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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

This coming Friday, April 3, marks the conclusion of the 100th year anniversary celebrations of women gaining the right to vote and hold public office in our province. As we reflect on this past year's activities, and celebrate this step forward toward equality, it is also important to recognize that even after this milestone was achieved, it was many more years before those in Labrador as well as Indigenous and racialized women were able to cast their ballots.

Achieving the recognition of this right for women in Newfoundland and Labrador was an arduous process, having been considered by the House of Assembly twice in the late 1800s and defeated both times. When the issue of the social and economic importance of women's work and their entitlement to franchise returned to the Assembly for consideration in the mid-1920s, the House was persuaded and amendments finally allowing women the right to vote passed on April 3, 1925.

On the 100th anniversary last April, the House of Assembly was pleased to unveil a display in the public foyer, honouring a century of remarkable individuals who identify as women and their stories of breaking down barriers to make significant and outstanding contributions in our communities and society. I encourage people to take the time to view this display and learn more about these remarkable individuals and their stories.

As we mark this important anniversary in 2026 embarking on the 51st General Assembly, I want to take this opportunity as Speaker to honour all women who have served as Members of this Honourable House since May 17, 1930, the date on which Lady Helena Squires was the first woman elected as MHA for the District of Lewisporte.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Since that time, this House and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have been strengthened by the leadership and service of: Hazel A. McIsaac, Member for St. George's; Hazel R. Newhook, Member for Gander; Lynn Verge, Member for Humber East; Ida M. Reid, Member for Twillingate; Patricia Cowan, Member for Conception Bay South; Shannie Duff, Member for St. John's East; Caroline (Kay) Young, Member for Terra Nova; Mary Hodder, Member for Burin - Placentia West; Yvonne Jones, Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair; Sandra Kelly, Member for Gander; Judy Foote, Member for Grand Bank and first woman Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador; Anna Thistle, Member for Grand Falls - Buchans; Julie Bettney, Member for Mount Pearl; Joan Marie Aylward, Member for St. John's Centre and the current Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador; Sheila Osborne, Member for St. John's West; Kathy Goudie, Member for Humber Valley; Joan Shea, Member for St. George's - Stephenville East; Elizabeth Marshall, Member for Topsail; Kathy Dunderdale, Member for Virginia Waters and first woman premier of Newfoundland and Labrador; Charlene Johnson, Member for Trinity - Bay de Verde; Dianne Whalen, Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island; Lorraine Michael, Member for Signal Hill - Quidi Vidi; Patty Pottle, Member for Torngat Mountains; Tracey Perry, Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune; Susan Sullivan, Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans; Gerry Rogers, Member for St. John's Centre; Lisa Dempster, Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair; Cathy Bennett, Member for Virginia Waters; Siobhan Coady, Member for St. John's West; Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Member for Placentia - St. Mary's; Carol Anne Haley, Member for Burin - Grand Bank; Betty Parsley, Member for Harbour Main; Pam Parsons, Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; Alison Coffin, Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi; Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Member

for Harbour Main; Lela Evans, Member for Torngat Mountains; Sarah Stoodley, Member for Mount Scio; Krista Lynn Howell, Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows; Lucy Stoyles, Member for Mount Pearl North; Andrea Barbour, Member for Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows; Bettina Ford, Member for Gander; Sheilagh O'Leary, Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me now in reflecting on this important milestone and giving thanks for these trailblazers. I would also ask that we take a moment to celebrate our female colleagues of this 51st General Assembly, thank them for their leadership, for their valuable contribution to this hon. House and for serving as role models for the next generation of women in leadership roles in this province.

Thank you all for your service to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before we begin, I would also like to welcome a new face to the Table today, Tomas Brosnan. Tomas is an information specialist in the Legislative Library, and he will be serving as a journaling clerk on certain sitting days.

Please join me in welcoming Tomas to the Chamber.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Andrea Burke-Clarke, who is the subject of a Member's statement. She is accompanied by members of her family and friends.

Welcome everyone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Burgeo - La Poile, Burin - Grand Bank, Carbonear -

Trinity - Bay de Verde, Conception Bay East - Bell Island and Gander.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Speaker, today I rise to recognize the Isle aux Morts Winter Classic, a beloved community tradition that has grown from a simple idea among friends into one of the most anticipated winter events on the Southwest Coast.

Each February, residents and those who return home gather for a weekend that celebrates friendship, resilience and our love of the game of hockey.

What makes the Winter Classic so special is not just the hockey itself, but the spirit behind it. Founded by Vic Lawrence, the event brings together the entire community to play good-natured boot hockey, a nod to the way generations grew up playing on the pond – no skates required, just community, laughter and a shared sense of belonging.

The Winter Classic lifts spirits during the quietest time of the year, drawing people home, reconnecting neighbours and reminding us of the strength found in small communities that continue to show up for one another. It is a celebration of heritage, of home and of the enduring ties that bind Isle aux Morts.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in thanking the organizers, volunteers and participants who keep this cherished tradition alive.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, I'm so pleased to stand in this House today to recognize two individuals from the District of Burin- Grand Bank, Marc and Lorna Pittman – a husband-and-wife team from the beautiful community of St. Lawrence.

Both individuals are role models, mentors and coaches to male and female athletes

from their community, their schools on the Burin Peninsula. Both teachers by profession, they have an extensive background in soccer, basketball, hockey, cross-country and have a vision for success to provide friendly and healthy competition to children.

They spend countless hours fundraising, organizing, coaching and everything in between for athletes to develop to their highest potential. Both have a passion to ensure St. Lawrence continues its legacy as the soccer capital of Canada.

Their experience as players themselves is also quite impressive. Marc playing soccer at the national level, a high school sport athlete of the year. Lorna, a high school athlete and gold medal coach. They often coach against each other and have both recently coached their teams to gold medals in two schools in the district. This statement represents only a snapshot of their passion.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating and thanking Lorna and Marc.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Speaker, today I rise to recognize the accomplishments of a young man from Heart's Delight-Islington, Nathan Bishop.

Nathan is a 16-year-old honours student at Crescent Collegiate who is an exceptional athlete. He grew up playing minor hockey in the Trinity Placentia Association in Whitbourne, with the Trinity Placentia Teepees.

In 2022, Nathan decided to play Triple A Hockey with the Tri Pen Ice. Nathan's development was a result of his pure talent and good coaching and lead to his selection as team captain. The following season, he donned the jersey of the Tri Pen Osprey,

captaining the team for 2 years. This resulted in Nathan's selection to Team NL and participation in the Atlantic Cup in New Brunswick.

Nathan also excels in ball hockey and, in 2025, represented this province at the U15 Nationals in Mississauga. While there, his performance caught the eye of Team Canada scouts, who selected him to play in the 2026 World Under-16 Ball Hockey Championships in Slovakia. Nathan will be joined by seven other talented players from this province.

I ask all Members to join me in wishing Nathan and Team Canada the best of luck as they compete under our nation's flag this summer.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you.

I rise in this hon. House today to pay tribute to a remarkable constituent from Conception Bay East - Bell Island who has been recognized for her exemplary contributions in the field of education. Ms. Andrea Burke-Clarke who, as you pointed out, is with us today with her family members, is principal at St. Augustine's Elementary on Bell Island.

Ms. ABC, as she's affectionately known, has been in the teaching profession since 1996. For her, it has always been more than a career; it's a calling.

Ms. Burke-Clarke has recently been awarded the NLTA School Administrators' Council Distinguished Principal Award, which recognizes outstanding leadership in education and celebrates administrators who make a lasting difference in their school communities. She will be formally recognized at an upcoming event in April and has also been nominated for the Canadian Distinguished Principal award.

She is relentless when it comes to ensuring the very best for – quote – her kids, as she proudly calls them, and her philosophy of education is rooted in the belief that connection must precede cognition. When she became principal at St. Augustine's in 2022, Ms. Burke-Clarke pledged to make every decision with her full heart so every student would feel loved and rooted before being expected to achieve and to learn.

I ask all Members to rise and join me in congratulating Ms. Burke-Clarke for this most deserving recognition and to thank her for her dedication to youth and learning in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, today I rise to recognize Broadening Horizons. They're dedicated to empowering adults with intellectual disabilities to live more independent, connected and fulfilling lives.

Based in Gander, the organization offers life changing pre-employment and group employment programs that build skills, confidence and meaningful community connections.

For more than two decades, this charitable non-profit organization, guided by a committed volunteer board, has been a vital community resource. Through innovative programming and strong partnerships with families, employers and community organizations, Broadening Horizons has helped countless individuals discover their strengths and reach their potential.

The pre-employment program supports participants as they develop life, work and social skills while also offering educational, recreational and community engagement opportunities that promote long term well-being and independence – outcomes that also help lessen pressure on the health care system.

The group employment program, including the Broadening Horizon Recycling program is a shining example of social enterprise, combining environmental stewardship with inclusive employment. Last year, the program diverted over five million beverage containers and 48,000 pounds of electronic waste from landfills while employing eight client workers and three support staff.

Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the dedicated staff, the volunteer leadership, community partners, corporate supporters, government agencies, families and inspiring clients for creating such an impact.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week, the Minister of Energy and Mines and I had the privilege of representing Newfoundland and Labrador at CERAWeek 2026 in Houston, Texas.

CERAWeek is one of the world's leading energy conferences, bringing together global leaders from industry, government, technology and finance to shape the future of energy.

I was proud to attend as Premier – an important milestone for Newfoundland and Labrador. It underscores our commitment to showing up, engaging directly with global decision-makers and investors, and competing on the world stage.

Our focus was clear: to position Newfoundland and Labrador as a globally competitive energy jurisdiction.

We showcased the full strength of our energy sector – from oil and gas, to hydroelectricity, to critical minerals, mining and our growing renewable energy opportunities.

Speaker, the level of interest in Newfoundland and Labrador was strong. That interest has only increased following our recent announcement on Bay du Nord. In meeting after meeting, we heard the same message: The world is looking for reliable partners, and Newfoundland and Labrador is well positioned to deliver.

Speaker, this is about more than one conference – it was an opportunity to once again tell the world we are back in the oil and gas business. It was about building relationships, attracting investment, and ensuring our resources create jobs and long-term economic growth here at home for all of us.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you.

It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to CERAWeek and to emphasize Newfoundland and Labrador's long-standing position as a competitive energy jurisdiction. The Premier says this is about telling the world we are back in the oil and gas business but the reality is, we never left.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: This industry has been a fundamental part of our economy for decades, supporting thousands of workers, driving investment and sustaining communities across Newfoundland and Labrador. What the Premier is really acknowledging is that the world continues to depend on the energy produced right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, as it always has.

We agree that promoting our province on the global stage is important and that attracting investment matters, but that work must be supported by transparency, clear timelines and decisions that actually move projects forward. Our workers, our industries and our communities deserve more than announcements and photo ops. They deserve real actions to create jobs and to build projects.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will always support showcasing Newfoundland and Labrador as a global –

SPEAKER: The hon. Member's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Premier for an advance copy of the statement.

We indeed have the potential to be a globally competitive energy jurisdiction. However, Karim Fawaz, oil analyst and director of the Energy Advisory Service at S&P Global said that there's an irrational optimism – an optimism without a solid foundation among people in the oil industry.

That is why we ask this government to invest more in other sources of energy, to finalize the Churchill Falls MOU and get power to Labrador West to create more jobs, grow industry and build thriving communities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a remarkable group of young women who are the recipients of the 100th Anniversary of Women Achieving the Right to Vote and Hold Public Office Scholarship Program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Scholarships valued at \$1,000 each have been presented to 100 young women in Grades 10 to 12 from communities throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Office of Women and Gender Equality received an impressive 284 applications for the scholarship program from young women eager to share their achievements, leadership and community involvement.

I extend my sincere congratulations to the applicants and commend them for stepping forward to share their accomplishments and inspirations. You are our future leaders.

The future of Newfoundland and Labrador is bright because it is being shaped by these talented, determined young women who are committed to building stronger communities, expanding opportunities and ensuring our province continues to thrive for generations to come.

A century after women in this province secured the right to vote and to lead, today's young women remind us that democracy thrives when every voice is empowered. Their leadership, courage and commitment to community light the path forward to a future that is brighter, more equitable and full of possibility for us all.

The next 100 years looks bright for us all.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: While I recognized the Member as the Minister of Health, I should have recognized her as the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to join in recognizing the remarkable young women across Newfoundland and Labrador who have been named recipients of the 100th Anniversary of Women Achieving the Right to Vote and Hold Public Office scholarship.

Their leadership, dedication and commitment to their communities are truly inspiring, and they represent a generation that is already making a meaningful difference.

These students are not only excelling academically, but they're also stepping forward, getting involved and helping to shape the future of this province. That deserves to be recognized and celebrated. But, Speaker, recognition must also be matched with opportunity. If we want to see more young women lead in our communities and in our public life, we must ensure that they have the support, mentorship and pathway to do so.

Today, we congratulate these recipients but we also acknowledge the responsibility we share in continuing to create spaces where their voices are heard and their potential can fully be realized.

Congratulations to each of them.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: I thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement. I agree our future is strong with powerful, future women leaders. Our party was the first ever in or province to run a gender-balanced slate of delegates.

While it is with great pride that I applaud the Speaker's acknowledgement to the many women MHAs past and present, sadly, 100

years after gaining the right to vote, women still only make up a quarter of this Chamber.

We know that snap elections are a barrier to women standing for office. We, therefore, call on the government to do its part to level the playing field by strengthening the fixed election date legislation.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

We know that the gas tax in this province is currently 7.5 cents and if Bill 5 passes in this House of Assembly, gas tax will be 7.5 cents. However, we have a Liberal amendment on the floor to actually lower the gas tax.

Can the Premier explain why he's claiming to cut the gas tax while failing to support our amendment which will actually do that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Yes, we are eliminating eight cents on gas tax that was due to expire on April 1. If we don't pass this legislation, this tax will come back into effect.

So it's not about renewing it every year; it's about making this reduction permanent, which is exactly what we are going to do. We will ensure that we have the lowest

provincial gas tax of any province in the entire country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: A non-answer, again.

Can the Premier tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why he won't vote for our amendment to actually lower the gas tax?

Further, why he has decided, for the first time in over 10 years, to close debate on a bill in this House of Assembly?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, what we are doing is making sure that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador can bank on tax relief, not simply have to wait year after year to find out if that relief is going to be provided. That's exactly what we're doing with this legislation.

Unfortunately, the Liberal amendment that they wanted to put forward would see more gas tax being saved by people who run on propane fuel and have the forklifts in their driveways. That's where the most of this amendment was going to cover off.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

They must be hearing from different Newfoundlanders and Labradorians because we're hearing from people that want the gas tax cut at the pumps so they don't have to pay more money as this government continues to rake in increased oil revenue day over day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: In their election platform, the Conservatives promised to ensure Newfoundland and Labrador receives its fair share of any new federal government defence spending. Newfoundland and Labrador companies are getting the share of \$16 million in repayable loans; however, Nova Scotia is getting \$2 billion in defence spending.

Does the Premier think \$16 million for us and \$2 billion for Nova Scotia is our fair share?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, we are working with the federal government – the federal Liberal government that has actually turned around and agreed to work with us; a federal Liberal government that actually supports the Bay du Nord project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: A federal Liberal government that has already made announcements on defence spending and are going to make another one on April 1 in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: The last I checked, Labrador was part of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: More than happy that we teed up Bay du Nord for the government, Speaker; however, when we talk about defence spending, Newfoundland and Labrador is getting less than 1 per cent of what Nova Scotia is getting.

Why is our Premier letting Nova Scotia led the way in defence spending while Newfoundland and Labrador gets left behind?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I need to remind the previous government of their record when it comes to defence spending contributions by the federal government when they were on this side of the House, when we ranked the lowest in Canada.

So yes, we are working hard with the federal government. We have met with the Defence minister, we have met with the prime minister, we have met with the Energy minister and we have met with other ministers and we will continue to do that because Newfoundland and Labrador is built for defence.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I appreciate the meetings, I appreciate that they're working hard, unfortunately it sounds like Premier Houston is working just a little bit harder because he's the one getting \$2 billion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Not only is Nova Scotia ahead of us in defence, they're working on deals to sell their energy to Quebec. Just last week, Quebec and Nova Scotia signed an agreement to explore offshore wind energy.

