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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 54, An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve into Committee of Whole to consider Bill 54.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 54, An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts. (Bill 54)

A bill, "An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts." (Bill 54)

CLERK (Hawley George): Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair is recognizing the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, while towns are now being charged real property tax, especially the smaller towns, will they be required to maintain roads that are currently maintained by TI, including the infrastructure that comes with those roads, snow clearing, hydrants, including underneath the roads as well? Will any towns be required to take on any new roads with this new legislation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Chair.

Excellent question – the short answer is nothing changes in terms of town's responsibilities, should this act pass in its current form. If, in the future, towns wish to move down that road, that will be a decision of council.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to just touch on that once more because it is a very important question. I know that a lot of towns are watching. For a town to take on any more responsibility financially, in the future, I mean they're very strapped right now, as a lot of people in the province are, the towns are no different. I just want to make sure – because we got a short answer and a long answer and we need to really need nail this down.

Will towns be required by the provincial government to take on any new roadwork that they do not currently have, that is done by TI right now, that they do not have presently to maintain – will they be required to take on any new roads in the future per this legislation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The act does not alter any of that.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, who was consulted during the lead-up to the legislation, what municipalities, LSDs, and by what means were they consulted?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This has been a lengthy process of consultation. It began in 2018. There was a variety of fora with MNL, with PMA. I think the premier of the day had a forum, too. There was engageNL, an equivalent. There were options to email directly. The list is actually available from 2018 in a *What We Heard* document.

I think it references two occasions, with over 140 individuals or groups represented. So that was the kickoff since then. I and my predecessors have met with MNL and PMA on a regular basis, as well as toured communities, be they LSDs or towns and cities.

CHAIR: The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

You said that the consultations started in 2018. How long did they go on for from 2018?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Right up until about three days before first reading, from what my recollection is. I had meetings with both PMA and MNL within the week before the legislation was first brought to the House.

CHAIR: The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

How many towns and LSDs responded to these consultations, percentage-wise or numbers?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The *What We Heard* document gives accurate numbers for those occasions. I don't have the number of municipalities subsequently that have contacted us or been contacted. I can certainly endeavour to find that out, but by then it was much more of a dialogue rather than a contacting exercise.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Did you use the regionalization consultations as part of the legislation? Concern at the time was lack of consultation with the various LSDs. So was the regionalization consultation used as well?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, I mean, basically any discussion with LSDs or municipalities of any kind was used to derive their wishes and their views on ideas that they or we would float for part of the process. As I say, very much a dialogue over the course of even my short tenure there, and I know that trend had been set by my predecessor.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Why are we eliminating the poll tax over the next three years? What's the purpose?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The advice has been from a variety of sources that poll tax is generally regarded as regressive. It makes no allowance for income or wealth of the individuals required to pay and hits particularly those on income support or with income challenges differentially harder than those who have larger income. There is no perfect tax. However, that is seen as the most imperfect form of taxation and hence the bill's view, currently, that either a straight mill rate on property values or, alternatively, a base rate and a much smaller mill rate on property values would be the way to go.

There is nothing in the legislation that precludes how any town would choose to determine its base rate and this was felt to be much more flexible and provide the municipalities with a much more open way of dealing with revenue issues.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

A new real property assessment, who will do this and at what cost?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: There is no change, currently. The Municipal Assessment Agency is the body mandated to do this. They do this for all but, I think, 48 municipalities. The reason there is a phase-in for three years is to allow those municipalities that don't use the MAA to do so – allow MAA time to do them. There is a charge. I think from memory, it is around \$87 or \$86 for the initial assessment and then it's \$25 or \$26, I think, annually thereafter, but if the Member is keen, I can get him the exact numbers. I think those are ballpark accurate though.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Will changes in the regulations and this act mean towns will have to amend their town plans?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This act is more around flexibility, autonomy and governance. It does reference taxation, but this is part of a suite of acts which the department controls or holds. Taken together, they will deal with issues current to municipalities. Zoning and town plans, more properly fall under URPA, the Urban and Rural Planning Act. That is not changed in any way by this bill.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: At what cost would this be, Minister? Also, does Municipal Affairs have

the staff to be able to deal with all these amendments in place?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: We have a small but mighty team in Municipal Support. I think if you look at their track record, particularly around the *Municipal Conduct Act*, they trained 98 per cent of councillors in about 11 months. Ongoing training is part of their mandate. It is envisaged and we've discussed already with MNL and PMA about how those support staff would be reallocated to dealing with the changes under this bill. There are transition arrangements and certainly from a material change in terms of the way municipalities might choose to do their taxation or have to. That is a three-year process and we would anticipate that we should be able to deal with this over the course of that time.

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

C. TIBBS: Sure, Minister, as you can appreciate, we don't want anybody in your department to struggle or fall behind or not have the resources to do the job that needs to be done with these changed amendments. But, also, we want to make sure that the towns, themselves, have the right personnel, the proper personnel, enough personnel and they're not overloaded, especially the smaller towns.

Is there anything in place to ensure that town staff will not be overloaded with these changes and amendments?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: There is certainly going to be a learning curve and staff in the department feel confident that given their experience with the *Municipal Conduct Act* in the last 12 months, that will not be unnecessarily onerous for either side. It is our desire to

make this work; it gives the towns and Local Service Districts, by and large, what they have asked for and is a modern and flexible framework.

In terms of capacity, which I think the Member opposite kind of alludes to indirectly, we have studied regionalization as a form of governance and for various reasons, including inputs significantly from communities, decided that is not the way to go.

What we are focusing on now is regional collaboration and support. We have spoken with MNL about our desire to help them if they wish to provide some of that. As well as, for example, our Community Collaboration Grants, so a group of interested communities could actually choose to collaborate, work together and receive some seed funding from the department. For example, if they wanted to collaborate on housing initiative, we could, perhaps, get them a housing coordinator, these kinds of things.

That level of support is being provided through roots that are not specifically prescribed in this act, although there are enabling clauses in there to enable them to do that more easily.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, when did you meet with the PMA?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I think I would have to go back from memory, but it was within a couple of weeks of taking this office. My last meeting with PMA, in actual fact, was the morning the bill was introduced for second reading. As soon as Members opposite,

parliamentary precedent and such, had their copy, I think within an hour I was talking to MNL and PMA.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, what impact will the elimination of poll tax have on small towns, if any?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I think that is for each individual community to decide, because their options in the act, which they do have, will allow them the flexibility to match their revenue from poll tax. It's just a matter of arithmetic as to how they choose to do that. They'll have their property values and they'll have that data from MAA. They'll be able to set a mill rate that will mean they should be financially neutral, or to the better, if they choose to increase their revenue stream, or if they choose not to, that's their choice, too.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Will real property assessment be applied to LSDs when the legislation is implemented?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: LSDs do not have the authority to tax currently and they will not under this new legislation so property values for that purpose are irrelevant.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

This bill allows towns to sell town property for less than market value without ministerial approval.

Are there clear conflict of interest rules around these sales in relation to council members/administrators so that such a mayor or a councillor can't sell a piece of land to their brother for 10 bucks or whatnot?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Where ministerial approval has been removed, council is required to make the decision by two-thirds, so there is more than just a simple majority.

The issue of conflict of interest was dealt with, in my view, by legislation brought in by my predecessor under the *Municipal Conduct Act*. That is very clear about conflicts of interest. In actual fact, there are allowances in there where members who identify an issue under the *Municipal Conduct Act*, there is a clause in this bill that makes it that they have to leave or they have to recuse themselves from the vote without penalty. Because, obviously, if a councillor is in the chamber when a vote is called they are expected to vote.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

The tourism accommodation tax, is this for any tourism accommodation in the province and how will this be paid to the towns?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That is laid out in the bill itself. It is clearly for tourism purposes.

There are discussions under way or will be in the near future. I have staff reaching out to Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador because they have some views on how those monies should be allocated. That is not referenced in this bill but would be dealt with under regulation. We want to make sure that their views are taken into account when we write those regulations, but also that it follows the spirit of the act. The act itself is not prescriptive as to how that money is spent other than on tourism-related activities.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, when you met with the PMA, did they have any concerns at the time when you met with them and could you outline and talk about some of those concerns, please, if they did?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yeah, yesterday.

The PMA have their own unique sort of view of the municipalities world. They had some concerns around their membership, how they were viewed by government. I think some of the challenge came from a view there that somehow the provincial government had a role in the terms and conditions of employment of municipal or town employees.

I think that will remain something of a discussion point as they feel that their views don't quite match up with employment law, as I understand it. Not that I'm a legal expert in that field, but my advice is that hourly rates, minimum hours of work for their staff,

this kind of thing, are issues between the employee and the council. The intent of this bill is to allow council's discretion or autonomy and flexibility, but also with some accountability at the back end to kind of match that.

So I think those kind of issues are unique to PMA. Other ones they shared with MNL, and these were really around things like municipal funding and that kind of thing, which actually isn't addressed in the bill. The fiscal framework that MNL has talked about is a topic for discussion between myself, but also other branches of government in the province around how money should flow and sources of revenue. What it does do is it gives towns considerable flexibility which they didn't have before. So PMA have a little twist of their own; MNL share some concerns with them, too.

CHAIR: The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: I'm sure you can appreciate, Minister, the PMA will be influenced by a lot of this legislation. So they are going to have their concerns, which we hear as well. The bylaw enforcement is critical, but when will these powers include traffic violation and ticketing? Any discussion about that, Minister?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: In these regulations, the enforcement clauses for bylaw offices allow for non-moving violations to be ticketed. The choice of the council, they can have bylaw officers or not. They can enforce or bring in bylaws around non-moving violations. My understanding – and I'm sure colleagues to my right would be able to elaborate – is that when it comes to moving violations these are not solely under provincial jurisdiction.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Is it the case that the bylaws are intended to replace the regulatory powers that the towns had under the act that's been in place since 1999?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Any municipal town bylaws that are in place today will remain in place after this. Should the council choose to use the framework of this act to change them, it is entirely their discretion. They don't have to.

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

C. TIBBS: And this may go along with that, Minister, but these are the mandatory bylaws a town must impose. This is section 7. How much leeway will the town have to design these bylaws? How much oversight will the minister and government impose on towns to ensure they comply with the mandatory obligations?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: How they choose to met their mandatory bylaws is down to the council. As long as, for example, waste management or that kind of thing, they don't have to do it themselves; they can contract out. The department is agnostic as to how they do it. Really and honestly, the accountability piece lies with the council.

A lot of these things, I would argue that all of them are things that certainly the larger communities do anyway. So I'm not sure that this is simply just restating what they do currently rather than requiring them necessarily to do anything new. The only thing that is new, that is mandated, that isn't in the old act, it relates to Local Service Districts who have to deal with garbage collection. Currently there are no mandated services required of LSDs.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Any consideration given to the training that's going to be required now for towns or obvious training where smaller towns especially may not have the Wi-Fi accessibility to do this training – any discussion around that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Training was a big piece of the *Municipal Conduct Act*. The department actually had a mix of pretty well any kind of interaction you can think of between staff as trainers and councillors as trainees, ranging from the high-tech end Zoom. For those who were challenged, there were actually in-person visits to the community, and I think on several occasions there were actually one-on-one training sessions done over the telephone; a conference call by, certainly, staff out of Ms. Pomeroy's department in Central, for example. Not to say there weren't in others, but I just use that as an example.

So training is all part and parcel of this. We know we need to do it, happy to do it, and we were trying to enlist both MNL and PMA in the training.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, this bill mentions crematoriums, but it doesn't mention aquamation facilities. In Grand Falls-Windsor I have an aquamation facility. I was just wondering if they go hand in hand, or if it can be added?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I would bow to my colleague from Service NL about the regulations required for aquamation as they do differ from crematoria. My understanding of the act here is that it would be entirely flexible and within the town's jurisdiction to bring that in if they wished.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Has any thought been given to encouraging towns to allow people to keep some farm animals to supplement, like food, eggs, milk, meat – we all know that we don't produce over 90 per cent of our food here; food security is a big deal. And of course, healthy food security is an even bigger deal. So it would be great to see some new legislation or regulations brought in that would at least encourage towns to facilitate any small farms or farm animals that could assist in our food security.

Has any thought been given to that, Minister?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes, again, I'm not sure that this is entirely within the remit of this act. The act is written in a permissive way so that when URPA and municipal zoning discussions occur, that will be a newer line of enterprise. Certainly we're conscious of the comments the Member opposite makes and it's not the intent of this bill to prohibit that, if that's comfortable for a local council.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

What kind of town bylaws would ever apply outside the town's territorial limits, if any?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's kind of an odd question because I'm not sure that the answer is any. There are references in the act to authorities for municipal town employees to act with protection from the act outside their own community. But that really relates to the provision of fire services.

The other thing is that there is a difference in some communities between the municipal boundary and the municipal zoning boundary. So, again, there may be some nuances there, but it is intended that bylaw officers would confine themselves to the municipality, the town, that employed them.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Were there any concerns raised about towns imbedding economic development with bylaws that are overly restrictive or new council throwing up roadblocks that prior councils removed undermining industries themselves?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: One of the purposes listed in sections 3 through 12 is facilitating economic, social and physical well-being of the town and its citizens. Decisions of a council are accountable to the electorate and every four years the electorate get a chance, just as they do in this House, to say goodbye.

It is our desire that towns would act in the spirit of that and certainly the rest of the act, with relationship to business, is very much

geared to the concept of incentivizing. There is an ability here to alter business tax. There are opportunities here to offer incentives for certain businesses or certain types of businesses. I mean, you can't tax a gas bar one way at one end of town and a completely different way the other. There are also allowances for hardship and these kind of things.

I can't see the utility of a town council acting against the interests of its population, quite frankly.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Just thinking of that a little bit, Minister. What if a town didn't want windmills, 5G cellular towers or power utility towers? What is the dividing line between provincial power and town power when it comes to this development?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's a nice knotty question down in the weeds, Mr. Chair. A lot of those things are governed under other pieces of legislation. There's the cable and telecoms act. There's hydro and this kind of thing that act under their own legislation. It may well be that would be a question better posed in the particular for an individual instance.

Just off the top of my head, one of the things that we've tried to do, on this side of the House, is to – and we do it as MHAs in our own constituency office to a large extent – be the kind of the oil that grease the wheels when there's more than one government department involved.

So I think we're not going to do ourselves out of a job with this act, but I'm hoping that the noise will drop.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Were any concerns raised about extra layers of red tape for businesses and the need to undertake red tape reduction and one-stop shopping for businesses and developers?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes, and if you do one of these kind of legislative impact things on this bill, we have a net reduction of 11 ministerial approvals.

This actually fits very nicely with the spirit of red tape reduction and handing more autonomy over to towns and Local Service Districts should they wish to take it up. So I would actually tout that as one of the strong points of this bill.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

The current act requires a feasibility study for incorporation, amalgamation, annexation, boundary settlement or disincorporation. The new bill removes that requirement. Feasibility reports will become discretionary.

Is that reasonable for such weighty decisions?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I think it's a balance and I think, to be perfectly honest, there are certain occasions where an amalgamation or a disincorporation, the reasons for that, are

just so glaringly obvious. You don't need a consultant to tell you that.

It's an attempt to reduce the load on communities and the expense for communities, but I do take your point. I think there is a desire in the department to exercise a degree of due diligence along with that discretion.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Why is the minister increasing his discretionary authority over such matters when a feasibility study has been required until now and seems reasonable?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: My view is if it seems reasonable and is justifiable, then I would exercise, personally, my discretion in favour of having one. If it doesn't, I would also then exercise my discretion in the other direction.

You know, whilst it is ministerial discretion, it is based on the advice of people who work in the municipal world on a regular basis, full time and have considerable expertise. It's not just the expertise of the individual sitting in the minister's chair that is relevant here.

We have a very knowledgeable staff both within municipal support and within our planning office, not to mention at the executive team level in MAPA and really and honestly, they are any minister's right-hand individuals.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: I'm just looking at clause 35, Minister.

When would a council delegate any of its powers, duties or functions to a town council committee, the town manager, town clerk, department head, bylaw enforcement officer or a municipal service delivery corporation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That would be basically up to the council. I mean, we've talked in here about using Standing Committees. I know in my own municipality, they have a finance committee. They do the bulk of the budget work and then present it to Cabinet. I think it's a question of what the council feels would work in their locality. We're not prescribing what it should look like. We're just saying you can and if you don't like it, you can change it.

CHAIR: The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Clause 41, these conditions for a closed meeting – that's what it says there – which the current act calls privileged meetings seem to have been limited by the 10 conditions listed in the paragraphs. Currently, councillors could vote to make any meeting privileged. Now, they have to meet one of the conditions.

In practical terms, would it be difficult to meet one of these conditions or no?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The logic behind this was that just like this is the people's House, anyone can come in here after admitting strangers and watch what we do directly or on the TV. The default is that government should be open, whatever level it is. However, it recognizes also that there are occasions and those are listed in the subs under 41: information that could violate the

confidentiality of information obtained from the Government of Canada.

Those are not unreasonable things. The decisions have to be made in public, but the discussions can be held in private. We feel that is a reasonable compromise because of concerns from members of the public that said, well, we don't know what they're doing in there behind closed doors until they've done it. This goes as far as is reasonable.

These conditions here actually also fit with other legislation, provincially, ATIPP being one of them.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Just to stick with that for a moment. Do these provisions provide sufficient privacy protection since they demand documentation? Has the Information and Privacy Commissioner reviewed these provisions?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The last bit, the answer is yes. I think that was something that I was aware of.

From the point of view of whether it meets the test of adequacy, I would argue that given the fact it's consistent with all the other provincial legislation, that may be a defence on using these rather than just plucking them out of the atmosphere kind of thing.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Clause 45, Minister: Will the minister confirm that clause 45 adds a new right of appeal to certain decisions to make the councillor's seat vacant? Is this right of appeal new or simply being spelled out in the clause present?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Section 45 is a carry-over from sections 206 and 401 of the existing legislation. But it references the conduct act, which is new, includes gender-neutral language, that kind of thing. So it's a rewording of what was already there.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Are advisory committees new or were they always permitted as special committees, and confirm that such committees do not require councillors to be on it?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: If you'll just give me a second, I have a sneaky feeling that this is new. The advisory committee's under section 48 is a new concept and this is as written in 48(1), (2) and (3).

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Clause 57: Is subclause 57(2) new? It says: "Where a town no longer requires the land, property or an interest expropriated under subsection (1), the town shall give the person who owned the land, property or interest in the land or property at the time of expropriation the first opportunity to purchase the land."

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Sub (2) is new to this bill.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Moving to clause 88 for a moment here. The new bill says the council can now approve that decisions by two-thirds vote and within 30 days, prepare and adopt a revised budget in the form set by the minister.

Will the minister confirm that his prior approval is no longer needed with this new legislation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This is a new clause. The only thing that requires approval is if the town wanted to establish, and hadn't already got, a reserve fund, an operating reserve or a capital. That's new and that would require ministerial approval. Everything else is down to the town.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Sticking with the reserve funds: Reserve funds are covered in clauses 85 and 88. Could the minister explain what is changing with respect to reserve funds? Clause 88 lists two specific kinds and points to other types.

How does the minister see this working? What are the pros and are there any drawbacks or concerns with the reserve funds?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Essentially, there's a chunk of this as a carry-over from the old bill, the old act, but it stipulates clearly in this act what they can and can't be used for. It can't be used for speculating on short-term investments, for example. There has to be a level of financial diligence around it and, as I say, section 88 is new. It requires the town to establish by-law to do it and then it requires ministerial approval for the funds.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Clause 89: Is anything changing in clause 89 with respect to grants?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you.

It does actually carry-over pretty well from section 99. There are a couple of new bits in this. You can grant to charitable not-profit – it's specified what you can grant to and prohibits the council from providing a grant that reduces tax or fees. It overtly states that in sub 4. So it's, essentially, adding parameters around the provision of grants to try and make sure that it goes to organizations that would further the purposes as laid out in the initial sections.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Just reverting to the poll tax for a moment. Poll tax provisions are being eliminated. We know this now. What will the impacts be? Was there an analysis done on the impacts to the people that are charging the poll tax and do you feel as though a three-year window is enough? Has there been any

concerns from your consultations with any districts at all that the poll tax that three years wouldn't be enough time to phase this out? Is that a concern?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The phase-in doesn't seem to have been an issue, the duration of it. Certainly, the Municipal Assessment Agency was the ones that suggested that three years would cover all bases. In actual fact, given their recent performance they may actually be able to get the assessments done in a much more timely way than that. This gives the councils time to do the math, to figure out – as I said earlier on in an earlier answer, it should be cost neutral unless they want make it anything but cost neutral. It's down to how they do the math with either a mill rate or a base and a mill rate.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Property tax is changing from a discretionary may to a mandatory shall. Towns will be required to impose this property tax. Is every town on board with this from your consultations, Minister?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I have not heard anyone say that they don't want it. I think on the other side, that's where the bulk of their revenue comes from is from residential taxation; very little comes from business.

That's why, after further discussion, from an incentive point of view, a business attraction point of view, and some of the recruitment challenges that we've talked about in this House, a business tax is a discretionary

one. They can set that in the way that they choose. But I've not heard anyone say that they don't want the ability to tax.

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

C. TIBBS: As I'm sure you could appreciate, Minister, we don't, at this time, need any more taxes on anybody in the province. We just don't want to see anybody get hit with a bill that went from \$600 to \$1,800 within one piece of legislation. It could be devastating to a family.

Is there any possibility that a town could find an adequate revenue source other than property tax or poll tax? Has that analysis been done?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: There are towns that receive grants in lieu of taxes. I know, for example, that the airport in Gander does that. I know that Come By Chance Refinery does that. I also know that some businesses, particularly exploration companies, are providing revenue streams to nearby communities that are outside the tax base. It doesn't preclude that at all. It just has to be declared on their financial statements.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Would the minister confirm that the tourist accommodation tax in clause 129 is in fact a new distinct clause?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The Member opposite – I think he said 129. I'm just going to check, because I've actually got a list here which

will tell me whether it's totally new for this. I've a sneaking feeling it is. I just want to make absolutely sure for the Member.

The short answer is yes, it is new to this act.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

How have tourist accommodations been taxed until now?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: My understanding is they've been taxed through the cities act.

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

C. TIBBS: If you can elaborate, Minister, on what will this mean for Airbnb and such operations throughout our municipalities?

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

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the Member opposite would likely recall, in March of last year we introduced the *Tourist Accommodations Act* and the regulations. We've been working very closely with the platforms because the implementation date is March 31. We've had great co-operation with them.

I had the opportunity this morning to speak to the CEO of Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador and assured him that we will ensure, going forward, the *Tourist Accommodations Act* and how it interacts with the new *Towns and Local Service Districts Act* will be in the benefit of tourism operators in the province for certain.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Minister, if I can go to clause 190 for a moment, please. This bill allows towns to sell property for less than market value without ministerial approval.

You talked about the conflict of interest rules on that and it would be held within the municipalities to have their own conflict of interest but, just to make it clear, there's nothing sent down from the provincial government or from your department that would impede or intersect any clear-cut conflict of interest that could come up. It's dependent on the towns at this point, and I'll just elaborate.

We don't want anything to happen inside of a town where a backdoor deal could go wrong. Not saying that it could, it's a possibility and we want to make sure, again, a mayor doesn't sell or councillor doesn't sell his or her brother, aunt, uncle a piece of a land for a dollar that is under that market value. That could cause and create a lot of headaches for your department and for the town themselves.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you.

On the specifics of the question, it is an issue covered under the *Municipal Conduct Act*. On a broader picture, what we're trying to do is move away from an older, paternalistic approach where the provincial department somehow had rigid oversight of everything that was done at the municipal level.

This is a different level of government. What we are trying to do with this suite of acts is to provide them with a jurisdictional box that is theirs and theirs alone. We're not going to mess inside it. Just as we don't want the federal government messing inside provincial areas of jurisdiction such as

education or health without some mutual discussion.

It is very much the approach we have taken in the department that this, along with the other acts like *Municipal Conduct*, URPA and these kinds of things, almost could be viewed as a constitution for municipalities and describes the working relationship between two equal sections of government rather than a more hierarchical, paternalistic point of view. The towns are down to doing their own thing and being held accountable for it.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

I'm just looking at clause 301. A council will have a three-year window before it is required to impose a property tax, if it doesn't have one yet. That same three-year window before it has to end a poll tax in favour of a property tax, are there any concerns around this, around that transition, Minister?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The short answer is we felt that three years was long enough for the communities, the town councils and their staff to come up with a process and to do this. The MAA will have the property assessments done. The town can do the math and seek advice as to whether or not it wants to do a straight mill rate and, if so, what that should be or whether it wants to do a combination of a base rate and a mill rate.

