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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin today, I would like to welcome in the Speaker's gallery, former Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, Deputy Speaker and a good friend, Brian Warr.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In the public gallery, I'd like to welcome students from Heritage Collegiate and their teacher Paula Dooley.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also in the public gallery, welcome to Ronnie Coady. He is joined by his wife Raylene and their children Lila and Natalie. Ronnie will be recognized this afternoon in a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Placentia - St. Mary's, Placentia West - Bellevue, St. George's - Humber, Stephenville - Port au Port and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, the Town of St. Mary's has a mother-daughter award winning duo. Each year, the 4-H National Awards recognize extraordinary contributions of supporters, volunteers and alumni who embody the mission of 4-H and make an impact on the youth in the communities they serve.

The Volunteer Leader of the Year Awards are given to a leader in each province. Yvonne Bishop of the Zodiac 4-H Club, a resident of St. Mary's, is the 2023 Newfoundland and Labrador provincial winner. Her daughter, Amy, is the 2023 4-H Canada Leadership Excellence Awards of Distinction Recipient of a \$20,000 scholarship for the pillar of environment and health in the science field of study. Amy will receive \$5,000 annually while attending Memorial University.

Amy first joined the Zodiac 4-H Club over 10 years ago. She has held every executive position and credits 4-H with developing her leadership skills and helping her find her voice. She has sharpened her public speaking skills, racking up awards at competitions. Amy was a highly active student in high school, earning three back-to-back Scholar Athlete Awards for athletes who maintain a grade average of over 90 per cent.

Congratulations to the mother-daughter duo Yvonne and Amy Bishop.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I rise in this hon. House to recognize the Marystown Lions Club in the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue. The Marystown Lions Club was chartered in May of 1974 and on April 27, 2024, just this past weekend, I was honoured to join them to celebrate their 50th anniversary at their annual charter night.

The Lions are a non-profit organization made of volunteers who come together to raise money and give back to their communities in any time of need. The Marystown Lions take part and host many events including the Lions Recycle for Sight, community meals, goods bingo and

participated in Earth Day with their electronic recycling.

From helping individuals in need, supporting other non-profit organizations and being strong community leaders, I stand here with pride to know we have such a great organization in our community for the people to utilize and admire.

Speaker, I ask all Members of the 50th General Assembly to please join me in congratulating the Marystown Lions Club on their 50th anniversary and wish them many more years of great success.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. REID: Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Beverley McIsaac of the Codroy Valley who passed away peacefully in March of this year, surrounded by her loving family after a courageous battle with cancer.

Many people in the District of St. George's - Humber know Beverley as a nurse practitioner but through her career, spanning over four decades, she worked as a registered nurse, a nurse practitioner and a nurse educator.

Her legacy is one of compassion, professionalism and a relentless pursuit of patient-care excellence. Beverley's devotion to nursing took her to various regions within the province and across the country, including Canada's North. Her tireless efforts left a mark, not just on her patients, but also on those who she inspired to become health care professionals and follow in her footsteps.

Speaker, Beverley served in many communities in the district I represent and was well liked and respected in the community.

I ask all Members of the House of Assembly to join with me in sending condolences to her family and paying tribute to Beverley McIsaac for the contribution she has made to health care in this province.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

About three years ago Tracy Boland, a Stephenville resident, observed that seniors were struggling with some of the simplest things in life in order to stay in their own homes. Tracy decided to organize a small but mighty group of volunteers who were willing to take on the challenge to help. This group call themselves the Guardian Angels for Stephenville Seniors. Their main mission is to provide assistance to seniors who are living in their own homes.

Since starting the program, the Guardian Angels have helped seniors with a variety of tasks such as providing rides to doctors' appointments, shovelling driveways, minor home maintenance or any need that presents itself. They have been distributing food hampers, as well as hot meals and cold plates to combat the rising cost of living.

The group relies on the generosity of local businesses, as well as individuals who come forth with monetary donations and food items. Children from the local schools got involved by designing cards to brighten the seniors' day.

The biggest issue among seniors, as identified by the group, is loneliness and the Guardian Angels are working hard to make seniors' days a little brighter, one senior at a time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, Coady's Metal Works has produced custom ironwork and kept the art of blacksmithing alive in St. John's since 1882, that's 142 years. Ronnie Coady is the fifth generation to run the shop.

William Coady started Coady's Forge on the current site of Sir Humphrey Gilbert Building in 1882. Several moves and 94 years later, the business relocated to 110 Lime Street in 1976. People still visit the shop to reminisce or for small repairs. Ronnie serves the everyday customer, doing small welding jobs when most modern shops will not.

Ronnie and his father, Ron Sr., are proud of their family business' community support, longevity and resilience in a changing world. From hammering out 6,000 horseshoes a year as late as 1970, to fabricating ornamental spiral staircases, to serving the fishery, forestry, agriculture and mining industries; if it was made with metal, they made it. Coady's Metal Works still produces custom work, ornamental gates, and railings for homes, home decor and service repairs. You can see their quality work throughout the city.

Ronnie and his dad acknowledge the challenges facing small businesses but continue to work hard and thrive.

Please join me in recognizing the resilience and determination of the Coady family.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Speaker, on behalf of the provincial government and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I send my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the legendary broadcaster, Bob Cole.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: The passing of the voice of Hockey Night in Canada is not just a loss for the nation of dedicated hockey fans but is especially emotional for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

He was an incredible man, with an incredible voice, an incredible storyteller. Hearing him call games played by our hockey heroes, allowed us all to dream. It helped us realize that, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we too could achieve great heights in any endeavour and on any stage.

While his impact on the world of hockey was indeed immense, he was something extra special for us, for the people of his beloved and his most celebrated on national TV home, Newfoundland and Labrador.

When you look at all achieved in his lifetime, all the awards, all the accolades, I think it can best be summed up in his words: "Oh baby!"

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I would like to thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

Bob Cole made all of us, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, fiercely proud. The voice of hockey in this country was one of our own. Week by week Bob Cole put us right there on the ice in the heat of the action. Families and friends came together on the weekend, eager to watch

the game on the edge of their seats because of the way Bob called it, and dreaming of being part of it. Imagine how many of our finest athletes were inspired by Bob Cole's passion for the play by play.

He realized he had a gift for inspiring others and he used it to elevate all of us. He was a role model through and through, excelling at everything he did, whether in multiple sports or in broadcasting, or in just helping those in need. He helped bind this country together week after week from coast to coast to coast calling Canada's national game.

We are genuinely grateful for the hundreds of hours we all spent riveted by the games his voice brought to life in our homes. Those memories and recordings are now an indelible part of our proud national sports history.

To all Bob's family, and to the millions who've been inspired by him, we express our deepest sympathy on his passing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Premier as well for an advance copy of his statement.

Every Newfoundlander and Labradorian held a special sense of pride when they heard Bob Cole's distinctive voice announcing a hockey game. Even if you weren't a fan of hockey, you probably knew the voice.

He enthralled millions over his 50-year career with an encyclopedic knowledge of the game and an unparalleled ability to narrate, and a stellar personality.

We offer our condolences to the family and friends of Bob Cole, a Newfoundland and Labrador legend.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers.

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

A. PARSONS: Speaker, last week, the Premier and I were pleased to be in Come By Chance to celebrate the refinery's 50-year history –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: – in the community and mark the beginning of a new era with the launch of renewable fuel production.

In February, Braya Renewable Fuels successfully commenced refinery operations, converting the traditional petroleum refinery into a renewable fuel-production facility, investing more than \$1 billion into our province and drastically reducing emissions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: Our government recognizes the importance of this refinery and the jobs it supplies directly and indirectly to the local communities, to the region, and to the entire province. It's why, in January of 2021, we provided \$16.6 million in funding to keep the refinery in warm-idle mode, as the owners at the time searched for a buyer or investor.

We were pleased that our support provided the owners with the time necessary to secure the investment to convert the refinery to sustainable aviation fuel and renewable diesel production, securing employment for workers and a long-term, environmentally sustainable solution.

On March 27, Braya's first ever shipment of biofuel, produced from soya bean oil, was exported from Newfoundland and Labrador to a customer based in California.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Braya Renewables, its employees and the Come By Chance region on this milestone.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

It is truly commendable to witness the transformation of the refinery in Come By Chance from being the biggest emitter of carbon in the province to becoming one of the lowest emitters in the entire industry. This shift towards renewable fuel production marks a significant milestone in the refinery's 50-year history and sets the stage for a new era of sustainability. It is imperative for the government, not only to celebrate this accomplishment, but to also make a steadfast commitment to continue supporting our oil and gas industry workers throughout our province. Balancing the need for economic growth and job security in the industry with environmental concerns is a delicate task that requires strategic decision-making.

As we congratulate Braya Renewables, its employees and the Come By Chance region on its remarkable achievement, let's also reaffirm our commitments to supporting workers in the oil and gas industry while ensuring a sustainable future for our beautiful province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

We are very pleased to see that the refinery has reached this milestone. It provides good jobs and a good income for many people of our province and it has worked towards a green future and positioning ourselves towards a future in biofuels.

This hasn't come without hazards. We call upon government to make sure that all workplaces have safety standards and maintain the facilities so that workers can come home every day from their job safely. We want to make sure that government also applies that for all industries across this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there are further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, today we're focusing on mental health and addictions, a topic that hits home in one way or another to every single Member in this Chamber and those watching at home. Newfoundland and Labrador has seen an extreme increase in deaths from overdoses.

I ask the Premier: How many people have died because of overdose in our province in 2023?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, we share the sentiments from the Member opposite as every family has been touched, either directly or indirectly, with respect to mental health and addictions and I'm sure many Members in this Chamber are no different.

We'll continue to do our best to ensure that we're putting in policies to support mental health and addictions across the province, Mr. Speaker. This is a problem that has gripped the entire nation, starting west and moving east. We're not immune here, Mr. Speaker. That's why the Minister of Health and I take this very serious, as does our entire government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

The answer is 51, according to an ATIPP request we received in February. That's an increase of 143 per cent since 2019.

Speaker, in September, it was reported that in eight months, 24 Newfoundland and Labrador residents had died due to overdose. Four months later, that number more that doubled to 51. The rate of overdose deaths in Newfoundland and Labrador is accelerating.

I ask the Premier: Do you think your government is doing enough to address the situation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, the government can always do more to support the situation. This has been an evolving crisis that gripped the West

Coast of the country and has moved east as there are more drugs available, stronger drugs available, spiked drugs, things like fentanyl that weren't in the common-day language. Fentanyl was only available in hospital four or five years ago and now, unfortunately, is on our shores.

We have to do more. We've started things like Narcan kits available, more available throughout the entire communities. We continue to focus on education, continue to focus on building mental health and addiction strategies into all government departments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Again, Speaker, the statistics are getting worse and worse.

Speaker, non-fatal overdoses are seen by police, front-line health care professionals and others. In two separate ATIPPs we have filed, there was no responsive records – zero – pertaining to any data relating to overdoses other than those resulting in death. Other jurisdictions collect that data, allowing them to target addiction supports and intervention before it is too late.

Premier, how do you address the problem in this province if you do not even know the scale of it?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, we are a data-driven, evidence-based government, Mr. Speaker. If that's not being collected, we're certainly happy to change that. Anything that we can do on this side of the House to prevent increased deaths with respect to overdoses, we will do, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I look forward to that data actually being collected.

Speaker, letters and requests for meetings and information have gone unanswered. Families feel ignored and have not been invited to the All-Party Committee struck to address the growing crisis in this province. Some are here in the gallery today to get an answer.

Premier, why has your government ignored those seeking answers regarding addiction treatment options for their children?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the All-Party Committee has not concluded its work. Up to this stage, the All-Party Committee, consisting of Members on all sides of the House, have been meeting and hearing from officials and other officials. There is a plan in place to meet with the community stakeholders and those with lived experience, and that will happen as part of the work of the All-Party Committee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, substance abuse is rampant in Labrador. Communities all over are begging for assistance. The six-bed mental health unit in Labrador was a welcome addition, but unfortunately, we're hearing of consistent issues with staffing.

I ask the minister: Is that unit currently up and running and accepting patients right now?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've been advised by the provincial health authority that they did have some human resource challenges, Mr. Speaker. There was a temporary closure of that six-bed unit, but they do anticipate having it reopen this spring.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I've been told that when the unit was open, it was fully staffed by travel nurses and now, obviously, it is closed down. I would just simply say to the minister, all those nursing students that are here now doing their practical examinations from Labrador, maybe some of them could be approached to see if they would take on the extra year of study, or whatever it takes to become a psychiatric nurse.

Speaker, the social issues in Labrador are growing and the resources are simply not there to help those seeking help. The budget allocates \$15 million to develop options for help regarding mental health and addictions.

I ask: How much of that is being spent in Labrador?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There has been a significant increase in mental health and addictions spending in this province over the past five years. Much of that, Mr. Speaker, is being spent in the Labrador region of the province. There are a number of improvements in place throughout the province.

Again, if you compare the mental health and addiction services that were in place five or six years ago with what is in place today, there has been a huge improvement. There is much more work to be done, Mr. Speaker.

We're not nearly there, which is part of the reason we have the All-Party Committee to continue to build on the recommendations that were put in place as a result of the first All-Party Committee to build on the foundation that has been put in place through *Towards Recovery* so that we can continue to provide improved services for those needing them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, we didn't get an answer to the question in terms of how the \$15 million is being spent.

The crime rates of the rural Newfoundland and Labrador are on the rise, and many are failing to address the mental health and addictions supports that they need. The budget highlights seven communities that will host mobile crisis teams with just \$1 million for their start-up.

While the unit is up and running in my district, will the remaining communities have crisis teams in place before the end of the year?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, that is part of the budget this year. We are still debating budget. As soon as the budget is passed, we can get on with that work in earnest.

The addition of the Mobile Crisis Response Teams through a number of areas in this

province is one of the enhancements being put in place to help those with mental health and addictions issues. They have proven to be very valuable. There are seven additional units in place for this province this year – new units. We'll continue to look at the success of those units, but yes, it is our hope that we will have those units up and running before the end of the year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, can the minister provide an update on how many staff have been recruited for those units and some timelines about when they might be actually up and running?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The sooner we get budget voted on and passed in this Legislature, the sooner we can hire staff for those units.

It is a part of this year's budget. The budget is still being debated. Although, I know recruitment has started for those positions and we can certainly get an update.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, again, we've already voted in Interim Supply for three months –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – and to say that we can't start recruiting positions until the budget is passed is not good enough.

So again, I ask: Have the positions been advertised? Have the interviews been held? Do we have start dates for all of these additional staff?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Premier – sorry, Mr. Speaker. An early promotion.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at recruitment for those positions. That will happen in earnest.

What I can say to the Member opposite is that while this Premier and this government has focused on increasing the number of positions in health care, we know that the Member opposite, when he was CEO of Lab-Grenfell, focused on reduction of positions.

That is the contrast between this side and that side.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I'm not even going to respond – I'm not even going to respond.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: No urgency, no priority.

Speaker, those in recovery oftentimes find themselves in difficult housing situations. There are very few options for them to seek shelter in a drug-free place. The sole option for many is the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing wait-list.

I ask the minister: Will the comfort inn be a place for those recovering users to seek shelter away from drugs?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to answer that question.

The Transitional Supportive Living Initiative at 106 Airport Road, the folks who will end up staying there, signing a lease and living there for whatever period of time it is, determined by our Coordinated Access table. That's a group of our community partners who work with and are partnered with folks who need help and need assistance, so its quite possible some will be there.

To say exactly who's going in there is going to be up to our Coordinated Access table. Those folks make the determination, they make the recommendation to End Homelessness St. John's. They have the contract for the operational status of that facility, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, in response to the growing crisis in this province, an all-party Committee was announced in September 2023.

I ask the minister: How many times has this Committee met?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've had a number of meetings. We've attempted to arrange a number of other meetings. Members at that meeting indicated that the best time to have those meetings was when the House was in session. That is on record in the minutes of those meetings. We've attempted to have meetings since the House has come back in session, I believe on two occasions, and

Members could not attend those meetings. We are attempting to have additional meetings.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, the answer to that question is three. There have been numerous cancellations and the option of meeting while the House is in session came from the minister and his officials.

Speaker, unlike the all-party Committee struck by a PC government in 2015, this Committee has seen very little actual work and many cancelled meetings. One of the purposes of the Committee is to consult and receive testimonies from individuals and families with lived and living experiences, many of whom are here today.

Minister, when will your department invite these individuals and their families to present to this Committee?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, in a question earlier by the Leader of the Opposition that question was asked. We will have meetings with individuals with lived and living experience and other stakeholders.

For the record, it was Members of the Committee who suggested the best time to meet was when the House was in session. That is in the minutes of the meetings, Mr. Speaker, taken by non-partisan officials. It is not our choice, Mr. Speaker, that was the choice of Committee Members including Members on that side. We were not the people who cancelled those meetings while the House was supposed to be in session.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The minister knows and I know the difference, too, because I'm a part of that and we're sitting down. One day we got a 10-minute notice that the meeting was cancelled. Lo and behold, the emergency was the minister went on *Open Line* at 10:20. I guess that was why we cancelled the meeting.

You want to get on the reality of passing the buck. The minister makes those things and the Committee agrees to it, when it's brought forward by the minister. We're trying to be reasonable, but it's not fair to the people out there looking for help.

With the number of deaths from overdose rising, this is a growing crisis in our province.

I ask the minister: Is his department committed to truly working with the Committee to address the growing crisis or was it simply created to make another announcement?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that we're taking an all-party Committee that is supposed to be non-partisan and making politics of it. This Committee was put in place in good faith, Mr. Speaker, based on the success of the initial Committee with 54 recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, again for the record, the meetings that were supposed to be held while the House was in session, that Members themselves indicated was the best time to have these meetings, it was the Members that cancelled, Mr. Speaker. I am attempting to not get political here, but the reality is, those meetings were cancelled by the Members.

Mr. Speaker, we have increased the number of sites for distribution of naloxone kits from just over 100 to about 140 in the last several months.

There is good work happening as a result of that Committee and that work, I hope, will continue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to just respond back to the minister who is making this political. You know that's not accurate. The steps of the Confederation Building are protested daily, and I mean daily, parents, families, from my district and from other districts across this province. People are upset. They want government to do more. The minister announced he would form an all-party Committee, which the group and all those protesters were happy about.

Smoke and mirrors is what we're seeing. We call government out for it on a daily basis, Speaker, and that's what we're seeing here. There has been no action from this Committee. It's fine to form a Committee – I sat on the last all-party Committee, we actually did stuff.

I ask the minister: When are you going to do stuff to address the problems that are outstanding now? The people in the gallery are waiting for answers, Minister, not (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, we've had two meetings set at the Member's request and other Members of the Committee to hold them in the afternoons while the House was

in session. I'll gladly arrange another one this week, Mr. Speaker. Will that Member attend?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Information we obtained from the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary indicates that in the last two years alone, from 2021 to 2023, the number of files assigned to the Drug Investigative Unit doubled from 80 to 112 to 141.

Does the Justice Minister acknowledge that the drug crisis in this province is only getting worse?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Yes, I acknowledge, as the Premier did earlier, when we were asked about questions about the drug problem in this province. I think it is fair to say, and it's obvious to say, that it's getting worse. As the Premier mentioned, it's something that we saw on the west coast of this country and it's spread across to Newfoundland and Labrador, which is very unfortunate.

The RNC and RCMP, I know, and so do I, as Justice Minister, take this very seriously. In fact, I think it was two years ago there was a joint task force announced on the West Coast between the RNC and RCMP, which has been very successful in combating any crimes that are committed with drugs and with guns in this province.

So I take it seriously, both police forces, which I said on a number of occasions. We're very lucky to have two great police forces in this province which have taken it seriously. They have tangible work that we've seen over the last two years to deal with the drug crisis. I know that they

continue to work on it to make sure that we're as safe as possible in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: More information provided from the RNC indicates that the number of charges laid by this Drug Enforcement Unit rose from 25 in 2021, to 82 in 2022, to 181 in 2023, more than seven times what it had been just two years earlier. The drug problem in our province is spiralling out of control.

When will this government treat the underlying addictions crisis as a health crisis and not leave it to our police to pick up the pieces for this government's failure to act?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a health issue. It's also an issue where health officials and health professionals work with law enforcement and other agencies. There is training and so on in place for those that are involved in responding to individuals with mental health crisis or mental health issues. That will continue.

This is an issue where all individuals, all agencies, all groups are working together and must work together to ensure that we respond in the most appropriate way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, there is a clear link been established between untreated mental health conditions

and crime. Unfortunately, many people go untreated and it's because there is a lack of access, not from a lack of trying.

Does the minister know how many individuals who are incarcerated or facing charges have untreated mental health conditions?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I don't have that number in front of me right now, but as the Member knows, we're working very hard to deal with any facility issues specifically with regard to HMP here in St. John's to increase – there's \$15 million in the budget over the next couple of years to provide extra spacing at HMP. There's an expansion of Labrador Correctional Centre, which will provide additional spacing as well. Not just for educational programming, but for addictions and trauma-centric and, in Labrador's case, Indigenous-centric programming that can help treat people.

As I said before, it's very important that individuals who go into facilities in this province receive the proper rehabilitation. It's part of the *Criminal Code*; it's part of the sentencing provisions that take rehabilitation into account.

I do look forward to continuing to work on making sure that those programs are available for individuals in this province.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll give the minister a number. In 2018, the Jesso report estimated that between 77 and

87 per cent of the inmates either had mental health issues, substance abuse issues, or both. Six years later, I'm sure that number is much worse.

Sadly, too many people fall through the cracks under this government's watch, and they end up committing crimes before they have a chance to access the help they desperately need.