So what does this mean for the non-negotiations that are taking place between NL Hydro and Hydro-Québec? Has Quebec moved on?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador is blessed with so many natural resources. We talked about them earlier, whether it's oil and gas, whether it's hydroelectricity, whether it's critical minerals or other minerals.

At the end of the day, what we are going to do, on this side of the House, is make sure that any time that we want to talk about our resources, that the benefits of those resources are going to be maximized for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that's exactly what we're doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I find it hard to believe that you can get the upside of those opportunities that we have here when you're not even talking to Quebec and our sister provinces, and his friend, Premier Houston, is literally taking the money that should be coming to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and potentially going to Nova Scotia.

Is the Premier finally prepared just to admit that he made a mistake and even as he waits for the biased panel to report, he should have continued negotiations with Hydro-Québec? Why won't the Premier pick up the phone and call Quebec, just like his friend in Nova Scotia has done?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has the power that the world needs, and we're going to make sure that power gets developed.

Gull Island is one of the most important projects not yet developed. It has been recognized as the best project not yet developed for hydroelectricity potential in

the entire North American program. We are going to make sure that that gets developed. We will electrify Labrador, and we will make sure that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are the principal beneficiaries of all of our resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: In my heart of hearts I hope that's true, but they have to pick up the phone and there has to be negotiations for that to proceed. If you're not talking, you won't get a deal.

Last week, me and caucus Members from this side stood on the steps of the Confederation Building with our early childhood educators who came to protest this government's unwillingness to follow through on campaign commitments. In fact, the Blue Book says – and I quote – we support early childhood educators by promoting access to pension plans and sick leave.

Pensions, sick days and wage increases are needed now. Why won't this government act now, and why is it waiting four years?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've said it before, our youth are our greatest resource.

Just this past week, I attended a symposium put off by the YWCA. They did a study on what's needed in early child care. They also did an exercise in prioritizing that, which is exactly what we're doing with establishing an early childhood steering committee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. DINN: We are going to stick with these groups, and we're going to work through the issues that they need in terms of pensions, wages, inclusive education, and we're going to get those prioritized by the ones who are working in the industry so that we can start addressing those issues.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I attended the same symposium, and they provided a really detailed report with all the information in it.

I ask the minister: He has spoken to early childhood educators, he's attended symposiums, he's been told what they need and what they want, why is he waiting? Will he just say that he will commit to what he has already been told early childhood educators need and put it in this year's budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you.

The Member opposite just criticized our leader for not reaching out. I'm reaching out. I'm reaching out to the early child care –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: It's unfortunate he likes it to go both ways. I have the report here. It's right in the report that changes to the system take time. That's their report.

I'm going to work with them to prioritize what they need done first.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'm glad the minister agrees with me that the Premier has failed to reach out to Quebec to talk about negotiations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I'm pleased that he recognizes that he has reached out, and I'm glad he was there, but he's heard from our early childhood educators, so what is he waiting for? He can continue to say children are our most valuable resource. Well, put your money where your mouth is, and put the money in the budget for our children.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to take my direction from industry. That's who I'm going to work with. That's who are going to tell me. Those on the front lines, the parents, the families, they are the ones who are going to tell me what their priorities are. We know what they need, but we don't know what the top priorities are. This is what we're going to work through.

This is what this symposium did. They actually had an exercise on trying to determine their priorities. We're going to follow through with that and work from the top down on what their priorities are. That's the best we can do if we're listening to industry. Those are the ones on the front line. Those are the ones who know. Those are the ones I'm going to listen to, and those are the ones we're going to help.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, he already knows what the top priorities are because he was there on the front steps, and I heard them say wage increases, sick days and pension benefits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: He already knows because he was at the symposium when they told him the top priorities are wage increases, sick days and pension benefits. Not only that, I don't understand how he didn't know that when they put it in the Blue Book seven months ago. Clearly, he was speaking to them before the election.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: It was a promise made by this government. The early childhood educators continue to tell him what they want, and he continues to say maybe in four years. That's not good enough.

Will you put it in this year's budget and deliver what you say is our most valuable resource: our children?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

This symposium – it's interesting. If the Member had stuck around, he would have realized that they went through an exercise. They went through an exercise to prioritize –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. DINN: – what the industry wants. Not a list. We know the list, but I want to find out

which is the top issue for them, which is the top issue. There are many, because they just went through 10 years of nothing. That's what they just went through.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: So now I'm going to focus on the children, the families and the early childhood educators.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

P. DINN: That's where I have to focus.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: You know, as we used to say when we were on the other side, facts matter. In fact, I was there for that exercise. Just by saying that, the exercise was to tell the minister what the priorities were. So go and get what the results were.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: The reason he doesn't know I was there was because he was out talking to the media, rather than participate in the exercise.

So I say, Speaker, if the minister wants to finally listen to early childhood educators, I'll tell you what they'll say. It's wage benefits, it's sick days and it's pensions. So we'll –

AN HON. MEMBER: Is there a question?

J. HOGAN: Yes, there is a question. There's a very important question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: Will this government commit to what they promised and commit to what early childhood educators are saying they need for this year's budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you.

I can't be any clearer in what I'm saying here. Children are our most valuable resource. We know that. Our early child care educators are key to that, but what also is key to that is addressing what their priorities are. Now, the Member opposite can list off multiple issues, but what is their number one issue?

He was there. He's saying pensions. I can guarantee you, in the discussions I had, there was no clear answers. There are wages. There is sick leave. There is inclusive education. There are pensions. I'd like the report he has. He can table it.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, the fishery is the lifeblood of this province and, in particular, rural committees and, in particular, the crab fishery which is set to open next week but the price has not yet been established.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture update us on the process and can he guarantee the opening date of April 5 won't be delayed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to stand up and be the stand-alone Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, over the last five or six months, we certainly spent and had numerous meetings with FFAW and ASP regarding the crab situation and every other fishery issue that's been going on. We want to look after all of the province to make sure that the fishery gets going on time, that the crab season starts and that our plant workers, harvesters and processors all get started on time.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, while I've been told in this House not to bite the hand that feeds me, I owe it to my constituents to ask why the minister has cancelled Route 100 roadwork, that was already planned and awarded by the previous government, and is neglecting Route 92.

With millions of dollars in crab moving over these crumbling surfaces, will the minister explain why he's putting the politics back in pavement?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I say to the hon. Member, I look at the roadwork over the years and she's done very, very well in her district, and rightfully so. They continue on – a lot of issues that comes with our way. We're doing our best to deal with them all, but there are 40 districts in the province and the roadwork that was so-called promised, I'm not sure where it is.

We did a roads program. When we came in, it was a new administration. It was our

administration that wanted safer communities. We developed a new roads program, and that's exactly what we've done. If that wasn't included, it's not about cancelling. It's about doing what's best for the full province, for everyone out there, for all districts and, as we like to say on this side, for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Speaker, the previous government recognized that a 30-kilometre passing lane was essential to prevent highway chaos when Marine Atlantic vessels dock.

Can the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure provide this House with an update on this project?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I say to the hon. Member, I'm aware of that. We are having discussions; there's no real decision been made on that. It's something to do with, probably, funding, but it's an issue I'm well aware of.

I know your former colleague, the former Member for that area, had that as a priority. There was nothing about cancelled; we really haven't made a decision on that to be quite honest with you. We have had discussion with Marine Atlantic about some improvements out around the dock, but that's an issue as well.

It's not really decided what we're doing out there, so it's not a commitment either way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Speaker, the funding was already committed. There's been numerous work done on the project already, brush cutting for example.

So can the minister clarify if the project will be proceeding or not?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Our roads program that I announced recently will be proceeding; anything further, we'll decide.

That's on the list of being discussed. I can't commit to what has been committed to in the previous administration. If that was the case, we would have a lot of imbalance in the roadwork.

Is it on the list? Yes. Is there a decision made? No.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, the minister says she wants Newfoundland and Labrador to be the tourism capital of Canada, but unless a buyer is found this season will be the last for beloved tourism attraction, the Johnson Geo Centre in St. John's.

I ask the Minister of Tourism: What is she doing to prevent the closure of this geological museum and important tourism attraction?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Mr. Speaker, the Geo Centre is actually under Memorial University and is under review.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, I'd just like to remind the minister that the Geo Centre is promoted on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's tourism site. It attracts 50,000 visitors a year and it was recognized in Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards in 2025 ranking in the top 10 per cent of trips to do worldwide.

I again ask the minister: Does she, as the Minister of Tourism, have any concerns about the potential closure of the Geo Centre?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that are listed under that website; the Geo Centre is one of them. Just because it's listed there, doesn't mean the provincial government runs it.

Like I said, we are working with Memorial University on the next steps.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, First Light has proposed and advocated for funding for an Indigenous health clinic and have come to the table with funding. They are seeking only \$500,000 in this year's budget, which will provide health care to 1,300 patients. This is good value for money.

Will the minister provide this funding, or will she maintain her position that this is a duplication of services?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I really don't like when things that I say getting taken and twisted. I did not say we weren't looking at it because of duplication of services. I said that we're very interested in helping Indigenous people be able to access primary health care, be able to access the social determinants of health.

In actual fact, it's a good proposal. We're reviewing it. The Member who is a former minister understands how government works. We have to take it. We have to review it. We have to make sure it's something that can be implemented properly, and we are looking at supporting Indigenous access to health care, Speaker.

I did not say it was a duplication of services, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, First Light released a report today that Indigenous people are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than the rest of the population in this province. We acknowledge that this is unacceptable.

What is the minister's plan to address this systemic inequity and to introduce culturally relevant programming in correctional facilities?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: First of all, Speaker, I'd like to thank First Light for their important work on this report, and we recognize that overrepresentation of Indigenous people in our correctional institutions is unacceptable. We recognize

that the status quo cannot continue. We look forward to future collaboration with First Light and all Indigenous partners in the province to work on addressing this serious problem.

I can also say that we have met with First Light and had two meetings in the last month or so to talk about their report and the important work that they're doing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you.

Last year, the Conservative government closed courts across this province. In December, the minister established a working group to analyze the pressures within the Provincial Court system. She committed to an update by mid-February, then extended to mid-March.

Given that it's now the end of March and she's missed yet another deadline, I ask the minister when can we expect an update from the working group?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to say that I received the presentation from the Provincial Court working group this past Thursday. I can also say it was very comprehensive findings. The situation, though, we should note, did not happen overnight, and it did come after years of neglect, unfortunately.

We are currently reviewing the work of the working group to determine next steps. We're looking at short-, medium- and long-term goals, and I can advise that I'll be providing an update to the media and the

public of Newfoundland and Labrador later this week.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I put in an ATIPP request to see how much interest the Future Fund had earned in 2025. My request was denied. This was deemed too sensitive information to release from an ATIPP.

So, Speaker, the Government of Alberta just releases this information; this is kind of a normal thing of a sovereign wealth fund. I ask the Minister of Finance to tell this House how much interest the Future Fund earned in 2025.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, I'd like to inform the House that we will be bringing, as far as a review, the legislation on the Future Fund into this Chamber. We are well aware of thinking that there needs to be adaptations of the Future Fund. We know the value of saving money and paying on the debt that the previous government has left us, to a very large amount, and we can see the value in the Future Fund.

So I would say, within a very short time, I would ask my hon. Member across, we will have all that information on the Future Fund right here, debating it in the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The government campaigned on transparency. This is a sovereign wealth fund. It is the government's prerogative if they want to make changes on it, but I ask the Minister of Finance to table in the House today how much interest the Future Fund earned in 2025.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, we've had some questions coming across the House today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: One, the Leader of the Opposition says put your money where your mouth is. Put the money in the budget.

The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair says it is –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: – only half a million dollars.

They have been very flippant with the budgetary controls in their reign. We are handling the price or bearing the brunt of it now in programming, but I can tell the minister that we appreciate the value of the Future Fund and it will be brought to the floor of this House in short course.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, Natalie Warren is unable to work as a nurse because of a life-threatening condition. She paid \$15,000 to travel three times to Ontario to have the life-saving

surgery completed. MTAP, so far, has only agreed to cover \$1,500 of the cost, and that's after appeal and intervention by the minister. Essentially, MTAP is nickel and diming a person in need with a serious medical condition.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services, when can Natalie expect full reimbursement for the life-saving surgery that could not be performed here?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, MTAP is not funded to 100 per cent.

We, the PC government, are actually going to increase MTAP coverage to 100 per cent, but, that being said, I can't speak to individual cases. I did say to the media and it wasn't carried – it was omitted from the story – that when somebody submits an application for reimbursement, what usually happens is, if they don't have the supporting medical documentation, they're told they have to appeal and bring the medical documentation. More importantly, if somebody travels and stays longer –

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

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

When the Member was in Opposition, they would not have tolerated such a bureaucratic answer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: We have two different Members from Torngat Mountains. We have the Opposition Member who's a fierce critic and who railed against the inadequacies and unfairness of MTPA versus the government minister who has become an apologist for the shortcomings.

So, I ask: Will the real Member for Torngat Mountains, please, stand up and fight for Natalie and others in her situation and make sure that they do not have to choose between their financial and personal health?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, MTAP covers what the policy states. If a person travels for medical and stays days longer after the appointment is over or the appointment is cancelled and they have to come back, that's not covered and the taxpayer can't bear that burden. If somebody goes for medical and their food bill is above the per diem, the taxpayers can't bear that burden.

We have specific policies and I am a true advocate. I speak the truth. I don't create false information and then create fear mongering like the Member over there is actually doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: This is putting fear in terms of people accessing (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

L. EVANS: This is fear mongering. That's what it is. It's blatant fear mongering.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

L. EVANS: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Both the Minister of Justice and the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality have stated in this House that they will declare intimate partner violence an epidemic, yet, since then, there's been silence.

Will either minister be transparent with the public and say when that declaration will happen?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, myself and the Minister of Justice just spent seven years in Opposition under a Liberal government. We saw advocates fight to try and raise awareness against gender-based violence, sexual violence, family violence, all of the things that impact people, not just the people who are suffering the violence, but the advocates who support them. We witnessed that; a 10-year Liberal government, it hasn't been done.

Speaker, a PC government is going to do what we did with the Disabilities Advocate. We're going to empower them. We're going to bring it into legislation. We're going to actually do things the right way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: We are the PC government. We are basically –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, First Light's report released today on the rate of Indigenous incarceration in adult correctional facilities shows a clear absence of culturally appropriate supports and services.

I ask the Minister of Justice: What is the timeline to deliver culturally grounded

programming to support the reintegration of Indigenous peoples following incarceration?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I can say – first of all, I'd like to thank First Light for their important work that they have done and the report that they have completed with respect to overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in our prisons.

We recognize the status quo is unacceptable. We recognize that change is necessary. We are working with First Light and all Indigenous partners in Newfoundland and Labrador. We've met already, just in the last four to five weeks, with First Light to review their concerns and to discuss their issues that they have with respect to incarceration. We're looking at various initiatives, and we're going to continue this important collaboration with First Light going forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that notwithstanding Standing Order 11(1), this House shall not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: I give notice that notwithstanding Standing Order 11(1), this House shall not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 1.

I give notice that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 31, but shall continue to sit for the conduct Government Business, and if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS access to safe, affordable housing is essential for the well-being and economic stability of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS recent public reporting, including findings by the Auditor General, identified serious concerns regarding the planning, management and delivery of housing initiatives under the previous government; and

WHEREAS delays, lack of oversight and missed opportunities to expand housing supply contributed to increased wait-lists, rising rents and growing pressure on vulnerable residents across the province; and

WHEREAS a new government now has the responsibility to restore public confidence and ensure housing programs are properly managed and deliver real results for residents; and

WHEREAS the people of Newfoundland and Labrador expect accountability for past failures and a clear path forward to addressing the housing shortage;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House recognize that the housing challenges facing Newfoundland and

Labrador were significantly worsened by the failures of the previous administration to properly plan, manage and deliver housing initiatives; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House supports the efforts of the new government to implement stronger oversight, improve transparency and accelerate the construction and repair of housing units across the province; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House encourages and supports the development of a comprehensive housing action plan outlining timelines, targets for new housing units and measures to address wait-lists and affordability; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House encourages collaborative action of the government and Board of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation on the development of housing policies that ensure that accountability, efficiency and delivering homes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is in reference to private Member's resolution coming forward this Wednesday.