Certainly our staff, Director Stamp and his valiant team of directors, will be around to provide commentary and advice but, at the end of the day, it is the department's view that this is clearly and firmly a town

decision. We're here to educate and support but not to dictate.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Does the minister have any reason to believe some old decisions and orders might be incompatible with this new bill?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Not especially, although if you look at some of the legislation that we've brought to the House as rewrites or as amendments, they are to deal with changing circumstances. You write a bill in 1996 and then modify it in 1999 and, 27 years later, there are things there that are out of date. It's not exactly surprising. That is the role of council, which is analogous to a legislative review. You review your bylaws from time to time, to make sure that they are still relevant and not obstructive and adapt to the new circumstances.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, when we look at a base plus percentage mill rate, how is the base any different than a poll tax currently?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The base is applied to residential properties. Poll tax is applied to individuals.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

In a lot of the smaller communities, there's professional training that is mandatory, and I agree with that. It also requires Wi-Fi or cell service to locate the training. Has that been considered for the Local Service Districts and the towns that don't have that ability currently?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes, very much so. Our experience with the *Municipal Conduct Act* showed that we had a variety of tools in our toolbox. We would have regional meetings face to face. We would go to communities and meet with their committees or councils directly or even do one-on-one, in person, or over the phone. So we're open to any and all methods of training and we'll continue to do that and if there are new options and as my colleagues here roll out broadband initiatives, hopefully, that will become less of a problem with time, if they choose to use virtual meetings.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

The introduction of the business tax for municipalities to apply discretionary business tax – why is that not being extended to the LSDs because if we're going to phase them out in three years, wouldn't that give them an opportunity to have some wherewithal to move in the right direction?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: LSDs do not have the authority to tax. Local Service Districts are entitled,

however, to apply a fee for services that they provide and collect that fee. That is different than taxation and a tax is an unfettered revenue stream; whereas, a fee is that we pay \$300 and we get our garbage picked up, kind of thing.

From the point of view of a LSD, our concern has always been around capacity for communities. Some LSDs work extremely well and are assets to their residents. Others and towns, as well, do tend to struggle. It is not the intent of this bill to enable any LSD to tax. They can, however, charge for fees for the services that they provide, whether it's garbage collection, which is mandatory. They can do it themselves or they can contract it out. If they choose to go down the route of fire services and these kind of things, they'll have a fee to their residents.

That's the way LSDs are funded and that's an increase, as it were in some respect, over what they're currently able to do. If they wish to change and want to change their way of governance to allow them to tax and have the resources to collect it, then that's another discussion we're happy to have, too.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: For the Community Collaboration Grants: Is there a minimum of how many communities have to be in on that or can it be a minimum of two?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: We set it at three. We've had a good response. The Community Collaboration Grants closed 14 or 15 days ago and we're currently in the process of evaluating those. It's certainly something that was a little bit of an experiment from our point of view and we'd be interested to see what the nature of that is.

At the moment, three seems to be –

(Disturbance.)

CHAIR: Order, please!

Thank you.

I'm going to go back to the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, if you want to just continue.

J. HAGGIE: I've been tested and found wanting the ability to switch the damn thing off.

I'm not sure I have much more to add to that. We would love to look at other mechanisms. We have also the Regional Service Boards Act, which is under review. I have open discussions with the chairs of the RSBs about how they could assist in regional delivery of services and regional collaboration in a more structured way.

I've had talks with MNL about sharing of maybe back office functions somehow or accounting. I know MNL already has access to legal advice for any of its members as part of a membership deal. So there are lots of different threads on the go.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Does this legislation affect a community's ability to make boundary extensions?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: No, if they wish to, they can still go through the process. That process is not governed by this legislation as such. The council would simply need to express a desire and go through the paperwork. It might make it easier if it involved a feasibility study on the criteria set out in the

old act. But it's not going to affect their ability to ask and do that if they wish.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

The last question from me is: Which LSDs and towns were consulted in the District of Placentia West - Bellevue? Would you be able to provide that list to me?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I don't have it to hand, and yes.

J. DWYER: Sorry?

J. HAGGIE: I don't have a list at hand, but, yes, I can get it for you.

J. DWYER: Okay.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Chair.

Just a question: In the towns that you're saying you're covering on the roads, they're covering their local roads going through. What about the byroads in those towns as well? Some of those are covered now. I'm just wondering about that.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Chair.

Nothing changes. What they're doing now, they will do afterwards, unless they choose to change it.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Can municipalities charge accommodation tax on rental units used by fly-in, fly-out workers from out of province?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Accommodation tax, is that a tourist accommodation tax the Member refers to?

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Yes, the new taxing ability from municipalities, will they be able to use it towards fly-in, fly-out workers from outside of the province?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: In terms of the utilization of tourism accommodation tax dollars, those regulations have not been written, but it is the intent of this legislation and our discussions with HNL is to ensure that goes on tourism-related activities. If a rental property is registered as a holiday or a tourist destination, somehow under my colleague in TCAR, they would be eligible to charge a tourist accommodation tax. Whether or not they are mandated to do so, I'd have to defer to others.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

My point of view is we want to remove the ability for tourists and just have it as an accommodation tax, because municipalities in Labrador West have been asking the ability to tax fly-in, fly-out workers from outside of the province, as they are a drain on services to municipalities. This is something they were hoping to do, but if it's

just slated for tourist accommodation, it's very pointless in a place like Labrador West.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: It is conceivable that a town might choose to use the business tax in that regard. That would be down to the town to take advice as to whether or not that would work.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: The problem is they tried but these businesses are not registered in this province, they're businesses from Quebec or Ontario and they are unable to take them that way as they brought in for doing work in the region. This was brought up by the municipalities from Labrador West during discussions of this new act. Why wasn't this implemented?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The answer there lies between departments. From my point of view, if these accommodations are designated as tourist, then they can charge a tourist accommodation tax. You can't, under this act, tax individuals. You can only tax properties or businesses. So either you're residential, in which case you pay a residential tax, or you're a business, in which case the business pays a business tax, should the town choose to exercise one.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: These are businesses that are coming in from Quebec and Ontario that cannot be taxed that way, as they do not have an address in this province, but their workers are coming in here working and using and draining municipal services. They have no other way to tax them. This is why

it was asked that they have the ability to tax accommodations for fly-in, fly-out workers.

Given that, will this accommodation tax be allowed to be used on the bunkhouses in Labrador West for fly-in, fly-out workers that come from out of province?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: These are obviously questions of concern to the Member opposite. In terms of a bunkhouse, again, if this is a business and the business does not pay tax in this province, then there is certainly a challenge. I'm not sure how to resolve that and whether or not that actually lies within the mandate of this act.

So I take the Member's point and certainly would be happy to discuss how businesses that operate in this province but exist outside could be taxed. But this is not in this act; this is around towns and Local Service Districts.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

No, just because you put the word tourist in front of accommodation, it makes it just for tourists. If you remove the word tourist and just have an accommodation tax, then that would make sense for opportunities like this.

My other question is: While this legislation will empower municipalities to engage in more activities and services, there really isn't much of a point if we're not going to provide significant financial resources for some of the new opportunities here. Some municipalities right now can't afford to avail of some of the opportunities in this act.

Will there be some financial help in the coming years to help facilitate municipalities to be able to utilize some of the new aspects of this act?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Certainly, municipal financing is not addressed directly in this bill; it's not the intent of that. On a budget note, we did increase the Municipal Operating Grant last year and we will increase it again in budget '24; that is pre-committed and that is a 27 per cent increase.

I think it behooves towns to look at their tax rate, their mill rates, and see how that matches up with the services they choose to provide. If they want to provide more, then one could argue that either the residents of that community pay or the residents of the entire community pay. From a governance point of view, there is an interesting twist there in the sense that a resident of Grand Falls or Gander paying provincial tax through their Municipal Operating Grant subsidizes activities going on in Labrador West yet has no say over those.

From a governance perspective, there is only one person paying tax. Whether they pay it through the province or whether they pay it through the community or whether they pay it as a fee, those are decisions – certainly two of those decisions – that are resting clearly in this act with municipalities.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: In many parts of the bill the town councils are required to request the opinion of the town manager before reaching a decision. Why was this consultation mandatory?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I think that depends on the context. Would the Member please supply me with the clause and I can provide a more detailed answer?

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Yes, it would be under section 1.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Section 1, one moment. I'm confused because section on is: "This Act may be cited as the *Towns and Local Services Districts Act*."

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Okay, I must have miswritten down what section that was in.

It says, in many parts of the bill – there are multiple parts, actually, sections; that's why I wrote it this way. Sorry, my apologies.

In many sections and parts of the bill it says that the town council is required to request an opinion of the town manager before reaching a decision. So this is multiple times throughout the bill. Why was this put into this new act compared to the other act?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The next bit of those clauses pretty well also states that it is down to the discretion of council as to whether they act on the advice of the town manager. I think it is to make sure that the councils, some of whom have new councillors, some of whom have councillors with different skill sets, would benefit from the advice of a professional municipal administrator. Whether they choose to take it is down to them.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Given that municipalities are expressing concerns about the housing crisis as well as a lack of coordination between levels of government in the front, is there any specific legislation that will allow better, smoother and faster co-operation between the province and municipalities in developing lands, resources, things like that? Given that currently now there is sometimes pointing fingers on who is responsible for what.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The act in detail and in spirit clarifies the fact that there is not, nor has there ever been, any prohibition on a town, should it choose to, to move into housing. The only caveat is they cannot compete with the private sector. So social housing or affordable housing, these kind of things, are open to them if there is no private sector interest there.

The other elements of the Member's question really rely or fall better into zoning and those kind of discussions which are not covered under this act. Certainly our department has, in parallel with this work, been looking at URPA, the *Urban and Rural Planning Act*, to see what changes could or should be made there in a hurry, as it were, to facilitate housing and also looking at some of the regulations under URPA and under other pieces of legislation the department hold.

But this act here simply refers to the flexibility they have in choosing how to exercise that. Some of the processes are defined along the timeline set by the town. Some we're looking at do have government timelines in and we're trying to make sure those are as short and as reasonable as possible.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Will the broad definitions of powers and purposes of towns lead to an increase in litigation or court challenges to multiple bylaws as a result of overlapping or the unclear jurisdiction?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Those purposes outline the spirit behind which bylaws should be written. No bylaws currently will be changed. If a council on review of its bylaws finds that a bylaw could be altered to better suit these mix of purposes, then they're perfectly at liberty to change it. I don't anticipate a rush of litigation on any of this because we don't see anything in that area that is at all controversial and outside what municipalities have asked for.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Do the natural person powers allow for towns to sue or be sued? What happens in the case of a town with few resources that must defend itself in court or pay large settlements out?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: If a town is liable at law, the town has to comply with the judgment. That is my understanding. If they find themselves in a situation where they are financially embarrassed as a result of it, they may, depending on their fiscal capacity, have the ability to pay. I'm sure if they haven't, I'll hear about it.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Given that, is there anything in this bill that requires towns to have insurance for cases like this that would cover them in the case of this kind of thing, or is that optional?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: We do not stipulate insurance except for tangible assets. So it's optional.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Given the broadened abilities, would the department consider making it mandatory for municipalities to have a board insurance for situations like this?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This falls under the jurisdiction of a council. If they wish to spend their money doing that then that's a decision they may wish to take. The provincial government is not going to mandate any activity that we feel shouldn't be mandated. The bylaws in there that are mandated and the framework here is what we feel is a reasonable framework for flexibility, for autonomy and for decision-making at the council level. Again, the flip side of that is if it goes sideways, council carries the can.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: We've heard from a number of municipalities regarding the difficulty they face in addressing housing, especially given conflicting rules and purposes between the municipal level and the provincial level, and on some cases the federal level. Will section 7 potentially allow towns to increase

the number of barriers, either inadvertently or otherwise?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I can't see why a town would want to increase barriers to housing its residents. This doesn't change their abilities in any way. They have a power to make bylaws. Zoning issues may be relevant. I can't see a town, personally, wanting to bar homeless people from its municipal boundaries.

I'm not quite sure that that's a realistic concern and it may well be if the Member opposite has an instance that he could use to illustrate it, I'd be better able to answer that question.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

No, we just want to make sure under section 7 that this wouldn't be a barrier or anything like that. We just want to make sure that it's not going to be used in any other way. That's what we just want to make sure.

Also under there, is six months a reasonable timeline for towns to adopt changes to the National Fire Code and the National Energy Code? What work must towns engage in before they approve such changes and what work must be done afterwards?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Those timelines were taken from a jurisdictional scan and fit with what others do. I think it's a reasonable place to start.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: If any municipalities have to incur additional costs leading up to this and the towns are not resource capable, will the department be able to help with the costs to reach this timeline?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: From our point of view, we don't anticipate a significant cost burden to the town. There will be training and the department has undertaken to provide that directly. MNL and PMA are interested in joining in with that.

Other than that, those communities that move from a poll tax to a mill rate should factor those change costs in. I don't think they are prohibitive.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 8, clause 1, does not include ride-sharing services. Why are they explicitly left out of the legislation? If the intent from the new act was to give broader powers, why can't municipalities make their own bylaws stipulating the provincial rules can be given on both sides often between municipalities? After all, taxis often do and they're included here.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Whilst not the expert on ride sharing, that Member currently sits behind me. My understanding is that is governed by provincial legislation, not towns and Local Service Districts.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 9: What happens if a town inadvertently passes a bylaw that is in conflict with provincial or federal legislation? How will the conflict be identified and what is the procedure for declaring that the bylaw is null and void?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I think that's more of a hypothetical. I cannot really see due diligence of a council going down that line if they have advice from a clerk; however, it is down to the town to remedy it.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 12: Would it not be a good idea to include a list in 12(2), in section 12, a sort of virtual library on the MAPA website of all the bylaws for each municipality that they would be able to be look in one convenient place and could even use their conduct of their own cross-jurisdictional scans to help drafting or amending their own bylaws as a means of identifying best practices?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

To answer the previous question about ride sharing. So that is included in 8(1)(i). That section does contain the provision around ride sharing for municipalities.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

On the other question, I'm recognizing the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes and I've got a mental block here. He's going to have to repeat the question, my apologies.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West, please.

J. BROWN: Perfect. No problem. I'll do that for the minister.

Would it be a good idea to include a list in 12(2), in section 12, a sort of virtual library for the MAPA website for all the bylaws of each municipality, that way they could be available in one convenient place and the municipalities could even use it to conduct their own cross-jurisdictional scans to help in drafting better bylaws or amending their own bylaws by means of identifying the best practices within the province?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I'm open to a suggestion like that. I'm not sure whether it would be us that did that or MNL or PMA, but I don't think it's necessarily a bad idea. We, certainly, with the Code of Conduct on our website, have kind of boilerplate templates for Codes of Conduct and these kind of things that towns could download and adapt to their own local circumstances. That was well received.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under section 14, why are the minister's powers to incorporate a town retroactive from the date of the order?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: It simply lines up the date of the order with the new town boundary. I'm not sure that that's a significant alteration from the previous act.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Again, under section 14, under that condition, would a minister issue an order to amalgamate, disincorporate or annex land to existing towns should there not be a referendum mandated as such is the case?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I'm not sure where the word referendum comes in under section 14. These are provisions which are kind of rolled over, section 14 from 312 and 313 of MA, 1999. The feasibility piece is addressed elsewhere and is discretionary. Where it makes sense to do a feasibility study, then the minister can, at his or her discretion, arrange one or order one. Where it makes no sense, then it's not obligatory.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under section 15, now that the completion of a feasibility report will be at the discretion of a minister, not mandatory, do you have any specific cases already drawn up where drafting such reports will be mandatory? In what cases will this requirement be waived?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Personally, no, because I've only been in the department since June, but staff and municipalities have advised that this has arisen in the past. I'm guided by their experience and knowledge. I can't really add any more from that.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under 15, when the minister orders a feasibility report and appoints

people to draft it, where will they come from? Will it be department staff, residents of the community or a general member of the public? What qualifications will they have or will it be contracted out?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I don't see any difference in how we would identify individuals under this piece of the legislation than under the previous one. The last phrase in that section 2: to prepare the feasibility report in accordance with regulations. So the regulations would lay out some of that.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Given the new way that the feasibility report is not necessary or anything like that, does the minister still have the ability to order a plebiscite in a community, when a community themselves don't have a plebiscite?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This would come from a community. So from the point of view of us going around looking at redrawing lines on a map or amalgamating things, this is not the intent of this legislation at all, nor does it say anywhere about this. This is all driven by communities.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: The reason for the question is because in the past the minister did have the ability to order a plebiscite between two communities. I'm just wondering if the power still exists within the minister's hands.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I'll take this under advisement. I'm not sure that plebiscite ever popped up in my consciousness. It was all around the feasibility study and discussions with the communities.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Why is it not mandatory that public hearings associated with feasibility studies be conducted in the area affected by the purpose measures being studied? What was the rationale for not making that kind of stuff mandatory?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: With regard to plebiscites, section 49 actually references it, which is why I couldn't find it here. It has not changed from the previous act.

In terms of the Member's other question about public hearings, one of the whole issues here is why you would hold a public hearing at a venue that was not related to the communities under discussion. I mean, I'm not quite sure what the logic would be about that. One of our interesting carry-overs from COVID has been – and it's seen in here in the publication section – other ways of engaging the community to get public input.

So I think he makes an interesting point but I'm not wedded to the idea of it having to be in community A or B. If community A or B want it there or would prefer it there, again, it's a matter of feasibility of having the public hearing in there. Is there a venue that will do it?

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Seeing section 15 clause (6) could be used to dodge public scrutiny of a controversial proposal. Does this act stipulate a minimum length of time for soliciting public opinion on such thing?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: No, my understanding that's in regulation.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under which circumstances might the Crown not accept responsibility for those costs associated with a feasibility study? In the case, who would pick up the cost of that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: There have been communities that keep on requesting feasibility studies for something that may involve, say an amalgamation, where the other community isn't really interested. So that's been asked and answered before and under those circumstances, it is a toss-up as to why anyone would spend public money on doing it a second time, hoping for a different result.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Under section 18: Why would this not be done as part of a feasibility statement? What is greatly concerning? Why approve an amalgamation or other alterations of a town if the ability to sustain itself economically or financially has not been received due to this constraint?

Are we putting the cart before the horse here, potentially?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: It is again a little bit of a hypothetical. To be quite frank, if a community wants to change its boundary and it doesn't involve anybody else, then the question is moot about opposition or unpopular decisions. Quite frankly, if one community wants to take over another, that's never going to happen.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 21(2)(c) it appears to give the minister wide latitude in giving orders. Why were these broad powers given and under what circumstances might the minister use such power?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That is to try and deal with a situation whereby different tax rates applied in different areas prior to amalgamation or even different tax schemes. I think it protects both communities. The other piece about that is, again, ministerial discretion is not unfettered ministerial whim. It is advice of the staff, the civil servants, who live and breathe this kind of stuff and discussions with the communities. But at the end of the day, it is sometimes easier for the communities if somebody outside makes the decision. If they can come to an agreement by themselves, fine by me.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 25 clause (4), it is noticed that the prohibition on altering wards is longer after

an election than before. Why is this the case? What type of practices is the post-election ban on amending wards designed to prevent?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: It lines up with other jurisdictions. I think sometimes there is a discussion about who would have voted which way, as a ward, given a different boundary. This House has a Boundaries Commission. This just simply says that you can't do it immediately to the run up to an election, nor can you do it afterwards. It is a four-year cycle, you have plenty of time. There is no need to jump.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 25, under clause (5) and (6): Is it mandatory that a town council having at-large members? Is this correct or is it going to be mandatory? It has to be at least some at-large members.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: How the town want to do that, I think, there is a requirement that you have at-large members. I will verify that and get back to the Member opposite.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 25: Why must the members, the at-large councillors be greater than the total number of councillors elected under a ward?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This is a carryover from the previous act and nobody seemed to mind to

want to have it changed, Chair. It fits in with practice elsewhere.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 28: How many towns currently select their mayor by using this practice?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I don't have that number. I would try and get it for the Member opposite.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 35: In the interest of maintaining the authority and ability of town councillors, is it necessary to authorize delegates to confer power on sub-delegates? Under what circumstance might we need sub-delegates?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This is a new section and it addresses concerns that were brought to us by MNL so that there would be some clarity in the minds of councils, if nothing else, as to who was responsible for what in a community. So if you had someone designated as director or manager of water treatment and you had a water treatment question, you don't go to the outside worker. It was for clarity.

Section (2) basically says you can delegate someone but you can also tell them what the limits of that delegation are. Also in section (3) it shows what cannot be delegated and those are really core functions of council.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Section 37: Does this section mean that the first meeting must take place within 14 days after an election or merely that date of the first meeting must be set within 14 days?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: It's no change from current. My reading of it, it means it has to be set.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 41: Why is the act prescribing the rules for closed town meetings to the public where meetings are being necessarily closed – subsection (d) allows meetings to be closed when the acquisition or disposition of land is being discussed? Residents should be entitled to be informed about development of their land. What was the acquisition in the first steps of that process?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This relates to an answer I gave earlier to the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans. These are lined up with ATIPP. The default is that a town council meeting should be open. The reason for that is that this could give commercial advantage or it could give commercial disadvantage to individuals in business, and that the decision that's made at these closed meetings has to be ratified at a public meeting.

This is a balance between ATIPP protecting confidentiality, business interests and commercial sensitivities, with also the desire

that business is seen to be done in an open way.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under section 44, under what circumstances are town councillors required to meet a two-third vote majority when approving something?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Those are identified, Chair, within the appropriate sections of the act. For example, if a council wish to dispose of land or an asset at below market value, that would require a two-third vote. There are various ones listed. I'm sure you could just rummage through and find at least three more.

Those are the ones, by and large, which replaced ministerial approval. As we have 11 removals of ministerial approval, I suspect there are 11 of them.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Why are town councillors generally prohibited from abstaining from voting?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: If we're in the House, we vote – same logic. You have a duty to exercise the duties of your office as a councillor. Just as if we're in the Chamber when a vote is called as MHAs, you have to vote. There are no abstentions.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 45: Is it really fair to declare a councillor's position vacant when the councillor owes taxes or fees to council, especially given the economic climate? There might be some people going through – no fault of their own – and find themselves in a predicament, considering the variety of circumstances under which this could happen? Is there any offer of leeway?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: There is discretion under the act for a council to come to a payment plan with someone who is delinquent on their taxes or fees. My understanding is if they have a payment plan, they're not in arrears; if they haven't got one and they are, they need to set an example. It's called leadership.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 45(1)(h)(i), could a person in a position of power use this subsection to abuse their position withholding sworn duty of an elected councillor because of a personal grudge or difference of opinion?

After 60 days, the problematic councillor would be declared unable to hold the post.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's a bit of a stretch but the short answer is that, you know, if the council give an individual leave to be absent, then these clauses are not triggered.

If you're not sworn in after 60 days, you're not interested in doing the job.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 45, why is a councillor not allowed to carry out their duties while waiting for a ruling on an appeal of their dismissal?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's consistent with previous approaches to this. If there has been a dismissal, you are dismissed. You're only reinstated, and retrospectively maybe, after the appeal have been heard. Those are legal nuances. If you're dismissed, you can't function.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 48: Will the non-elected member of the advisory committee receive a vote? If so, should it be explicitly stated in the legislation that the vote of an advisory committee carry no legislative weight or any binding power to the municipal policy?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: An advisory committee by definition, as I understand it, advises. It doesn't tell anybody what to do.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 49(2) is vague. What necessary changes would be required to proceed if laid out of the Municipalities Act in order to hold a valid plebiscite?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's how it is done, not whether it's done.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 50(3), I would see that the town is charging unreasonably high fees for obtaining copies of information listed as a means of restricting access to that information. What safeguards are in place to protect public to obtain this information and not be charged unsightly high fees, if the municipality chooses so?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: How much does it cost to put a piece of paper in a photocopier for a salaried employee? The other piece is that if you go further down, you can ask for electronic copies, which are not charged.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Sometimes a person in a community wouldn't read the act to know that, but if there's something in place for a municipality to stick up a sign and say \$50 for it. I just want to make sure people aren't taken advantage of.

Under section 56, has sufficient consideration been given to subsection (2) that might be the instance in which the towns find themselves necessary to provide goods or services when there are already a private market provider such as there is a monopoly being abused or gouging residents, in service or goods provided of poor quality or private provider lacks the capacity to meet demand?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes, I think this is again a balance. Councils are mandated to operate as not-for-profit entities in the best interests of their residents. Businesses are residents. I think that is trying to tip the scales a little bit in favour of the local and we here have regular debates about why work is going to non-Newfoundland and Labrador properties and companies and this kind of stuff. This is kind of a reflection of that. If you can keep it local, let's do so.

Seventy municipalities have separate elections for mayor I have been advised.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

For the purpose of this act, does the term "property" include a corporation or business, even if it is a for-profit business that the town then does not intend to run on a for-profit basis, going forward?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Which section are you referring to, please, Sir? It's a little difficult with quotes taken out of context.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: I'll double-check that from my notes.

Okay, that would be under subparagraph (a) and (b) on section 57.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Okay.

URPA controls this part of the section and it states in subparagraph (a) that it can be expropriated if the person who owns the

land, property or interest refuses to accept the amount offered in writing by the town; or, (b), the person who owns the land, property or interest is incapable of conveying the land or cannot be found. It then allows the town to expropriate, subject to the conditions under URPA.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: I thank the minister for that.

