell you the thing about that Premier's office in Central. Those workers who are in the office are doing great work. Not just for Grand Falls or Exploits, they're doing work for seniors in my district, people who are looking for CPP disability benefits, and they do great work and are working very hard, so it is a good investment.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) voice in Central.

E. LOVELESS: They have a voice, but the voice that you and your colleague have, you're voting against \$1.2 million annually for the Lionel Kelland Hospice in Grand Falls-Windsor. You can't be on the media saying oh, it is wonderfully important to me and voting down \$1.2 million annually. The people of this province, they see what's going on here.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Topsail mentioned mental health today and it is important. It's also in this document, which is a plan, and that's our budget – very important – \$5 million for community-based, wraparound mental health and addiction services; \$4.4 million annually for Flexible

Assertive Community Treatment teams; \$200,000 for the Regional Early Psychosis Nurse program in Labrador-Grenfell region. These are important.

Can we do more? Absolutely. I've always said about you build a facility, it's not necessarily building a new mental health facility; it's what services are inside that building that matters most. It's not about the kind of windows or the doors – it's important obviously to that structure, but what services someone can avail of is also important.

In the budget we have seniors care. I can keep talking about the good news in this budget but I know it will drive blood pressures up. Helping with high cost of living, we certainly recognize that and we have listened. We have listened to the people of this province, half a billion dollars to help people in need in this province.

The housing supports and –

B. PETTEN: It's not his first time reading that.

E. LOVELESS: No, it's not my first, but because it's such good news, it's worth repeating, I say to the Member for Conception Bay South. That's why I'm repeating it. I know you're loving it, I do. There's a smile on his face even though the Boston Bruins are gone.

Mr. Speaker, there's also, in terms of accessible and inclusive communities, \$2 million for special assistance grant programs and \$400,000 for accessible vehicle and taxi grants – very important as well. A lot of this I'm reading is because it's worth repeating.

I say to the Member opposite, I say to the Member for Topsail, if there was a new school announced in this budget would you have voted for it?

P. DINN: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: Yes, he said. Thumbs up. There's a new school announced for the Leader of the Opposition but he's voting against it – very important there.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot in the plan that talks about early learning, good news there, and youth engagement as well. We don't talk enough about it. We have more than \$2.5 million for the Community Youth Network – very important.

I want to say to the Member for Harbour Main when she stood and talked about listening to seniors. I do listen to seniors. Last time I was in my district, I visited 50-plus clubs; I listened to them. I listen to them on a daily basis and will continue. I don't need her to tell me that I should listen to seniors. I get what her job is, but please don't tell me how I should do my job. That's all I'm saying, because I take great pride in helping seniors, I really do. It's a very important part of our sector in terms of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

E. LOVELESS: I know they're loving all what I'm saying here, so I know it's painful for them. They can't handle good news.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's a privilege to stand here as always. I'm going to take my seat and at some other time I'm sure I'll get opportunity to speak to this hon. House and the people of this province and tell them all the good things that a Liberal government is doing for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further speakers to the amendment?

Seeing no other speakers to the amendment, all those in favour of the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division

SPEAKER: Division is called.

Call in the Members.

Division

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready for the vote?

Order, please!

All those in favour of the amendment, please rise.

CLERK (Barnes): David Brazil, Barry Petten, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Lloyd Parrott, Tony Wakeham, Pleaman Forsey, Loyola O'Driscoll, Craig Pardy, Chris Tibbs, James Dinn, Jordan Brown, Lela Evans.

SPEAKER: All those against the amendment, please rise.

CLERK: Andrew Furey, John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, John Haggie, Gerry Byrne, Bernard Davis, Tom Osborne, Siobhan Coady, Pam Parsons, Elvis Loveless, Krista Lynn Howell, Steve Crocker, Sarah Stoodley, Derrick Bragg, John Abbott, Brian Warr, Paul Pike, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Scott Reid, Lucy Stoyles, Eddie Joyce, Paul Lane.

Speaker, the ayes: 13; the nays: 22.

SPEAKER: I declare that the amendment is defeated.

On motion, amendment defeated.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 13, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, Bill 38.

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that Bill 38, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 38, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000." (Bill 38)

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm glad we survived that vote of non-confidence by the Progressive Conservatives and we're able to now move forward with some of the legislation that's required for the implementation of the budget, and that is exactly what we're doing today with Bill 38, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000.

This bill brings together three tax-related initiatives that impact revenues. An increase to the exemption threshold for the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax, which will lower the cost to business in this province. Improvements to the Physical Activity Tax Credit to encourage and

support physical activity, which will further our goal for Newfoundland and Labrador to be one of the healthiest provinces in the country by 2030. It's very important, saves families money, and a repeal of the federally imposed carbon tax effective July 1, 2023.

It all began with changes to the exemption threshold for the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax. To encourage economic growth and expand employment, we are increasing the exemption threshold under the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax from \$1.3 million to \$2 million – a significant change. This initiative will benefit all 1,250 employers that currently pay the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax, with tax savings of up to \$14,000 annually per business.

This change to the payroll tax was requested by the business community, including the boards of trade and chambers of commerce around the province and Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council during meetings held prior to budget. The business community, Speaker, I am pleased to say is very supportive of these changes.

Changes to HAPSET, which is the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax, threshold will be effective retroactively to January 1, 2023. This is the largest to date change in the thresholds and positively impacts, as I have indicated, 1,250 businesses in this province. A significant change, an important change, to business.

With initiatives such as this, we are encouraging economic growth and expanded employment. We continue to look for other ways to reduce costs and improvements to the burdens to businesses. Other measures within the budget to support economic health include a Manufacturing and Processing Investment Tax Credit to invest in capital equipment; a Green Technology Tax Credit of 20 per cent; as well as some \$35 million in economic initiatives.

A tremendous assistance to the business community, of course, expands our economy, improves employment and drives growth in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is unfortunate that the Opposition is not voting in favour of the budget.

The second measure in this bill is an increase in the Physical Activity Tax Credit rate. The Physical Activity Tax Credit was introduced in budget 2021 to provide a helpful incentive for individuals and families as they access sport and recreational activities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Improving access to active lifestyles and creating a culture where Newfoundlanders and Labradorians place greater emphasis on living healthier is integral to achieving better health outcomes.

The Physical Activity Tax Credit helps families with the cost of recreational activities, with the added advantage of supporting the local health and wellness industry. Preliminary data indicates that there were some 29,390 filers who claimed the credit in the 2021 tax year. We do not yet have the data for this year, 2022, but I'm sure it will be forthcoming and we're really pleased to see that many filers taking advantage of the tax credit.

In the spirit of encouraging more active lifestyles and breaking down potential barriers to accessing recreational sporting activities, *Budget 2023* announced a doubling of the Physical Activity Tax Credit rate from 8.7 per cent to 17.4 per cent effective with the 2023 taxation year. This doubles the potential return to families. As this is a refundable credit, families can claim up to \$2,000 in eligible fitness expenses and receive a credit of up to \$348 per family.

We have doubled this rate because our commitment is to become a healthier society by 2030. The Health Accord highlighted physical well-being and called for incentives for children and adults to get more active. The Physical Activity Tax

Credit is one example of how we're doing just that.

Speaker, this bill also repeals the federally imposed carbon tax as of July 1, 2023. In 2016, the federal government announced plans to implement carbon pricing to help Canada meet its greenhouse gas emissions targets. At the time of implementation, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador was able to negotiate an agreement to ensure the impacts on consumers were minimized and to maintain competitiveness for taxation and trade. Importantly, exemptions included home heat fuels, meaning no carbon tax on home heat. Further exemptions from carbon taxes negotiated by the provincial government included agriculture, fishing, forestry and offshore and mineral exploration.

This year, the Government of Canada has determined that this carbon tax agreement is no longer compliant with its benchmark requirements and is therefore imposing its federal backstop in Newfoundland and Labrador, as it will also be doing in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Yukon and Nunavut are already subject to the backstop.

This is a disappointing and difficult outcome, as it means that exemptions from the carbon tax in our province will be removed. These exemptions were implemented in January of 2019 and, as I said, included home heating fuel, aviation fuel for flights within the province, fish processing, mineral and offshore exploration, silviculture, on-grid electricity production that is not regulated by the *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act* and government operations including municipalities.

We have made our concerns and disappointment clear to the federal government. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has advocated again and again for flexibility regarding the federal carbon tax. We have been vocal in

opposing the Government of Canada's removal of the carbon tax exemptions, as outlined in several letters to the federal government from the Premier.

As stated by Premier Furey in his September 2, 2022, correspondence to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change: "The current price signals being provided by the market are far stronger than the signals that removal of these exemptions would have provided under normal economic circumstances, and they are already generating the changes in perspective and behavior that the Federal Government desires."

As a result of the federal government's decision to impose the federal carbon pricing backstop, we will repeal the carbon tax effective July 1, 2023.

To conclude, Speaker, this bill introduced today will allow us to increase the exemption threshold for the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax as requested by businesses. It will increase the Physical Activity Tax Credit, which will help families with the cost of activities and help the province be healthier by 2030 and, as well, it will repeal the federally imposed carbon tax.

I look forward to a healthy and progressive debate on these three issues. I think, especially, the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax and the Physical Activity Tax Credit are very important to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and I look forward to the concurrence of the House.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed an honour again to get to stand in this House of Assembly and speak to the budget process here. I've had the opportunity with my colleagues on this side to speak on a number of occasions, particularly around some of the issues that are pertinent and very important to the people of this province, not to dismiss a lot of the good things that are in the budget, but to support those, but to talk about the gaps in what people in this province has identified as needed investments and needed supports for the people of this province.

Again, just to clarify for the people at home, we're now debating Bill 38, which is a bill that will amend the *Revenue Administration Act*. People will understand there are a number of components related to this here. Those are relevant and the minister outlined particular things but she did it from her perspective or her department's perspective on what they're presenting. We on this side will do it from our perspective, hopefully outlining exactly the impact this is going to have on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is to remove the tax on carbon products, and I want to make sure people are clear. This doesn't mean that the carbon tax is removed; it's the opposite. What this means is that there's going to be a carbon tax there that will generate revenues coming out of the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that, from the perspective in this province, is not in the best interest of helping the environment because everybody in this province is cognizant of the environmental changes and our responsibilities to do the right thing for the environment.

If you look at what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have been doing for the last decade or more, we've been brought in to this process much more quickly than most and much more knowledgeable on our hydroelectric power on what we've been

doing in reforestation and what we've been doing to minimize the footprint on our environment from our mineral exploration as part of it.

Our offshore with the policies and the guidelines and the healthy approach and environmentally healthy approach to doing things out there and ensuring that we've identified, in our drilling process, to have minimal impact on the environment and the seabed. But also the fact that it has been identified that we have some of the cleanest oil products in the world. We're trying to market that so that there is a cleaner environment because products, while they're still being used and still necessary, would be bought from a jurisdiction that adheres to all of the safety and environmental regulations that are necessary.

We have the most rigorous in the world and that's why companies from Norway were very cognizant of it, who come from England are very cognizant of it, who come from Spain and the United States were cognizant of what needs to be done here because they see the value of what we're doing here from an environmental point of view. I'll get back to talking about that over the next hour or so.

The other one here is to increase the provincial payroll tax exemption threshold to \$2 million. Well done. I support that; I see the value. I even think it could be a little bit higher because more employers could take advantage of this situation, but I do see that. I think it's a great next step in ensuring that the business community here is supported for doing the right things when it comes to hiring and supporting the environment and the people of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. So I see that as a positive.

The benefit here, from a cost analysis, moving it to \$2 million, I know these businesses are still going to take the revenues they save and invest back into their businesses and back into their

employees, which is a benefit for everybody. In the long run, I would think we'll get more tax revenue because people are more productive, the businesses are providing more services that are taxable in other ways and, as a benefit of that, the people of this province gain again and so does government. So I see the real benefit in that; I would have liked that it had even been a little more.

We had talked about this in our Blue Book a number of times in the last number of elections of how we would support businesses, from a taxation point of view, to see the benefits to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and to flourish and drive businesses, but also to let people know nationally and internationally that we're open for business and here are some of the incentives, if you come in here: treat your workers right, be cognizant of our safety regulations, be cognizant of our environmental regulations, then we would ensure that you would get supports where necessary.