SPEAKER: Was that seconded? I never heard you second it.

K. RUSSELL: That is seconded by the Member for St. George's - Humber.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that the PMR just read by the Member will be the PMR we debate on Wednesday, April 1.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

L. PARROTT: Just a note.

Yes, there will be, but when I stood and spoke on late sittings, the two dates were wrong. It should be April 1, and April 2, for

Wednesday and Thursday. Do you want me to reread them?

SPEAKER: Clerk, have you got that or is it necessary to reread it? You've got it?

That's fine. We have that.

Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I give notice that on tomorrow I will move the following motion:

WHEREAS a report by the Auditor General respecting Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has been tabled; and

WHEREAS the report identifies significant findings requiring government action;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House express its support for the government's commitment to fix long-standing systemic issues identified in that report, ensuring they are not repeated, and encourage the government to take immediate and decisive action to address its findings and strengthen accountability in housing services.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

Answer to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

The reason for this petition is, as follows:

The 24-hour emergency department at the Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre effectively shut down on June 27,

2022, due to physician staffing shortage. After that, the emergency unit experienced repeated temporary closures and long shutdowns through 2022 and early 2023. In March of 2023, an urgent care clinic with limited hours was opened. In October 2025, the reopening of the 24-hour, seven day a week emergency unit was promised. To date the 24-hour emergency unit has not been reopened.

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 reopen the 24-hour, seven day a week emergency unit immediately at the Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre as promised in October of 2025, in Whitbourne.

Now, Speaker, as you can see, I got quite the bundles here in my hand. This was presented to me by constituents in my district and in districts surrounding the Whitbourne area. There are over 2,000 signatures there. It represents 80 communities.

On the NL Health Services website it says that the Whitbourne clinic represents 2,500 people. Well, Speaker, there are over 2,000 signatures there, so I can assure you that information is not accurate. In actual fact, Whitbourne area, the urgent care there right now, serves at least 40,000 people. This was a very hastily arranged petition by the individuals because they wanted to get in before the House closed. As I said, there are well over 2,000 signatures from 80 communities.

Speaker, many, many years ago, the Markland Cottage Hospital was established. It was 1935. It was a 12-bed hospital. It offered multiple services: internal medicine, minor surgery, pediatrics. It was a teaching hospital. It was there, and we all know, like I said in the petition, that it was shutdown because of lack of physicians, but the blue book promises that the 24-hour emergency in Whitbourne will be reopened; not only that, the Premier and a Member stood in

front of the emergency unit during the provincial election and said it will reopen.

So, Speaker, on behalf of the constituents in my district and the adjoining districts – 80 communities – I present this petition.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I think the constituents from the MHA that presented that petition are going to be really happy that the PC government is now in government, as opposed to the Liberals.

The thing about it is, we made the commitment in the blue book, not only for Whitbourne, but also for the Botwood Emergency department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, there are barriers we are facing. There are barriers because where are we going to get the physicians from?

We're going to work with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, not only on recruitment, but on some thinking outside the box, to make sure that we can open Whitbourne and Botwood to 24-hour restored, because the blue book and the PCs, we are a government of our word.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I table the petition to implement the GPS ankle bracelet monitoring system. These are the reasons for this petition:

Intimate partner violence numbers in Newfoundland and Labrador are unacceptably high and immediate action is needed. Women live in fear and some have died. Those accused of violent IPV crimes are often released on bail with few conditions.

When arrested for breaching, they are released again on similar conditions. We see this pattern increase danger to victims and our community. Last year, Provincial Court judge, Wayne Gorman, expressed his frustration in a judgment saying: Why are release orders so spectacularly unsuccessful in protecting women from their intimate partners when those partners are charged with assaulting them?

In Newfoundland and Labrador, electronic monitoring is currently only used in a pilot project for convicted offenders on parole or probation. Ankle monitoring for bail release is used in Quebec, PEI, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba and, in some places, specifically to protect women from their abusers, and it is being proven effective.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement an active GPS ankle bracelet monitoring program immediately as an option for the courts when those accused of serious violent or repeat IPV offences are released on bail conditions. To ensure its efficiency, the program should include GPS base zones of exclusion around dwellings, workplaces and schools, and GPS mobile zones of exclusion for victims who request this.

I so table.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, as I stated previously, myself, the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality, and the Minister of Justice spent seven years in Opposition.

We actually saw a lot of things brought to the floor about how to protect women, young girls and gender diverse individuals.

One of our major commitments is making sure that the most vulnerable will not fall through the cracks. Also, we're looking at options not only just equal rights, because at the end of the day, that does not fully protect individuals if somebody out there wants to harm another individual.

So what we're doing now is we're trying to work with all the stakeholders, the police, the advocates, to find some solution. We're going to ensure that there are steps taken to make sure that women are protected.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, Motion 2, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 30.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on today, Monday, March 30.

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.'

The motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Committee of the Whole, Order 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 5.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2.

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.'

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

We are now in the Committee of the Whole, and we are considering Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2." (Bill 5)

The Chair recognizes the hon. The Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, pursuant to Standing Order 47, that the debate on Bill

5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2, shall not be further adjourned, and that further consideration of any resolution or resolutions, clause or clauses, section or sections, schedule or schedules, preamble or preambles, title or titles or whatever else might be related to debate in Committee of the Whole House respecting Bill 5 shall be the first business of the Committee when next called by the House and shall not be further postponed.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The closure motion has been duly moved and seconded. As this motion is neither amendable or debatable, we will now vote on the closure motion.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

CHAIR: Division has been called.

Call in the Members.

Division

CHAIR: All those in favour, please rise.

Table Officer (Hammond): Tony Wakeham, Lloyd Parrott, Joedy Wall, Lela Evans, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Craig Pardy, Barry Petten, Loyola O'Driscoll, Andrea Barbour, Chris Tibbs, Lin Paddock, Pleaman Forsey, Mike Goosney, Keith Russell, Riley Balsom, Hal Cormier, Mark Butt, Jim McKenna, Joseph Power, Eddie Joyce.

CHAIR: All those against the closure motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER: John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernard Davis, Sarah Stoodley, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Pam Parsons, Keith White, Paul Pike, Elvis Loveless, Fred

Hutton, Jamie Korab, Lucy Stoyles, Jim Parsons, Bettina Ford, Michael King, James Dinn, Sheilagh O'Leary.

CLERK (Hawley George): Chair, the ayes: 21; the nays: 17.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We will now proceed in accordance with Standing Order 47, which states that after the passing of the closure motion, in the affirmative, no Member shall speak more than once or longer than 20 minutes. If this debate is not concluded by 1 a.m., I will call the vote.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

It's certainly disappointing to see that this is the path that we're taking on this bill and this amendment. As we've said from the beginning, we're here to collaborate. We're here to work together. I think this was a reasonable measure put forward by the Opposition to help lower taxes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, a pillar of the government that they ran on and that they continue to remind us about. It's very disappointing to see something that hasn't been done here in a number of years. I think it was mentioned about 10 years ago. A very drastic measure to take on maintaining and amending a gas bill.

Chair, I'm not sure this what is to come in the future here in the House of Assembly on limiting debate, limiting opportunities for Members here in the House of Assembly to get up and speak for the residents that they represent, because this is what it's about. It's about helping the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and that's what we're trying to do here.

It's certainly very disappointing to see this closure motion come into place.

CHAIR: I will remind the Member that, as I stated, the closure motion is not to be debated and it's not amendable. I'd ask you to stick to Bill 5, the gas tax.

Thank you.

M. KING: Certainly, Chair. Thank you very much.

It's always a good day when we stand in the House of Assembly and talk about reducing a tax burden on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Just to remind everyone what the bill is about, this bill will amend the Revenue Administration Act to extend the reduction of tax on certain grades of gasoline by seven cents per litre. I don't think anyone in this House will be against lowering taxes because we go through a lot from day to day in terms of cost of living. You'll get support over here, but we can go a little further.

Speaker, we are trying to go that one step further, which is why we introduced an amendment to this piece of legislation which would further decrease the gas tax to provide needed relief to residents of this province. When we talk about gasoline and what it does, and we look at rural Newfoundland and Labrador versus urban and the cost, and you go out around the bay, the reality is, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the further you live away from a centre, be that centre Grand Falls, Corner Brook, Clarenville or Gander, it costs people more to live.

That cost is associated with the fact that they have to travel in order to get groceries, see their doctors, pretty much everything they do on a day-to-day basis. So they contribute more when it comes to how much gas they burn in order to do things. If you have to travel 200 kilometres to see a physician or get groceries, or 50 kilometres, whatever it is, or 50 kilometres to go to work, it really puts a different burden on those individuals.

It's not just about filling up your tank, it's about what you actually have to use your vehicle for in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We don't have public transportation systems, at least outside the City of St. John's, maybe a little bit in Corner Brook, but we certainly don't have subways or anything like that. We don't have those mass transports.

We all use, for the most part, our own vehicles, rely on our own vehicles or rely on someone else to drive us to where we need to go. Those costs are continuing to go up, as we know, and whether that's just simply going around your community or you're into sports or you're into other events, you travel all the time with different teams. I'm sure anybody's that's been involved in any sporting activity in the province and takes kids around would certainly see the additional cost of transportation.

Those are the facts that are out there and that are impacting people's lives, and we know it. Everybody in this House of Assembly can tell you a story about an individual who's had to travel for medical services outside of their communities and the cost of that travel. For many people their only option is to travel by their car or their friend's car. That's why any time we get an opportunity to reduce gas tax and lessen that burden, we're going to take advantage of it and we're going to do it.

That's exactly why we're going to support this measure. We're going to support this reduction because it will reduce gas tax for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. So I applaud government; I do applaud them for coming forward with this. We need to do it elsewhere. We need to start eliminating taxes and reducing taxes off other fuels, home heating fuels and that, but this is certainly a step in the right direction.

Speaker, we recognize there are fiscal realities facing this province. We recognize it is not exactly feasible to call for the tax to be eliminated completely, and without large influxes of cash coming in through the province – I don't know, say a new Churchill Falls deal – we understand that revenue streams can be a challenge, which is why we feel this amendment was so balanced. We did not call for the tax to be eliminated

altogether. We are calling for what I think is a reasonable reduction in the tax overall.

As the Member opposite pointed out last week, many of the fuels included in this amendment are used primarily for commercial purposes and some even get the taxes they pay back in rebates. So for those individuals, they are correct, as the Minister of Finance did point out – certainly correct. Those pieces of the amendment may not provide tangible relief to the average person in this province, but at the end of the day, though, Chair, that's no reason to throw out an entire amendment because for those individuals still at zero. Some gain, they'll pay less in taxes and will get less back from the rebate.

Sections 51(c) and (e) of this bill are fuels used every day by the average residents in our province, gas and diesel. For those fuels, we suggested a single cent decrease on the gas tax and they cannot bring themselves to support it. You go around and ask a fisherman who depends on it, or you ask a truck driver who depends on it, or you look at people who are just basically driving around the province or living in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, every single cent hurts these individuals.

People can sit and stand in this House and question what Opposition's role is and what we do. That is a prime example of effective Opposition, because if you rubber stamp stuff and let government do whatever, I do not think the people of the province will ever get what they need, but a lot of times, through this debate, underneath all of these issues that you are bringing up, as humans, it's personal, there are people involved there.

I'll go back again to what the Premier said. The Premier said we had the lowest provincial tax in the country. Misleading, the way it was put out there, it was as if we had the cheapest gas, but we do not have close to the cheapest gas. Chair, don't take my word for it, take theirs. Nearly all of the speech that I've given so far has been word for word from things Members of the current

government have said in the House related to the price of gas.

My comments take quotes directly from the Minister of Energy and Mines, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Minister of Education and from the current Premier himself from just over a year ago, March 10, 2025. These have been their words, their arguments, their warnings about affordability, their insistence that government must do more, but now that they are in charge, they aren't doing it. These statements paint a clear picture. Transportation is not optional in this province. People do not have alternatives. Fuel is essential. Distance is a cost in itself. Relief matters.

As I've stated in this House a number of times, I represent a number of rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, small coastal communities that rely on their vehicle to get them where they need to go. So this is a relief for those people and many people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador who rely on their vehicle.

Chair, that was their commitment, their principle, their election promise, to the people of this province. Yet, when presented with the smallest possible reduction, they refused to support it. That is exactly what our amendment attempted to do, take it a step further, provide a small, targeted, reasonable measure of relief to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is the heart of this debate; this is where we are today. There are people involved here. People who feel the cost of every kilometre, people who feel the cost of every appointment and people who feel the cost of every tank of gas.

Our amendment was modest. It was practical. It was grounded in the very principles this government themselves champion. They said every cent matters and we certainly agree on this side of the House. They said rural residents pay more. I certainly agree with that, and I know a number of my colleagues certainly agree

with that. They said government must do better and, us, in the Official Opposition certainly agree.

We will continue to stand in this House, no matter what time we get to do that, to advocate for exactly that. I promised the people of my District of Burgeo - La Poile that every opportunity that I can get to advocate and support them, after I was elected, I would do that, and I'm currently doing it now. Because this is not about political convenience. It is about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who feel the cost of living every single day. It is about the seniors in our districts who drive to medical appointments who have to travel hundreds and hundreds of kilometres over our highways to get to their appointments.

It's about the parents who drive to work, school and sports. As I mentioned earlier, so many sports tournaments happening across the province this time of year, travelling to different parts of the province. Whether in Labrador or on the Island, parents and students, they're all trying to make their way to participate in extracurriculars and have a bit of fun, but that's all a cost as well.

It is about the worker who travels a long distance because that is the reality of our geography. As I've mentioned a number of times, the people in my district who work on the lakes or who have to travel to Alberta to work, they have to drive to at least Deer Lake to get to their flights to get to where they're going. Those are costs that are they are facing. Those are costs that they are seeing to them, so any relief that we can give them is essential.

It is about the rural resident who has no alternative to their vehicle. As I mentioned a number of times, Chair, we don't have public transit as readily available as some of my colleagues here in the House in the urban centres, which I certainly know plays an important part in their districts and the communities, but we don't have those services. The residents in my district, for example, in Rose Blanche, they have to go to Port aux Basques to get their groceries.

They have to go to Port aux Basques for their medical appointments. They have to go to Port aux Basques to even get gas, for example. So those are costs that they are face with.

These are the people, as I mentioned, that we're here to serve. These are the people who deserve relief, these are the people who deserve action and these are the people who deserve representatives who stand by their own words.

So, Speaker, this is what we are here today to debate: to provide lower taxes, to provide relief to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who are currently struggling with affordability. We hear the stories. We hear the questions in Question Period. All Members, I know, hear from their constituents about the daily struggles that they go through. Whether in health care, whether in education, from early childhood educators, it doesn't matter. There are so many issues that we need to – it's our duty in here to address those concerns and to make sure that we are listening and we are taking action on their behalf. One of those actions they want to see is relief at the pump. We know there are very geopolitical issues that are happening, but these are the tools in the provincial government's toolbox that can provide that relief to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think it is incumbent on us all to reflect on where we've been, where we're going here and to take that action for the people. We're asking for a very modest change. Chair, I know we're willing to work with the government. We have more amendments, I'm sure, that we could have brought in here to make sure it would work for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, but that, unfortunately, will not be happening.

Chair, it's been stated from the beginning, as well, we support the bill – we support the bill. We support maintaining the changes that we made over here on this side of the House. We certainly will, but we will continue to push for fairness. We will continue to push for affordability for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador,

and we will continue to push for the people of this province because that is our responsibility, that is our commitment, and I can certainly say that is my commitment to the people of Burgeo - La Poile.