Section 59: When a town manager delegates the authority to someone, is that person then protected by subsection (4) as well?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 65: The language and procedure proposed here seems circular. If the town council under 63(b)(i) has the power to set a maximum amount where the expenditure (inaudible) case, why can't the amended amount be the original resolution? Why this extra step in consulting with the town manager?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I assume here we're talking about section 65(1). This is a requirement to consult with the town manager. The town manager, if he doesn't respond in a timely way, the council is allowed to go on. It doesn't require the council to adopt the recommendations that are made by the town manager if it feels, as an elected body, that they are not appropriate. This is a

carry-over of sections 58(3), (4) and (5) of the current act.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under section 67, when a town clerk designates their authority to an employee, is that person also protected under subsection (6) as well?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 70: The language here deals with a request. What happens if the department head requests that the town manager report the issue at the next town council meeting but refuses to do so? This doesn't seem like it's an obligation.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This is a carry-over from subsection 57(2) of the current act. The Code of Conduct may apply because it is possible that the individual who is not being heard may file a complaint under that, which will then bring it to the council's attention.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 84: Under what circumstances would a minister approve the postponement

in preparing, adopting or submitting a budget?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Well, the most obvious one would be when the town's finances are in a mess. Other than that, you know, there are circumstances where – sorry, which section was it again, 84?

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: That was section 84.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Chair.

This, again, is current in the legislation at section 77. I can't tell you when the last time that was triggered but if it's of interest, I'll see if I can find out.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Minister.

Again, under 84, what resources does a town have if the proponent expenditures must exceed revenue, especially given that towns are liable for differences between the funds government approved and the capital works and now we see inflation in the cost occurring between those things and the final build? What would be for that, given the current economic situation we also face right now between budgeting costs and inflation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Towns are supposed to operate without deficit. There is leeway, now, around reserve funds, an operating

reserve. A prudent organization keeps a reserve fund. Certainly, from my experience in the not-for-profit sector, we would endeavour to keep a year or even 18 months of operating funds as a reserve and, certainly, that didn't affect our not-for-profit status. That is simply a matter, I would suspect, where the minister or the department might go back to the town and say, you're running into the hole; can we help you?

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under section 86, the language is a big vague here. What will the procedure be for determining whether a revised budget is necessary? Will there be certain thresholds in regulations that would be triggered for a revised budget?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This is again down to the town. The council should really be their own fiscal stewards. It is, again, a rewording for clarity of section 80 of the current act and doesn't anticipate any change in current processes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Section 89: Doesn't section 89(2)(c) open up the town for towns to possibly try to outdo each other competitively. Take for example a company choosing where in the province to locate or expand. Towns could start bidding wars with various financial incentives. The larger and more prosperous ones will clearly have an advantage against other smaller municipalities.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That is an interesting concept, Chair. I have to say a certain level of competition, I think, is healthy but that is not the intent of this. If people in the town feel that is what they're doing and take issue with it, then they have a voice to deal with it.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 90: What kind of advice would the department employee be giving to a town in this situation, how in-depth would it be and would it be a detriment to the services of the town providing or the financial well-being of its residents thinking higher taxes or establishment of a list of fees?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This, again, is a carry-over from the current section 84. The bottom line is the answer to that would be it depends, quite frankly. It depends on what their problem is. A lot of the time it is something, you know, when these kind of things have occurred during my tenure, they've been cash flow issues. Some competent financial management skills, which the department has supplied from time to time, will remedy the situation over a period of time and that is the way out.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under section 95, what kind of situations might the minister waive the requirement for the audit? Is this for very small municipalities with very few resources?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Often under these circumstances, someone from the regional office will go in and have a look at the books and if they're happy, I'm happy.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 97, regarding the adequacy of a town's safeguards against fraud, does this department currently provide training and other supports to municipalities so they can prevent fraud or quickly identify suspected fraud?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's a good question. I would have to check on that. I know there have been discussions between the department and some communities about instances of fraud but I couldn't tell you at the moment whether that was general. I'll look.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Section 106: Has the department undertaken any study to figure out if or how much the collective changes to taxation powers in this bill will improve capacity of towns to grow their income?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Well, with respect to section 106, that's a rewording of existing section 101 in the bill.

I think the areas of growth, really, as it were, may lie in business attraction and how the towns choose to use incentives and tax breaks, tax holidays or differential tax rates to manage business.

It's very, very much a local issue and that's why we have councils rather than the department doing it. Councils know their council.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Section 115: Are corporations considered persons under this section and can a person representing a business apply for exemption, remission or deferment in taxes for the company?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's a legal question that's not covered in this bill. A corporation is a corporation. We have talked about natural person's powers for the town. I would defer to my legal colleagues for an answer to that question.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 117: Property taxes are often labelled as regressive since two owners of a property of equal value could have significantly different incomes.

Has the department considered a way of making property taxes less regressive other than allowing deferment or exemption from taxes on a case-by-case basis?

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: One of the areas, I see, that has particular merit here would be the use of a base plus a mill rate rather than necessarily a flat mill rate. That's an area that I think would be interesting for some towns to explore.

The challenge with taxes is that where there are two owners, if one has resources and the other hasn't, then it would make sense if the designated individual was actually able to pay.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under 117(3), it allows for the possibility of assigning one owner of a property all responsibility for paying the taxes.

What other ways might a town legally assign responsibility for paying taxes in case of multiple ownership on single properties?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The town could decide that because it actually says where there are two or more owners, the town may designate one of them. It doesn't have to.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 118, the wording of subsection (2) is a bit off. As the current stands, the real property tax income and other venues are not at all significant to the covering of the expenses that the town might responsibly incur. Is this correct or is it just the wording of it? It just seems a little off.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That's a carryover from the current act. Basically, it says you have several streams of income, add them all up and the property tax should make sure, at the end of the day, that the sum from income is the same as sum from expenditure.

CHAIR: Thank you.

J. HAGGIE: It's a balance book (inaudible) deficit, no change.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Minister.

Under 118, the wording here is a little confusing. Does it allow the town to change the different rates of residential properties assessing at different tiers of value or is it all residential properties to be taxed at one rate as opposed to commercial ones, which can be taxed at another?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Those are categories of tax base. Once you're in one, the category should pay equivalent taxes across those businesses. So, for example, if residential, they should all be on a level playing field in terms of how they're assessed and obviously that would vary with property value. Commercial property you can have different classes of commerce and you can set different rates should you choose to for fabrication, commerce, rather than storage or for gas bars.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Under section 120: There are many ways a person might come to occupy property, what scenarios does the department have in mind for section 120?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: We just carried this over on the advice of MNL. From my point of view, if

you can't find the owner, and there are occasions where that does happen, then the occupier carries the can.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Given that funds going to municipalities, each municipality has their own issues and different obligation, and to meet some of their obligations under section 121, should the province be expected to pay some property tax or grant in lieu of tax for some of the properties they have in municipalities?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: That has not been the case either in previous iterations of this act or in other jurisdictions. It's an interesting discussion, but not relevant particularly under this. We're just following precedent.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Why are students' residences attached to Provincial Health Authorities exempted from taxation but other residences and apartment-owned properties are not exempt under section 121?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Chair.

That's, again, been a precedent in the past. From my point of view, it's certainly consistent with government not paying taxes to another level of government for its existence and that's consistent throughout.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 121, farmland and woodland within town boundaries are exempt from taxation. Is this a carry-over or is this something new?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: It's a carry-over.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Clause 122: Why should tenants pay a tax on properties that they do not own?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Hang on a second, I will just read. This is 122(1) is it?

"A town council may require a tenant who pays rent or other valuable consideration for real property exempt from real property tax to pay a tax equivalent to the tax that would have been payable by the owner if a property was subject to real property tax."

That is a carry-over from before. It really kind of ensures that there's a revenue stream from the tax for – again, consistent with the previous bill. It's reworded for clarity. I think if you read it with the preceding of the following clauses it makes a little bit more sense than if you just try and read it in isolation.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Under section 125, when a business has a fixed place of business, their tax is calculated based on their property value. If the business does not have a fixed location, they are taxed based on their revenue. Wouldn't it be more flexible to allow the towns to tax businesses on a fixed

location based either on property value or revenue, given one versus the other?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This is what was asked for by the municipality. It's a kind of mishmash; it incorporates elements of the old act, but it gives the town the ability to do the same for businesses, in that you can have it based on a percentage of the assessed real value of the property, or a base amount plus a percentage of the assessed value of the property. So it's akin to the residential one.

That section about not operating from a fixed location, it actually brings them into the tax base and also does it in a way that is more consistent with their ability to pay, necessarily, than anything else.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

But given a business that has a fixed location, they cannot be taxed on their revenue, just on their property, but while a business that doesn't have a fixed location is just based on their revenue, why can't a municipality have the option to tax a business with a fixed location based on their revenue, like a business that doesn't have a fixed location? Why don't they have the leeway like that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The impact to the town in terms of its expense and infrastructure is related to the property more often than it is related to the revenue. So it's fairer for the town.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under section 126(5), what would be counted as a valid reason for obtaining a revised estimate?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Read the last bit and, I would say the Member, I think it explains it there: "... for a revised estimate where the business is able to show a valid reason for the revision to the town council."

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker I move that the Committee rise and report progress and ask leave to sit again.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

B. WARR: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them

referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and direct him to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the bill be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee ask leave to sit again?

J. HOGAN: Presently.

SPEAKER: Presently.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again presently, by leave.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 5.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs that An Act to Amend the Water Resources Act, Bill 46, be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce Bill 46, and that said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Water Resources Act," carried. (Bill 46)

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Water Resources Act. (Bill 46)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 46 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, November 15, 2023, but shall continue to sit for the conduct of Government Business, and if not earlier, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 16, 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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs that An Act to Amend the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, Bill 60, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 60 be now read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act. (Bill 60)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 60)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs that this House do now recess.

SPEAKER: This House do stand recessed until 2 this afternoon.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Before we begin this afternoon, in the Speaker's gallery, I would like to welcome the Commander of 5 Wing Goose Bay, Lieutenant Colonel Aleem Sajan and Chief Master Warrant Officer Paul Mooney.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In the public gallery, I'd like to welcome Jim Hickey Jr. and his daughter Jasmine Hickey. They are family members

of Jim and Ann Hickey, who will be recognized this afternoon in a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also in the public gallery, I'd like to welcome our former Sergeant-at-Arms, Wayne Harnum and his wife Diane.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Finally, in the public gallery, I would like to recognize Ken Drover, Sherri Hiscock and Steven Forward. They are here this afternoon to be recognized in a Ministerial Statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the District of Mount Pearl - Southlands, Mount Pearl North, Placentia - St. Mary's, St. Georges - Humber, Placentia West - Bellevue and Bonavista with leave.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise in this hon. House to recognize several outstanding young people in my community.

The 2023 Mount Pearl Focus on Youth Awards was a tremendous success and highlighted the great talent, athleticism and intellectual ability possessed by some very amazing youth. These individuals included: Mount Pearl's Youths of the Year, Alexander Fahey and Grace Lee; Youth Volunteer of the Year, Alexander Corbett; Youth Athletes of the Year, Kailey Murrin

and Chris Weeks; Sport Team of the Year, Mount Pearl Senior High girls under 15, tier 2, Soccer Team; the RNC Youth in Service Award winner, Alexander Fahey; the S.T.E.M. Award winner, Eric Goulding; Youth Group of the Year, O'Donel High First Responders; Performing Arts Individual Award winner, Summer Bennett; Visual Arts Award winner, Argeline Cabral; and Literary Arts Award winner, Brianna Fleming.

There were also performing arts recognition awards presented to O'Donel High Drama Club and the Mount Pearl Senior High production, *Into the Woods*.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating these amazing youth on their accomplishments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Speaker, I stand today to recognize another successful business in my district.

Marlene and Wade Hickey started their company, Hot Frost, out of the basement of their home in 2007. Over 16 years later, they have seen their business grow from a small family business to a very successful business in the District of Mount Pearl North. They now have 20 full-time employees. Their staff have been recognized by clients to be extremely helpful and efficient, all while providing quality work. Their professional customer service is certainly one of the main reasons for their success.

Just this past year, they were awarded the Canadian Daikin Dealer of the Year. This business is located on Topsail Road and still has a welcoming family atmosphere.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in saying congratulations to Marlene and Wade Hickey on their success.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, today the Port of Argentia is a heavy industrial seaport located on the southeastern portion of Newfoundland and Labrador in the Town of Placentia. It was formerly the site of a US naval base.

As a child growing up in Placentia, I associated the base, as we called it, with watermelon and bowling. In the '60s and '70s, it provided economic opportunities for the area and today it continues to do just that for the province. Argentia is being redeveloped with a diverse group of port users and tenants providing support services to key industry sectors such as marine transportation, renewable energy, aquaculture, offshore oil, mining and wind energy.

The Port of Argentia is North America's first and only monopile marshalling port in support of US energy transition. Argentia's strategic location and proximity to US offshore wind developments are key factors in securing contracts to receive offshore wind foundation monopiles for laydown and storage. Utilizing its existing infrastructure and vast land assets, the port has dedicated over 70 hectares of paved runways within two kilometres of waterfront to monopile marshalling.

Congratulations to the 34 board and staff members who are successfully managing the Port of Argentia's activity and growth.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

S. REID: Speaker, the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador is the province's highest honour and recognizes individuals that demonstrated excellence and achievement in any field of endeavour benefiting in an exemplary way the province and its residents.

I rise today to recognize the achievements of Andrus Voitk, one of this year's recipients who lives in the District of St. George's - Humber. Since his retirement, Mr. Voitk rediscovered a childhood interest in natural history and pursued a curiosity about fungi.

While president of the Humber Natural History Society, he sought out a group of like-minded enthusiasts and organized the first annual mushroom foray in 2003, which evolved into the provincial mushroom club: Foray Newfoundland and Labrador.

From this beginning, over the past 20 years, FNL has recorded almost 2,000 species of fungi native to Newfoundland and Labrador, with the help of the Grenfell Campus of Memorial University. Over the years, Mr. Voitk, along with his wife, has received many awards and recognitions for their work and publications.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in recognizing the contributions of Andrus Voitk and his wife Marie to the study of natural history in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today, I stand in his hon. House to recognize Anne and Jim Hickey of

Terrenceville, the owners of A&J Mini Mart, for celebrating 60 years in business.

They started in 1963, with \$700 worth of merchandise, picked up in St. John's in their taxi, as there were no deliveries to Terrenceville.

While Jim was busy as a taxi driver, Anne managed the store and took care of the passengers while they waited for the coastal boat to leave. They were both actively involved in the community of Terrenceville, providing employment and community support to many organizations.

Anne and Jim both have fond memories of owning and operating their business built with long hours, determination and dedication. They have lived their lifetime in Terrenceville, raising their family and are proud to say their lifetime of hard work continues to provide employment opportunities for residents of their community and region.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members of the 50th General Assembly to join me in congratulating Anne and Jim Hickey on their business success and their contributions to Terrenceville and the surrounding area.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista, with leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: On behalf of the residents of the District of Bonavista, I thank my hon. colleagues for leave.

In 1723, Reverend Henry Jones took up residence in Bonavista – the first Church of

England clergy to take up residence in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This assignment was likely the first of five to be founded in North America at the time. In 1726, Reverend Jones built the first church school in the province at Bonavista, and in 1736 the Christ Anglican Church was erected.

Today, Wednesday, November 15, a celebratory event is happening in Christ Anglican Church in Bonavista with a supper at 5 p.m. and Holy Eucharist at 7 p.m., with a reconciliation and healing purpose. Archbishop Chris Harper of the National Indigenous Anglican Council will be presiding.

A smudging ceremony will be conducted which acknowledges the historic spiritual event of our First Nations. Archbishop John Watton of the Central Diocese will also be attending. Although the Bonavista area did not have major interactions with the Beothuk, the congregation strongly feel the reconciliation theme is quite appropriate and timely.

I ask Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating Christ Anglican Church in Bonavista during this milestone event.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my hon. colleague for slapping my arm when we get going here.

I'm very pleased to stand and rise in this hon. House to highlight the launch of the

public engagement process for two new proposed Climate Change Action Plans in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 2019, we released the first provincial Climate Change Action Plan, and I am pleased to say we have taken action on all 45 items identified within this plan.

These efforts, together with reduction emission targets for large industry, have lowered greenhouse gas emissions to 8.3 million tons a year – the second lowest on record and well below the 10 million tons per year average over the past decade.

Building on this success, we are now developing two new action plans for the 2025 to 2030 period.

The Climate Change Mitigation Plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emission to achieve the province's 2030 greenhouse gas reduction targets, establish foundational actions for net-zero emissions by 2050 and support the transition to low-carbon economy.

The Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan will focus on actions to adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as increased flooding and wildfires. This will be the first stand-alone climate change adaptation strategy for our province.

Public engagement in developing these plans is important to ensure that they reflect the priorities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in building and supporting resilience and prosperous communities that are sustainable for future generations. I encourage everyone to visit engagenl.ca to participate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

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

In the interest of being completely accurate, the previous PC government, on August 16, 2011, started implementing two action plans to address climate change: *Charting Our Course: Climate Change Action Plan 2011* and *Moving Forward: Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2011*. These plans were built on the 2007 Energy Plan, which was another PC action plan to address climate change.

Obviously, this government doesn't like to talk about those action changes, but they had enormous positive impact on our province's reduction in emissions. We welcome actions, if they actually work, to reduce emissions, help us adapt to the changing climate and to help mitigate the impacts of climate changes that are already happening.

That means such things as ensuring water bombers are in good repair and properly crewed in time for forest fire seasons – something the government failed to do, despite the warnings they received during the forest fires in Central Newfoundland. It also means foreseeing risk before floods occur, strengthening the infrastructure, moving people out of harm's way and responding more quickly with assistance after disasters happen, whether it's in Trepassay, Port aux Basques or elsewhere.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time is up.

I gave you an additional 30 seconds as it was.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

This government continues to leave workers out of the discussion when it comes to the low-carbon future. If we truly want a sustainable province and earnest efforts to engage and consult with the public, it must be undertaken by this government. However that cannot be achieved solely on a virtual model questionnaire.

We ask that the minister undertake meaningful engagement with workers and the general public in person to have these discussions.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you.

Speaker, I rise today to highlight the completion of construction of the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: Which I would like to remind Members is the largest building project undertaken by the provincial government in over 40 years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: Last week, the state-of-the-art facility was officially handed over to the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services by the Corner Brook Health Partnership. I'm still looking for the keys from the Member for Corner Brook.

Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services will now begin the process of moving equipment and staff into the new

hospital, with the goal of welcoming patients in the spring of 2024 – less than six months away.

During construction, the percentage of residents on this project from Newfoundland and Labrador was consistently greater than 90 per cent. We will continue to work closely with our partners to ensure all of our infrastructure projects are providing maximum employment for local workers and companies.

Speaker, I want to acknowledge the Transportation and Infrastructure project management team for their hard work, who are here in the gallery today. The project was on time and on budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: The project was completed to the exact day to which government committed when the project contract was signed.

The new hospital will offer an expanded Cancer Care Program including radiation services, in addition to all of the same services presently available at the existing Western Memorial Regional Hospital.

Combined with the connected 145 bed long-term care home that opened in 2020, it now forms a significant health care campus in Corner Brook.

This project represents a major milestone in our efforts to improve health care service delivery across the province. We look forward to seeing the same positive outcomes on other major infrastructure projects, like the new adult mental health and addictions hospital here in St. John's and the next HMP.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, everyone on this side of the House supports improving hospital infrastructure in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: This important centerpiece of health care on the entire West Coast is long overdue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Part two coming now, Speaker.

Unlike the long-term care facilities in Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor, I do hope there are not hundreds of deficiencies and issues to be corrected before patients can actually be moved in. The Liberal government loves a good follow-up but sadly reality is often different than perception.

The minister has also mentioned the new adult mental health and addictions hospital, which I remind the minister is taking 1½ years longer and \$39 million more to construct under the Liberal procurement plan. History will judge that process and value for taxpayer money, Speaker.

I lastly note, the minister's statement did not mention the laundry service or the new PET scanner as a part of the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital. I only can assume that this was an innocent oversight.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Glad to see that this is completed for people of the West Coast of Newfoundland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. BROWN: I hope this government can quickly resolve the health care retention problem so that the hospital doesn't go the way of other health care facilities in this province with beds empty and without any staff that work in there.

This government rushed to applaud the P3 project, forgetting that health care workers are what will actually turn the tide of this health crisis, not just shiny new buildings with no workers to work inside them. I hope that this is a big part of their plan.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the sudden shutdown of the province's only paper mill has put shockwaves through the West Coast of the province.

I ask the Premier: Has he spoken to Joe Kruger and can he provide an update?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have not spoken with Mr. Kruger just yet. Certainly, this is of concern to us. We certainly value that asset and, more importantly, the hard-working women and

men who work in that facility and those that are supporting it in the forestry industry.

I can guarantee you this government will be there for them, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: That's good to hear, Mr. Speaker.

I just hope it doesn't take as long as it took for the fishery earlier in April.

People on the West Coast need to know that the Premier has their back and we need to find out from Mr. Kruger what exactly is going on.

Eight years, 95 months and 2,886 days, that is how long it took this Liberal government to produce any semblance of a poverty reduction strategy. Eight months ago, March 2023, the Seniors' Advocate reported 25 per cent of seniors can't afford their medications. She also reported that 60 per cent didn't have enough to purchase the food they need, but the Premier's so-called poverty reduction plan said: "A targeted poverty reduction plan for seniors will be released in the coming months. This will be informed by further stakeholder conversations"

Premier, how much more data do you need to provide the seniors who are struggling?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me first thank the Seniors' Advocate for her report.

This side of the House certainly values seniors in our province. We know, just like everyone else in the province, they have

significant challenges when it comes to living.

That said, we know that there are unique challenges, given their aged demographic and the challenges that they face from a demographic perspective, a health perspective and a cost-of-living perspective.

That's why we took the extraordinary measure of having a Cabinet Committee focused on seniors, Mr. Speaker, in addition to making sure that we didn't lump seniors in with the rest of the poverty reduction program. We wanted to make sure that we had targets that worked for them.

This report will help us refine the analytics to make sure that we're doing what's best for seniors in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Eight years, 95 months and 2,886 days and we're still not there.

Speaker, Mary Moylan, an 80 year old working to make ends meet recently spoke out about the high cost of living for seniors. Quote: It affects the contentment and peace of a person's life. She said the Liberal government is – quote – kicking the can down the road on support for our seniors.

Again, Premier, after almost a decade, why are seniors still waiting for a poverty reduction strategy?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you want to quote numbers and timelines, Mr. Speaker, 10 years and almost \$14 billion. It's taken up a tremendous amount of this government's revenue sources to ensure that we're addressing electricity

rates so that they don't double for that senior, Mr. Speaker.

We'll continue to make sure that we are putting plans in place to support the seniors. It has to be separate. We want to make sure we get it right and it will take some time, but I encourage the Member opposite to reflect on how long it has taken to complete Muskrat Falls and how much money that it's taken from the hands of seniors in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the Premier likes to talk about Muskrat Falls. The Premier oversees a \$10-billion budget. This is about better decision-making. This is about better choices.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: With \$10 billion over the last eight years, surely you could have found a way to introduce a poverty reduction strategy.

Again, I ask the Premier: Will he take one of the recommendations of the Seniors' Advocate and index the Seniors' Benefit plan?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't have to remind the Member opposite that the deal that they locked in for Muskrat Falls would have seen that senior's electricity rates double. It's because of this government that we prevented those rates from doubling.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: Five point two billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, \$3.2 billion of new money to

ensure that that senior's electricity rate does not double. In addition, we fought the federal government to make sure that the carbon tax didn't apply to home heating fuel. That's what we're doing to look after seniors, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to do more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Let me remind the Premier of the hurting taxes that the Liberal Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and his Trudeau Liberal friends have implemented in Newfoundland and Labrador, whether it's a carbon tax, whether it's a sugar tax –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – and every other tax that's impacted the lives of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what we're talking about, the cost of living here.

Speaker, approximately 1,400 seniors were consulted by the Seniors' Advocate. At the same time, the Seniors' Benefit hasn't changed since 2016 and the cost of living for seniors has skyrocketed.

Again, I ask the Premier: Why are you keeping seniors in poverty? Why will you not introduce a poverty reduction strategy?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Surely, the Member opposite realizes that seniors use electricity in this province – they either use electricity to heat their homes or they use furnace fuel, Mr. Speaker, to heat their homes.

I want to take a second to address the carbon tax. Finally, it came up again today. I want to ensure the people of Newfoundland

and Labrador understand that we fought against the federal government to have home heat excluded.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: You want to waste your Question Period arguing back and forth, go ahead.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

You have 17 more seconds.

A. FUREY: Well, let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to develop the seniors' poverty reduction strategy to ensure it meets the unique demands of seniors. All I can say is that it wasn't appropriate to have it amongst the rest of the poverty reduction strategies that we've had put in place, some of which address food security, childhood poverty and, I can assure you, it'll be a robust plan that deals with the –

SPEAKER: The Premier's time is expired.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, we all know who introduced carbon tax to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – the Furey Liberal government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We also know who introduced and supported the increase in the carbon tax – the Furey Liberal government. That's a fact. Those are facts, not fiction.

