



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume L

FIRST SESSION

Number 36

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Tuesday

March 15, 2022

The House met 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Pearl North, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, Lake Melville, Conception Bay East - Bell Island and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MS. STOYLES: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this House to recognize one of the finest organizations in my district, the Kinette Club of Mount Pearl. This group started its first meeting over 50 years ago. The Mount Pearl Kinettes is one of the largest Kinette groups in Newfoundland today and is part of a national organization.

The Kinette motto is "Serving the Community's Greatest Needs," and that's just what they do. All funds raised stay in the community to support local charities. Some of the projects they do, include: a turkey drive, collecting over 160 turkeys for the local food bank; the Hearts for Hope campaign, raising money for local charities like the seniors, single parents and Kirby House; and the sunflower project, spreading joy by placing sunflowers on people's lawns.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in saying thank you to the Kinette Club of Mount Pearl.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this House today to recognize a lifetime of hard work and sacrifice by a woman who has done so much for so many: Diane Murdoch.

Diane got her first certificate in counselling from a college before going on to McGill University

where she completed her Bachelor of Social Work. During the time in Montreal, she worked with so many groups such as Ville Marie Social Services, Jewish social services and Project Pal with psychiatric patients.

In 1993, Diane moved to Grand Falls-Windsor to work with Child Welfare, a position that would last 5 years and eventually led to her work with Youth Corrections. From there she would move on to Community Supports where she remained for the duration of her long career. It was in this role that Diane did her greatest work as she helped the vulnerable, seniors and people with disabilities.

Diane Murdoch fought with her heart and soul to ensure people had the services and programs that they truly needed. After a lengthy career of hard work and sacrifice, Diane Murdoch retired this year.

I want you all to please join me in saying thank you and best wishes to Diane in her coming years.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Speaker, on the theme of International Women's Day, the Legislature will recall 19-year-old Zara Rutherford from Belgium, who was attempting to become the youngest woman to fly solo around the earth.

Goose Bay hosted Zara in her ultralight aircraft for two days in the fall, before she continued her record-setting adventure. She left us inspired and motivated to encourage other women to pursue careers in aviation.

After five months, five continents, 41 countries and several challenges including volcanoes, storms, visa issues and conflict zones, I am pleased to announce that Zara accomplished her amazing feat and has inspired a generation.

Creating excitement wherever she went, Zara landed back in Kortrijk, Belgium, on January 20. She was greeted by family, throngs of fans and

media, in person and online, who followed her along those lonely 52,000 kilometres.

The New York Times reported that Zara's good luck charm was the wings on her flight suit, a gift from another female pilot, Captain Erin Pratt with 444 squadron at 5 Wing Goose Bay, something we are all very proud to see.

Please join me in congratulating Zara Rutherford and thank her for encouraging young women in Labrador, and around the world, to pursue their dreams.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand today to recognize the passing of a great legal mind, a volunteer, loving family man and proud Newfoundlander and Labradorian. I speak of the late Judge Robert Smith.

I had the privilege of working with Robert and got to see his commitment, not only to our legal system but more importantly his commitment to his fellow citizens.

Judge Smith served for nearly four decades in the legal profession, serving as a Provincial Court judge in Stephenville, Port aux Basques and St. John's, while being one of the province's top volunteers with a number of local, provincial and national organizations.

The evidence of how Robert's actions as a volunteer had such a positive influence on the people he served is seen in the number of awards he received as a volunteer. Robert has been recognized as citizen of the year; top volunteer at the university level; and acknowledged for his contributions to such organizations as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Rotary, the John Howard Society, Knights of Columbus and many more. Robert also had a real passion for theatre, sports and radio, which he had an extensive background in.

Please join me in passing on our condolences to his wife Ella, his family and all his friends.

Rest in peace my friend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I recognize a performing arts group in the Town of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove known as The Concert Crowd.

The original group staged its first production in 1968 in the old schoolhouse in Outer Cove, as the local parish was raising funds to offset the cost of opening a new school. Asking this presented no real challenge to the people of the town since singing in the kitchen, dancing on Savage's bridge and penning stories was simply a way of life for them.

These concerts were performed regularly, helping to preserve the songs, stories and dances learned. It also provided a space for new performers to showcase their creativity.

The first concerts had a cast and crew of approximately 15, but in the early 1990s, the group boasted a crew of 40. In 2018, The Concert Crowd celebrated their 50th anniversary, which was marked by a \$10,000 award to Memorial University, now an annual award to the School of Music and the faculty of arts.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating The Concert Crowd on their successes, and we certainly look forward to their upcoming performances in 2022.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Speaker, an illegal, immoral and horrific war is raging within Europe. Without any pretense of legitimacy or justification, the Russian Federation, under its authoritarian leader, has ordered an occupying army into Ukraine. In its wake, mass civilian casualties, along with the wanton destruction of cities and villages including the hospitals, schools, daycares and basic services contained within is causing human tragedy beyond understanding. Residential neighborhoods have been targeted and steps towards war crimes proceedings have begun.

But the people of Ukraine are far from defeated. Unanticipated by their invaders, the people of Ukraine and their government, led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have challenged Russia's invading force with courage and unwavering resolve. Speaker, Ukraine remains standing.

And we, too, must stand strong and stand with Ukraine.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador as well as Canadians from coast to coast to coast have given voice to our collective resolve to support the people of Ukraine as we condemn this illegal and unjustified war imposed by Russia.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador stands with Ukraine. We recognize that a humanitarian crisis is evolving both inside and outside of Ukraine. With Russian combatants deliberately targeting cities and civilians, nearly three million Ukrainians, including children and their caregivers, have fled to neighboring European countries.

Speaker, it is our duty of conscience and our duty as global citizens, it is our duty as Canadians to extend an open welcome to Ukrainian refugees, and Newfoundland and Labrador will be there. Our province is already showing the type of leadership that is required. Recognizing that an estimated 1,400 of our friends and neighbours in this province identify with Ukrainian roots, we have created a Ukrainian Family Support Desk within the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism to provide support for efforts within our province.

Speaker, I have already had several meetings with Minister Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, pronouncing Newfoundland and Labrador's support, advising him on coordinating an expedited Canadian response and informing him that Newfoundland and Labrador will be actively welcoming Ukrainian refugees to our homes, when it can occur.

Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador will stand tall. Newfoundland and Labrador will stand with Ukraine.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. minister for providing us with an advance copy of his statement.

The horrendous actions of Vladimir Putin are almost beyond words. We have seen his ruthless military action attack, not only military targets but hospitals, schools and civilians. Mr. Speaker, blood is on his hands.

I am proud to be in a country that is united in denouncing this barbaric action in Ukraine, driven by the vanity of just one man. This time he has met his match in President Zelenskyy, the embodiment of hope for peace in Ukraine and a peaceful world. The courage of the Ukrainian people is nothing short of incredible, and this Legislature is 100 per cent united in supporting all of them.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister rightfully points out, there are an estimated 1,400 of our friends and neighbours in this province that identify with Ukrainian roots and we are here to support them. We are also here to support any and all refugees from Ukraine en route to Canada and then on to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, any and all assistance that the Official Opposition can offer government in supporting the people of Ukraine is something we would be honoured to provide.

I thank the minister and his government for taking the concrete steps to supporting the

people of Ukraine. Newfoundland and Labrador has the reputation of opening our homes and our hearts to those in need; we always have. Let's do everything we can to live up to this reputation.

Slava Ukraini! Glory to Ukraine!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The Third Party caucus stands with the brave people of Ukraine. We must pull together and do everything possible as a province for those displaced by war. We hope that in doing so, the government has learned from its experience with Afghan refugees last fall and is better prepared to welcome Ukrainian refugees with adequate resources for housing, education and language supports.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, just moments ago the Liberal government tried but failed to address the rising cost of living in our province. While increases in the Income Supplement and the Seniors' Benefit will help some of our most vulnerable, there is no relief at the pumps, grocery stores, rent or all bills for the average Newfoundlander and Labradorian. This is a case of too little too late. We've been calling for decisive action since November.

I ask: Did the minister forget to make changes to the gasoline tax and the home heating fuel tax?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm glad to rise in this House and discuss this very serious issue. The people of the province have been under a pandemic, and now with the challenges of the Ukraine there have been the rising costs of living and the rising costs of food, which is a very serious challenge.

Today, we did announce a program to help those most vulnerable. We're providing a 10 per cent increase in Income Supplement, a 10 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit and a special one-time \$400 for a family of four, for example, on income support. These are significant benefits to help the people of the province.

We also spoke today, Mr. Speaker, about helping people to transition from oil to electricity in their homes by giving them a \$5,000 rebate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

These are welcome announcements for a small part of our society who are very vulnerable, but the other hundreds of thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are feeling the crunch here with the increased cost of living are getting no relief at the pumps or in the grocery store –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: – and any other service that they need right now, because of this government.

It's clear this announcement was made today only because the Liberals started to feel the pressure from the citizens of this province and were afraid to face this House without coming

up with some solution that would benefit the people of this province.

Speaker, the Liberal government stated again and again how they could not make any changes to taxes, yet other provinces have taken decisive action to reduce the cost at the pumps and grocery stores.

Will the minister admit her announcement does nothing to lower the skyrocketing costs of living for the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are faced with this stressful situation?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd say it's disingenuous for the PCs to lecture this government on financial responsibility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: I will say, Mr. Speaker, if we had access to the \$500 million a year that we have to pay because of their mistake of Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker, if we were able to not have to use that amount of money –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: – to offset the doubling of the costs of electricity, if we're able to provide that money for the other programs –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

S. COADY: – we would certainly do so.

Regarding the price of gas, Mr. Speaker, we've seen a lot of volatility; we've seen a rise in the price of oil to almost \$130, down to today it's trading under a hundred. This volatility, of course, is having an impact on gas taxes. The Public Utilities Board has already done an intervention. Perhaps they'll do more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's disingenuous to ignore the needs of the hundreds of thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: – who won't be able to (inaudible) right here in Newfoundland and Labrador as we speak, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, people are having trouble affording to live here and the federal Liberal government is making it worse by working to cancel our offshore oil and gas industry. The federal Liberals seem bent on cancelling the Bay du Nord Project, while the Premier sits back and lets Ottawa decide Newfoundland and Labrador's future.

We need to know: Whose side are you on, the prime minister or the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will say to the Member opposite that we have announced a program worth almost \$20 million to help the people of the province, especially the most vulnerable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: I will say, Mr. Speaker, this government stands behind the Bay du Nord Project, as we always have. We're the ones that made an arrangement, made a deal with Equinor to bring that project forward. We support it strongly. It has very low carbon per barrel; it has been through a stringent process with the independent assessment agency.

We've been working to ensure that it gets passed. What that Opposition has been doing has been very, very precious little. We've been working hard day in, day out to get that project approved by the Government of Canada and we're looking forward to ensuring that project progresses.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The amount of money that was just announced is a small pittance of what's needed in this province to address the cost of living for our citizens here, Mr. Speaker. I do want to reassure the minister that this side of the House has been proactive in ensuring that the Bay du Nord Project went forward.

We've written the prime minister, we've written Cabinet, we've publicly acknowledged that we would collaborate. I offered to the Premier to go to Ottawa and sit and plead our case, but we haven't been taken up on that. We collaboratively need to work, that we would bring the House back to solve any of the issues around our oil and gas industry.