Premier, how can you continue to allow this happen on your watch?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's pretty much the same answer as I just gave. We're working very hard to make sure that individuals who are in facilities in this province, such as the Labrador Correctional Centre and HMP here and other facilities throughout the province, have the proper treatment programs available to them.

A big step we've taken over the last couple of years was to transfer health services away from the Department of Justice and Public Safety, which obviously it is not its area of expertise – it's health and addictions – into the Health Department in this province.

I know I've had meetings over the last couple of weeks with individuals who are there on a daily basis and said they're very pleased with the way that's working and that they feel that people's access to health care was increasing. I had a meeting last week as well where a group said: Can we look at these facilities being more health intensive as opposed to punishment?

I totally agree with that. I think we need to continue to work on that and I'm happy with the work that's been done by the Department of Health and Justice and Public Safety, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I'd like to thank the minister for highlighting the issue. It isn't about the treatment once they get there. They're there because they're not getting the treatment and they end up there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Speaker, families struggle immensely navigating the mental health and addictions services in this province. There's no better example than a family in my district from a couple of weeks ago. Their 23-year-old son who struggled for two years trying to get mental health interventions he desperately needed, to no avail. He was recently arrested and currently sits in a fit program for the next 30 days.

What do you say to his family?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we must do better for those with mental health and addictions issues. As we have in this year's budget, whether it's the mobile crisis response units that we are adding throughout the province, or enhancing the addictions centres with funding in this year's budget, we continue to look at mental health and addiction services.

There's funding in this year's budget, as well, for a step-down facility in St. John's to add additional capacity. We are focusing on increasing and improving capacity but we are building on – like I said, the foundation that was put in place through *Towards Recovery* is the beginning. That's not the end of where we need to go. It's the beginning because much, much more work

needs to be done and this government is focused on that, which is why we continue to invest.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I can tell you the family that I'm talking about; they don't care about the services here in St. John's. They're in rural Newfoundland and I don't hear a word about it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: The young individual, along with support from his family, tried on several occasions to get help. He went to Doorways, as the minister suggested. He called 811, as the minister suggested. He had contact with the mental health navigator, as the minister suggested. He went to the Waterford, only to be sent home in a taxi, not once, but several times. The mental health system failed him and now he's in the justice system, as the previous minister just talked about.

Minister, how is this fair to this individual and his family?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, we can't speak to individual cases, but what I can say is it's not just in metro region that we are putting service. The majority of the mobile crisis response units, funded in this year's budget, are for rural Newfoundland. There are other services such as the FACT teams that are put in place, Mr. Speaker, throughout the province.

There are others, such as the narcotic addiction sites where we are expanding those services into other substances; this year, starting with alcohol. We have an alcohol addictions plan in place. We have a

suicide prevention plan put in place. Those plans have been put in place in the last couple of years and the recommendations on those plans are being acted on and the services, as a result of those plans, are being put in place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, there are too many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians struggling with mental health and addictions. A mother of a 14-year-old in my district has lost her daughter to addictions and mental health challenges. Everywhere she turns for help, whether it be the Health Sciences Centre, RNC, 811, the Janeway, the Waterford, they all get deferred; constantly hearing: Not my department.

Minister, is this your plan for wraparound supports?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the wraparound supports come from the 54 recommendations. They will also come from recommendations from the new All-Party Committee. We're not simply waiting on the recommendations from the new All-Party Committee. Otherwise, we wouldn't have the funding in this year's budget for things like the Mobile Crisis Response Teams.

We are acting – while we are waiting on recommendations from the All-Party Committee, we are putting action into place, Mr. Speaker, with wraparound services in areas of the province to ensure that mental health and addictions services are there.

Is there enough? No, absolutely not. We need to continue to add to that, Mr.

Speaker, and we continue to look for ways we can do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Speaker, I've heard it from reports that have been put out there and it is a quote from a lot of people dealing with lived experiences: Mental health and addictions does not do good on wait-lists, and this government has waited nine years now, at least.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Speaker, just last week, a mother expressed her heart-breaking desperation to find help for her teenage son battling with addictions and mental health struggles. Her son will have to wait over a year to see a psychiatrist.

What do you tell this mother who says – and I quote – I don't care if my son hates me for life, as long as he lives a long life?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, access to psychology and psychiatry services in this province is important. We continue to recruit, Mr. Speaker. We look at areas where recruitment is necessary and we recruit for those positions.

Recruitment is challenging, as the Member knows. It is not only challenging in this province, it is challenging in every province across the country. There is a shortage of health professionals in each and every province in Canada and, in fact, globally.

There is a shortage of skilled labour, regardless of which discipline you look at, whether it is in the trades or engineering or health care. So it is a challenge, no question, but we continue to recruit because

these services are vital to the people who need them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, in response to my questions on the lack of mental health supports in my district the minister spoke about the six-bed psychiatric unit – that is actually closed – FACT teams, 811, Bridge the gapp that aren't helping people in my district who are at greatest risk.

Can the minister commit to at least the most serious cases will be able to access the appropriate level of care?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, are there enough services in place? Absolutely not. But to say that the services that are in place are not helping is a little unfair as well. We need to increase and expand on the services that are in place, Mr. Speaker. That is how we are going to appropriately service the individuals with mental health and addictions needs throughout the province.

But there has been a great focus and a great investment in services in the Labrador region of the province. I'm not going to say it's enough, because it's not nearly enough. We continue to focus, continue to invest and continue to build on the services that are there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, the services available are not nearly enough.

When I asked the minister: Does it take someone actually dying before people in my

district can access mental health care? He replied: If there are gaps that need to be filled, this government will fill those gaps and put services in place that need to be there.

But people are dying, children are dying. People are dying at their own hands.

So will the minister commit to ensure psychiatrists and psychologists are available to people in my district?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that those services are available, but those individuals, those health professionals, need to be recruited. As I mentioned to an earlier question, there is a challenge in recruitment of health care professionals across the country, in every province in Canada and, in fact, in many countries around the world.

It is challenging. We absolutely need these positions. We need them in Labrador. We need them in Gander. We need them in St. John's. We need them throughout the province and the health authority are doing their best to recruit these positions. We put a recruitment office in place in the health authority specifically focused, day in and day out, full time to recruitment of health care professionals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Friday past, police in riot gear cordoned off a section of Livingstone Street in my district. It was another incident in a long line of violent incidents affecting the residents of the neighbourhood. The trauma of such incidents can impact people in many ways

and have ripple effects on mental and physical health.

Police in tactical gear, Speaker, cannot be the only response to the issues facing the area.

I ask the Premier: What immediate, proactive steps will government take to ensure all residents of the area have a safe neighbourhood?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've been receiving emails about this incident, actually, before the incident happened last week and, in fact, some of the emails called for an increased police presence there. Then, sure enough, unfortunately the police – or maybe fortunately, the police did show up. They do a lot of planning before they do anything like that, to show up with any plans like that because of crime.

Then I received some emails that said: Of course, when we sent the initial emails, we weren't aware what the RNC were going to do. So I think they were thankful that the RNC showed up to deal with the crime in that area on that specific day.

Those emails continued over the weekend, some of which I was involved in, and the Member was as well, coming up with some creative ways, some out-of-the-box ways to improve the area specifically, such as the community centre.

I have a meeting set up already with an individual at Thrive who wants to look at putting a community centre there and any supports that could go along with it. I think individuals there are willing to be engaged. I look forward to continuing talking with them as well as we continue to talk about that specific part of the city, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, since 2019, I have called for such measures as community policing and a community centre, among others. It's only the past year that government finally committed to a feasibility study on a community centre.

Government's so-called wraparound supports for people with complex needs are totally inadequate.

I ask the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development: What further tangible supports will his department put in place to ensure people remain safely housed and people feel safe in their neighbourhood?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Member is right, there has been a commitment by this government to that specific part of the city. In fact, issues were raised a couple of years ago when I was minister as well, talking about safety there. I know that the RNC took steps to meet with them on a regular basis, to meet with individuals there who wanted to meet. They did some things like send their police forces there, on a daily basis as well, to show that there's a presence of the police in that area, that part of the city, so people could feel safer.

Again, I continue to look forward to meeting with them and discussing options with them, such as public safety money that the City of St. John's has that might be available to those individuals as well.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, pursuant to the motion of referral of March 21, 2024, and in accordance with Standing Order 72, the Social Services Committee met on six occasions: April 15, 18, 19, 23, 25 and 26.

The Social Services Committee has considered the matters to them referred and pursuant to Standing Order 75(2) have directed me to report that they have passed, without amendment, the Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development; the Department of Education; the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Justice and Public Safety; the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs; and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation. Further, the Committee recommends that the report be concurred in.

SPEAKER: Further presenting reports?

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

S. REID: Speaker, pursuant to the motion of referral, March 21, 2024, and in accordance with Standing Order 72, the Resource Committee met on five occasions: April 15, 16, 17, 23 and 29.

The Resource Committee has considered the matters to them referred and pursuant to Standing Order 75(2) have directed me to report that they have passed, without amendment, the Estimates of the Department of Environment and Climate Change; the Department of Fisheries,

Forestry and Agriculture; the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills; the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology; and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. Further, the Committee recommends that the reports be concurred in.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

L. STOYLES: Speaker, pursuant to the motion of reference of March 21, 2024, and in accordance with Standing Order 72, the Government Services Committee met on four occasions: April 16, April 18, April 19 and April 26.

The Government Services Committee has considered the matters to them referred and pursuant to Standing Order 75(2) have directed me to report that they have passed, without amendment, the Estimates of Consolidated Funds Service; Digital Government and Service NL; Department of Finance; Department of Labrador Affairs; Public Procurement Agency; Public Service Commission; and the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the report be concurred in.

SPEAKER: 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, May 13, 2024.

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order

11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 14, 2024.

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, but shall continue to sit to conduct Government Business and, if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 16, 2024.

SPEAKER: Are there any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

The background for this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS there are no current operations at the Bull Arm Fabrication Site; and

WHEREAS the site is a world-class facility with the potential to rejuvenate the local economy; and

WHEREAS residents of the area are troubled with the lack of local employment in today's economy; and

WHEREAS the operation of this facility would encourage employment for the area and create economic spin-offs for local businesses; and

WHEREAS the site is an asset to the province, built to the benefit of the province and a long-term tenant for this site would attract gainful business opportunities; and

WHEREAS the continued idling of this site if not in the best interest of the province;

THEREFORE, we residents of the area, near the Bull Arm Fabrication Site, petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to expedite the process to get the Bull Arm Fabrication Site back in operation. We request that this process include a vision for a long-term, viable plan that is beneficial to all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Furthermore, we request the government place an emphasis on all supply, maintenance, fabrication and offshore workover for existing offshore platforms, as well as new construction of any future platforms whether be they GBS or FPSO in nature.

I know that we have been moving along with the Bull Arm Fabrication Site. As I joined the minister and the Premier in Come By Chance for the 50th anniversary of the refinery and the launching of Braya, while there are some really good initiatives that are happening, the people of the area really do see the Bull Arm site as an asset and we'd like to get an update as to where we are right now, and I invite the minister to answer to the petition.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank my colleague for an opportunity to provide a small update on Bull Arm and the facility.

It's not the update that we want to hear yet, but the good news is that we are moving in the right direction. We did put out an RFP and we have had interested parties submit bids and, right now, we're in the process of going through that and doing analysis of that. In all cases we had to do a clarification, where we go back and ask certain follow-up questions.

We want to see what comes out of that. That process is moving fairly quickly and hopefully, even during this sitting of the House – who knows; anything is possible – we can talk about this.

Just a couple of points I would make. I mean, we all agree that it is an asset. It is underutilized and we want to do more with it. The second part, though, is that because it is an asset and it's a government asset, sometimes the bids that come in, the interest that comes in is not as valuable as we think it should be. We don't want to make use of an asset for less than what it's worth or to dispose of that or to partner on that.

Anything we do, whether it is something or if we choose not to move forward, we will be discussing it here and there will be opportunities to ask questions and there will be lots of discussion on that.

So, on that note, I look forward to the opportunity to provide a bigger answer sooner, hopefully, rather than later.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS in the District of Harbour Main there are many residents who are concerned with the deteriorating cellphone

service that they have been experiencing in recent months. There has been a significant decline in the cell service throughout the district where calls are being dropped and residents are unable to get their calls to go through for no apparent reason;

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 work and partner with the various cellular providers and telecommunication officials to stabilize and improve the cellphone service within the region so that citizens have a reliable service that they can depend on.

Speaker, this matter is only getting worse. I am hearing repeatedly from constituents throughout the district. Most recently, a constituent from Avondale, she had stated that we really need to get out mobile phone coverage back. There are so many dead zones throughout the district, and it seems like there is even more lost connections each and every week.

There are constituents that have said that they're concerned about the safety issue. They're concerned if there is a real emergency and there is no cellphone service available. I just heard this morning that one of the schools, they don't even have reliable cellphone services within the district.

Speaker, this is my fifth time presenting this petition. The last time was in November of 2023. I will add that the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology was concerned about this at that time. In fact, he met with me right after the petition and he encouraged me and others to reach out to our providers.

We have done that, Speaker, yet there is no tangible improvement. It seems that we're hearing from throughout the district that matters are only getting worse. We're hearing from Clarke's Beach, the town

council there, who says that the situation is just intolerable.

So I implore the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology to work with us. I've heard from constituents who are saying this is not only just about getting the matter fixed, but they need communication. They need to understand what the problem is. Information is power and at least if our constituents knew where this stood and exactly what efforts the provincial government is doing, in partnership with the federal government and other partners, then at least we'd be that much further ahead.

Again, Speaker, this situation is serious and it has been ongoing for many years now and we need to deal with this as soon as possible.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

I appreciate the petition from the Member. I will say that in my time in Opposition, you've still got a way to go to catch petitions I put in when I was Opposition about cell service in Newfoundland and Labrador. The reason I say that is that no matter who's in on either side of this House, cell service is an issue and it's difficult because we're dealing with huge multinationals.

There are couple points here. Number one, while I think the service in many areas – and I've been and drove on these roads; I agree the service is not there. It's like it in many parts of this province and it's not acceptable. But, at the same time, I'm not prepared for the provincial government to fully fund, 100 per cent, the cost of providing this service. I do not think that's something

where we should be. I do think the federal government has a role to play here, and I do think the companies need to step up and do more. There it is.

I'm more than happy to work with the Member or any Member on either side of this House when it comes to targeted areas. Anecdotally, I can say that I've had places in my constituency where it seemed like we had a certain level and then a degrading of that, and then we try to communicate and say what is going on there to see if we can fix it. In some cases, maybe there's a technical reason that they're not aware of.

So I'm happy to continue to try that. All I can say is that this is an evergreen frustrating issue. I appreciate the concern of your constituents. I'll continue to do what I can. But again, you see this on a conversation; nobody ever said it was easy working with telecommunications companies and I think we need to continue to hold them responsible for the service they need to provide to all of us. They need to realize this, and I think we can make sure that we present that case together as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador urge our leaders to take action to address the accelerating climate emergency. We are not on track to achieve our target of containing global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. Unprecedented, extreme weather events have become routine while oil and gas companies continue to post record profits. If we are to avoid a climate catastrophe, we must take serious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through a just transition away

from fossil fuels that doesn't leave workers behind;

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to declare a climate emergency, invest substantially in public transit infrastructure province wide, cease subsidies of oil and gas companies and introduce legislation that bans the advertising for oil and gas companies.

Speaker, the petition is not calling on for the turning of the taps, as some might say, but it is about getting ready for it and about just transition. Which was the impetus and the central point of our just transition PMR. Which is about making sure that when oil companies pull out – and eventually they will – that our workers are protected and our environment is protected. It's basically to protect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Oil companies will operate in their own best interests. It's as simple as that.

So what it's looking for is a recognition, not a we-all-believe-in-climate-change-but statement, but that we have an emergency. We only have to look in our province what we've seen and, in Canada, with regard to – I think we've had the warmest summer on record. We've had forest fires raging across the rest of Canada and here in our own province. We've had the effects of Hurricane Fiona, which are still affecting our province and the cost of that.

It's interesting that little PEI is actually looking at a feasibility study, Speaker, of a hydrogen-run passenger train between Summerside and Charlottetown. That's not what we're suggesting but, certainly, it comes down to a regional transit system where people don't have to rely on cars, not just in the metro area, but in the Northeast Avalon and across the province.

We have seen that when we gave subsidies to oil companies, they basically laid off workers and they still posted record profits.

As for advertising for oil and gas companies, we do the same very much for cigarette companies and alcohol companies as well. So I think these are reasonable initiatives –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology for a response.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess I'm three for three today in responses to petitions.

I think the easy thing to do on this one is to just start off with an agreement as to the premise of the petition, which is climate change, and I'm going to be different than some of the people, not so much in this room, a former leader of the PCs who famously went to Ottawa just recently and said climate change is not real. I'm not going to agree with that. I don't think most Members in this room agree with that.

We do recognize that climate change is real and we have to combat it. Many of us have children, grandchildren, we do want to leave something to them and I think it's incumbent on us to get there. But the word that is necessary here is "transition."

Transition is not the flick of a light switch. The reality is that we do have to plan for the future. We will have, just by necessity, an oil and gas industry for some time, because if we eliminate ourselves from the equation, the slack will be led by companies in Angola, Namibia, everywhere else down in South America with lesser ESG standards and our workers will not get the benefit. We will not get the benefit of that resource but, at the same time, what we're trying to do is lower emissions there. We're electrifying our offshore.

I just look at our refinery. I just spoke about it today. We went from something that was a significant polluter in this province, small investment to us, a large international investment and now we have something that's providing renewable fuel to the world, and it's done here in Newfoundland and Labrador and making sure not only do we protect the workers, we increased the number of workers out there.

I'm not prepared to do anything that harms the mining industry in Lab West. Realizing they are significant emitters, but we need to work with them. That's why we launched the Green Transition Fund –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

A. PARSONS: – \$100 million that we're trying to get there. So I agree with the Member, the Green Transition –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

A. PARSONS: – (inaudible) and protect the workers in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to the petition is as follows:

Cellphone coverage from the Goulds to St. Shotts is continuing to deteriorate. The coverage has gone from no coverage in some areas where was previously coverage available.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, urge the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to requests upgrades or repairs to existing towers and equipment to enhance and

improve the quality of cellphone coverage in the region.

Speaker, I've certainly mentioned this on many occasions in my district. I drive from here and I live in Bay Bulls and drive throughout the district and all the cellphone coverage and the issues that go on. The one thing that I do question is every household has a cellphone; I would say nearly every cellphone is \$80 to \$100 per package, per person. So it's something that we should be looking at to make these big companies available.

I know the minister has certainly looked at it, but when I drive from here and I drive through what we call Middle Pond Hollow, in our area, one time last year from Bay Bulls Big Pond to the top of the hill, where it ended in St. John's, there was no cellphone coverage and, at one time, it was good. SOS used to come up on the phone, so it's pretty dangerous. We've had a couple of accidents in the area; had a couple of nurses who had an accident and happy to help people who were in accidents and had no cellphone coverage; had to run to a house to make a call.

Now this year, in the last few months, the cellphone coverage seems to have improved in that area, whether they turned the tower and not tell people, I'm not sure, but right now I can drive through that area, cellphone coverage works a little bit. You lose it for about 10 seconds and the call comes back. Last year, it didn't work at all.

So maybe they are changing that stuff, but the big issue that I have with it is we all, as individuals, have cellphones that we pay for and pay these companies big money. You think about the number of people and the number of cellphones that are in this country. Let's use Newfoundland and Labrador; I would say, barring somebody that just got a flip phone, every phone is probably \$100. If you get three or four kids in the family, let's use three kids, two adults, more than your car payment most times for

these cellphone coverages and they give us little service or improve the service.

So they're saying we'd like to have some coverage and we'd like to have some data to prove it. You know, you try to get on and make a report to them, to explain where the cellphone coverage is and it's disappointing that it doesn't improve. We pay big money to these companies and they should be investing.

The government has a part; they put out some RFPs and stuff like that, which we hope to improve. But it's very critical in these areas, certainly in the rural areas. I can tell you driving through the communities that I'm trying to go to an event and you're trying to make phone calls, if you try to leave 10 minutes early to get there, then if you have to make a call, you either have to haul in on the side of the road to finish the call or you have to get there and not make the call at all. We do a lot of work on our phones, as you know. It depends on what district you're in.

Thank you so much. It is certainly appreciated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Four for four, Speaker, bring it on.

What I would say again, starting with the premise that, look, I get it. We understand. We all have roadways, areas of our constituencies that don't have coverage.

Just a couple of points I will make in no particular order. We actually did Estimates with my colleagues this morning. We talked about the fact that this is like it everywhere. This is a global issue. Sometimes we think the grass is greener. I hear it. We talk and we complain about self service and then

when you get a chance to visit other places, you realize there are issues in many places.

A couple of things – one: The reality is that I don't think the tech is keeping up with where we need to go in terms of the cost effectiveness. We simply cannot – for the amount of coverage for a tower and X number of people and if we expect to pay, I don't think we're getting a great return on provincial dollars there. That's why we're exploring different opportunities to provide coverage.

The second part: Look, in many cases, it is very hard for a provincial government to force a multi-national or a large company, which you have a contract, to hold up their end of the bargain. The other reality is you mentioned the kids. I say this all the time: They've got it solved because we're all buying the contracts. Yet, at the same time, they're not holding up their end of the bargain but they're not seeing any less business because we're all paying these contracts.