I ask the Premier: The Seniors' Advocate has said that medical transportation is an issue for seniors in our province.

Will the Premier commit to 100 per cent reimbursement for medical transportation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me take an opportunity to address the preamble. With respect to the carbon tax, we have been fighting that. I'm glad that he thinks I've been here for eight years but I wasn't here when it was first introduced, Mr. Speaker. When the federal government tried to change it to get rid of exemptions, we stood up for Newfoundland and Labrador. We ensured that was cut out. It was carved out so that the home heat was not included and we'll continue to fight the federal government with respect to the carbon tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: The facts are, Speaker, they didn't get concerned about carbon tax until they started to slip in the polls. That's when they got concerned about carbon tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: When the revenue wasn't going into their budget anymore. That's when they got concerned about carbon tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. WAKEHAM: I ask the Premier once again: Will you reimburse seniors for their medical transportation at 100 per cent?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to address the question.

I would just like to take a moment to speak to the preamble. As the carbon tax was identified and as we had discussions and more information became available as to what would benefit or disadvantage Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, this government made a decision that that was no longer appropriate. We changed our minds, we changed our plan and we had a new initiative to address the carbon tax and to petition the federal government.

I would ask if the Members opposite are so concerned about people being able to change their mind and forgiveness once new information comes to light, once you support something or support a person and then you change your mind, is there retribution to be felt by the Member opposite and the Leader of the Opposition for those who follow his track?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, full on defence mode across the way. If they can't get anything, they come back with Muskrat Falls. They refuse to take ownership for carbon tax and when the Premier gets tired, he gets his other ministers up defending this carbon tax. They supported it and brought in carbon tax for Newfoundland and Labrador. This government here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, seniors are worse off under this Liberal government. According to the Seniors' Advocate, while other provinces are not forcing low-income seniors to pay out of their own pocket for home care services, seniors already living on low income must pay more.

I ask the minister: Why?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure where the Member has been in terms of some of what we've done for seniors in this province. Yes, we can do more. The Seniors' Advocate has identified that. We will continue to do more, Mr. Speaker.

But seniors were a large focus of the Health Accord. In the Health Accord, it's a 10-year transition plan, as the Member knows. We've provided free drivers medicals for those 75 years of age and older, a 15 per cent increase in the Income Supplement, the 15 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit, the reduction in the cost of vehicle registration, the elimination of sales tax on home insurance, Mr. Speaker. That is on top of a number of other things that we've done, such as the senior-friendly emergency departments that we've announced; the centres of excellence for seniors; cardiac cath –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll remind the minister I've been here watching this government flounder. He's wondering where I'm to. I'm still looking across the way for years watching them flounder and they continue to flounder.

Speaker, the Seniors' Advocate says the current model is – quote – forcing seniors prematurely into personal long-term care homes. The report says seniors in receipt of full the Seniors' Benefit are still expected to pay out of pocket for home care.

I ask the minister: Why are you forcing those with the lowest incomes to pay out of pocket for health care?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Speaker, I would just like to take a moment to reflect upon a statement that was made by the Member opposite, the Member for CBS, when in reference to the carbon tax he said: Mr. Chair, is as much as you want to say it's a Newfoundland approach and a made-in-Newfoundland approach, this is a federal project, federal initiate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. HOWELL: So I would like to remind the Members opposite that they did have an understanding of what was a made-in-Newfoundland approach. However, now they've changed their mind and they seem to think that the blame falls solely on the provincial government.

Again, I ask the Members opposite, if there is a penalty for changing your mind in what you do and do not support, I'd be fearful for some of the Members on the other side.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

AN HON. MEMBER: Boom.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, there is no booms over here.

There is no one on that side of the House that can ever lecture me. I don't have to take lessons from anyone on that side of the House. We've been watching them for years and they will continue – I remind them – to

flounder and yes, they did support carbon tax. They're a big part of the reason why carbon tax is here and now they're trying to back out.

So I will ask again because the seniors would like an answer to this question. Speaker, seniors are worse off today after almost a decade of Liberal government. In 2016, the Liberals made it more expensive for low-income seniors to access home care, that is according to the Seniors' Advocate.

Why does the Liberal government continue to take money out of seniors' pockets?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we've been focused, including the increases to personal care homes, to ensure that good service is provided to the seniors of this province. There are a number of initiatives that we continue to put in place in this province for seniors. We put an RFP out for dementia adult daycare in the province, dementia services, for rehab services for seniors in this province and for restorative care for seniors. We've released the *Dementia Care Action Plan*, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to focus on seniors, including the seniors' poverty reduction strategy that the Premier had announced last week that we are working on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I can only assume the minister is suggesting that the Seniors' Advocate is wrong. We're going by the Seniors' Advocate report. What he's saying there is refuting what she is saying. Maybe he needs to tell the Seniors' Advocate that she is wrong and then she can respond.

Speaker, the Liberal governments' Review of the Statutory Offices recommended the Seniors' Advocate receive investigative powers. More power means more ability to advocate for seniors and improve their lives.

Will the government commit to implementing this recommendation, among others?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I need to speak about the preamble of the Member where he tries to insinuate that somebody is saying that the Seniors' Advocate is wrong. Mr. Speaker, in a previous question, I have identified that fact that we have done a great deal for seniors. The Seniors' Advocate has raised some point, including the points raised by the Seniors' Advocate; I have indicated we need to continue to focus on making life more affordable for seniors. That is part of what the seniors poverty reduction strategy will be, Mr. Speaker.

We have also put in place a Cabinet Committee on Seniors, which has come up with a number of the initiatives and focusing on a number of the initiatives that we have outlined, which has been referred to in the Health Accord in this province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Obviously, he just answered my question; he does this (inaudible).

This question is for the Government House Leader or the Premier. Will you commit to implementing the recommendations of the statutory review committee that asks for more powers for the Seniors' Advocate?

Simple question, Minister.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've had to obviously take some time to review the report, and I want to thank everyone who worked on that report and provided it to us so we could focus statutory Officers to do the job that they've been asked to do by the House. Obviously we had some issues with them in the past, where reports were being filed and we didn't know who they were supposed to be looked at, who was supposed to review them and we even saw reports from Members of the House that were filed.

The report we got back was that there was no basis for evidence at all to file those reports, so it was clearly a waste of time. Those reports didn't need to be filed, so we'll address all those in the future; part of the review is for us to look at it all and work forward to make sure it works better in the future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, the Seniors' Advocate has also condemned the abuse of no-fault evictions, where seniors are being evicted with nowhere to go. The minister has previously stated that these evictions don't exist.

Does she now agree with the Seniors' Advocate?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

We have a system of residential tenancies in Newfoundland and Labrador and we try

and balance the needs of the landlord and the needs of the tenant, Speaker.

I will say that Newfoundland and Labrador is equal or better than five provinces in Canada when we look at the notice that landlords are required to give tenants. Newfoundland and Labrador provides more or equal notice than five other provinces.

We do have a dispute resolution process that's quasi-judicial, Speaker, and if anyone is interested – if anyone is unhappy or unclear about a decision or an eviction or anything like that, they can reach out to our office; we have a team of people who can give them some help.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, equal or better than five provinces in the country is little consolation to the seniors that are on the street.

Why are we one of the only places in the country that allows landlords to put seniors out on the street, with no-fault evictions?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a very stressful situation for anyone who receives an eviction notice and I imagine that's a very stressful time. As an MHA, I help constituents with that as well.

We have a system here where we balance the rights of landlords and tenants, and in all provinces, Speaker, landlords can give tenants a notice period and require them to be evicted. It is difficult, but we can't tell landlords that there's no means for them to evict their tenants.

We do have to balance the rights between landlords and tenants, and as a government I'm very proud of the measures that we've put in place to help tenants and to help people who come on hard times, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, the Advocate said – quote – seniors are devastated after being put out onto the street. Community advocates have spoken out; poverty advocates have spoken out and now an independent Officer of this House of Assembly has spoken out.

When is the minister finally going to take action to protect the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

P. PIKE: Thank you for the questions regarding the Seniors' Advocate report. Whenever I speak of seniors, I always think about the great job that they have done in the communities that they live in and the fact that they were able to raise families there and live there and now be part of age-friendly communities. Which is very much part of what our government is trying to put forward and so on.

We do have established a Cabinet Committee on Seniors, which is working quite hard in its commitment to make inclusive, age-friendly communities.

I just want to point out as well, through *Budget 2023*, we invested in a wide range of programs for seniors, which include the Seniors' Benefit – there was a 15 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit – and the Newfoundland and Labrador –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, the Liberal's poverty reduction plan does not include anything for Indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples need more than an apology from the Premier.

Why did the Liberal plan fail to include anything to address the cost of living in northern and remote communities?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Speaker, thank you again for the question.

As the Member opposite referenced, the Premier has spent a significant amount of time in the communities and he's been working with the Indigenous leadership here in the province.

I know that the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation has been working very closely as a part of that conversation, so that all the apologies that have been issued are appropriate and respectful to the communities and to the individuals who have been impacted by the harms of residential schools.

As we continue to work with our communities, work with our Indigenous leadership, those are plans and discussions that will continue and we'll continue to work towards a path of reconciliation. As the Premier has mentioned before, the path to reconciliation is often not a straight line. There'll be steps forward, there'll be steps

back, but the important thing is to endure and to work together to reach the end goal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I suggest to the Member that she visit Labrador, because apologies do nothing for the cost of living up there.

Speaker, food security for Indigenous communities is a huge problem, yet it is not mentioned in the Liberal poverty reduction plan. Why?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to poverty, we know that there's a higher burden in our remote, rural and Indigenous communities, Mr. Speaker. That's why we increased the child poverty benefit by 300 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: We increased the prenatal nutritional supplement to extend it to five years old, from prenatal to one. That's going to serve the people of Labrador, Mr. Speaker. It's going to help with food security and it's going to help people who suffer from child poverty in our rural, remote communities, especially in Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Premier, you never even mentioned the word "Indigenous." Remember that. There was nothing in the plan.

Fuel security is a huge issue in northern and remote communities, with supply issues and

some of the highest fuel costs in the country.

Why was this issue not even mentioned in the Liberal's poverty reduction plan?

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

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

I had the good fortune to be up in the Coast of Labrador and met with the Inuit community leaders to talk about many of the issues that the Opposition have raised. We talked about the price of food. We talked about the price of fuel and other essentials for those communities.

The interesting thing to note is that in terms of the service we're providing, as a province, there's not much to dispute. It's a reliable service that gets the shipment of goods and services and foodstuffs to those communities. What we have found and through our discussions with the Inuit leadership and our team is that we have a Canadian federal nutrition supplement program that is not working. That is the source of many of the issues right now.

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, people living with disabilities are not mentioned in the poverty reduction strategy. Aging parents with children living with disabilities are concerned about how they will be cared for, especially without access to accessible homes.

I ask the minister: How many persons with disabilities are on the wait-list for accessible housing?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member for her question.

It's an important issue. The Citizens' Representative has provided a report talking about the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families, the supports available to families. We've accepted that report.

I've had a meeting with the Citizens' Representative. We, as a department and as a government, are focused on addressing those issues. We have a Committee in place that is addressing many of these issues. We've already made announcements addressing many of these issues but the issues that the Commissioner has raised that have not yet been addressed, we are working on addressing those as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, it's not a difficult question and we need to identify the numbers and the need in order to properly address it.

Access to timely and specialized services is essential to persons with disabilities. Inclusion Canada Newfoundland and Labrador says many of their members are upset that the poverty reduction plan does not represent their needs.

I ask the minister: Why were there no broad consultations with advocates for persons living with disabilities?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the poverty reduction plan that the province has put forward is inclusive of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We are striving to help all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We do understand that individuals with disabilities and their families face special circumstances. As I've indicated to the Member, in the previous answer, we are focused on the issues that specifically impact and affect individuals with disabilities and their aging parents.

We will continue to work with those individuals. We will continue to work as a government breaking down the silos between departments so that we can better serve those individuals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm deeply concerned of what I heard from residential school survivors in my district last week. Many survivors say that they felt the apology was premature and rushed, given that their quality of life continues to erode. They wanted to see real action first that would help them and their families overcome the legacy of harms inflicted upon them.

So I ask the Premier: What do you say to those survivors?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, recognizing the importance of the issue that the Member opposite is raising, the Premier has taken significant steps in working with the leadership of the Indigenous communities to craft apologies that are meaningful and substantial to the members of the communities that they represent.

So they've taken great time and they've worked diligently to ensure that these apologies were appropriate. I would assume

that the members of the leadership of these Indigenous communities have had stakes in this conversation as well and it will continue, as the Premier and the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs continue to work on a path to reconciliation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, I will give you examples of lasting harm residential school survivors have suffered through.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: An elderly couple last week asked me not to come to their house because they didn't have any oil. Their house was cold and they were worried about me being cold. They asked me not to come, right? They were waiting on their pension cheques so they could buy oil.

So I ask the Premier: Why did your government exclude them and others from my district of the province-wide oil-to-electric rebate?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to stand up and answer this question again for the hon. Member.

As I've said many, many times before to the hon. Member, we're working very closely with our federal partners to try to extend those services to others within this province, both in Labrador –

L. EVANS: (Inaudible.)

B. DAVIS: If the hon. Member would listen or care to listen to me, I listened to her

adequately for her questions. The leader is listening very closely.

I'm concerned to make sure that we want to extend that process right across the province. We're working very closely with the federal partners. We're going to continue to do that and stay tuned.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, in the four-point poverty reduction announcement last week that is missing a plank, I ask the Minister of CSSD: When is this All-Committee on Basic Income set to meet again and will this government commit to tabling a report on the GBI that they're discussing and hopefully to have it soon?

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

P. PIKE: Thank you for the question.

We are meeting on a regular basis. We're hoping to be meeting real soon. I think the last time we met we had to farm out some of the things – committees and different presentations – we had to do. But we'll be getting at that real soon again. It's a great All-Party Committee. Everybody is extremely involved and we're looking at the province as a whole and hoping that we'll be able to bring something forward in the near future.

People who are sitting on that Committee, that are here, will know that that's where we're to.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the keys for the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital were turned over to government last week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: With the determination of the health action committee, led by Israel Hann, Dwight Ball and the staff at the regional hospital, they made this dream a reality.

I understand that there will be an orientation for staff, equipment to replace in the new facility and patients moved in in a timely manner and hiring of new staff.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services for an expected timeline to have this new facility operational and accepting new patients at the new facility in Corner Brook.

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for his question.

We are very happy to see the new hospital turned over to government, the keys passed over. Mr. Speaker, while we have a hospital that's fully functional and operational, getting the equipment, getting the supplies, getting the staff transitioned from one building into another efficiently and effectively, we do anticipate having patients and receiving patients by late spring, early summer at the latest, at the new facility in Corner Brook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, radiation services is a key component for the new facility and is much needed for the residents of Western Newfoundland and Labrador. I must recognize the former premiers, Dwight Ball and Tom Marshall, and Joy Buckle and Ms.

Sarah Humber for their valuable contribution to have this valuable asset in the new facility.

I met with two radiation technicians hired and a physicist who was hired. Can the minister update the people of Western Newfoundland and Labrador on the recruitment of professionals needed to operate the new radiation unit and expected date that this service will be offered to the residents of Western Newfoundland?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member has indicated, there is a medical physicist and two radiation therapists hired for the new unit already in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of incentives and initiatives put in place, including the Come Home Incentive, to ensure that we recruit to health facilities throughout the province, including the new facility in Corner Brook.

We do anticipate that the new cancer treatment and radiation unit will be operational when we open the doors and start accepting patients late spring, early summer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I'd like to table a document that refers to the Liberal budget

of 2016 for some of the hon. Members on the opposite side so they fully understand how much the Liberal government cut health care by in the 2016-17 budget. This starts off with a \$50-million cut to health care; part of fiscal reality, says the former minister of Health.

SPEAKER: Does the Member have leave to present the document?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

Any further tabling of documents?

In accordance with section 106 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015*, I hereby table a special report of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 4, 2024.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice that I will move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider a resolution for the granting of Interim Supply to His Majesty, Bill 63.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting Health Research Ethics, Bill 64.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

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

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Animal Health and Protection Act, Bill 65.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons for this petition:

WHEREAS individual residents and municipal leaders have spoken to the deplorable road conditions in the District of Harbour Main; and

WHEREAS the district is made up of many smaller communities and towns like Holyrood, Upper Gullies, Seal Cove, Cupids, Colliers, North River, Roaches Line and Makinsons who have roads in desperate need of repair and paving, specifically Routes 60 and 70; and

WHEREAS these roads see high-volume traffic flows every day and drivers can expect potholes, severe rutting, limited shoulders and many washed out areas along the way;

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 take the necessary steps to repair and repave these important roadways to ensure the safety of the driving public who use them on a regular basis.

Speaker, I have presented this petition on numerous occasions, but today I am specifically focussing on Roaches Line. I've raised this area of the District of Harbour Main repeatedly since I've been elected in 2019. It has come to a point where I can no longer remain silent because of the deplorable state of the roads.

How bad are they, Speaker? Let me give this as an example. One of my constituents in Roaches Line actually got a call from a Day & Ross driver who asked him if he could drop off the package to him somewhere in Bay Roberts, as driving over Roaches Line he damages too many items that he's delivering.

How bad are the roads, Speaker? That speaks volumes. The roads are deplorable. They're not only deplorable but they're at the point of being hazardous, Speaker. We're looking at an area that's such an important area. It's an important road. Route 70, Roaches Line, it was the original exit from the TCH to surrounding communities in Conception Bay North, to Brigus, to Cupids, to these important towns.

Cupids, for example, the oldest colony in North America; John Guy's colony heritage dig site. Brigus is one of the most visited sites, tourist spots on the Avalon due to the many attractions in the community: Hawthorne Cottage, which was the home of our famed Arctic explorer Captain Bob Bartlett; the tunnel; the lighthouse walk; the many restaurants and Airbnbs; the Brigus Blueberry Festival, it attracts thousands of tourists. We have the famous TV show, *Rock Solid Builds* highlighting architecture

and new builds in the area and the Newfoundland Distillery in Clarke's Beach.

Roaches Line, Route 70 is a feeder road and it is an important road. It plays important significance. It has economic benefits. It needs resurfacing and we need to see that action now.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

I certainly hear what the Member has to say and I drive that road on a regular basis. We will certainly be considering that and other roads in the Member's district and every other district in the province as we develop our Roads Plan for 2024.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

There are many people in Newfoundland and Labrador who are without a primary care provider. We currently have doctors with provincial licences waiting on Practice-Ready Assessment seats, but those seats are not available at Memorial University.

Therefore, we the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to direct Memorial University to provide Practice-Ready Assessment seats as needed to help licensed doctors so desperately needed. We will need at least 30 seats in the coming months; if this cannot be done, then we request that our Minister of Health and the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association work

together to set up Practice-Ready Assessment outside of Memorial University.

We further call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to appoint at least two individuals with knowledge in this process to help navigate incoming doctors through the process of Practice-Ready Assessment in a timely manner and back through the College of Physicians and Surgeons once they have the Practice-Ready Assessment completed.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, we have a serious issue in this province when it comes to lack of physicians, particularly when it comes to lack of primary care. As this petition is indicating, there seems to be a real disconnect here when it comes to the Practice-Ready Assessments, which are required for doctors that we get from outside to come and practice here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Memorial University does not seem to be supplying enough seats to get this done; they're not getting them through fast enough.

I would say, while I do appreciate and acknowledge the work of the Minister of Health and his officials, since he came there, I have to say, trying to get new doctors here and taking a lot of initiative to do so, but it is a total waste of money to go out recruiting doctors, if, when they try to come here, they cannot get these Practice-Ready Assessments done in order to practice.

There seems to be a real disconnect between recruitment and between MUN and between that College of Physicians and Surgeons and that has to be straightened out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: Order, please!

This being Wednesday, I call upon the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to present the private Member's resolution for this afternoon.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

WHEREAS targeted relief solutions are needed that lift people from crisis, keep their homes warm, ensure their families are fed and healthy; and

WHEREAS many people in Newfoundland and Labrador are struggling to survive soaring food costs, skyrocketing housing costs, gas prices through the roof and a carbon tax on top of all of their other taxes and fees; and

WHEREAS we have seniors sharing medication, or cutting their pills in half, because they can't afford the cost of the medicines they need. Many seniors are living below the poverty line, too poor to stay healthy;

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to: order a complete review of all taxes and fees, cutting or adjusting those that are hurting people; lead the charge to end the carbon tax for good; eliminate the sugar tax; continue the provincial gas tax relief; order a complete review of the Income Support Program and an evaluation of all programs and services intended to support vulnerable populations to ensure they deliver; index the Seniors' Benefit programs to inflation; and deliver a new poverty reduction strategy.

SPEAKER: Could we have a seconder to that motion, please?

T. WAKEHAM: It is seconded by my colleague, the Member for Terra Nova.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, let's just speak to some of the WHEREAS clauses at the beginning: targeted relief solutions. We have talked in

this House and we've seen money being given out for relief solutions, but let me give you a quick example of what I mean by targeted.

Last year, when the government announced \$500 program to give to everybody in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I had an 88-year-old senior from Corner Brook call me. He was very grateful to the government that they had given him \$500 to help with his cost of living. His total income for the year was \$24,000. What he couldn't understand though is that neighbours two doors down, a couple working, were making \$180,000 between them and they got \$1,000. He said to me: I don't understand how that works. I said back to him: Neither do I. Because that's where we spend the money and we target money but we don't target the people who need it the most.

What turned out that could have been a good initiative, doesn't meet the target. That's the problem. We need targeted relief.

The second WHEREAS talks about the struggle to survive with securing food costs, skyrocketing housing costs. Last week I spoke to a young man here in the City of St. John's. He makes \$22 an hour. He's a single dad. He lives in an apartment and has a car with a car payment and he goes to the food bank because the cost of rent has gone up significantly for him. He is struggling. Even at \$22 an hour, he is struggling to survive and to make ends meet.

These are examples of real people that are in our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that are actually having to make tough decisions or to go to food banks. Think about the fact of a 44 per cent increase in food bank usage in our province. If that is not an alarming statistic for everyone in this House of Assembly, then I don't know what is. Because that tells you that there are a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador right now who need help. That's what we're talking about:

targeted help; how do we help these people? How do we help them survive with the cost of living that's happening right now?

Well, a lot of times we, as an Opposition on this side of the floor, always get criticized for only offering criticism and not solutions. Today I have outlined seven different measures which this government could implement, which this government, when we form government, will implement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Right now, let's not play politics; let's talk about people over politics. Right now it's about these measures that we're proposing. I'm not going to turn around and criticize my hon. Minister of Environment if he chooses to implement these seven recommendations. I will applaud them if they choose to do it.

The first one is a review of all taxes and fees that we currently charge, to look at why we are charging a fee and the taxes we're charging and eliminate those taxes that are hurting someone.

Let me tell you a story of when I was the critic for Finance and I was talking with the Minister of Finance – fact – in Estimates and asking about how much money you make off a fee. They couldn't tell me, because we have no idea – and I'm not blaming this on any particular government. This is a fact; the government has no idea of any money they make on fees. In other words, we collect fees but we have no idea what our costs are to administer or collect.

At the end of the day if you were in business and charging \$10 for a product that was costing you \$15 to make, you wouldn't be in business very long. So when we talk about review, we're not talking about simply looking at why we're doing things.

I don't have to talk to anybody here about the carbon tax and the significant impact it

has had on Newfoundland and Labrador. Perhaps more so than anywhere else in the country, when you think of the fact that most everything that we get comes in through transportation of some type, whether it's across the ferry or across Labrador, but we spend a lot of money on transportation of goods and services. And that carbon tax has hurt Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I would argue, more than anywhere else in the country.

While we've got a temporary relief – because that's all it is, temporary relief for the people who are burning fuel oil so they don't have to pay carbon tax on their oil products right now, but it's temporary. The Liberal plan for carbon tax is to increase it three times more. What we're looking at in the future of Liberal governments is a further significant increase in carbon tax, not the elimination of carbon tax, but a significant increase in carbon tax. That's what you have coming to us.

We have to continue to argue and find ways that that carbon tax has to go. The sugar tax is a self-inflicted tax made in Newfoundland and Labrador. As they like to say on NTV: Made right here. Made right here by the Liberal government. There is no evidence that this sugar tax is impacting any health outcomes. There is no evidence in Newfoundland and Labrador –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

T. WAKEHAM: I'm being told it's not true; you show me the document. You table the document right here, right now that says Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are better off and outcomes are better off.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Now, if the minister talks about too much sugar is not good for you, I agree 100 per cent with him. Totally agree with him; totally agree with what the Canadian Diabetes Association says; totally agree with all of those; will not argue.

But what I would suggest, if we're really going to help people reduce their consumption of sugar, then let's do it through education and not taxation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That, to me, is what we should be talking about. Let's talk about how we help people, not hurt people. Because sugar tax is a hurtful tax.