We would work with the minister. We support what needs to be done here, Mr. Speaker. So I want to make that clear to the minister that we support this project and the people in that industry.

Speaker, Minister O'Regan last week refused to publicly endorse the Bay du Nord Project, while the rest of the silent six Newfoundland Liberal MPs are missing in action. Meanwhile, the federal Fisheries minister wants us to leave the fish in the water and plant seagrass to help the environment.

I ask the Premier: Are you content to sit back and allow Ottawa to dictate the future of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to be back in this House today and to answer questions on the issues that face all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as we move forward. The issue raised by the Member is certainly one that's of extreme importance to us today and will be tomorrow.

I appreciate his efforts and his promise to co-operate because the reality is this project is necessary. It is one that we support. It is one that we think is not just for Newfoundland and Labrador, it will be good for the country. We do think that it will help with the transition.

I will point out that as it related to the debate mentioned earlier, I don't think that this House would have been unanimous in support for this project, but I do know that the Official Opposition has expressed their support and that is support that we are glad to hear.

The reality is that we have done everything in our ability to advocate for this. In front of closed doors, behind closed doors, publicly, you name it, we will continue to do so and I remain optimistic about this project.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

I do acknowledge the minister's statement and I do hope that we make this project go forward and will, again, reiterate the Official Opposition will do everything possible to support government in making this project move forward. It is too important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: The Labrador Inn, a hotel that has been acting as a for-profit shelter in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, residents there have complex mental health needs, addictions and inter-generational trauma which has been unaddressed. The staff at The Labrador Inn are doing their best but do not have any formal training and are left unsupported. Residents are

left unsupported; staff are left unsupported. The minister's reaction was to hire two security guards.

I ask the minister: Why did he allow this department to ignore the situation and let it get to this point?

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

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

I was up in Happy Valley-Goose Bay recently and met with the manager of The Labrador Inn. We talked about the issues that he and his staff are facing. We are working with him and his staff to make sure they have the supports in place to address some of the issues that the Member mentioned.

At the same time, the residents who are at the inn are also supported by the Housing Hub, which is run by the Nunatsiavut Government. So we have a lot of supports in place on the ground, working as well with Labrador-Grenfell Health to make sure those residents are supported where they are and as they need their support.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

The price of gas is skyrocketing because the world oil supply cannot keep up with demand. The world needs clean and ethical oil; we have both. Bay du Nord will be the most environmentally responsible project in the world.

I thank the minister for talking about his lobby efforts but I ask him if he will table all documents of his lobbying to his friends in Ottawa.

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, when this process is over, I will be happy to discuss publicly all the different things that we have done. It is not just with the federal government; it was with a number of people. In fact, I have remained in close contact with Equinor throughout this entire process. We have had a number of conversations about their presence here and the fact that they have committed to Newfoundland and Labrador, and we want to ensure that that continues.

I've spoke to Noia on a regular basis and thanked them for their advocacy and for the advocacy of their members to talk about this project and its necessity for Newfoundland and Labrador. I've spoken to all of the MPs. I've spoken to senators in Ottawa – senators from Newfoundland and Labrador. We are all, I think, in agreement that we want this project to proceed. We do know that it sits in the environmental assessment stage at the federal level, but I think we can all say here – and I believe this in my heart and my head – that this project, it's the right one and it should be approved.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Sadly, while Equinor tries to fast-track it, the Liberals are trying to stall it. The future of Newfoundland and Labrador is being decided by anti-oil Liberal MPs from British Columbia and Quebec, while the Premier and the minister are silent on the issue. Our own Cabinet minister in Ottawa wouldn't even publicly support saying: "The work that I do as Newfoundland and Labrador's cabinet minister is very much within the cabinet room."

If the federal minister has backed away from his support, what assurances can the minister give that this project will be approved?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think he's referring to federal ministers. Certainly the ministers on this side have absolutely been very public and vocal in our –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: – support for the project, and I would think that if anybody had any questions, they could easily call Noia or Equinor and they will reiterate and repeat those things. They have no issue there.

The reality, though, is that this project is in the federal stages. We've done everything we can, provided all the information we can and we await that decision.

So again, it's not a decision I can make. If the decision was up to me or to this team right here, the decision would be made in favour, but we will await that process. It has to go through its due diligence. We understand that; it's frustrating. But the reality is we still think that this is the right project and we continue to do our job.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I wouldn't agree that everything has been done; they refused an emergency debate.

A statement released by Equinor reads: "The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada assessment concluded that 'the Bay du Nord Development Project is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects, taking into account the implementation of mitigation measures.'"

Has the provincial minister spoken to the federal minister since he decided to give himself a 40-day extension?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So a couple of things I'd point out. Number one, I don't believe an emergency debate in this House would've solved anything, because the reality is there are Members in this House that are against that project. So it would've been a lot of talk, would've been a lot of attention, but certainly I don't think it would've changed any of the outcomes that we face right now.

What I can say to the Member opposite is that I do find it interesting. I wrote a letter to DFO and to the federal government a couple of years back when we were at our worst when it came to the oil industry advocating that we needed to ensure the science that was explicit, that it was followed. I was told by the PC Member, the Opposition critic, that I should be kicked out of Cabinet for interfering with science

I say to the Members opposite – and, again, no, not the Member for Terra Nova, the Member for Bonavista said I should be kicked out of Cabinet for interfering with science.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

A. PARSONS: So, again, I think we should look amongst ourselves to see do we all really want (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: When we heard that Bay du Nord could be cancelled by the Ottawa Liberals, it was noted that Ottawa may approve Bay du Nord in exchange for early decommissioning of other platforms such as Hibernia, Hebron, Terra Nova or White Rose.

Can the minister tell the people of this province exactly what is being negotiated?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can absolutely assure the Member opposite and this House that is a conversation I've literally never had on any single one occasion with

absolutely anybody. There will be no concessions given for this.

This is a project that should be approved after it goes through the due diligence process and the environmental process. It'll get approved because it's right; it will not get approved because we've given anything up.

I can tell everybody in this House and anybody who's watching, we will not give up what is right for Newfoundland and Labrador for Ottawa or for anybody.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Two of the Premier's hand-picked advisors signed a letter from the Sierra Club calling for the federal government to reject Bay du Nord and transition away from fossil fuels.

I ask the Premier: Does he agree with his hand-picked advisors, yes or no?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is this is a newsflash to everybody here, but there are a lot of people out there in this world that are against the development of oil projects. Some of them sit in this House; they've expressed that. There are Members who are on environmental committees who speak against this.

But a couple of things I would say: number one, the Premier has made clear on every single occasion – every single occasion – that he is supportive of this project and he wants this project to go ahead.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: I can say that I have spoken and my colleagues have all spoken in favour of this project, we think it's the right one. In fact, to the

point where when I did write a letter to the federal government expressing my concern with their science, again I would point out that the Member for Bonavista said I shouldn't interfere with science, I shouldn't interfere with these deliberations.

Again, I will advocate for Newfoundland and Labrador every single time I get a chance.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Women in this province are reporting increased stress and anxiety because of the increased cost of living. Many women, especially single moms, are trying to provide healthy food for their children and gas for their cars. It is a fact that the pandemic has disproportionately negatively impacted women.

Does the minister agree that it is unacceptable that women make 76 cents for every dollar made by a man?

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It sure is great to be back in this House of Assembly. It always is; back for the spring session. I thank the hon. Member, my colleague, of course, for always raising these important issues we all know.

We can all appreciate all the challenges that have been faced since COVID, the cost of living, as we know, but I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to doing everything that we possibly can, not just the department of Women and Gender Equality but across government, with regard to the gender wage gap and all issues that have faced women and gender-diverse people in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, we need to have answers with substance and we're not getting them.

Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in Atlantic Canada without pay equity legislation, despite the House introducing it five years ago in 2017. In June, when I raised the issue, the minister said it's certainly not a new issue.

Well, it's been five years. Will the minister, once and for all, commit to bringing pay equity legislation to this House during this sitting?

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I thank the hon. Member for always raising these important issues, but I would like to remind the hon. Member it's not just several years, it's been multiple, multiple years and multiple premiers.

What I will say, Mr. Speaker, believe you me, there has been an interdepartmental Committee struck; we voted unanimously as a House on a PMR that this is certainly an important issue.

But I will say this, Mr. Speaker, the half a billion dollars that we need, that we get from Ottawa every year to just mitigate our rate hikes would go a long way to help with issues such as pay equity, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: But we are committed to doing everything that we can. When there's an update, believe you me, Mr. Speaker, I will be providing that update to this hon. House.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, let's stop with the rhetoric; let's get this moving.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Let's debate the legislation once and for all.

The minister, in the past, has suggested that she doesn't even have the authority to bring pay equity legislation to this House.

I ask the Premier, will he make pay equity legislation a priority and direct his minister to table the new legislation so women are no longer left behind?

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

P. PARSONS: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll thank my hon. colleague, we can all agree that these are all very important issues, but what I can say is that we're certainly committed to doing everything that we can. We have a fiscal reality to live in. We all know that. The Members on the opposite side know that the most, Mr. Speaker, but rest assured we're doing everything that we can.

This Premier has also –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. PARSONS: This Premier has also extended the mandate – removing it from a standalone department to also include gender-diverse individuals across Newfoundland and Labrador, and that's a first. Make no mistake; we are committed to doing everything that we can.

I also welcome the hon. Member – my door is always open. Come on over; let's get to work. We're all stakeholders here in this province and the onus is on every one of us to do everything that we can to support the people who live in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as most COVID-19 restrictions across the country drop, teachers and students are facing unprecedented challenges in our schools. Our caucus continues to hear with 50 per cent of students not present and classrooms with no teachers due to critical shortage of substitutes.

Speaker, with no online option, how is the government ensuring students receive quality education in these circumstances?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if the Member opposite has a list of schools that have closed due to teacher shortages, I'd like to see it because my understanding from the NLESD and the CSFP is that there are no schools closed due to that. There are no classrooms closed due to shortage of teachers.

Yes, the pandemic and isolation rules, Mr. Speaker, has put a strain on the availability of substitutes, but we've taken extraordinary measures, including working with the faculty of education and retired educators, to fill those gaps.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you.

Speaker, having teachers trying to teach two different classrooms at the same time is not the best practice, or even sensible for either the teacher or their students. Speaker, we had a shortage of substitutes before COVID-19 and now the situation has gotten much worse as MUN students will be writing exams soon and then going home for the summer.

How is the minister going to ensure continuity of education for children of the province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we've had far less learning loss in this province than most jurisdictions, probably any jurisdiction across the country. We've had more in-class instruction and when we didn't have in-class instruction, we've had online instruction in this province. Mr. Speaker, I'd put our record up against that of any province in this country for the delivery of education to our students in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Sometimes facts don't matter, Mr. Speaker.

I'll give him credit, though, he hasn't mentioned Muskrat Falls once. He's doing well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. PETTEN: That is three times.

Speaker, the critical shortage of substitute teachers has also impacted extracurricular school activities and sports, as teachers are not able to get leave to accompany students to events. Teachers are actually being forced into taking their sick leave.

Speaker, as we begin to emerge from COVID-19, a return to some level of normalcy in our schools, how is the minister going to ensure children can enjoy all aspects of an education?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is an important question; I'll give the Member that. Ensuring that school sports continue is important. We've had discussions with the NLESD regarding this particular topic. I've had discussions with the School Sports association regarding this particular topic.