I will stand up here any chance I get, whether I'm told to or not, any chance that I get – limited I should say – to stand up to support them, to see relief in their pockets, to see the cost of living to lower for them. All the issues that we've mentioned, all the obstacles that they have to go through, it's enough for rural residents as it is. I know the challenges. I've been there. We need to be in here acting for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I know that the people on this side of the House will take every opportunity to do so.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity, like my fellow Members here in the House, any opportunity to stand up and speak on behalf of the constituents I represent, which happens to be Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

I would like to start out by also expressing – and I know it's not up for debate – the invoking closure is very disappointing to me because, as you'll hear throughout the next 20 minutes or however long I'm allowed to speak or can speak, it's important to be able to debate issues that are important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, the people who have given me and everyone else in this room the privilege to be here, including yourself, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: I'd like to, as well, once again, acknowledge my colleague from Mount Scio for bringing this amendment forward and my caucus Members for recognizing that this is

one of the levers that we can pull on, that the Premier of this province and the government can pull on right now to provide immediate relief to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

There is not a person in this room, no matter where you are sitting, on this side or that side or in the centre of the aisle, who are not familiar with the struggles that people are facing because of the cost of living and the ever-increasing cost of living on so many fronts.

Somebody has asked me before, what is it that you can do when you are sitting in the Legislature? Well, this is one thing we can do. We pass laws, we debate them and we also can determine how much tax people pay and how much they have to take out of their bank machine or their tap or cash out of their pocket when they go and fuel up. This is not a huge amount of money we're talking about here in terms of the overall scheme of what the hon. Finance Minister is dealing with right now in an overall budget of about \$11 billion for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I want to back things up to begin by talking about a day after I was first elected, and one of the very first calls I got to the office was from the owner of the gas station on Bell Island, and in my District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island, which everybody in this House may know, but for those watching at home, includes a large portion of Paradise, all of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, and it includes all of Bell Island. There are three gas stations.

It was threatened that the gas station on Bell Island was going to close. We worked for about seven or eight months with various departments – this is when we were in government – to try to make sure it was kept open, transferred ownership and the flow of gas continued.

The relevance to this is that the people who live on Bell Island need gas, and it's like oxygen: you don't realize how important it is until you can't get any of it. If you're cut off and you have to have gas for your own

vehicle over there to get back and forth – now yes, they could fill up in Portugal Cove on Thorburn Road or on Portugal Cove Road, and they can pay less because on Bell Island, it actually costs more to fill up your tank because of the zones that are included in the PUB and the zoning for what gas is paid. We know that in Labrador constituents in Labrador pay more for gas. They pay a lot more for diesel because of the cost of transporting it there.

So we fought for many, many months to try to keep that open because the fear was that people who don't actually still work and don't have to come to St. John's all the time or come to Paradise, or go to Costco or wherever could stay on Bell Island and continue to buy their gas over there. We wanted to make sure. My point is the importance of this fuel to everyone to get around.

All you need to do is drive around and look at people who are going to their appointments. Many people have had to adjust the way they drive. I don't hear people talking about we're going to go out for a Sunday drive anymore because it would be \$20 or \$30, and it's \$20 or \$30 they don't have.

From years ago, when I was a child, we'd sometimes do that as a family and stop in, and you'd get ice cream or whatever, but people have to watch every penny – literally, every penny. That's why this amendment, while it may not be huge in the big scheme of things, it is important to people when they gas up, and they have to reach in their pocket and take out money.

I just did a quick search. As a reminder, just since February 27, the price of gas went up 2.3 cents a litre. March 14, it went up 9.3 cents a litre. March 21, it went up 6.3 cents a litre. March 24, it went up eight cents a litre. We did get a reprieve on the 25th, it went down 9.9 cents. March 26, it went up another seven cents a litre. March 27, it went down a penny.

The Finance Minister and I were talking in the House last week, back and forth during

Question Period, talking about the volatility of the price of fuel and oil, and because of the geopolitical events that are happening, still in the Ukraine, four years ongoing, and now in Iran, with very uncertain geopolitical tensions in the United States and tariffs and all these things that are impacting how people behave and what they spend their money on.

One of the things anyone in business will tell you, and governments will tell you, is that consumer confidence is important. If people are feeling good, if people are feeling optimistic, they will spend money; but for somebody who is literally living cheque to cheque, that's not something they're thinking about. They're wondering okay, can I get my daughter picked up from volleyball on the way home so we can carpool, so I won't have to drive my car because it's another \$5 in gas or \$7 to go and do it, or you know, if they're getting kids picked up from school.

Maybe this is a good thing in that regard to get people carpooling and thinking about it. In other countries and provinces, carpooling's huge because of the traffic congestion. But here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we don't enjoy the same benefits of mass transit.

As my colleague from Burgeo - La Poile mentioned, his constituents in Rose Blanche have no choice but to drive to Port aux Basques to get gas. There are certain services that residents I represent in Bell Island, which if we left here and in a perfect world the ferry was on time and we got across, you could be there in about 45 minutes, if I left right now, from here to the dock. The reality is, is for a good many of the people who I present, they can't. They don't have that same luxury, but they still have to come across to either go to work – there are hundreds of people who do that.

This is not just to speak of the residents that I represent on Bell Island but also those who live in Portugal Cove- St. Philip's and Paradise, many of whom work perhaps here at the Confederation Building or in downtown St. John's or in one of the East

End office buildings on Hebron Way or Kelsey Drive or wherever, they have to go somewhere. We have small businesses but there are a lot of people who have to come to town, university students, medical professionals. The price of gas is important to people. They take note of it. It's why media do extensive coverage of it because they know people are concerned about what the price of gas is going to be on any given day.

They may decide on a Wednesday evening, if they hear a report on one of the local channels, or on Facebook, if they see one of the news outlets putting up a post, to go out and fill up their tank. I actually did it a couple of weeks ago because I knew it was going to go up 10 cents a litre. My gas was still \$10 more than it had been a month ago, but it probably would have been \$12 or \$13 more if I'd waited the day.

It impacts the way people operate. I heard the Premier talk about this today as well and I heard the Finance Minister talk about it last week, about the propane forklifts in people's driveways. Honestly, for the life of me, I know that this amendment does impact propane, but nobody, I can guarantee you, in my district is concerned about the propane forklift. I don't know where that's coming from. I'm not trying to be flippant, but it is not something that anyone has referenced to me, at any point in time, about this whole gas price debate – nobody. This is a small reduction.

During the campaign – and I'm sure every Member in this House, this side and that side, will say the same – when you go through a district, you see the disparity between people who are living in a million-dollar home and I've seen people who live in homes that have no electricity. I've got people who are in my district now – one person whom I communicate fairly regularly, who has had to park his vehicle for the winter because of the price of insurance, the price of fixing the vehicle that he has and the price of gas. He said: Even if I could afford to fix the car, I wouldn't be able to drive it. He's stuck, but he still has to get to

town to get groceries or to do some kind of banking – a senior citizen.

I've had people who have called because something as simple as anyone in this Legislature may be able to do, if there are two windows in your house that need to be replaced because you're getting air blowing in, your heat bill is going up, what has it got to do with the price of gas? Well, if you're paying more for gas, you're not going to be able to fix a window.

These are why these thresholds are there through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing for emergency funding or if your oil tank breaks, or if you get a leak in your roof and that you can step in and help. These are some of the ways that we, as legislators, can step in and help people and we can do it immediately.

We showed, two weeks ago, we are willing to work with the government. We unanimously supported their Bill 1 on the Disability Advocate. Yes, our role is to oppose. Our role is to question. They know that because they have been in this position. I also know, having been on that side, albeit for a brief period of time, there are many hands that are out at any given time and there are so many people who need help in this province, at this point in time, so many groups who require funding.

This is an appeal to, if you will, the heartstrings of the government right now. They know that people in their districts are hurting. Show that you're willing to do exactly what you said when you were running: lower taxes. We didn't get in the House back in the fall for whatever reason – not debating that at this point – but we could have lowered the income tax, as was one of the promises and pillars of the current government. That didn't happen. That would have helped. It might have been \$300, \$400 or \$500, whatever the tax break is going to be in the budget, but it's something and they all add up.

It's why we reduced the price to register your car. It's why we brought in \$10-a-day daycare. It's why we took the tax off home

insurance. All these little things add up to more money in people's pockets. This is a small amount. So we're, literally, appealing to the sensibility of folks on the other side, the Finance Minister, the Minister of Energy and Mines, the Premier and others to think about how this small gesture would help people in their districts and in my district, as well.

I know people in Labrador, they're shocked at the costs of fuel up there now and people who are literally not driving their trucks. They're not talking about propane forklifts, but they are talking about their trucks that they need for work or that they do for whatever lumber they might be moving or equipment that they might have to move or towing a big trailer.

This brings me to, if you're a council, like the Town of Wabana, and you've got a fleet of 20 vehicles and you've got fire trucks – and yes, there are tax rebates to this, but all those costs have to be paid by the municipalities. When you go and gas up your garbage truck and then that truck has to go down and sit in a lineup to get on the ferry and come across, same in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, the same in Paradise, the municipalities have to come up with that money upfront to pay it.

Yes, there are industries and others that get the tax back; I understand that, but this is more about giving the average person of Newfoundland and Labrador a break at the pumps. Giving them something that can actually feel good about.

As I mentioned, improve that consumer confidence, that feeling that yeah, okay – all right we signed a great, big oil deal; we haven't seen the results of it yet, but when are we going to start seeing some of the money? When is some of that money going to come to me? I've seen those comments online and in talking to people. They want to know when this is going to trickle down to them.

Well, it could happen today. We could literally do this today. This is why we brought this gas tax reduction in back in

2022, reinstated it in '23, in 2024 and in 2025 and would have done it again this year. Yes, there were hopes pinned on Churchill Falls and the MOU and a billion dollars. We could be this week, if we had signed the definitive agreement, as we had hoped, by April of this year, be collecting a cheque that would wipe out the deficit.

The Finance Minister would be excited to see that cheque come across the table. That would make his job a lot easier. We could get a billion dollars. The meter started running on that. That would really be able to give people in this province immediate relief.

Now, the argument from the government side is that this war is 30 days old or 25 days old. Yes, I agree, which is why we said if the price of oil and gas tanks over the next little while, we'll come back in here. This legislation is not permanent. We're not oblivious to the fact that things change and it is a volatile industry, but this is an opportunity to give people of Newfoundland and Labrador immediate relief today, where we can literally, like we did with the Disability Advocate, agree. Every person in this House stood up and voted for that.

We should do it again. This is a no-brainer to me. I don't understand why for the amount of money that's involved here we can't give them a small break, send some kind of a small signal that you are actually going to go through – and yes, in the budget, we'll likely hear some of the things that you campaigned on in a few weeks but give people the break today.

I remember – I mentioned earlier – I went to a gentleman's house. There was no electricity at his house. He's not worried about the price of gas. He's worried about whether or not he can get bread and milk and some meat to make a sandwich, and I'm not exaggerating. But up the road, there's somebody who's living in a \$1.5-million house.

In our own communities, we see the disparity of wealth. For us to not recognize that this could be immediate help, albeit a

small amount – as I mentioned, it's not going to change anyone's life, but those little, small things, anything we had done while we were in government, anything this current government is planning to bring forward in their budget coming up will be even more.

We're willing to work with them. We've proven that already, that we're not just here to oppose for the sake of opposing. I'm not going to do that, but I certainly will oppose things that I fundamentally don't believe in, that are not principled or that I disagree with.

This is their opportunity to show that what they've campaigned on is actually something they're going to do here today: to actually reduce the price of a tax, today. We could do it, and it could be done, instead of it just staying exactly the same. Because the way this bill is right now, nothing changes on April 1. The price remains the same, except for when the PUB jumps in like they did on February 27, March 14, March 21, March 24, 25, 26 and 27, and we see the price of fuel go up by about 25 to 30 cents a litre, more if you're in Labrador and way more if you're buying diesel.

Again, we were willing to amend the amendment, but with closure we can't. This is literally about helping people today, giving them the help that people are begging for today. And again, I'll say it, it's not much, but it's better than nothing, and nothing will change on April 1 after this vote.

We will come back if the price of oil goes down, but I've seen it, too, in the last 30-odd years, 35 years watching this from a media perspective and in government. It's funny how the price of oil goes up, but sometimes the price of gas doesn't always come down right away. It's weird. Everybody expects it to always come up and down at the same time. It doesn't.

This is an opportunity where we can step in. Unless we're going to do some huge review of the PUB, which will take a lot longer than this, today we can give people the relief they need and they're asking for and they

asked for at the doors, not just your doors, our doors, all Members in this Chamber, in this House of Assembly. We heard it.

AN HON. MEMBER: Eight cents a litre tonight.

F. HUTTON: Okay, so we're getting notification that it's going to go again, go up tomorrow. It's really disheartening and we want to be in a place where people are feeling good and then if they spend more money or drive more, then the government ultimately makes more money anyhow and you're making more money as the price goes up. So give a little bit of it back now. If it changes dramatically, we'll come back in.

You still have the majority. This is literally an opportunity to appeal to your sensibility to say give the people of Newfoundland and Labrador a break that they deserve, to put more money in there.

AN HON. MEMBER: Compassion.

F. HUTTON: Yes, some compassion because everybody is hurting. I'm sure that during the week off, the constituency week off, those of you who were back in your constituencies and attending events and doing things heard from people about how tough it is.

How tough it is to make a go of it – families, single people, seniors, everybody. It's not confined to one demographic; everybody is hurting and seeing more and money. I mean, I can remember as a father of four kids, trying to get teenagers to all different directions and two cars going every evening. I don't know how people do it now.

This is an opportunity to say, we recognize that and it's nice to see both sides of the House working together, in a collaborative way, to actually reduce the tax and give people in Newfoundland and Labrador some money that they need.

Chair, I thank you for the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

I thank my hon. colleague down the way for St. John's East- Quidi Vidi as well; we're working together. I always say when we work together, we achieve the greatest results.

We are here today again speaking about the amendment to the gas tax – of course, the Liberal gas tax that was passed over the past several years that was reduced. Actually, I want to commend my colleague as well from Mount Scio, who put forth the amendment to even give the residents of this province a further break. Again, although not much, as my colleague just pointed out from Conception Bay East - Bell Island, but it will make a difference.

As we know, Chair, we're just coming upon, after our constituency week, it's a time when we break from the Legislature after three consecutive weeks in here and we get to go home and spend time in our constituencies, at our offices, in our communities, at events. I know what I've heard and I know what I've heard by listening to *Open Line* the past week.

Again, I ask the Members on the other side, I mean some of them have to travel a great distance. They live far away. The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans have a great, big drive. The Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, up on the Great Northern Peninsula I asked here when she went home this constituency week, what did she hear from her constituents?

I encourage them to stand up. I mean they're all elected here just like myself and everybody else here, all 40 Members. We are certainly all elected to get up and to represent the views and the concerns of the people who put us here because, again, it is through our democratic process that put us all here.

On that note, to talk about democracy, we often talk about the pride that we have in

Newfoundland and Labrador and in Canada for celebrating democracy in such a great country of freedoms and rights, but today I am disappointed – and I will put it on the record here – very disappointed to see that closure had been invoked on that and what this means for the people at home, we're, literally, shut down. We're not allowed to debate it. It's limited debate.

CHAIR: I remind the Member that the closure motion is not to be debated. It is not amendable.

Thank you.

P. PARSONS: Again, but just for the interest of the people at home, that's exactly what –

CHAIR: Bill 5.

P. PARSONS: – is happening today, what has been invoked here on Bill 5, closure. The last time we've seen that was at Bill 29, back in 2011, when Muskrat Falls was passed and access to information was blocked.

That said, I digress from that, but it is important to talk about what we are hearing. We just know we're fresh off an election campaign, just last year, last fall and a big part of the pillars of the Blue Book that every Member on that side boasted about and still talk about – although they don't give answers. They still talk about so much they're going to do for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but we're waiting to hear the substance to that. Well, here is an opportunity. Let's work together.

My colleague, the Member for Burgeo - La Poile, literally, just spilled, verbatim, his speech on the words that were put on *Hansard*, on record by Members on the other side. They were, literally, their own words that was, again, just put on record here in *Hansard* of what they would do and commending our government's efforts for the reduction in the tax and the reduction for other taxes and programs to help with cost-of-living measures. Here's an opportunity where they can really stand up and do that.