Because, again, the business plan here would be the more businesses come here and are attracted to come to Newfoundland and Labrador, the more we can promote and tout the skill set that we have in this province, the more internationally people will see the value of doing business in Newfoundland and Labrador, the more productive it will be for us and the more tax revenue that is generated. So it is a win-win across the board, so I do applaud the government for acknowledging that and increasing that.

I would hope, as we continue forward, that becomes one of the mainstays of the Liberal administration, about trying to entice businesses, who are good corporate citizens, who do the right thing and understand the value of the workers in Newfoundland and Labrador and the value of following the procedures and policies that keep people safe and engaged and are cognizant of the environment, that they're

welcome in Newfoundland and Labrador. We'll do whatever is possible to ensure that their companies are viable, that their companies can flourish and that their reputations are never tarnished by policies that are not in tune with what is necessary for a good business to operate. So I do applaud that part.

But then we get into the third part of what this bill, Bill 38, is going to do: Increase the tax credit rate for the Physical Activity Tax Credit from 8.7 to 17.4. Now, not a bad thing; I am not criticizing that. My question here is around three different things: Why is that put in there right now? We know why. Because the Liberal administration taxed its citizens again with the sugar tax. A tax that we've debated in this House, that we've asked to give us the logistical information that justifies that this would be a benefit, from a health perspective and a social society point of view, to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador; that it wouldn't be an extra burden on the lower income individuals; and in some way, shape or form that it would make health outcomes be better. We couldn't see it.

The Premier quotes an obscure piece of documentation from England, but he doesn't clarify exactly that is a partnership more or regulatory tax with the industry itself, not with the citizens who purchase those products.

So it becomes very confusing. The Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, last week, read out something, and you can propose anything and present it, if it's only half-truths, if you don't clarify all the information that's relevant to it. He outlined something about a statement I had made, but he neglected to read the two paragraphs in the middle. He read the first one and the last one.

So if you don't share all the information, it's not accurate. If it's not accurate information, people can't make an informed decision as to whether or not it's in the best interest of

them from a health perspective, from a financial perspective or from a development perspective in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There's not one person on this side of the House, particularly I know in our caucus here, who doesn't support finding ways to improve people's health in Newfoundland and Labrador. We've said it from day one. The last eight years we've been touting it. There has to be a way of doing it, so much so that we've even offered to collaborate on certain things. We wouldn't challenge the government on legislative processes. We would actually be supportive, if it was the right thing to do. That would be supportive for the people and have outcomes and access to health care.

This is a tax here that we see no way, shape, or form that it can be a benefit to the people of the province. But, with that being said, the last number of months, I've been still here waiting that there might be some more documentation. I'm looking at the demographics, I'm looking at the response from people and I'm hearing responses from people that are saying they're actually now, with this tax – and it got me, I thought people were misconstruing it or misinterpreting what it was, but when I went and saw it for myself – so prior to that, if it's about soft drinks, the sugar – and we know soft drinks have much more of a condensed form of sugar in it and, obviously from a health perspective, is one of the worse things that could have an impact on it. But then we find out after meeting with the industries that they're cognizant of that, too, they want to be good corporate citizens.

You don't think they want to keep their clientele healthy and live longer so that they can sell more products to them. Of course, they do. Great business plan. What a business model to mould yourself around. But when the industry came in and said we're cognizant of this, our research shows the same things that sugar can have an adverse effect on people's health, not necessarily everybody, but on certain

people's health. So why wouldn't we do things that would be beneficial to keep people healthy?

They've done it. If you look at a lot of packaging now, a lot of it will have minimal sugar or no sugar; it will have reduced sugar content. They're looking at better ways of using technology to minimize the sugar content, while at the same time giving the flavour that people want because they've got products they've got to sell, because people work in the plants that produce this or people farm the products that go into these products, these drinks as part of that process.

So when it was targeting the soft drink industry – and one of them that wasn't targeted, one of the components was diet drinks. I get that, if you just stick to saying sugar is the be all and end all for causing trouble or health issues in people in Newfoundland and Labrador. But there are other products or other components of diet drinks that also have an adverse effect but they weren't touched. So what we're finding from people – and I've had people say this – you're forcing me now to buy diet drinks.

Now, I know and I've seen it and read it, there are health articles that note diet drinks have certain components that are much more hazardous from a health point of view than sugar would be in a number of cases. Now, is sugar a component that can do damage to people? Yes, particularly in mass amounts, depending on people's lifestyle and how often they consume it, but if you're pushing people back to diet drinks, you're not making them any healthier, by no stretch of the imagination. If you're pushing back people who can only afford it, people on fixed incomes, people on low incomes, then you're doing more damage than what you should be doing.

Education was going to be a big component. I would have thought that administration, the Liberal administration, would have worked with industry. We've

met with the Beverage Association a number of times – I think four times over the last number of years. We've met with the producers. I went and saw some plants and operations on the Mainland, saw the valued work, got them to explain. They've got dieticians; they have physicians who work for them. They have researchers, chemical researchers who look at ensuring that the product they produce is as healthy as possible.

So hats off to them. Let's start working with the industry and if we see an industry that's not playing the game or doesn't have the best interest from a health perspective of the customer in play, well then there are all kinds of things we can do about that. There are tax exemptions that they wouldn't be entitled to; there are restrictions that we can put on them. But when the beverage industry nationally says: We have committed to a policy with our membership that those who produce drinks that have sugar will find ways to reduce it.

If you look on most packaging now, I ask anybody, from things that I didn't even know had too much sugar, chocolate milk, for example. It's posted on it: produced here in Newfoundland and Labrador, 25 per cent less sugar. I'm told by the industry in another two to three years that could be 50 per cent less sugar than the original intake. That tells me the industry is doing their part as part of the whole process.

Again, I've been told by physicians that sugar is not necessarily a bad thing. It's not a drug that will automatically kill you if you OD on it; it's not that. But, like any other thing that you take in life, anything, if not done in moderation and depending on your present health, it could have a detrimental effect. No different than eating greasy foods constantly could have it. No different than eating ice cream could also have it. There's an effect that it can have on everybody else.

You look at the impact and you look at doing it in a manner that's beneficial to all

engaged and that you can guarantee the outcomes are going to be positive from a health perspective. If you're doing things that are now forcing people to go with an alternative that potentially could be more dangerous from a health perspective, then you haven't done anything that works.

Let's add in at least – I don't know about anybody else's society, but I know in Newfoundland and Labrador we all have seen juices as a positive, healthy alternative to soft drinks. Always saw that. Apple juice, orange juice, grapefruit juice, pineapple juice – I say pineapple juice because I recently read an article that said pineapple juice is the best fruit juice to drink for anybody who's had COVID and have had adverse effects to it. I said, what a marvellous drink. Then what do I find out? The 20 per cent tax is put on that again.

If you're already coming from a fixed income, if you're a senior citizen who now sees an alternative that could be a positive for helping you address some of the ailments you had from COVID or some of the ill effects and you're thinking, even peace of mind – because a lot of what we do, too, part of it is psychological. We need to feel good that things are going to improve. Well, if people say take this, drink this, eat this it's going to improve your stature health-wise, well then you're going to be engaged to do it.

Now all of a sudden the sugar drink that was adamant – I remember a former minister of Health on that side over there or minister of Finance was adamant about the sugar tax, purely, and concentrated on soft drinks. I could probably, with the right evidence, be convinced that that indeed would be something to be considered. We'd even have that conversation over here if the evidence proved it. But now when we find out how it slipped in there, it's on all other considered healthy products – key juices, which is to me confusing, bewildering.

What is the alternative you're asking people to do? Drink solely water? But you know all these other products have a multitude – if you look at the ingredients on the back, all the different levels of vitamins that it has, potassium, all the other positive things that people have. Even sodium – you have to have a certain degree of sodium in your body for your body to function. Again, in moderation. But all these other vitamin necessities, they all come from natural fruits that we all say the *Canada's food guide* says fruit intakes. I know there's a balance of fruit drinks would do it but if these are natural fruit drinks that have an outlined percentage of what you would need for your intake for a particular day, I see that as a positive thing.

But now you've added 20 per cent, more in some cases, depending on the size of the carton that you are buying and the product there, then I have a real problem with that. Particularly, when there's no evidence still – a year later, I would have thought there'd be 20 studies, people showing us – I would have thought somebody in Newfoundland and Labrador would have took it up and said here's the evidence. Here's the evidence, Mr. Brazil; here's the evidence, PC Party, that this is actually going to make people healthier. I would have said well done.

Had we had this earlier, we could have easily got up and supported this and maybe we would have made amendments to even do more. But it doesn't exist. Then when I learn what we all consider and I would think physician's still consider healthy drinks, pineapple juice, orange juice, there 20 per cent on that. How in any way, shape or form is that helping people find a more affluent way to have access to healthier foods? Now you're taking more money out of their pocket that could have went for direct raw fruits. It could have went for better quality meats. It could have went for milk products and all this. None of that was seen.

So I'm actually going on the premise that that administration, at the time, thought that this was a good thing that would actually help people. We were hopeful, too. That's why we asked a multitude of questions, why we had a massive debate about this because we were actually hopeful, if the evidence was presented and we were convinced that this would be something that would help health outcomes – particularly, when we talk a lot here, we're talking seniors and young people are the more vulnerable because they consume most of that products in certain matters or in a different consumption level.

We were hopeful, but it didn't materialize. Now I am told – and I've had my researchers look at this and I've even gone out of my way when I'm looking at the medical journals and that to see is there something there around that. We've had discussions with those in the diabetes industry and the not-for-profits to see does everybody from a natural philosophy think sugar is a bad thing. Of course we do. Too much of it obviously has a major impact. How do you curb that? By putting a tax on everything else, particularly other drinks just because it says it has a certain percentage of sugar in it. Then all they see there, all this administration saw was we're going to bring in money there and that'll stop people from drinking that. But when they're not drinking that, they're not drinking a healthy product because the healthy product is also included in that – the fruit content, the vitamins that are part and parcel in that, the potassium, the calories that are necessary for energy. All these things that are not seen, or not touted when you talk about the tax, are now being lost by these individuals.

The other thing is, still, we're hopeful that any monies – as a matter of fact, we made an amendment and part of our understanding and part of our debate and negotiations at the time, by our House Leader here, was that this money would go directly to ensure people would have better access to healthier foods.

Now, because we pushed it on this side of the House, there are some things there – we support monies going to the school lunch program and the breakfast program as part of these processes, but these are programs and services that I would have thought government would have the responsibility to ensure every child goes to school, that they don't go hungry. At lunchtime, that children don't have to worry about going home to an empty house and an empty fridge. That they stay and get a healthy meal.

I thought that would be one of the priorities automatically from a government. So did you need the \$6 million, \$8 million, \$10 million, I think we're up to \$12 million now that's going to be generated from this out of nearly \$10 billion budget now? I would have thought that you put too much thought into coming with a tax revenue process that I can only think was something that somebody touted would be revolutionary from a health perspective and have since found out that it isn't. Because do you know what happened? Nobody else jumped on board. Every other jurisdiction didn't jump and say rah-rah; let's look at Newfoundland and Labrador. What an amazing, forward-thinking administration down there when it comes to health care. Look what they've done with the sugar tax and look at the great benefits later on. No.

What we're seeing now is a few tidbits of dollars being put out. Particularly when we talk about the increase in tax credit rate for physical activity. The minister touted there was some thousands of people who've already applied for that tax credit, but I would question a number of issues here. What tax bracket are they in? Because I would suspect there are very few who are in the low- to middle-income tax brackets there, because with the additional tax put on other issues and the cost of living in this province right now, they don't have the ability to put their kids or themselves into physical activities where they're having to pay for a fee-for-service process here.

I would suspect these are people who already had their children or themselves were already in a program. So this tax revenue that came in that's going there to offset that was not necessary from that perspective.

We would have rather seen all that money taken – if you're going to do, it's passed, you have a majority government, we can only outline what we think are concerns, what we're hearing from people and we can only make suggestions that we would hope and think that the government would take into account when making decisions that would be in the best interest of the people of the province.