We will, on a case-by-case basis, Mr. Speaker, if a teacher is not available make sure that there is

somebody available so that school sports can continue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

This province is now entering into the third year of a pandemic, the cost of living is out of control and the Seniors' Advocate position has still been vacant for more than nine months.

Minister, when will this position be filled?

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, thank you again for the opportunity to answer the question. As I think all of us know, the Seniors' Advocate is an important Officer of this House. We look forward to having that position addressed in the very near future.

But what I want to add is that, as a government, we are supportive for all the seniors throughout this province, all the seniors' organizations. In the meantime, while the office is vacant, we are working with that office, as well as all the seniors' groups, to make sure their issues are addressed as expeditious as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Speaker, seniors in our province are facing more issues than just the outrageous increases to the cost of living. Backlogs for surgeries, housing, long-term care beds, mental health supports: Speaker, the list continues to grow at an alarming rate. The Seniors' Advocate is supposed to be in place to provide an expert voice to these issues.

I ask the minister: Why has this position been vacant for so long?

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

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

One of the things that I've done recently is met with our Provincial Advisory Council on Aging and Seniors to make sure that the issues of seniors are brought to the attention of both me, as minister, and to the government. We will continue to make sure that council works in the interest of seniors for this province while we're waiting for the Seniors' Advocate position to be filled.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to point out to the minister I never said anything about schools being closed. I also want to point out that the minister only answered half my question the last time around, so it's two mistakes.

Minister, I asked you about extracurricular school activities, not just sports. There's a critical shortage of substitute teachers. It's more than sports involved; it is extracurricular activities as well.

What are you going to do to address that issue?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The issue hasn't been brought to my attention at this particular stage; I have been made aware of school sports and so on. But if there are issues, Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to work on any and every issue to ensure that our students have a well-rounded education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

A combined Grade 5 and 6 class at JRS Middle School has joined in to advocate for the seniors

of Labrador West by submitting their ideas directly to the Minister of Finance and budget consultations.

It is jarring to learn that the minds of these young children in my district are not wondering what their friends are going to do this weekend but if their grandparents will have somewhere close to Labrador West to live.

I ask the minister: Will this government finally commit the resources needed for the seniors of Labrador West?

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

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

I was in Labrador West recently and met with the Grade 5 and 6 class who eloquently and, I would say, professionally presented their views on seniors' issues, particularly housing issues for Labrador West. I committed to make sure that we brought back their ideas, their suggestions, their proposal to discuss here with my colleagues.

I wanted to congratulate the J. R. Smallwood class for the tenacity of sticking with an issue that I know is very important to the people of Labrador West.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a letter here from the chief of the Mushuau Innu First Nation. In spring of 2020, Simeon Poker, a resident of Natuashish, needed a kidney transplant and he got his brother approved as a donor and was told that the surgery would follow in three to six weeks.

This summer, a year later, I alerted Labrador-Grenfell Health and Eastern Health that there was vital information not being properly communicated to this patient. Language barriers

are a reality in my district, Mr. Speaker. Chief Nui's letter stresses this gap still has not been resolved and I believe it is preventing Mr. Poker from being approved for transplant surgery. The physical and mental toll is too much, Mr. Speaker. I am now getting pictures of blackened toes and fingers from diabetes damage.

I am asking the Minister of Health: Will he reach out to the health authority to review Mr. Poker's case? I quote Chief Nui –

SPEAKER: Move on to your question, please.

L. EVANS: Please consider seriously our appeal, as it is a matter of life and death – Chief Nui's words exactly.

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Obviously, I can't comment on the specifics of clinical cases. Transplants are not done in this province. We have a very active transplant coordination program and they liaise with either Halifax or Toronto. If there are specifics of this case the Member opposite wants addressed, I would be happy to do that.

We are, however, in terms of waits, at the mercy of Halifax. Under normal circumstances, this has not been an issue but we are aware that COVID has slowed things down and last year they had a shortage of a nephrologist. I'm happy to look into a specific problem if the Member opposite would like to provide details.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just the other day I received a call from a family, a couple who are 73 years married. After 73 years of marriage, one of the spouse's health has declined and now they're going to separate that couple. He's going to have to go to long-term care in a different facility

away from his spouse. This represents cruel and unusual punishment as far as I'm concerned.

This is not a new thing. It's been happening. I've had other calls, Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years on similar situations like this. I understand Nova Scotia has put in a policy recently, I was told, that couples cannot be separated.

I would ask the Minister of Health and Community Services: Is the government considering some similar policy to prevent this cruel and unusual punishment on our seniors?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much for the question, Speaker.

These are always very difficult situations. When you have a senior whose level of care exceeds the ability of the facility to provide it, our first aim must be to look after their well-being. Certainly, in this province, long-term care facilities are challenged to meet the demand for those people who require that level of care. The regional health authorities work very closely with the family to make sure that spouses who do not need that level of care can spend as much time together as possible.

Nova Scotia simply guarantees to put the individual in the same complex. They do not share rooms. They are at the other end of a different building in many occasions. These are difficult situations and, as we increase our long-term care capacity, hopefully we can look at what potential solutions exist.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: I thank the minister for that answer. While Nova Scotia may not keep them together in the same room, as you said, they are in the same facility so they are at least able to see each other every day.

Mr. Speaker, in a similar vein, I've also had similar complaints from families where it wasn't a couple, per se, but let's say you may have had a father or grandparent or whatever the case might be that need to go to long-term care and they're living in one community – so one example would be they were living in St. John's and under the first available bed policy, that person had to go to, I think, Placentia. Now the family are not able to visit their loved one; again, cruel and unusual punishment.

I would ask the minister: Are there any plans to address that issue as well?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Two issues rolled into one there. The first available bed policy is to deal with the urgent and pressing issue around care and providing the appropriate care. These individuals remain on the wait-list for their facility of choice in the community of choice, assuming that community actually has the facility capable of managing their clinical care needs.

With reference to visitation of couples separated by different care needs: the RHAs actually provide the ability to enable visitation on at least a daily basis, if at all possible.

I take the Member opposite's concerns. We are working within the limits of our system to address them.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I am pleased to present the first report of the Standing Orders Committee in the 50th General Assembly.

I do want to take the time to thank the Members of the Committee for their diligence and hard work and I recommend this report to the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider a resolution for the granting of Interim Supply to Her Majesty, Bill 45.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider a resolution relating to the advancing or guaranteeing of certain loans made under *The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957*, Bill 46.

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider a resolution relating to the raising of loans by the province, Bill 47.

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

S. COADY: Apparently, I'm busy.

Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act, Bill 48.

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that the House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider certain resolutions for the granting of supply to Her Majesty, Bill 49.

Thank you.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Petroleum Products Act, Bill 52.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting Access To Health And Education Services, Bill 51.

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

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Repeal The Colonial Building Act, Bill 50.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will move the following motion: That the House concur in the first report of the Standing Orders Committee of the 50th General Assembly tabled March 15, 2022.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

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

S. CROCKER: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That notwithstanding Standing Order 63, this House shall not proceed with Private Members' Day on Wednesday, March 16, 2022, but shall instead meet at 2 p.m. on that day for Routine Proceedings and conduct government business; and that if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

In response to questions arising from the construction of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project, changing climatic conditions and the disastrous flood of 2017, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador undertook a comprehensive flood risk mapping and flood forecasting of the Churchill River (KGS Group 2020). This million-dollar study was described by government as state of the art in the province and across the country.

KGS Group 2020 concluded that under projected climate change and one-in-20-year

open water flood zone conditions, several homes adjacent to the Churchill River will be subjected to a disaster similar or worse than what was experienced in 2017.

So my petition is:

WHEREAS elevation, adjacency and other topographic features in the KGS Group 2020 depicts certain homes to be particularly at risk; and

WHEREAS there is mental and physical stress taking a severe toll on the residents of these homes, particularly as each flood season arrives; and

WHEREAS we are the owners of these homes;

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon this House of Assembly to urge the government to develop a plan to address the conclusions of your own work, protect the citizens of this province and provide support to relocate us out of harm's way.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to this before. It remains an ongoing issue. We remain very concerned that while this report has been done now for some two years, we have yet to see meaningful progress in terms of reading the report and following it. This winter has been particularly severe. We are facing extreme ice conditions. I would suggest that here we go again, Speaker, with river roulette. Will we again have a flood this year that could be as serious as what we faced in 2017? The residents really have no option.

I know there are other communities within flood zones in this province; however, each and every other one of them, you can get in your vehicle and drive. The option out of Mud Lake is to be helicoptered out by basket under a very stressful, very tense and very dangerous condition. There is no option for Mud Lake. So we really need support.

I commend the citizens and residents that are most affected. They have stepped forward and said we need this government to listen. I'm going to keep speaking to it. Nothing has changed, Speaker. Mud Lake and adjacent communities remain available and willing to sit

down and talk to government about helping them get out of harm's way.

Thank you very much.

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the petition.

I did tour the area up there with the hon. Member last year, I think, it was. I did see some of the impacts that were there. That's why we put in place a world-class water monitoring system; that's why we've done that. Obviously, there have been disaster mitigation funds that have already been dispensed in some of these cases.

We have to look at all options on the table. I know that's what we've done when we visited those individuals before, and we're going to continue to provide that first top-notch service of water monitoring and flood monitoring up there. That's what we're going to continue to do as a government and committed to that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The rising cost of fuel is having a dramatic effect on our truck drivers here in our province. The drivers are finding it increasingly difficult to pay their bills, maintain their machines and pay for ever-increasing fuel costs. This means that, for many, they must spend more time on the road, with smaller margins of survival and, for those with families, more time away from their homes.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to consider a fuel rebate for truckers so that they can continue to supply those essential services to many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that depend on them each day.

These are the very people that kept our economy going when everything else was shut down and now they're being impacted the hardest. This is in no way, shape or form affiliated with the convoy in Ottawa or anything like that, but I did want to take a different approach in that I wanted to listen to the people and I wanted to talk to them.

This is signed by actual truck drivers. This is not going out and getting signatures from three or four of your buddies or whatever type of thing. This is actual real people that are really impacted by this. And, like I said, I think it's incumbent on this government to recognize the people that kept our economy going when nobody else could. They took risks. They took chances. Now we have to support them. I think it's time that we give them some kind of rebate or some kind of tax break on maintaining their trucks.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand on a petition concerning cataract surgeries in Western Newfoundland. The background to the petition is as follows:

WHEREAS there are approximately 750 to 800 people – mainly seniors – who are on a wait-list for cataract surgery in Western Newfoundland; and

WHEREAS it will take almost 14 months for these seniors to have the procedure carried out; and

WHEREAS many of these seniors had their driver's licences suspended, they can't read the instructions on their medication properly, they can't read a book or watch TV due to cataract problems affecting their eyesight, which is having an impact on their quality of life in their later years; and

WHEREAS a one-time allotment of funds will eliminate the wait-list for cataract surgery in

Western Newfoundland and Labrador and give these seniors, and others awaiting surgery, a better quality of life which they deserve;

THEREFORE we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide the necessary funding required to carry out these life-changing surgeries in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today as I have been talking about this issue now the last four, five or six months about the cataract surgery –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, this goes right from Southern Labrador, right out to Baie Verte area to Grand Falls. A lot of Northern Peninsula still go to Corner Brook, a lot of the Bay of Islands and in the Premier's own district.