That's where the feds come in. This is federally regulated and Newfoundland and Labrador is no different than Alberta or Nova Scotia. We are not going to be able to bring the Bell Canada's or everybody else to their knees. Nor are we trying to bring them in. The reality is this is a difficult thing. Where I think the solution comes with, we can be a partner in providing coverage in different formats and different solutions. We can also lobby together, but I also think that tech –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

A. PARSONS: – (inaudible) work coming with satellites.

On that note, I will sit down again but I look forward to the next one.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Frequently, patients are prevented from getting to medical appointments at outside provincial health authority centres. Some of the delays are due to inclement weather. Often patients are prevented from getting on medical flights to their appointments because there are no seats on the flight.

There are multiple reasons for this and we're calling on government to work towards removing these barriers so patients can access their medical appointments.

Now, Speaker, when I present this petition, timely and adequate access to health care, I talk mostly about patients trying to get out to their appointments, their scans, their chemo treatments, and also the delays on getting home. But very rarely have I talked about mental health and I should be focusing on mental health as well, access to timely and adequate mental health.

Now, in this House of Assembly, I present a lot of petitions, but I have not presented one on mental health. When looking at access to health care, I quote Inuit Tapirisat of Canada in the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy where they say, "The high rates of suicide in Inuit Nunangat are a symptom of the social and economic inequities that have existed between Inuit Nunangat and most other regions of Canada since Inuit began to be impacted by colonization and transition off the land into permanent settlements. It goes on to talk about, "The stress our people experienced during this transition, coupled with the prejudice and social inequities families faced in settlements, led to enduring social challenges that create risk for suicide in our communities."

Suicide is just one aspect of the harm that's being done to our communities since we joined Confederation and these petitions that I present, the petition to return the freight boat, they're main services so we can access high-cost food but food that we could actually be able to obtain. Right now, where they removed the freight boat, we can't actually buy nutritious food. We have trouble purchasing adequate food.

I also talk about inclusion to rebates. When the rest of the province gets these rebates, we're looking at \$17,000 to transition off oil to electricity, we can't access that, and our elders suffer and low-income families suffer. A petition to access affordable travel and fair electricity rates.

Speaker, our mental health is being impacted by the failure of this government to actually address the social inequities in Northern Labrador. So that's the reason why I have the petitions that I try to present, but in actual fact –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time is expired.

Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 4.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I moved, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodation Act, Bill 75, and I further move that the said be bill now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and second that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act, Bill 75, and the 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 Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act," carried. (Bill 75)

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act. (Bill 75)

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 75 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call the Concurrence Motion on the Report of the Social Services Committee.

SPEAKER: The motion is that the House concur with the Report of the Social Services Committee.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise

P. DINN: Thank you.

I won't be long. I do have to reach out and say thank you to all the staff who participated in the Committees there last week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Lots of good knowledge there, and I don't think anyone in this House will deny that those are the people who make ministers and Members look good – no doubt about it – in having the expertise behind them.

I had the privilege of sitting in on the Children, Seniors and Social Development Estimates, as well as the Department of Education, and I can honestly say that we did ask a lot of questions, a tremendous amount of questions, actually, and responses from many. In fact, some were deferred. So we've gotten a lot of information.

Many of the staff, actually, that I had worked with previously, so I had no doubt in the response that they would give. Again, I applaud all the work that they've done to ensure that questions were answered and information was put forth.

As I said, I wasn't going to talk long, I am done.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Before I start and have a few words in this area of our Estimates, I just wanted to recognize a school, Heritage Collegiate, in the gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I'm not sure if many schools are so in tune with the operations of the House of Assembly, but I know two years ago I was invited to speak to a class and the class discussed many questions about the operations of the House of Assembly. I would say that this particular school, one, it traditionally has very high academic scoring, a record of schools within our district; it is a very high athletic performing school in the district; and I said last time for the minister, this is where in our district the robotics started, was in this particular school.

So a big welcome to Heritage Collegiate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: We've had the Estimates in the Children, Seniors and Social Development and my aspect looked at the social development side, income services. In the Estimates, we asked about the social well-being plan, as to how it's going to affect the seniors that we would have in our province and how it will move them along. Apparently, under the social well-being plan, I think part of that will be the targeted basic income that will be provided. This will treat or serve or assist a small segment of the seniors that would be in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When the announcement was made in November of last year, there was a lot of fanfare and I would say we received calls in the District of Bonavista wondering: When am I going to get additional funds in order to make ends meet? Because we weren't sure at that time, in November, what was going to be in this particular plan. Well, right now, we are into April and we're still not really sure because people still ask: What's involved with it? Is my well-being going to be improved as a result? That's a fair question.

I've heard many people say that obviously there was no plan in prior to November when the announcement was made, because here we are this number of months

since and we still don't have the plan rolled out. So that is something that we'd like to see and see soon so that this small segment of seniors are going to see their lives improved with this targeted basic income. I heard that the numbers speculated maybe 400 to 500 being positively affected with this targeted basic income. Maybe the minister can speak to that a little more later.

One thing when we create targets in this House and in the school system we often say: The goal of this class in Heritage Collegiate is that we're going to try to strive for an average of 88 per cent in the upcoming mid-term exams. That is a tangible target that we put out there, 88 per cent for Heritage Collegiate in the upcoming mid-term exams. That is a target that we would have out there.

BC says that they're going to reduce poverty in British Columbia by 56 per cent. That's a goal. I would say, Mr. Speaker, we don't hear those goals here in the House. We don't have those goals in the House. We would hear the House say: Well, we've provided 15 per cent more money. We provided 5 per cent more money. Here is the amount of dollars that we spent. Money fixes everything, but we must have a plan and it's nice to have a targeted plan to know that we're working towards this amount by the target. I would think that's important.

The suggestion I would have is that whatever action we take in the future, let's have a targeted improvement. We're going to lift 40 per cent of the seniors in our province out of poverty. There's your target. We're going to lift X number and that's right.

One thing that came up, as well, in our Estimates was the fact that the department has – and my memory is – 367 social workers CSSD has in their employment, give or take some, but I think that's generally, Minister, around that number that was stated last week. What was surprising in it was that we have 105 vacancies. If you

look at 105 vacancies, that's basically 30 per cent to 40 per cent of what our entitlement would be.

When we look at serving the population out there, that is a big figure. That is a startling figure. That can be a crisis. I understand that every effort is being made to make sure that we would recruit the numbers. I think the minister had stated that there are now 80 graduates per year from social work, so we've increased the classes over what they've had. There were 40 social workers matched up with Labrador, but of those 40, there were 20 vacancies.

So I know that having the personnel in place to be able to address the needs is a challenge. I didn't know quite how big the challenge and how big a shortfall we have with the social worker. I'm not sure what the class size was before but I know that CSSD stated that, I think, they captured 39 graduates from MUN within their department, I think, the last graduating year, which is a decent number.

One thing that I found out in the Estimates was that we are moving towards social worker assistants, very similar to adding teacher assistants in our school system.

When Marian Fushell did her study back last year in '23, she talked about teacher assistants, but she said it doesn't move the needle as far as the situation within the K-to-12 system. The gist of what she was saying was that it was better to make sure that we maintain and invest in more teachers and reduce the class size instead of keeping the class size as large as what it is and adding more teacher assistants. I agree. Marian Fushell agrees and the authors.

So when we're talking about now CSSD heading down the road to having social worker assistants, can the same correlation be made in social work as what it is in education? So the minister had stated what the qualifications were of the social worker

assistants: a background in ECE, a background in social sciences and in humanities. We currently have a one-in-six ratio, social worker assistant to social worker in the system and it was stated at our Estimates that the goal will be one to three.

So what we're missing in social workers, I would think the plan – unofficially – is to replace them with social worker assistants and we won't need as many social workers in our system. I don't know and the minister will speak to that when he has an opportunity to speak a little later. If that is the case, which we feel that has happened in the K-to-12 system, adding more teacher assistants, the past minister talked about staffing the schools and talked about staffing equally teacher assistants and the certified teacher, all in one number, all in one piece of data. I'm saying there's a difference. There is a difference. So I'm not sure what the social worker assistants will bring, but would be something that the minister may be able to address.

We'll find that when it comes down to seniors, I've presented a petition three times and the situation goes, Mr. Speaker, the federal government indexes their contribution to the Guaranteed Income Supplement. The federal government will index to compensate for the cost of living. It's a good thing. So we have the federal government, who's a contributor, and we have the provincial government and the provincial government is not indexed. There is no indexing with the provincial government. The same formula as what has been in existence since '15-'16 – same formula.

So as the federal government contributes more money to the seniors, the threshold, which is around \$16,000 in the formula – \$16,700-and-something – that has been the same since '15-'16. So seniors get more money. When they get the income above that threshold, what does the provincial government do? No indexing, the provincial

government will give less. The federal government gives more; provincial government will give less. And you see what happens: The federal government provision is here; provincial government, the same, only they will pay less now because that threshold has not moved.

Now some would call that a clawback. And it would be nice to know from the Finance Department or from CSSD, when the minister talks, how much since '15-'16 has been reduced as a result of the indexing of the federal portion, how much less does our provincial government pay seniors. And I know that we've given them an increase. Yes, we have. But why have we maintained a threshold from '15-'16 and never, ever indexed it or raised it? Fair question. Why haven't we?

Some seniors would say it seems like the provincial government is saying that we're getting too much. Once you go past \$16,000, whoa, getting too much money, we pull back some of our contribution. And that's a fair comment.

CSSD –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

C. PARDY: I personally think that's a fair comment; if you're clawing back and not increasing the threshold, I think that's a fair comment.

My colleague from Topsail - Paradise, in Estimates, had asked about the chronic absenteeism. We know, for probably some years back, we talked about a chronic absenteeism in our K-to-12 school system of about 10 per cent.

Another figure that we hope to hear today, maybe, would be what is the chronic absenteeism in our K-to-12 system now? Is it less than 10 per cent? Is it more than 10 per cent? Or are we still at 10 per cent? Because that indicates to what interventions we've had as to whether they're successful.

If it isn't, we can't keep doing the same as what we're doing. We've got to change it up and we got to be more strategic. The question was asked to the minister as to what was done, what the change would be.

The disability top-up now is going to be coming from the federal government. The disability top-up, we're going to give our disabled and those with disability in our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, right across Canada, the federal government is going to index and give them more money.

If they're being given more money, the question was asked in Estimates: Will we be clawing back? Will we be reducing in any way the payments that we give out or contribute to those that are disabled in our province? There was no firm answer as to whether that would be the case or not. We didn't know. That is something that probably should be asked and should be expressed in the House: Are we going to claw it back or not? That's a fair question.

One thing we look at, that's an indicator out there of a great need, would be the food bank usage. I just want to share some statistics from the food bank in Bonavista. I asked permission to share it. Here are the figures: In 2021, there were 557 families that were helped and assisted with food at the food bank. That's 2021; 557 in Bonavista to serve the area. The expenses at the time, by the food bank, were a little over \$11,000.

In 2022, it grew from the 557 to 622 and then in the year that just ended, in 2023, we had 786 families accessing and using the food bank, but the dollar figure now for to provide the increase and the cost of groceries is over \$13,000. In 2024, January broke a new record with 83 families being served; February, 85-plus being served. So I would say that is a very significant increase in the cost of providing, plus the number of people of which they provided.

The Seniors' Advocate has many recommendations in her report for government to adopt. The number one recommendation she stated is that six out of 10 seniors are doing without food, medical supplies and special diets they're prescribed. That's pretty significant: six out of 10 – six out of 10. That's huge. I would say, for those seniors, we ought to bump up that threshold, increase it to provide more for the seniors, not claw back when the federal government increases it.

She asked the provincial government – she wanted and suggested that you would index the NL Seniors' Benefit – index it – and that was a suggestion not acted upon yet.

The Seniors' Advocate made comments like, seniors are existing on toast and tea, and that is the case. They're struggling to provide for themselves in our province. So when I look at the targeted basic income, if it's going to provide and serve 400 to 500 of the most needy, we got to applaud that. That is a good thing.

What's out there in the system is that people are thinking that it's going to be serving and affecting more. If we index it for all seniors, the benefit, we have everyone that is going to benefit from indexing of the Seniors' Benefit.

So I end, with my final seconds, I want to thank the department officials and I think they were second to none. They are good at what they do. One thing Estimates do is they show us, in the public service, the quality of employees that we have, and it is something to watch each and every one.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a privilege to speak today in the House as the Minister of CSSD, as well as the MHA for the District of Burin - Grand Bank.

Before I begin, I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance for a great budget and a strong focus on the well-being and social determinants of health. Building a strong foundation for a healthy and fulfilling life must take into account many factors: the conditions of which where we are born, where we grow, learn, work and live – and age, by the way.

I happened to be in my district this weekend and it was so great to get back to the district, to my community where I grew up and still reside, and it was great to talk to the people in the community about the goings-on in government, the budget and about things we're doing for seniors and so on.

Just a few weeks ago, I was out doing an announcement – a great announcement – on summer camps for persons with disabilities. While I was out there – I had people from my department with me – we took advantage of the time to meet with seniors. We met with representatives from all the clubs in my district, all the 50-plus clubs. They were fantastic meetings. The seniors are very hopeful. They are very excited about the Seniors' Well-Being Plan, and they realize that government is doing their best to help.

One thing that I did notice is that the number of people that are in these clubs is increasing. For example, in Grand Bank, they have a club that's able to hold between 90 and 100 people. They have 139 members, the largest ever, and now they're looking at expansion, but it's a testament to our aging population here in the province.

It was something that, when I was there, the president said: When we have our meetings, we have to say to 40 of our members, you stay home this week

because there's not enough room. That is something that I never realized would happen, that we'd have that many members.

But 50-plus clubs are taking off in the province. I spoke last year to the 50-plus representatives at their annual conference and the spirit and the things that they want to do and so on is just unbelievable.

Before I sit down, I'm going to talk about a project I learned about on Saturday night. I attended a dinner with the Member for Placentia West and one of the Lions talked about a project that they were doing. I saw it as an intergenerational project. I want to talk about that before I sit down, but there are other things I need to talk about as well.

A key recommendation of the Health Accord in the final report is improving the social conditions that affect our health. *Budget 2024* delivers on our government's commitment to broadening the framework to a better focus on social factors that impact health and further expand the approach to supporting health and well-being beyond traditional health care models.

Certainly, the most important highlight of *Budget 2024* for my department, as well as many other departments, was the investments that are being made under the Poverty Reduction Plan.

As a government, we recognize these are challenging times and there's a high cost of living. That impacts people throughout our whole province, across the country and across the nation. This certainly impacts people living in poverty and \$41 million of incremental investments towards our Poverty Reduction Plan in 2024 will support targeted actions. These include: reducing child poverty, creating and sustaining income and employment, improving income and supporting our seniors.

We realize that when our children grow up with improved resources and opportunities,

they will most likely receive a higher education, secure better jobs and ensure a brighter future for them and their families.

In *Budget 2024*, our government is investing close to \$30 million to increase the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit by 300 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Last month, eligible parents received their first payment. This puts us the highest in Atlantic Canada and third in Canada only behind Quebec and Alberta.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: *Budget 2024* includes \$4 million to expand the prenatal infant supplement up to age five.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Again, eligible families of children aged one to five received their first Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement last month as well. We are delivering.

This year, we're investing \$3 million to expand the school food programing in schools.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: This will be in K-to-9 schools starting this September with schools with the highest needs – fabulous. Being a school principal at one time, the same as my colleague across the way, the Member for Bonavista, we realize the importance of children that have a good breakfast, a good lunch, because it certainly affects overall achievement. It affects the overall morale in your school. It affects children to a point where they're able to take part and be active in school activities. So this is very important and we welcome that. If I was in the school system now, I'd be out celebrating that. I'd be celebrating the fact that we can feed the children that come in

and it doesn't matter their background, we're feeding them all, K-to-9.

These investments are intended to provide our children and youth a healthy start and a bright future. Our new Poverty Reduction Plan includes important measures to improve income, another key element of reducing poverty. Through a comprehensive review of the income support program, my department continues to work on streamlining and improving income support benefit structure and application process.

S. COADY: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: I got one fan.

J. ABBOTT: It's an important one.

P. PIKE: It's an important one, yeah. If you're going to get one that's the one to get.

Changes will be announced soon to reduce to number of different benefit rates, starting from eliminating the lowest ones and to simplify administration.

Additionally, \$4.8 million is allocated in *Budget 2024* to initiate that Targeted Basic Income pilot for people 60 to 64 who currently receive income support, as well as benefits from the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services programs.

J. ABBOTT: Good one.

P. PIKE: That is a good one.

We are just beginning the enrolment process, just in case you're wondering, the enrolment process has started, which will provide participants with more adequate financial supports, which are similar to the federal benefits that they will get when they turn 65 years old. So between 60 and 64, now you'll get the same benefits as you would as the federal benefits you'll get at 65.

Under this plan, we also have expanded the Employment Stability Pilot, which provides increased incentives and supports to people who are on income support to enter the workforce and maintain employment. Based on the success of the initial pilot – just listen to what’s coming up here – in St. John’s, we expanded it province-wide and now we have over 400 individuals in that program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Four hundred people working and receiving income benefits as a supplement to their earnings. Mr. Speaker, not only that, because of this pilot, 80 former income support clients no longer rely on income supports.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: That’s how we measure. That’s how we measure.

The final element of our poverty reduction program is a \$10-million investment in *Budget 2024* for a comprehensive Seniors’ Well-Being Plan, which will help seniors by prioritizing home renovations and modifications – wonderful – supporting the caregivers of individuals with high-care needs. Just on the weekend, I spoke to a person about this and they think that this is the best idea they ever heard because they’re putting as much home care support that they can into their – she’s looking after both parents and this will certainly help there for extra help that they may be required by family members.

We are providing grants to low-income seniors. Further details on the Seniors’ Well-Being Plan will be coming forward very shortly.

Mr. Speaker, social inclusion is a very important part and a social determinant of health. My department’s Senior and Aging Division also continues to invest approximately \$600,000 in programs to support seniors, older adults, persons with

disabilities to stay and participate in their own communities. That’s the key. The key is to keep people in their own communities. People are happy there.

My mother sits in the window and she tells me she’s not going into no home – a little bit of home care, yes, but she’s not going to any homes. She’s 93 years old and she can sit in that window, she says, and everybody that passes out the road, she knows who they are and they always wave and she waves back. She’s not giving up that, and that’s what we’re trying to do. We should be having people be able to stay in their own homes in their own communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Communities Programs are what we’re talking about. We’re talking about Newfoundland and Labrador Community Transportation Program, and that’s a great program. I happened to be out with some colleagues in Clarenville a while ago and when we were out there, they talked about their community program. They have a bus. The bus is run by volunteers, but they do have community partners.

This particular bus transports seniors all over the district, all over their immediate region. That’s so important. To say all of this is being run by seniors – the Town of Clarenville picks up the cost when it comes to maintenance and so on of the bus, but it’s just a fabulous, fabulous program. We’re seeing now that other communities are joining together and putting in funding proposals so they can do the same things in their community. We welcome those proposals.

Mr. Speaker, we have a Cabinet Committee on Seniors, which I chair. This continues to focus on addressing seniors’ issues as well.

In 2024, just to name a few, we invested in a number of programs under the Disability Office and these included \$400,000 for an

Accessible Vehicle Grant program; \$325,000 for Accessibility Grants; \$94,000 paratransit for the GoBus Accessible Transit program.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that in Marystown, last week, we did an announcement on Summer Camp Inclusion Grant. This was announced last year, a great success, and provides assistance to families, individuals and organizations to pay for a support person to help facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities in summer camps.

Budget 2024: We are continuing to invest \$3 million in a Basic Income Program for youth receiving residential services for the Youth Services Program.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is getting short. I don't want to miss this opportunity to talk about the Circle of Life Program. This is something that when I heard about this, I know it's been around for a long time, but it's something relatively new in this province. The Circle of Life Program, by the way, was began by a young social worker from Portugal Cove-St. Philip's Lions Club who saw the importance of connecting children with seniors and the value it had mentally and socially for these seniors.

Her vision was shared with Lions Clubs across our province and nationally and internationally, and I will say that this spinoff from this has gone provincially, nationally and now internationally. Something that was created by a social worker in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's district.

Here on the Burin Peninsula – this is what I'm reading – for the past year and a half, the Marystown Lions Club, in partnership with the Burin Peninsula Brighter Futures, has been offering this program to seniors. The reason why I'm bringing this out today is because it's something you may want to bring back to your districts. I thought it was something wonderful and it's something that

we're going to fund, as well, through our intergenerational activities.

The families visit homes twice a month. Now, these would be families that have children from zero to three, so three years or younger, and they bring those children with them when they go. While there they share stories, they do crafts, they play games and they also provide musical entertainment for the children and the seniors. Each visit becomes very special for all involved.

The Circle of Life Program is done through generous donations from individuals and businesses in the community. Because of the little bit of money that they raise by doing that and their sponsorship, they were able to donate 200 blankets to the seniors in the Marystown area. Isn't that fabulous? I think it is.

The program received national attention with over 22,000 views on social media. The value of this program is immeasurable and successful. The parents, children, seniors, facilitators and staff at the homes benefit.

Again, this is an intergenerational activity and its benefits are immeasurable, but the thing with it is that it's an idea that you may want to bring back to your districts. Because, as we know, seniors – I noticed the Member for Bonavista mentioned it – are lonely. Again, they are lonely. These types of things do help.

In any event, I guess I'll leave it at that. But to conclude, I'd like to thank again the Minister of Finance for the hard work that her staff and herself put in to *Budget 2024*, because it ensures benefits for our children, our youth, our families, our seniors, persons with disabilities, persons experiencing poverty, as well as our valued community partners.

Thank you all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you, Minister.

I now recognize the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm glad to have an opportunity to speak to Concurrence for this particular Committee. I didn't really get the opportunity I wanted during Estimates because of this new rule, so I'm going to utilize my three 20 minutes to get any points I have across in this particular format, I guess.