So we would have thought and hoped that all of that money would have been taken and put directly into a program or service that directly shows how people can access healthier eating, particularly the most vulnerable: senior citizens on fixed incomes, young people who are part of families that have low income revenue generating processes and/or other vulnerable sectors in our society.

That's what I would've thought would have happened there. I would have thought there would have been some other support mechanism. Maybe there are supports that goes to places like the Gathering Place to make sure that the vulnerable sector there, who are coming there for interventions, are guaranteed to have some additional healthy foods. I give full credit to the Gathering Place for the marvellous work they do and the thousands of people they see on a weekly basis that they take care of with a multitude of services. But I would have thought it would have made it easier for them if there was an extra million dollars or two to go into some of the programs and the multitude of other services across Newfoundland and Labrador.

In Labrador itself, some of the supports that could have been there for healthier eating or healthier interventions as part of those

processes: we didn't see that. I know the administration over there will not admit that what was probably developed in a concept of the right philosophy, the right intention and perhaps convince that this would be something beneficial, it hasn't panned out that way. We would never say I told you so, but we could not see any way, shape or form of how this would improve people's lives and particularly the outcomes for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians around their consumption of sugar.

There are a multitude of other approaches that could have been and should have been used to do it, including partnering with the industry here, the industries that produce these products. Sometimes, maybe if you needed to be, a bit heavy-handed, that if they don't reduce sugar content in certain products that there's a fine or they lose a certain exemption that they may have or, in other cases, give exemptions to some other industries here to make sure that they meet certain targets that are set out.

That wasn't done. Again, it's about forward thinking and thinking outside the box that would have been something that we would have accepted and we would have supported on this side of the House. But we did not see that. Again, it becomes one of my criticisms of this administration for the last number of years and all of our criticisms for this administration: being reactive to stuff versus proactive.

Do we have a health crisis? Of course we do. Do we have too many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are diabetics and need other interventions? But saying that this is one of the solutions that would address that, to me, was nonsensical. It wasn't based on data, it wasn't based on fact and, unfortunately, I think you either convince yourself of it or now you won't revisit it to do the right thing as part of this process. Now we're putting another burden on the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador and it affects everybody. But the

biggest impact is going to be on those fixed income, most vulnerable individuals.

I'm fortunate enough to be part of a small business that collects the sugar tax, but I have people question it. What benefit is that? As the sugar tax is being collected and they're looking at it and saying: What is this changing? What is this doing to keep me healthy right now as I am drinking that soft drink? Absolutely nothing.

Now, some have brought up and said if you had gone to Browning Harvey and said: Is there any way you can help take sugar out of them? Now you see all these new soft drinks, industry has come out, zeros: Pepsi Zero, Coke zero, 7UP Zero. All these things now to show the sugar content; industry took a lead on it.

So industry took a lead, and we're fortunate enough that we didn't have to support it, which is even better. We didn't have to use taxpayers' money for industries that are already making a profit. But if we had to entice them to move things quicker, that would have been a discussion that we would have been willing to have. But now all you're doing is putting a tax on individuals to pay for programs and services that you should have already been paying for because you're touting yourself: Look how wonderful we are in keeping people healthy and supporting the most vulnerable. But you're supporting them with their own money. You're taking it out of the pockets of the most vulnerable right now and saying you're giving it back to them, but now they have to jump through a number of other hoops to try to get it back. A lot of them won't even qualify for it. Again, it is the Physical Activity Tax. A lot of these people here don't have that ability so it becomes a confusing exercise here in revenue generating, and we get it.

Now to go through all of that to generate \$12 million – come on. The administrative costs of that, the confusion, the checking up on stuff after, even the tax collection

process here, to me was an exercise in futility. It really didn't serve any purpose other than generate some money to give to a program that really is probably going to end up costing you more at the end.

So I'm looking forward over the next few years of actually looking at the cost of collecting that tax, the cost on industries and, more importantly, the cost on the individuals who are paying for it and that's the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Again, I can't stress enough, it's the most vulnerable because you didn't lower any of the other healthy foods that you're expecting or thinking were alternatives. I say that because, I don't know, I've never once heard anybody over there say: Do you know what we're going to do? We're going to do this so people can get access to milk cheaper, or here is another healthy alternative. I don't know what the other healthy alternatives are because you've taxed every other thing that my concept and our concept said was healthy in society: juices for people to drink. So I am totally confused from that perspective.

I was bewildered on a tax that you put in play without talking to an industry who could have addressed the issue in advance, but, fair enough, that was your exercise. I am even more bewildered when you're saying this is going to give people an alternative from a healthy perspective on what to drink and then you taxed everything else that they would have to drink also. But you can go out and buy a full bag of sugar that has no tax on it. I'm baffled. I shake my head. I don't understand where the health analysis is there.

So I can have a cup of tea or coffee and put seven spoons of sugar that I paid no tax on. That's probably 10 times your daily intake, and that's a healthy alternative? But I can't buy pineapple juice, identified as a health intervention now with certain ailments, because I have to pay 20 per cent on that. I

say this to the people: if somebody else can show me evidence, give me something else that shows that.

My other argument is that there could have been another approach to it and it hasn't been done. If I saw the commitment: we're taking all of this money so milk tomorrow will be \$2 a two litre. Fair enough. I would have said do you know what? At least that's a better use of the money that you've got there now. At least that is a legitimate healthier alternative or some other health intervention from a food perspective. I would have looked at that. But it didn't happen and I don't think it's going to happen because we don't see the will of the Liberal administration over there, and we don't see the will, or the understanding or the acceptance that this is not going to work; it doesn't serve any purpose.

It never served a purpose from the day it was discussed and it won't serve a purpose at the end of it when it's axed, and it will be axed. Somewhere a long the way, somebody over there is going to see the error of your ways or, in a couple of years, we'll be over there, we'll see the error of your ways and we'll make sure it's axed really quickly. I guarantee you that, as part of that process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: So there's something now, another burden. We talked again today, I mentioned the carbon tax today in Question Period, but particularly in my rebuttal to the Premier about what's happening with the carbon tax and the relationship, federally and provincially, when it comes to taxation here. We saw just recently, we've got the Marine Atlantic tax to go along with the carbon tax, the gas tax and the sugar tax.

So all of these are included in here, in the *Revenue Administration Act*, that are always generating money for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and, unfortunately, a number of them are being dictated by an outside

entity about how we collect tax and what should be the financial burden on the people of this province.

It's astounding that people are not standing up in outrage, particularly elected Liberals with their cousins who were promising all these great things. The prime minister has been here a dozen times since 2015, when he was first running. All the promises, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians were going to be treated equal members of Confederation and we're going to get a fair share of all the tax revenue that was generated from our offshore and all the other industry and mining things that we have here would be given back to the people of the province as investments and that equalization would be done on a fair component.

So when our economy was ditched, when our fishing industry was down, our oil industry was down and even the mineral industry was down, we still did not qualify for any supports from Ottawa, from equalization. Yet, we had sister provinces who were generating surplus budgets who were getting billions. We had our Atlantic counterparts getting hundred of millions of dollars.

We were lost on who was advocating on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and what is it they're advocating for. The next thing we hear: Oh, no, no, we're having discussions around what kind of tax is going to be put on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador around carbon emissions. Keeping in mind the footprint, the thing people have already done, the things we had asked for, carbon credits for what was done with our hydroelectric power, what we have in Churchill Falls, what we have in Muskrat Falls, our potential here in Bay d'Espoir, the other potential things that would be developed here, how could we not be considered for carbon emission tax credits that would have minimized any tax that needed to be

collected here for tax revenue around a carbon tax?

Again, just because somebody labels something as a carbon tax, it doesn't mean it's going to change anything around the carbon emissions in Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly, but anywhere in this Confederation that we call Canada. I can't see it. That was an ill-thought-out plan. Again, maybe this is the speciality of the Liberal administration. It's about generating money at the expense of taxpayers and labelling it something based on a principle that's not realistically backed up with facts and figures.

Carbon tax is not showing in any way, shape or form how the environment, tomorrow, is going to be better. Now, I can give you a hundred suggestions and I bet my colleagues here can give you a thousand other ones on how we could improve carbon emissions in Newfoundland and Labrador through education, through investments in industry or putting regulatory things on industry, supporting greener energy, if it's electric cars, if it's putting the infrastructure in like charging stations, if it's promoting in the world – if we're going to be using oil products, buy them from Newfoundland and Labrador because they're the cleanest in the world. There's a part we're doing.

Reforestation – I think you know we plant millions of trees a year. Well, maybe we up that. We do that for our carbon. We know what the value of plants is in carbon emissions. We educate people. We ensure people have a better way to keep their vehicles in tune so that there are less carbon emissions.

There are all kinds of things we could have done here through an education process and support mechanism and all that that wasn't related to carbon taxation. I don't get it. I think we're paying the dues because somebody is not willing to push industry in Central Canada or Western Canada to do

their part or other parts of the world. I'm still baffled by that. I don't understand the philosophy. We argued and the former premier had said they're going to impose – shame on the federal government. Shame on the Trudeau government. They're going to impose, shove something down people's throat to say you have to do this. Even though your society, your province, your citizens have adapted and adopted and have a philosophy around keeping the environment as clean as possible and have said we're doing our part.

We've spent billions of dollars developing a hydroelectric energy source so that we can eliminate one of the biggest energy carbon emission plants in the coming years. We've done our part. As a matter of fact so much so, we're willing to share to do our part for Nova Scotia to get it off coal. We know what impact that has on the environment, five times what petroleum products do. We're willing to even do that to support these types of things.

Yet, there was no discussion about where Newfoundland and Labrador sits when it comes to having a plan of action that would be cognizant of supporting the environment and doing our part. Reforestation: We would've bulked that up. It could have been done. Education for our schoolchildren and our adults to do it. Waste management: We spent hundreds of millions of dollars on our waste management to make it more energy efficient. Our mineral industry, even some of the interventions there have now been around good corporate citizenship by the mineral industry and the companies there that come to Newfoundland and Labrador. There are ways we could've done things.

We could've put incentives if that's what we needed to do it or we could've put policies that forced industries to do the right thing in Newfoundland and Labrador. None of that was discussed; none of it was talked about. We didn't have round tables on that. But if you want round tables on other things or consultations, it's very easy to get those

about what they want. We didn't have them on the sugar tax; we didn't have them on the carbon tax. That's why we don't have – neither one of those proposed taxes that are implemented now that are detrimental to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador reflect the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. None of them.

That's disappointing, because I would've thought that administration, we've touted it for years and we put it in our Blue Book – our Blue Book is very reflective of what we hear from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Do you know what? Fortunately enough, and I give credit to the Liberals, they've taken a number of our recommendations and put them into policy. We thank you for that and we applaud you for it – well, done. I say we, only we because we labelled them in a book. We wrote them up. But they're the people of Newfoundland and Labrador's solutions. They're Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that we listened to, the solutions to the issues facing them in Newfoundland and Labrador. Why wouldn't you keep listening? Why wouldn't you consult the right people and ask what are the solutions? Didn't happen. It didn't happen with industry. It didn't happen with the not-for-profit agencies. It didn't happen with the regular citizens here about what was going to happen in those processes. It's very disappointing when you look at that as part of the whole process.

Prime Minister Trudeau – I get that one of his philosophies is around the environment. Well done; good on you. I think I'm just as cognizant of the environment and I know my colleagues are of the environment. We would just have a different approach to it. I would think an approach that would actually at the end of the day see an improvement in the environment, show how emissions are lesser than they would be before with tons of carbon that goes into the air, or how the natural environment can be enhanced to absorb some of that so it's less detrimental on the environment itself. But that's not

what we saw. We saw a made in Canada, which was made in Ottawa by a handful of people based on a taxation process and pushed down the throats of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and other Canadians. It was not only us that were against it. Don't get me wrong, it's not only us that were against it.

Now the Liberals, provincially, say that they were against the carbon tax but no, you brought in something almost identical to what they had and said well, if we didn't do this, they were going to do this to us. You should have stood your ground and said this is not acceptable. You should have did what a number of other leaders have done over the years – John Crosbie, Clyde Wells, Danny Williams – stood your ground in Ottawa and said not acceptable; not going to happen. If you want to have a battle, here's the line in the sand. We'll have that battle.