Mr. Speaker, I noticed today – and I'm not arguing about the funding that's been announced today. I think it's great funding. Not enough, but it's good funding. I'm not disputing it. But we can find \$20 million today, we found \$5 million to do studies to see what assets and we can't find \$1.3 million so we could take care of 700 to 800 people – mainly seniors – in Western Newfoundland.

We heard in the media the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association commenting about the wait-list for surgeries. There are no times available, Mr. Speaker, to get these surgeries done at the Corner Brook hospital. The Stephenville hospital is not even operating for cataract surgery. There's no time available.

I urge the Liberal government that I was a part of that we're supposed to take care of the most vulnerable. There's no one more vulnerable than seniors who can't see. I urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, my former colleagues, help out these seniors. For the money that's going to be spent, it will give a quality of life. It will eliminate the backlog. It will eliminate the wait-list one that's in Corner Brook and Western Newfoundland. I urge the

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to do the seniors a favour and give them back their eyesight.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Eastern Health has recently repositioned one of the ambulances from the Trepassey area to the Cape Broyle area. This has left only one ambulance in the Trepassey area. Residents of Trepassey and the surrounding area are at least two hours from the nearest hospital.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the residents of the Trepassey area have accessibility to an ambulance in a time of emergency by repositioning a second ambulance back into the Trepassey area to ensure the safety and well-being of local residents and meet the national standard for response times.

Speaker, I spoke on this a number of times in the last session. We are getting numerous calls regarding ambulances in the district. Up in Trepassey area, they're two hours to the nearest hospital. Once one ambulance is gone, they're in a red alert stage at that time. It's not acceptable that we don't have a second ambulance in there.

The ambulance that did move to Cape Broyle has been down there probably four or five months. A couple of incidents we've had in the last little while, the ambulance down there have not even been manned. We have one ambulance gone and the gentleman that has an issue, calling for an ambulance, and looking through his window one minute away and can't get an ambulance. It is not acceptable, in this day and age, that you can look at two ambulances and they're not being manned,

The minister should step up and look at the owners of these ambulance services and make them accountable to get this back in order the way it should be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that the high school students of Labrador will not have to continue to sacrifice their in-class lecture time in order to attend CDLI courses online.

Our Labrador students are burdened with the loss of Atlantic time slots, which is our local Labrador time zone. A decision that was made to offer all CDLI online courses in Newfoundland time slots only.

We feel that this is unacceptable and this decision was made without ensuring Labrador students would have to sacrifice their in-class lecture time in order to attend these CDLI courses.

This is unacceptable because Labrador students are forced to leave their in-class lectures 30 minutes early to attend the CDLI online courses and arrive 30 minutes late for their next in-class lecture.

As our students' reliance on distance education grows, we fear that having to juggle two schedules and losing important class time will deter many Labrador students from enrolling. Our Northern Labrador students are already burdened with slow internet speeds averaging approximately 0.2 Mbps to 1.9 Mbps. We feel the additional burden of sacrificing one hour of class time for each CDLI course is not acceptable and must be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time I read this petition, but what really shocked me was why would our English school board for the province think it was okay to make these changes, forcing

our Labrador students to leave their in-class courses 30 minutes before the course was done to attend CDLI courses. Then, when they finish the CDLI online course, arrive for their next in-class 30 minutes late.

That is a huge burden. As our reliance on online courses grows, it is going to actually jeopardize our students' academic careers. When you look at what courses are offered online, the CDLI courses, all the math, all the science courses, the academic courses that people need to pursue university courses and programs in their future is basically going to be eliminated.

Not only that, what I fear on the North Coast of Labrador is students are actually going to be forced not to take these courses and stick with their in class because there is too much of a burden and I don't think that is right. I would like the minister to actually address this petition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to start the debate on Interim Supply.

SPEAKER: Is leave granted?

I hear no opposition.

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I wish to inform the House that I have received a message from Her Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor.

SPEAKER: All rise.

As Lieutenant-Governor for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I transmit a request to appropriate sums required for the Public Service of the province for the year ending 31 March 2023, by way of Interim Supply, and in accordance with the provisions of sections 54 and 90 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, I recommend this request to the House of Assembly.

Sgd.: _____
Lieutenant-Governor

Please be seated.

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

S. COADY: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, that the message, together with a bill, be referred to a Committee of Supply.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of Supply to consider the said bill.

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.'

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are considering the related resolution and Bill 45, An Act Granting To Her Majesty Certain Sums Of Money For Defraying Certain Expenses Of The Public Service For The Financial Year Ending March 31, 2023 And For Other Purposes Relating To The Public Service.

Resolution

“Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:

“That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to Her Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2023 the sum of \$2,754,562,200.”

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

Today we introduce the Interim Supply bill. The Interim Supply bill is required to be passed by the House of Assembly to continue ongoing operations for the period from April 1, 2022, to June 30, 2022, or while budget 2022 and the associated main supply bill is being introduced, debated and approved by the Legislature.

The total amount is \$2,754,562,200 and this legislation will need to be passed by the House of Assembly and receive Royal Assent by the Lieutenant-Governor by March 22, 2022, in order to meet payroll, Income Support and other expenditures effective April 1, 2022.

The Interim Supply bill represents approximately 30 per cent of the 2021-2022 budgeted current and capital account gross expenditures and it is based on allocations approved during *Budget 2021*, which was approved by the House of Assembly in June of 2021.

Government operations include payroll, Income Support and other expenditure obligations such as the calling and awarding of tenders, as well as annual contractual obligations that must be encumbered, pursuant to the *Financial Administration Act*.

Allow me to give you some of the expenditures that this money will help fund. For example, for Transportation and Infrastructure, this is to get an early start to summer maintenance; snow and

ice control; awarding of the sand and salt tenders; purchase orders for winter contracts; to encumber funding for ferry operations; leased accommodations; vehicles supplies; fuel expenditures; and to set up contract agreements for a variety of contracted services.

For Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, it will be for the silviculture program, for example, which is front-loaded at the beginning of the field season; for the Office of the Chief Information Officer, to encumber portion of the maintenance commitments; for Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, for a large portion of the grant program and the Labour Market Development Agreement, employment development program, workforce development program, youth and student services, employment assistance programs. For example, in Children, Seniors and Social Development, there's a substantial number of early grants that require payment in the first quarter and expected monthly expenditures for child welfare services.

Those are some of the expenditures that this Interim Supply bill helps to fund. The Interim Supply bill will have no incremental impact on government's financial position in 2022-23 beyond what will be included in budget 2022. As mentioned previously, the total allocation for the Interim Supply, April 1 to June 30, is \$2,754,562,200.

Why do we need this amount? Well, it's based on the 2021 numbers. The Interim Supply bill accounts for approximately, as I said, 30 per cent of the 2021-22 original budget figures. The base amount of Interim Supply is calculated on funding for seven pay periods or 25 per cent – three of the 12 months – of all other expenditures. And not as simple as just dividing the dollar figure by the number of months. Nothing is simple in finance. Departments make adjustments after the original calculation to account for items that are required in the first quarter.

Spending requirements vary and are based on what part of the year we are working with and the type of expenditure. For example, if a department enters into a contract to spend funding, they must encumber or set aside the total value of that contract. So they would need the total amount included in Interim Supply.

Interim Supply is required to provide funding for the additional three months so that normal operations can occur while budget 2022-2023 is being debated in the House of Assembly.

The majority of funding for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure comes upfront because they need funding available to enter into infrastructure agreements. Other departments need to encumber funds to allow for contractual commitments as well. In this three-month period, the highest amounts can be attributed to health care; it is always the highest level of expenditure, which is quite normal; Transportation and Infrastructure, the highest percentage of budget required in Interim Supply to enter into contracts, large-scale infrastructure projects; and Education, the second highest level of expenditure next to Health.

It should be noted that Interim Supply does not have any incremental impacts; again, I say this, on the province's financial position beyond what will be included in budget 2022. It is simply an advance on funding for the upcoming budget. It allows government to continue normal, day-to-day operations while we rigorously debate the new budget. As has been said, the budget date is Thursday, April 7, so a mere three weeks away.

When budget 2022 is approved, whenever that date is that the budget is approved, the amount allocated through Interim Supply will be deducted from that amount required through the main Supply bill.

I think that pretty much covers off what we're doing here this afternoon. I could answer specific questions if you wish on some of the items that are included. The breakdown that's included as I've said and indicated, the majority is for Health; second, Education; third, Transportation and Infrastructure. These are the largest expenditures and then you get into Municipal Affairs, for example.

In conclusion, Interim Supply keeps our dedicated public service who deliver all of government services paid and working, supporting their families and contributing to the local communities. It allows us to continue operation as we have rigorous and solid debate here on the budget for 2022-23, which is set to be released on Thursday, April 7.

With that, Chair, I conclude my remarks and take my place. I look forward to hearing remarks from Members opposite and will certainly take the opportunity to speak again, as necessary.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to talk about how we can better service the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador through this House of Assembly. I'm going to start out by saying, I just watched my colleague from Placentia West - Bellevue give a petition and the Minister of Finance, I'm sure she was busy for a moment, but afterwards she came over and took that time to talk to him about it. That is great communication. Kudos to the Minister of Finance for that, because it's much appreciated when there's a petition put in there.

Chair, one of the greatest books I have ever read in my life was *The Last Lecture*. It follows a professor of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Randy Pausch, that was given a terminal diagnosis, but his perspective was absolutely inspirational.

One portion of his beautiful journey was when he discussed his views on leadership, which is very important in any sector. Randy was asked who he admired as a great leader and his answer may surprise most of us here. He said Captain Kirk from *Star Trek*. I'm going to explain why.

When he was asked why, he went on to say Captain Kirk wasn't the smartest, he wasn't the hardest working; couldn't give medical advice like Bones could, couldn't fix anything like Scotty could, couldn't fly the Enterprise like Sulu and didn't have the battle cry as Mr. Spock. This is important.

What did he have? What he did have was humility and the honesty to realize his weaknesses. More importantly, he knew how to

use the people around him and the attributes that they possess. The team, he realized he had access to and the knowledge to use those people, along with available resources to get the job done right, that's what made him a great leader.

Mr. Chair, I have seen some great leaders in my lifetime. I've served with them; I've seen them. Often without title, just great work ethic, the ability to listen and a moral compass. Though we have all earned the right to call ourselves leaders, I don't represent all of Newfoundland and Labrador, the leaders of the Opposition parties do not represent all of Newfoundland and Labrador and I can assure you the Premier does not represent all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

You see, Chair, 40 of us collectively represent Newfoundland and Labrador. A great leader will recognize this and then run with it. The first leader I see do this from the eighth floor, by God I'd follow to the ends of the earth and back again to help the people of my province. Unfortunately, we haven't seen it yet. I don't believe we will any time soon and that's my opinion.

The communication from the current Premier about issues that truly affect people is close to non-existent and that is shameful from this side of the House. I want to make it clear before I go any further, Chair, this stigma the current Premier has established does not hold true for all ministers. I have worked very well with ministers on the opposite side of this House.

The Minister of Justice not too long ago took my call and called me back right away. Fantastic to see. The Minister of Energy has always been there whenever I needed him for anything and it is much appreciated. The Minister of Environment, same thing. Yes, Chair, even my counterpart, the Minister of Immigration, not to blow the head up too much, but I tell you what, for the past year that I have been his counterpart, he has always been accessible. We have to tell you from this side, we appreciate the ministers from that side helping us with our issues. It is much appreciated.

This is not to say that we all agree on everything, but when I reached out to these ministers about issues important to me and my district, they were only too happy to work with

me because it is the right thing to do. They recognize that and it needs to be recognized.