Anyway, first of all, just to respond to the minister – and he had a lot of good stuff to say and I'm not knocking any of the things he said, I'm really not, but I just want to say, though, during COVID-19 we had the CERB program that came out. Basically, the federal government at that time determined, I guess, that a livable amount of money, of revenue coming in for a person to live on was \$2,000 a month. That's what they came up with, \$24,000 a year. So I would argue that they set that standard and even that amount, I would suggest, I don't know how a lot of people even can survive off that. But seniors in this country are expected to survive on even less than that. So I really believe that the federal government, through our OAS and CPP supplement program, I believe they are failing, not just the seniors of this province, but they are failing the seniors of this country.

The fact that the provincial government sees the need to put in a Seniors' Benefit – and seniors are certainly thankful for that and I'm glad they're doing it to try to help the seniors survive. There was an increase, albeit a small one. I think it was 10 per cent or whatever it was. But, then again, 10 per cent on \$1,600 or whatever it is, that's an extra \$160 a year. So, at the end of the day, it's very miniscule in terms of what one would need to survive. We're seeing more and more seniors at the food banks, sadly. It's all throughout the province.

I know if you were to talk to Major Hillier at the Salvation Army in Mount Pearl or if you were to talk to the fine folks with the Saint Vincent de Paul at Our Lady, Queen of Families on Ashford Drive, as well as the former Mary, Queen of the World site over on Topsail Road, and thankfully the Baptist Church, when that church was sold, the new owners of that facility, the Baptist Church, they allowed the food bank to continue. It's still run by Saint Vincent de Paul but it's still operating out of the same church that it once did. If you were to ask those people, they would confirm, certainly in Mount Pearl and I know it's across the province, that food bank usage is increased and sadly seniors are part of that.

So while certainly I'm sure seniors appreciate – I know they do – the Seniors' Supplement that the provincial government provides and the increase, albeit a small increase, but an increase and doing the best, I think, that we can given our own fiscal circumstances as a province, to try to assist seniors, I still think that, as a province, and I would say all the provinces, should be lobbying together, if they're not already doing so – I haven't heard of any big move on it. I've heard the Premier talk about how all the premiers have lobbied the federal government about the carbon tax now, but I'm not hearing about the premiers getting together necessarily and lobbying the federal government about increasing Old Age Security so that seniors are not living in poverty and so that provinces are not having to supplement what should be the work of the federal government.

I put that out there and say to the minister and the government, certainly say to the minister, when you're talking to your counterparts and we're here trying to do stuff with seniors with our scarce resources, that the federal government needs to be stepping up to the plate and providing enough income to seniors through OAS, CPP and the supplement so that the provinces are not required to have to fill in the gap with Seniors' Benefits, so that

seniors have enough money to live on, so that they're not having to cut pills in half, not having to go to the food bank.

Also under this heading, falls Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and I just want to make the point, and this has been raised in the past as well, I guess, around the Tent City. I have been down to Tent City in the past and spoken to some of the people there. I understand there are complex needs. It's not an easy task, I understand that. I was down on the weekend, I wasn't talking to any of the residents, I was down having a look and there are actually more tents now than there was before, not just on the back of the building but on the front of the building as well. That issue is still not being resolved.

One of the big issues though, of why they're not moving, at least what some of them told me, at the time and others have said, is the fact that they don't feel there are any, what they consider, safe and suitable options being provided to them.

Now, I know they're all individual cases and some of them are going to be very complex. I know there are some people who you might say they don't want to follow the rules and all this kind of stuff, I understand some of the complexities there as well. But I have been told and I have seen pictures of and spoken to advocates of some of the filthy facilities, these privately run shelters that are out there in our city. I've seen more pictures there the weekend.

I understand you've got to take the pictures with a grain of salt. Pictures can be manipulated to make it look worse than it is, but I'm being told that there are places where we are putting people in these private shelters and there's not even a door on the bedroom. They're using a sheet instead of a door and this type of thing and to see some of the filth and being with just a box spring thrown down on the floor and said: Here, sleep on that.

I don't know if Members have seen or if the minister has seen pictures of supposedly a lunch that was provided for somebody at one of these private shelters and it showed a piece of white baker's bread cut in half, nothing on it; not a sandwich, just a piece of bread, and some Cheerios in a bag. Now was that staged? Was that real? I don't know. But I'm just saying it is out there and it does make you wonder.

So I would say that part of the solution – I'm not saying it's the whole solution because it is complex and there are mental health issues at play, there are addictions issues at play – but part of it has to be these private shelters and making sure that we have standards.

So I guess I just want to throw out to the minister, he has talked about shelter standards, I think in Question Period maybe this week or last – it wouldn't be this week. I guess last week, I think I heard him respond to a question about shelter standards. I think he said it's coming sometime later in June, I think. It might have gotten delayed and now it's going to be June.

You need to get those standards in place, Minister, sooner rather than later. It's pretty bad when you think about it, that someone would prefer to be in a tent, especially in the wintertime and in all kinds of weather, than they would be in one of these shelters. If we're going to be providing shelters – and I understand the hotel, that's a different beast altogether, I get that. But if we're going to be putting people in shelters for whatever reason, these private shelters, in particular, there must be standards and those standards have to be enforced. That's the key. You can write anything on a piece of paper. If there's no enforcement, it's going to be abused. History has shown us that. So that's something I just wanted to throw out there as it relates to NL Housing: shelter standards. It's something important I think that needs to happen.

Also under this set of Estimates is the Department of Justice. So I just want to throw out to the Minister of Justice, as we have done petitions regarding the *Limitations Act*. I think we're tabling something here now; haven't seen the legislation, but he did table it, first reading of changes to the *Limitations Act*. I say to the minister: I hope that will be before us before this session of the House of Assembly closes down.

Next, I want to speak very briefly on education, because that also falls under these Estimates. In terms of education and in terms of our schools – and I know I'm not alone on this one as well. Every Member, I'm sure, on both sides of the House can speak to issues and concerns they are hearing from teachers, administrators and students and the community as a whole, for that matter, as it relates to issues in our schools. Whether that be issues around inclusion, issues around violence in our schools, issues around overcrowded classrooms, issues around resourcing.

As one Member over here on this side – I can't remember who it was – the other day was talking about, what is 0.25 a teacher? What's that all about? I would have to concur that this whole idea of taking a teacher, a human being and dividing them up into quarters and three quarters and all this kind of stuff is absolute nonsense. At the end of the day if someone does the math and they say, well, we need 32.5 teachers, make it 33. I can guarantee you there's enough work to go around. If you talk to the teachers in this province, they will tell you there is more than enough work to go around to find something for that 0.25, that 0.5 or that 0.75 of a teacher to do. Make it full units.

That's something very tangible that can be done. We no longer have to talk about the school board and blame it on them and put it on them anymore. There is no school board. You are the Department of Education now; there is no school board.

That's something that the Minister of Education, I would think, would have the ability, through government policy, to send a memo to all of the schools and say on this day forth there will be no percentage of teachers anymore. If you need 32.5, you're going to have 33. If you need 28.5, you're going to have 29. If you need 31.25, it's going to be 32. No more portions of a teacher anymore, that policy has now been ended. Something very simple, I would suggest, that the minister could and should do.

Another thing I have been getting a few questions about as well, during COVID-19, of course, we went virtual, and at least some of the schools – schools in my area and high schools for sure – are continuing to use Chromebooks and technology and so on. I'm just looking for some clarification from the minister around whether that's going to continue or not.

As new students come into the picture, whether they be from other countries through programs that the Minister of Immigration is responsible for, or whether this be local students moving around the province or students coming from other provinces, what is the intent, what is the plan when it comes to Chromebooks and technology? Will this be continued? Will we have a program to make sure that they are replaced, new ones for students coming in, replacements for ones that get broken and so on? What is the plan when it comes to using technology in the classroom?

Because I'm not sure that there's a well-communicated policy out there. Talking to some teachers, you kind of get different stories as to their interpretation of where this is going and there does not seem to be a plan or a policy. So that's something else that I would say to the Minister of Education that you could do. Clarify that issue and get rid of the 0.5 of teachers. Those are couple of things that you would easily do.

Class size: I don't know how many studies we have to do on class size. This has been done over and over and over and over again, yet now we're going to have an accord this time, I think, is it? Now it's the Education Accord. Now we are into an Education Accord and before that we had committees and we had studies and we have Think Tanks, and now we're going to have an accord to figure out what is an appropriate number of students per teacher.

I don't think we need to do another accord. I don't think we need to wait to do that. I think the data should definitely be there and someone can make a decision as to what are reasonable numbers with these caps on class sizes, particularly these soft caps and the hard caps. Like, let's just come up with a reasonable number and let's stick to it.

Let's make sure we have appropriate student assistants in place and other resources. The government just lost a court case to the Churchill family because they couldn't provide resources for a deaf child, and there are all kinds of other children with other needs that are not receiving the resources they require to thrive in school. Again, I don't think we need an Education Accord, another Think Tank or another study, just get it done.

Finally, I just want to delve quickly into health care. Just to reiterate, I guess, some of the points that I've raised in the past and other Members have raised. This is probably the number one issue that I receive from my constituents. I can't speak for other Members; I'm sure you're getting lots of calls, but if I were to rank the number of phone calls and the types of calls, I would suggest that, by far, the number one issue that I hear from constituents about in my district is health care.

Now, that could range from any number of things. It could be wait times for MRIs. Wait times for MRIs are crazy. Sixteen, 18 months, two years to get an MRI. If you actually get an MRI, how long are you going

to have to wait to see a specialist? If something shows up on that MRI, how long are you waiting to see a specialist to tell you exactly what that is, how advanced it is, whether or not surgery is an option, what type of treatment would be required?

Besides the fact that whatever is going on is continuing to go on in your body, potentially spreading throughout your body, potentially growing in your body, besides all that, from a physical point of view, just think of the mental stress. Think of the mental stress that somebody is going through when you get an MRI and you're told that a spot has shown up, you need to see a specialist and not only are you waiting for months, you can't even get on the list to get an appointment.

We actually have two lists; I couldn't believe that one. We have two lists. You have to go on a wait-list in order to go on the appointment list. That's how bad it is. I am not making it up. Any Member here can call down and you can confirm it. It's true.

Of course, wait times in the emergency department, that's another one. I've had a lot of sick people – I know there are people that go there and they're really not that bad and probably they shouldn't be there, but they don't have a primary care physician, that's why they're there. But there are a lot of sick people. I've had cancer patients and stuff who've been down and waiting for hours and hours and hours in the emergency department. I've told stories here last week, specific ones. It's just not acceptable. It is just not acceptable.

One of the ways we can help deal with the load, and my colleagues have talked about it, is nurse practitioners, allowing them to bill MCP for services rendered. There is no reason in the world why it can't be done. The only reason why it's not being done, of course, the minister has alluded to it, is that he wants nurse practitioners to take other jobs. So, basically, we're not going to allow you to set up a practice because we want to

tell you where you're going to work. That's what it comes down to. That's not going to work either.

Anyway, I see I'm out of time, but I certainly look forward to the next set of Estimates.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now call on the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I begin my comments and say what an honour it is to get to speak to the budget, my first budget –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: – I'm not sure if this is the appropriate place, but I will do it.

Over the weekend, I had the honour of attending the celebration of life for Caroline Hong, your wife. Many people in this House were there as well and I can say, Sir, it was an absolute honour and pleasure to be there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: When I pulled up and I had to park in the seventh row of the parking lot next to the building that I was going into, I was not surprised. The music, the memories, the reflections from those who were there, not just your family, but her co-workers and the people she worked with, the people she volunteered with and the difference she made was very evident, not just in your community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay but across the province and I'm sure with her colleagues across the country. So my condolences once again to you, Sir.

Over the weekend, I also attended an event in my own district, in Portugal Cove: The

People of the Sea Service. Ultimately, we are a people of the sea in Newfoundland and Labrador. A couple of years ago, when the George Street United Church closed, there was a famous bell that was there and, they, each year hold a ceremony for the people of the sea. It was part of the blessing of the fleet related to the sealing industry and it was donated by Morrissey Johnson, of course, no stranger to this House of Assembly or to Newfoundland and Labrador.

When the church closed, the people there decided that it was not appropriate for that tradition, that 60-year-old tradition to end. While they missed a couple of them during COVID, the 57th annual People of the Sea ceremony did take place yesterday at the Memorial United Church in Portugal Cove and it was a pleasure to be there as well to honour those.

Very poignant in terms of the timing of the tragedy we faced and to just return to my initial remarks to you about your wife. As I was looking around and looking at the daffodils that we're all wearing here, I don't think there's a person in this House who has not been touched by cancer, your own family, my family. I opened this drawer the first day I got here and Derrick Bragg's name is written in here. So it speaks to the fragility of life, but also to the importance of what we're doing so that we can try to make better strides in education, better strides in health care, better strides in housing.

I also want to take just a moment to speak to the young people who are in the gallery today. When I was your age, I did not imagine ever standing here, getting to do this, and I sometimes still wonder why I'm doing it. But in all seriousness, the fact that you're here today and are as interested in this process, because while most young people would not care enough to stay for this amount of time to listen and to see what is done here may seem sometimes a little bit rambunctious, a little boisterous and sometimes not exactly what you would

expect, but it does actually make a difference.

The decisions that are made on this floor by both sides, the exchange of ideas, the debate, the respectful debate, is really important in terms of what kind of a society we put in place for you and, hopefully, as you come forward, the society that you'll leave for people behind you. So thank you for coming today and thank you for showing your interest.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to address some of the comments made by the previous speaker in just a moment related to some weekend images that appeared on social media. But I want to just begin my speech about the budget to talk about the highest ever provincial investment in housing.

Now, we understand that there are issues and it's why there is such a focus on housing in Newfoundland and Labrador, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, but across Canada. If you saw in the recent federal budget, it was really one of the main cornerstones of the federal budget, realizing that housing is a major issue and a lack of affordable housing, which is why we're taking these extraordinary steps.

Now I've only been in this position for a couple of months, but reviewing what I saw from last year and what I see now, I can tell you that these steps are being taken with the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in mind.

Budget 2024 really does support the well-being of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians by increasing access to safe and affordable housing. One of the big issues, though, is to try to build houses. You cannot do it overnight. It takes time. Coming through COVID, coming through increased cost of living, it has put extreme pressure,

not on just the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, but, again, across Canada and around North America and across the globe.

This budget that we just revealed a few weeks ago prioritizes investments for the creation of new homes; the maintenance and repair of existing homes within the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation inventory, almost 5,700 units; investments to support those experiencing homelessness; and a continued focus on our five-point plan.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of this budget, I had an opportunity to visit Corner Brook recently to announce that our government is going to build 50 new provincially owed homes in that city by 2026.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: We're also building an additional 50 homes in Central Newfoundland within the next few years and in the very near future we'll be building an additional four homes in Labrador West, two of them were destroyed by fire in recent years.

This complements the ongoing builds in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and here in St. John's. New provincially owned housing is important, but so too is maintaining what we have. It's part of a national strategy. We have 5,700 homes; we have to maintain them. Anyone who owns a home knows that it is expensive. Imagine having to do it for 5,700 on an ongoing basis.

Much of that attention has been paid to investing in things like exterior, but also interior repairs, Mr. Speaker. We know the importance of ensuring that our current homes remain in good condition to meet the needs of both the current population and future tenants.

Last year, 1,000 people were housed in Newfoundland and Labrador housing. That's why in *Budget 2024* we're increasing

the repairs maintenance. Last year, we added an additional \$3 million, on top of the \$3 million we were spending. This year, it's an additional \$8 million, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the existing affordable housing is maintained and available to families in need.

The family dynamic has changed. The pressure on our system is no longer with larger families. The vast majority of people who are looking for housing in Newfoundland and Labrador, looking for affordable housing within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, are looking for one- and two-bedroom units, because the family unit has changed from 40 to 60 years ago when these homes were initially built and families were much bigger.

Similarly, we're allocating \$12 million over four years to repair and modernize provincially owned housing in the Nunatsiavut communities of Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik. The Nunatsiavut Government have indicated their interested in taking over ownership and administration of these units, and we welcome this discussion, along with other opportunities for partnership.

Mr. Speaker, just as I was taking over this role as the new Housing Minister, the Nunatsiavut Government were going through their own set of elections, and the previous minister in my role was supposed to visit Nain in late March. Because our House is open and because of their elections, we decided to postpone that, but we have been back and forth with the Nunatsiavut Government to make sure that we have a meaningful discussion to continue some of the groundwork that's already there with a view to moving in the direction which I've just described, Sir.

Speaker, in discussions with sector partners in recent years, they all identified transitional, supportive housing spaces as a significant gap in what we now refer to as the housing continuum. People hear that

phrase more and more now because housing is really at the forefront in a lot of jurisdictions, including here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We've expanded staffed shelter options in the province and we continue to incentivize the expansion of new, permanent, affordable housing solutions, but in between we need more transitional spaces with wraparound supports to help bridge that gap. In January, we did just that. We announced the Transitional Supportive Living Initiative in St. John's at 106 Airport Road and we recently announced a partnership with End Homelessness St. John's. They will serve as our operator of that initiative.

Mr. Speaker, they have the expertise. They work with the other community partners. For those who may not know, the intake process, when you're talking about transitional supportive living, is done through our community partners. It's not a decision made by anybody here on this side of the House or on that side of the House. They work with their partners. They work with the teams or, say, an intake worker or a social worker or somebody they're partnered with and if their needs are best suited to go to 106 Airport Road, our Transitional Supportive Living Initiative, that's where they'll go or perhaps it's not, perhaps it's somewhere else. But those are the folks who understand and have the expertise and experience to do this and to make that decision.

But ultimately, the decision is up to the individual on what it is they want. In this case at 106 Airport Road, what will happen is folks who go there and decide to go there will actually sign a lease. It will be their unit and they are there for as long as it takes until they can transition to the next stage of the housing continuum; perhaps get their own apartment and, with the help of other benefits offered by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, we can help them along

that transition as well into their own units away from the supported living.

Many have expressed the need that folks just can't be put somewhere or offered something. They also need these wraparound supports, and that's why it's crucial to make sure that we get this right so that we don't continue the vicious cycle of homelessness, so that people are given the assistance they need, if they want to take part and so that they can move on to the next stage of their living life.

The initiative, Mr. Speaker, is going to be a gamechanger, according to the executive director of End Homelessness St. John's. He said it will be transformative, as the name states, and it's going to help bridge that gap and help support those experiencing homelessness, to break that cycle and achieve more stable housing solutions on the other end.

The executive director, as I said, said it is going to be transformative and the people leaving that facility, according to the executive director, is just as important as the intake process; making sure that they are not going there forever. They are going there as a transitional stage in the housing continuum until they get to the next stage.

Budget 2024 includes over \$13 million, Mr. Speaker, to support this initiative – \$2 million of it coming from Health, which will provide some of the wraparound services, and the rest for the facility and the other staff associated with that and feeding people and making sure their needs are met.

This initiative is going to complement the expansion of other transitional and supportive housing initiatives under way such as The Gathering Place. Of course, we're all familiar with The Gathering Place here in St. John's and the fine work there, which is going to add over 50 new supportive housing units to this sector, this

year alone and we'll see the opening of a new 40-bed, low-barrier emergency shelter.

I had the honour of touring that with the executive director of The Gathering Place recently, and it really is quite something. If folks get a chance to go down and see it, it's really a great initiative and the work that's being done there is to be applauded on a daily basis. There's much volunteer work taking place there as well, I might add.

Budget 2024 includes an additional \$1.5 million to The Gathering Place to ensure that it can continue to provide the valuable service it provides to its hundreds of clients each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, just last year, as well, this government unveiled a five-point plan to increase access to housing that is affordable and this budget continues investment to support that very plan. The aim of the five-point plan is to stimulate private-sector development and stabilize and reduce housing prices making more available and more affordable housing.

The five-point plan provides \$50 million for the Rental Housing Development Loan Program, which offers low-interest loan financing to qualified property developers to encourage the construction of new rental housing for our market. The aim here is to help increase the availability of housing as quickly as possible by incentivizing the construction of these new units.

Another highlight, the Secondary and Basement Suite Program under the five-point plan will help current homeowners unlock extra value in their own homes by renovating space to create affordable rental units for others in the community who need them, new space. Once again, new space, Mr. Speaker.

This *Budget 2024* included \$4 million to support this program which provides homeowners with a forgivable loan of up to \$40,000, should they reduce their rental rate

below the market value for a period of time into the future.

There is more than \$3 million in *Budget 2024* also earmarked for the HST rebate on new residential rental properties. When you purchase something now to build a rental property, if you've qualified under our program, you don't have to pay the tax. It's a great incentive for contractors and anyone who's trying to build.

We know that for some families the gap between renting and owning a home comes down to the lack of a down payment as well, so the First-Time Homebuyers Program helps lower to moderate-income households who qualify for a mortgage to access the required down payment to purchase a home, their first home.

This program will also assist with the closing costs of up to \$1,500 to match the federal first-time homebuyers' tax credit, another great incentive helping about 100 families in this province. I may stand to be corrected on this, but I think 20 have already actually moved into their new homes.

Budget 2024 includes \$225,000 for the grant portion of this important program. While there is a loan portion available of over \$2.5 million, this program has already seen, as I mentioned, nearly 100 families receive approvals and 20 move in.

The fifth and final point of the plan is making Crown land available for rental housing development. We have received numerous applications for the areas identified in a request for expressions of interest, which was issued back in November. I've met with the minister recently to discuss this for an update and will have further updates coming in the next few weeks.

We've received numerous applications for the areas since then and, along with the Minister of Transportation, we're hoping to have more information as I just mentioned.