Now, do you want us to do the right thing? We'll find a way to do the right thing. Do you want an end result? You tell us what your end result is and we'll find a mechanism that gets there. We're much more creative. This is Newfoundland and Labrador; this is the most creative province in the Commonwealth here and it's the most innovative people we have. We've seen that from where they work in the world and what they've already developed.

So why would we not engage a process there that would have actually worked for the people of this province? That again is another thing that was baffling to me and would have been beneficial to the Liberal administration here. It would've got us to support it if you had come down and said this is not acceptable, this is what we're going to do, let's have a consultation with the people of the province, we have to do something, we all have to be cognizant of the environment and we have to find a way to make this work, we would have sat and if you wanted an all-party Committee, that's one of the ones we would have supported

here to make sure that we get the right information and get the right plan that people can live with but, more importantly, that the outcomes are actually beneficial to our environment here and not detrimental from a financial point of view on people. We didn't get that. We didn't even get that engagement as part of the process.

What we got was a dismissive process no, no, Ottawa is forcing our hand so we came up with something quickly that reflects what Ottawa wants. It's not exactly what Ottawa wants, but it's enough that they'll be happy. We didn't really gain anything out of it. We still got to give up everything here and we've still got to tax people. So there was no benefit to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and so much for being able to pull in the favouritism that you have with your cousins in Ottawa. At the time when this was being debated, all seven Members in Ottawa were Liberal Members. So it didn't help benefit anybody in this province at the time.

So I agree, any process there has to be a targeted end result. Share the targeted end result with the House of Assembly, share it with the people of the province and you will be surprised – we wouldn't be surprised because we've already heard of it. That's why we've come up with a policy in our Blue Book that reflects people's needs and are actually solution based at the end of the day, because we've listened to the people in this province, who don't necessarily vote for us and that's obviously evident. They didn't all vote for us in the last election or we'd be government now, but they see the value of us consulting with them. We see the value of their information, that's why it's in our Blue Book. That's why it's being adopted right now.

But I guarantee you, when we –

B. PETTEN: Yeah, they wanted to but they couldn't get to vote.

D. BRAZIL: That's another debate for another time on the election process.

But I will say they are now seeing the value of what our Blue Book outlines because not only do we talk about the issues that we see in Newfoundland and Labrador, we offer solutions. We offer solutions that can be implemented. Do you know what we also offer as part of that? Solutions that can be implemented but also we're open minded enough that can be flexible and can be modified to meet the changing needs of our society.

That's the difference on this side of the House than that side. We're open for dialogue. We're open for discussion. We're open to say we have a good starting point that came from the people of this province. If you have something else to add to it, let's do it; let's collectively solve those problems.

So we've come along way, in certain things, but we still haven't come anywhere near far enough to actually have enough dialogue in this House to solve the issues that are relevant to the people of the province.

So when we look at a number of things here, again, I outlined why I think the present administration has let us down when it comes to taxation here, but, at the same time, I'm going to support them in their endeavours to say their big cousin in Ottawa forced their hands – forced it. That's what's disappointing. Not on you guys. I know at times I would have liked to see you be a little more vigilant and ask this House collectively to stand together and to go Ottawa or whatever we have to do, or get all of our MPs here to stand collectively together and challenge the federal government.

Keeping in mind now, we're into a minority situation, federally. I think we would have had some influence here. Seven MPs in Newfoundland and Labrador, while it's not a mass number, would have had some influence; a provincial Liberal government,

the only left in this country, should have had some influence; getting the Official Opposition to support that endeavour that we all agreed to, would have had some influence.

But that didn't happen and that's disappointing because there are certain things that I know we're willing to put politics aside on, and if it's about the rights of the people of this province, it's about improving their lives, we'll put politics aside.

I'll wear a red coat running to Ottawa if it improves the people of this province because collectively we talk about what the solution was – no problem. I'll sit on that red couch and outline exactly what the issues are in Newfoundland and Labrador as part of that.

B. PETTEN: Well, there's only enough room for three or four, not six or seven.

D. BRAZIL: So some may have to sit outside.

Nonetheless, I will say, tongue-in-cheek, we're still open to be collaborative, and I know my independent friends, we've had the same dialogue here, they're open to doing what's right. They'll be flexible. They don't always agree with us. They don't always agree with you, but they do always agree that we will do, collectively, what's in the best interest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We just need the mechanism to make that work and we're hoping to make that work as part of it.

I

I don't think the sugar tax does any of that. I don't think the carbon tax does any of that. I definitely don't think the gas tax does any of that as part of the process there. Does it generate money? Yes. Well, if that's how you generate money, do you know what I'd rather easily do? You'd say everybody's income tax going up half a per cent. It's clean. It's across the board. Industries know where things are. You would know, directly, what your revenues are going to be at any

given time. It's not hit and miss of how much gas is consumed in all these things as part of that process.

There are all kinds of ways that you could do it, but taking it out of somebody's pocket, once, and then taking it again and again, it doesn't work to the benefit of the people of this province.

So there's a collective, clean way of doing things. To do that, you need to have that dialogue. That's what's disappointing here. At the end of the day, there could be a clean taxation system that's natural and everybody would know in advance, instead of: there are hidden taxes; there are five and six taxes; there are certain taxes that hit the most vulnerable more than others; there are certain taxes that hit the middle class even worse.

Let's get a system in play here that not only is fair across the board but actually benefits or has a set desired outcome and you've got a way of achieving those. Carbon tax is not doing it. The gas tax is not doing it. The sugar tax is not doing it. I guarantee you, the Marine Atlantic tax is not going to do anything to enhance our tourism industry or enhance the cost of living in Newfoundland and Labrador or access the fresh produce or let's even add – there's a dual way that we travel here.

We've got great manufacturing processes going on in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have a great fishing industry, great agricultural industry. How are they going to keep competitive with the markets? They already have challenges because of transportation things. How are they going to now keep competitive when they've got to pay an extra 4 per cent on their products to get them out of Newfoundland and Labrador?

We've got another challenge that has got to be thought about. There are industries here that employ thousands, tens of thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, pay

hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes that are going to have to find a way to, either change their productivity, their costing or undercut other jurisdictions or undercut their costing by laying off people, not producing certain products. That becomes very challenging. I think that got lost in the mix, too.

The tourism industry is very important, that should be one of the focal points on any taxation that increases access here from a transportation link. The cost of products and goods coming here, obviously, a major priority in keeping those costs down. But on the other side, produce, products going out of here are going to have a detrimental effect also on our economy here. So it has to be collectively looked at, all the components that go on in Newfoundland and Labrador. That hasn't been thought out – well, if it has been, it hasn't been discussed. Nobody's mentioned that in their debate over there, nobody's mentioned it in their argument as to why this isn't beneficial.

Now I get there was a letter written, and I hope it was a stern letter as part of it. But letters do nothing, absolutely nothing. People need to sit face to face, outline why they're against a certain particular issue, give an alternative of what could be just as effective but less of a detriment financially on people, and/or let's talk about the bigger picture. If you're only moving at 70 per cent, how do we find a way to move at 100 per cent so you don't need that 4 per cent surcharge because you made it on the revenues you generated?

That's how the airlines did it. The airlines did it by changing the size of their flights. They changed how many flights came in to make sure that they couldn't price themselves out of it. Instead of coming 60 per cent full, they found a way to get 90 per cent full. They made their money the same way because they even knew there's a threshold where people will just not travel after a certain amount. It's crazy. They're putting surcharges on things; governments

are putting surcharges on fuel and everything else.

It's becoming a detriment to the consumer here. Nobody's having that collective discussion about the rights of the consumer versus generating monies. Companies can be creative; governments can be creative on how they can save money. We've said it, thinking outside the box, collaborating on more efforts. We've heard it in this House: the amalgamation of schools boards was to save money; the amalgamation of health boards was to save money. Rationally, if it's implemented properly, there are some rational ways that you could save money by collectively putting different support services or different services that have to be provided together and being more efficient on how you do it, if it's procurement, if it's payroll, whatever it may be, there are certain ways of doing it.

No different than any industry coming here. I still think Marine Atlantic could find more efficient ways to make up – if they need this 4 per cent. I think the trend now has become – and COVID did it to us. There are a lot of people who took advantage, including a lot of government entities, where it's easy to say, oh, we have to add money to it. Because everything was added to everything else at the time and everybody could use the excuse it was COVID.

Now people are still thinking: Well, do you know what? We can get away with it because we've gotten four increases. Let's ask for another one. Every airline did it; ferry services did it; everybody did it. The petroleum industry did it. We've seen they all are still making billions of dollars of profit. Somebody has to call them out to task and ask for their viability when it comes to why there are additional expenses.

If our profit margin is going to be 20 per cent, well once you hit the 20 per cent threshold that should be going back into cutting the cost for your consumers. In this case, particular something that's supported

by the federal governments, there should be a mechanism here to say how efficient are you running it; show us that you really need to have this.

The PUB does it here. When there are increases, there has to be some justification. When there's a rate increase asked by Newfoundland Power, they have to go in and justify why. I know over the years there has been pushback where they're saying no, you're claiming for this investment you need to do for improvement but you've been doing that for three years. That's already been done if you go back three years and they've had then to pull that back.

That's why we haven't had as many rate increases as we used to at one point because there are more checks and balances and you have to justify exactly what monies you're spending, because this is taxpayers' money. This is going to be a burden of the people of this province. If you're not providing an additional or an enhanced service, why should we be paying more?

So 4 per cent additional to Marine Atlantic, there are not bigger ships going to be there. They're not going to travel faster. It's not going to be much more luxurious. So what are we paying the 4 per cent for? Why are we paying extra money if we're getting no additional services, no enhanced services? The 4 per cent is not going to enhance tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's not going to enhance cheaper produce for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's not going to lower the cost of living. So they should be accountable.

I mean, I heard their spokesman talk about, oh, this is our normal process. Normal doesn't make it right. Normal doesn't help the people of this province. So somebody needs to be accountable. I would have thought and hoped the federal government would have took that lead, but I've written that off for this administration, federally.

Checks and balances are immaterial. I've seen blank cheques being written nationally on stuff that really baffled me on some of the things that they're supporting.

Yet, not supporting a province that has one of the most viable tourism industries, that relies on shipping in 85 per cent of its produce, as part of that process, and also has a very valued manufacturing industry that would ship stuff out to the rest of this country. Not seeing a value then of people being accountable on why this 4 per cent is automatically necessary.

They're saying, oh, the price of fuel now. I've been looking back and forth – and our researchers – and there hasn't been a lot of volatility dramatically. As a matter of fact, it's at the most stable point it's been in a couple of years right now. You can always test it; it's around 80, to 83 or 84, so you know where you are in those targets. It's not at 100 anymore. It's not at the high nineties. It's not even at the high eighties. So why all of a sudden now is this a major necessity for a fuel surcharge tax being added to Marine Atlantic? You know when, because it's the tourism industry.

They figure they're going to get it anyway. People are going to come. They've already booked it in advance, so 4 per cent more, they've got to absorb, but it's going to have an impact. Cost of living has been going up naturally by people, so we can just say it's not on us. It's just natural cost of products going up and up and up and up. Well, no, it isn't.

If you're really, on economy of scale, doing your homework and watching exactly what you spend, in this case, what's changed dramatically – don't forget costs of products have gone down over the last number of years as they were in COVID. These prices that they were setting there were at COVID prices. They've gone down. Unfortunately, some of the manufacturers haven't passed that on and I blame governments for not putting in safeguards to ensure that. You

know, there are all kinds of discussions out there that there's price fixing between entities and I suspect – I know, I've heard rumours – there's a number of major industries that are now being investigated for that particular reason and I suspect there will be eventually charges and they'll take a \$5-million fine and they'll move on, yet they've made \$5 billion.

There has to be more safeguards than that. Just to accept somebody's adding a tax because we need it based on what? I listened to the spokesperson for Marine Atlantic and he never reassured me in any way, shape or form of why they needed it. The quote was: This is a normal process that we do every year when we review exactly the cost of our fuel. Okay, I looked at what the cost of fuel was last year compared to this year. This year it's less. So what drove the fact that you'd need to increase your cost?