I can show you the receipt that I have right here from a lady in my district who went to the local supermarket and turned around and bought a container of fruit punch. It was powder. The containers that she bought cost \$4.60. When she went to the cash register and checked in, it was over \$16. When she inquired why, the clerk told her there was \$11 in sugar tax applied to that \$4.60 purchase because it's all based on how much volume of product is produced.

Now, how can we defend that, if somebody goes in to buy a \$4.60 item, turns around and has to pay \$11 in carbon tax? I'm sure we'll all have a lot more to say and I'll have a part at the end to say.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to highlight the work of our government and, in particular, the work of my Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development in supporting individuals and families, especially those living in poverty.

Just over three years ago, our government set out to transform Newfoundland and Labrador by taking action to make significant investments in initiatives that would prove the overall well-being of

individuals and families. This includes placing a heightened focus on the social determinants of health in both spending and policy decisions.

As a government, our record is already strong. We have spent over half a billion dollars to help ease pressures attached to the higher cost of living. We have increased spending on income support, increased the minimum wage and introduced a basic income pilot project for youth receiving residential services.

We recently announced a new five-point plan to incentivize the rapid construction of new housing options and we are continuing to increase availability of public housing options through the affordable housing program that will build over 850 new homes over a three-year period.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Stay tuned tomorrow.

We have also championed and funded initiatives to support age-friendly communities, seniors and social inclusion grants and accessibility and inclusion grants. We prioritized affordable child care from an average of \$40 per day in 2020 to \$25 in 2021, and now there are over 8,000 child care spaces operating at \$10 a day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: As work continues, it is critical that we prioritize the social determinants of health as outlined in the Health Accord as these determinants have far greater impact on well-being than the health care system itself.

Through the province's new poverty reduction plan that the Premier and I announced last week, we are taking further action to better support the well-being of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The new poverty reduction plan is supported by

an investment that will grow to \$85 million annually after the first three years.

This is in addition to more than \$900 million the provincial government allocated in *Budget 2023* for social programming and support for low-income individuals and families. Informed by community stakeholders, Indigenous and municipal governments and, most importantly, people with lived experience, this new three-year, phased-in program has four key focus areas and associated actions to better support the well-being of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The first focus area is reducing childhood poverty which has three action items: Expanding the Prenatal Infant Nutrition Supplement and renaming it the Prenatal Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement to better reflect its expanding scope. The expansion means more than 500 families with the lowest income will receive \$150 monthly benefit for an additional four years; increasing the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit by 300 per cent over two years which will benefit approximately 14,000 children and families with the lowest income.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: The third action under this intervention is providing additional funding to ensure school lunch programming is available in all pre-kindergarten and K-to-9 schools in the province beginning in September 2024.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: This new funding will result in seeing over 30,000 students have access to school lunch programming, bringing the total to over 45,000 students.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: The second key focus area is creating meaningful and sustainable

employment, which includes the following two actions. We are continuing the Employment Stability program and now making it province-wide, which supports income recipients to attach to the labour market. The second action is providing enhanced programs to train and connect non-unemployment insurance eligible individuals to employment, fabulous measures.

We have also been strengthening our approach to working with income support clients, new Canadians and other eligible individuals to provide employment and training support. This will build on our existing workforce development efforts with this investment of \$170 million this year alone to provide programs and services to help 15,000 individuals secure employment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: The key focus area is improving income which has two sections including streamlining and improving the income support program benefit structure. For example, single people under the age of 30 receiving the lowest rates will receive almost four times their current benefits, bringing them up to the same rate as other adults. More details on these benefit changes will be available in the coming months.

We have begun with increasing the comfort allowance immediately by \$50 per month to a total of \$175 monthly for people staying in temporary accommodations where meals are provided such as the emergency homeless shelters.

The key focus is supporting seniors. That's the final focus. Older adults and seniors have shaped Newfoundland and Labrador's communities. As a government, we value their role in building our economy and raising families and we appreciate the pressures that they are facing due to the high cost of living, which is impacting everyone globally.

There are three main action items to help further support seniors which include: implementing a second targeted basic income pilot for people aged 60 to 64 who currently receive income support and the community supports program through the Department of Health and Community Services.

These same individuals receive an increase of payments to match the federal senior benefit that they would receive at 65. This will allow for more adequate and stable financial supports.

Next is the targeted poverty reduction plan for seniors that will be released in the coming months. This will be informed by further stakeholder conversations.

Third: the ongoing work of the Cabinet Committee on Seniors which will continue to foster inclusive age-friendly communities. We anticipate that further measures to help seniors manage the higher cost of living will soon be released.

This new poverty reduction plan recently announced creates the framework to better focus on the social factors that impact people's health, which is critical to well-being in our province.

Before I conclude, I'd like to sincerely thank the community stakeholders, Indigenous and municipal governments and, most importantly, the people with lived experience for helping to inform the development of the poverty reduction plan. It is essential that together we continue to collaborate in order to build an environment that supports people to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

In conclusion, Speaker, we are excited to take this next step forward in our journey to further improve the health and well-being of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

The minister just stated in his opening address to us that as a government, our record is already strong. He stated that. I would say that the people that are watching this afternoon and the people that are living out there in Newfoundland and Labrador are going to determine how successful the initiatives that were put forth by this government are.

That's the way it works. We do an initiative. We measure it to see how effective it is and the people will tell us that all is well. We are doing quite well. If we are doing quite well, it'll be our residents that we serve in Newfoundland and Labrador that are going to tell us that all is well.

I would say, from me interacting with those in the District of Bonavista, all is not well. All is not well. I think most in the House would agree with that.

So let's look at some initiatives. The minister had stated 15 per cent. I'm not sure if he referenced income support or the Newfoundland Seniors' Benefit. If we look at 15 per cent on the Newfoundland Seniors' Benefit that we hear: We added 15 per cent on the Newfoundland Seniors' Benefit; we did it. Well, according to the Seniors' Advocate report, that equates to \$200 per year. How much a month? It is \$16.67 a month.

So to say that we've put 15 per cent on the Newfoundland Seniors' Benefit and we've provided seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador that avail of the benefit, \$16.67 a month, that's not a lot and that's not going to move the needle. I think the minister would agree that alone is not going to move the needle.

I asked some questions in the House this sitting and I remember I asked the government: What new initiatives are we going to bring forth this year? The Minister of Environment and Climate Change stood up, and when the minister stood up he stated about the move from oil to heat pumps and a good initiative. Nobody is complaining that's a good initiative. It's a good initiative. Last year it rolled out improperly. Improperly in the fact last year most people who had a low income couldn't avail of it.

The second rollout in the second year, we find people are very attracted to it and they can avail of it up to \$17,000 to put the heat pumps in their home. But what wasn't planned or what wasn't forecast by this government is that it's going to take the whole winter for them to ever get a heat pump in their house. At least in the District of Bonavista.

I put in one application for a heat pump and an electric furnace on September 15. It says six weeks. As of now, November 15, they don't have that processed yet. What was six weeks is now eight weeks and 12 weeks because it's a good program and people are availing of it, but it's not going to help them out this winter.

The Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, a couple of weeks ago, cited an article that came up in *The Telegram*. This article, there was no author, but the only thing that wasn't mentioned was this was Westland Insurance. Westland Insurance used data from the Canada statistical agency. The minister stated that three times in his address when he answered questions that day; never once did he use Westland Insurance of where it comes from. I would say to you, I'm not sure if he forgot the name of the study or whether he conveniently left it out, but he sure remembered the stats that Westland was drawing from.

Shortly after he mentioned that, that we are doing quite well, I've got a letter or an email from residents in the District of Bonavista. I'd like to be able to read it into the record in the short time I have. I'll try to speed it up, to make sure I get it in there.

My wife and I can't work due to health issues and we're living on provincial government income support. If you double the amount that we have to live off, we would still be below the poverty line. The Newfoundland drug program does not cover the entirety of our meds, and with the insane rise of the cost of living, our situation becomes more dire each day.

The amount of income support that we qualify for is not that much higher than it would have been 30 years ago. Yet, due to inflation over those years, especially the last few years, folks like us are worse off now than we would have been in this exact same situation 30 years ago. It's insane when you stop to think about it.

We own our own house – without a mortgage, but it's an old house. It was not lived in for a while before we moved here in 2014, back when I was still able to work. My plan was to fix it up a little bit each year, as I could afford it, but then I had to stop working due to the onset of health issues.

We have kitchen cabinets and closets that have no paint and no doors. The flooring is totally worn out and in a lot of places the underlay is showing as the flooring has completely worn through. The front door of the house and the door box is rotted that bad it has been sealed shut and can't be used anymore. The back door that we use is broke off in the middle and is rotted where the hinges attaches to it. The taps in the shower and bathtub are broken. The hot water tap in the bathroom sink is broken and on and on the list goes. We can't afford to fix this stuff. We can't even afford groceries at this point.

Please go ahead and invite the minister who said that all was quite well, citing Westland Insurance, to come to Bonavista and visit me here in my home. I'd love for him to see the condition of this house that my wife and I have to live in and for him to sit as we tell him how we have to live and the amount of money that we have to live on. We have to rely on the food bank and family members for food to help us get by to stay alive.

That is what some people are living with under the system that we've created. And I would say that when the Seniors' report is released and the Seniors' report says 8 per cent of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador are visiting the food bank, the minister across is going to stand to his feet shortly and hopefully have a few words and he won't reference the 15,000 people that visited a food bank in March. If it is 8 per cent of the 15,000, that would mean that 1,200 of our seniors have visited a food bank in March.

I would say to you that is unacceptable. So when the minister says, and he quotes Westland Insurance, that we're doing quite well in Newfoundland and Labrador and when the Minister of Environment and Climate Change stands up and says listen, this is the one thing that we put out that works, and it's a good thing, we need more in order to transition to help out the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Before my time elapses, the Premier today stated 300 per cent – 300 per cent – we've increased the Newfoundland Child Benefit – good thing. Everyone states it's a good thing. In 2018, in this government's tenure, we had amongst the lowest amount ever awarded or given out for a Child Benefit. If you say three times that, we're still significantly below several provinces in Canada. So how you present what you're doing matters.

How you present a 15 per cent increase, you're not over there standing up saying \$16.67 is what we gave seniors in

Newfoundland and Labrador. That doesn't fly. You say then 15 per cent. Seniors, they hardly see it.

I look forward to hearing other speakers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm happy to stand up here; I wasn't planning on this –

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh yes, you were.

A. PARSONS: Oh, no, no, I was planning on sitting here, listening and being enlightened here today.

But I have no choice but to respond when the Member for Bonavista gets up, and it's not me he's questioning, really. He's questioning –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: No. Again, I say to the Member, my God, I'll table the document so you can actually read it, okay. I'll table the document. Do you know what? What I'll do is I'll let everybody, including your couple in Bonavista – I think if people go back, and what you should do is go back to those questions I read and take the answers and the questions and refer them. Use some context there because I don't think at any point in this House, on either side, I have ever stood up and said things were perfect. I never had the benefit on that side of sitting there listening to a Minister of Finance stand up – the hon. Tom Marshall stood up and said: Mr. Speaker, we are flush with cash. That's what a speaker said when I was in the Opposition. He stood up and said: I am flush – flush with cash.

But I can tell you what, since December 15, 2015, we have never had that opportunity. We have never had that opportunity.

Now, I'll get to this now in a second, but the first thing I had to bring up is the information that the Member referenced for the couple in Bonavista. Again, I point out to everybody, as I said multiple, multiple times, this is from *The Telegram*, which is a part of the SaltWire chain. There wasn't an author because it's from the Atlantic Briefs Desk. But I'm assuming that when you put out a publication, that it is vetted, especially when you're putting it out for the public to read, that it is vetted. And if you have an issue with the content, you should go to the publisher and say: Hey, I think what you're saying is fraudulent because I don't believe that happened.

What I did was I referred to the article. The headline was NL has Canada's lowest cost of living: study. So I didn't make that up, that was refer to: Atlantic Canadian provinces rank within the top five cheapest places to live along with Quebec.

Now, my point was, I was combatting the questions that were being raised by the Member opposite using statistics and objective articles from other studies. Now, we could get up all day and say things are perfect; no, things are terrible. It's sort of rinse, lather and repeat. That's what happens, but at no point did I stand up here and say things are absolutely perfect.

Every single Member in this House hears from their constituents who are having a difficult time – every single one of us. There is no exclusivity because it's a PC district that things are tough there and they're rosy over here. The fact is, it's tough everywhere.

What I will point out – and I point this out from my travels throughout the province, throughout the country and sometimes I get to go and represent the province elsewhere

– we are not alone. We are not alone. We are facing this issue everywhere.

If you go talk to your colleagues in other Legislatures, same as I do – and, again, most of the ones I'll point out now, most of the colleagues I point out, especially energy ministers, they're not Liberal. They're PC. They're Conservative. They're not the same stripe, but we sort of get together when we have conferences and everybody says: Man, same issue here. Especially when health care was the number one issue, every minister said: Man, we're getting beat up on health care, too. It didn't matter what province you were from, you got beat up on that because it was a huge issue everywhere.

So I need to point that out. It's not a Liberal issue. It's not a PC issue. These conversations have been going on for some time, but, again, I go back to the main point here, is that I was referring to an article that I read in *The Telegram* that I pointed out here in the House: "Using data from Statistics Canada and the Canadian Real Estate Association, a Western Insurance study" So he's right, it's a Western Insurance study.

Now, if you want to go to Western Insurance to complain about that or complain about the source of their stats, that is fine, but to say that I'm putting it out there that everything is rosy. That's a misrepresentation. That is a misrepresentation. I can guarantee you that there's no media source that sits there and says, we're going to put out something today that's going to make government look good today.

That's not how it happens and I can tell you, I realized that on the other side. That's just how it goes. The media sometimes, it's not within their interest. Again, sometimes they have an editorial event, that's fine. But in this case, it seemed to me to be an objective article. Again, I refer to the title: Newfoundland and Labrador has Canada's

lowest cost of living according to this study using Statistics Canada data. So I had to point that out.

Now, I'm not going to use all my time, but I'm going to get to one of the specific points. It's comes up a lot when we talk about energy and we talk about the sugar tax specifically, which I think brought in, in the realm of, about \$12 million.

Now, my understanding – correct me if I'm wrong – is that every single dollar of that is to go to healthy living activities, whether it's school lunches –

AN HON. MEMBER: Active NL.

A. PARSONS: Active NL, glucose monitoring, things like that, that's fine. But I'll point out, it's interesting, we would need 17½ sugar taxes to pay for the amount that this government had to pay this year in March, which was \$190 million, is what we had to pay to implement rate mitigation so that customers would avoid having those costs recovered on their bill. So that's what we did to limit future customer rate increases and reduce financing costs, to basically keep those rates low.

We know that there are struggles everywhere. There are struggles with food, struggles with fuel and struggles with heat. But I can tell you, if we didn't do this one it would have been felt pretty equally everywhere; people would have felt this.

So what did we have to do? In March, we had to announce that we were going to come up with \$190 million to take care of heat costs from a decision that I can guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, didn't belong to us.

So to get there and say oh, you should have done this, you should have done that. Well, nobody is going to say we shouldn't have done this, but I do wish that we had a few more sugar taxes, I guess, to pay for this.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

A. PARSONS: I hear some comments from the other side. If they want to stand up and talk about what we had to do to pay for this, if we shouldn't have done that, but it's called putting in some context.

Now, we could talk about sugar tax, there is an equal sort of – one side says we shouldn't have done it, one side says you should. But not everybody on the other side feels this way; not everybody on that side feels that way and I'll tell you why because it is funny.

Back in 2017, I had a Member on the opposite side –

AN HON. MEMBER: PC Member, Opposition.

A. PARSONS: An Opposition PC Member on the other side in 2017 put a post on Facebook and in that he said: In this province, we have two huge problems, debt and obesity, especially in children. Why are we not taxing the junk food, which is so easily accessible and cheap for our kids to put in their mouths? Why don't we tax – and again, I will table this if people want me to table it.

Again, going back to the original point here, I am just referencing the material that's public. I didn't write it. In the first case, it was written by a reporter. In this case, it was written by a PC MHA: Why don't we tax the hell out of the garbage our children are eating so it is less accessible and, in turn, it would decrease child obesity? This is a sound solution. So I ask: Why are we not doing this?

Again, Mr. Speaker, don't take it from me, take it from the PC who said it. When we talk about Stats Canada, take it from the people that wrote it. I just felt like I had to put that on the record.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very honoured to stand here to speak on this very important private Member's resolution on the cost of living. I also would like to bring some context to this debate and some focus, perhaps, as to what really the important issues are that need to be addressed here.

When we look at the struggles that we are seeing, that our seniors are facing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – in Newfoundland and Labrador we only have to, first of all, look to the report from the Seniors' Advocate: *What We Heard*. Now we have another follow-up: *What Golden Years?* That was recently released this week. It's very important for us to focus our attention and to look at the objective information that we receive here without the political drama that we see displayed here just recently.

The government says they're never claiming they're perfect, and we're not asking for perfection in the programs and in how our seniors are treated. We're just asking that our seniors receive the proper respect and dignity that they need. I would submit that is not happening now, Speaker.

I've spoken to many of my constituents in the District of Harbour Main. I've heard from them even just as early as this week through emails and phone calls. Seniors are struggling, but the bottom line – we need to be clear about what the issue is here – is the cost of living is higher than it's ever been and that essentially seniors' financial

resources have not kept pace with these increases. That's the bottom line. It's really not complicated.

I heard from a senior today that said basically seniors are on fixed incomes; that's the main issue. Their income does not increase, yet the cost of living does. It's not only increased, but it has doubled. This is having the impact of having seniors to go further and further into debt. They're further and further in the hole each month because they cannot keep up. They cannot keep up with the cost of groceries and they cannot keep up with the cost of fuel and oil and gas for their cars, to heat their homes.

As the Seniors' Advocate in her recent report has said, unless we address the financial needs of seniors and ensure they have access to safe affordable housing, adequate and nutritious food and necessary health care, they're going to have continued poor health outcomes, they're going to have early admission into government-subsidized residential options and they're going to have reduced quality of life, Speaker. That is the path that they're on.

So when we look at what these reports say to us, we need to have government to recognize this is a reality check. These are real people that are struggling and suffering right now. I heard from another constituent on this issue, and this was really heartbreaking, Speaker, because she said that her and her husband feel like they are being left behind. They worked all their lives. They raised three children. She said their three children are doing well, thank God. They own their own home, yes. But now her husband is suffering stage 3 cancer; he's only getting a CPPD. She worked outside the home, but due to an injury, she's now only getting workers' disability.

She said basically the cost of living is destroying them. But do we say that this cost of living is not something that we need to address here in Newfoundland because

it's going on in the rest of the country? We need to look at the fact that this is destroying our people in our province right now. As the Seniors' Advocate has stated, the poverty reduction plan that is in place, that's important.

This report released by her is not meant to replace that. What she's calling upon in this latest report is immediate relief so that we can see money going back into seniors' pockets. The poverty reduction plan is not going to do that in any immediate way, in any urgent way. Yet, our seniors are struggling every month. They are struggling to figure out how they are going to be able to make ends meet.

So we know that the Seniors' Advocate has asked that the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit be indexed, and we are calling upon that in our PMR. We're asking that BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to index the Seniors' Benefit programs to inflation. That would provide immediate relief. The government has power to do that and we're asking them to do that to help the seniors that they represent as well.

I go back to one of my constituents, who were telling me about her and her husband, Speaker. She said the cost of living is destroying them. Yes, they're getting supports from Eastern Health, home care supports, but their co-payment is \$300. The Seniors' Advocate referenced the co-payments and how difficult that is for seniors to be able to pay.

Do you know what she said this past Christmas she had to do? She never had an oven to cook her turkey, because they could not afford to replace the one that was broken, Speaker. Now, that's reality. That's the reality check that this government needs to hear.

These are people who are suffering and who are struggling. Where are the golden years? What happened to the golden

years? Because all of these seniors worked hard their lives – many of them. Most of them worked very hard all their lives to have the comforts of the golden years. But that is an illusion for so many of our seniors, Speaker.

When I look at other seniors I've heard from, they talk about the increase in the cost of living. I spoke to a 75-year-old constituent in the District of Harbour Main. He gave me examples of what he had experienced on a fixed pension income. What about groceries? Well, two years ago, he and his wife could go to the supermarket and pay \$230 for three weeks of groceries. Present day, guess what? They go to the same supermarket and they pay \$457 for the same amount of groceries. Furnace oil, again, two years ago he paid \$300 a month for his furnace oil. Guess what? Today, he's paying \$600 for the same amount for oil.

These are examples, but there are thousands of our seniors throughout the district and throughout the province who are experiencing these same issues. The seniors' income doesn't change, yet the price of everything else is skyrocketing.

Speaker, we have to have immediate action. We need to see this government hear the calls of the Seniors' Advocate to index the Seniors' Benefit. The Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit has to be indexed. They have to do more. They're not doing enough. We're all hearing it from our constituents, from our seniors, and I'm sure they're hearing it over there as well.

I'm calling upon government to look at that and also to be mindful of the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador, when it comes to food banks, we have the highest percentage of seniors that are reaching out to food banks, Speaker.

That is a statistic that we, of course, cannot be very proud of. When we look at the rest of the country, Newfoundland and Labrador

has the highest percentage of seniors that are reaching out to food banks. We have to heed to these serious calls.

On that note, I hope that the government will really take immediate action to help our seniors in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to participate in the debate here this afternoon.

I am interested in the source of a lot of the comments from the Opposition today because they were referencing the Seniors' Advocate and her report. But if memory serves me correctly, it was a certain party in this House that didn't want the Seniors' Advocate. The Liberal government of the day made sure that we did have a Seniors' Advocate. We're very proud of the office and the work she is doing for us and for the people of the province.

The *What We Heard* report and then her recommendations, which are new and which we are certainly taking under consideration – both the minister responsible for Seniors and the Minister Health and Community Services, as well as the Cabinet Committee on Seniors, which I am a Member of. So we will be digesting that report to consider the specific initiatives that we can implement on a go-forward basis.

Getting back to the resolution. I guess, from my perspective, I see the resolution as slightly redundant, and I say that in the context of the first clause. It says: “**WHEREAS** targeted relief solutions are needed that lift people from crisis, keep their homes warm, ensure their families are fed and healthy ...”

That's exactly what this government has been doing over the past two years is identifying, developing and targeting programs that meet the specific needs of different parts of our society, whether it's seniors in need, families in need, youth in need or children in need. So that is something we are doing.

We have laid out – and the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, in his comments, identified the very specific targeted programs that we have implemented or are implementing. He did not complete the full list because the Minister of Finance, who is not here with us right now, she –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. ABBOTT: I'll take that back

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. ABBOTT: Accept my apologies.

The Minister of Finance, in addressing this House on numerous occasions, has specifically identified initiatives that she and the government are implementing. We've reduced taxes. We've put out the fuel rebate, a supplement program. We had the \$500 payment last year to go to housing and families in need –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's getting a little difficult to hear the identified minister.

J. ABBOTT: So again, the Minister of Finance has implemented quite a number of targeted initiatives. The Minister of Health and Community Services identified earlier today what his department is doing, directly and through the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, to meet the needs of seniors and other folks across the province. So that WHEREAS clause is

relevant but it recognizes what the government is currently doing.

When it comes to what the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port is asking – and this is where I do believe it becomes redundant. He says: You should order a complete review of all taxes and fees, cutting or adjusting those that are hurting people. Well, that's exactly what we have done, and we'll continue to do. What have we done with the insurance tax? What have we done with the gas tax? What have we done with other taxes and fees? We've reduced them, eliminated them and held them in abeyance while we are going through this difficult financial time for the province and for many households.

It says: lead the charge to end the carbon tax. The reality is the province does not have the carbon tax; we voted unanimously to eliminate the carbon tax. We do not have a carbon tax. It is gone, kaput. It is over.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

We're having a debate; let's have a debate. I addressed the minister to speak to us; let's have a listen.

Thank you.

The hon. the minister.

J. ABBOTT: So again, I speak to the redundancy; the measure is gone. We do not have a carbon tax, and that is complete. So thank you for that.

It says: eliminate the sugar tax. I think, again, there's been a lot of discussion around the sugar tax. Why we think it's important, it's to support a healthy population. Also, with the revenue, we are

using that to support health living initiatives in this province. You have to tell me which of those initiatives you would not support.

AN HON. MEMBER: We support them all.

J. ABBOTT: Well, thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. ABBOTT: We have targeted – again, using your words – those funds for very specific programs to ensure a healthier population. It says: continue the provincial gas tax relief; that's exactly what we're doing. We are continuing to make sure that our gas tax is one of the lowest in the country and we will continue that until the economy improves and that we can look at should we continue at that level, should we reduce it further, or reinstate it. But for the time being, we are providing that tax relief.

It says: order a complete review of the Income Support Program and an evaluation of all programs and services intended to support vulnerable populations to ensure they deliver. As part of the poverty reduction plan, we've committed to doing that. I know the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development is reviewing the Income Support Program in particular. Although we've already announced certain measures and we are in government, at the present time, reviewing all our programs for the financial thresholds so that they meet current needs, current standards and so that more people can be eligible for programs on a go-forward basis. As I said, we are doing that.