Unfortunately, we're not seeing that. We stayed late the other night, as we all know. It was after 10 and that was because this debate continued on that but, again, that's when we know that closure was invoked, yet again, and we were shut down to debate this.

But here we are. We are, now, in Committee of the Whole, for the viewers at home, where Members will get an opportunity to stand up and raise these concerns and these questions.

We all know what's happening in the Middle East is having an impact, not just here in our province, but around the world. Of course, it's global. I would like to extend our thoughts and prayers for the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Canadians who are currently in the Middle East and who are living in the Middle East and our prayers are with them for their safety. We do know the reports coming out, we're hearing stories of fatalities every day. Breaking news, happened just before I stood up, United Nations workers have been killed.

We do know it's very scary. It's very concerning what's happening, but it does hit home is my point. We do have Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are currently in the Middle East.

Again, I'll go back to my constituency week and what I heard when I travelled around – even going to the grocery store. We do know that the Easter break is upon us and I've heard a concerned parent talk about how they're going to make ends meet, to celebrate the Easter season with regard to buying the essentials, the staples. It's everywhere you go.

There are even advisories – there is even caution that we're hearing from the industry in air travel. For people who are wanting, who need to book travel, whether it's essential travel, whether it's leisure travel, to book soon because the impacts are going to be felt on air travel, where consumers will be picking up that cost.

It's something that's impacting every aspect of life, from every corner and pocket here in our province, for cost of living, to everywhere in the world, what we're seeing. Again, I really am calling on the government. We worked together and we saw some good legislation when all Members have collaborated with regard to the recent bill for the Disability Advocate. We know what can happen when people work together, the winners are the people from Newfoundland and Labrador, the residents who put us all here.

Again, I am calling on government to do just that. They're hearing it. The concerns that they all stood in their places, representing their districts and said – again, the Member for Burgeo - La Poile put it on record here that anybody can go back and view. It's in every industry. My colleague from Gander talked about the impact it has on travel, for sports and for recreation, which we all know contributes to healthy, positive living.

This certainly impacts every aspect of lives. It delivers real affordability, right now, when people need it most, this amendment, should it pass. The reality outside this Chamber is getting harder, not easier. We've seen report after report, from outlets like the CBC News, VOXM, NTV, highlighting what people are dealing with.

Families are skipping groceries because prices are too high. Young people saying they've given up on ever owning a home. Workers commuting long distances because they cannot afford to live where they work. Again, this goes back to the public transit reality is that we don't have that in rural Newfoundland. It's not like other jurisdictions and other provinces that we're seeing, so people are forced to travel. They have to travel.

Again, it's not just about the leisure; it's about people who have to travel for medical appointments. Think about the people every day – all you have to do is turn on *Open Line* every day to hear about the people who have to travel across the province to come to the Health Sciences Centre, to come to St. Clare's, to come to the

Janeway, to come to the metro region to receive those life-changing, life-saving treatments that they will need.

That reminds me of a promise as well to lower taxes, was to cut the paid parking at the Health Sciences Centre. I mean, that's something that can be done. It's relevant to the cost of living –

CHAIR: Please stick to Bill 5, please.

L. PARROTT: It is not a money bill.

P. PARSONS: The Member over there from Terra Nova is talking about the relevance and the money bill. I'll tell you one thing, I can't wait to speak to a money bill here. I know every Member on this side of the House, it is going to be a real great time with the budget coming up.

CHAIR: This one here is currently not a money bill, so stick to Bill 5, please.

P. PARSONS: It's not a money bill and it's about the cost of living, you're right, Chair. Yes, certainly it's about the cost of living.

CHAIR: It's about the tax on gas.

P. PARSONS: It's about the cost of living and it's about cutting a tax. We know that this Conservative government promised to cut taxes. The Premier is here; the Premier can hear me. He promised – he got out there and he stood before groups across the province to cut taxes – cut taxes.

And this is a small tax. This is not going to make or break the Treasury. We know that the Treasury in Newfoundland and Labrador is getting richer and richer and richer when the prices of oil are going up but the people are suffering.

We heard the rich debate. We heard the cries. We saw the tears from Members when they were on this side of the House, but now they're in an opportunity where they have a lever. They are the government. We've all recommitted – everybody here has stood in their place and committed to supporting this tax cut.

Again, there's no change that's going to happen on April 1. Unfortunately, it's not an April fool; we do know that that's not going to change. They're simply extending the tax cuts that we, as a Liberal administration, brought in for the past several years to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with the cost-of-living measures.

We're asking them to take that a step further. It's not a big step further, but it will help the people. It will help the single mom. It will help the grandmother. It will help the families. It will help the senior citizens who are on fixed incomes, as we know. We've heard it and I've heard it.

I'd like to commend Mr. Eugene Nippard. I listened to his call on *Open Line* just last week and he talked about the cost of gas and the cost of living. He's calling on Members – we need to hear more. Fortunately, I was on after him, so I was able to talk about what Mr. Nippard brought forward and I told people and I told the host on *Open Line* that we currently do have a Liberal gas tax that is before the Chamber and we also have put forth an amendment which would propose a cut in this gas tax on gasoline.

Gasoline is an essential item. We know it. People need it for survival, literally. People are travelling – my colleague here from Placentia - St. Mary's talked about the significance of people who are travelling for medical reasons, people who are travelling for chemo treatments, for dialysis – and we know that we live in a jurisdiction that we have the highest rates of cancers, heart disease, diabetes, in Canada here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Not something that we're proud of. Those are not titles that we want to be number one in our nation for, but it is a reality. It is a reality that people rely on having to travel for these essential, life-saving services and treatments. Again, it's an opportunity.

I talk about seniors in our province cutting back on food to afford heat and fuel. We've often heard those seniors calling in who are either going to pay their oil this month or going to have to cut short on their

medications, or even take half of the dosage. We've heard the stories.

I am very proud of the leadership that we took and the measures that we did take when we were in the position in government. We cut motor vehicle registration in half to help with the cost-of-living measures. We actually brought forth this very gas tax; this is what was brought forward by our administration, and we know that's simply what we're voting on here again, something that we've done for the past several years. There's no change. There's no further reduction. And, of course, we've brought in other programs to help people because we hear it. We all hear it.

Those realities are not political. They're not Liberal. They're not PC. They're not NDP. They're across the board. That affects everybody and, again, it's an opportunity here for government to do just that. We're going through the proceedings here in the House of Assembly with the *Standing Orders*. We're in Committee. We have opportunity to do it and, as my colleague from Conception Bay East - Bell Island said, there's no such thing – it's not permanent. We can come here at the will, at the call of the Chair, the call of the government, at any time to debate and to change and amend legislation, because legislation are living documents, if you will.

We did it during COVID; we came in here and we took different measures, obviously, to abide by the public health measures, but we saw that happen then. It's good what can happen when a legislature works together on all sides for the people.

Again, we are awaiting the budget to see what programs will be available and what they're going to do. There have been hints about how good this budget is going to be, but at the same time, in the other side of the cheek, they're talking about the deficit that was left.

Again, I remind them of the deficit that was left back in 2016 as well. That deficit is extended and it all impacts our quality of life and the cost of living here in our great

province. So, again, do the right thing. We stood here; you said one thing when you were here just a short time ago. Here's your golden opportunity with the full support. You'll get the full support of this Legislature to do just that, to support the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Chair, for my time to speak. I look forward to standing and speaking again and representing the constituents of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

I'm honoured to be able to stand on behalf of the residents of the District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi to speak on this, as well, again; of course, we're talking about Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No 2.

This is pushing it beyond the status quo. We've discussed about kind of holding the fort and putting this into legislation, and certainly the government has put that forward. Of course, we want to see things enshrined that are going to be cost saving but this isn't going to help anybody in their pocketbook right now. Holding the fort on the gas tax doesn't do a single thing for vulnerable folks. Right now, the people who are unhoused, the people who are food insecure and with a need for social wraparound supports, they're not going to be helped by this. This is not going to help them.

So we will be supporting this amendment, first and foremost. We've discussed this already, but I think the main point here is that, while this helps with the predictability factor, we're living in a completely unpredictable world right now. Geopolitically, as many have mentioned, the ups and downs of the gas prices are happening and the turmoil in the world's economy. We can't bank on it. It does not

put money into the pockets of people who need it now.

People truly need immediate relief. This is not going to put the money into their pockets right now and, you know what? Look, there's no proof that this wouldn't have continued in another government. The reality is that it might be a bit of a messaging exercise more than an affordability measure.

Now we understand that there are many things coming forward, and we certainly look forward to the conversation about cost savings that are going to come forward in this budget. We're looking forward to that conversation. We can't wait to get in on it. However, nothing happens in one big fell swoop. The reality about cost savings is that you pick away at it piece by piece by piece. That's the way we have to try to tackle affordability issues for people, all the people that live in our districts.

People in my district, of course there are a lot of people who live in the downtown core. A lot of them won't even be impacted in one way, shape or form at all because they are people who walk, they drive and they live in the downtown core. Really, this is a non-issue for many of those folks. Of course, we know that the PCs have run on lowering taxes, but refusing to go just one step further, rather than keeping it at the basic level and just holding the fort, is not going to help anybody.

So, look, there are a couple of things that I'd like to just mention, because we're being inundated in my constituency office about the cost of affordability. It truly is atrocious that there are so many people living in poverty and are really struggling. We're not just talking about people on the lower end of the spectrum; we're talking about middle-class people, people who should be able to afford to live.

We've got seniors – I'll give you an example of a senior. A retired couple living on a pension after working for 35 years, their federal sector pensions increased by 2 per cent in 2026, while their Newfoundland

Power equal payment plan has increased by 44 per cent. They told us their only option this year will be to cut back the thermostats, put blankets on the bed and board up some of the windows. That's what we're dealing with, folks, when we're talking about cost savings and the ability for our government to be able to help alleviate some of those costs there. Any lowering of gas tax in these volatile geopolitical times is a relief to the residents, to our taxpayers. That is an absolute.

We have another family living downtown, right in the heart of downtown, a family of six – which is a big family for this day and age in the downtown core – but rent is \$1800 a month and the Newfoundland Power bill is over \$900 a month. Relying on food banks for diapers for their youngest child, they don't know what to do. They don't know where they're going to get the money next. Every single little piece of the pie, every cost saving is going to help people in their lives.

In our constituency office, we were speaking to another gentleman, a gentleman living in Rabbittown. He was injured on the job. He's now disabled. He's been receiving workers' compensation, but he's going to lose it when he turns 65 this summer. His income goes from \$55,000 to \$20,000 per year, so what's going to happen to somebody like him?

We know that we have a responsibility in leadership. That's where the power is, in leadership here. I will say that I didn't have the great fortune of going to see the new NDP leader elected, but I certainly was watching it on CPAC and living vicariously through my colleague and leader here. The reality is that government has power to do these things. Government has power to do these things, and we're watching people like the Premier of Manitoba stepping out and completely removing the PST off grocery items. That's the power of leadership, making decisive decisions when you can to help the cost of living. These are the things that you can do, and government can do that.

What we've seen right now is that, again, we have the ability to enshrine something in legislation; however, we're legislators, we're people who actually can make these things change all the time. This is not set in stone, when something happens and a bill is decided on. The reality is that legislation is meant to change. It has to change actually, to ensure improvements can be made for the people that we represent. That's a crucial part of the process, we're all here in an elected democracy, that we're able to do and, of course, we have the, as well, to decide whether or not we're going to, you know, subsidize multi-billion-dollar corporations, oil companies. Those are the things that we can decide to do in our capacity as representatives.

Cutting the gas tax just a little bit more so people can actually see a difference at the pumps is something that can help. Refusing to cut the HST from all forms of home heating, as we certainly have been discussing; refusing to take the provincial HST from children's clothes, as we've seen in the NDP platform – these are all things that are doable – refuse to discuss pilots for basic income; again, we're waiting, we're waiting, we're waiting. We'll wait and see – refusing to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. There's a number of different things, these are all pieces of that pie. These are small things that we can do that all add up.

We all know what it's like to put money in a piggy bank. You start bit by bit, a little bit by a little bit.

CHAIR: I remind the Member that we're talking about Bill 5.

S. O'LEARY: That's right, and these are all – thank you, and I appreciate that, because it's the cost savings of this amendment that will actually reduce the weight on people's lives and affordability. All of these things.

This is important. These are the reasons why I'm bringing in my constituents' issues, because I know that we all represent people around this province and we all want them to thrive. However, those small choices,

those small things, even an amendment of this kind when we're talking about such a volatile geopolitical climate right now is crucial. We can't control what's happening in the sphere of the war and, what's happening to the gas, that is relative to this and this amendment. We can't create that kind of predictability. It's too much for us to be able to contain. We have to be able to consider how we can think global and act local, and how we can represent people in our own Province of Newfoundland and Labrador with the gas prices.

This is one absolute way that we can continue to help people thrive in their struggles. These are a number of different things that we can do to try to alleviate the stress. Any lowering of the gas tax is power to people, is a help to anybody and, again, saying it's not just the people who are impoverished as we speak right now. Obviously we want to make sure that we represent everybody but this is hitting everybody from the lower class to the middle class to beyond. It impacts everybody.

So holding the fort on the gas tax isn't really going to help people in the here and now. It's not the answer right now to be able to alleviate. While we wait for the budget to come forward so that we can have the discussions, so we can really get in there and pick it apart – while we're waiting for that – while we're waiting for the report on the basic income, while we're trying to serve communities, it's really important that we look at these kind of cost-saving measures that can help people absolutely today.

I will basically kind of clue it up here to say that we can always do better. We can always improve, and that is our job, to constantly be revising, to be constantly changing legislation, to be constantly moving things around so that it really is reflective and something that is going to be tangible for people to be able to help them in their lives and in the costing of their families and their home budgets. When I get messages from seniors, from families and from individuals who are really, really going to be suffering a pay wage from \$55,000 to

\$20,000, we need to find every single avenue possible in order to make their lives more affordable.

Thank you very much, Chair, appreciate it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Chair.

It's always great to stand in this House to represent the people of Burin - Grand Bank District. Of course, this is a very important topic we're discussing here today, a very important bill.

To me, anyone who looks at this would say, well, what difference is this bill going to make in our daily lives? What I said to them when I was in my district was, really, nothing, because we're only doing what we were always doing.

Anyways, we realize gas and fuel prices have a significant impact on the lives of every Canadian now, especially here in Newfoundland and Labrador. In recent years the cost of living has been very significant, but people were being afforded some relief due to the decrease in fuel costs that have occurred.

The events of the last four or five weeks, though, they've changed all that. The events in the Middle East with the American and Israeli military action in Iran has resulted in rapidly increasing fuel prices which then increases the goods and services due to the higher prices for transportation. For people and businesses, the result is very significant, and it certainly has an impact on their weekly and monthly budgets. There's more money needed to live, but there's been no corresponding increase in wages and income that families are receiving which has caused challenges for people.

In my district last week, when I went and I met with most of the towns, their councils and individuals, during that week I had in the beautiful district, the topics ranged from

the cost of living, price of gas, the deplorable state of the roads, the lack of projects in our district when it comes to roadwork – we're not receiving an inch of pavement. It's had a big impact on the district and people.

To put this in context, I suppose, what's happening in our little province is being influenced by something that's happening 8,000 kilometres away. Where oil was \$60 a barrel not too long, right now it's over \$100 a barrel. Most of the time it's predicted, by the way, to go much higher soon.

In the District of Burin - Grand Bank, this would be not only that for all rural areas. There are a lot of us here that represent rural districts, and if you truly represent rural districts and you care about rural Newfoundland and Labrador, you would vote for our amendment –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: – because the cost of gas in rural districts is significantly higher than it is in the capital city. Gas tomorrow, by the way, in the capital city, in St. John's, is going to be 196.45 cents, that's what it's predicted per litre. That puts it over \$2 in our districts.

We need to fight for rural Newfoundland. If we don't, we're all going to be in trouble. It's where we live. It's where our families live. It's where our children live. We should stand up as rural Newfoundland and Labrador Members and say enough is enough. It costs us to get goods and services to our stores.