I am very active in my district and my constituents ask the same question I ask: How can the Premier of the province preach to us about fiscal restraint and responsibility and then open an office in Grand Falls-Windsor that is unnecessary which will give his buddy a very lucrative paycheque?

When the current Premier was first elected I scheduled a meeting with him to discuss the issues of my district and the province and to let him know that I am available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, here are the numbers you can reach me at any time. The Premier has called me once in the year and a half that he's been in his position. That's not good enough.

I wasn't informed about the change of the name of Red Indian Lake until it was brought here to the floor of the House of Assembly. A failure in communication.

I have been asking about the long-term care centre in Grand Falls-Windsor and have been ignored. By doing this, the Premier and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure doesn't just disrespect me, you disrespect the seniors and their families desperately seeking simple, simple answers.

This prompted, after many inquiries, for me to write the following email to government: As leader, I am pleading with you to please reach inside your departments and deal with the failure of communication that continues to make issues more difficult than they need to be. For weeks, I have gone to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure to get answers in regard to the status and delayed opening of the long-term care centre in Grand Falls-Windsor. I was told it would be open in the not-too-distant future. As of last week, after my inquiry, I have not received any response. This is not good enough.

As an MHA, I, too, deserve to be here and work on behalf of my constituents. I, too, deserve the respect of proper communication from your minister's department. To be ignored and pushed off is an insult to my position and an insult to the constituents of Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

I want to be clear, this does not hold true for all ministers and departments, as I know many work hard and have worked very well with me, but on this issue, it's absolutely unacceptable.

There are very worried families throughout my district who want answers as they make long-term arrangements for their loved ones. There are 40 MHAs that represent Newfoundland and Labrador; we all deserve the courtesy of clear communication. Could anyone please give me an update on when this project will be complete and ready for occupancy? Mr. Chair, do you know how many responses I got from that email? Zero, goose egg, none.

A few people have asked what my problem is with the Premier opening an office in Grand Falls-Windsor. My response is this: I know the issues in my district and at any time, the Premier and his team can reach out to me and work with me to address these issues. Nobody has ever reached out to take full advantage of the resources that exist in my office, and they are abundant, trust me.

I'm a rotational oil and gas worker of 17 years that represents so many blue-collared men and women, personally. Not once have I ever been asked: How can we keep rotational workers right here at home?

The biggest problem I have with this office and taxpayers' dollars paying for it is priorities.

I have seniors who have to stay in bed while they wait for their home care worker to arrive so they can go to the washroom. Why? Because their home hours were cut, fiscal responsibility. Everybody takes for granted you can get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and go pee. These people can't because their home hours are cut. Now we have to swallow another office at taxpayers' dollars being opened up for no reason at all.

If we are to open another office, might I recommend an office to support the mental health pandemic that we see so another mother like Andrea Woodford doesn't have to bury her young son after he took his life. It's raw but it's real. Perhaps a person to deal with seniors, as Jean Stuckless heats up one room in her house and wears a blanket through the other rooms to stay warm. It's raw and it's real. Maybe hire on

a veteran to talk to other veterans that we are so proud of, and a veterans' affairs office, a small branch of government. There are enough veterans out there and they've served our country well.

There are so many more options that could have been chosen to actually help the people of the province; far better options than setting up your buddy and ensuring he has a paycheque.

If the intention was admirable and truly to help the people of the province, a great leader would set up a meeting to say here are the roles of the office and I want everyone to work together to ensure the initiative doesn't get lost. Instead, more division has now been created in a time where we should all be working together.

I am very disappointed and embarrassed to work with a Premier who believes this is the path forward. When, in fact, it is the path to failure once again.

If we are to be successful here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we must recognize there are 40 leaders and we must work together. If you cannot see this then maybe you shouldn't be sitting here today.

I have faith that one day a leader will emerge that will know how to communicate and utilize 40 personalities in this House. Then, and only then, will our beautiful province see the light of a brighter future, a future full of pride and prosperity and the fundamental shift in politics will be the change this province has missed for so many years. When egos and arrogance are replaced with humility and sacrifice, people will believe we are doing the right thing for the province and not just ourselves nor our parties; something I will continue to commit to.

Mr. Chair, might I suggest, if we do receive Ukrainian refugees to Canada, and we are lucky enough to have them right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, I would suggest that all 40 Members be there when these Ukrainian refugees come. No lights. No cameras. Not even a shirt and tie. Let's go down, roll up our sleeves and help wherever we can. United as one. The way it should be in many occasions.

The announcement today by government, hopefully, will help some people. Unfortunately,

it does not address those blue-collar workers, those moms and dads that get up and work 40, 50 or 60 hours a week. They're not fighting and working for a second vacation. They're fighting and working to put food on their table. They're just making ends meet.

Somewhere along the line, there was a breakdown because if you work that hard you should be comfortable. Unfortunately, they're not. They're just surviving like everybody else. We can look back through the years and we can talk about so many things that got us to this point, but what we need now is a unified government that can push forward and help the people of the province; help those hard-working men and women; give them some relief. If we do not find relief for these people, they will leave. They will go to other provinces. They'll go to other countries.

As the pandemic starts to wind down, we see so many other countries opening their doors, inviting people in, trying to find the incentives to get people to come to their country. What are our incentives? Come here and there's a four to five chance that you might get a doctor. That's not good enough. That's not going to bring anybody here to Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have, on average, about 17,000 or 18,000 rotational workers here. What keeps them here? We have to ask ourselves that question. I have the answer. What kept me here? What kept me here was a province I was proud of; I knew that I could make a living in. I enjoyed taking the money back from the West to Newfoundland and Labrador and putting every cent back in this province, the way most rotational workers like to do it.

I enjoyed my time up there, but make no mistake: I could have saved an awful lot of money by staying up there and I chose to stay home. We need to look at a plan to keep people here, to keep these young families here. That is our tax base. That is what is paying for our most vulnerable and our seniors, and that's the way it should be. We are all going to be there one day. We should ensure that there is going to be social programs for us, that there is going to be food on the table and there is going to be heat in our house. Unfortunately, for so many, it is not there

right now, and that is unfortunate. It will turn people away from this province.

Somebody wrote me today about the sugar tax. This is their quote, and I have never agreed with the sugar tax and I don't now. They said: I don't need the Liberal government planning my nutrition and my grocery list. We don't need more taxes here, and taxes are hard to get rid of. As we impose these taxes, it is going to deter more and more people. As other provinces work hard to give their citizens a relief, whether it be at the pump or in the grocery store, we have seen it in many provinces throughout Canada over the past couple weeks here.

One other thing before I sit and take my place: cabin owners. I have gentleman who owns a cabin in my district right now; he's been there since 1981. The Crown is asking him to move his cabin at a cost to himself. There has to be some other way of doing this. A cabin that has been there for over 40 years, almost 45 years, he is being asked to move it on his own dime. What do you think that man is going to do? Because he cannot get any common sense over policy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is weird standing again, but it is all good.

We're doing Interim Supply and we have a lot of issues in Labrador West. Our biggest thing now that we see is that we have grown, but we have grown differently in the last number of years. We have more and more seniors now staying in the community. At one time when you go to Labrador West, you work your 30-plus years, then you have your house back in the community that you originated from and then you go and retire there. That is not a thing anymore; that is long gone by the wayside.

We are now into generation four in Labrador West. There are four generations of people living in that community. One individual just turned 96. She's been there since basically day

one; 96 years old, still living in the community, still driving: Mrs. Stamp. She has her kids still living there, her grandkids and her great-grandkids and potentially great-great grandkids soon. This is the kind of community we have now.

But if Mrs. Stamp wants to go live in some sort of Level 2, Level 3 assisted living or – we don't have that in Labrador West. If she chose to do something like that, we don't have anything like that in Lab West, and that's very concerning because we want to grow and continue to develop as a community. We're not a camp; we're a permanent community. These are the things that seniors are looking for.

We have a massive lack of (inaudible). What home care workers are typically paid in this province doesn't match up to the massive cost of living in Labrador West. Right now, the average price for a home in Labrador West is \$240,000. These are 50- and 60-year-old homes who are now going for more than some houses of the same age in the City of St. John's.

Someone working in home care or anything like that just can't afford it. Average rent costs now are over \$1,000 a month. Someone on minimum wage or even up to \$80,000 a year just can't afford rent in Labrador West, and good luck finding a place to rent right now because there's just nowhere to go. We are in a crunch in the region.

I do want to thank the Minister of CSSD and the Minister of Labrador Affairs who did listen and did put the funds – they did say that they were going to do it, and they did it. We are going to get some of the NL Housing units fixed. That's a help, but we're still not right there where we need to be when it comes to actual rentals in the private market.

A lot of the market developers we do talk to are afraid to invest in Labrador West. They're terrified to invest in Labrador West because they're afraid of the resource bust. As much as we want to assure them that IOC has operated 365 days a year since 1954 and has never stopped production, they're still scared to invest in the region. I think that's something that the government needs to look into is how do we reassure developers that this economy and this

region is here to stay. We've produced iron since 1954. We have the opportunity to do that.

So this is where we're stuck between a rock and a hard place, or should I say a piece of iron ore and a hard place. We need to reassure the market that building a house in Labrador West or developing there or opening an apartment building is a feasible thing to do, and this is where we need to step in and help with that.

I know one community said if they were given the right access to appropriate funds that they would build the street, they would build the sidewalks and they would put the water and sewer in. All the developer would have to do is put up the houses. And that's something that we really need a serious look at is kind of just to give that bump in the housing market so that people who are in the private business can actually build an apartment building, build some townhouses or something like that. We're in such a rock and a hard place.

I spoke with teachers in Labrador West recently too. They're having a hard time recruiting into the region – a very hard time recruiting in the region. The biggest thing is that they can't afford rent or can't find anywhere to rent. So they're turning down jobs up there and it's putting a big burden on the schools in Labrador West. We're missing IRTs. We're missing resource workers. We're missing just regular workers, regular teachers.

They're having a hard time getting a French Immersion teacher and they're also having a hard time getting a math and physics teacher in the high school because anyone who applied or wanted the job couldn't find anywhere to live. So this is becoming a serious issue we have is just the recruitment and retention of everyone that's not in the mining industry: nurses, doctors, auxiliary workers in hospitals, teachers, IRTs. We just can't recruit and retain these people because we just don't have anywhere for them to live.

This is actually causing economic issues because now we have people considering leaving the region from the mining industry because they just have no access to services or they're missing teachers, they're missing nurses, lab techs. We're missing all these people because

they just can't find anywhere to live in the region. And it's such a burden that they're facing because they're not making the same wages as mineworkers. They just can't compete with it and they are just being priced out of the market completely.

I had my assessment on my house that I purchased. I live in a single level mini home. When I bought it, it was \$68,000. Now it's valued at over \$200,000. My wife would never agree that it was worth that much because I have a list of things that need to be done but, at the same time, it's just an exorbitant cost because I live on a postage stamp. I think my piece of land and my house is smaller than this House of Assembly.

So, you know, this is the thing that we're (inaudible). The market is so overheated right now. It's pricing completely people out of the market and we just can't get teachers, doctors, nurses, anyone there because they just have nowhere for them to live. If we can't provide these services, it's just going to download onto other issues and we're just going to be spiralling out. It's great, but we just don't have any developers who are interested in building right now, we just don't have any interest in that way and we need to do something to actually bring in these groups so we can actually grow and expand. The newest census right now, Labrador West grew by 4,000 people since the last census – 4,000 more people live in Labrador West now. That's wonderful, that's fantastic, but most of them have nowhere to live.