Index the Seniors' Benefit programs to inflation: Well, as we've mentioned, we've increased the Seniors' Benefit and the Income Supplement by 15 per cent, and we will continue to look at that. So that's a measure that we're looking at and we'll look at what the budget can contain for next year

when it comes to looking at these seniors' programs.

Finally, it says, deliver a new poverty reduction strategy. Well, folks, I don't know where you were a week ago, but we announced a plan. A full plan –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It will go a little easier, Minister, if you address your remarks to myself and hopefully the Opposition will calm down. Please, let's have some listening.

Thank you.

J. ABBOTT: Well, Speaker, you're more accommodating than certainly the Opposition, so I will continue to address my remarks to you, Sir.

One week ago today, we announced our poverty reduction plan and a lot of work has been done within government to identify those measures and more to come that addresses the unique needs of unique populations in this province.

Again, those initiatives are targeted to support individuals that are most in need, whether it's youth who are coming out of child protection services, we have a targeted basic income for them.

The Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development has now identified that he wants to implement the targeted basic income for seniors between the ages of 60 and 64.

Third, though the All-Party Committee on Basic Income, we are looking at how that can be expanded to a broader population. So that work continues.

What I really wanted to say here and what I said at the outset, this motion is redundant. The government is acting. We are targeting

the programs and services where they are needed most and we will continue on in that vein while we improve the overall health and well-being of the population of this province that we're here to serve.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Always a pleasure to stand and talk and certainly I just listened to the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi say that this amendment is redundant. This PMR is redundant.

Just think about it. Obviously, you're not talking to people out there in your district. Last time we did a PMR and he stood and spoke, he said there was no health care crisis and just five minutes ago, he asked where we were a week ago, just before he announced that there was no carbon tax in Newfoundland and Labrador. Now, the minister said that: There's no carbon tax in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would suggest that the minister go buy some gasoline, or he go buy groceries and look at how it affects all of that. There may be a lift on the carbon tax for home heating fuel, but that's it, Minister, and I would think a Minister of the Crown would know that.

My God, you would think that a minister sitting in this House would know that there's a carbon tax that affects all the people in Newfoundland and Labrador and his constituents included. Shameful.

Shameful to stand and say there's no carbon tax in Newfoundland and Labrador and that is what you said. There is no longer a carbon tax in Newfoundland and Labrador.

J. ABBOTT: I put provincial in front of it.

L. PARROTT: Listen, you did not put provincial in front of it but let's get back to that.

The carbon tax was fine when the money was going back into the provincial government. The moment that it didn't, then it became an issue and that is exactly what happened. There is zero question about that. The moment that the province lost the money, then it's a big issue. Let's stand on it. Let's stand and fight for people.

Well, the two occasions that you had previously to vote against it, no one over there voted against it. Every single one of you voted for it. Every single one of you voted for it. You argued, back then, that it was a provincial plan. Now, you've flip-flopped on it.

SPEAKER: I remind the Member to address his comments to the Chair.

L. PARROTT: You flip-flopped on it and now it's the federal government. Guess what? Another indication of how out of touch this government is.

We talk about how redundant: I can't believe that a minister would say the whole idea of giving people an opportunity to succeed, to lift people up through poverty, anything that this PMR suggests, is redundant in this day and age. Go to the grocery store, go talk to a senior, go out around the bay, go where real-life struggles are happening; go talk to a senior who needs to drive to a hospital in St. John's from Corner Brook or anywhere else and tell me that this is redundant.

As a matter of fact, I would say take this out, read it to them and ask them if they think it's redundant. I can tell you, not one of them is going to think it's redundant.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: The Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology stood up and he

said, we're not alone. He's not wrong, we're not alone; we are not alone. The rest of the country is suffering. But guess what? We're here to look after this province. He said this isn't a Liberal problem; this isn't a PC problem. You know, it's not. It's a Newfoundland and Labrador problem and the people in this province are the ones that are suffering every single day.

They can't pay their heat bills, they can't afford to do things with their kids, they can't afford to put kids in sports, our education is suffering, hospitals are suffering, people can't eat. No, but all of that is redundant, redundant, according to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. It doesn't matter that people in Newfoundland and Labrador are suffering. It's redundant. I cannot believe that a minister would stand up and talk about that.

Now, last week, when we were actually paying attention and there was a new poverty reduction plan announced – announced – the key word. The same as everything else. Announcements that are going to happen down the road. Oh, it's a 10-year plan, it's a six-year plan; it's a four-year plan. It doesn't help people right now and right now is when people need help, not six years' from now. Right now is when they need help.

I'll ask the minister: Where has this Liberal government been since 2015 when there was a poverty reduction plan in place in 2015? Not only a plan in place, but the best plan in the country and it was discarded by this government. Now they're coming out with a new plan to try and replace the best plan, eight years after no plan. Tell me what kind of governing that is or what kind of good that does for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Nothing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: He then stands up and boasts about the increase they gave to seniors: \$16.67. Not even enough to pay for

Netflix anymore. Not even enough to pay for Netflix, think about that. They talk about it being a 15 per cent raise. Fifteen per cent has done nothing for the men and women who are suffering in this province, our seniors, our most vulnerable; the people that are the most down and out. You know, most of them are probably living by themselves, they're widows, widowers and they struggle all the time.

And guess what? They're proud people, like most of us, but as you get older and you've been through hardships in life, you get prouder and you get more afraid to ask for help. Well, they shouldn't have to ask for help, we should be giving it to them. We should be giving it to them.

It is funny how every time we talk about this stuff, we go back to Muskrat Falls. I'd like someone to answer a question about where we would get power if we didn't have Muskrat Falls. I'll tell you, Holyrood. Oh, wait, wait, do we have carbon tax here anymore or don't we? Because guess what? If we were paying carbon tax on the fuel that goes to Holyrood to power this province, our heating bills wouldn't be doubled, they'd be tripled. So anyone who wants to argue that; let's argue all day long.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: It was you guys that took over in 2015 and said that this would be done in 2017. It's 2023 and it's still not done. Oh, wait, you announced that was done, too. Another one not done.

The problems that we face in this province as individuals when it comes to poverty, debt relief, all of the social-economic problems that people are facing right now are immediate. That is the word the minister should have used and not redundant. He should have used the word immediate. He shouldn't have said this is a redundant PMR; he should have said this PMR needs immediate attention.

Instead, he chose to say I don't believe the hundreds of thousands of people in this province that are suffering. I don't believe that people are living in poverty. I don't believe that people are leaving their houses to go to the mall to walk because they can't afford to turn the heat on. I don't believe that they can't afford groceries. I don't believe that they're splitting their medications and I don't believe they're parking their cars or not putting insurance on their cars. I don't believe any of that; this PMR is redundant.

This PMR is important. It requires immediate attention. The people in this province require immediate attention. Everything that is happening, regardless of the announcements or some of the initiatives – and I am not saying that the initiatives were bad. What I am saying is that they don't go far enough, people are still suffering and they're going to continue to suffer until we change things.

If you're a low income, medium income, a senior or an individual with a disability living in this province and you're not suffering – wow, I don't know how anyone can look at this and say it is redundant. It is actually shameful that somebody would stand in this House and look at something that targets our most vulnerable and say this is redundant; redundant was the word – redundant.

You know what is redundant: this government because if they don't listen to the people that put them there, then obviously they're not doing the things that we were put here to do. At the end of the day, when you talk to a senior who goes out and they – and listen, I get the whole idea of the sugar tax, I don't agree with it, but I understand the premise behind it. But at the end of the day, there are people who want to go out and have their Purity syrup, a Newfoundland staple.

Go buy a bottle of Purity syrup, come back and tell me how many taxes you pay on it. I'll tell you. It creates 21 litres so you pay

taxes on 21 litres when you buy a bottle of Purity syrup. That's a lot. It is really a lot. How this is managed, it's silly. At the end of the day, we talk about it going back to the provincial government or food programs, it goes back to help people.

Why do we take money out of people's pockets, out of their left pocket to put it back into their right pocket? People should have the opportunity to make their own choices. We don't do that.

We talk about gas tax relief and in the same breath we say we've got the lowest gas tax in the country. Yes, maybe we do, but guess what else? We have the highest gas prices in the country. We got the highest rate of unemployment in the country.

Someone stood up here the other day and boasted about our unemployment rate. Oh my god, we're below 10 per cent. Whoop-de-do. Guess what? What if all the people that went away to work came home? What would our unemployment rates look like then? Like, be realistic about it. What would Newfoundland and Labrador's unemployment rates look like if people that went away to work chose to stay here? How would government afford to help them with social assistance or any of the other things that would be required if they didn't choose to go away to provide for their families? Our unemployment rate would probably be about 20 per cent, I would figure. I would argue it would be close to that number for certain. Our government would be drained for cash. There would be no programs to succeed it. Charities would fold because of the money that comes in and the people that provide it.

What this bill is saying is that we need to do more. It's saying that we need to go further. I don't think that's a stretch. I, for one, believe that this PMR deserves immediate attention and action. Unlike the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, this

is not a redundant bill, it's an important bill, I will be supporting it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm getting a dirty look from my colleague.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to this private Member's resolution and to highlight some of the work our government is doing to support the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We recognize that, not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but in every province in Canada, and in other countries throughout the world, due to a number of issues, be it COVID, as one example, the cost has increased on a number of products, on a number of services. There's a shortage of labour, which has added to the cost of services because people are paying more to get that labour, which in turn costs more for the end product.

Mr. Speaker, it is challenging. We have seen unprecedented challenges across Canada over the past couple of years. But our government has been responding and are continuing to respond and putting plans in place to try to address some of these issues.

We've put targeted measures in place to help with the cost of living. In *Budget 2023*, for example, we did not put any increases in taxes or fees in this province. Mr. Speaker, I think that's important to say that we didn't put taxes or fee increases. Government also has to deal with the consumer price index, the increase in inflation. To be able to continue to offer services and not put an increase in the cost of taxes or fees that the

provincial government charges, but to pay the additional cost associated with the rising costs due to inflation is important. That's an important component of trying to keep the costs in line for people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to touch on other initiatives recently announced by our government to help residents at this challenging time. Specifically, the five-point housing plan and the new poverty reduction plan.

When you look at measures that help with the cost of living, we know that people in our community are struggling. We know that across Canada they're struggling, I mentioned that at the start of my comments. That's why we've invested more than \$500 million in targeted short- and long-term measures since March of 2022, Budget of '22 and Budget of '23, to help residents with the cost of living.

Some of those initiatives, Mr. Speaker, are the 8.05-cent reduction in the provincial gas tax. Not only have we not implemented taxes or fee increases, we've put an 8.05-cent reduction in the provincial gas tax. It is the second lowest of all provinces. There was a 50 per cent reduction in the cost of registered passenger vehicles, which doesn't sound like a lot, it is \$90 a year, but it's one more measure where we've reduced costs instead of increasing costs, even though the provincial government is facing the inflation costs and pressures on the services we provide as well.

Eliminating the sales tax on personal property insurance is also important, Mr. Speaker. That tax on home insurance of \$1,000, that's \$150. Again, it's not a lot, but when you add it to the motor vehicle registration fee, it does add up.

Free driver medicals for people 75 years of age and older. Every person in the province age 75 or older who has gotten a driver medical, that's \$100 that government will

pay towards that driver medical, Mr. Speaker. The Home Heating Supplement, which provides up to \$500 to residents who currently rely on furnace oil or stove oil.

What we have increased, Mr. Speaker, is a 15 per cent increase on the Income Supplement and also a 15 per cent increase on the Seniors' Benefit. We've lowered the cost of early learning and child care. I remember, Mr. Speaker, three years ago that was \$35, \$45 in some cases. Today, it's \$10 a day - \$10 a day. So a significant reduction in the cost of early learning and child care.

This fall government has also announced targeted investments through the new poverty reduction plan as well as the five-point housing plan. The new poverty reduction plan really is an important element to achieving the province's goal of becoming one of Canada's healthiest provinces by 2031. It's also aligned with the recommendations of the Health Accord.

The plan has four key focus areas, associated actions to better support the well-being of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. These include: reduced childhood poverty, creating meaningful and sustainable employment, improving income and supporting seniors. This initiative adds to other work currently underway, such as the review of means- and income-tested programs like the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program and the income support program.

In addition, a targeted reduction plan for seniors will be released in the coming months. This will be informed by further stakeholder conversations to acquire their input, Mr. Speaker, into the plan that we release. I think the Seniors' Advocate report that she just released will certainly play into what the seniors' poverty reduction plan will look like.

The removal of HST on new, purpose-built rental housing: We do have a shortage of

affordable housing in the province, Mr. Speaker, and our government is always reviewing tax policies and seeing what can be done to help people in the province. As part of the five-point plan, to improve the availability of affordable housing, we've announced the removal of the HST on new, purpose-built rental housing.

This could potentially save developers hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on the size of their building or on how many buildings they built. A building would have to have at least four rental units and would have to be rented at below-market rentals. These new initiatives announced under the five-point plan will incentivize the construction of housing that is affordable and support the transition to homeownership.

No new tax or fee increases: I talked about that a little bit, Mr. Speaker, and that is important. So along with the supports for the cost of living, *Budget 2023* assured that there'd be no new tax or fee increases as noted in the Budget Speech. With the same determination and focus, we are looking to improve the health: physical, mental, financial and economic.

Mr. Speaker, the budget sets record investments for high-quality delivery and availability of health care. It's also focused on financial well-being, with no new taxes or fees and supports to assist with the cost of living. All while ensuring strong fiscal management of the province. It supports and nourishes economic growth in the province as well.

The resolution urges government to do a complete review of all taxes and fees. As administrators of provincial tax statutes, the Department of Finance is continually reviewing tax regimes for residents and businesses. One such tax that has gotten a lot of attention is the carbon tax. Mr. Speaker, we do know that when the federal government implemented the carbon tax, they also told provinces that there would be

a backstop for any province that didn't implement the carbon tax. That is a reality; it is a fact. We opted to put in place a solution here that kept the carbon tax off things like home heating fuel.

Mr. Speaker, I see that the 10 minutes went by very quickly. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to get up in the House, as always, and speak for my district. Conception Bay South is a town that I'm very proud to represent. I've been their MHA for a number of years now, and people in my district are not getting the same message as what I'm hearing across the way.

Our leader has brought this up many times, and I'll remind them again: the sugar tax. So there was a time – and I'm listening to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Minister of Health, and a lot of these ministers – Minister of Environment and Labour. They all drank the Kool-Aid. For a long time they were drinking Kool-Aid. They can't afford the Kool-Aid anymore, Mr. Speaker. Because, with this sugar tax, that's out of reach.

Now they drink water, but they still have the remnants of the Kool-Aid in their system. They're all drinking the same thing. But we don't drink that, and we don't have the rose-coloured glasses on, because this is not utopia. I refer to it – look up what utopia means; this is not utopia. We're not living in utopia.

Do you know what amazes me? I sit down here and I sit with colleagues and listen to it, and I have listened to the majority of the commentary, some good and some bad. It

amazes me, this tunnel, how you can put yourself in a tunnel and ignore all the bad things, ignore all the outside influences, and say what you think are good things. But you're distracted from all of the other outside forces. You're ignoring everything that's out there.

The Minister of Health today, during Question Period, was back and forth and he was reading off – he's just done it again; he's reading from notes all the things government has done. That's fine, but obviously we've got a crisis. The Seniors' Advocate comes out today, but now we've got another crisis. So we've got a seniors' crisis; we've got a housing crisis; we've got a health care crisis; we've got a cost-of-living crisis? Where does it stop?

But they'll get in this tunnel, and they'll keep their head down and go, this does not affect me. I sat and listened to the Premier of this province give a 15-minute speech at least, and I'm telling you, I've said it before, you close your eyes and you thought you were in utopia. I opened my eyes and I'm proud to say I was in Manuels, beautiful place, beautiful city. But this wasn't what I was hearing when I closed my eyes and listened – and kind of did that, to be quite honest. I was blown away. I said it's unbelievable – and you know, there are certain words you're not allowed to use. When people start believing their own you-know-what, we've got a problem. And as the saying goes: Houston, we've got a major problem here in Newfoundland.

It's this crowd across the way that don't seem – and I've said this for a long time. I've stood in my place in the House of Assembly since I was elected in 2015, and I've called them out for this year after year after year after year. Back in 2016 there's a list – I don't need them – of fees that were charged, put upon us on top of the levies, and you name it, library cuts – I can remember my colleague from Conception Bay East - Bell Island, we battled this, we filibustered stuff, gas tax or the tax on

insurance was added back onto us. There was an outcry in the streets. There were a lot of Members opposite, even back then, stood in their place and defended it, voted for these budgets, supported those cuts and supported those taxes. They did the same thing back then; they looked at the few good things that were mixed in there.

This is the problem, Speaker; this is what we're dealing with. So today in the House of Assembly the Minister of Health stands up when the Seniors' Advocate comes out and says seniors are struggling – she's not making this up. She is not a political officer; she's there defending for seniors. Then when you get up and basically they're standing in their place and saying what the Seniors' Advocate said was not right, not correct. I think that is shameful – absolutely shameful.

AN HON. MEMBER: I want to hear from Brazil.

B. PETTEN: You'll hear from Brazil.

Speaker, I want to read an email out – and I always say the middle class, because we have a lot of struggles in this province; the middle class; we have seniors that struggle; we have single parents who struggle, moms and dads; we have low-income people that struggle; we have a lot of people struggling in this province and it is time for government to pay attention.

I'm going to read an email that came from a constituent of mine who I happen to know and, to be quite frank with you, I won't say his name, but it was surprising to me the struggles that these people are going through. I think this comes down to the middle class, the people that we don't realize are struggling, because somewhere it's lost in translation that a lot of people out there are struggling. I have a lot of people in my district that go to food banks on the way home from work; the hours have been extended. I have said this repeatedly; they

have extended the hours so people coming home from work can get food.

I have talked to people who operate shelters in the city; the parents are going to the shelters for their meals so they can feed their children at home. I am not making this up, Speaker; this is factual. So when I hear Members opposite stand in their place – including the Premier – and tell me how wonderful life is in Newfoundland – I love Newfoundland and Labrador and every Member on this side of the House and in this Legislature loves our province. I love the province. Last year we fought hard for the “Ode to Newfoundland” and I still believe in that.

Newfoundland and Labrador is our home and we love it, but we can't live in denial. These reports are real. You can't live in denial. We have to face reality and the only way to face reality – do you know the best thing the Premier or anyone around that side could tell us today or any time? We have a problem. We have a problem with seniors, we have a problem with housing and we have a problem with cost of living. Then people would say – I said once before that I would actually applaud him for coming out and saying that. Telling me it is sunny out when it is pouring rain, that's the problem I got. That's what this government tends to do: pull the wool over your eyes. They don't pull the wool over my eyes or anyone on this side of the House, I can assure you of that, Mr. Speaker.

I got to read this email. They said: Hey – my name of course; I'm not allowed to say that – here I see there is a lot of talk lately on housing and people that can't afford housing and people going out of their way to help do what they can to look after their needs. I am 100 per cent behind that and what they are going to do – the average Joe, like myself, that is working 40 hours a week, looking for something part-time, and my wife works two jobs and looking for a third that is trying to keep the wolves away from the door.

Yes, I miss a mortgage payment from time to time because, yes, the money isn't there. Yes, maybe it's because my daughter's school comes first or my son's sports. How do you say no to your children when it comes to things like that? Living cheque to cheque seems like the new. Just throwing it out there to see what you see from my point of view. Trying to stay afloat when you work so hard. Thanks for lending your ear.

That to me speaks volumes about most of the middle class in my District of Conception Bay South and all of our districts. That's what we're being faced with. That's what the province is being faced with. The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure would like to say it was redundant because he looked down and they've accomplished all the things in our PMR. They think they've accomplished it, but they haven't. They have not accomplished it.

The sugar tax is real. The carbon tax is only delayed. Probably going to delay it and try to suffer through the polls, get the polls to turn around and try to get through an election or two. That's all that's happening there. That's politics before people. That's all that is. People don't matter in this conversation. It's all about politics.

Mr. Speaker, as I've stated, and my colleague from Terra Nova said, carbon tax was not an issue. That was not an issue until it took the money out of the general revenues, until it started affecting the province. They had a made-in-Newfoundland approach. The only reason they had a made-in-Newfoundland approach was because they didn't want to join on with the federal government. But they were okay. We have quote after quote after quote, every Member over there, and some made several quotes, how wonderful the carbon tax was.

But then when things changed, when everything changed, they knew this was coming. Everyone knew this. We spoke about this for years. This would increase

over time. See, what happened was, back in the day – if it were today, you'd never see a levy bought in that this government bought in. I remind the public that this government bought in the levy, but the cost of living wasn't where it was to then. It was high but we were managing. So they could slip in a levy to try to help government out, which we know where that went. That was one of the most unpopular taxes and nearly – well, put them into minority, it almost cost them – they should have seen the door but they just barely survived. It's because of a levy. People suffered through it.

You can't do that now. When everything changed and the carbon tax is 17 cents and more, that will increase. It's on gas, too. It's on everything. It's on the food we eat, the transportation and every network. We're an island. We're an island where it affects everybody.

All of a sudden, when that became a thing, it was hold on a second there now. This is not good anymore. We've got to reassess what we're doing. All of a sudden, it's the worst thing in the world. The carbon tax cannot be any worse. The Premier is out and he's rolling up his sleeves, he's going to bat with Ottawa. For years that's been their best friend, my good friend, my friend, and for a while there – a few years back, there was a picture in Ottawa. They were all jammed on a red sofa. Trudeau was up there. They couldn't get them all on the sofa. They were jammed up. I was really concerned that Trudeau was going to be knocked on the floor because they all couldn't get on the sofa together because they were all in a big love-in. They couldn't wait to get in the picture. It was up in the prime minister's office.

Now, all of a sudden, no one goes to Ottawa any more. No, no, you stay clear of him. It was only back probably six months ago, there was a party on the hill. There was a shed party on the hill and Trudeau was in his glee. They were all up there and all the Newfoundland entertainment, the

Premier and all – what a shindig. You won't see that now. No, no, no, Trudeau is not a good word to say now.

We don't say Liberal anymore.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're not even allowed to say Liberal anymore.

B. PETTEN: Oh we can't say Liberal, no, no. It's not Liberal. Liberals don't even use it.

We see these ads come on the television and it's the Premier's last name across it.

AN HON. MEMBER: No more Liberal Newfoundland.

B. PETTEN: No, you're not allowed to say Liberal. That's a bad word, that's right.

So there'll be no shed parties on the hill. There'll be no jammed up pictures on the red sofa. I don't know where that red sofa is gone, but I think someone has a picture of it and I saved it. It was a fun time, used here in the House a lot.

I don't think that sofa survived, Mr. Speaker, but people matter in this province and this Opposition party cares about the people of the province and that's why we introduced this PMR.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Given the situation that I've seen in my district and given the situation of how expensive things have gotten, we've seen how everything is out of proportion. Was it last year, Loblaws, a large grocery corporation – this year they took in an extra \$100 million in profit this quarter compared to last quarter. We're just going to see that, these large corporations are gouging us,

absolutely. I see it in my district. I see the cost of things are going up, yet the profits of the companies that are running these grocery stores seems to be going up coincidentally.

Where are we talking when we talk about these grocery chains gouging our residents, or talk about our large oil and gas companies gouging our residents or, as I even said, large regional airlines, gouging our residents.

Look at this now, look at how much it costs to fly up to my district. There's no way in the last number of years, when we seen time and time again, the cost to even fly within this province has constantly gone up and then you look at the ends of these companies, their profits are going up. These large corporations are running away with our money. Why aren't we going after them? I know the idea of poverty reduction, but I don't see them going after any of these companies who are making exorbitant profits off the backs of our people. They're not going after them. That's one thing I don't see here, is what they're going after.

Another thing, too, we see now are solutions that I've asked. I asked the government here: Why haven't they brought back in the HST exemption on home heating? In 2015, the Liberal government put it back on; put HST back on home heating. But it's an opportunity to help every resident of this province, to remove the HST off home heating again and save those residents that much money.

I haven't seen the government say why they can't do that. They just ignore it. But it's an opportunity that this government could easily have done is take the HST off home heating. Not just fuel oils, but for the other 40 per cent of the population that heat their homes with electricity; it never was an option to take the HST off home heating. Instead, you know, it's this.

So why aren't they going after that as an opportunity to do this? We talk about things that we could do and we can't do. But we also have to look at the things that are affecting society, affecting residents that we're turning a blind eye to: runaway corporate profits; runaway opportunities to save residents taxation. You look at how you handle the problem when it comes to building more homes, affordable homes. No problem to take the HST off that. Yet, when you ask to take it off home heating, silence.

So the question is where does government want to help? Because at the same time, there are all kinds of different opportunities out there. The government touts taking taxes off home insurance. That's great, if you own a home. But what about the renter? They don't get to see those savings. I doubt very much that the savings get trickled down to the renter on that.