While in the district, I had the privilege of going shopping and what I got in the stores was the same as I got at council meetings and so on. I can't afford to shop here anymore. It's too expensive. See what that just went up to. That's after going up since last week. This is after going up since last week. It's gone up because of the price of gas. Getting goods and services there – you drive the Burin Peninsula highway, what you'll see is transport trucks bringing goods back and forth – not a cheap venture.

People in my district have to make trips for medical services, whether that be to St. John's or whether that be to Burin. Because the Town of St. Lawrence, right now, the hospital in St. Lawrence doesn't have a nurse practitioner or a doctor. They figured that, by now, they'd see something happen out there. Anyway, I digress. Nothing has happened.

The Town of Grand Bank, when I was over there on the weekend, apparently if a patient goes in there, in their hospital and has to stay two or three days waiting for a bed, there are no food services. The family has to bring food to them. Talk about a step backwards.

If we live in rural Newfoundland, we have to get to larger centres for any type of service. Whether that's a bank, whether that's going to a lawyer's office, whether that's going to a big box store and so on. Most of the communities – not most, but a lot of the communities in my district don't even have a local store. The kids can't go to the store and buy candy. They have to get in their parents' car and travel – costs money.

As well, in rural areas – and I always talked about this because I came from rural Newfoundland and Labrador, had three children who went to university – the cost of gas going back and forth. Post-secondary education for a lot of people that live in rural Newfoundland and Labrador is not attainable and if they do go, it's student loans.

Changes in the price of fuel we use is challenging. It's challenging. We're not dealing with changes of 1 or 2 per cent but changes of 25 per cent more. How can you live like that if you live in rural Newfoundland? What if you want to see your kids on the weekend or one of your kids are sick and they live in here and they're going to school? It costs money.

I was filling up my car in Marystown on the way back in and there as a guy there in a big truck. All he could do was look at me and shake his head. He said: Listen, can

you do something about this? Can you do something to bring this cost down?

As has been pointed out, as well, by many speakers here today, the Liberal government reduced the gas tax by half in 2022. That's 8.05 cents per litre for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Each year since then, we've maintained the gas tax cut and would have done so again this year, and more than likely made it permanent. The Liberal Party realizes the significance of helping taxpayers when faced with high gas prices, especially when gas prices are impacted by factors that occur outside the province.

People are also expecting a major, major reduction at the pumps when this goes through. They are expecting 7.5 cents at the pumps and trying to tell during the past week that you're not getting anything. All we're doing is extending what we have for at least another four years, is what you're doing. People looked at me and said, are you serious – are you serious? Well, why all the talk about this? Why didn't they just say what we're going to do? I don't understand it. We're not getting any gas tax cuts.

The legislation that is being brought forward by the Conservative government will not reduce the price of fuel from what it is today, and that's what I've been saying to everyone, especially when I visit my district. It will only maintain the cut that currently exists.

What we've done here, our caucus, we've introduced an amendment that when it's brought forward will not reduce the price of fuel from what it is today, it will maintain the cut, but ours will cut it. Not a whole lot. I don't know if the Minister of Finance has costed out what it would be.

I think that if our amendment was passed, it would demonstrate that the government is aware of the challenges and the reality that people are facing every day. I think that's what it would do, and that's key. Not only that, I remember the kumbaya moments that we all had here when you guys were looking for something and we agreed. We'd

all leave the House, all smiles. Look what we've done for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I felt so great during those times.

We should all do the same here today. We should all do the same with this amendment. Let's work together. I remember people on the other side when we were in government, when we formed the government, saying, boys, we have to work together. We're all here for the same reasons; we want to help people in our districts. Why can't we do that today? There's no reason why we can't do that today.

Given the unique times in which we live and the large increases that we're seeing, we strongly encourage government to support this amendment. The reality is that we have an increase in the cost of oil. Is there some way that we can find out how much profit the government is making now on a barrel of oil? Then we could probably look at doing a lot of things with that. Why wouldn't we cut all the tax off the price of fuel, if we're going to really help?

Everybody here today, as well, has talked about seniors on low income. They're the people who are most impacted, I have to say, by the cost of living due to the events such as higher gas prices, no doubt.

I was in Harbour Mille this weekend – actually, it was Thursday. Harbour Mille is a community in my district with a population of around 70 to 80 people. Fifty people showed up at the meeting. Harbour Mille has no store, no gas station. It doesn't have anything. What the meeting was about, was the cost of trying to do something with their roads. It was the fact that there was nothing in the announcement that was made by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure that would help this community, that really don't have –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. PIKE: Well, I'm getting to that. It does have relevance because in order for them to go to the pumps, it's about 30 kilometres

away to get to a gas pump and it's another 30 kilometres to get to a store, so it costs them to move. The reason why I brought the roads into this, is because the roads are not fit. It costs them a lot more than gas; it costs them tires and rims as well.

Anyway, seniors on low income often live cheque to cheque. It's true: cheque to cheque. I haven't heard that in years, but that's what one of the seniors said to me the other day. We're living cheque to cheque. When the price of gas goes up, it impacts what we can spend. They rarely have any flexibility in their lives – our seniors.

We need to assist those people who have very few options when it comes to their finances. Our seniors deserve to live with dignity. We have built a society in Newfoundland and Labrador that we want to include our seniors; we want to make sure that they have everything they need to survive. Our Seniors' Advocate said no one falls through the cracks. No one should fall through the cracks. Well, this gas tax is doing that.

The irony is that the increase in the price of oil results in increase of revenue being received by the provincial Treasury. It makes all the sense in the world that these added revenues be used to help the citizens of our province in a time when fuel prices present a negative impact.

The Minister of Finance said earlier on today – I wrote it down – we were left with a big bill. That's why we can't do what we want to do. Well, in 2016, this government was left with a big bill as well. That big bill cost this government \$500 million per year –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: That big bill comes to an end in 2030 –

L. PARROTT: Point of order, Chair.

Article 48, paragraph (2), Relevancy – this has nothing to do with the tax cut.

CHAIR: I ask the Member to stay to the bill.

P. PIKE: Yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much, Chair.

In terms of in my experience, I guess, how relevancy happens, I just want to highlight for the House that on March 12, the Premier was the first speaker in Committee to this amendment. When the Premier spoke about this amendment, he spoke about the budgeting process. He spoke about the Home Heating Supplement. He spoke about Motor Registration. He spoke, extensively, about poverty reduction. So in terms of relevance, we've been working –

L. PARROTT: There was no point order. She's lecturing. She hasn't made (inaudible) what it is.

S. STOODLEY: It was your point of order. I'm speaking to your point of order.

CHAIR: Just one second, please.

I will ask that we will be collegial in here. There is a point of order that's being discussed. It was brought up by the government side and now it's being brought up by the Official Opposition. I will ask that we give Members the time to make their point of order and then we will rule on it.

Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio to continue.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

So in terms of relevance of this amendment, we've been taking our direction from the first speaker to the amendment who was the Premier. So I would challenge that we are being as relevant as the Premier and he was the first speaker to this amendment.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burin - Grand Bank to continue.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Chair.

I think I may have lost some time but, hopefully, not too much.

The seniors' report, as well, had transportation as part of some of the things that are impacting seniors most. I'd just like to say that higher fuel costs are certainly impacting our seniors, limiting choices for seniors. Even in those communities where they're lucky enough to have buses for senior transportation and so on, it's having an impact there.

When changes occur in fuel prices, consumers are impacted directly by prices at the pump and it's getting more expensive each and every day to full up your vehicles. When businesses fail, communities are impacted. Governments have a responsibility to act in situations like we have facing us now. Reducing the gas tax during times of increased fuel prices is something that can be done. Let's do it. Let's do it today. The increased revenue should, first of all, go to the people of the province.

Speaker, it would increase the amount of disposable income that people will have. A 50 per cent reduction in fuel tax, amounting to 8.50 cents, what we did in 2022, offers direct and indirect impacts for people on low incomes, not just our seniors. Extending our tax of the Liberal government would do some of the following: It would increase the amount of disposable income; it would lower the tax and lower the cost of living; the lower tax supports the mobility and independence of seniors; it would provide long-term security; and a reduction to the tax works in addition to other supports that have been complementary supports.

I think we should all do the right thing here today. Let's get this through with the amendment, let's get it done and let's show the unity and the foresight of this House.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Excellent, thank you, the beautiful district of.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

I'm thankful that I get the opportunity to stand in the House of Assembly to debate this piece of legislation and the amendment to it. Albeit it is a historic day that I wish I never had the opportunity to stand on, a closure motion, I know that they're going to say that it's not in order, but I think it's just to set the tenure of the conversation. That's why we're standing up here. We're fighting for our constituents.

I'd like to start by simply saying that lower taxes, better health care and safer communities – those were the three pillars of the campaign, that was a successful campaign, for the people that are on the opposite side of us.

In lower taxes, there has been nothing done on that yet. In the almost eighth of the mandate, they have not completed one of those initiatives. The better health care – well, we've seen it in St. John's where they've cancelled the hospital and the like of that in St. John's. My constituents have reached out to me on many occasions on that. Safer communities – closing courts, as well as cancelling the hiring of RNC officers.

L. PARROTT: (Inaudible.) This is not a money bill.

CHAIR: I will remind the House that it's not a money bill and it's not open for open debate. I didn't necessarily, I guess, rule on it earlier, but this debate has been long. I remind all Members that I want their comments to come back to Bill 5. I have given some leeway when we bring it back toward the cost of living, but it is about the gas tax and the reduction that can be invoked tomorrow night.

Thank you.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Chair.

I will assure you that I'm going to be as relevant as the first speaker was to this very act that we're talking about, very piece of legislation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: One of the things that we're doing here today – and I know full well that the Finance Minister is working very, very hard on developing a budget for the people of this province. I wish him well; I really do. But there have been a few things that changed over the last period of time.

My hon. colleague from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave said this so eloquently the last time, our hearts go out to those individuals who are being impacted by the terror of the gentlemen south of the border and the stuff that is going on in the Middle East that's causing a lot of impact to the people and gas prices in this province.

One of the things that is interesting, and it's very timely and very relevant to the bill we're talking about here today, is that I watched, with great excitement, when the hon. Finance Minister stood and told us that we were in a tough financial spot – I know; we were there. I've also watched when he reaffirmed that the barrel of oil price that we were budgeting for was \$66 a barrel, US Brent crude, and that's changed, there's no doubt.

I used the word "windfall," and I think he corrected me the last time, it's not really a windfall. I think it is something that we can't plan for, we budget for \$66 and as of today – before I got on my feet, I checked – it's \$112.80 US per barrel right now. Earlier today, it was \$116.89, today. So it is volatile; that's the point I'm trying to make.

I agree that it is sometimes challenging to say make a public policy decision that's going to be, as someone would say, permanent, but you know my feelings on the permanency of the House of Assembly. It's a time machine and laws can change, and they do on a regular basis here. That's a

good thing, because we do have to represent the people of our province and the needs and the wants change from time to time.

During a budgetary process – and the hon. Finance Minister can feel free to stand on his feet to correct anything I've just said – we were told that a \$1 change per barrel of oil increases the Treasury over the year by about \$20 million. So we know that this is not sustained for a full year. We know that.

But we do know that the change that we're asking for, in this amendment, is very modest. We put it that way because it is a modest change. It is something that's doable. It's something that's achievable. It's something that we can do with the stroke of a pen here, that the current Premier and previous Leader of the Opposition said many times, we should pull the levers that are available to us. All we're asking for you is to pull the levers that the current Premier and former Leader of the Opposition said pull those levers.

With that said, in the month of March, we've seen the coffers of this province go up by north of \$130 million, based on the change that we're talking about here today.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) over a year.

B. DAVIS: Yes, I know it's over a year – no, it is way more – fair enough. You will have your time. Thank you.

But it's an interesting thing that we see here today. So while we're sitting in the House of Assembly, we get a news release that comes out to us dealing directly with this piece of legislation, which is a good thing. I think it's great to tell the people of the province what's going on in the House of Assembly. So I'm going to take some opportunity to read it. I'll table it later if the hon. Members – but it's all in your emails.

It talks about what we're doing here today – I can't get any more relevant than using your own documentation, so I ask leisure of the House of Assembly to allow me to do

this – proceed with debate on the legislation that will make the reduction – I want people in the province to be very clear. There is no reduction. Regardless of what it says in this news release, there is no reduction to what you're paying today versus what you're going to pay tomorrow when the government passes this legislation, because they will pass this legislation. They have the numbers. They have the majority.

Failure – another line in this says – and as my nan used to say, you're trying to be too cute by half. Right? So you're trying to say to the people of this province, you're giving them a reduction in one hand, but you're not really giving them a reduction. You're ratifying something that already currently exists. We put it in place. We know, 7.5 cents, the cheapest gas prices across the country. That is excellent. Good news. We want you to do more. The people of our province want you to do more.

"Failure to pass this bill today will result in gas prices increasing on April 1." Yes, that is true, but you have the ability to pass this. You absolutely have the ability to pass this.

We made an amendment on March 12, not today, not last week, not the week before – the week before that. So we're talking about something that, you're putting a proverbial gun to somebody's head by saying that we're causing this to go up.

The House of Assembly could have called this piece of legislation in the seven days or six days that we've been sitting, or five days that we've been sitting, during that same time period. They could have. They chose not to.

Up until the last night, before we had a break for constituency week, up until that point, there was no conversation. We were going home. We weren't sitting late, not an issue for us. We wanted to get this done and we needed to, but then we started the debate. We were going through the debate, going thorough those processes, talking about our amendment. People were standing up talking about that and then there was a piece of, I guess, Legislature

stuff that can't be named, almost like Voldemort. It can't be named anymore, this closure motion. So all I'm saying is that the people got to understand what has actually happened – facts matter.

The fact of the matter is that the governing party could have brought this at any juncture – any juncture – and not wait until the last day, like they've done. It's them putting it forward.

So you continue on in this news release and it says: "People in this province expect their House of Assembly to work for them" I agree; they do. We put an amendment forward, so you can choose not to vote for it – which is fine, that's your prerogative – or you can vote for it.

This ends today. I'll sit down right now if the Members on the other side of the House of Assembly want to vote for this amendment – right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: We can have it done right now. This plan will permanently lower the gas tax, as permanent as any piece of legislation can be. This bill, what we're trying to do, is do a little more for the people of this province.

Then there's another quote in here that says: "This legislation delivers real, lasting relief for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians." Now, I know the hon. Finance Minister is not trying to say to the people that this is going to be a reduction in their gas tax at all. I know that, because I know him as an individual. I don't think he means it the way it sounds but if a member from my district read this, they would think it's going to deliver real, lasting relief for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

What's actually happening – and he knows this because he said it to me before. I think he said it on his feet here and I know he's listening intently, like he always does. He said that the gas tax is going to be the exact same today or as today, as it will be when this piece of legislation passes. The only

thing is they're making it permanent, which we agree.

I think my colleague before me had said that was something that we were going to do. The federal government had changed legislation and regulation, at the time. We couldn't make it permanent because it would have put it against the backstop for the carbon tax.

That changed after this piece of legislation was passed last year, virtually the same piece of legislation they're bringing forward. I can almost guarantee, with certainty, that would have changed the outcome of what we would have done last year had Prime Minister Carney made that change prior to the vote in this House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: We couldn't do it, and I'm glad you are doing it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Thank you. Thank you.

It really is, for me, interesting that over the last 11, I guess, days or so of debate and the possibility of utilizing many of our times to speak about this piece of legislation, we didn't, and that's okay because there are important issues that we had to deal with too. I agree. There was a piece of legislation that we all supported in this House of Assembly that we really wanted to get done, Bill 1.

This is another piece of legislation that we can get done as a group, right now, at 16:17. I will sit down, and then we can vote and then we can have everyone vote and, as my hon. colleague had said before me, a kumbaya moment. I don't know if those happen very often. I wish they did in this House of Assembly more, and I know some Members are smiling across the way because I think they would like it to happen more often too, but there are lots of opportunities for us to work together, work across the aisle.