Now, if you had a different vessel that uses more expensive fuel, well, let's have that discussion. Then I would say bad investment. You should have went with something that uses more cost-effective fuel as part of that process. So nobody is justified and hearing that the Premier wrote a letter to Ottawa, I would have first asked you to write a letter to Marine Atlantic and say please justify to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador why you need this increased first. Maybe we can make some suggestions that might offset it. Maybe the province can do something that could support it to minimize that. Maybe there's a process of let's implement this over periods of time so it's less effective or less impacting on the individuals of this province. But we didn't hear any of that.

We heard they got really angry after we brought it up, after the general public brought it up, after Hospitality Newfoundland said the impact it was going to have. This is what we heard: reactionary. I'd love to see some proactive approach well in advance. Do you know what the

disappointing thing is? I know again this time next year we'll have the same debate because that side of the House did not take a leadership role, and go and demand an overview of ensuring that there are no increases on the transportation links to Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: I know it's going to happen. I've seen it. Eight years on this side, I've seen it constantly over there. Eight years, the same thing, no proactive approach when you know what's coming. Eight years ago, had they been getting to our medical school, had they been getting to our nursing school, had they been getting to our respiratory therapists, to our psychologists and psychiatrists and encouraging them to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador, make some incentives with your student loans, student aid – if you want to go in a remote community, sign a deal with us; here's what we can do to support you. Or go to municipalities and say there's going to be a challenge down the road for health care professionals, can we work with you guys to put some incentives in play well in advance? If they had done that, proactive, we would not have a challenge.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

D. BRAZIL: Exactly. People saw this coming. To say, well, it's happening all over Canada, do you know what? I blame the other provinces for not doing their part. I would've hoped you would've done your part because you would've got support on this side of the House if it was changed in legislation, 100 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Again, if you want to be proactive on anything, talk to this side of the House, if it's the right idea, if it makes sense, if it's something we can afford and it's going to benefit people's lives, we'll have such an open debate here your head will

spin and it'll be done in a quick, efficient manner. We've come back when it was necessary a couple of times during COVID and passed legislation very quickly, because they were the right things that needed to be done. We could've dragged stuff out and we could've gone for five days in Question Period to try to beat up on government, but we didn't. We stood by what we said. If you're doing the right thing, we'll acknowledge it and we'll support it.

If you're doing the wrong thing, we're going to call you out and give you suggestions to change it. That's all we suggest here. We don't even get too combative in here anymore. One time years ago, I know and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology a couple of days ago last week talked about what it was like here a number of years ago. He was a young rookie in here at the time. I was only into my first year or so and it was very combative. But we've since kept it down to everybody looking at what's in the best interest.

For two reasons: There are fewer Members in the House of Assembly than there were at that time. People are more cognizant of issues because they have bigger districts than they had before, so they have a bigger demographic. If once you had 6,000 or 8,000, or 10,000 or 12,000 people, people now have 10,000, 12,000, 15,000 and 16,000. The issues you're going to hear are going to be more diverse and more impactful on people.

Over here, and I would think all of us get a better understanding of some of the things that people are facing. If you're in a certain district at one point, you only had the same eight or 10 things. Now with the bigger population that we have, diverse population in our province, it's people moving in all urban, rural areas we're getting a better understanding of particular issues. If it's seniors, if it's people with special needs, if it's new Canadians, if it's the business community, if it's middle-income individuals, it's about education, health care, industry,

all of it, we get to hear it. Seniors impacted, medications, we're hearing it from everybody now. I think we're more informed than we ever were.

I wasn't a big supporter of the reduction of the number because I think it put an extra burden. But the only benefit I see, MHAs now are much more knowledgeable because the bigger population dictates that they actually hear more issues and are more diverse than just the common things that they would have in their district continuously. If anything came out of it, that's probably the only good thing.

Now, it means it's obviously even more frustrating because now we have to deal with other issues, but these are important issues to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. So it means that all of us are touched by every issue that goes on in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Do you think things what happen in Labrador don't affect the people in Newfoundland, on the Island part? Sure, they do. Do you think issues in Nain are not similar to what they are on Bell Island? Sure, they are. If it's about poverty, if it's about seniors' issues, about mental health, if it's about addictions, about employment, it's all relevant, no matter where you live in this province. The issue may be it might be more impactful in certain communities because they don't have certain services. It might be more of a cultural issue because the economics dictate that or the geographics dictate that. But all of us in this House of Assembly share similar issues. Not particularly all the same priority ones, but similar issues.

We prioritize based on what our constituents tell us and what will have the most impact on our district itself. I think we all do a great job in identifying that and representing that part of it. But we could do a better job if we all collectively, then, looked at what are the priorities that need to be done in this House of Assembly and find

a more diplomatic, inclusive way, that's open to the general public, of addressing those particular issues and not playing party politics, leaving that aside for periods of time. We'll have lots of time to play politics and to outline why we think our policies are better, why you think yours are better or what we think should be done that you're not doing. We'll have lots of time to do that.

But while we're in this House of Assembly, the short periods of time we spend in here, we should have robust debate on important issues that are going to come out with solution-based interventions, that, at the end of the day, we all go home saying, do you know what? If this gets implemented, the targets will actually be met and people will be better off because we had the proper initiative here and the proper foresight to outline exactly what would benefit the people of this province, because we put politics aside. That has to be an objective here.

I came into politics with my head held high thinking I knew everything about the world as a civil servant. I very quickly learned there are a lot of issues in this House of Assembly that I was never aware of, because people represent people from all different dynamics in this province. But I very quickly started to realize, do you know what? None of us are ever going to solve them if we keep continuously fighting or pointing fingers.

So why don't we sit and come up with solutions that are in the best interest of the people of this province and if there's a common adversary – I'll never say enemy because I don't think we should have enemies in the House of Assembly no matter what jurisdiction you live in. But an adversary who doesn't see the viewpoint that we see, then I think collectively we should come together, stand together and stand for what's right for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and make their lives better in the future than they are right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I will repeat again, it is good to get up and speak and it is always good to speak to issues of importance to the province and of, course, my district.

We look at this legislation, the Bill 38, I mean, it is basically threefold: we're removing the provincial carbon tax and the federal tax is being imposed, increasing the provincial payroll tax exemption to a threshold of \$2 million and amending the income tax to increase the value of Physical Activity Tax Credit.

That's all fine, Speaker, when you read over those words, to the naked eye it looks fine. One component of this bill that I question, I think that the people of the province should question, I think we all in this House question on a daily basis is, you look at this carbon tax component, it has been debated in this House many, many times. We've stood here in our place in hours of endless debate, it comes up every other day in Question Period, but what we're talking about is removing the made-in-Newfoundland approach that was the be all and end all and we gave up, took our tent and folded it up and now we have Ottawa coming down and imposing the federal tax upon us because we couldn't agree on the components of the made-in-Newfoundland carbon tax.

The crux of all this carbon taxing over the years has been to fight climate change. I know a few months back the government opposite took great length to basically try to, I suppose, discredit my view on climate change and they cherry-picked a few clips that I had spoke here in the House of Assembly on it. They made it seem like – I'll

use the Premier's words – trying to weaponize the issue on me, which was anything further from the truth. I, and our caucus, like most people, we support climate change; we know that it is real.

We'd never, ever support a carbon tax – I say never, ever support a carbon tax, right back to 2015, 2016 when this issue started circulating. The records will show, any media clips will show, it has always been something that, when I was shadow minister for several years of the portfolio, spoke many times publicly on it and our caucus, as a whole, never did support it, ever, but we always said climate change is real.

But that is not how you reach your goal, that's not how you reduce emissions. You can't just tax people. Taxation: this is what we hear every other day; it's a sugar tax; there's the carbon tax. In 2016, we were bombarded with tax; everything was taxed. We were even charging every individuals tax to live in the province, the head tax – you know, the levy. That is not how you reach goals; it can't be punitive.

We look at the sugar tax, you look at this Physical Activity Tax Credit here, but underneath all that you're taxing sweetened drinks because it is going to make everyone healthier. But now you go in, all that has done in turn is drove up the price of carbonated drinks. If you walk in any store now, the price of cola has gone through the roof, even the diet stuff. You're not paying more for sugar sweetened, you're paying more for all of it combined. It's not separated out, which is a concern that was brought up in the House of Assembly. It was brought to this floor, we spoke about it, that they would do it separately. That's not what happened. It's adding to the cost of living.

There's no government in this country and especially a Commonwealth – we live in the country of Canada and the world, you shouldn't be punishing people for their choices. It's punitive; it's a punitive measure and I've taken great exception to it. Our

Member from Stephenville - Port au Port has spoke many, many days here in the House of Assembly on axe the tax because you're trying to control people's behaviour.

The Premier will stand in his place day after day and take credit for imposing the tax because the health of our Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is necessary. I don't buy it and most of the people in the province don't buy it when you see the tag on your drinks.

So I see hypocrisy there, Mr. Speaker, because on one end you're increasing the tax credit to encourage people to go to the gyms, buy physical equipment, exercise more, play sports, that's all fine. On the other end, you're taxing them for what they drink, or anything that has sugar in it, you're taxing them.

So, okay, you're going to encourage them to go to the gym but don't drink that. No, don't drink that. Why not? There's no one in this world that should be dictating to you what you should drink and what you shouldn't drink. I think if every individual decided they're going to go to the gym, they're going to work out and if they do, to take advantage of the credit. That's not the country we live in.

You know, for years we've stood in this House and we've watched Members opposite boast about the importance of the carbon tax. It was the answer, it was the be-all and end-all; it was the only way forward. We've got records of ministers there, quotes from ministers that are speaking on record of their support for the carbon tax. But now when you hear it coming up in the House of Assembly, it's like, how dare you say I support a carbon tax. That's Ottawa's problem. We don't have enough time for that no more. That's terrible. Big, bad Ottawa are imposing that on us.

You can't have it both ways. That's not the way it works. In their world, it works that way, but that's not the way things work. For a while it was cool to be up holding hands

and buddying around with Ottawa and up with your cousins and selfies and the tie loosened up, the shirts rolled up, the photo op and up on the hill with the shed party – all good. All good. But all of a sudden it's not as cool anymore. It's not as cool anymore to be associated with this group. It's not as cool.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, they got caught.

B. PETTEN: They probably got caught. Yeah, that's not cool anymore.

All of a sudden, you're nicely trying to separate yourself but you want to get the benefits of keeping your relationship with Ottawa so you'll get your federal monies, and fair enough. I never opposed any federal money coming to this province. We should get our fair share.

But it's all about the optics; it's all about these photo shoots. I keep saying photo shoots, and I know sometimes it irritates government opposite, but there's a level of accuracy when I say that. I've said in the House at different times and you'll make a bit of humorous comments. You try to bring a bit of levity – I don't know what you want to call it – to the House. But underneath what I'm trying to say, there's a validity to what I'm trying to say here. Is that what we've become? Have we become that superficial that it all depends on the nicest picture we can get? Everywhere you go, that seems to be the outcome.

I mean, I'm just there waiting to speak and I looked and there were pictures all over Twitter today and they're nice, glossy pictures. The Minister of Transportation is in them, the Premier, our local MP and our federal minister here. It looks great. It looks really good, but underneath all that what's really there? Yeah, there was an announcement. What are the details of those announcements? Will we see the benefits? I'd say we'll be long out of this Chamber before you see any real benefits

of that announcement. That's a massive undertaking.

Is that the number one issue facing the people of the province today? It's all good. I'm not knocking it if people want to jump on the wagon to say I'm against it. But is that your number one issue today, the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway? Is that what you hear in your district every day? Does anyone hear that in their district every day? Is that the number one issue you're hearing in your district every day?

AN HON. MEMBER: Good pavement is another one.

B. PETTEN: Everyone likes a bit of pavement. I bet you're hearing about health care. You're hearing about the cost of living, ambulance service, child care issues and shortage of teachers. Health care predominates. But we are solving the problems, we're dealing with the issues and we're announcing \$350 million cost shared with the federal government to twin the highways.

Is that dealing with anything? Is that dealing with the issues that are out there? Is that going to help anyone pay the extra costs on their home heating fuel on July 1 when this carbon tax comes in? Is that going to help you? All that's going to do is make your ride to the bank a bit more painful because you're going to be in tie-ups of traffic for who knows how long, but that's fine, eventually the road will be great. I'm not knocking that. But what I'm talking about, here and now, is that where we need to be? No.