I recognize, Speaker, that I have spent most of my time here today going through a long list of initiatives in the housing sector, but the point I want to make with all of this is that we recognize the size of the challenge, and we are taking active steps to face them head-on.

I think that was made evident as well when the Premier put Housing as a stand-alone portfolio, to give it the due attention – not that it wasn't given prior to this, but we know that it needs more attention. It is a large file and there is a lot to do with a lot of people counting on government to step in and help. That is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about something the Member opposite brought up, a Facebook post over the weekend, related to a situation that was put on the protest site, Tent City for Change, on their Facebook site. I have not spoken to the person in question whose story was relayed through there, but because I wanted to find out for myself what had actually happened, I went to that very shelter this morning and I spent about 45 minutes. I will say this as well, I went there with inspectors from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing who gave the owner about 15 minutes notice that they were showing up, and I showed up unannounced.

I took a full tour. I spoke to people who were there. I talked a little bit about the situation that was going on over the weekend and nobody really could give any solid answers, the people who were living there, because they had been in and out and didn't really witness what was going on. I can't speak to really the specific case.

But what I can tell you is what you sometimes see on Facebook and what you see in person, there is often quite a discrepancy. What I saw was not what had been portrayed. But I wanted to go and see. I spoke to one gentleman today and I said: How are you doing? And he said to me: Well, I'm here in a shelter, so not great. But

he talked about the situation in his own life, which was heartbreaking in itself.

But I got to see where they were staying. I got to see the food that they were given. I went into the staffed areas where, obviously, with no notice of my arrival, there was a refrigerator that did have food in it, a fair bit of food. There was a deep freeze that was full. The upstairs people that I spoke to said that they were given the three meals a day.

I want to add as well, Mr. Speaker, that the shelter in question that was talked about over the weekend, it was inspected by our team on April 12 and it was also inspected on April 16, we were back again. Our quarterly inspections continue, and we also inspect when there are complaints.

But I want to say in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that the staff at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, they need to be commended for the work that they do on a daily basis, dealing with very serious and complex issues.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: The two people that I was with today – and I know I'm running out of time – I want to commend them and I want to commend the other 300 or so staff at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing who each and every day have the same goal in mind that I have, to make sure that at night people are safe and they have somewhere to stay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I now call on the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you very much.

I also, Speaker, ask for a bit of leeway. I want to acknowledge the tragedy out in Lark Harbour last Friday. I know Trevor, Nick and the whole families, and Joanna, with three kids, trying to survive and it's going to be a tough time.

I just want to recognize the Premier who went out to the funeral. The family is very appreciative that he went out to greet families. The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Third Party reached out. My colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands reached out to me and the Member for Burgeo - La Poile to offer any assistance they can.

It's going to be a tough time for them, so I just wanted to say to the families, all the people in the House, we all come together in this type of tragedy. Once again, for the Premier to take the time to go out to the funeral and meet the families, socialize with the families and understand the pain.

So to the Lark Harbour and York Harbour communities, they've come together. There were 350 people in the gym outside and they numbered over 600 or 700 in the church itself. So those two young people touched a lot of people. So our hearts and prayers are with all the families associated with that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I'm going to speak for a second, Mr. Speaker, and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has brought it up, the reason why we're speaking so much is we're in Estimates now, we get very little time to speak and ask questions in the Estimates. That was never that way. For some reason now, we've got to wait for the three hours. If it's 10 minutes, we get 10 minutes after the three hours.

We usually go: Opposition, NDP, Opposition, NDP, then independent, we'll

ask questions. So that all changed for some reason. I just want to point out something here today, it involves one of the Committees here.

We've heard a lot of questions today on the mental health Committee. No one approached myself or the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands to be on that Committee. There are people in our districts who need and avail of these services. There are people on the West Coast – my understanding is there is no one on the West Coast on the Committee – changing, revolving door for who's on the committee.

So I just say to the government, if you're really dedicated to helping out all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, you may not like it, you may have to adjust to it, but there are two independent Members who represent people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There are a lot of situations where we can't give a lot of advice or assistance. We can pass on what we hear from me on out on the West Coast, for the area, and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, I'm sure he's hearing it on a regular basis. So when we're going to do an all-party Committee, it should be an all-party Committee.

We all have to work together to solve the mental health crisis in the province. We can't just pick and choose because it may be a bit political; we have to work together on such a serious and major issue in the province.

So I just want to bring those two points up about being cut out of the Estimates and, also, not even being asked to participate in the mental health Committee for the province. So when you stand in this House and say it's an all-party Committee, it's not really true. It's not an all-party Committee, it is the party of the three parties and if there are three or four more independents to come, they won't be included. So there is a problem with that and I ask the minister to try to resolve that.

I heard the Minister for the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, I heard some of your statements that you made, some of them are good, but each one is coming in the future – it's coming in the future. I'll give you the biggest thing I hear and I know you addressed some of this today. I always give this example.

There are two seniors, husband and wife. They have a house, they have a car, they have insurance, they have all the things that you need to stay in your home. One spouse dies, they're left with the same bills, usually with one income. That's what you're hearing mainly, and with the cost of living now, everything has gone up, groceries have gone up, oil is gone up, their electricity is gone up, their insurance has gone up, their tax bill has gone up. And when you see that you have this demographic and one passes on and you have one person struggling to stay in her home, if you hear the complaints that I hear from seniors asking me to bring this up on a regular basis, it is that, that they're living on one income.

We see a lot of programs that are coming out for seniors to do their homes up, do this part up. We have money for this, but the people that we are really missing are the single-income seniors, they're the ones we're missing. I understand there are a lot of good programs out there. I understand the concept of keeping them in their own home, but I ask the minister with the programs that he announced today – and he announced a nice few of them today – is there any way to look somehow at the single seniors who are living in their homes? Because we can give it to a household where there may be two in a household and a lot of times there are two, but many, many times that I hear concerns from seniors that they can't meet their bills is because it's a single income. That's the biggest drawback for seniors.

Then a lot of things that they need, they can't get done in their house because they can't afford it. By the time they have to do

major renovations, they can't afford it. By the time they have to put a roof on their house, they can't afford it. So if there are any way – and I'm sure you probably have the stats on the demographics of the single seniors in this province. I'm sure that is one group that there's a narrow group that I can tell you is suffering, and I hear it on a regular basis. I'm sure other people in this House here also on a regular basis about the seniors.

Last weekend I was to several events, three or four events and if I wasn't stopped 20 to 25 times by seniors to say what are they doing for us – what is government doing for us? I know two, in particular, said I'm living alone. I'm trying to stay home. I'm trying to stay in my own house, but I need to try to get something because I can't afford it. My husband passed away six, eight months ago; I can't afford to stay in my own home.

I'll just bring that up to the minister and I'm not going to, in any way, say that it's not a major concern of the minister, but I was asked to bring this up on numerous occasions and every opportunity that I have, I will bring it up.

So if there is any way possible that the government could help out those single seniors who are living at their own house, that would be a major stride for a lot of people to stay in their own homes. Because we're all in this House saying we have to try to keep seniors in their own homes. You mentioned your mother, a prime example, and I can assure you there are a lot of people around who want to be like your mother and stay in their home.

That's one thing I would bring up to the minister and ask the minister is to have a review of those policies that you mentioned that you got funding for that's coming out. See if there is anything extra there for these one-income seniors who live in their own house and you will keep a lot of seniors in their own house and take off the stress of having to go to a long-term care facility, go

to a seniors' home where it's going to be subsidized. They want to stay in their own house.

I'll throw the challenge out to the minister. I know you got a lot of challenges, but that is one that I feel very strong about to help out. If you just look at the finances when you got two seniors living on OAS and they might have a bit of pension, and one passes away who had the pension, the pension is cut but they got the same about of bills, it's tough. It's really, really tough, so I just want to bring that up to the minister.

The second one, through this here, I'm going to talk about is the Department of Education. I know everything is under the department now, and I was asked to bring it up and I'm going to bring it up. The new school built up in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, did I see the evidence for it? No. Do I know that the Department of Education didn't ask for it? Yes. Do you I know that it wasn't even on their list? Yes.

The issue with it – and people can stand up and justify what's going on – once that school is built, you're going to notice that you're going to have a big configuration of students having to go to different schools. What happens, and you can see this in a lot of rural parts when you don't get the numbers in one school, the programs drop. Their programs drop.

The second thing that it does – and I'll just bring this up to government because it's brought up to me on a regular basis – it takes away the confidence of people that you're going to do things for the right reasons. That's what it does. It takes away the confidence that you're going to do things for the right reason when you sidestep the school board, who had the priority, and you sidestep the whole process in the Department of Education to say, I want a school – no matter who it is, it takes away their credibility of doing the right things for the province and then you say it's all political. That's all I'll say.

I'll say to the Minister of Education, I wrote at least six, seven months ago on the school, Sacred Heart, that there needs to be work done and it hasn't even got a response yet. I know the Minister of Education is listening intently about the letter I wrote, and I never even got a response on it. Here are the teachers, here are the parents saying that they need work done and can't even get a response. They can't even get a response.

P. LANE: She's nodding her head.

E. JOYCE: She's nodding her head and saying she understands it, yes, but then you can take a Premier, build a \$25-million school, and you can't even get a response from a letter because there needs to be work done at the Sacred Heart School. I wrote eight months ago or nine months ago; I haven't even got a response from it for the Sacred Heart School in Curling.

There's no one in school board now that got authority to do it, and then when you see \$25 million, just to step up, we want a school, but there's been a school there now – I went to the school in 55-60 years ago – 62, 63 years ago. My older family went to that school, but we can't get any work done because there's no one out there who has the authority. I have to write to the Minister of Education and you can't even get a response.

This is where people lose the credibility of a government. When they can't get things fixed and take a bit of pride in the school that has been around and part of Corner Brook and you can't get the pride and have work done to say this is a great school, we can keep it going and it's a nice, concrete school, yet here's \$25 million to build another one. This is where you lose confidence.

When people ask me – don't ask me. Don't ask me why; I can't explain it because it's not a priority. It was just summoned – well, it's all politics. That's always the answer. It's

all politics. A lot of times, I can understand politics. I've been on both sides; I can understand politics. But when you take something so major as the education system, you should try to treat everybody equal and same as health care. You should try to treat everybody equal. I understand politics, there is absolutely no doubt, but when you can't get the bit of work done at a school, it's sad.

I'm going to go to another is the Department of Education –

P. LANE: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

P. LANE: What happened to the evidence-based decision-making?

E. JOYCE: Decision-making, yeah.

The Department of Health, and I have to bring this up – I know the Opposition House Leader asked this the other day. Either the Minister of Health and Community Services is sidetracking this story, or he just don't understand what is being asked. I wrote him three or four times about nurse practitioners, and the minister said the other day, he started out: Yes, you can get paid. Then it came back saying: Oh, that's only if you can't get up to a primary care. That's if you can't get hold of 911.

Oh, by the way, that's also if you have a long wait at emergency. And then the final answer from the minister was that – here's what the minister said: We want to put nurse practitioners in the hospital. Here's what the minister is missing. The nurse practitioners that I'm talking about in Corner Brook that seniors have to pay, work at the hospital. They do this in the nighttime and weekends because there is a need for it. So when the minister stands in his place and says no, we're not going to start that because it is going to be a private system. The minister either doesn't understand it or

he's passing the issue off because he doesn't want to do it. Because he can do it.

The Minister of Health can let the nurse practitioners – and I'll use Corner Brook and I know them personally and I know how many people they serve, and I just say to the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, most of the people who use the nurse practitioners are seniors and they have to pay \$50, \$60, \$70 and this government can do it. They can put it through Western health.

So when the minister says no, because we don't want a private system and take away nurse practitioners from the private system, that is false. It's absolutely false.

P. LANE: The same as doctors are doing.

E. JOYCE: The same as the doctors, but they have full-time jobs at Western health. They see a need. They have a four or five week wait-list to get in to see a nurse practitioner. There's another doctor leaving in Corner Brook, family doctor – two are leaving. One is filling one but there's another family doctor leaving in Corner Brook.

There's going to be another 2,500, 3,000 people who are the patients, a lot of them are seniors, and a lot of them will have to try to wait three or four months to go in to see a nurse practitioner and it's going to cost another \$55, \$60 a trip, and we can solve it. But the Minister of Health – and I refuse to let him sidestep it anymore. For him to say no, we got to make sure we have them all in our public system because we don't want them private. They are working there.

I'll say it again, Minister, they're working in the nighttime, on the weekends, because there are thousands and thousands of people who can't get a family doctor. The seniors are the ones that are paying for it. The same ones who have to come up with \$55, \$60 a visit because that minister will

not allow it to be billed to MCP through Western health, and that's the facts.

So when the minister stands up now and you speaks to the minister, you can ask him why don't they allow to do it and the final answer he gave, because we want them working at the public system, not the private. They are working at the public service hospital – they are. This is a separate business which is done – and I see people who are working at the hospital. I'll give you an example, people working at a hospital for psychiatric, they set up a clinic also outside; not a word about that; not a problem with that.

So I call upon the minister, for the nurse practitioners that set up their private business outside their own time, outside their full-time job, because it is taking away a lot of money from seniors.

The other part I'll bring up about the health, Mr. Speaker, is the radiation. I understand that it's tough to recruit it but what I always said, and I said before, you had four or five years to do it. If you can't get it done, let's tell the people we can't get it done. That's not to say we anticipate it's going to be in there when it's opened, when we know it's not going to be. People are actually waiting on the radiation. Some people said: Oh my, God, hopefully my loved one won't have to go to St. John's in May or June now.

This is the issue, and this is why it became such a topic in Corner Brook because everybody anticipated it. We were led to believe that it's true, knowing full well that it's not true. So I understand the problems of recruitment. I understand that. But when you've got problems with recruitment, let's tell the people – let's tell the people.

I remember Clyde Wells telling me – when Clyde Wells said to me: Don't underestimate the intelligence of the people of the province. When you tell them, they understand. But once you're honest and upfront with them, now we all work together

as a group. But when you give the false assumptions that yes, it's going to be done or we may have a locum coming in when you know you can't have it, let's be honest to the people.

The doctor shortage is another big thing, and that's all across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We heard about psychiatry today. I just wanted to give you an example. We heard about the psychiatrist, the shortage. I know a psychiatrist wanting to come back to Corner Brook. I think it was the fifth or sixth year; never recruited. From Newfoundland, went to the school here and never got a call. Couldn't get a call back. The way the person got a call, I contacted and said: Will someone please contact this doctor who right now is doing their locums and their internship? Will someone please contact them? They contacted them.

So this idea that there's a recruitment, I can assure you, there are gaps in the recruitment. There are gaps in the recruitment, I can assure you. I know personally because I had to write and ask someone to contact this person. Now, luckily this person is staying in Newfoundland and Labrador. This person is going to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador. Not only that, she's getting married and her fiancé is going to come and stay in Newfoundland and Labrador as an ENT.

I'll just bring that up because I heard today that they're actively recruiting and if we're going to recruit doctors in Newfoundland and Labrador, we shouldn't wait until the sixth, seventh, eighth year, we should start at year one or two.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

I've prepared some remarks actually last weekend. It was my colleague, I sometimes think of him as the minister responsible for Gander, but of course, he's the MHA for Gander. But him and I sometimes think alike and I had written the same title that he had on his speech, which was: Are we better off than 2015?

I often like to say that to people when they've spent some time at a position, they've been involved in whatever leadership role and they move on and I always say to them, well, how do you feel? Do you feel that you're in a better place? Did you leave this place in a better spot, a better quality than when you found it? He and I were on the same wavelength, which we almost always are.

So I started thinking about that theme. It's interesting that in the Official Opposition, the last few weeks I keep track of the questions that ask and the themes and the approach that they use. It's interesting and you can see the strategy. But there are kind of two themes that I felt a little curious lately. One was it's almost like an apology that you're asking questions that you're challenging government and their policies. It's like, well, it's the role of the Official Opposition. Well, absolutely, it's your role to do that and to prod and investigate what are the policies of this administration that I'm standing here with now.

The other theme that came up a little while ago was – and there were a serious of questions – going back to that wonderful time in 2016, the first budget that myself and many of my colleagues, several on the other side of the House, were all involved with. It was a baptism by fire.

We can go back to those days and it was almost suggested by some of the Opposition in their series of questions that oh my gosh, they cut this. Oh my gosh, they

raised this. It was like somehow there was a choice on this side of the House.

Well, I can tell you, there really was no alternative other than to deal with an amazing fiscal inheritance that we found ourselves in at that time. I'm looking at some of my colleagues and as we think back to those days, they were some of the toughest days in politics that I've experienced, that's for sure. To watch good, quality people have to be escorted out of this building after years of service just because we had to desperately find a cut. We had to tell our investors, all those financial institutions that are heavily staked in our province, that we meant business and we're going to get things under control. Very difficult times.

I think back to my colleague, the Minister of CSSD, thanking the Minister of Finance. I feel that we actually need to thank this minister and the previous minister for setting us on a plan all those years ago to the point where we are now approaching a surplus. It's quite a miraculous situation.

I'm glad I survived in politics to be here on this floor to the point where we're actually going to be able to see an opportunity in the future. I always dreamed about this, that you'd go to the ministers and say, what, Minister? I'm going to give you an opportunity to increase your budget this year. Where would you like to spend your money? I can just imagine what that's going to be like. I look at so many of us who had to face an up to 30 per cent cut. What a heck of a time to get into government.

So what I thought I would do and what I'd like to do, I'm going to challenge the Opposition, because this isn't a criticism of facts, but I want to point out the context. This is so important to go back to the context. Tomorrow is the 30th day of April. Nine years ago, guess what the headline was? Minister Wiseman tabling a budget, 30th of April 2015, *Budget 2015*, \$1.1-billion deficit, tax hikes, job cuts, all coming.

S. COADY: It turned out to be \$2.2 billion.

P. TRIMPER: Oh yeah, once we get in to have a good look at the books. He was trying to sort of brace the province for what was to come.

Massive criticisms on where did all those oil revenues go and so on? Here's some of the quotes from the Finance Minister at the time. He had projected a deficit of \$1.1 billion in 2015 and he said we needed to cut about 1,400 jobs. He said: We need to adjust our course to meet this reality head on, Wiseman said. Wiseman added: The higher tax rates and fees will generate more than \$122 million in revenue this year, fees paid for everything from motor registration, hunting licences, camping, swimming lessons and permits.

Does that sound familiar? This necessary nightmarish path that we all found ourselves having to embark on in December when we almost, again, did not make payroll. The desperation that we found ourselves in was just what we walked into. We had to take those tough decisions and it was very, very difficult.

It meant from then on, a very tough situation. Looking around for ways to save money, ways to borrow money more efficiently and so on. I know that context is really important for everyone in this House to understand that when we start criticizing actions that we took as an administration, I can tell you they weren't by choice. They were purely by what we happened to inherit.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the good things going on in my district and in Labrador in general and across the province, staying with the theme of this sector that we're looking at, the Social Services sector.

I was pleased to attend several of the Estimates. Again, I will echo the sentiments of so many in the House, we all feel the same way. I sat with the Member for

Bonavista this morning and we were just remarking on the quality and caliber of the folks associated with IET, for example, and as we've sat and watched other departments.

We are very fortunate in this province, that while we are a small and mighty force, I can tell you we are high quality. I've had the honour, too, as minister or as an MHA to be around and see these folks in action, particularly as they compare to across the country. It's always an honour when you see other jurisdictions will come to one of those bureaucrats, whether at an entry level or at our deputy minister level, who are so good and can guide us.

You know, our job is really to decide, as a Cabinet and as an Executive, how are we going to allocate those funds, but I can tell you, we rely on really good people to give us good technical advice and they are committed to the job.

Some good things going on in Labrador, and sticking on some of the themes, let me just start with the new campus of Memorial University, something I'm extremely proud of. We now have an ability, in Labrador and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, at the School of Arctic and Subarctic Studies, to now offer degree-granting programs. This is quite a remarkable thing.

I remember years ago, I spoke about my former company I worked with in consulting, Jacques Whitford and Stantec, we used to have a scholarship. It was awarded to someone who was pursuing a college or university program and it was to incent them to go back for a second year, or third or fourth year, whatever is required, because the painful reality in Labrador, when you're dealing with so much cultural challenge, so much geographic challenge, is that we tend to have a very high dropout.

When folks would leave a coastal community and then come to St. John's or elsewhere in the country to attend a

university, not only are there academic challenges and everything else; it's the cultural, it's the isolation from home, it's leaving a small little village to go to a big city and then feeling very lost and very alone.

So moving forward with this campus, it not only is a good thing to do; it's the right thing to do. I can tell you, and I just listened to some of the questions today and I'm thinking, do you know what? I spoke a few months ago in front of a class of about 10 up-and-coming nurses, most of them from Labrador, some from the Island and some from elsewhere who are attending university in Happy Valley-Goose Bay to become a nurse. Talk about a success story in watching these folks coming up. I just can't wait to see them graduate, find positions throughout our province, hopefully, right there in Happy Valley-Goose Bay at the Labrador Health Centre. It's going to make such a difference and, again, these solutions, they don't come overnight.

Let's face it, we all realize and recognize these situations. I just listened to the Housing Minister talk about the complexity of housing. It's not just finding a roof. I mean, there is mental health, there are addictions, there are long stories and each of them is so individual and thinking: How do you find a solution that's going to fit all of those people that are looking and needing our help? It's going to take a while.

What you've got to do is develop a plan. You got to get outside of this four-year mindset that so much of the criticism that's often levelled at government is: Oh how come you're taking so long to get these things in place? If you're going to do it right and you're going to set a course so that the next administration, whoever it is inherits the government, they're going to find themselves where they can just pick it up and keep moving, as opposed to being faced with an over \$2-billion deficit and just nothing but desperation and having to cut. You have to think in the long term.