Just because we created an amendment that you may or may not like because it was in a Liberal amendment – let's forget that Liberals did it. Let's remember that there are 40 of us in the House of Assembly who are partisan by nature, but in the House of Assembly we shouldn't be. We should be just 40 individuals representing the some-535,000 or 540,000 individuals. Chair, I've heard you say that many times to me – many times – that it's about representing those people. Representing those people is what we're all about and this is a perfect opportunity to pass a savings to everybody; everybody who drives, everybody who buys things at the grocery store.

What we have seen, and I did hear on *Open Line* – or a media outlet, sorry – that there was an owner of Akita Equipment. I think it was just an interview on VOXM, but I could be corrected on that. Chris Howlett was mentioning – I think I can mention his name here. He's a very good fellow. He was going through the costs associated with his transportation company. Who better to talk about the cost associated with transportation than someone who owns a transportation company that is paying for these costs right at source.

If he can give us some insight into this, and he said if this is sustained, in the short term, like a few days or a week or two, you can probably weather that storm, but after – and Russell Bowers asked him the question, I think it was. He asked him, well, when is this going to start to change?

Well, at that point, any time into a week or more, or two weeks or more, it really affects your business and your bottom line, in which case he's got to pass those costs onto the people he's moving goods for. Those goods that come to this Island, being an island, and to the Big Land are very costly to move around. We have a huge geographic space in this province. We have to move goods and those goods are going to cost more because of the actions we make in this House of Assembly.

This is an opportunity for us to save people a little bit of money. It's not something that

we thought of lightly on this side. We thought of something manageable. We thought it was something that was achievable. We thought it was something that would be able to be done based on where we are. We know we've collected significantly more money from the increase in the cost for the barrels of oil than we budgeted for; we know that. The Finance Minister is shaking his head; he knows it too. That's perfect. We're all on the same page.

Now the quantum we may debate, because if this was sustained for the full year, fiscal 2026-2027, it would probably be closer to a billion dollars – closer to a billion dollars. Now that would eradicate the deficit, right, but we don't know what the oil prices are going to be next week, next month, next day, even this afternoon.

We do know that we've collected significantly more money than the \$16 million this is going to cost us for those variety of asks that we put into the amendment. All we're asking for the people of this province, by their representatives that sit right here in front of us and right next to us, is to vote for them.

We know that this is a good bill. We know it is. We know that it's good to make something permanent. We would have done it ourselves. That's where the similarities end. We know that you, when you were on this side, talked about doing more – asked us. In some cases, like my hon. Member mentioned, we had those kumbaya moments where we actually got to work together to make something a little bit better, because we could do it. This was one of those occasions. People remember when people get the opportunity to stand up and stand together for them.

This is a perfect opportunity for the seniors in our province. I know that the hon. Member before me spoke about that, those seniors that are impacted. I mean, Burin - Grand Bank seniors are not unlike seniors in my district or other districts. They probably have to travel a little bit more because I live in the City of St. John's, but

it's significant. It's a savings that they can see in their bottom line today, at the gas pump tomorrow and I urge the government to do that, not just because and probably in spite of the fact that we brought forward the amendment. In spite of the fact that Liberals brought forward the amendment – let's forget who brought forward the amendment because, I can tell you, if the Member for Terra Nova brought forward this amendment and we were on that side of the House, I would have said kudos to him. Kudos to him, we will do it.

Now, given the circumstance that we're seeing right now, we're seeing significant gains in the Treasury for the province, which is a good thing, some of that savings should go back into the hands of the people of this province. I know that the Finance Minister is going to stand up right after me and say that we're going to do that. I hope they do. I hope they do.

What we're saying is we can do it right now. We can actually tick off one of your three pillars that have not been ticked off yet. There's a lot of people ticked off, but none of those have been ticked off yet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: I'm hopeful that we can help you with that.

Help us help you, from *Jerry Maguire*.

It is for all of us. It's going to be an opportunity for you to lower taxes today and take the win. I'll clapping in the seats, right here with us, when you hopefully vote for our amendment, because I think it's the right thing to do for the seniors.

I'm not going to go through some of the savings that we would get for the seniors, because I think the Member for Burin - Grand Bank went through that, there are some interesting things that we can look at though. Small businesses are big-time hit when there are changes in fuel; we all know that. They are the engine that drives the economy in this province. Each and every day, they employ thousands of

Newfoundlanders to do good work. Anything we can do that will help small business, which this will, is going to be beneficial to all of us across this province.

It is for all of us, as every minister has said so far at the end of every speech or the end of every question in Question Period. The one thing that is consistent is that it is for all of us. That's what they say. So I'm here to say let's do it. Let's make it for all of us today. This is an opportunity for us to do it. It's an opportunity for us all to stand together in a kumbaya moment, as my colleague said, and it's an opportunity for us to actually make this news release that came out at 2:50 this afternoon legitimate. It's a perfect news release then.

It's an opportunity for us to get together as the House of Assembly. As the Premier quoted: they expect the House of Assembly to work together. I expect it as well. That's why we made this amendment, and that's why I'm so excited that I get the opportunity to stand and talk about the amendment, and be relevant because the hon. Chair has not said relevance, except for the first part. I got off on a little bit of a rocky start, I'll say, but I turned that corner.

Thank you, Chair, for bringing me right back, which is really important because we don't need to create a sense of urgency on something that we could have fixed weeks ago. We put this amendment in, as I say, and I'd like to close – we put that amendment in on March 12, for clarity. It had many days to be debated; we're debating it here today. We invoked Voldemort, or the closure motion, to bring it forward and stop debate, which is fine. That's the prerogative of the government to do, albeit it hasn't been done in my tenure here. The last time was 2012; we all know how that worked out for the previous Conservative government.

At the end of the day, I'm hoping that the people of this province will get an early Easter gift here this week of a reduction in their gas tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Please vote for the amendment to lower the gas tax for each and every Newfoundlander and Labradorian right across our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for the District of Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Chair.

Last time the House sat and we were debating this issue, I chose to focus on young families; the cost of gas and how that impacted young families in my District of Gander and right across Newfoundland and Labrador, but today I'd like to focus on tourism.

As the shadow minister, but also as someone who has worked in the industry, worked with industry –

CHAIR: I'll remind the speaker that –

B. FORD: The relevance –

CHAIR: Excuse me.

B. FORD: Yes?

CHAIR: You're setting up your thing to tell us that you're not going to talk about the gas tax. We need to stick to Bill 5, please.

B. FORD: No, not at all, Chair, sorry –

CHAIR: Thank you.

We'll stick to Bill 5. Thank you.

B. FORD: Sorry to argue, but I am talking about how the gas tax impacts the tourism sector. I think I was literally one second into my remarks before you stopped me there, so if I could continue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. FORD: As someone who worked in industry –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. FORD: Well, it's true. I haven't even hit a comma yet.

So as someone who has worked in industry, in the private sector and with non-profits that operate tourism attractions to contribute to economic development; I speak as the MHA for Gander District, as well, located as the hub and service centre for Central Newfoundland and Labrador for residents and visitors alike.

Mr. Chair, here is definitely where we get into relevance.

Recently, I asked the Minister of Tourism: What is her plan to ensure that the rising cost of fuel will not negatively impact our tourism industry. I'd like to remind the House of her answer, and I'm going to quote from *Hansard* here, Chair: Our new Progressive Conservative government is focused on making tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador the capital of Canada.

I believe she meant to say make Newfoundland and Labrador the tourism capital of Canada. I'll continue her quote, Chair. "The economy will fluctuate, and that is a normal thing. It happens on a regular basis and we will assess as we need."

So as we're here now debating Bill 5, and our amendment to Bill 5, I would suggest to the minister that this is a perfect point in time for the minister to do just that. When we're talking about the cost of gas and tourism, this is a point of reflection. It's a point to reflect and assess. This opportunity to lower the cost of gas, this is an assessment point – our amendment to Bill 5.

Where the Minister of Tourism could be asking and really should be advocating to her Cabinet and caucus, yes. Yes, let's vote for this amendment for the benefit of the tourism sector.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: We should vote for this amendment to lower taxes.

Related to gas tax and tourism, Chair, the Conservatives have said that they will develop a new tourism strategy. In the Speech from the Throne about tourism, they said that they will encourage people to "vacation at home." Essentially, moving existing money around our province. Encouraging people from Gander, for example, to vacation on the Avalon or Western or the Southern Shore.

A few days later, the Premier declared, at an industry association, that their plan is to make Newfoundland and Labrador the capital of tourism in Canada. These are two very different strategies; both of them will be impacted by the cost of gas. That's why I wanted to focus on tourism and how our amendment to this bill has an opportunity to positively impact the tourism sector in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When I think about strategies that bring new money into our province for businesses, tourism operators, for the restaurant sector, the accommodation sector, for the artisans, for craft shops – so the department and the minister haven't yet developed a strategy, and I appreciate that. We're about one-eighth of the way into this new government's term. We have asked for an update on the strategy or when we might expect to see a strategy. That hasn't yet been shared with us, but whichever direction they choose, the cost of gas is going to have an impact on the success of the season. It was just a couple of weeks ago that the Minister of Tourism delivered a statement about the upcoming tourism season.

As we're debating this amendment, I can't help but reflect on some conversations in my district over the past week. One of the questions that a teenager asked me is why is everyone always shouting in the House of Assembly?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: This goes to relevance, Chair.

This goes to relevance because we are debating. When I envision how our democracy works here in this House as we debate this amendment, the sitting government has brought forward a bill and we've proposed some amendments. While we are attempting to debate the amendments, the majority of Members opposite, they don't really pay attention or give respect to the feedback that's coming from this side of the House.

Some do, and I really respect that. I would like to think if the situations were reversed that I would give them the respect of listening as well.

Here in this House, Mr. Chair, we're talking specifically about tourism. When we think about tourism and the 20 –

L. PARROTT: Point of order, Speaker.

This is about the gas tax.

B. FORD: I'm speaking about the gas tax.

L. PARROTT: Standing Order 48(2), we're not talking about that.

If we want to talk about tourism, we can highlight the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador will now have permanently the lowest gas tax in the country. If that's not going to increase tourism, nothing will.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: It's not relevant.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Thank you for the point of order.

S. STOODLEY: (Inaudible.)

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

In this House, when there's a point of order, other Members are allowed to respond to the point of order, which is my intention today.

Chair, thank you very much.

When we had Committee and this amendment was made, the next speaker, Chair, was the Premier. The Premier spoke about a range of topics. I already read them out; I won't do that again. So in terms of relevance, I would remind the House that we are attempting to be as relevant as the first speaker, which I know in the past has been kind of a benchmark or a standard of how – certainly when we were in government.

I know many times the House of Assembly leadership team would look in terms of how relevant the government Members were, in terms of how relevant they would keep the Opposition, so I ask the same of this House.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: So before I continue, looking at the point of order from both sides, it's the fact that when we started this bill, yes, it was a little bit open to – almost like a money bill.

What we're trying to do now is bring it back to the bill because that's not going to happen going forward. It's not a money bill. It's not open for open debate on any topic. The closure is not debateable and it's not amendable. I just want all Members to understand that those are the rules that we're governed under while we're in Committee and I want us to move forward with debating Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the hon. Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Chair.

I'm actually shocked that the hon. Member opposite would get up and say that me talking about how fuel tax impacts the tourism industry worth \$1.4 billion in Newfoundland and Labrador, employs

20,000 people, 28,000 businesses, and 9 per cent of jobs in rural and in urban Newfoundland and Labrador come from tourism and the Member is telling me –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: – that this is not relevant, that gas tax is not relevant to what residents and non-resident visitors pay in Newfoundland and Labrador. I think this is completely relevant.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. FORD: Chair, may I have the floor again?

CHAIR: Continue, yes.

B. FORD: Chair, that's fine for the Members opposite to laugh and to call into question. To me it highlights the fact that they do not have appreciation for the sector, because they're trying to develop a strategy. So whether Newfoundlanders and Labradorians drive around their own region or within the province; if they're going to and from Labrador from the Island; whether its new money coming into the province, people travelling by ferry in vehicle, people flying and renting vehicles – we saw it recently with Porter increasing the cost of tickets because of fuel – our amendment to Bill 5, if it's voted upon by this hon. House, can reduce the tax that people pay on gas. That will be really helpful.

How does gas impact tourism behaviours? Chair, this is completely 100 per cent relevant. As reported on CTV news last week, tourism expert and Dalhousie University professor, Lorn Sheehan, has witnessed fuel prices already casting a dark cloud over the tourism and travel industry in North America. Sheehan also reports seeing warning signs for this summer, which was projected to be a busy tourism season across Canada, resulting in travellers spending money directly on transportation. The cost of gas is impacting where they might go.

So if we're going to see road trips – and it sounds like that's the direction that government wishes to take, to encourage resident travel within the province and encouraging people to vacation closer at home – because of the gas prices, Sheehan reports expecting Canadian travellers to stay closer to home in an attempt to avoid those higher fuel costs. This opportunity to support our amendment, again, can lower the tax even further than what the bill has proposed.

In the Speech from the Throne, specific to tourism, there wasn't any mention of a goal of being the tourism capital of Canada, but, again, to encourage people to vacation at home. So I'd like the Minister of Tourism to consider this: In my district, we're a service centre. People travel throughout the province and they end up in the District of Gander for things like gas, amenities, shopping, accommodations, restaurants, and I'd also like to highlight it for the Members opposite.

When I think about districts represented by the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, the hon. Member for Exploits –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. FORD: – the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, the hon. Member for Terra Nova, okay? You know and you appreciate how visitors move around the central region, and they're moving by car. I know that the Members appreciate the value of the tourism sector in their districts and how important it is to make it easier for those people, to make it more affordable for those people to move around the district.

The Minister of Tourism has been advocating, I would hope, as the minister for this sector, again, worth over \$1.4 billion, and the jobs, but also as the Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows. I've travelled the length of that district many times, dozens of trips from Gander all the way up through to St. Anthony, and it is a beautiful tourism product and cultural experiences. I would wish that all visitors and residents,

non-residents and resident visitors alike, would get to make that trip, but the 416-kilometre route of Route 430 from Deer Lake to St. Anthony is a significant amount of time for travel, but also in the gas that would be spent, the fuel.

Chair, I'm going to suggest a question, and this is completely not partisan in nature. I'd suggest, if the Minister of Tourism, as MHA for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, asked any tourism provider in her district if lowering the cost of gas for resident and non-resident visitors would positively impact the tourism product in her district?

I have no doubt that the answer would be yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Yes. This is an opportunity for the government to have that kind of positive impact on the tourism industry.

The reality of it, especially when it comes to our amendment again to seek further reduction in the gas tax, just think about the reality of our geography. Another Member spoke about it earlier today. Talk about scale; it's over 1,000 kilometres from St. John's to L'Anse aux Meadows. That is a massive commitment for any traveller of time, but also of gas.

Then we think about the ferry trek for example. If you're coming off the ferry in Port aux Basques, you still have a 900-kilometre drive ahead of you just to reach St. John's. As we think about the cost of gas and government's taxation on that gas, without taking turns off the Trans-Canada Highway, visitors don't get to experience the rural tourism product, and so many of the Members in this hon. House come from rural districts with rural tourism products, where the community relies on their tourism product. It may even be seasonal.

So anything that government can do to encourage people to take that turn off the Trans-Canada Highway, get out into the rural parts and support the economy of rural

Newfoundland and Labrador, this is a way that government can do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: When it comes to the cost of fuel, it can also kill local travel. Again, back to the Speech from the Throne and wanting to encourage staycationing and resident visitors, nearly one-third of our own people say they're shortening or flat out cancelling trips because the pump price is too high. Again, it's just really starving rural Newfoundland and Labrador. When gas is this expensive, this is when tourists hunker down and they don't leave St. John's. They're not making the drive to rural gems.

Not only that, think about boats in the harbour; tour boat operators having to cut back perhaps on sailings or to just to keep their fuel overhead from swallowing up the profits that they're looking to make. It could also mean empty menus. It's not just the gas tax on the vehicles that are moving the food, it's delivery surcharges as well impacted by the cost of gas. So rural and urban restaurants are being forced to strip down their menus just to keep a basic meal affordable.

Outside the Avalon especially, Newfoundland and Labrador is a very expensive destination. The staycationers, for example, I hear from operators in some districts of the hon. Members opposite I just referenced, they rely on staycationers, people taking day trips or weekend trips near home.