I say this again, Speaker, and you may recall I brought this up before. Is climate change the number one issue in your district today? Is it the number one issue in any of your districts?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

B. PETTEN: How many times do you hear that in the run of a day, a week, a year? How many times do people come in to your office and say I have to talk to you, Sir; I'm really concerned about climate change? I don't get it. We are all generally concerned about climate change and its effects. We see the changes. We see the disaster that happened out in Port aux Basques. We all get that. For the most, part people are trying to live their lives in a more environmentally friendly manner. We all do it, through how we live our life. Emissions in vehicles and electric vehicles and the recycling, you name it, we've come leap years in the last 10 years in what we do as communities.

Recently, in my own Town of Conception Bay South, they're promoting composting and selling compost at reduced rates to try to get people into that. That's all part of climate change. It's not meant to be sewed in on a tax. Climate change is real, but recycling is a very important part of climate change. Back in the day, I know 10, 12 or 11 years ago when I worked with a former minister of Environment at the time, we were talking about those things. We were talking about doing things more naturally. That was the early stages of climate change, how to address our global issues.

But do you notice the conversations have all become about the carbon tax? That's all we talk about. It's about a tax. I really don't know if that benefits anybody. I don't get how it's benefiting this province. I'm at a loss how we benefit from this tax. I don't know. I still haven't figured it out.

In July, according to the Minister O'Regan, we're going to have our pockets full. We'll never be better off. The best off we're going to be is, July, we're actually going to make money. I mean, I'm looking forward – I'm postponing events until July 1 when we all start getting our cheques. It will almost be like the \$500 cheque over again.

Oh, the moneys coming. Stay tuned, we've got money coming for everyone. There will

be 13 beer in every dozen, July 1. We've got it all solved. The carbon tax, forget about that. We got all this fixed up. Don't worry about the climate. You'll have your pockets full, July 1. Bring it on. I'm looking forward to it, Mr. Speaker.

Little do we realize, you know, Newfoundlanders, most of their houses are heated on oil, more than anywhere else in the country. Newfoundlanders and others, PEI, maybe New Brunswick, they will not benefit from this. There will be a net loss in Newfoundland. You're taking national figures and you're trying to impose it on Newfoundland. We've always been unique.

You can't impose a national average on one province. It looks good. It's playing with numbers, but the minister and he was on – he was adamant. His nerves were rubbed raw. I saw it all over Facebook. His nerves were rubbed raw. People were misleading, miscommunicating, putting his words in the wrong place and reading his lips. My nerves are rubbed raw. But do you know what? My nerves are rubbed raw listening to him, because it didn't make any sense.

We like a few facts here and there. I don't mind. I can take punches, too. But throwing out foolishness like that – and that's all that is, Mr. Speaker, is foolishness. We know the difference; we know what that's all about.

I'm going to just read a couple of quotes because it's important to put in this context. It bears repeating I say to my colleague from Ferryland, everyone should repeat this. We have all kinds of paperwork here showing how they voted. They voted for this.

The current Minister of Environment and Climate Change said: "... it may not be something that we're all excited about, but it's something that's going to help us in the longer term.... I have no issue with supporting a carbon tax based on how we're going to be moving as a people, not just in this province, not just in this country, but in

the global community. That's where we have to be." That's from our provincial guru on climate change, our current Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Those are his words, not mine. This came right out of *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker. I can't be corrected. There are no points of order. It's right out of *Hansard*.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: The evidence.

B. PETTEN: It's evidence.

Okay, I'll read it again if he wants to, but I want to get to a couple of others. The time goes too quick here, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to have more time. I haven't even read my paper yet and I'm almost done.

Anyway, the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development: "... what are the best policy instruments that we can be using to influence behaviour and reduce greenhouse gas emissions" – guess what – "it is a carbon tax." His words – his words. "The carbon tax is the right policy instrument, and we need to stick with it, come high or low, when it comes to how popular it is or it is not."

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Give him a cheer. That's another minister.

Now, we have a Premier that stood in his place and he's adamant this is wrong. We're not in favour. It's a federal issue. We have no time for carbon tax, zero. We don't support it. Next Cabinet meeting should be interesting.

I have another one. The Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology said: "... I bet you as opposed to 2018, I do think there's widespread acceptance of carbon tax." Amazing how this changed. "It's become accepted. It really truly has become accepted.... We're going to continue to defend the choices that we've made." Key

words, now listen to that, Mr. Speaker: “We’re going to continue to defend the choices that we’ve made.” Is that what I hear on a daily basis from the Premier? Is that what he’s saying now?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

B. PETTEN: Who’s he blaming it on?

AN HON. MEMBER: Ottawa.

B. PETTEN: Ottawa, you got her. He’s blaming it on Ottawa – unbelievable.

I would see a federal Conservative government rolling back the carbon tax. I hope so. That’s the commitment now from the federal leader, he wants to roll it back. But that’s a bad thing. According to what the minister is saying there, that’s a bad thing. I think it’s great. “... that would not bode well for any of us in this House.”

Now it’s not so good now; it don’t suit now. But the federal government are collecting the carbon tax now as of July 1, not the province, so it’s not a good thing anymore.

Wait now, there’s more. The Minister of Justice: the argument about Muskrat Falls being our carbon tax doesn’t work because Ottawa has the right to impose whatever taxes it has the power to and he would never go fight for the sake of fighting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. PETTEN: So quit, go home. It don’t matter, go on home. Let him do whatever; we don’t care. We’re ran by Ottawa anyway. Sure, this House, here, we should be in there having parties. What are we debating for, let Ottawa run the province. We’re not fighting. Just imagine.

We care. On this side, do we care? I think we care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: And we don’t support carbon tax, we’ll never supported a carbon tax. So you won’t find quotes from me supporting carbon tax. No. The best thing they could do was chop up a video in the House of Assembly and there was that many intervals they got embarrassed to death mimicking me on climate change. They couldn’t even find something genuine. They had to go in and dissect a tape to try to make it work.

I don’t need anybody to put words in my mouth, Mr. Speaker. I think you can be rest assured of that. I’ve shown that here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. PETTEN: Now we’re getting a bit of chirping, but the Minister of Environment and Climate Change – no, the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, they have lots of opportunity to get up here and speak. I’m looking forward to it. They’ve got to get up and defend this.

If I was sat on that side of the House and I had an Opposition Member looking at me and reading my quotes, which they don’t agree with me it seems like – this is *Hansard*, okay – they need to stand up and defend what they’ve done here in the House. Stand up and tell the people why you support a carbon tax. Stand up and tell the people why you agreed to a 20-cent increase on home heating fuel; why you agree with increasing gas by another three or four cents; a diesel increase. You can’t afford to buy a can of soup now, so you’re going to increase diesel because of the federal carbon tax. You’re not going to be able to afford to heat your home.

Now, O’Regan says we’re going to have a lot of money for everything. Like I said, it will be 13 beer in every dozen and – I’ll take a PC quote – have not will be no more. We’re all good as of July 1 because we’re going to get nailed with the carbon tax but we’re giving you more money than we’re taking from you. Listen to that concept. How silly that sounds. That don’t even make any

sense, but, anyway, he says it, but it's not factual. It's not factual. It's just based on, again, I'll say a national average.

I look at Members opposite, we've sat in this House and we've debated and we've debated and we've criticized them and they all agreed the carbon tax was the be-all and end-all because it was something that they had to get through. They never did once look and go around and talk to people in the province who supports this. There are people out there; sure there are people out there that supports it. There are still people who support the government opposite, right now, but as we always say stay tuned.

Mr. Speaker, the LOP has been going on alive and well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. PETTEN: I know I am not allowed to use it, but I hear the LOP is still alive and well. I couldn't resist that to let them know. I'm not so sure what the numbers are, I'm hearing the numbers are a bit soft in areas but I would say those people are going to be the ones that are going to be nailed with the 20 cents on their home heating fuel as of July.

Look at the seniors trying to fill their oil barrel this winter. The LOP will not help. I guarantee you now the Liberal outreach program will not help fill their oil barrels this winter.

Minister O'Regan getting up and telling everyone that we're going to have barrels of money for everything is not cutting it either. I talk to seniors. We all talk to seniors. My colleague for Harbour Main was criticized earlier by the Minister of Transportation because she speaks up for seniors. I hope we all speak up for seniors, that's what we're here for, isn't it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Forty Members should be advocating for seniors; why be criticized for

speaking up for seniors. I mean that's offensive in its own right.

So you bring in this legislation – we have lots of time to talk about this in Committee yet, don't we. Yeah, we have all kinds of time in Committee.

On the heels of my final seconds, what happened on the Gulf to increase the rates? They're increasing the rates on the backs of all this. Why? Because of carbon tax, the cost of fuel surcharges; it's all combined.

Something has to give, Mr. Speaker, and the people need someone to be a voice to stand up for them. Give up with the photo ops; do something that is real and substantive in the province because that's what people really want.

Do you know what they're looking for, Mr. Speaker? They're looking for leadership.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to have a few words on this; I won't be long at it.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that there are going to be three parts to this bill. The first one is the payroll tax, the exemption gone higher, which everybody in this House will agree to and do what you can to help out through that way.

The second one is the physical tax credit. I say to the government, when you do a physical tax credit and the amount that you have to spend to get back \$350, a lot of people in this province can't afford that. I can say that. It's great for a lot of people who can afford it, but there are a lot of people who cannot afford that physical tax

credit. They cannot put that amount – they haven't got that disposable income to ensure that they would reach that limit; they just don't have it. The disposable income is just not there for that.

So what I say to the minister is, you said there were 127,000 people or something use it, something like that, but I can assure you there are a lot of people in the province that if there's any way possible to help some way to subsidize, for example, buying their milk or helping something out for dairy products, which will be healthier, because they just can't afford that kind of money for their physical activities to get back that tax, they just haven't got it. It's great for people who can afford to put the kids in hockey, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing and other sports. It's great.

I'm just urging the minister, if there's any way that you could take some of the money that you're going to use and put it in for some school programs that would create physical activity. I use one that's in Corner Brook up in Vine Place. It's a program that they have for youth to encourage physical activity, healthy eating, healthy cooking and things like that. That would be beneficial a lot more.

Then you see the announcement yesterday about the \$25-million processing plant going to go in Deer Lake with dairy farming and you see the money being spent, a lot of it is going to be shipped out. This is a great example, if the government can find some way to subsidize milk for the people who can't afford it in this province. That's a healthy food. It's a healthy drink. We're going to process it right here in this province. If there's any way that we can find a way to lower the cost. We know all about the sugar tax, how we're putting the taxes on so they don't drink sugary drinks and other things, but if there's some way that we could find a way to subsidize milk.

Milk is a very vital to kids' growth, very vital to youths' growth and one of the biggest

things with seniors in this province and anybody who dealt with it – my wife's a dietician, she dealt with it for many years – is obesity and as people get older they get osteoporosis because a lack of milk in their bones. That is a big issue and here we are building this \$25-million plant out there for dairy farmers to produce milk and they're going to ship a lot of it out.

So that's an option for the minister to consider about how we can find some way to tap into a healthy drink, which is milk. Because if we look at the health care benefits of someone with osteoporosis, if they fall: broken bone. If they get a broken bone, look at health care costs down the road. This takes away from the health care system also. That is a big issue for seniors is osteoporosis with weaker bones, brittle bones, that when you have a fall, you have a bad bump, you get a broken hip, broken leg, you're in the hospital and then usually a lot of people find it very hard and difficult to recover from that. So if we can tap into that, I'll say to the minister, it would be something that would be beneficial to the province as a whole in the long term.

Now, we'll get into the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. I was on the government side when we were negotiating with Ottawa on that and I'll go back before this 20 cents a litre exemption. The whole concept that we had in place at the time was that there was funds coming in and we were going to balance it out to the people of the province. That was the initial concept. It would be a net-zero benefit to the revenues of the province or Ottawa. That was the intent, that we will find some way. We know the last budget, we supported it. But the Opposition mainly pushed to reduce the gas tax. We heard the government mention it many times: We can't do it because they're going to say we're reducing the carbon tax on fuel.