In addition to the campus, another great feature that I'm really looking forward to seeing come to reality: we had a building established many, many decades ago called the Paddon Home. It was a complex for our seniors and, unfortunately, as we developed a Level 3 and a Level 4 seniors care facility attached to our hospital, the Paddon Home was mothballed, at the time, and then unfortunately left to languish until the point that we really had to do something with it.

So I am pleased to say that it has been stripped down, ready now for construction and it will become a family care centre. It is going to take a while. Things are happening. The first contract has been let and completed. I am looking forward to now seeing this facility up and running. I feel that folks will be very excited to now not have to go wait in emergency, but to go to a beautiful, newly renovated, well designed and, of course, much on our mind, well-staffed family care centre there in Happy Valley-Goose Bay at the Paddon Home.

Looking over, again, to my colleague from Municipal and Provincial Affairs, I have to thank his department in particular and in particular, he, himself, for the support on Mud Lake.

Folks will recall back over the years, myself speaking about the very dangerous situation that we found ourselves in. Yes, there's climate change; yes, there's other projects; yes, there's other concerns, but the nature of the beast is that the Churchill River, Atlantic Canada's largest river, flows through 300 feet of sand and can be extremely unpredictable.

In 2017, we go hit with a flood like – I still remember being here and listening to the anguish as we had to airlift people out of that small village. We needed to find some strategy to relocate them. So I thank the Premier, this government, my colleague in Municipal and Provincial Affairs for helping to support, for those who wanted to leave,

the ability to relocate. For those who wanted to stay, I'm very pleased to say we're continuing to support them. It is not very many, but I can tell you, we were able to find a way that we could get those out of there who were very anxious and, frankly, are very happy and content right now. A very important project.

Again, in terms of inheriting government and the responsibilities in 2015 versus looking at that community now and where it is, I'd say we've come a long way.

The YMCA, this is such an important project for us. When we came to government in 2015, our pool had collapsed, the roof had collapsed in on it. We didn't have a gymnasium, frankly, available to the public. My contact badminton league was suffering on the sidelines. We needed to get a building going and it took a massive effort to get all of those partners together. I know any time I'm showing off Happy Valley-Goose Bay and taking people on the tour, I've got to take them in to see that incredibly beautiful building. I often get a photo with them underneath the polar bear, but it's a lovely facility that now answers so much in terms of recreation opportunity.

But do you know what? This is also about the other important departments in this sector: Education, health care and attracting those key professionals and retaining them there. To have such a beautiful facility that we've invested in, along with the federal government and municipal government and other partners, it's an improvement in our health care system. You can see it and I can hear it in the professionals that I talk to when I'm home.

Not quite in this department, but I do want to give them a shoutout, and on this theme, is a company called A&M Construction, who managed to, with the support of my office and my colleagues here, sorted out a legal snarl that had been existing for many years at Gosling Lake. This was a beautiful facility for camping and so on. It's such a lovely

location. But because of some transition and former organizers of an entity that kind of went by the wayside, we really needed to straighten out so many deals.

Finally, we're able to do that and A&M, through Crown Lands, have been able to take over that facility. It's so exciting now to see them offering up opportunities for people to sign up. We now have a recreational vehicle facility in Central Labrador. Until this year, many folks who were looking to explore Labrador would stop at Red Bay and not make that next four- to five-hour journey. I'm looking forward to welcoming them this year. It's just another example of stick with a plan, co-hit it hard and then watch and enjoy that investment as big problems get overcome because you're thinking over the long term.

I need to mention, because I'm on the social sector, the contribution that has been made to our community and I would suggest to our entire province by so many new Canadians. I make sure I spend as much time as I can helping and supporting them, whether they be from Ukraine, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, so many different countries that have come to be in our community and support all matter of retail, buying up housing, supporting, enhancing our community and our economy.

We have to just admire their dedication to finding a better way, a better life, choosing to come and settle, in my case, in Labrador where the weather is often quite different than what they experienced in the past and to see them now settling in and, again, starting to buy up businesses, starting to buy up housing, contributing in many ways is quite remarkable.

The Philippines, I can't forget the Philippines because I'm sure we're now somewhere in the vicinity of 600 to 700 Filipino families now living in Happy Valley-Goose Bay alone. What a tremendous contribution they're making to our situation.

The mental health wing was mentioned a little bit in Question Period this afternoon. I do hope and believe and will do whatever I can to ensure that we continue to staff it and that we get as operational as it needs to be. The challenges we've had in the past of having to watch our loved ones go elsewhere for help in the mental health support has been very much a frustration is an understatement. There are always those community home family supports that are so important. We're a long way in Central Labrador from some of the locations where we have other facilities, so we do need to get this staffed. I will do what I can to support the minister and her department and the government in doing that. I believe we'll be on the right path to get that operational.

I've had a great tour of it. Those who have been able to avail of the services so far, certainly have benefited and others are going to continue to benefit from that.

I did want to thank my colleague from Housing, and I want to reach out on a personal note to all of my colleagues here in this House of Assembly, for the journey I've just been on with my wife over the last 12 months. I thank you for your support, for your attendance, for your messages, for your handshakes and your help, it's really been very special. It's an incredibly difficult chapter in my life. I can't imagine anything worse, frankly, and I thank you all for your, actually genuine love, support and friendship, it's been great.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. TRIMPER: Thank you.

What I wanted to do, and I wanted to bring it up here, because Health and Community Services is in this sector that we're discussing. There were so many health care workers, and if you had a chance to see the slideshow that we had on Saturday to a packed chapel and that we've been showing, and you can go online and see it,

but there are a lot of health care workers there who I just will forever be indebted to. They were so compassionate. I would see them after hours. They continue to send me messages. We bonded with them. They were just so captured with my wife, Caroline, and I could see that dedication.

Now, Perry and Caroline moved through this system and I thank them all very much. But just every day there's another couple, there's another family that are going through and you just can't do anything but admire the dedication of our folks in this department, from the janitors, to the cooks, to the nurses, to the doctors, the X-ray technicians, what a remarkable group.

We kept a box of soap that we had, little bars of soap, with appreciation. My wife would give it to each of these health care workers to thank them. Well, we ran out of the first shipment of 50 bars of soap, we had to go get another load because it just kept coming. Good people that would reach out and provide that personal contact. I'm so proud to live in this province. And yes, I can feel the stresses and the strains on our health care system, but I can tell you, what a quality and calibre of folks we have running it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour for me as well to stand here and speak with respect to the Social Services Committee. I'm just going to focus my remarks on one area here this afternoon, that's with respect to our health care system. We've heard from the previous speaker, the Member for Lake Melville, and our condolences extend to him and his

family and the difficult journey he has had to pass through in the last number of months.

It certainly speaks to him that he recognizes the dedication and admires the quality of service from the health care workers. He would've had to experience this first-hand. I'm sure we all can vouch for that. We have all had loved ones that have had to go through our health and can certainly speak to the quality of our health care workers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: There's no debating that. But I think what's important to recognize here, Mr. Speaker, is the bigger picture. The Member for Lake Melville was correct in recognizing that it is our role as the Opposition to question and to criticize the government on its policies and its platforms and on its decisions that it makes with respect to various issues that our people face.

I don't believe we're apologetic in that because that is our role, it is our responsibility to do that on behalf of the people that we represent and it is our responsibility in any healthy democracy to do that. It is our duty and it is our obligation to vigorously hold the government to account in its actions and its decisions.

Now, on that point, the Member for Lake Melville had mentioned the very difficult times that we've been through in the past, and I think he referenced it as the nightmarish past. Well, Speaker, I think that when we look at the present, we also have very difficult times right now.

We have tough days that we are experiencing. I have actually two examples that I will bring – just two, but two examples from the District of Harbour Main of people who have reached out in crises in terms of our health care system. I think that is necessary – as the Member for Lake Melville had indicated, it's important to bring context, and I agree context is essential

when we are analyzing the state of the affairs of our province, especially when it comes to health care.

We need, as the Opposition, to bring reality checks to the government and to the Members and to the ministers who just, perhaps, want to live in this ideal world that really is not reality. I'm going to give you one reality check first off.

When we look at the Liberal's platform and we look at what they have announced in terms of better health care outcomes, in 2021, in the red book, they focused on three things: They wanted to provide better outcomes, they wanted to improve patient satisfaction rates and best deliver services to meet the needs of the people in the communities across the province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I will address those points and I would say that has not happened. What their plan was in 2021 in their red book has failed. Let me direct you to one particular fact and that's with respect to life expectancy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When we often hear the Minister of Health, and others, say this is a nationwide issue and this is a global issue, I would argue that when we look at this fact and this statistic that the life expectancy in our province, in Newfoundland and Labrador, has fallen but it's now the worst, Mr. Speaker. It's the worst in Canada, in almost every age group. In almost every age group, life expectancy has fallen and it is the worse in the country. That's not a statistic, that's not a reality that we can accept and that we can be content with.

This is very, very concerning because I have two examples that I'm going to highlight in my district. That's only two of many that reach out to me and I know reach out to my colleagues in the Opposition, and I'm sure reach out to the Members opposite as well. But when we look at things like a quarter of our population here in the

province has no primary care physician, when we look at the fact that there are, in numerous communities, people that do not have access to local emergency rooms on weekends – no emergency rooms on weekends.

Not only that, I can speak with respect to hospitals in the area that my district is involved and people go to. I know of constituents that have gone to the emergency rooms only to wait for hours and leave because they could not access care, because they were waiting for hours on end, because they were hurting and suffering in these rooms, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to the other point about the red book and that they were concerned about increasing patient satisfaction, well, I'll give you those two examples to show you. These are not isolated examples, Mr. Speaker. Any one of us, I'm sure, in each of our districts can point to examples like this where patients and people are dissatisfied with the state of our health care in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Many are suffering, they're waiting for excessive times for care. Let me give you two examples. I have a constituent, a very, very sick man, a 58-year-old from Harbour Main District. He's got a serious medical condition, symptoms of congestive heart failure, other major complications. He was in the hospital, but guess what? He was sent home.

Why was he sent home? Because of bed shortages. He was sent home because of bed shortages – a very sick man. He was told: Basically, your options is go see your family doctor. Fortunately, he did have one – not like many others who are probably sent home without a family doctor – or go to the emergency room if he slipped into crisis while he's at home.

Those were his options, Mr. Speaker. Go to your family doctor or go to the emergency room if you get into a crisis – if you're in serious, serious crisis. This man has congestive heart failure. Meanwhile his symptoms were only getting worse and worse and life threatening. He and his family were in shock, Mr. Speaker. They were in shock and disbelief that he was turned out of the hospital because there were no beds available and basically left to fend on his own.

So, Speaker, these are reality checks. This is happening throughout our province. This isn't just in the District of Harbour Main. This patient, his family, feel that the system failed him and abandoned him. Now, I can say that we were involved in trying to facilitate him getting some response from government, some response from the department and yes, they did get response. This was in January that they reached out and, by March, there was a response from the minister, but guess what? That response was not satisfactory to the patients and their family.

They basically said it was a little late in coming, three months – even though they'd been back and forth trying to get some reassurances because they're stressed, they're worried about their family member who might end up dying because he's not going to be able to get the immediate access that he needs. Then I have to ask the question: How many more people are not reaching out and not getting that access and are essentially dying in our towns and communities?

Speaker, the other thing that they were concerned about, the family came back – and this was as recent as March of '24 – saying look, this really does not show any interest. The response did not show any interest in what we were going through. That is very sad, Speaker. That is a very unfortunate reality that is happening in our province. Yes, I would say you want to look to nightmarish past, look to nightmarish

present, because this is a family that are frightened to death. They're so worried about their loved one and what's going to happen and basically, according to them, they've been left to fend on their own. They've been abandoned.

I'll bring your attention to another constituent. This is a senior in my District of Harbour Main, January 2023, so over a year ago and we're talking about excessive wait times. Back in January, my constituent met with a family doctor because he was experiencing some medical issues. That family doctor referred him to a neurologist to see if they could help him.

He is having issues with his legs. He is unstable. He doesn't understand. He kind of has difficulty walking. His family doctor identified a neurological issue. Basically, in January 2023, he reached out, he wanted to see, and they referred him to a neurologist. He hadn't heard anything back, Speaker.

He got a letter finally. This was in February 2023. He was told then that he was on a wait-list. A month later he was told, you're on a wait-list. Okay, very well, I'm on a wait-list, but the problem is 13 months later, still no appointment.

My constituent called the Health Sciences to find out how many more months he would have to wait. He asked them: How many more months will I have to wait to get my appointment? The employee, in their understanding and compassion, tried to explain to my constituent and informed him she could not give him a number of months. Do you know what she said? This was honestly what she said to him. She said, it could be not months, but years – but years – Speaker, before he could get an appointment to see a neurologist – years. That is not acceptable. That is not acceptable in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our people deserve better.

This is a full-blown health crisis that we're in. When we looked into it for our

constituent, basically, he has been referred back now to his referring family doctor and advised if there are any worsening symptoms, have the doctor re-submit an updated referral.

Now this constituent, he is terrified. He doesn't know what's happening. He can hardly walk. He is having difficulty. They know his family doctor says it looks like it's neurological. He could be years before he gets an appointment. We cannot accept that as the state of our health care in this province.

So, Speaker, on that note, I am going to end with respect to my submissions here. I do have more comments to make later on other issues, but I think these two very sad and tragic examples of experiences that real people in our province are undergoing with respect to our health care needs to be acknowledged, it needs to be not sugar-coated. We're living in tough days. These are nightmarish experiences that each of our constituents are going through, yet it's falling on deaf ears.

Speaker, hopefully, we can do something that will address these issues that will, hopefully, bring the necessary help to constituents like the two that I have described that are struggling and suffering and worried sick about their health and their loved ones' health.

On that note, thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

In this session, I'm hoping to at least touch on Housing, Education, and Children, Seniors and Social Development. I'll start by saying that I do firmly believe in the social determinants of health, not only because it makes people healthy, but it makes for a

much better society and a healthier society. In the end, if we want to look at it from a purely fiscal or economic point of view, it's actually more economically sustainable and creates savings.

Now, I've heard in the House both the Premier and the Minister of Housing talk that housing is not simply providing a house, a home. Well, I don't know if anyone has ever said that, because at once it is and isn't. But I will tell you from a housing-first philosophy it's about getting people into some sort of stable arrangements. I'm not sure what the purpose of it is in saying that, except the fact is that we still need decent housing for people.

It's interesting, I was looking through some notes last week and I came upon one, September 13, 2022. At that time in the House and media, I was speaking about a woman who couldn't afford her house, she was living in her car under a bridge. She had a job. Before that, I was speaking to people who had been living up in Pippy Park because they couldn't or wouldn't go into the shelter system, the shelter system wouldn't take their pets, their companion animals. I've brought to the attention I think of one house in my district, four gentlemen living in it, where you could literally put your hand through the outside envelope and into the inside. Yet, they weren't going to speak up because they were afraid of not having a place to live.

I know I've been speaking about shelter standards for quite a while, about inspections, about the growing problem. We know from ATIPPs and from the fall, the condition of our shelters – some of them, especially the private ones. We know that people have come to Tent City because of the conditions of the shelters. We've seen ATIPPs of the increasing number of shelter visits over the past year or so, the amount of money spent on shelters, the increasing amount, and the calls to the Shelter Line. They've all represented a growing problem.

I'm under no illusion and neither should anyone listening to this or in this House, that were it not for ourselves, for Members of the Official Opposition and independents, were it not for the advocates on the ground, the protesters, the people who lived over in the tents because they had nowhere else to go, and were it not for the media, we would not even have that five-point plan and as imperfect as the hotel at Airport Road is, we wouldn't have that – period – period. Because before any of this was in the media, the housing crisis was increasing, no budging on it at all, Speaker. That is the problem.

Now I'm hearing government talk about: Well, we're offering these people something, they're choosing to be there, I guess, because they're protesting. In other words, they're not really homeless – demonizing them, I would argue. We can do better.

Daniel Cullen was a housing advocate from Ontario. He spent 25 years on the street, good home by his own admission, but from the time he made the decision to get off the streets to the time he actually got into housing, was five years. It's not as easy as a house, but I can tell you from the questions I asked today, from the media reports, from the letters I've written various ministers on behalf of constituents, that the supports for people with complex needs, in the community, are almost non-existent. They're called wraparound services, but I would argue that they are far from that and far from the supports that they need.

Recently, in a news article "Canada recognizes housing as a human right. Few provinces have followed suit" Marie-Josée Houle, the national housing advocate talks about the value of a human rights-based housing – housing as a basic human right.

"That the approach includes listening to people without homes and focusing on getting them housing that meets their needs, rather than deciding what's best for

homeless people without their input and forcing them into stopgap measures such as shelters that they don't want to live in, she said."

Now, that's pretty clear, because I've heard that from September and before, they do not want to go into the shelters. They feel more unsafe there than they do in Tent City.

"It also includes providing heat, electricity and bathrooms for people living in homeless encampments if adequate housing is not available. Essentially, it's a commitment to work from the recognition that homelessness is a systemic issue and people are homeless because governments of all levels have failed them" That is the crux of what we've been talking – right now, there will be no electricity and there will be nothing there to support them because those people, the people living outside the Colonial Building, refuse to go into the shelter system. It's not something that they want to go into. They want something adequate.

We brought up in this House about temporary shelters such as the one on Erb Street in the Waterloo region and they're duplicated across the country. So if we cannot get people into adequate housing right now – and that doesn't mean some fictitious hotel or one of those private shelters, it means let's set up something where we can put the supports until – until – the supportive arrangement at the Airport hotel are set up.

The other thing: "Dale Whitmore, policy director with the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, said provinces could take a simple first step toward recognizing and upholding housing as a human right by adding a clause to their tenancy acts saying that eviction can only be used as an absolute last resort." But we can't get that here. There's another measure. Doing away with no-fault evictions. Putting caps on rental increases and putting vacancy controls in place would at least, I would say,

give some people a sense that they are not going to find themselves homeless.

It comes down to where the priorities are, because I do think getting the people who are in shelters, out of the shelters, getting people who are in the tents, out of the tents and into stable housing will have big dividends overall for everyone and for the people themselves.

I want to talk a little bit about education, because the one thing – and it is a similar approach here, because the minister said, well, it's not as simple as putting resources into the classroom, putting bodies in the classroom. The classroom shouldn't be responsible for all the issues; it is a societal thing. And I would agree, but in the end, it comes down to having bodies in the classroom. And I will tell you the one thing that was very clear that bodies in the classroom would help is in addressing school violence.

Now, I'm not going to repeat everything I said, except to say that if you want to improve learning outcomes, then you have to start looking at class size and class composition. It is interesting here that in Estimates for Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, it was made known that we had 686 Ukrainian children who came into our education system, with 52 off the Avalon. That's the size of a school.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: That's right, a big school.

But I will tell you this, one thing that I know as former president of the NLTA, back in 2014, I was asking for was the resources in a school system, EAL, LEARN positions to help with the children coming from Syria who had been traumatized by war, who probably had gaps in their learning, couldn't speak the language.

Yet, this is not new. We would have known this to come and I think, in many ways,

government really should have been prepared. Because, at the last minute, it announced a reconfiguration of schools. Great, but it tells me that up until then the problem had gone right under the radar and it wasn't being addressed and it resulted in, again, a reactionary response.

But I will tell you that, again, smaller classes that account for the needs of the children in that class will be significant, will go a long way in improving outcomes.

There are practical measures that people could have seen, teachers were expecting, that I was expecting in the budget: an end to fractional units, more teaching positions and so on and so forth. Didn't see it. Instead, what we got was \$3 million to increase student assistant hours and hire more student assistants.

Now, sounds good, except – that's about 100 student assistants – it includes the 25 that were hired on for the end of this year. It works out to about 100 but when you look at it, half the hours, half those units, basically, are going into supervising the new buses, the elimination of the 1.6-kilometre busing rule. I really think you could have done that, but you still could have put more of those resources in the classroom.

So, in the end, not 100 in the classroom and 50 is what it comes out to – half those hours – 50 in the classroom, across 255 schools. I would argue then subtract the 25 that were already in from the end of this year, for the rest of this year and we're really only looking at an increase of 25 in the classroom itself.

There is \$3 million to help meet the needs of the student population and, basically, when asked, that covers 12 LEARN teachers, EAL teachers and, I would say, fantastic, about time. At least we're addressing those needs. But nothing in the budget to address the needs, the class composition or the size of the class. That's what teachers were looking for. That's what

parents were looking for and I would say that's what students needed because if it's about success, then it's about having those professionals in front of you.

So the numbers sound good, but they don't really add up when you do that deeper dive. In both cases, it's not as simple as getting a house and it's not as simple as putting more teachers into the classroom. It seems like one more excuse not to resource the systems properly.

I'll end with Children, Seniors and Social Development, 105 vacancies – 105 social work vacancies. That's gone up from a few months ago when it was 99. Yet, I had an email from a parent whose child had been full-time casual, basically, as a social worker with CSSD for several years. It would make you wonder and I'm still trying to figure out how that happened. I had an email from another social worker with a degree from a university in Germany who's been a baker since they arrived.

It's interesting if you read Hugh Segal's book, *Bootstraps Need Boots*, an argument for a basic income, he uses the line that the social safety net is strong enough to entangle but too weak to lift up. I can't help but think of some of the numbers there that the budget put forward about the increased childhood benefit by 300 per cent, boasts the Budget Speech.