We could have the potential to grow even bigger as the market continues to want Labrador's high-grade iron ore. We're just stuck here that we can't grow, we can't expand and we can't live up to our full potential. We should be living up to our full potential. That includes our seniors, that includes newcomers and that includes everybody that makes Labrador West the wonderful place that it is. I want to see more people moving to Labrador West and I want to see the community grow, but if I have nowhere to house them, it becomes a big issue. I really hope we have a serious look at how we can improve housing, not just social housing, but just housing in general in this region so that if Labrador West prospers, the entire province prospers.

That's the thing. It's a steady hand. We've been at it since 1954. We've been mining in this region. We continue to have massive outcomes. We're looking 40, 50 years in the future of iron ore reserves left. So we're not going anywhere. We're not a camp; we're a community. We're a big community and we're very proud of our community. That's why we have seniors who want to stay and we have our youth that don't want to leave and want to continue to work in the industries there because we've just built such a wonderful community that has a heart and a soul and everything like that. But we just want some attention brought and something done to help make sure that people could afford to live there, have a roof over their head and a good-paying job and to make sure that they have the services that everyone else gets, and we'd like to have them too.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

You stand where you sit, but you sit where you stand. I want to say a thank you to you and to Members of the House for this, the opening day of the spring session. Wonderful to be here to debate and discuss Interim Supply.

Now, Interim Supply, of course, as we understand, just affords the government the latitude to be able to continue on that which it's already doing. It's not for new initiatives; it's for the continuation of government.

So with that said, I'm very pleased to highlight some of the things that the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills are doing to advance the government's agenda to continue on with some of the great work, particularly as it relates to population growth.

Mr. Chair, population growth is intricately tied to immigration, but it's not exclusively tied to immigration. Of course, the greatest challenge that our province faces, the underlying cause of population decline has been, not only out-migration but also, of course, comparison of birth rate versus fecundity; fecundity in terms of

birth rate versus death rate. We have far, far too many people passing away compared to the number of young children, births, that are occurring in our province. In fact, it's getting close to two to one.

Mr. Chair, one of the things that I would say, if there is a path or course that the government is taking that I'm sure the entire Chamber, the House of Assembly, would echo it should continue to advance, it is the initiatives within Immigration, Population Growth and Skills. We have really targeted resources towards immigration, in particular, to take on the population decline, to advance population growth and it is succeeding. In fact, Mr. Chair, as I've announced earlier, for the last three consecutive quarters, the population of Newfoundland and Labrador has, for the very first time in many, many years, grown.

This is quite an accomplishment, not just in and of itself but it's occurred over three consecutive quarters. From a statistical analysis point of view, from a demographer's point of view, having three consecutive quarters is enough of a time series and a data pattern to be able to indicate a positive correlation, a positive trend and that's what we have.

Mr. Chair, one of the things that I would highlight to the Chamber in advancing this Interim Supply, you will be advancing money for population growth for advancing immigration. You'll be advancing resources to be able to continue on with the work of the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism. You'll be advancing money to make sure that our work on supporting refugees and newcomers to our province is supported. You'll also be advancing things, which are inherently important to each and every one of us, which is the economic well-being of our province.

It goes without saying that immigration – well, it needs to be said, I began by saying it goes without saying. The truth is that some may disagree but they would be, I would argue, ill informed with their position. It goes without saying, it should be said over and over again, that immigration supports economic growth. Immigrants bring jobs. Immigrants help us maintain existing jobs. They support businesses

in our community that have already created jobs and will continue to create jobs.

We have seen through the labour market crunch many positions in the labour market that have gone unfilled using local job market searches. They have been able to be filled by newcomers. New skills have been brought into the province that would otherwise go unfilled.

Mr. Chair, it is important to recognize that we spend over \$150 million a year supporting the skilling up of the Newfoundland and Labrador workforce. We provide over \$150 million on skills development, on apprenticeship development and on training opportunities. That is above and beyond – that \$150 million figure does not include the supports to Memorial University of Newfoundland or the College of the North Atlantic. We really do a deliberate and intentional and successful effort in skilling up the Newfoundland and Labrador workforce.

But, of course, there are times when the labour market still does not provide all of the resources and the skills that are required for each and every job. So that is where immigration really plays a major role. We have had great successes in our immigration. In fact, this past year, 2021, in the middle of a global pandemic, our province realized the highest-ever permanent residency nominations in our history as a province.

In fact, the number of permanent residency applications we forwarded to Ottawa under our Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program and our Provincial Nominee Program, the number of nominations that we forwarded last year – well, to put it in a comparative term, we did more nominations in one week last year than was performed in the entire calendar year of 2007. So that really speaks to how much we have embraced immigration, acted on immigration and we are succeeding in immigration.

In fact, we have a target of 5,100 newcomers to our province, per year, by 2026. We have already exceeded our targets and expect that global target of 5,100 to not only be met but, at this pace, we anticipate we may be justified in rearranging that target and increasing it before the 2026 time frame.

So that is encouraging news, but I also want to recognize that we have incredible academic institutions, post-secondary training institutions and trades programs in our province that we support on a regular basis. This is what we will be voting for. This is what the House will be reconciling with Interim Supply. We really encourage everyone to become fully aware of what is happening.

On the critical issue of Ukraine, many have asked and done so with great heart: When can we expect to see Ukrainians in Newfoundland and Labrador? Mr. Chair, the situation in Ukraine or the refugee movement for Ukraine is very different from what we've seen in other refugee designations or situations. For example, in the Syrian or Afghan refugee designations and movement to Canada, this was a situation that was designated by the United Nations Refugee Agency; it was followed by Canada.

Canada designated which refugees would come to our country. They provided the transportation for the refugees to come to Canada. When landed in Canada, Canada then parcelled out or positioned the refugees throughout all of Canada based on who was willing and interested and able to take them, which provinces were able to do so. Then, of course, Canada provided for many supports, whether it be income, housing, resettlement, language training and other things, but, most importantly, provided immediate permanent residency upon arrival in Canada.

With the situation in Ukraine, it's different. At this point in time Canada has announced that it's prepared to offer a special visa to Ukrainians, those holders of Ukraine passports, to grant a special visa allowing them entry into Canada for two years and with a two-year work permit attached. After that, of course, the visa would expire. So there is no permanent residency that Canada is, at this point in time, providing; nor are they providing a designation as a refugee; nor are they providing the transport; nor are they providing the supports after they arrive. That would be subject to the refugee and their family themselves to provide their own basic supports.

What I can report to you, Mr. Chair, is that, as you can be assured, Newfoundland and Labrador will be standing tall and providing whatever additional supports that we can, as it's needed.

We will be reaching out directly to Ukrainians to support them in their time of need. Newfoundland and Labrador stands with Ukraine.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is indeed good to be back in this hon. House and to see everybody again. Well, to see most of you again, most of you for sure.

I have to say to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board as she gave notice of motion to the bills earlier, you're going to be busy, Madam, and so are your staff. I'm glad that we are here to discuss those bills and go forward. Again, it's a pleasure to speak to Interim Supply.

Mr. Chair, over the last number of months I can assure you that I've spoken to many of my constituents, many people that I've known all my life, that I hold dear and give great respect to those people, but I can tell you people of my district are struggling. I know my district is not alone. We have 40 districts represented in this hon. House and I know that everyone is feeling it over this last number of days and number of months.

When you look at the average blue-collar worker and those people, an important generation that is here who are working, who are paying taxes, who are helping to keep our province afloat; we need to be mindful of those people as well. I know the announcement that came out today does help a certain portion of our population but we can't forget about others. We're all struggling no doubt about it.

When I get a phone call from a constituent who I've known for 40-plus years and those people who I hold in high regard are crying on the phone, don't know what they're going to do; a family of four, two parents working, have to park one of their vehicles and take the insurance

off that vehicle because they can't afford to operate it. When they have to take their children out of their recreation and extracurricular activities because they can't afford to pay for that at the end of the month, then we have an issue.

We have many people who are struggling no doubt about it. We need to keep that first and foremost in our minds here in this hon. House as we make the decisions. As our leader has said, collaboratively we can work together, no doubt about it. I'm open for that. Of course, the people on the opposite side who know me know that I'm here to do that as well.

We need to keep in mind all the concerns that they have, the cost of living, rising fuel costs, the choices that people have to make day to day.

My hon. colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans said earlier with respect to heating one room in your house, that's been said to me many times. I'm finding it difficult, Mr. Chair, to listen to these people over and over again, because it hits right to the heart. These are people that we know and respect and you don't think that they're in that predicament or in that situation. But I can assure you that I'm hearing it from my constituents. I'm helping them whatever way I can. Please God that we will all get through this.

When you look at the many seniors in our districts, as was said earlier about the pandemic, who've come through this last two years, no doubt, they're feeling the effects of it. But you also have to look at the seniors who are trying to stay in their homes and not being able to afford to do so. They want the independence of staying in their homes, but many people need an extra level of care.

I know one gentleman in my district, at 93 years of age, could not sustain the level of home care that he needed because there weren't people available to do that work. And that's been said here earlier with respect to the level of pay for home care workers, which, as far as I'm concerned, needs to be addressed and the amount of people that we have in this field. But we have many examples like this gentleman who cannot get home care and the family, after five and six years of providing care to the loved

ones, they're stressed out and they're physically and emotionally feeling those effects because we don't have the people to provide the care to our seniors.

Then what happens? You have a senior that's medically discharged from the hospital and waiting for two and three weeks to get a placement into a seniors home. The last days of their lives – and, my friends, we will all be there, some of us earlier than others, I can tell you that, but we're all going to be there. It hits home on a repeated basis, Mr. Chair, when we're looking at what cannot be provided to the people of the province.

I know this is not new. This has been a long-standing issue, just on this one alone. But when we're looking at keeping seniors in their homes, doing what we can for them, we need to be mindful of what has to be offered to our seniors and to our loved ones.

I had the opportunity of joining a seniors' group in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove this past week and had wonderful conversations with the people that are there. Many of them that I've known all my life. When you look at the conversations that I had with Mrs. Boland or Mrs. Smart or Mrs. Rose and hearing their stories while sat down having a cup of tea, no doubt causes me to struggle. When you look at the choices that they are making in their lives, at this point in time, it causes me to struggle, Mr. Chair.

I have to say that I'm looking forward to the debate when it's budget time, for discussion, and to see what's going to be in this budget going forward for seniors and to provide some relief to them.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, in part of my outreach to the schools in my district, I was interviewed by two classes from Cape St. Francis Elementary. I'll give a shout-out to the Capers in the Town of Pouch Cove.

They had many questions for me with respect to my role as an MHA and a former municipal leader, how can I make their lives better. These are children who are very in tune, Mr. Chair, as to what's going on in their province. They had questions like: Why can't we have a bigger class

size? Why can't we have more teachers? Why is my teacher in the next room right now? Because teachers are struggling, as the hon. minister knows, with respect to substitutes and emergency supply, no doubt about it. It's happening throughout, I'd say, most districts here in this hon. House.

We all have to be mindful of what's coming out in this budget. That's why, Madam Minister, I'm looking forward to the budget coming down to see what is in this, not only for my constituents, but for the constituents of the 40 districts of this hon. House.