Guess what happened? After the pressure, they reduced it and it worked. It was made life easier for a lot of people in this province. It worked. So that was the whole intent.

Then after numerous times, waited for the House to close, walks out and makes a big announcement: We're reducing the gas tax. But for a year prior when the request was being made, we can't do it because the feds have clawed back because of the carbon tax which, we know now, that wasn't correct. So this is why Opposition, myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands are asking questions.

I'm going to say something to government and I've heard back and forth – myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands voted against the amendment today. We heard it many times: Well, why don't you vote for the budget? Look what you voted against. I can tell you something: In 2007, when the PCs brought in a budget, everything in this province was almost covered in the budget. They actually overspent. Did you know that the Liberal government at the time voted against the budget? Because it's customary for Opposition to hold government accountable on things in the budget. It's customary. I have yet to sit in Opposition in my years – and I go back, way back – I've yet to see once an Opposition voting for a government budget. I've yet to see it.

So this idea that look what you're voting against; you should vote for the budget; how can you stand up and ask for stuff if you're not voting for a budget – it is not done. 2007 was a prime example; a lot of Members opposite weren't even in here in 2007 – I don't know if anyone was in here in 2007. But I can tell you, they voted against the budget. The PC government at the time almost overspent on the budget. They took care of the sectors and the Liberal government voted against the budget because it is customary for Opposition to hold the government accountable and say there are things that we can do differently. So if you want to go back in history and talk about history, I can give it to you.

That is another example. There is no need to pick up for the Opposition; there is

absolutely no need, but I just want to highlight to the people of the province who happen to be listening why this is being done. Because government has to be held accountable and it is the Official Opposition and the Third Party that is their job and that is their role. In a parliamentary system, that is their role and that is what they are doing. They're not saying that there are not good things in budget; they're saying that there are things that we like to see that could make it better for the province.

Let's get back to the carbon tax. I go way back, a lot of this, Mr. Speaker, comes from the international stage by the prime minister. The international stage comes back to the prime minister; look at what we're doing here in Canada. When you're going to put 20 cents a litre on home heating oil – what is it, 48,000 in this province? Forty-eight thousand households on oil in this province and here we are struggling in this province. There is not a person in this province who doesn't understand and don't appreciate the struggles that a lot of seniors and people with low income are going through. Nobody.

I just want to give you an example. The government was out just recently saying they might take the federal government for putting a surtax on diesel for going across the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Port aux Basques – the government came out and said they may take them to court. This is more than what (inaudible) that is for the people. This is going to be worse for the people. This carbon tax is going to be worse. People can't fuel their houses now. Seniors can't live in their houses now. They just can't. And here we are now going to put on this here and others, forestry and fisheries, and this carbon tax is going to be another blow to the people who can't afford a blow.

There just has to be away for this government to speak to the federal government and find some way. We just

can't do this. This is going to be tough on a lot of people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I asked several times, the money that we were getting in before on the carbon tax before now, we're repealing it. They always said, well, it's for green initiatives. I asked to table in this House the \$120 million worth of green initiatives that you did. There was none. I shouldn't say none; they did some. But you can't do it because it went into general revenue.

One of the ministers, I think it was Seamus O'Regan, said when he was coming out, the reason why part of it is that the provincial government took it and put it into general revenues. It was Seamus O'Regan who ratted the government out and said they put it into their general revenues. That's what they did with the money. They didn't use it for what it was proposed to do, for green initiatives in this province. That's the federal minister saying that.

P. LANE: We said it.

E. JOYCE: We said it here. We asked for it. We actually asked for it. Couldn't get it because it's not there. There was no documentation to show that.

When this government says – before this one, the 20 cents coming in July 1 – well, they forced us; guess what? They took it, they put it into general revenue, look how much money we have here and the people who were suffering were the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Then when you look at it and you talk about the 20 cents, just think about it. I know all Members are concerned. I know that, but we have to do something. We really do. We could take them to court because of the benefits that people are going to have pay for Marine Atlantic because they're saying that there was in our constitution. That there is our highway. This here is some people who are going to live longer because they can buy food or pay this 20 cents on oil

because they need to stay warm. That's what's happening. If they can take it to court, there's got to be something we can do here. There has to be more pressure we could put on Ottawa.

I'll just give the people out there in the province – because I speak to a lot of seniors. A lot are in Humber - Bay of Islands, Corner Brook area. Can you imagine any two people here now on Old Age Pension, CPP, husband and wife living in your house, raised a family, lived there for 40 or 50 years making ends meet and all of sudden one passes away. All of sudden half the income is gone. The city tax is going to be the same. The oil bill is going to be the same. The maintenance is going to be the same. Now you've got one income. The heat bill, light bill going to be the same and now you just have one income to try to stay in your home that you lived all your life, raised all your kids, you fed all your kids, helped all your kids through, you struggled, as most parents do – and I'm sure there are a lot here in this House do the same thing, do what they can to help their kids – and now, all of a sudden, one of the spouses passes away and you've got one income and July 1, you've got to pay more to heat your home. It's sad. It's sad actually for this to come in because it is on the international stage and the benefits. The idea that was put in is that people, if you put a carbon tax on gas, they won't drive anymore. If you put your carbon tax on oil, they won't burn as much anymore.

Here's the other thing – I know government knows it. They won't talk about it, but they've got a rebate there if people want to put in a substitute for oil. I'll just go back to this scenario I just used, Mr. Speaker. You take one person living in a household. They've got the same bills as if they had two. They lived on oil all their life. Now they're saying if you want to put in an alternate heat source, we'll give you \$5,000. It costs, average house, \$30,000 to \$35,000 to change it over. Just to change it over, \$30,000 to \$35,000. So a lot of those

seniors, one-income house, same bills, and now you're saying, go spend \$30,000 and we'll give you \$5,000 back. They don't have the \$25,000 to \$30,000 disposable income to do that. They just don't have it, Mr. Speaker.

So this idea of the carbon tax that you're going to force the people – I ask any Member here, any Member in this House of Assembly, since we got the carbon tax on gas, how many of us stopped going to work? How many people in this building that drive from all around the Avalon to come to work stopped coming to work? It hasn't stopped the people from driving. What it did is stopped people going, on Sunday, taking the kids for a drive. That's what it did. That's exactly what it did.

So this idea that because you're going to put this five cents a litre on tax and now put this fuel, people are going to switch. People will switch if they can, if they can afford it. But mainly seniors and a lot of younger people also, a lot of younger couples also, Mr. Speaker, they just can't afford it.

I don't know why this government is not saying to Ottawa – and I heard the Premier say and I heard the minister say that, no, we're going to stand up and we're going to stand up and we told Ottawa. You got to be able to do something more than just tell Ottawa. You just can't say, oh, it's not our fault, it's Ottawa; therefore, we don't want to be a part of this here, putting in the 20 cents on the home heating oil, the fishery products and other things. We don't want to be a part of that, so take it away so we can blame it on you guys. That's what's happening here.

Before that, Mr. Speaker – I want to make it quite clear – the funds that they were getting from the carbon tax was going in general revenue. The money they were taking – okay, here's our money. Now we'll find some way to give it back. We'll give it back now. We'll beat our chests. We just gave \$500 to people. We beat our chests.

Some of that money came from the carbon tax that they said they're going to put out for green initiatives. So it's a switch and bait here. That's what's happening here.

I don't know how much I can explain to the government how much this is going to harm people, how this is going to harm a lot of people who can't afford it. A lot can't afford it. I'm sure some are hearing it across. I've been around long enough; the easiest thing in the world is to pass the blame. It is. The easiest thing in the world for politicians is to put the blame on somebody else and put them on the hot seat. But the hardest thing in the world, Mr. Speaker, is to have the courage to stand up.

I remember back when I worked with Roger Grimes and they were closing down the capelin out in the St. Lawrence. I was parliamentary assistant. I stood up and I said I'm not voting for it. I said fire me but I'm not voting for it. I got a lot of flack, but it was the right thing to do.

So I say to the government, the right thing to do here is to find a way with Ottawa. If we're not going to stand up to Ottawa for the seniors of this province and many low-income people, we are not doing our duty. We can stand up and we can beat on this desk all day, but there are things we can do collectively and I've given some good examples of where it happened before in the fisheries. I used that, as a prime example, we had an all-party Committee that went to Ottawa on the fisheries. We got some results. Not what we wanted, but we got some results.

This is one of the things that might not sound big and it might not be a big public issue, but I can assure you, as sure as I'm standing here today, that this here will hurt people more than just about any bill that's going to pass here in this House. I can tell you that. I can assure you that, Mr. Speaker. The seniors can't do it now. You're going to see a lot of seniors stay home. They won't be able to eat, they won't be

able to take care of themselves properly and then what's going to happen is there's going to be an extra strain on the health care. This is a domino effect.

So I implore the government – and I understand the government didn't make this decision. I understand that. But we have to come together somehow as a unified group to say this is going to do harm and any of us, any MHA in these districts swore an oath that they would stand up for the constituents and bring their issues forward and this is a prime example. I'm asking government to join all the parties here, let's all unite here and say we're bringing this forward to stop this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 38, I will say the payroll tax exemption, I think, is a good step in the right direction and it's nice to see it increased. It's important to small to medium businesses for sure and maybe at some point we'll be able to expand it even further. So it's a good step in the right direction.

When it comes to the Physical Activity Tax, again, it's something I get and I understand. I struggle with the fact that we have to take money out of our pockets in order to get it back. It's a healthy incentive and I would also say that the \$2,000 is a bit of a stretch. When you think about low-income families and their ability to spend that kind of money in order to get \$348 back – now, the doubling is good. Last year it was \$174, I believe, and it's doubled to \$348. But there are things about it that just don't work and, again, I say this all the time. We put in bills like this and we look at Newfoundland as a whole – I'm not sure what number the minister used. I think it was 29,000 people

availed of this last year or two years ago, 2021. The statistics aren't in for this year.

But when I think about that, the one thing I think that's excluded again is rural Newfoundland. Because if you go to rural Newfoundland to places that don't have facilities, that don't have hockey rinks, that don't have gyms and golf courses and places where people would spend \$2,000 in order to get a pass or to partake in physical activities, they cannot avail of this. It's just not for them.

AN HON. MEMBER: Online.

L. PARROTT: Yeah, if they got internet. The minister is saying online but, I mean, a lot of rural Newfoundland doesn't have internet. That's a topic for another day. We're talking about other things here today.

When you think about rural Newfoundland, those kids still go to a gym, they still need sneakers and they have cross-country skis and different things. But I'm pretty certain that you can't claim those things, so there needs to be something looked at with regards to that.

Then we come to carbon tax – carbon tax, carbon tax, carbon tax. The reality with carbon tax is that last year we sat in this House and we debated for an extended period of time what was touted as a made-right-here solution. The made right-here solution didn't work, the made-right-here solution was no good and the made-in-Ottawa solution is even worse. We're assuming that we can tax people into prosperity. That's the reality of it. We know that we have to be cleaner and greener and Newfoundland is making an effort to do that. All you have to do is look at the Lower Churchill, the Upper Churchill, Fermeuse, St. Lawrence, if you look at some of the incentives that we have in the industry, you look at what's going on out at North Atlantic right now.

We're making those steps; we're looking to get rid of Holyrood. There's no question we're trying to do that. Electrification of vehicles, we're trying to do that. But trying to do that and taxing people in order to do that are two different things.

There's one thing that I'll throw out there that nobody's considering. You go to rural Newfoundland – and rural Newfoundland again is probably where the bulk of the oil tanks are. There's no question. It's there by design. Most people in rural Newfoundland may only have 100-amp service, they can't have electric heat, they don't have alternatives and they go to oil. An average tank is around 1,300 litres. From zero litres to 1,300 you're looking at around \$221 in carbon tax alone – \$221 in carbon tax on a tank of oil. Think about that. That's just carbon tax; that's not other taxes. Then on top of that the tank itself at today's price is \$1.58, comes out to be \$2,038.40 for a total now – the new total will be \$2,259. That's a lot of money. It's a lot of money for people who are choosing between food and medication and vehicles.

Then consider that these people live in rural Newfoundland. No shopping centres and there are no grocery stores, so they actually pay a little extra carbon tax in order to get regular goods. They have to get aboard their vehicles and they have to drive to Gander, Clarendville, Corner Brook, St. John's, a larger centre where they can get stuff. It's disproportionate and that's a sad fact of life.