There are situations in how much do you give out programming? Is it quantity over quality? Because right now, if the program doesn't have quality, it's not going to do the effects that you want it to do. You could have a hundred programs, but if the quality of the program is not there to actually benefit the most possible people at a given time, then how is it supposed to work for any resident?

So we all look at these opportunities; we all look at the ability of how do we get down to the situation? So you look at that, one of the things they tossed out, taxes off home insurance. But that's a very select few people that will benefit from it.

Do I say it's good? Yeah, it's something but at the same time where is the broader help? You can have a hundred programs, but they might not reach the intended people that you think they might reach. So, you know, quantity over quality.

We need to look at the seniors there. Another interesting one is that they say the medicals for seniors for their driving. You

know, there are seniors that still drive; a lot more don't. So there is a group of people that it helps but as a broader statement for helping seniors, once again, we look at quantity over quality.

And from what I've been hearing from seniors about that medical, the majority of them are saying the wait times to get in to get the medical done is obscene, with no family doctors and very few nurse practitioners working inside of a hospital that would be able to do the medical for them. Most of the seniors that I call now are complaining that they can't even get their medical done in time to keep their driver's licence. So, you know, once again it's quantity over the quality of what you're actually trying to do. What you're trying to do is to help people.

Seniors my way have been asking for affordable housing since 2018. Will we get there? We'll wait and see. So far the report for residents of Lab West has been delayed for their application to try again. There have been delays in the reports, so that's going to be interesting to see how that turns out.

But at the same time, I have seniors living in four- or five-bedroom houses. They are living in the living room because they physically can't get up and down the stairs anymore. Their quality of life has diminished. Most of these seniors don't drive. Their spouses have died some number of years ago. Most of them died because they gave up their health to the mining industry. Many died of industrial disease and stuff, so these seniors are living on a pension that was decimated because of the mine closure in 2014.

Their quality of life has diminished greatly and they're living in spaces that are not accommodating. They are having a hard time heating it, they're having a hard time getting anywhere, they're having a hard time getting groceries and some of them don't have much family left in the region.

These seniors are living in very difficult situations and all they've been asking for is a safe and affordable place that they can go live that they don't have to worry about climbing up and down stairs, they don't have to worry about getting the house painted or they don't have to worry about getting somewhere.

These are the situations that we're seeing here. Once again, we're looking at all these programs that the government put out to help seniors but, once again, it's quantity over quality. The program is there but it only helps a certain group of people. It doesn't get the broader amount of seniors that we could possibly get with a more qualitative kind of programming, a qualitative lens on how to help the most possible people that we can. A senior getting a discount for their driver's medical, that's great for a group of seniors, wonderful, but at the same time it doesn't get to the broader situation of what we're trying to deal with, what we're trying to get to the bottom of.

Like I said once again, the discount on home insurance, great if you're a homeowner. But if you're not a homeowner, it doesn't help you. Once again, you're looking at quantity and you should be looking at the quality of the programming you are trying to do to help people.

We talked about the 15 per cent added to the Seniors' Benefit.

L. PARROTT: It is \$16.97.

J. BROWN: Yeah, the Member for Terra Nova piped up and said \$16.97. Once again, it's great; you said it's 15 per cent. Fifteen per cent looks great on a press release but when you actually break down what they were getting and the 15 per cent added on to it, it doesn't look that great, does it? Once again, it was more a quantity over the quality of programming to help a group people. You're not helping the maximum amount of people that you should be able to help.

When you look at the programming and you look at this, you have to look at the quality of what you're delivering. Clearly, the quality is not there. The quality of how many people you can help is not there.

We see the fuel oil supplement. I said it's better to take the HST off the fuel and residential electricity to help more people, but a one-time payment of \$500, that only helps one time. It's not even a full fill-up, from my understanding. It's not even a full fill-up in most regions of this province.

You give them \$500, but instead if you took the HST off residential heat so you include the fuel oils and residential electricity, you actually help more people over the course of a year in a bigger sense than you would in a one-time payment of \$500. Once again, you went for quantity over quality of help.

I see that you put out a slew of things just to see what would stick, but it was more a quantity thing than an actual quality of programming to help individuals. You keep saying targeted –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time is expired.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

I have a few minutes to address this PMR. Since the Official Opposition seems to be on an historical reflection, I thought I might start with another image. This is an image that I got to live as a resident of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and on the wings and the heels of the wing commander and his master warrant officer here today from 5 Wing Goose Bay, I want to just put back a little image.

Let's go back to December 2004 when the then premier got into such a relationship with the prime minister that he said let's haul all the Canadian flags down. The

criticism is often about the differences of opinions with the Liberal federal government and this Liberal provincial government. Yes, we do have differences because we take a stand when it matters for this province. I can tell you back in December 2004 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. TRIMPER: – I found myself a few months later as the chair of the Goose Bay Citizens Coalition in front of the then prime minister, Paul Martin. Leo Abbass was the mayor of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and we were asking for political support to keep 5 Wing Goose Bay going.

Do you know what? The prime minister, he leaned across and he said: Mayor, I'm going to do what I can for you and all of your community because you guys did that, you were there for us and, by the way, thanks for putting that flag back up. Because as the flags were being hauled down in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, a gentleman by the name of Kirk Lethbridge and Jim Learning and a few others, they put it back up. Each day we were doing that because we wanted Ottawa to know we were with them on that issue. Sometimes we're against them; sometimes we're with them. We were there.

So that was an image of watching all of the Canadian flags on all of our provincial buildings hauled down in 2004. I'm thinking about your sofa story. Well, that was the image I remember: Every flagpole had the Canadian flag hauled down. I thought it was so inappropriate.

I say to my former critic when I was minister of Environment and Climate Change, he will recall – and what they keep forgetting and I'm going to say it again – back in 2016, October, I'm representing this province in Montreal at those very talks on climate change and how this whole pan-Canadian framework was going to work, how are we going to price carbon, what were we going

to do, and the stand we had to take that day was harsh.

I walked out of the meetings with the support of the premier and my colleagues because it was not going to help this province. It was against our offshore, it was against those communities, so many of which are in Labrador and depend on diesel, and it was against things like our fishery, marine shipping. There was so much that it did not consider what was going on in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So my walking out that day in October 2016, that's when the concern started. Not just a few days ago, not with all these other suggestions, October 2016. So it's been back and forth. Two years of negotiations. We came back and it was final. We had our made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador solution brought before this Legislature. That's what we supported were the exemptions for all those key aspects of it.

Unfortunately, what was happening just a year ago was the federal government said no, we're going to go back. We're going to take those exemptions away. The federal backstop is going to apply. That's why the opposition. We didn't take our flags down, but I can tell you we're not happy. That's why the Premier started writing letters to Ottawa. That's why we've taken a stand and that's what happened. Those are the facts. You can look it up and talk about it.

I wanted to pick up, while I've just got a few minutes left, my colleague, the Minister of Health and Community Services, if you were paying attention, he was outlining – and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure was challenged a little while for how he referred to this PMR. Well, what we are all saying is that in fact whether you use the word redundant or whatever, what we are saying is that there are actions happening. This is what the Minister of Health and Community Services was saying.

What I'm going to do is put on the floor in the next couple of minutes a real-life example for a family from, by the way, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans. This is a family of five with three children, two vehicles and how they've benefited under this government. I'm just going to walk through this quickly.

The decrease in child care expenses has gone from \$35 a day in 2020 to \$10 a day. Currently, based on monthly –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. TRIMPER: – savings of \$1,200 per month.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. TRIMPER: That represents some \$14,400 per year saving for that family with those two children in daycare. The 8.05 cent per litre reduction in tax on gas. Let's assume you burn 150 litres per month, that represents 1,800 litres per year, yields a saving of some \$145 for the two vehicles. The vehicle registration that's been referred to by so many of my colleagues has decreased from \$180 now down to \$90 and \$80 online, a savings of \$80 to \$90.

The removal of the 15 per cent RST on property insurance, assuming that the provincial home insurance policy of \$780 per year, yields a saving of \$117; doubling, by the way, that Physical Activity Tax Credit to a maximum of \$348 a year.

You add all these things up for that family of five with three children, two vehicles and guess how much they are saving now a year: \$15,315. Thanks to my colleagues on the fifth floor for pulling that research together. A real-life example, Speaker. That's why we're saying this PMR frankly is

not needed. The government is working and working hard.

I can tell you when you start adding up all of these moves: \$15,315. I rest my case.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I know I only have a few minutes here to speak on this issue. I'm just going to take a different little tact to it all, Mr. Speaker.

No matter what we say, there are people hurting. When you look around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, when you look at housing, forget the social housing, this is no reflection on any minister over there on social housing; rent itself, people are hurting; the cost of groceries, people are hurting; the cost of oil, people are hurting.

AN HON. MEMBER: Mortgages.

E. JOYCE: Mortgages, people are hurting; finding jobs; affordable housing. Why can't we find some way together to set up some all-party Committee that we can actually try to make a difference in people's lives?

I understand them bantering and I completely understand the different policies, but as much as we banter, I visit a lot of people out in Corner Brook and Humber - Bay of Islands area, I visit a lot. There are a lot of people that are really hurting. Then a lot of times when they hear different policies and different procedures, they talk about how we can help, what should we do. As legislators, we should try to come together.

I heard it was brought up earlier about getting rid of the oil furnaces. I was speaking to a company – I'll just bring this to the minister's attention – that when they go out and you want to decrease the price

because of the oil, because it is going to be cheaper if we get the mini-splits. One of the biggest problems they have – and I just want to repeat this – is that if a company goes out and does 10 or 15, they have to carry that for about six or seven months because there is not enough people there to process them. That is a reality.

A lot of people who are trying to cut their costs, the contractors won't do them until they get paid because they are carrying so many now. So that is one way that we can help. If we had some way to say, okay, in the 30-day period, we're going to pay those contractors to get it. Some may do six or seven in a community, but they have to carry that for 90, 120, 130 days, a lot of them are smaller companies.

I heard about the carbon tax. I just want to give a little perspective on carbon tax before I sit down. I have two minutes left and I'll sit down after the carbon tax.

The idea why the Liberals accepted the carbon tax, and I was part of it at the beginning, is that we made a commitment that any money we got from the carbon tax would go back into people's pockets. That was the commitment. That's why, in all my negotiations and all my discussions, we're going to put every cent back into it.

What really got me about the carbon tax is Seamus O'Regan, the federal minister for this province, when he went out and he was talking about the tax that was going to be on furnace oil. Here is his statement. This is not my statement; this is Seamus O'Regan who made the statement. He said the problem with the province is they put it in general revenue and once it goes in general revenue, then you've got to compete against health care; you've got to compete against the schools; you've got to compete against the roads that we're all asking for, for upgrades. Instead of saying, whatever we get from carbon tax in general revenue, we're going to find a way to give it back to

the people. That was the intent. That was the actual intent.

Then when Seamus O'Regan made that statement publicly, what the Minister of Finance was doing, then the carbon tax all of a sudden became such a political issue in Newfoundland and Labrador, whereby we made a commitment that we were going to put it back in the taxpayers' hands, the people who needed it the most. That was the intent.

So when we hear now about the carbon tax just going on, as the feds did it, but we, as a Liberal government and I was a part of it, made a commitment to collect the carbon tax and give it back to the most needy people. That was a fact.

What happened then is there was so much money that started coming in, it went in, and then I even wrote the Minister of Finance and I said: Give me a copy of the breakdown of all the environmental issues that the \$113 million uses. Couldn't get it.

So here's a chance here now, and I've only got a minute left, let's find some way that we can help out the struggling people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Let's find a way. I know government is doing a lot and I know the Opposition has got a lot of great ideas; can we get together somehow and try to work it out so we can get it? Because I can tell you, people are struggling, Speaker. People are struggling. It's up to us to find ways to make life better for people; let's find a way that we can do it.

It may be a small thing here, a small thing there, by standing up and saying, well, we gave this, we gave that, no doubt it was done, but it's still not enough to help the people who are struggling right now.

I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

As per the *Standing Orders*, I'll call upon the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to close debate.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to thank everybody for their comments. I think there were some very good comments. There were some comments that have caused me a lot of concern. I heard the Minister of Health talk about the things that government had done, nobody disagrees with the actions that have been taken.

But I do take exception; I take extreme exception to the fact that this PMR is considered by some Members opposite to be redundant or by others not to be needed. Well, let me talk about the Seniors' Advocate report because maybe – maybe – what they're talking about is the report of the Seniors' Advocate is not needed or is redundant. Because let's take a look at the recommendations of the Seniors' Advocate report and compare them to what we have asked for in a PMR.

One of the things we asked for in our PMR said index the Senior Benefits programs to inflation. The very first recommendation of the Seniors' Advocate's report: "The Department of Finance annually index the NL Seniors' Benefit so it reflects the increases in the cost of living. Further, the benefit amount must not decrease in the event the cost of living goes down." That's the recommendation of the Seniors' Advocate and if I listen to certain Members opposite, that recommendation is redundant. That recommendation is not needed. That's just not good enough.

One of the other things we mentioned in our PMR, we asked for government to order a complete review of the Income Support program and an evaluation of all programs and services intended to support vulnerable populations to ensure they deliver. So let's go further into the Seniors' Advocate report because the Seniors' Advocate was clearly

on the same page and looking for solutions from government.

“Recommendation 6: The Department of Health and Community Services revise the **Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services** to reflect that seniors in receipt of GIS would be exempt from the financial assessment requirement for access to Home Support Services; they would automatically be financially eligible, and not have any client contribution.

“Recommendation 7: The Department of Health and Community Services revise the **Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services** to reflect that households with a family net income of less than \$29,402, would be exempt from the financial assessment requirement to access Home Support Services; they would automatically be financially eligible, and not have any client contribution.

“Recommendation 8: The Department of Health and Community Services review the **Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services** specifically for seniors whose family net income is between \$29,402 and \$42,404, recognizing that they are also in receipt of some portion of the NL Seniors’ Benefit, and reduce the current assess rate of up to 18 per cent.

“Recommendation 9: The Department of Health and Community Services review the annual exemption thresholds outlined in the **Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services**, related to the highest income thresholds (\$42,405 to \$150,000), considering the substantial income range as it relates to the percentage rate (18%) which income is assessed at.”

Those are some of the recommendations that are in the Seniors’ Advocate report.

There are 12 recommendations in this report and the government’s response to the Seniors’ Advocate yesterday was to issue a news release at quarter to 5 – quarter to 5, yesterday evening, they issued a news release to talk about everything they were doing. Not to talk about the recommendations that the Seniors’ Advocate was making but to talk about what they were doing. Then to turn around and say oh, by the way, stay tuned, because a few months from now or months from now, we’ll come up with a poverty reduction strategy for seniors because we don’t have one.

Today, when we introduce a PMR that talks about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who are hurting, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who are struggling and I hear that this PMR is redundant, that means this report must be redundant, too, because she’s calling for the exact same things that we asked for here.

We’ve asked for reviews and we’ve asked for indexing. So are the government Members telling the Seniors’ Advocate that her report doesn’t matter, that seniors don’t matter? Because that’s exactly what is happening.

You can talk about all the great things you’ve done. Listen, we all understand you’ve done lots of great things over there. I’m not disputing that. But when you turn around and dismiss a PMR that comes in here with good intentions of trying to implement and make recommendations to government to help seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador, to help other people in Newfoundland and Labrador who are suffering and then you turn around and say it’s redundant and it’s not needed, that’s not good enough – that’s not good enough.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. WAKEHAM: So, Speaker, there are lots of things we should be focused on in this Chamber. The last thing we should be focused on is politics. The first thing we should be focused on is the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As I said, there are Members opposite and ministers opposite who have outlined things that government has been doing, but that's why we need to have this debate. That's why we need to have this PMR. We've made great solutions here, great suggestions and recommendations. Don't just call them redundant; talk about them. Let's talk about them. Let's discuss them. That's what we're asking for. We're asking for these recommendation to be discussed.

One of them is even something you've already started, which is to continue the provincial gas tax relief. You introduced it; all we're asking for is continue it. Is that redundant? Does that no longer matter? That was one the things that we've asked for in this PMR, and a new poverty reduction strategy for seniors, not months from now, but now.

I already spoke earlier about the eight years-plus that we've waited for a poverty reduction strategy and last week they announced a partial poverty reduction strategy. Part A, I guess, because we certainly haven't seen anything in it for seniors and that's what's important.

We have to complete. We have to keep going. There are too many people in Newfoundland and Labrador who are hurting right now. My colleagues have outlined numerous examples of people all across our province who are struggling to balance their books, struggling to put food on the table, struggling to pay for their medications and struggling to heat their homes. But, no, when we ask about reviews of all the programs and services, when the Seniors' Advocate asks for reviews of all the programs, they're redundant. It's not needed.

Well, I'm telling you, the Seniors' Advocate has called for these recommendations and government needs to sit down and seriously consider implementing the 12 recommendations that the Seniors' Advocate has put before them. That's what the people of the province deserve, that's what the seniors of our province deserve and that's what we should have.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

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.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Call in the Members.

Division

SPEAKER: Are the Whips ready?

Are the House Leaders ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER (Hammond): Tony Wakeham, Barry Petten, Lloyd Parrott, Paul Dinn, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, David Brazil, Jeff Dwyer, Chris Tibbs, Loyola O'Driscoll, Craig Pardy, Joedy Wall, Pleaman Forsey, Jordan Brown, Eddie Joyce, Paul Lane.

SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER: John Hogan, John Haggie, Gerry Byrne, Bernard Davis, Tom Osborne, Pam Parsons, Elvis Loveless, Krista Lynn Howell, Andrew Parsons, Steve Crocker, Sarah Stoodley, John Abbott, Paul Pike, Brian Warr, Perry Trimper, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Scott Reid, Lucy Stoyles.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

If Members want, take their disagreements outside, please.

CLERK (Hawley George): Speaker, the ayes: 15; the nays: 18.

SPEAKER: The resolution has been defeated.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 54.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 54.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 54, An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts.

A bill, "An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts." (Bill 54)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair is recognizing the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Once again, I thank you for this.

Under section 126(5), what would count as a valid reason –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

J. BROWN: – for obtaining a revised estimate?

CHAIR: The Chair is recognizing the hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I think the last part of subsection (5) explains that: "... where the business is able to show a valid reason for the revision" If the business feels it's being treated differently than businesses in its class, it can present that case to town council and they will deal with it.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

But under that subsection for the valid reason for obtaining a revised estimate, would the valid reason be at the discretion of council? Could council say no?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Is there any other recourse that a business could say if they feel like they were treated unreasonably and council could go back? Is there anything to appeal to or is it just at the whim of council in that section?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

We're debating a bill here and I'd like to speak –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

We're debating a bill and I want to hear the Member and the minister; that's it.

Thank you.

I'm recognizing the hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Depending on the grounds that the council said were not – I mean, we're going down a bit of a rabbit hole here, but

ultimately the decision of council would be subject to appeal should the business wish to take it to court or to deal with it under the *Municipal Conduct Act*.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you for that answer, Minister. I appreciate it.

Under section 137, would it not be fair to residents to include in a notice a breakdown of how much each resident would be charged as an improvement fee rather than providing a total cost in aggregate?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Chair.

It gets to be a mouthful after awhile; I get that.

This is related to a local improvement zone. The idea, I would assume, behind this is that the definition of the zone would be such that the residents or businesses under a levy would all benefit to an equal extent from the improvements in that area, hence the costs would be shared evenly amongst the properties.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

I'm just curious if for each resident the breakdown would be broken down for each one, or is it just going to be one number for everything? Is that what we're trying to do?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The discretion would be with the town as to how they would propose to present their financials. I mean, at the very

simplest, they could take it in aggregate and say zone A, or however defined, this is your bill, it is \$10,000, there is 1,000 of you and you'll pay \$10 each.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Minister.

Under section 162, the requirement to provide fire protection, road maintenance and snow clearing are new, despite the new taxation and the tax base the towns still will not bear these costly services. Is government concerned that the imposition will sink some municipalities and is there anything that the department is looking at to make sure that this doesn't become a burden, given that this is a new section there?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you.

The towns currently provide these services; this simply enshrines that as the duties and responsibilities of a town. It doesn't say they have to actually do it themselves; it says they have to arrange for them to be done. Those are, I think, reasonable, bearing in mind the purposes of the act laid out at the beginning, which is around the safety and well-being and health of the population. It is new in the sense of listing them in that area, but I don't think it's unreasonable.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you again, Chair.

Section 257: Now that LSDs will be required to establish and maintain a system for the collection and removal of garbage, can we be sure that every LSD will be able to afford this service? What about cases in LSDs

with very few or limited resources or residents for that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you.

One of the kind of conceptual things about having a fee is that it stipulates that the fee should cover the cost of providing that service. A lot of LSDs either do it or arrange for it to be done currently. Again, I don't think we're asking a lot. Again, they either do it or arrange for it to be done.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Section 279: With this section, it gives the bylaw enforcement officers the power to inspect. Is there a standard of training that must be gone through in order to qualify as such? Will the department offer it to the municipalities so that bylaw enforcement officers acting as inspectors will know how to conduct the inspections properly?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Bylaw enforcement officers will, by virtue of their office, be inspectors for the purposes of bylaws. Training of these officers will be something that the town may already have the capacity to do and have a particular approach to it. Certainly, my department would be available to provide support.

Training is a big thing. In actual fact, this binder is actually the core of what will be the base material for MNL, towns, Local Service Districts and PMA. This, in actual fact, is kind of a test run for it. I'm the guinea pig.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

I thank the minister again for that.

Section 284: Why does this section not allow law enforcement officers the ability to intervene in moving traffic violations, as this could be a potential source of income for municipalities and also help with some of the issues that some of them face internally?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I may stand or sit to be corrected, but I think moving violations come under the *Criminal Code* and *Highway Traffic Act*. This is separate legislation. So this is nothing new. It carries over from the previous act.

It's not just about revenue generation. It's about safety and protection of property and life and limb.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: That was my final question, but I do want to thank the minister for his time, for answering the questions, I really do appreciate it.

CHAIR: Thank you

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

In the first reading, probably the theme of my address was the fact that LSDs may have been not understood well or there might be some misconception about their existence in our province.

When you met with the LSDs in a meeting with them was there a request that they would like to have access to more teeth in looking at those that may be delinquent in their areas or a change, a tweak in some

kind of policy that would provide some more revenue for them? Was there anything that would have come up in your consultations?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I'll take this opportunity just to clear a little bit of air. There is a view – or has been a view in certain communities – that this department has some prejudice against LSDs. That is not the case. Certainly, myself and my predecessor, neither of us, would have gone down that road at all. So just to lay that out there.

In terms of revenue, yes, everybody would like more money than they've got at the moment and a lot of the time in this House is spent debating how we get more and how we do it in a way that doesn't inconvenience or produce hardship.

The facts of the case are Local Service Districts offer a form of fairly basic, if you like, governance, which is all that some areas want and all that they feel they can manage because LSDs, like towns, like cities, have different levels of capacity within their communities. Some LSDs function, quite frankly, better than some of the incorporated towns.

I'm certainly happy to talk about fiscal frameworks. It's not referenced in this bill. It is a topic with MNL and it will be a topic for communities, in general, whether they be towns or Local Service Districts. It's not strictly referenced in this bill.

We've tried to put in there the things that were asked for where they fit with the purpose of the towns and LSDs.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: I'm thinking that MNL may not have been asking on behalf of the LSDs.

That would have had to come through dialogue with LSDs.

MNL on regionalization did say that LSDs that were viable ought to be a pathway to become incorporated. I just wanted to know your viewpoint towards that and the question would be is that I've had two areas in my district that had letters back from your department but they did reference each time that it may cost \$25,000 and that was almost a stopper.

Would that have been the feasibility study and would that be a moot point now, that cost that would have been communicated to them with the discretion of the feasibility study which may not need to be activated?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: There's a bit to unpack there in that sort of multi-level question. The Member opposite channels his previous occupation, making one feel like a student at an exam with these things.

I won't do the Question Period thing and pick what I would like to have asked, but the bottom line is there is a root for unincorporated areas to become LSDs. There is a root for LSDs to become incorporated as towns, should they choose to do it. There is no compulsion in this act. There is no drive to do it.

The cost for those was the old act mandated feasibility studies. So where it makes eminent sense and advice from planning and experts in the department shows no evidence of any controversy or impediment, then ministerial discretion would be exercised on the basis of that advice.

CHAIR: The Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: I asked could it be on my advice that they would resubmit their request just to see into those areas, to have a look at those

two areas, which I would think are quite viable to become incorporated. At least now with that provision, at least we can have a closer look at those two designated areas in my district. Would that be advisable, that I could pass that along?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: To coin a local phrase from St. Anthony: Fill your boots. The answer is we do have some communities that have requested changes like that. They were held in abeyance because at the time those who submitted, there was a bigger discussion about regionalized governance. That has fallen by the wayside, as I've said earlier.