When we go through the budget, I'd be remiss to say with respect to transportation and infrastructure – I can't wait to see what's in there for transportation and infrastructure because of the state of not only the roads, but the infrastructure throughout the district. I will be sure to email the liaison and the executive assistant when it comes to what needs to be done with respect to transportation and infrastructure in the district.

Mr. Chair, we have, no doubt, an important job here to do. With the number given by Madam Minister of \$2,754,562,200, that's going to take us up to June 30. That's not chicken feed; that's major numbers that we're looking at to operate our corner of the vineyard here in our country. It's something that concerns me. I know that nothing comes easy, nothing is cheap anymore, and the amount to run this province, no doubt, is astounding. But we will, I'm sure, look forward to the debate on the budget.

I'm looking forward to see what's in the budget for us to discuss it, how it's going to benefit every Newfoundlander and Labradorian in our beautiful province. We have to remember each and every demographic here. I'm thankful for what was announced today; no doubt, it affects a portion of our province who needs help. But we have to look at the men and women who work day to day and keep their money here in our province.

My colleague mentioned also rotational workers. Very proud of rotational workers in my district. I have to say – I never thought I was going to say it – my son Zacharey, at the age of 23, is now a rotational worker in Fort McMurray because he

couldn't find employment here. That hits home around the supper table, Mr. Chair, I can tell you that. I am proud of him. I am proud of all rotational workers throughout our province and what they do day to day to keep our province running.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity. I look forward to the discussion on the debate on the budget that is coming up and I thank you for your time and your interest.

Thanks so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am happy to speak today to Interim Supply, a very important part of the budget process. I am not envious of the Minister of Finance. She has had many, many budgets and many, many pieces of legislation. Probably almost as many pieces as legislation as we do in Digital Government and Service NL, but they are all kind of at one time of the year. It is a very challenging department, so thank you, Minister.

I also think Interim Supply is especially important so that we can guarantee teachers and health care workers and government employees the reassurance that they are going to keep getting paid after the end of this month, because I know that is when the budget year runs out and if, for example, we decided not to bring forward Interim Supply without having the budget approved, that wouldn't happen.

Approving Interim Supply also gives us ample time to have a fulsome debate about the budget and go through the Estimates process, which I know we'll do soon. I think that is very important so that all of our hard-working government employees know that they'll be getting paid during that time and we can spend money on very important initiatives like were announced today for the lowest income residents of the province, Mr. Chair.

I just want to highlight some of the other initiatives from last year's budget that were very

close to me and the residents of Mount Scio and things that I advocate for on an ongoing basis. One of them is the Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement. I wouldn't be eligible but, last year, this government increased that amount of funding from \$60 to \$100 a month for people who are pregnant and for kids under one year of age. This is a significant help, I think, for those on low incomes.

Just to give everyone an example of some of the costs of having a child, mine is over one year of age at the moment, but a think of formula that would last a week would be at least \$40. So an increase from \$60 to \$100 certainly makes a difference. Any support that we can give to new mothers and new families would be very important, Mr. Chair.

Another one that I thought was a great initiative in 2021 was the Physical Activity Tax Credit. I did my taxes a few weeks ago, Mr. Chair, and I saved my physical activity receipts and I had some for Alexander as well. We went to The Little Gym, so we put those in. So I was very pleased with the Physical Activity Tax Credit and I am getting a little refund from that, so I thank the government and I think it does a good job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: It does a good job in encouraging – it's just a little push. If you need that extra push to do more physical activity or engage in a program or for your kids to get into a program, I think it is a small help that will hopefully push someone to the edge. I know it doesn't cover everything, but it's an additional tax credit to help show, I guess, as a government that we hopefully want people to prioritize increased physical activity.

I think the Tourism and Hospitality Support Program has been incredibly important to small businesses, hospitality and tourism industry. In Mount Scio, we have a lot of hospitality and tourism, restaurants and tourism businesses. I think they have benefited from these programs throughout the year. That's a very important program, Mr. Chair.

Another one from 2021 was the \$13 million extra for guidance and administrative support in

schools. I think there was an extra support given – I can't remember the exact number – for guidance and administration, just acknowledging the challenging times that schools have had for COVID-19. That was the last two years of the pandemic, which was, I think, pandemic-specific. I think that that went a long way to helping residents of the province and schools and families deal with the extra burden of COVID-19, Mr. Chair.

Another one from the last year's budget, and I think the budget before that, which is very important to me and my constituents, the low-income bus pass. As we know, public transportation is a challenge. It's not ideal; I know that. But helping people with low income with their transportation costs certainly, I think, helps them take advantage of things, for example, on sale that they might have at one grocery store or another and they don't have to worry about the cost of transportation.

One of the things that really brought it home to me, Mr. Chair, was during COVID, I had a constituent who wanted to come see me. I was happy to go visit her or we could chat on the phone anytime, but she wanted to come see me. At that point, I think it was just after Snowmageddon when the bus was free. So I remember talking to her on the phone and she said, I'm so excited to come see you and the bus is free. She can come see me because she didn't have to pay.

I just never realized the cost of the bus would be keeping someone from coming to see their Member of the House of Assembly, if they really wanted to do that. That was a realization for me of the barriers that I don't think about. I know it's a barrier. So I am personally advocating for the low-income bus pass and encouraging that we invest in helping transportation for low-income people, Mr. Chair.

When we're thinking about residents of the province, Mr. Chair, I do want to talk about, just quickly, Muskrat Falls. There's \$500 million a year that is going towards Muskrat Falls that we could be putting towards programs for low-income residents in the province. I think that is certainly a missed opportunity.

I do want to recognize the rate mitigation efforts that the Premier has led, meaning that our light bills will not double. I think people of the province would not be able to afford that –

AN HON. MEMBER: I can't hear (inaudible).

S. STOODLEY: That's okay.

It is a significant amount that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Thank you.

S. STOODLEY: – we're paying to Muskrat Falls to make sure that rates don't dramatically increase. That's money that we could be building new schools, new hospitals and implementing the health accord and all these amazing things that we need to do, but we don't have the money for at the moment.

In terms of Mount Scio, there are three areas in my district: Elizabeth Park in Paradise, then we have Kenmount Terrace and the area around the university and the mall. That's the way I picture it. I've been trying to advocate for different services for my residents.

One thing I just realized recently – I thought it would be interesting to share in this House – is Kenmount Terrace has grown significantly in the last 20 years. When I went to university not that long ago, Kenmount Terrace didn't exist. It's just all, kind of, grown since then and now it's the size of Lewisporte. The City of St. John's has just approved more houses to go in Kenmount Terrace. I think given the metro and there's not that much extra space, Kenmount Terrace has seen a significant increase in population. One thing that I do, Mr. Chair, is advocate for more services for that growing area of the metro region.

I'm also very excited that in Mount Scio we're very lucky to have the university, the new adult mental health facility and we have the Health Sciences Centre. Sometimes when all the health care spending is grouped by district, Mount Scio looks inappropriately weighted, but it's just because we have the Health Sciences Centre.

We're fortunate to have that in Mount Scio. We're very fortunate that services for people of Mount Scio are close to home and they don't have to travel too far, Mr. Chair.

Just to touch on some of the things in Digital Government and Service NL in terms of the budget, I know MRD has been a topic of a lot of conversation during this sitting and since I've been in the department. We're working very hard to make sure that wait times are going to be improved this year.

One of the changes that we're making is we're working on allowing people to submit a photo online. While we're working on that, we've reduced the photo requirements from 10 years to 15 years. That should alleviate most people who need to get a photo retaken this coming year. That should alleviate a lot of appointments, Mr. Chair. So we're hoping to have reduced activity. Of course, we need to accommodate all the people who want to come in for a new licence plate for Come Home Year licence plate, or if you have to have a peeling licence plate, you can come in and get a Come Home Year licence plate at no charge and give us back your peeling licence plate.

While we're talking about our department, I'd like to thank the Queen's Printer staff who will be busy shortly with the budget. I know they stay up all night, I believe, printing and getting all the budget documents ready. I'll thank them again. I just wanted to thank them in advance.

I recently spent some time with some of our Occupational Health and Safety and Highway Enforcement teams around the province, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to thank them and all the public servants in our department for all the hard work that they do. I've really enjoyed talking to the workers in the various fields. It's a huge range in my department, Mr. Chair, but they've made us some excellent suggestions that we're investigating. I'm going to continue to do that to improve services for the people of the province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to stand and have a few words today on Interim Supply and a few issues that have been brought to my attention.

First of all, Mr. Chair, Ukraine is on all our minds here. The Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills gave a great Ministerial Statement on what we should be doing as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians because we all feel the pain of those people in Ukraine. I'm sure that we would all do whatever we can to help out. I applaud the government for stepping up and doing what we can for the people of Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to speak first on the cataract issues out in Corner Brook. I've been speaking about this now for the last four, five or six months. It's an issue that was brought to my attention by a few seniors. I started getting a lot of information on it, calling different individuals and dealing with different professionals in Western Health, getting information through access to information and other things.

Mr. Chair, I just can't understand why we don't put in the \$1.3 million to \$1.4 million to get rid of wait-list one, as they call it. I'll explain wait-list one and wait-list two. Wait-list two are ones that they already had a consult with the ophthalmologist, that's wait-list two. Wait-list one are the people who went and seen an optometrist who are waiting to have the consult with the ophthalmologist.

The Department of Health and Community Services put \$250,000 into a program where they were to have in-house people. There are two people at the Apex building in Corner Brook, paid for by the Department of Health, through Western Health, who went through the whole wait-list for cataract surgeries, the whole wait-list, paid for by the Department of Health.

Well, those people on wait-list one, because they had never had a consult with the ophthalmologist, are not on the national wait-list of 112 days. They have to wait until the quota is up April 1, so they can start being seen. So they

won't even get a surgery for the next year and a half or two years. Won't even get a surgery, won't get it. Yet, the government stands up and says, oh, the wait-list, and their own department paid for it. It's cheaper to do it at the Apex building – it's cheaper. Documentation that the Department of Health has says it's actually cheaper, 23 per cent cheaper.

Again, I just want it done. I wrote before to several people here. I won't discuss any private conversations I had. I wrote and I said: Let's just get it done. We'll come out and applaud it. Let's get it done.

There are seniors right now who, during COVID, can't drive, are too scared to go out of their house, can't look at TV, can't read their prescriptions. We see on a regular basis that many people are saying that we need to get this done. Well, why don't we just put up the money?

We heard today the minister announcing – what is it, \$20 million today, the deputy premier, the minister. I'm not arguing about the money, I'm not going to argue about the money. I'm not going to say it isn't a need because it is a need. There's more that could be done, but I'm not saying that, the need is there, no doubt.

I see the \$5 million to see what we own in the province, doing the assets; I'm not going to argue any of that. I saw the Minister of Tourism announcing money for Come Home Year. I'm not going to say a word about that, because we need to get tourism up and running.

Why can't we find \$1.3 million? Why can't we do it? Then we hear, on numerous occasions, well, we could do it in hospitals. There is no surgery in Clarendville; there's no ophthalmologist in Clarendville. People from the Northern Peninsula come to Corner Brook, people from L'Anse au Clair come to Corner Brook and people from Southern Labrador come to Corner Brook.

There are two days right now for surgeries. There used to be three, now there are two. One is for retina and one is for glaucoma in the hospital in Corner Brook – two days. There's not even a third day because there's an ENT doctor now who takes up the third day in Corner Brook.