The new pre-natal early childhood nutrition supplement is the best in Canada – sounds impressive. Now, while the amounts for the child benefit have indeed quadrupled, I guess, the income bracket is only marginally widened. Think about this number: earning less than \$17,400 qualifies a parent for a full benefit. Think about that. If you earn less than \$17,400, you get the full benefit. If you earn between \$17,400 and \$28,500, however, it qualifies a person to earn a scaled down benefit, depending on income. The maximum allowable income was increased from \$25,500 to \$28,500 –

\$3,000 in this latest announcement. The benefit was peanuts before the increase.

Now, on the surface, it does surpass Nova Scotia and Ontario's payment rates. Where we fall short is the income brackets for qualification, which means fewer people qualified for the full amount. So Nova Scotians earning less than \$26,000 – not \$17,400 – in income, qualified for the full amount with payments scaling back until income exceeds \$34,000. Their base is almost as high as our ceiling. And while Ontario's not as forthcoming with their income bracket, coverage starts at \$24,500. Again, a much higher base compared to our \$17,400.

So here's a simple thing. I don't know how anyone earning \$17,000 a year is going to be able – even if they're single, Speaker – to survive, let alone if they have children.

So the first thing, if the government is truly interested in eliminating poverty and increasing the child benefit, raise that income threshold as well. On the surface, it sounds good; in reality, it's not as good as it sounds.

Since being in this position, and keeping in mind what Hugh Segal said, it's interesting here the rules and regulations – and we say here the devil is in the detail. I'll give an example of a gentleman who ended up – he was on income support, I think he received a comfort allowance, so roughly around \$150, a little bit more than that maybe, depending on the dietary supplement he gets, who ended up being struck by a car, foot was broken, ended up in emergency. The doctor prescribed via a person that he had to have a boot cast so to walk and he would need transportation through MTAP to and from his drug treatments.

So from Income Support, we got back that we don't have enough details from the doctor, we would like more detail from the doctor as to why this person needs the boot cast. This is just one example of many that

we encountered. In speaking to officials there, I said, I can understand if I wrote the note, of course, you'd want more details, but if I got to send this person back to a specialist, to possibly an orthopedic surgeon, to get more details, it's just a waste of time and insult.

If nothing else, it makes for great media coverage because this is nonsense. And then, no, you can't have the transportation for three weeks or so for that.

Now we've got it straightened out but it took an awful lot of work.

There are plenty of other examples here – I've got 39 seconds, I'm not going to get through them – where people through either dental; accessing mental health supplement; people who've been two to three years waiting for a housing transfer to accessible housing; a lady whose joint space broke while waiting for hip replacement because she had to leave the shelter every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. to walk the streets.

There are plenty of examples here that we've encountered and we've got a record of where people on income support have faced barriers along the way. If you want to help people, remove the barriers.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers.

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that the House concur with the Report of the Social Services Committee.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Report of the Social Services Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call the concurrence motion on the Report of the Government Services Committee.

SPEAKER: The motion is that the House concur with the Government Services Committee.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to get up and speak on this. We went through Estimates the other night and I thank the department for that as well, for Transportation and Infrastructure. They did a great job in answering most of the questions we had and some of the questions that they didn't have answers to, they will certainly get back to us. I'm going to touch on one that I got from a community today, an email that was sent out to the minister touching on roads.

It says: Please accept this letter – it's a formal request from the Town of Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove Council to make the repaving of Long Run Road at Petty Harbour a priority for your department. I've done many petitions on that along the way and it's something that I had said to the minister, hopefully, they'll have a look at it in their five-year plan or whatever plan they're using now, we're not sure.

Over the last number of years, the condition of this provincially maintained roadway has deteriorated significantly. Each year, town staff submits requests to have the roadway upgraded to no avail. Each year, representative from your department advise the town that it's on the list – it's been going on for a long time. It's gotten to the point of deterioration that more is needed than simply filling the potholes. We haven't even

had the potholes repaired properly over the last number of years. The town's advising that a conversation with an employee a few years back that a major asphalt project would take place on this roadway. To date, there has been little to no work completed.

The Town of Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove has heard from numerous residents and visitors who have damages occur to their vehicles from the condition of this road. Many tourist visit our area throughout the year and have mentioned the poor road condition on what's called Long Run Road.

Several provincial government departments have already recognized the importance of upgrading this road over the years, it was even highlighted recently by the Department of Tourism during the process of revising the town's strategic tourism plan.

The issue stretches beyond simply fixing a road and into the economic future of the community. Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove is a tourism hub in very close proximity to the City of St. John's, which I've certainly stated many times. Tourists want to take advantage of the proximity to the city and its outport charm. Numerous film crews from all over the world want to capture the town's beauty. Travelling over a deteriorated road full of potholes and ruts to get to their destination leaves much to be desired of our province.

The Town of Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove thanks you for your consideration and looks forward to a response and the significant repairs being made to the Long Run.

That's from the Town of Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove. Again, I've done numerous petitions and we've been in here now five years. I'm sure that didn't just happen in the last five years, as the minister knows. But again, looking at some of the roads that are in the district, I'll certainly touch on them along the way and have been.

Another one we discussed the other day in Estimates was brush cutting. They spent a couple of million dollars on brush cutting. The question that I think they were going to get back to me on was: How much does a couple of million dollars in brush cutting do across the Island? There's a fair amount of brush cutting to be done in a lot of areas, but hopefully the minister's representatives will certainly be able to come back with an answer when we asked how many kilometres is being done and when is the next bit going to be done and how much is going to be done and where to.

Because everybody in here has a vested interest in what's going to be done in their districts in regard to brush cutting. So it's certainly something that we've been speaking about for the last five years I've been here.

Witless Bay Line: I'm sure that didn't just deteriorate in the last five years. I'd say there are not many petitions done more than that one in the last five years, I can tell you that. Every week we've been in here, I've done it at least a couple of times, maybe three times. To a point you get sick of listening to it. But do you know what? I prevailed and the minister has got some paving in on the Witless Bay Line. I'm certainly glad and appreciate that.

Another one is in the Bay Bulls city limits. Same thing, from the Foodland in Bay Bulls up to the St. John's turnaround is something that, in the last few years, we've been talking about. It's very dangerous. I can only give you one example, and this happened yesterday. My parents showed up at my house 1:30 p.m. They were going out to Goulds and they got up over the top of the hill or up to the turnaround in St. John's and turned around and came back. It was only raining, but it was raining pretty good. She said it was really dangerous, a lot of water on the roads and it's in the ruts of the roads, as we know, and it's very dangerous to be driving. She turned around and came back. She didn't even go to Goulds on a Sunday

afternoon. So that's pretty serious when that happens. It's concerning. It really is concerning.

I have a folder for petitions, obviously. There is a petition there for the Long Run Road, which I just read a letter on. Robert E. Howlett extension: I'm wondering how many times since I came in here that the Gushue Highway has been announced. Maybe the next time it gets announced, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands and myself may get in on the next photo op when the next announcement is. I mean, they say it's going to be done in a couple of years. Let's see if we can hold them to account to it. We'd certainly love to be in on it and maybe we'll get in on it.

Another petition I've done over the time is on the St. Shotts road as well. Most of my petitions – most of them – I do have some in there on cellphone coverage and I have others on ambulance issues and doctor issues and nurse practitioner issues that have recently come up. It's something that seems to be affecting my district. Ambulance issues, again, I spoke on it. They have to travel these highways as well. How much more beating has the District of Ferryland got to take with losing an ambulance, losing a doctor, losing a nurse practitioner? It's just relentless on this government. It's totally relentless and it's got to stop. I'm getting letters now on nurse practitioners. It's got to stop.

Speaking to officials last week – I don't even know if they know where the district is or how it's covered. Sometimes I wonder if they really do. It's a bit disappointing to hear that.

Again, I spoke to the minister and hopefully on some of the other issues that we went over in the Estimates – one was touching on the road maintenance, some equipment for the areas. It's not only my district; there's some upgrades coming to some equipment and, hopefully, look to see that. That's something that was desperately needed for

sure. In some of the other ones that we dealt with in the Estimates – let me see here – the ranking system we asked about as well. We're certainly going to get a copy of that. That's a very important one, too, where it sits now.

If there's an election called where there's another road going to be paved in a promise of election, is that going to jump into the five-year plan, in between everything else that's already on a list?

So there are some of the things we went over. Again, I thank the department for going over, going through the Estimates. They did a great job on answering the questions and I certainly thank the department. That's it for now.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any other speakers?

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to stand up and have a few words on this here: the Government Service Committee. Once again, I'll put it in there that the reason why you've got to speak on it is because we don't get time in Estimates anymore to ask questions. We do have a lot of questions about it, yet, for some reason, the government doesn't want to allow myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands to ask questions on the budget.

We're all-inclusive and we all want to get along, yet we can't ask questions that we're having. So I'm going to find every opportunity I can to speak on it, on the people that I represent. I'm sure when they bring up concerns to me, I will try to bring them in the House of Assembly and make government aware of it and the Opposition

aware of it so we can raise those concerns together.

I'll just touch on a few of the things that people brought up to me, and I'll be brief on some of them. The Department of Finance: People are asking: We have a huge deficit; what's the plan for the deficit? That is a big question – that is a big question: What is the plan for the deficit? I heard one Member there earlier talking about the 2016 budget. Yes, it was a tough budget. Absolutely, no doubt.

But, then again, we were put on a path ourselves then to try to start with a balanced budget and whatever happened in between – I understand COVID also and COVID is part of it – that we started moving away from that idea of a balanced budget. Now the deficit is growing and growing and growing. People are concerned about it. Eventually, we've got to deal with it. We, as the people of this House of Assembly, because we can't keep on adding to the deficit and then more and more debt as we're going to have to pay on the interest to service the deficit, which will take away money from the services that we offer.

So that is a concern that has been brought up to me on more than one occasion and a lot of people – and you hear it in the public domain, too, about the size of the deficit that we're running. I never heard any plan from government yet on how we're going to reduce that deficit and try to get into a balanced budget. That is something that most governments always bring in, in their budgets – always – and they stick to it the best they can.

I understand COVID. COVID may have caused a lot of issues with the deficit, and we always hear their story: We can't pass it on to our kids and we can't pass it on to our grandkids. So, somewhere, we have to bite the bullet and explain it to the people.

I give people here a great example. I remember Clyde Wells, 1992, he was

having a fight with, I think it was – the Teachers' Union was the big one. That was 1992. In 1993, we were going to the election. A lot of people went to the premier at the time and said: Look, we're going into an election, we're going to have problems winning this election. We're going to have problems. They're going to be out in full force.

I remember they asked me to speak to him on it because I had a good relationship with them, a very good relationship, actually. I remember us going through Gillams and McIvers and I spoke to him. I said: Premier, you know a lot of people are concerned about the deficit and now you're going to take on the union on it. I remember Clyde Wells looking at me in the car – I was driving the car – he looked at me and he said: Eddie, I'd rather lose with honesty than win with dishonesty.

In 1993, he went ahead with the plan. In 1993, he won more seats than we had in 1989. When I made that quote earlier today, he said: Don't underestimate the intelligence of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to understand what we're doing.

I say to the government, and maybe whichever Government is going to be in there, that somewhere we have to make a plan to try to erase the deficit and then try to get into the balanced budget so that we can knock down the amount of money because every time we borrow, we've got to pay interest on that money, which is taking money from the services around. So that is the bigger concern that a lot of people have brought up to me and I just want to raise that with the minister on that concern.

Also, when you look at the Department of Finance and the deficit, that takes away from our health care, that takes away from our education in the province, that takes away from our social programs in the province, that takes away from our housing initiatives in the province because,

eventually, we can't keep on supporting that if we've got to give the money out for the interest on our debt. I'll just leave that there.

The next one I'm just going to bring up – there are a few I'm skipping – the Department of Labrador Affairs. Of course, I'm not really involved with that department and I'm sure the Members for Labrador are going to have questions on that and have a speech on that.

The Public Procurement Agency, I had some dealings with the Public Procurement Agency lately and I have to say they're very efficient. They're an efficient group. They get back to you. They try to solve the issues that people bring to my attention that I pass on to them and when you bring the concerns to them, they handle it, they do an investigation and they handled it. At least, they get the answers back and do an investigation into the issues that you're trying to get resolved.

There's another part that is brought up to me and how to handle this, I don't know. It's the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, it's the procurement. I'll just give you an example. One of the hardest things to do for towns in this province right now, if you have an engineering firm that you're doing water and sewer projects, is say okay, we have to find some way to get a good group that's going to work with us because there are some groups that finds it very hard to deal with, very, very hard to deal with. But because they're the lowest bid, you have to deal with them; you have to take them.

I know a lot of towns out my way wish somehow that we can change it so that you can pick somebody, not because they're the lowest bid, but because of the quality of work, and not always because they're the highest either. You can't pick the highest. There has to be some medium inside that. I'll take part of the responsibility because I was part of bringing in that procurement act

also. That is a flaw that we didn't recognize at the time that now is becoming an issue.

So I want to bring that up to the minister on that because it's being brought to my attention, not only by the towns, but also from a lot of people working in the department also, that is an issue that we have to try find some way to work with.

The next one I'm going to bring up, of course, is Transportation and Infrastructure. I say to the minister, again, I'm going to send you an email later from a lady – this is something I'm sending you to explain the seriousness of it. She was driving down in Mount Moriah. There are signs up. The Premier seen them on Friday, seen the condition of the road in Route 450. The signs up in Mount Moriah: Be careful of potholes. We've been trying to get them fixed. She went down and she busted her whole tire up and part of her rim, right in the town, right on Route 450. The pothole itself, there's a sign up, a foot deep, a foot and a half deep, it shouldn't be. The department is well aware of it. It just shouldn't be.

I know the minister is trying to do all the roads in the province, but you're well aware of some of these concerns. So I will be sending you an email from this lady, asking you to ask the department, who's well aware of it, not fixing it, it should not be their responsibility, especially when you're going through Mount Moriah and there are not a lot of lights. When you get past Benoit's Cove and you go out to York Harbour and Long Harbour, there are no lights on the road and there are so many different potholes, the roads are bad.

I asked the minister and the minister before: When the department officials go out and have a ranking system, table the ranking system to match up who got the money. Table it. I asked the minister before: Table the ranking system so you can correlate it with whoever got the most points gets the funds. I asked the minister; it's never been tabled. It hasn't been tabled.

I said to the minister and I said it last week when I was talking about the roads money, where the Premier and his district got \$29.7 million in one year. There are roads that were done in the Premier's district, there's more traffic that goes over in a day on Route 450 from Lark Harbour up, than goes in a month in that area. Yet, the same areas will get the funding again this year.

On Route 450, according to the minister, which I haven't got the documents from him, all I've got is an email saying they're looking at doing the gabion baskets, one part. There has not been one cent spent on Route 450 for the last three years except for patching. Yet, you've got a district in the Premier's riding, \$29 million.

I ask the minister again to put out the ranking to correlate with that \$29 million last year. Table it, because what's happening – I don't mean to be picking on the minister because this is before your time, too. Don't take this personal, but you happen to be the minister on it. It was before his time. The roads are unsafe and this one who broke the tire, smashed up the tire, is asking: Where can I go to get repaid? I think they should because you're aware of it. We're constantly sending emails. We're constantly saying here's where the roads are. The Premier himself drove out the other day. I ask the minister because it's getting to the point where someone's not going to just beat up their tire, someone is going to get hurt. I'm serious on that. I am serious.

Where does your responsibility as a government go when you know the road is unsafe? You know that when one district gets \$29.7 million, I think it was \$29.7 million, and you can see half the road in some areas is gone, ask the Premier, he drove out. Ask the Premier of the province about the condition of Route 450, but because it's all politics, not safety, and anybody in this House knows that if you sign a note as a minister, you're a minister of Newfoundland and Labrador, all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I raised this issue last year. There was stuff going to be done – not done. In Bottle Cove Road itself, where they were trying to get water and sewer – the only place in the district that doesn't have water and sewer. They were hoping to get it for the last two or three years and got none.

That school buses won't go over it because it's so bad. Yet, nothing there. All they do is put a bit of patching there. Then when you ask why people like me, who happens to be representing the District of Humber - Bay of Islands and I'm proud to do it, why I'm standing up and raising these concerns and always talking about, it is because of safety. It is not luxury; it's safety.

I noticed I got an email – to be fair to the minister, I got an email saying they're looking at design to do the gabion baskets out by number four brook and, hopefully, have it done the year. Yet, when I saw the announcement coming out, just by coincidence, I happen to read it and I was going through the announcement, two of the tenders are already put out and there are two in the Premier's district. Two is already in the Premier's district.

I'm going to see if I got it. I'll read out some of the funding in the Premier's district, because I refuse to let this continue to go without raising it. You can look; I got I right here. Even in the Humber - Bay of Islands – this is the funny part and I'm sure it had to be a mistake. Here's the part that I find funny. They start adding things from other districts to make it look good. So here's the amount you got.

That bridge in Hughes Brook was announced in 2018. And what happened with it was they ran into an artesian well, yet they're still saying here's what were doing. It's already taken care of. It's already paid for. It's already done. They're just waiting because they ran into an artesian well and they couldn't get the cement down. Yet, the big thing what they're doing for Hughes Brook. It has been shut down now two

years, I think. Going on two years that they couldn't do anything with it, but they're still adding to it.

Just some things here: Wiltondale, \$4.3 million; rehab Cormack, \$2.1 million. This is all in the Premier's district. Rehab Route 430, near Reidville, \$1.37 million; rehabilitation – it doesn't say, actually – \$1.6 million; \$5 million here, Birchy Narrows Bridge. Wiltondale, Cormack, it is to the point – and I understand government; I understand sometimes there has to be a little leeway that if something is 50-50, which way do you go. I understand the politics. But when you constantly – and I use the word “pork barrel” – pork barrel one district and leave roads unsafe, fundamentally, I feel that the oath that you've taken to be fair to the people of the province is in jeopardy. I really feel that. I honestly, truly feel it.

I'm not talking about one town; I'm talking about 45, 50 kilometres on one side and another 30 on the other side, nothing, only patching. Everything here for the Humber - Bay of Islands in the last number of years is patching, rehabilitation, temporary asphalt, rehabilitation: \$6,000. Also right here from Pinchgut Lake – I'll just let the Member know from St. George's - Humber that Pinchgut Lake now is included in Humber - Bay of Islands. I just wanted to let you know that all of a sudden now to try to increase the amount that's being spent there, which is wrong. It is wrong. This is the kind of stuff that you have to speak up on.

I'll say to the minister, do me one favour: Speak to the Premier. Because I'll be writing the Premier and say if you drove over that road, would you have that? Would you want your kids, your family driving over that road? It is unsafe. I'm talking potholes and, for some reason – someone mentioned brush cutting, there's absolutely none. It's almost sit down, trying to bribe people to say here's how you better vote if you want anything done. It's almost getting to that point.

I can tell you, people of Humber - Bay of Islands aren't going to be pressured into that. I can honestly tell you that. So when the minister wants to stand up here and talk about the great road plan, you should include the great road plan for all the districts and all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Then when you see the announcements coming out again, the tenders that they're putting out, and then you look at them, where they're from, it just reinforces what I've been saying.

I've very serious that someone's going to get hurt. I just hope no one does. The other night there was a car – and that's not the first tire that was beat up on it. I would say if there are not 40 letters on file from the towns, if there are not letters that I put there, if there's not information that the department sent in – and I've asked on numerous occasions, and I'll ask again to the minister, table what the recommendations were from the staff. Because the staff are telling me – and I'll tell you why the staff are telling me. Their families are driving over the road. They're driving over the road. They know. They honestly know. They don't even want their school bus to go down Bottle Cove Road. They don't want it. That's how bad it is, and the minister's aware of it. The former minister was aware of it.

So I'm just asking the minister here to go back and do a re-evaluation of the priorities that were put in by the staff and I can assure you that there are areas on the Route 450 and Route 440 that would meet those requirements and would be in the recommendations. I can assure you that. If the minister was so – I don't want to say that the minister hasn't got his hands full with the department. I'm not saying that, but I have to bring up this, Sir, every opportunity I get because it is a safety concern and there are people that are asking me to bring it up.

I say to the minister again –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Pardon me, Minister?

AN HON. MEMBER: He said, it will get looked after. That's what I heard.

E. JOYCE: No, this is not a laughing matter, I say to the people opposite. This is not a laughing matter. I'm serious on that; this is not a laughing matter. Because I can tell you, and I know how this works. So if the minister really feels that every district is – table the recommendations made by your department that you said you have and let's correspond with what's being done.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, when it comes to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, I don't have a big lot of dealing with that department, because quite frankly the vast majority, almost all actually, almost all the roads in my district are municipal roads. They all fall within the confines and the responsibility of the City of St. John's on the Southlands-Galway portion of my district and, of course, the City of Mount Pearl in the Mount Pearl side of my district.

The only exception, really, to that rule would be on the Pitts Memorial Drive, the entrances into Mount Pearl and the on-ramps and the off-ramps basically on both sides of that highway. There are three sets on one side and three sets on the other side: the Commonwealth Avenue on-ramp, off-ramp, the Richard Nolan Drive and the Ruth Avenue-Galway roundabout. Of course, those roundabouts are on both sides of the overpass by Galway. That would fall under the provincial government. So I wouldn't have a lot of dealings in that regard.

I will say to the Minister of Transportation, though, that as it relates to the – and I understand it pales in comparison, I suppose, to some of these safety issues my colleague is raising. I'm not discounting his concern or anyone else's concerns, but I would say that when it does come to the roundabouts on either side of the bridge for Galway, the Costco crowd and so on, that the lines never seem to manage to get painted until the summer is almost over.

It always seems to be very, very late in getting that done and that would be something that I think a lot of people, not just in my district, but in the region would appreciate. Because I would say that's probably one of the busiest areas, I'd say in the whole province actually, is that area going in and out of Galway. All hands going to Costco.