When we think about the capital city and the large population of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, who, I understand, this government is going to encourage to travel at home, they're six hours away from Twillingate, for example, six hours away from an experience. If people are looking at their bank account and trying to decide, will we take that family trip or won't we, naturally, the cost of gas has to be considered. The accommodations are considered; the meals are considered, and the cost of gas. They need to think: Can we afford a staycation?

Then, knowing that the cost of living is increasing for Canadians right across the country, well, Canadians must also be questioning that. They're experiencing this challenge, and then their decision to travel away and to be a non-resident visitor, well, of course, that's going to be impacted by the cost of gas as well.

When it comes to tourism, there's another element of this that I wanted to speak to which is very relevant to the cost of gas, the commuter crisis. If you're a seasonal worker driving 30 kilometres to a tourism hub, you're essentially working the first hour of your shift just to pay for the ride to work. It's making it increasingly challenging to find staff.

As the minister should already know, there is a labour crisis in the tourism industry. It was talked about heavily at the industry association's meeting. This is an opportunity for the government to help impact what we know is a labour shortage issue in the tourism sector, by voting for our amendment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Chair, as I wind up my remarks, the Department of Tourism did provide an update on 2025 highlights. In the first week in sitting here in this hon. House, the Minister of Tourism did reference the 4 per cent increase in visitation from 2024 to 2025 and, in that same report, auto travel to the province grew 9 per cent. So there were 9 per cent more automobile visitors in 2025 compared to 2024. I just, first of all, would like to say congratulations to the previous administration for making those increases possible and investing in tourism the way that they did.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Well done. Well done.

On March 11 of this year, the Minister of Tourism was quoted in the media about access, and about access remaining a key issue hampering tourism growth. It's also been identified, Chair, as representatives of

the tourism industry, and road travel is one of those access issues which has been identified by the minister and has been identified by industry, and I agree. I agree it's a challenge.

In Bill 5 and in our amendment, we put forward that amendment to make the cost of gas cheaper, so not only residents but resident travellers and non-resident travellers, when they too fill up their car, their vehicle, their camper, their RV, they too can have a lower cost of gas to make their travel and to make their tourism experience in Newfoundland and Labrador better.

Chair, I'll just close by saying that Newfoundland and Labrador is a place that people want to come, but if it costs too much to get here and if it costs too much to move around our province, then this government's goal of making Newfoundland and Labrador the tourism capital of Canada won't be realized.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague for making the relevancy of the tourism industry in focus.

Gas, as we've heard from all of my colleagues, impacts much of our life in different ways, and people in this province face extraordinary cost challenges right now. Some of these costs affect everyone, rich or poor, but they're particularly difficult for low-income families or seniors on fixed incomes.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we're used to being resilient. We face tough weather, economic shifts and isolation, but lately the challenge is not coming from our weather; it's coming at the gas pumps. The rising costs have gone far beyond being a nuisance for people. They are now a

genuine concern and they're making the difference on how people are feeding themselves, heating their homes, doing all the essentials.

Chair, gas prices are up 35 to 40 per cent this year to date. That's extraordinary.

In our province, having a vehicle is not a luxury; it's a lifeline. As many of my colleagues have mentioned, we don't have the luxury of extensive subways or public transit. We don't have high-speed rail. Whether you're commuting from CBS to St. John's or Deer Lake to Corner Brook, you are paying a geography tax. You have to have gas and every time gas goes up, that geography tax goes up.

This isn't just about the cost of the commute, as we've heard. In a rural province, almost everything we eat, everything we wear, everything we build arrives here via truck or ferry and when diesel and gas prices rise, the cost of a head of lettuce at our grocery stores, also increases. For families living on the margin, these increases lead to impossible choices.

My colleague mentioned the tourism industry; I'd like to mention municipalities. The cost of gas, of course, impacts our municipalities. Municipalities, unlike our provincial government, don't have the ability to run deficits, so when costs of things, like fuel, which are significant costs for our municipalities, go up, they feel the pinch and they have to cut elsewhere.

There is also a social cost to this, a hidden cost. We're built on community in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our families are very important to us. It's an important part of our fabric, part of our culture, but when a trip to visit an aging parent in a different area costs, say, \$60, those visits become more infrequent. Everyone's world starts to shrink a little bit, our seniors become more isolated and young people find it harder to participate in sports or regional events, as my colleague mentioned.

People are struggling. Many are one or two paycheques away from ruin, and there are some things we need to consider. This seems like a small decrease in cost for people, but just consider the knife's edge that they're living on right now.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are carrying the highest non-mortgage debt in Canada. They're also carrying the highest credit card balances. They're using lines of credit and credit cards to stay afloat. Obviously, our residents in this situation are not able to weather the ups and downs of mandatory expenses such as gasoline. Pennies make a difference.

You know, why are they struggling this hard? Well, if we look in Canada since 2015, inflation is up 27 per cent. Electricity here is up 37 per cent, but a great deal of that cost, of course, as we've heard, came from Muskrat Falls. Imagine how much those extra costs would be without rate mitigation. New houses cost double what they did, and that's not just a Newfoundland and Labrador cost. That's a Canada-wide problem. There's a lot of pressure on people's pocketbooks and, because of the reasons I mentioned, the rising cost of gasoline, which is impacted again by the HST on gasoline, it's almost unbearable.

Chair, historically, Canadians save around 4.8 per cent of their income. Last year, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians were saving negative 0.4 per cent of their income. That means they were dipping into their savings to make ends meet.

As a mayor in Corner Brook, we were required to run balanced budgets. We weren't able to run deficits. This government has made a lot of big spending promises. They've also made promises to cut taxes. Now that doesn't make a lot of sense for someone who has had to run balanced budgets for the last eight years, but, okay, in the short-term it will be difficult. As my colleague from Virginia Waters mentioned, this amendment would give government a chance to fulfill one of their promises to lower taxes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. PARSONS: Now, I've noticed a lot of the discourse in the House often focuses on the past, and it's understandable. The new government wants to blame the old government for things.

I'm new. I'm not going to take any of that. I will not take any of the blame for that, but that doesn't matter unless there is some kind of time machine. I'm more interested in the future. As one of my favourite character said: Yeah, well, the thing about the old days, they the old days. I'm interested in what we can do to help residents now.

Now looking at the news, we're all glued to our phones and our TVs waiting to see what's going to happen with the conflict in Iran. My heart goes out to the families impacted in that region. The Strait of Hormuz is a long way away, but it feels as close as the closest gas pump.

As I mentioned, gas is going up. It's gone up 35 per cent to 40 per cent this year only, and that means gas tax revenue from HST is up a similar percentage. We've probably already collected an extra \$14 million to \$15 million in HST because of the increase in gas prices. This will more than pay for the one cent decrease in gas and diesel that we are proposing on this side of the House. It seems small, but it is a help and there are other ways we could help, things like the Home Heating Supplement that was introduced. It would be great to see, in the budget, a continuation of that program or an enhancement of that program.

We've talked a lot about child care and the fact that lack of accessible child care keeps people out of the workforce and leaves people to have fewer children or have them later in life. It's a significant expense. Electricity costs, gas and diesel – energy costs of all forms, including electricity, affect our daily lives and everything we buy. We proposed eliminating the PST from electricity, our colleagues in the NDP did something similar, that would be a way to provide immediate relief.

Another reason we fill our tanks is to seek medical care. To get the care we need, we

often need to travel. I'm excited to hear how the government plans to fund 100 per cent of MTAP costs for our residents, though I'm not sure what that means.

Again, I will congratulate my colleagues here for initiating a gas tax cut in 2022.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. PARSONS: To be clear, the proposed amendment to the bill that the government has is not a tax cut. The Premier made it clear earlier today what the bill is doing is making that 2022 tax cut permanent. This is not a new tax cut.

Some on the government side have said this measure is just performative, our amendment that is, and that this is an untenable tax cut because we don't know how long the situation is going to continue in the Middle East. I agree that we should not make knee-jerk decisions when it comes to taxes, but it is clear now that this conflict is going to affect gas prices and oil prices for months or years to come. Even if things are resolved tomorrow, the damage is done. This is a structural change. We'll continue to see HST vary with the price of gasoline. We'll see our provincial coffers vary with the price of oil.

My colleague from Mount Scio asked a question earlier about the Future Fund, and the changing nature of our revenues in this province is exactly why we need to embrace reserves like the Future Fund. When HST on gas is up 35 to 40 per cent year to date and oil prices are up 80 to 90 per cent year to date, we definitely have to spend prudently but we can't put the negative effects of these increases on our residents. They can't bear the burden.

As I've mentioned previously, we've already collected \$14 million to \$15 million from the HST increase because of rising gas prices. The reduction proposed in this amendment has already been paid for for the entire year just from this extraordinary event, so it is not an irresponsible expense for government. That's not even including the 80 per cent to

90 per cent increase in the price of oil and the associated royalties.

The gas tax affects us all, but it impacts the most vulnerable in our province the most. This cut is a small cut but it is an effective cut. It is something we can do. It is something meaningful and I would urge government to consider accepting this amendment and moving forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just going to have a few words on this bill. I don't think anybody in this House could say that we don't feel the pain and know the pain of many people across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador with the cost of living, cost of oil, cost of heating oil, cost of propane and other things that people use. I don't think any Member in this House is lost on that issue – absolutely none. So when people stand up and say, well, if you're from rural Newfoundland, you'll know more. We all know more.

I'm from Corner Brook; I know it. I hear of people who can't heat their houses. I hear of people with their cars, they can't drive as much. I understand that. This is a global issue right now which obviously is affecting Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chair, I have two issues with the motion, and I don't know if it's too late; maybe it is, but there's no end date. I've seen it too many times, when you put an amendment in and then you come back and you say, okay, let's get it back to normal, and then there's a fight – well, let's keep it. This is one of the problems I have with this amendment, there's no end date. There's no date in the amendment to say when the gas prices get down to the level that the war started, that we'll bring it back down.

I think everybody in this House would have voted for that. I was waiting here. I never said anything about it. I did not speak on this before. I was waiting for an amendment to bring it in to say, once the price gets down to before the war started, then the tax will be put back on because of the budget that is coming down, probably even this week. That's the flaw in the amendment.

Because what's going to happen – and you can mark my words and I've seen it so many times before – is that when it's time for the oil prices to get down to that level, the pre-war level, we're going to be back in here. I heard some people say let's call the House back. Then it's going to go on, again, that you shouldn't do it. I've seen it too many times. I've actually seen it.

I seen it where someone made the amendment – and I was part of it, sometimes. We made the amendment and realized there was a flaw in the amendment and we amended our own amendment to bring it right, but this wasn't done. This is a flaw. Whoever did up the amendment and reading it through did not do their homework on it.

It's a great amendment, but somewhere along the line you've got to have the Minister of Finance – it could be this week. I think it may be even this week, usually before the Easter week. Have it on the Thursday and you go out and sell the budget. I'm just assuming. Unlike some people say that I've got an inside track on the budget, I don't. I won't get into that right now, but I will later about people leaking stuff in Cabinet, let me tell you. I won't get into that now.

The other issue I've got with it is that if we don't have this approved, the gas is going to go up seven cents on April 1. Did anybody take that into account? Did anybody push this to the limit now, saying that – and this is why we talk about closure. This last two times this was in closure, I was in this House. There was Muskrat Falls and Bill 29. That's the last two times there was closure.

If you had to work some way to say, okay, we can extend that past April 1, I wouldn't have voted for a closure. But if you don't get this bill in, which is going to continue on and continue on then, come April 1, it's going to be seven cents on the tax. Did anybody take that into consideration? Did anybody realize that?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Pardon me? They didn't. I think that's why they put closure in. That's why they did do it. Just letting you know.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Anyway, I didn't interrupt you, I say to the Member for Corner Brook. I didn't interrupt you. I let you have your words and I haven't said anything to anybody. I was just here listening and I took a back load of notes.

That's all I'm saying is if you didn't do the prudent thing and if the government leaders had to get together and say let's work out the amendment so that we'll bring it back to that price, I would have voted for the amendment. I would have. I honestly would have.

I told Members opposite that if they bring it in, to bring the gas down – but we're looking at the Minister of Finance and we're going to say, okay, you're going to put this extra gas tax on and some Members on this side went and said, well, it's only minimal. It may be minimal, but it could help a lot of people. When you continue on with it and you're telling the Minister of Finance now that your budget is going to be thrown off already, come to Budget Day, you have to start putting in for what's given out with this amendment, and the budget is going to be within the next couple of weeks for sure. Usually on Holy Thursday, though, I have to say, that's when they usually have it, from experience.

So what's going to happen then, people like me who are going to be standing in this House and saying to the Minister of Finance, saying to the Premier of the

province and to the Minister of Health, where are the funds to do up the old Western so seniors can move in? Where are the funds?

We have to come up with more money. That's going to be the answer to me. That is going to be the answer to me. So the question here is, will this be on forever? This amendment says it will on forever. This idea that we're going to come back to this House and everybody agree, let's just push it back, will not happen – will not happen.

This is why I voted for closure, is to make sure the price, the taxes didn't go up April 1 and the second reason is there's no end date. We had lots of opportunities to put an end date in and there's none. I say to my colleague, the Member for Corner Brook, I agree with everything you said. I agree everybody is hurting, I agree and I agree with the City of Corner Brook, the work you did with the City of Corner Brook, how you have your balanced budgets, I agree with all that. Everything you said, I agree with, but the problem is there's no end date.

As I go through the calculations of the amendment, in the short term it is not a lot, but in the long run it will throw a budget that's going to be brought in this House soon. It will cause implications for the budget. On the political side of it, once that happens and if the Minister of Finance wants to stay within his budget, he has to start making cuts, somewhere. Some departments over there will have to be cut. Because if this goes on and on and on – not because of the war. The war will end. That will end and the price will go up because of the war. It will come down.

But if we allow this to go on until the next Legislature or until it happens again, the vote comes to this House again, then it's going to be a fight because you're going to have to cut something. Who wants the health care cut? Who wants the education cut, student assistants? That's what decisions are going to have to be made, and this is where I stand on this here. I would have, as I say again, voted for it.

Then I look at the other things. The Member for Corner Brook and other people brought it up, too. The Liberals did bring in the reduction of the taxes. They did. I voted for it. I agreed with you. They did, but the issue with that is that it was never permanent. So this is an idea now to make it permanent, and I think it's a great idea. I support it 100 per cent, but we can't prolong it until after March 31, 12 o'clock because if not, it's back on again.

There are a lot of people hurting. There are other ways that we can help out – social housing. I know the Member for St. John's Centre, the Leader of the Third Party, for housing across the province, how he put in housing, so vital to help so many people. That's another way we can help right now with the funds that are in government. The Leader of the Third Party was such a yeoman, such a fighter for people who needed housing in this province. I was so impressed. I followed him the whole time because out in Corner Brook, it wasn't as bad. It is a serious issue, but not as bad as St. John's and this area. I have to say that there are other things that government could do.

Once this gas tax, if it goes in and doesn't come out, something has to be cut again. Will it be housing? Will it be health care? Will it be the MRI? This is what wasn't thought through on this amendment, I have to be honest with you. I waited for days and days and days to make amendments to it. I don't know if it's too late, but I'm confident that if there was anything that could be done to get this and put an end date to it once the price gets down to the level of February 28, I think when the war started, we get down to that level that we can cancel it, there is a possibility for that.

If we can do that, I'm on board. That's just my position on it. I'm not here to criticize the government for not voting for the amendment. I'm not here to say the Liberals, you're only playing – I'm not criticizing anybody. I'm just saying what my point of view is, someone whose been around, someone who has been through the filibusters for three and four, five days, 24

hours a day, is that somewhere along the line, we have to come together, somehow, to work this out. But this amendment does not help the government. It doesn't help the process that we're following through with the budget of what needs to be done, health care priority, safety, the other things.

This is why I understand that the government is in a bind with it. I just wish that there had to be an end date to it because I would have supported it 100 per cent.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I move seconded by the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair that this House do now stand in recess until 6 p.m.

CHAIR: The motion to the floor is that this House stand in recess until 6 p.m.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

We are now in recess until 6 p.m.