Regional and regionalized collaboration and delivery of services is, however, alive and well. So if anybody wants to progress it or move through the options in here in terms of becoming an LSD from an unincorporated or becoming a town from an LSD, happy to entertain it and we'll help with the process.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Minister, 158(2)(b): We have municipalities in the District of Bonavista that look at selling their properties that would be in tax arrears. When they go to sell their property in recent years, they've come across that, all of a sudden, Crown Lands didn't forfeit their right to be able to challenge for that land going forward and, for all intent and purposes, that stopped the deal.

I know you and I would look at that if we were going to look for a piece of property that would be in an area which we've talked about, dilapidated properties and properties that would be in arrears, but the showstopper is Crown Lands not forfeiting their right to be able to challenge that land and it stops.

Now, I notice in this act we're still going to go on with that confusion because Crown Lands is still stated there, which would be the exception. Was there consultation with Crown Lands? Why would that still be there now when we're looking at the impediment it would be for municipalities that we want to give them autonomy going forward? We're just talking about in the town boundaries in these municipalities.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: This is a knotty issue. The bottom line is, the legal advice when we were redrafting this was simply to reword 146 and 147 of the current act to keep that in because to deal with that really raises some significant questions about the Crown Lands Act itself, that falls under another jurisdiction, another department.

I think there is work being done there around Crown Lands, around registration of land, title by registration and these kind of things that would address that. Until that happens, our legal advice was that that would have to stay to avoid any potential litigation that the town might get involved in subsequently.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: For the record, I just want to state that my colleague from Exploits is very disappointed that the Crown Lands legislation is not brought to the House in this sitting. We expected it and that's unfortunate, but he will speak to that at some point in time.

I just want, for clarification and something that I've always in my municipal experience and so on, to throw out provincially and probably for the learning in the House here, we have the *Taxation of Utilities and Cable Television Companies Act*. I know that's not here, but it's referenced here. Provincial business tax says that utilities "shall pay to

the Crown an annual business tax at a rate prescribed by regulation and not more than 2.5% on the gross revenue of the utility for the preceding year derived from the areas of the province which are not incorporated as a city or a municipality." That would be the unincorporated areas and the LSDs.

Would the minister be able to provide how much the Crown receives in this utility tax and also in the cable television tax that we would garner from those unincorporated areas and LSDs in the province? Fair question on transparency, I know you're big on transparency. Would that be something that you could find out and inform the House?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I can ask the people who will know, but that's not something that would fall within my department. It would fall under others, but certainly happy to take that back, I don't have the answer at the moment.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: I understand you wouldn't have an answer to that, but I was hoping that you would give that response and say: I'll try my best.

The other thing I would love, and it's up to you whether you do, is the second largest Local Service District in the province is in my district, Lethbridge and area: regionalized outfit, very organized and serving eight communities. I'd like to know as well what they would – under this utility tax, if they were incorporated. I'll just leave that with you, there's no need to respond, but if you can, that's wonderful.

Property tax: We're going to move now, I think 48 communities are going to utilize the property tax now. The Municipal Assessment Agency will be engaged to do

that. I didn't know that their inaugural fee would be \$89 a home, I think you might have referenced that a little earlier. Back in 2017, when I was involved, when we transitioned from an LSD to a municipality, it was \$28 a home. At least that's what we used in our public meetings.

Do you have any idea what revenue the Municipal Assessment Agency will get in as a result of those 48 coming off poll tax? Because it is revenue coming in. I'm not sure if additional staff are needed.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: I've had discussions with the Municipal Assessment Agency. The current recurrent fee for municipalities, it's done on a three-year cycle, I think is \$26; rather than the higher one. But the higher one is, I recall, \$86.

MAA feel they have the existing capacity to do those over a three-year phase period of one-third, one-third and one-third.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Would you know what that would cost? I just ask because I reached out to some of the municipalities in my district. I throw out Trinity Bay North. Trinity Bay North had stated to me that what was told was about \$35,000 a year is what they would pay.

Now, I thought that was high. Trinity Bay North might have 1,600 or 1,700 people. I said that's three years. I was told yearly. It used to be a three-year period is what he said, but now it is down to yearly. I don't know whether that is totally accurate.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Yeah, the reassessments are done annually. There's an annual fee of \$26 per property, or whatever the number is in that ballpark. That is an ongoing expense of the town. That is something that they would have to recover when they work out what their mill rate or their base and mill rate would be.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: In talking to the council in King's Cove, Minister, in meeting with them, one of the things they disagreed with was the property taxes. They said poll tax is working for them.

So when we look at that town, they didn't wish for property tax because poll tax was working for them. Regressive: I think they're well aware of that, but that, as a democracy, is what they wanted. The fact that now they're going to have to pay the Municipal Assessment Agency a fee, that's taxes that are going out from the community in order for them to indicate as to what they're going to have to pay.

One thing that's different would be that before we had one mill rate and that one mill rate in the regulations had to apply to all residential properties in that particular town. My understanding now is that the change would be that we've got the base subclasses and classes that we can, I guess, be able to gerrymander to be able to have different rates that might apply within that town.

That is what my understanding would be of that. That one rate now is off and we can create classes and subclasses where councils can become creative to be able to provide probably two or three different mill rates for residential properties. Would that be accurate?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: We are the last province in the country to still retain the ability to provide poll tax.

I am just checking but I think the Member's comments about classes and subclasses is not meant to have one owner of a detached single-family dwelling pay different mill rate than another. It maybe that a multi-occupancy residential property would have a different class and mill rate, but that would be applied uniformly across that class.

The other piece of the equation is the revenue generated by a property is a function of its assessed value, as determined by the MAA and the mill rate. If a council looked at its properties and felt that is could better serve or more equitably serve its residents by having a base rate, which would not change property to property and a much smaller mill rate which would reduce those fluctuations, they're perfectly at liberty to do that.

Poll tax, generally, whilst it might work for the council, it may not be something that some of its poorer residents would feel works for them.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: I just want, in 20 seconds, to bring back to when we became incorporated back in George's Brook-Milton, part of the mandate when the consultants came out was that we were going to be annexed to Clarendville. That was probably their primary option. But what they found was that the legislation was preventative. Preventative in the fact that they only had one mill rate that would apply to everyone. So here we were in a very unserved area without the resources, but that one mill rate had to apply right across their jurisdiction. So they did write that in their feasibility study report that it was an impediment and they didn't see that working.

I looked at this change and thought that if we're looking at some amalgamations and some other areas come in that may be underserved with some capital infrastructure, you know that until they're brought up to standard that you do have the ability to those areas that join on to an existing municipality to be able to have a lower mill rate because they don't have the services that most of the community would have.

If we're going to grow and have other communities that are going to join on to existing communities, I would say that is a good move, if that is the case. Because if not, one mill rate, if we're back to the same thing, is going to be very restrictive for amalgamation of towns. I didn't have clarity on that. Not to belabour it.

To conclude, Minister, when we look at the Professional Municipal Administrators, we all got letters in the House from the association and you spoke to that earlier. One thing that caught my eye was that when we came here for the first reading, we had less than 24 hours on that full project. I think some of us didn't have really a firm understanding of the legislation in order to discuss it. Thankfully, we had a week off that we can digest it, analyze it and talk about it, to come back in.

One sentence that they had there, the recommendation was that: We also hope that the House of Assembly will modernize its parliamentary practices to include stakeholder input and its committee review stage to achieve inclusive development of legislation that allows expert input.

You have expert input because you consulted and I think PMA and MNL, but on the operation of the House, such an extensive piece of legislation, it would be nice to have a little more advance that at least we can meaningfully engage in debate and zero in on a lot of these issues that otherwise, it just speeds by.

I looked at that comment as something that in our processes in the House, it would be nice for us to make sure that we did have time and the knowledge or the time to be able to become acquainted with that legislation.

Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Further questions on Bill 54?

Seeing none, shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 357 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 357 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 357 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

That motion is carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Chair, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that the Committee rise and report Bill 54.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 54.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

B. WARR: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 54 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed that Bill 54 be carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time presently, by leave.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 10.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that Bill 61, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997, now be read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 61 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997." (Bill 61)

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*, provides standards for the provision of minimum pension benefits, the protection of pension funds and funding of the plans pensioned to Members and their beneficiaries. The act and its related regulations protect workers in Newfoundland and Labrador who participate in a pension plan, except those in federally regulated industries or certain exempted provincial plans.

A pension plan currently registered under the act in the province would not be allowed to make any changes that might lead to a reduction in the amount or the commuted value of the pension benefit or deferred pension benefit. One exception to this rule is a multi-employer pension plan which is established under a collective agreement.

A multi-employer pension plan is a pension plan organized and administered for employees of two or more employers who contribute to the plan under an agreement, bylaw or statute. The plan provides pension benefits that are determined based on periods of employment with the participating employers. These types of plans have historically been established through a negotiated collective agreement.

A multi-employer pension plan is administered through a board of trustees, a pension committee or other similar body

constituted in accordance with the terms of the plan, is usually set up through a trust agreement and the trust fund is exclusively for the benefit of plan members and their beneficiaries.

In a multi-employer pension plan contribution rates are either fixed or seldom adjusted and benefit levels are determined based on the plan's financial position and expected future contributions, thus they may be increased or decreased.

In December 2022, I received correspondence from the NLMA seeking amendments to the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*, to provide physicians in the province with the opportunity to join the Medicus Pension Plan, a national multi-employer pension plan specifically designed for physicians. Medicus provides physicians with an opportunity to access a pooled pension arrangement where they can receive pension income during retirement.

Established by MD Financial Management and Scotiabank in 2022, the Medicus Pension Plan is open to incorporated physicians in Ontario, Nova Scotia, PEI, BC, Alberta and the Territories. It is the first and only plan of its kind designed exclusively for physicians. It works by allowing an incorporated physician to play a dual role as the participating employer through their own professional medical corporation, and as an employee of that corporation the physician can become a member of the plan.

The *Medical Act, 2011*, permits registration of professional medical corporations where all the voting shares are owned by and registered in the name of one or more licensed medical practitioners. Directors of such corporations are licensed medical practitioners. The physician or groups of physicians is the employee of the professional medical corporation and would pay themselves a salary, bonuses or dividends through the corporation.

Upon entering a participation agreement with Medicus, the professional medical corporation would be a Medicus member and the employees of the corporation would be Medicus Pension Plan beneficiaries. Physicians who are not incorporated, but employed by a professional medical corporation participating in the plan, are also eligible to become members.

To date, only multi-employer pension plans established through a unionized collective agreement are recognized in the act. As Medicus is based on participation agreements signed between each individual professional medical corporation and Medicus, it is currently unable to register in this province. Bill 61 changes this. It does not specifically reference Medicus. The new authority provided in Bill 61 will allow for the regulations to be revised allowing Medicus to register in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Physicians are an integral part of our province's health care system and they have retirement saving options such as individual pension plans, RRSPs or Tax-Free Savings Accounts. Bill 61 facilitates another retirement saving options for physicians in Newfoundland and Labrador and may be another incentive that will assist our province's ongoing physician recruitment and retention efforts.

An independent administrative board serves as the legal administrator of Medicus and oversees day-to-day administration. Each physician would be able to make their own decisions on whether to participate in Medicus or an alternative retirement savings vehicle.

Bill 61 builds on physician recruitment and retention initiatives announced by the provincial government, showcasing Newfoundland and Labrador as an attractive place to work, live and raise a family, and now with Bill 61, an attractive place to also spend your retirement years.

The signing of a shared agenda earlier this year represents a commitment from both the provincial government and the Medical Association to work together to address critical issues related to the retention of the province's physician workforce, such as improving workforce satisfaction, reducing stress and improving overall capacity in the health care system.

I'm sure the Minister of Health can also speak further to the great work happening in our health care system to support, recruit and retain health care professionals. This is one small piece in a large puzzle.

Thank you to the NLMA for reaching out to my department and for sharing their input based on the proposed amendments to the Pension Benefits Act. I'm happy to answer any questions in Committee.

I guess, Speaker, that was a lot of complicated words. For anyone who's listening or anyone partially paying attention: This was requested by the NLMA. We are changing the law to allow doctors to spend their own money in a pension plan. There is no public money required here and there is no public backstop to this pension. So it's a win, win, win: it makes doctors happy and it has no consequence to the public Treasury.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise in this House and represent the people of my district and, of course, the people across Newfoundland and Labrador. This evening it is a pleasure to speak to Bill 61, An Act to Amend the Pensions Benefit Act, 1997.

Speaker, the purpose of this bill would be to amend the act to "... authorize the Lieutenant-Governor in Council to prescribe multi-employer pension plans that are not subject to subsection 20(1) of the Act; replace references to "Trial Division" with the correct reference "Supreme Court"; and incorporate gender-neutral language," which we all realize and agree is important in this House and encouraged in all legislation that is brought to the floor for debate.

This amendment to the pension plan is void if the amendment reduces the amount or the commuted value of the pension benefit or the deferred pension accrued under the plan, with respect to the employment before the effective date. In other words, Speaker, to simplify, you cannot amend the pension plan if it affects the value of the plan.

So with respect to the subject of approval of the Superintendent of Pensions, the above explanation does not apply where the amendment is required, for the purpose of maintaining the registration as the registered plan under the Income Tax Act.

It is good to see that the NLMA is requesting this amendment, which will allow the doctors registered in the professional medical corporation to register with the Medicus Pension Plan which is a plan designed for all of Canada.

Speaker, this is a bill that we are prepared to support. I do have a few questions that we will have in Committee to ask the minister. I will look forward to those questions in Committee, Speaker.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL speak now we'll close the debate.

Okay, no one rose.

P. LANE: I was waiting on the NDP. I thought they were going to speak.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: I thought half of them could speak.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

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

P. LANE: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I haven't had a whole lot to say today because of the nature of the last bill, I guess. I did just want to put it on the record, as I usually try to do that I will be supporting Bill 61.

Lord knows we're having our challenges as it relates to the retention and recruitment of physicians in this province and there are any numbers of issues associated to that. Of course, I raised one of them in the form of a petition today around some work that needs to be done with Memorial University and the college and so on.

Not to get off track, but I guess the point is that anything that we can do that's going to encourage doctors perhaps to come here and, more importantly, to stay here once they're here, then we need to do. So I'm not going to get into the technical details here. It's not necessary.

I think the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL – I liked her ending better than all the rest of it because it was clear and to the point. At the end of the day, this is something we can do to allow physicians to pay into a pension plan, if they choose, with their own money; there's no money coming from the public purse; there's no risk to the public purse; there's no provincial government backstops and so on. So, at the end of the day, there would be no reason for us not to approve it.

It's something that, if they want, they can avail of. Again, as I say, given the fact that we have such an issue as it relates to having doctors, retaining doctors and so on, if this little step can help along the way as

just one more little incentive we can throw at them to stay here, then I think we should do it.

With that said, I'll support the bill.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Now seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL speaks now she will close the debate.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank everyone for their comments and happy to answer any questions in Committee.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 61 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997. (Bill 61)

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

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

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 61)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 61.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to debate Bill 61.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 61, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997.

A bill, “An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997.” (Bill 61)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair is recognizing the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

AN HON. MEMBER: The beautiful district.

J. WALL: The beautiful district is correct.

Just a couple of questions, Minister, with respect to the bill. First one: What are the advantages that you have identified in proposing this bill to the House?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

This allows doctors to invest their own money, if they choose, into a pension plan with other doctors. There is no Provincial Treasury impact whatsoever. As other Members have said, it’s kind of – to me, there’s not a lot of downside so I’m very pleased to support this. It is something that doctors have asked for it and a small piece in a significantly larger puzzle of recruitment and retention of doctors.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you just quoted not a lot of downside, have you or your staff identified any disadvantages with this proposal of this bill?

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

S. STOODLEY: I don’t have any downsides to report.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

In your effort to recruit doctors, you asked if there was a provision for the pension plan, in your recruitment for doctors?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

Our department is not responsible for doctor recruitment, but the Newfoundland Medical Association has asked us for this as something that their members want. So we're very happy to support it. Doctors have asked for this, so we're happy to support it.

Thank you.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, just a last question: Is this the first request that you have had to your department for this change to occur from the NLMA?

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

S. STOODLEY: As far as I'm aware, yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Further questions to Bill 61?

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

In the case of Medicus, will the Pension Benefits Act or any provincial legislation apply to their plan, or will it be solely the

legislation and regulations of Ontario that would apply to this?

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

S. STOODLEY: So what we're actually doing in the act is allowing regulations. The word Medicus, that pension plan is not specifically mentioned in the act, so we're changing the act to allow regulations. I just want to be completely transparent with our regulations. The only thing the regulations are going to do is allow Medicus, the specific pension plan. All other parts would apply.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

If pension administrators decide to approve a reduction in benefits in plans like this, who gets to ratify it? Does our provincial Superintendent of Pensions or the counterpart in the province or jurisdiction that it's registered in?

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

S. STOODLEY: So we have an agreement, which was put in the Gazette in May, that we would follow Ontario's lead. I guess I also just want to mention, as a multi-employer pension plan, it would be registered in Ontario and Ontario would be the lead regulator for this multi-employer pension plan.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: At the federal level, the superintendent of financial institutions has the power to authorize an amendment that reduces assured pension benefits. Without this authorization from the superintendent, would the amendments be void or null in this case where it's multi-jurisdictional?

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

S. STOODLEY: I don't have the answer to that off the top of my head, but I'll be happy to get that for the Member. It is already operating in other provinces; we just needed to change the legislation to allow it here.

My team is telling me that the federal regulations do not apply in this instance.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Any further questions to Bill 61?

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I just have one question of clarification. In the introduction to this bill, the minister talked about the Medicus Pension Plan being the first and only plan of its kind for medical professionals. I know this is done at the request of the NLMA, so it's focused mainly on physicians, but putting this clause in, does this give the opportunity for other medical professionals or practitioners to do the same?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

My understanding is due to the unique nature of how doctors incorporate, they have that kind of company and multiple

doctors might be in that company, that this is allowing that specific type of medical company to register in this multi-employer pension plan. It is for PMCs specifically. It would be unique under corporation law.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Further questions?

Hearing none, shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 17 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 17 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 17 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: I move, Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 61.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 61.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

B. WARR: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 61 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed that Bill 61 be carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill 61 ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 7.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, that An Act to Repeal the Farm Products Corporation Act, Bill 42, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Repeal the Farm Products Corporation Act." (Bill 42)

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to stand on my feet in the House of Assembly representing the beautiful District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune on the South Coast, just in case anybody doesn't know.

SPEAKER: Moved and seconded.

E. LOVELESS: Seconded by the Member for Lake Melville.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 42 will be now read a second time.

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

E. LOVELESS: And Crown Lands, I say to the Speaker just for the record.

As I was saying, it is always a pleasure to speak as a representative for the great people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

I'm doing a little bit of clean up here today, Speaker, Bill 42, An Act to Repeal the Farm Products Corporation Act. Just to give a little bit of history, the *Farm Products Corporation Act* was enacted in 1963. The act ensured the creation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Farm Products Corporation and this corporation was administered under the supervision of the minister responsible for agriculture.

When it was up and running, the Newfoundland and Labrador Farm Products Corporation had the power to establish abattoirs, cold-storage plants, warehouses, packing and processing plants, and other buildings and establishments suitable for

the handling, preparation, processing and storage of farm products.

As part of its mandate, the corporation operated two abattoirs in St. John's and Corner Brook. In January 1994, a decision was made to pursue privatization of the Newfoundland and Labrador Farm Products Corporation.

In March 1997, the provincial government announced its intention to divest its interest in the Newfoundland and Labrador Farm Products Corporation. Throughout the next few years and concluding in May 2005, government had divested all of its associated assets. As such, the Newfoundland and Labrador Farm Products Corporation has been inactive since 2008. Given that all Newfoundland and Labrador Farm Products Corporation assets have now been divested, the *Farm Products Corporation Act* serves no purpose in our current system.

That's why I'm pleased to have the opportunity to repeal the Farm Products Act with all the assets of Newfoundland and Labrador Farm Products Corporation long divested. This nearly 60-year-old legislation is no longer required.

As I'm sure you can appreciate, the agriculture industry – I know the Member for Exploits is listening inventively – has evolved significantly in the time since the corporation was created. The current value of the agricultural industry has grown significantly since that time. For instance, farm cash receipts grew \$156.6 million in 2022, the number of farms is 552 and there are 65,000 people employed directly and indirectly in the agrifood industry in this province.

Recently, in the last week or so, I've had the opportunity to visit four different farmers in the province on the West Coast and down on the Burin Peninsula because we can ask questions, we can debate all in this House, but until you visit and you see it, you don't

know what their circumstances are and you know what they need to proceed as farmers.

They are young farmers, which is very encouraging to see that. I gave them the assurance that we would be there, as a government, to support them in any way that we can, but certainly listening to their challenges that they have in the industry.

Speaker, we believe that a strong agricultural sector is vital to the health and security of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. No doubt, Newfoundland and Labrador's focus has shifted and nearly 20 years later, government continues to support the agriculture industry in other ways, such as federal-provincial agreements – very important – provincial agrifoods assistance, business development advice, et cetera.

This is how our industry grows, by providing opportunities for new farmers, as I just said, to secure support for new ventures and enabling seasoned farmers to explore innovative ways to expand operations. We, as a government, are pleased to play a vital role in supporting farmers and increasing food self-sufficiency through funding programs, increased availability of farmland and research and education initiatives that help ensure fresh, local food is readily available right here at home.

Before I conclude, I'd also like to say to the hon. Members that the provincial government's commitment is to reduce the number of agencies, boards and commissions. Working in the House of Assembly, we can all appreciate that it is good practice to ensure that we are streamlining our provincial legislation like this one today and repealing legislation when it is no longer needed or relevant.

I thank you for listening to this information because sometimes history needs to be told in order to see where we're going in the

future and for taking into account as we move forward.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always nice to get up here and speak on a bill, especially on the farm products part of the Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, which is my critic role. I know the farmers in my area – there's a deep connection to farms in my area and we grow a lot of foods in our area.

Of course, we know that agriculture is very important, dairy, eggs and chicken, we're self-sufficient in that. We need to do more root crop and storage and all that sort of stuff, but the intent of this bill is just to repeal of the *Farm Products Corporation Act* and I don't see any big problem with that. So we'll certainly be in favour of the bill.

Dairy products, of course, Speaker, is one of our biggest products. Dairy is the most valuable agricultural commodity in Newfoundland and Labrador. Industry indicates that the combined production and processing value to be worth \$125 million to the provincial economy, employing over 1,200 people which is a good thing. We can certainly grow on that.

Chicken: the Newfoundland and Labrador broiler industry is a valuable agriculture commodity with farm gate sales of \$32 million. Chicken farmers in our province produce 20-million kilograms of live-weighted chickens annually, which is another good initiative.

Eggs: the Newfoundland and Labrador egg farmer industry's gate value is currently valued at \$19 million.

Again, just to change the name of the Farm Products Association Corporation is substantial for that. It changes the act since 1963 so I think the intent of this bill is good and I have no problem with continuing to approve this bill.

With that, Speaker, we do have a couple of questions in Committee but other than that I'll take my seat.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I won't speak too long to this, but I understand, like the minister said, it was great to give a bit of history on the creation of why we created it and how it has now evolved into what we've got today. It was a noble intent to increase production of food and to increase production, locally, within the province. Now the industry has evolved into a bit different now, I understand why it's irrelevant.

But saying that, it's interesting that we talk about agriculture and increasing the agriculture in this province and what other incentives we can do to make sure that we have these assets now that won't be held under a Crown corporation or agency anymore but held by private enterprise.

At the same time, we want to see what other things we can do to incentivize because that was an incentive in the 1960s, where can we move forward to incentivize again, seeing how things have changed in the world now. We should be looking at buy local, produce local, manufacture local and what other ways we can do it.

But at the same time, I understand why we have to remove this act. We look back, history sometimes reminds us of why we did those things and how can we improve on or take back old ideas and create them and make them into modern context.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, just for the record, I'll be supporting Bill 42. Obviously, it has been said, if we don't have a Farm Products Corporation any more, we don't need an act. So this is really just housekeeping, just to clear the books and get rid of this piece of legislation, I have no issue with that. It makes sense.

The only question I'll have, and I can give it in Committee of the Whole or maybe the minister can just address it when he closes debate. But if you look in the bill here under section 3(3) and it's also noted here in the Explanatory Notes: "The Crown is responsible for all the obligations and liabilities of the corporation."

It says that, I never heard the minister mention that. I know he said that the property has now been – there is no Farm Products Corporation any more, all the assets have been divested of, that's fine and dandy. But what I don't think he said was address section 3 here. It says "The Crown is responsible for all the obligations and liabilities of the corporation."

So I guess the only question I would have would be: What liabilities and what obligations are there? Do any exist?

Other than that, I will be supporting the bill.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture speaks now he will close the debate.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Members for their brief comments.

As you said, it's just a clean up, this bill here, repealing the act. I'll be happy to answer the questions in Committee stage.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 42 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Repeal the Farm Products Corporation Act. (Bill 42)

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

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

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Repeal the Farm Products Corporation Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 42)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that An Act Respecting Towns and

Local Service Districts, Bill 54, be now read a third time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts. (Bill 54)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 54)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that this House do now adjourn.

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.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 o'clock tomorrow.