There are a lot of people who can't navigate roundabouts properly, they're challenged with it at the best of times and certainly not having any lines on the road, especially where those are double roundabouts and, of course, the safety issue, as you will, if you're coming out of Galway going into Mount Pearl when you come off that first roundabout, you go from a two lane right into a one lane and not having proper lines painted there is a safety hazard as well.

I understand that it's maybe not the biggest priority compared to some of the big issues we face around the province. But I would say that there are literally thousands and thousands of people that are utilizing that from the whole St. John's, Mount Pearl, metro region, and people from all throughout the province who come and utilize that. Certainly, there are an awful lot of taxpayers in that area, both as individual taxpayers and as business owners who own all those businesses in that area, that are paying good tax dollars and the least they can expect is a bit of paint in that area.

Another issue around transportation and works and while it doesn't directly go into

my district, it does have an impact on my district, to some degree. Moreso to my colleague in Mount Pearl North. In her district, it has a greater impact. That would be the completion of the Team Gushue Highway. That's something that, I guess, people have been waiting on for a long period of time. It keeps getting put off, but I think the latest I heard was that we should see something happening late this summer, unless that has since changed again. I think the last answer we had was sometime late this summer we should see something moving, hopefully, on the Team Gushue Highway.

The section that was put in from Kenmount Road to Topsail Road, while it's moved that project along, it has been sitting there for quite a period of time and, of course, what's that's created, it's created a major traffic issue within the City of Mount Pearl because you're dumping all of that traffic onto Park Avenue and Smallwood Drive. They're either going down Park, Smallwood Drive, Commonwealth to head out to the Southern Shore or they're utilizing it to go to Costco and, of course, you have the traffic down Park Avenue and up Ruth Avenue into Costco.

Now, there's no doubt that the new entrance/exit, if you will, for Galway off the Trans-Canada Highway, that is hopefully going to alleviate a lot of the traffic from people from the east end of town that are currently utilizing Team Gushue Highway and Park, Ruth Avenue to go to Costco and, hopefully, they'll start utilizing the Outer Ring Road and go directly into Costco from the back entrance. I'm hoping that's what's going to happen and that's going to alleviate some of the pressure there.

But, certainly, there are a lot of people that are very anxious to see that last section of Team Gushue completed because, as I say, it is creating traffic problems for people living in the area, particularly people on Park Avenue and Smallwood Drive. So I just wanted to bring that up again.

Speaker, I also just want to touch on what my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands just said, in terms of the bigger issue and the overall issue around roads. Again, it's not something that would have a big impact on my district, as I say, because for the most part the roads are all the responsibility of the City of Mount Pearl and City of St. John's.

But the reality of it is, though, that the people from my district, as well as throughout the province, are the ones who are paying taxes to the government for the roads and we all recognize – I'm sure people in my area recognize the fact that we all have to contribute and we're happy and willing to do so for the greater good and to ensure that districts outside the metro area also have good roads and safe roads and so on. I think everybody would support that. That's where we get into this issue to my colleague is raising around how we can establish fairness in ensuring that the roads money is spread out reasonably equal and certainly with safety being a number one priority.

Now, there are other issues, of course, that have to play into it. I think if we have areas – for example, from a tourism point of view, I'm sure the Minister of Tourism would say, and I would agree with him, that if we have a significant tourism destination, then we need to make sure that the road or roads getting to that significant destination is in good shape. So that obviously has to play into it in terms of establishing priority. I think we would all understand it's the same thing if there was any kind of major business or something there. Maybe the area where the fish plant was to or where the mine was to and areas where people have to utilize roads for commutes and so on.

I think we would all understand that. But safety, obviously, has to be a significant piece in this as well. We need to have an open and transparent way of understanding how the priorities are chosen and how the money is spent. I think what's happening

now – which, to my knowledge, never happened before – it all goes now as a Cabinet document and the Cabinet ministers are sitting around a table and they are divvying out the roads money. We don't know what kind of a priority list they're using. Are they utilizing all of these factors? What is being recommended by staff? Are they following the recommendations of staff or is it just simply becoming a political exercise? Nobody will ever know. There's a big problem with that.

I'm not saying it's easy. I know one time there was a three-year plan and a five-year plan, and I can remember one time – I never availed of this because, again, it didn't impact my district – when there was a PC administration at the time and I think what they used to do was they divided the roads money up into 48 blocks or however many blocks and then the minister of the day or perhaps his EA would come to the Member and say, listen, we've got \$2 million each or \$1.8 million each or whatever we got. This is what I got listed.

You can only do this much. Here's the money you've got. You tell me what roads are the most important ones on this list and you pick out the priority. That was one way they used to do it, I can remember, at one point in time. I don't know if that's necessarily the best way either because, at least, there was input from the Member, he or she would know, but I suppose you could argue then you could get into this whole idea of well, for political purposes, I'm going to pick the road into heavily populated area and there is only a handful of votes down here anyhow so they'll never get pavement.

So I know no matter what way you do it, there are going to be challenges, but, at the end of the day, the best thing to do is to take the politics out of it altogether. Hence, there used to be a slogan from a former premier: we're taking the politics out of pavement.

I would argue that with this new system, we've actually put the politics into pavement more than it ever was before and I don't think it's serving the public, in general, by doing it. It may serve the Premier. It may serve specific districts. It might be a great tool to be able to use when there's a by-election coming up or there's an election coming up where we're going to put the pavement to, to try to get few votes, but it's not a good system. It's not a fair system and it's not a transparent system.

So I would agree with my colleague and all other Members who raised this concern that if we're going to do it, it's the people's money, there's nobody over there writing personal cheques. It all belongs to the people and it should be done fair and square, utilizing things such as priority and safety and the recommendation of professional people who have no skin in the game, politically.

Also, Mr. Speaker, under this section is the Public Procurement. I want to speak to that issue because I've had a couple of companies and people in my district and so on who have come to me, who have raised concerns about tendering processes and so on and around local benefits, but, specifically around contracts, around tenders being written to favour who somebody wanted to actually win the tender.

So let's pretend it's a vehicle. The couple of examples I had they're not vehicles, but I'll just use it for sort of a more clear example. The government wants to purchase 10 vehicles and when they're writing the specs, it's got to be a Chev. It's got to be a Chev. It can't be a full-sized vehicle with this size engine and whatever. No, it's got to be a Chev.

Obviously, if we're going to say it's got to be a Chev, now we are limiting it to one or two companies that are going to be able to bid on it. If you're a Ford dealership or you're a Dodge dealership or you're a Toyota

dealership, don't even bother to bid because you don't have a Chev.

This is the kind of thing that I've been told has been happening with different products, whether it be cleaning supplies and different things like that, where they start naming specific names of products and so on, thus eliminating the competition and there's only going to be one winner every time. This is something that's been raised.

Of course, it makes me think back to when we had a review of the *Public Procurement Act* and we passed a new *Public Procurement Act* in this House of Assembly. As Members opposite may recall, I believe everyone on this side of the House voted against it, I'm sure I did. It was because of the fact that there was nothing in the legislation, everything was left to the regulations. We talked about preferences for local Newfoundland companies and so on and there were a whole bunch of other issues. Every issue that came up was going to be in the regulations. None of it was in the actual act itself.

Of course, regulation do not come on the floor of this House of Assembly for debate. It falls solely to the discretion of the minister – in theory from advice with staff and so on – to set those regulations and to change those regulations, whenever he or she decides that needs to be done. But the regulations are never debated in this House, there's no input from Members here.

So I would say to the minister that you need to look at some of these regulations to make sure that things are being done, again, fair and square. We cannot have loopholes that exist that eliminate local companies, in particular, from bidding on government contracts and products to sell to government and so on because we're going to start specifically naming products and services and so on that companies here cannot meet. Even though they may have a competitive brand or a competitive product that basically does the exact same job, but

the specs are written in a way that there's a particular person who's going to get it before the tender is even let.

In terms of procurement and contracts, I would be remiss if I didn't bring up the fact that, while I appreciate the need for urgent care clinics, while I appreciate the need for the transitional supportive housing with the wraparound services and so on, what I don't support is the letting of sole-sourced contracts for this stuff. That's what we've seen with all three of those.

That's why I've had people contact me, for example, and say: Paul what's on the go with the comfort inn, as an example. What's on the go with that? All the money that we're paying out on that comfort inn, they could have bought the building five times for what they're leasing it for. Who owns that building? Is there any connection there between anybody? People are suspicious. Is there any connection there? Are there any ties there? Why would that have happened that way?

Then I had people ask me the same thing about Costco. Who owns Costco? Who's this company? I heard it was a numbered company or something. Who's that? Because, again, people are wary about these things.

Of course, that property on Topsail Road, that's an interesting one. That one really raised a few eyebrows, that property on Topsail Road. I think it's close to Blackmarsh Road. I've had some people inquiring as to who owns that. Who owns that land? I can seem to recall somebody I thought owned that land, they put a building up and there were supposed to be three buildings. They only put up one and the other two building never got built. Is that the same person who owns that land? Can't be.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sundara.

P. LANE: Yeah, Sundara got the building. There were supposed to be three building,

only one put up and the other two never happened. Is that the same piece of land we're talking about? Who owned that? I don't know.

So these are things that, when we talk about procurement, when you start putting out sole-sourced contracts and stuff on these things, we're talking big money and no competition and people are going to start asking: Who owns these properties? Could there be any connection to the government there? That's what's being asked.

I don't know the answers to that. I bet you there's someone going to be digging though. I have a feeling someone will be digging to try to find that out. Anyway, we'll see what happens with that one.

AN HON. MEMBER: Diggin 'em Dillion.

P. LANE: Diggin 'em Dillion, yes.

The final thing I just wanted to bring up, because I only have a minute left, I appreciate the hard work of the people over in Mount Pearl at the Motor Registration building, but I just want to put it out there to the minister of digital service and government of NL – digital services, I'll say, anyway, again, that I've had concerns raised from people about lottery licences, about the timeliness of getting it and the minister says the turnaround time is two weeks.

I have talked to some people who've gotten them in two weeks, but I've also talked to people who are waiting extended periods of time. A lot of these not-for-profits and charitable organizations depend on fundraising in order to pay the bills, literally. Not just to raise money for projects, literally, to pay the bills – to pay the heat bill, the light bill, to pay for staff. It's unfortunate when they get notified that you're going to have to change your fundraiser because we can't get your lottery licence in time, even though you applied months ago.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time is expired.

P. LANE: Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to use up all my time. A lot of times I go much longer than I anticipate.

When I speak on budget, when I speak on Estimates or when I bring a petition to the House of Assembly, usually what I do is I reference things. Like I referenced the Federal Housing Advocate, her report. I referenced reports, Food First NL. I referenced the Seniors' Advocate.

Speaker, I do that because a lot of the information from my district is really surreal – as my friend Stan Nochasak would call it: surreal. It doesn't sound believable. So, in order for me to keep my credibility, Speaker, I have to reference these documents.

I'm going to begin talking, today, by referencing what's in this report here by Food First NL. They went out into the community and they talked to people who are food insecure. They talked to people that were struggling to be able to access enough food throughout the week so that they weren't hungry. It's a really good document, Speaker, and I don't mind referencing a report, especially when it ties into reports into my community.

One of the documents that this report talks about is the NL Health Accord and it talks about recognizing that food security is one of the primary social determinants of health and it also recognizes that food security is determined by income. In my district, there's an added burden; it's the cost of getting food into my communities. Before, we could afford the food that was in the stores, the building materials – we could go down to the store and buy building materials

because the stores in our communities were selling them. I talked a lot about that. Access to materials, access to food, access to household goods – all of that is impacting our quality of life.

The Health Accord touches on that because food security is one of the primary social determinants of health. What that means is our access to food impacts our health, impacts our lifespan, impacts our quality of health, whether we're going to get disease, whether we're going to actually die prematurely – our lifespan. Everything is impacted by access to food.

Another document I'll reference is the provincial food basket. That came out and I talked about it in the House of Assembly. I asked questions on it. I referred to it in my petitions because the provincial food basket is another document that shows in Northern Labrador the cost of food is much higher than other areas in the province.

I go back to Food First NL because they looked at the provincial food basket and they actually summed it up. I went on social media talking about the report and putting it in terms that people could understand it. I referenced two quotes from Food First NL. They said: "The cost of food depends on where you live in the province and so does the rate of inflation. We see the highest cost, as always – that's what Food First NL said – on the North Coast of Labrador at \$467/week ... an increase of a shocking 18.5% since 2021.

That's the first quote that I referenced when I was talking about the provincial food basket and explaining what that means to our quality of life. Now, when I talk in the House of Assembly about things in my district and the barriers we have accessing services, infrastructure, grants, inclusions in services, I talk about quality of life. I talk about our health, our mental health, our stress, our ability to even look after and care for our children.

The second quote that Food First NL had that I posted on social media was: "A family of four in Northern Labrador would need to spend 129%" – not 100 per cent, 129 per cent – "of their base income support rate just on food" – just on food, 129 per cent; I wonder where the other 29 per cent is going to come from – "to afford the nutritious food basket" Mr. Speaker, 129 per cent just on food, not on other things. Not on other things your children may need, that your aging parents, that the seniors may need in your communities, just to afford the nutritious food basket, even with the additional cost-of-living amount provided to them.

That's always told, oh, there's an additional cost of living for Labrador. There are extra rebates. There are extra vouchers. There are extra things for Northern Labrador, but no one ever talks about why that has to be there. It's because we've never been able to access the same level of funding, supports, infrastructure that was handed out to the rest of the districts. Maybe it was because we didn't even know.

I was born and raised a Liberal. Until I ran with the PCs, I was a Liberal. When I got into the House of Assembly, I realized how wrong that was. I have to tell you, I realized how wrong that was and what a farce it was. It was just like cheering for the Toronto Maple Leafs and hating the Montreal Canadiens. They're never going to get to the Stanley Cup, but that don't deter people.

With the government, they're never going to help the people in Northern Labrador, but slowly and surely we're educated now. We're knowledgeable and if we weren't, we can darn well drive down to Southern Labrador after we get off the boat and see what the differences have made in terms of progress for the different districts. But then we look in our district – none.

But I have to talk about food, because food impacts our health. Food impacts our mental health. Food impacts our ability to

have quality of life. So anyway, talking about 129 per cent just on food to afford the nutritious food basket. This is up 109 per cent with the 2021 costs. So what does that mean? That's what they said on social media. People in my district: What does that mean?

What that means is we only have so much money. We only have so much household money and look at what we have to spend on food now that they've taken off the freight boat. In actual fact, I keep talking about that freight boat. But what else has changed? We only have so much money to go around, a handful of money that we have to spend on food, housing, clothing, heating our houses, being able to go off on hunt and fish.

What about the cost of fuel? The cost of fuel has gone through the roof to heat your home in Northern Labrador. The thing about it is – how many times do I talk about how many drums of oil you have to burn in one month? People weren't really upset when they heard how many drums were being burnt in my district, a 200-litre drum, because they thought that was for the full winter. No, no, sorry to burst your bubble, but that is for once month. So for me, the cost of fuel is really, really impacting the people in Northern Labrador because it has impacted their quality of life.

It has increased the stress, the burden on families, the burden on our elders because when you can't heat your house, everything is impacted. The ability to keep your children – CSSD is going to come take your children if you can't provide a warm, safe place for them to live. That's some of the burdens that we face. The provincial food basket I'm talking about here.

In actual fact, on social media when I did my first post about oil, I talked about people in the rest of the province don't understand what a drum of oil means, the 200-litre drum. So we have to talk about that red tank, now it's beige, out in front of your

house. That 1,000-litre tank, how much does that cost to fill up? In my district, you pay \$1,067.55 more, so that's \$1,000 more to fill up that tank outside your house in my district than to fill it up in St. John's. In actual fact, the real problem comes because we live in a northern climate, we are actually going to burn more fuel so that's a big concern for us. I present petitions in the House about all these things that impact us.

Now, I want to go back again to Food First NL. Like I said, they went out into the communities and they talked to people who actually have lived experience dealing with food insecurity, with being hungry, with having problems being able to access food. They had focus groups and they had findings. Here is says what the focus groups told Food First NL. Food insecurity damages their mental health and well-being. That's what happens when you're food insecure. That's what happens when you're hungry. That's what happens when you can't feed your children so that they're not hungry at some point during the day. It basically damages your mental health and well-being.

What does that look like? The focus groups actually outlines what that looked like: increased stress and rates of depression; increased social isolation and feeling of hopelessness; low ambition; lack of concentration; reduced mental health in general; inability for a person to perform at full potential because they are unable to fulfill their basic needs. That's what's happening when I talk about the cost of food up in Labrador. That's why and people made fun of me because I'm always talking about that freight boat. That freight boat is not about freight, it about being able to get food into the communities. Who took it off? Who took it off? It was this government. They basically took it off in 2019.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. EVANS: Speaker, they can talk all over me all they want, but at the end of the day,

I'm going to be heard. I'm going to be heard because of what they've done to us. They want to talk about reconciliation. I was really, really upset when they started about reconciliation because all they can show for their efforts of reconciliation is giving money out to groups so they can have conferences and meetings, building statues, taking down statues, getting a date on the calendar, it really upsets me. It upsets me when people are impacted, their mental wellness is impacted because of the failures of this government to address the colonialism that's impacted my people.

Intergenerational trauma, what's that? I talk about it all the time, but we saw the harm of policies. We saw the harm of residential schools.

Even people now who have raised their kids, who become educated, even the people in the communities that you look at on the outside and you say, oh they're not impacted by intergenerational trauma. They are. You scratch the surface and there are results.

When we look at mental health, mental health is a crisis, yes. Speaker, I have to try and stick to my line of pattern, because I get upset, Speaker. I get upset and I go off on a tangent talking about things and I don't get to include all the things that I want to talk about, because the only way I can be heard is to speak in this House of Assembly.

I remember talking to an AngajukKâk who was really good at letter writing and I said to him – I'm not going to say his first name, but I said, you know what I do, write the letters to show that you've actually talked to them about it, but you have to follow up, because they'll take that letter and say: Thank you, Mr. So and So, we'll look into that. They'll say, okay he's good for another three months. Three months later another letter will come out. They'll say: Thank you, Mr. So and So, we're looking into it. That's basically kicking the can further down the road.

But I want to talk about the impacts of mental health. Access to food, nutritional food impacts your mental health, access to being able to heat your house, raise your children in a safe, warm environment impacts your mental health. It also impacts your physical health.

So when we started having people come to us about their children suffering psychosis and not being able to get access to medical care, actually having a phone call, having to Zoom with the emergency doctor who said oh, I can't do anything about that. I'm going to refer you to counselling. Because they can't properly diagnose somebody over the phone or over Zoom.

But there was no follow up. There was no follow up. I had to start writing letters demanding things. Another thing, too, is I can't disclose those letters to the media. So does that mean what I'm saying is not credible?

I want to talk a little bit about mental health. When we started looking at psychosis, there's trauma-induced psychosis. If people undergo serious trauma and it's not addressed, if they don't get the counselling, the mental health supports to overcome that trauma, it can erode into psychosis.

We have other people who actually have no trauma, no trauma at all, but they develop psychosis because they have some mental health condition. The first one that pops to mind is schizophrenia but there are other mental health illnesses that can cause psychosis. So we started looking at psychosis.

So we started talking about psychosis and the chronic illnesses that are associated with psychosis. I'm going to read now from a journal: The outcomes are a consequence of psychiatric symptoms and physical illnesses that often accompany these disorders, particularly diabetes, obesity, metabolic syndrome, hypertension, cardiovascular and pulmonary disease.

So not only not being able to access nutritional food can impact your wellness and bring on conditions like diabetes, obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular and pulmonary disease, but now we're looking at mental health issues can actually trigger it.

I'll continue on. Contributing to the risk of developing these physical illnesses are disease-related factors such as the impact of symptoms on help-seeking behaviours, lifestyles. So all of these things can impact. What's reasonable to expect of a primary care practitioner when addressing psychosis, when trying to diagnose psychosis, when dealing with somebody in psychosis? What's reasonable to expect of your primary care practitioner? Diagnose and conduct the initial screening for underlying mental illnesses – was as that done? Not in my district. I can refer to incidents where there were calls for help and there was nothing, and I can actually back that up.

Assess suicide risk – was that done? No, that wasn't done either. Initiate treatment and monitor treat response and symptom severity – was that done? No, no, no, no. All the cases that I referred to in the House of Assembly, that wasn't done. Extreme cases, monitor ...

So anyway, Speaker, I've got to stick to the things that I wanted to talk about. In the House of Assembly and in the Estimates and I referred to, in last year's budget, they mentioned that they were going to get us a psychosis nurse when I was raising the issues of suicide – our high rates of suicide – and we were going through suicide. We were having people pass away from suicide and we were calling for help. Oh, in the budget, there's a psychosis nurse. That was going to address some of the issues. That psychosis nurse has not been hired yet and we're actually going through another budget. So where is our help?

We look at the deaths that we witnessed, that we experienced, that we lived through this past year. Also, what's heartbreaking is we look at some of the ages of the people that we've lost. I can tell you every single one of those people that we lost, it could have been prevented. It could have been prevented with help, support, the so-called wraparound services that we were promised that some people actually talk about as if they exist for our people, but they don't exist.

So, at the end of the day, we have to ensure our voice is heard – we have to ensure our voice is heard. If nothing else, then to call out the gaps that exist and put the truth out there.

Now, Speaker, my time is running down, but I mean I could go on for another hour actually, because everything that I do and say in this House of Assembly and that's affiliated with my role as MHA is related to our overall wellness.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that the House concur with the Report of Government Services Committee.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Report of Government Services Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by Deputy Premier, 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 p.m. tomorrow.

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