Now, I will say the provincial Liberals didn't do that. We know that; the federal Liberals did it. But what hits home is the fact that we haven't done anything against it either. We haven't stood up and said this is wrong. We can write a letter, but I'll agree with other Members in this House it's time for something like this, especially on something like this, for this House to stand together and say it just doesn't work.

When you look at what just happened with Marine Atlantic and the uptake in that along with the carbon tax – now, the carbon tax won't happen on Marine; I don't think Marine ferries will pay that. But if you start thinking about the cost that we pay for goods and how this will affect that, it's going to be astronomical. When you start thinking about the 17 cents plus the surcharge to get across the Island, the cost of fuel for tractor-trailers and everything combined together, the goods that come here, the carbon tax is hurting this province in a way that we're not talking about.

Then go back the other way. So we talked about tourism earlier. We depend on tourism. Tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry. It's incredibly important to this province. We also have industries here – so gypsum as an example. We ship our gyprock out of the province. Sexton Lumber, as an example, we ship that out of the province. So we've got lots of goods that are now going to be disproportionately disadvantaged because of fees associated with carbon tax and the Marine Atlantic price hike.

We're not having that conversation, and it's very important. I mean, if we're going to try and compete globally or even nationally – forget about internationally – we're already disadvantaged and guess who is doing it? The Liberals in Ottawa. We're not saying a word. There's not a word being said about it and the reality of it is that we have an onus to the people in this province to speak up for them, regardless of political stripe. It doesn't matter. It affects everyone's constituents in this building, every single one of us, and the people that are affected the most are the most vulnerable.

You take industry and you look at the amount of people that may lose jobs. There are going to be spinoff effects from all of this, make no mistake about it. You go out around, I'll say, the Bonavista Peninsula where Sexton Lumber is, and make the assumption that low-income people or

people that are middle-income that work at Sextons or other places that may be in jeopardy down the road of losing jobs because of their inability to sell their product because of carbon tax and other taxes. Once rural Newfoundland, once people start moving out, those places will not survive. They won't find workers. They struggle to find workers now. That's happening on an everyday basis.

The problem, as a government, when you're putting your hands in people's pockets to get money in the left pocket in order to put it back into the right pocket, it only works if people have money in the left pocket. At today's times, a lot of people just don't have the money to do it and to add additional fees, certainly for something that is so essential, home heat – let's be clear here. We don't live in Southern BC. We've got a lot of people on the Coast of Labrador, in Labrador, Northern Peninsula. It's cold everywhere. It's cold in St. John's. But our climate dictates that we need heat. There's zero question about it.

We hear talk about climate change. We heard the Minister of CSSD, all the time, talking about new initiatives and how we're doing things for the environment and how we're going to make things better. I'd love to know, certainly with this heat pump initiative, how many heat pumps CSSD has installed into Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I would argue none. I would argue it hasn't been done. So now you think about people in this Newfoundland and Labrador housing on oil, in 40-year-old homes, with sub-par insulation and we're talking about the climate; we're talking about our most vulnerable and a way to put them forward. Yet, if the oil tank breaks, we put an oil tank back in.

You talk about the federal Liberals, the ferry system, the surcharges and we're trying to get greener and what do we do? We just commissioned a new ferry to be built. What's it going to burn? It's going to burn diesel in this day and age. But, no, let's get

it right now. The Liberals care about the environment. We're all about the environment. We're getting away from that. There are loads of electric boats and options out there right now. LNG is an option. There are lots of options.

You think about the South Coast of Labrador. We're putting in a new power plant. What are we putting up there? Is it wind, do you think, or solar or hydrogen, or LNG or any of these cleaner options? No, we're putting in another thermal generation plant that burns diesel. Do you know why? Because we're getting cleaner. We can't speak from both side of our mouth, and that's exactly what this bill does.

Last year, the Premier stood here and he said this is a made-in-Newfoundland solution. They were all for it. Every single Member on that side of the House voted in support of this bill. A similar bill but it was the made-right-here-in-Newfoundland solution.

Here we are a year later, and when the Premier goes to Ottawa, he's all for carbon tax. When he comes back to Newfoundland, he's all against it – this is terrible; I wrote a letter, I wrote an email or I called him. It just can't happen that way. We've got to be one way or the other. This is a time in the history of this province where this whole House could be that way. This bill is no good for anyone.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said this is an opportunity for us to come together. I totally agree with him. This is one of those opportunities when there's nobody in this House who can stand and say that this bill, regardless if it's coming from Ottawa and being forced upon us, is good for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is not. It's repealing a bill that we have and installing a bill from Ottawa which is going to be –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: It will.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: Exactly but it will. At the end of the day, we will pay federal carbon tax from Ottawa, which will cost more, which will be applied to home heat fuel, which it isn't right now. When that happens, it will decimate rural Newfoundland and Labrador – it will decimate it. If people don't see that, they're wrong.

Speaker, \$221 – like I said I've got lots of constituents now that can't afford food and they're going to be expected to pay all that extra money on heating fuel? They're just not going to do it. I can tell you what else, the \$500 gift certificate from the government, a one-time cheque, is not going to cover it off. It's not going to do it.

Our friend in Ottawa, Minister O'Regan, standing up saying that you're going to get more money in your pocket, it's clear; they've shown it. It's not going to happen. It's not going to work in Newfoundland or PEI or Nova Scotia. We know that. Newfoundlanders will suffer because of this.

Do you know what we hear? Nothing, not a word.

AN HON. MEMBER: Any expiry on that certificate?

L. PARROTT: Yeah, 2023; it expires in 2023, hopefully.

We sit all the time and we talk about how we're trying to be better, we're trying to do things, we're looking out to the people of the province. If we're going to look out to the people of the province, we've got to speak up for them. This bill, quite simply, the carbon tax hasn't helped anyone.

It's a bill where we're trying to say we need to get greener. Everybody knows it. If you're not having that conversation at home with your spouse, your children and your

grandchildren; if you haven't been approached by teachers or constituents or someone to ask you your views on it, then you're obviously not going out through the door. It is a fact of life.

But how does this make that happen? It doesn't. I'll tell you how it's going to make it happen. You're going to have seniors, like I said, move away from their houses, shut them down. Forget about oil and gas, forget about heating their houses, they're not going to be able to afford to do it. They will just stop doing it altogether.

I'm curious about the new houses that are being built, too, if they're all going to have heat pumps installed. I'll put it in perspective what I said about the heat pumps and Newfoundland Housing. An average tank is about 1,300 litres. So 1,300 litres, if you think about that, it's \$221. My house is around 2,400 square feet and I run a heat pump. When I bought the house I have, the heat pump was installed and I was skeptical about heat pumps. I've said this here before: I was one of the people who didn't think they worked as well as they were touted to work. My equalized bill in my house is \$156 a month, every month. That's very economical. That's actually less than the price of the carbon tax that people are going to be paying for home heating fuel. That's a big number when you think about it, right?

So why aren't we putting them in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing? When we sit here and we talk how we're trying to help the most vulnerable, you would think that one of the main initiatives of this government would be to put heat pumps in every single house that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has. I would think that would certainly go a long way for low-income people. What an amazing initiative. Just think of that.

I shouldn't even have to ask, but I'll give you one better. If you live in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, you can't apply to put a

heat pump in your house. You're stuck, you're held. I mean, there's no ransom, there's no way to get out of it, you're there. If you can't afford to go anywhere else and you managed to save your nickels and dimes in order to take advantage of that grant and you go and say: I want to put a heat pump in this house. Guess what they're going to say to you? Not going to happen.

Think about that. At a time when we're touting the environment, at a time when we're worried about our most vulnerable, at a time when we stand here and think that we've got it all right, that's a great example of how we've got it all wrong.

So we sit here and we talk about why Opposition doesn't support things. It's not that we don't support things, it's that everything isn't perfect all the time. It's not that we're perfect, but listening goes both ways. It's a two-way street and at some point we have to have ideas that work, too. There has to be ideas that come across both sides of the floor and meet in the middle that make sense, that give us common ground, that are good for the people that we're here to represent. This is an opportunity for us to stand and say this doesn't work. It doesn't work.

We're talking about Churchill Falls and negotiating the 2041 contract. We actually have a trump card with regards to negotiating. We could be talking to the federal government and saying do you know what? Carbon tax doesn't work for us, any negotiation is going to include some exemption of certain parts of carbon tax.

It's funny, today when the minister stood up and spoke about different provinces with carbon tax, there's one province I never heard. I've never once heard her say Quebec. Never heard her. We talked about every other province, the word Quebec never was mentioned once. I wonder why. I don't think any of us got to wonder, do we?

Last May, when we sat here and we talked about carbon tax, the made-right-here-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador solution, adamantly the minister said that we could not reduce the price of tax on gas or we would be penalized because of the carbon tax. We just could not do it. Another Member mentioned earlier today – 100 per cent right when they mentioned it – we sat here in this House and we argued, we fought. I can remember our House leader going over and our deputy House leader going over behind this wall right here countless times negotiating, trying to find the path forward: How would we pass this bill? We were going to stay until we got something. At the end of the day, we got a resolution from the government that they would reduce gas tax.

Now, people on that side forget that. People on that side forget that they voted for carbon tax. They forget all about it and they did vote for it. So next time you go fill up your tank and you're wondering where it came from, it was a made-right-there solution, not a made-right-here solution. It was made right over there.

I always think of this one. The Member for Lake Melville, very big on the environment. A hyper, intelligent individual, lots of respect for his views on it, but when we talk about Newfoundland and Labrador, again, population and geography are two of the biggest hurdles we have. When we talk about geography, we have to consider population and we don't always do that. He said Newfoundland and Labrador is the third dirtiest of the subnational governments in Canada. Maybe, but it's based on 521,000 people living in a big area. The math don't work, right? On a per capita basis – there's the number – the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador frankly have the greatest carbon footprint.

So I would argue we have a very industrialized province. We have three thermal generation plants in Voisey's Bay. We have IOC, Wabush Mines. We have the

Newfoundland and Labrador hydro plant out in Holyrood. At the time, I believe the Come By Chance Oil Refinery was still operating under full steam. So we may be dirty with regards to what we put out, but then we forget we've got Muskrat Falls, Churchill Falls, Fermeuse, St. Lawrence, Bay d'Espoir. We've got all of these other beautiful, green projects and we're working hard to make them work.

As a matter of fact, I would challenge people to look at how many hydro projects or how many small hydro dams we have in this province compared to others. Quebec would outnumber us astronomically, but a lot of other provinces wouldn't even come close, and think of our population. When people say that we're not making an effort from a green standpoint, we certainly are. It's just that we have geography to struggle with.

So we have small islands like St. Brendan's, as an example. Again, they burn diesel. We've got all these places that require diesel in order to move forward, but we can't complain about that and then put a thermal generation plant on the South Coast and pretend that we're doing the right thing. We can't do that, but we do that. If we're going to do it right and we're going to make the steps forward that this government says they're doing, it's got to be all the way across.

I could tell you, one electric car isn't going to offset that thermal generation plant on the South Coast of Labrador. It's not going to happen. It cannot even come close. I just don't understand where these views come from. You're either one way or you're not. You've got to be all in on this.

Electric cars: it's funny, last year, when they came out with the whole idea of electrification and the grants that were coming back, I talked to someone who drove from Grand Falls to St. John's and they had to stop twice on the way out. Twice to charge: 35 minutes each time to get to St.

John's. Twice to go back: 35 minutes each time. An hour and 10 minutes, not a big sacrifice, but there were two charging stations and there was no one there.

So now imagine if thousands of people go buy their electric car and there are two charging stations. There are eight people lined up to get there. It takes each one of those cars 30 minutes and you've got an MRI in St. John's because you can't get one in Clarenville or other places on the Island. So now you're eight cars at 35 minutes. That's a long time to wait. That's four hours.

We've got to do those small steps in order to get forward. This bill will not do that. We will not get that money back in order to put in electric charging stations. This money will not come back to Newfoundlanders. It's a terrible bill.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now recess until 6:30 p.m.

SPEAKER: This House do stand recessed until 6:30 this afternoon.