Here we are, we have the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association talking about the backlog of surgeries all across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, including the West Coast. Here we have a private clinic that the Liberal government – which I was a part of and I'm glad I did it, I was a part of it – set up in Corner Brook so that we can get rid of all wait-list surgeries for cataract surgeries in Western Newfoundland and we won't allow them to get rid of the wait-list. It's inconceivable.

We always hear this old saying: There are certain people who have to put a bit of water in their wine. It has to happen. There are just too many people that are suffering because of \$1.3 million. Put a little water in their wine, people. For God's sake, I see those people. I know them personally. I speak to them. I drop down and see them. I got calls from all over. I got calls from Deer Lake, Corner Brook, Bay of Islands and Humber Valley. I get the calls.

I get calls from all over, Mr. Chair. For some reason, we can come up with \$20 million today – I'm not disputing the money and the need for it; I'm definitely not doing that. We can come up with a \$5 million-asset to see what we own. We can come up with money for tourism. We can for up for all others, but we cannot come up with \$1.3 million to help out 750, 800 seniors. Where are our values? It's a serious issue.

I know the minister responsible for seniors – look, I have to tell you one thing: You're doing a good job of it. Every time we've sent issues in to you to respond, we get a response, I have to say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I have to give you credit, I say to the minister. I really have to say that you take it serious. And this case here alone, if we look at the whole process – and I'm not worried where the money comes from. If it comes from the Department of Health, from seniors, it doesn't matter. But when we see announcement after announcement after announcement, yet we can't get money for seniors. We need to put a little water in our wine to get this done.

We know it's cheaper to do it. What I have here is another list of all the backlog of surgeries. Stephenville, as we speak, and we heard people

opposite speak – I’m not going to point anybody out – well, we could do it in Stephenville. Stephenville has not operated with cataract surgeries in eight months. They don’t even have the equipment right now, as we speak, to do surgeries.

The only way to get rid of that backlog is to admit there’s a wait-list, one, which the Department of Health is aware of. Western Health is aware of. Two intake workers at the Apex building has it all compiled. They say, okay, what we’re going to do you can do it half this year, next year. Here’s the money; you clear up that wait-list. Mr. Chair, I’ll guarantee you one thing, if that wait-list is not gone after giving the money, I would stand in my chair and apologize. I would say the Department of Health was correct. But I’m confident I won’t have to do that – I am confident.

There are three professionals at the Apex building – three. Three right now, as we speak, that if the money comes through, \$1.3 million, they’ll split it up and do them among three of them. Find the time, work Fridays, work Saturdays, work Sundays, work Friday nights, Saturday nights, Sunday nights and get rid of the wait-list. We will make 780 to 800 people – give them back the gift of sight. What is wrong with that?

I’ll ask one more question. What if someone stands up and says, well, Eddie Joyce, the wait-list is still there? We still have 50 or 60 on the wait-list. What if it was that? I know what I would say, Mr. Chair. What’s the big deal? We just had 800 people, mostly seniors, given back their eyesight in the latter years of their life. What’s wrong with that? What is the problem with that?

I will continue to bring up this issue because I know the people personally. There are a lot of Members in the districts opposite also know the people I’m talking about. What we need to do, Mr. Chair – and I see I only have 20 seconds left. I ask the government opposite, the old saying is put a little water in your wine, give a bit of water to other people’s wine so we can come together and we can get this resolved for the sake of the seniors in Western Newfoundland.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It’s a pleasure to be able to stand and speak to Interim Supply again this year. I think this is my 27th time speaking to Interim Supply.

Mr. Chair, some of the initiatives in our department as it relates to Interim Supply this year and the important benefits to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, based on what we are doing and why we need Interim Supply for them, the obvious are so that educators continue to be paid; we continue to provide funding to our early learning centres throughout the province.

You look at some of the things in particular. We announced just last week at the early learning announcement a number of initiatives; pre-K being one of them. So, September of this year, we will have a pre-K pilot program throughout the province. We’ll have a good mix of urban and rural areas throughout the province. I know that standing here today and talking about it, I see that the hon. Member for Ferryland, my phone is going to ring tonight and he’s going to say I want one of those in Ferryland. I can guarantee it, because he’s paying attention and he looks very interested. I know I’m going to receive a call from the Member for Ferryland.

These pilot programs for pre-K throughout the province, we anticipate a couple of hundred spots for pre-K four-year-olds prior to entering the kindergarten system throughout the province. The reason why we’re going with the pilot this year – we’ll add more next year, considerably more, but we want to make sure that if there are any wrinkles, any snags, so to speak, that we get those worked out in the pilot before expanding it throughout the province.

It’s a phenomenal program. It will be a consistent, standardized program throughout the province. Where we know that four-year-olds in St. John’s are going to get the same play-based

program, based on navigating the early years, but the children in St. John's will get the same program as children in St. Anthony, St. Mary's or Goose Bay. It will be a very consistent, standardized program –

L. O'DRISCOLL: Ferryland.

T. OSBORNE: Ferryland, the Member for Ferryland said.

It will be a standardized, consistent program throughout the province. We anticipate, by 2025-26, having a full provincial program with at least 3,100 seats. We anticipate the need will be about 3,100 four-year-old children in that program. But that may be larger than that, depending on the uptake.

We talked about, last week, a wage grid. For many years, we saw early childhood educators leave the sector because their wages simply did not reflect the valuable work that they do; did not reflect the important work they do. I indicated last week, I know that traditionally this has been called early learning and child care. But child care and daycare are misnomers. I'm going to move away from calling it early learning and child care to calling it early learning because these professionals provide early learning to our children. I think it's important to recognize that.

We use the example, we anticipate – and I don't want to preclude what the wage grid is going to determine. Right now, we have a wage supplement that the provincial government sends a cheque directly to the ECEs on top of their wages. So a Level 2 receives about \$15 an hour, give or take; the wage supplement is about \$8 an hour, so you're somewhere in the \$22, \$23 range.

We anticipate when the wage grid is complete that those wages, including the wage supplement – because we're going to roll that into the operating grant so that ECEs will get one paycheque instead of getting pay from multiple sources. Part of the reason we're doing that is because right now ECEs walk into a bank looking for a mortgage; sometimes the bank doesn't count the wage supplement because that program could be cancelled at any time. So instead of that concern or the fear, we're going

to roll that into the operating grant. It will be permanent; it will be a permanent part of their wages. If they go in and apply for a mortgage, they're more likely to get it.

Getting back to the wage grid, including the wage supplement, we anticipate that wages will be somewhere in the \$25 or \$26 range, so they will see a bump in pay. That's a pretty decent pay rate. It's certainly an improvement and it is the stability that ECEs have been looking for, for a number of years. I anticipate that we will see the recruitment and retention of ECEs will be made much better once those changes happen.

If you look at pre-K, it's going to require a Level 3 or higher. We've already established the wage for pre-K. It's going to be somewhere in the \$27, \$28 range for pre-K, so that's Level 3. You see the laddering effect where an ECE can go into the sector and can ladder up in terms of opportunity. There's opportunity there for them. It's no longer no advancement, because there is an opportunity for advancement. The wages will be commensurate with the level of education that they have and the years of service.

We anticipate, as I said, that will help with recruitment and retention of ECEs, but we also have a databank of ECEs who have left the sector. The reason they have left the sector is because for years their wages didn't reflect the valuable work they do. So we're reaching out to that database of those who have left the sector to try to get them back.

That's one of the short-term measures to increase the number of ECEs, which will therefore increase the number of spaces that we have throughout the province. We've already had tremendous interest from former ECEs looking to get back into the sector, because now they feel as though they will be respected and the wages will reflect the important work that they do. We anticipate that that's a short-term measure.

In terms of long-term measures that we're putting in place, between the College of the North Atlantic, Keyin Tech and Academy Canada, we have agreements with all these post-secondary institutions where we are providing funding to expand the number of seats that they have throughout the province. Between this year

and next year, about 700 seats will be available for ECEs to train.

It's either one year or two year depending on the level, Level 1 or Level 2, in terms of training. I know the private post-secondary institutions are looking at it as well. We've asked the College of the North Atlantic to get creative. There are others that they are working on, and we'll have some more news to talk about when they do, but one of the ways is "earn while you learn."

They've started a program where ECEs can go in and they spend half their time in the classroom and half the time in an early learning centre. They get wages right away. They get hands-on experience right away. It gives them the advantage of becoming more familiar – instead of just learning in the classroom, they're actually learning on the jobsite as well. So half the time in the classroom and half the time in an early learning centre. A centre could essentially hire two individuals in the same program; one that's on one shift and one on the other and, essentially, have a full-time staff. That program is starting in September.

That's one of the innovative ways to try to impact the short term and help grow the sector. We're also providing funding to family and child care connections to expand the home-based operations throughout the province. They're going to be expanding the number of home-based centres in the Avalon region and in the Western region. They're not yet operating in Central or in Labrador. They will be going to Central and Labrador as well, which will help grow the sector out there as well and get more home-based operations in Central and in Labrador.

We're providing funding to AECENL to continue with professional development, professional learning. I see there's 15 seconds on the clock. There's so much more good news, I will have to speak again.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

It is nice to be back in this hon. House debating the Interim Supply. Discussions that we are having here certainly affect everyone in our province, either directly or indirectly. I think this needs to be a very fulsome discussion, because we have everybody in the province to look out for and many people have many different needs.

To allude to the Minister of Education's statement, some of the things that can be done – before COVID or before any other budgets or anything like that, we had issues with IRTs and teacher assistants and stuff like that. The recruitment and retention program needs to be, probably, a little bit more robust to make sure we have the right supports in the classrooms for the different needs of the many students that present many different needs.

One of the big things for me in my shadow ministry role in CSSD is the Seniors' Advocate. It is something that is really bothering me for quite a few months here now. My hon. colleagues, I do have their support, but I think they know that I'm not going to let this one go very easily. These are specialized people in these positions, Chair, that have a better ability to direct seniors' issues to the right department or to get the right help that they need, but we need that centralized office so that we can provide those services.

Just in the last session of the House, we went through accessibility legislation for people living with disabilities. We had to figure out how this is going to be paid for because, obviously, it is going to affect a lot of our government buildings and assets.

Another big thing within CSSD are the housing issues, as we've heard here already today about Western Labrador, but that exists throughout the whole province because, currently, we have a lot of older residences. If people are in the position where they have been living in these assets for a long time, it might be the time to give them an opportunity to get some equity and buy those houses as they've been up kept for many years and then take the money that we make from selling those older assets to build new, but we need it now. It is not five years down the road or a couple years down the road; it is now.

I do agree with my colleague from out on the West Coast about the cataract surgery. It seems like such a miniscule amount of money when we just talked about Interim Supply is almost \$3 billion, so I think we should be able to find \$1.3 million and I don't think there will be any rebuttal to getting rid of that wait-list.

The other big one that hasn't been touched on, really, is how much glucose monitoring would help the people in our province with diabetes, which tends to cause other health issues. Like I said, if they had these glucose monitors and they're getting their reports in real time, it would certainly cut back on some other conditions that are presenting themselves in our society.

So one of the biggest things that we could probably do for improving our economy or anything like that is coming up more to date with the times. As we heard the federal government come here and announce expansion of Wi-Fi and broadband and cell service, then we need to realize that this is already antiquated technology. There are many different towers we can take it from, but for our own residents to be in 2022 and not have access to Wi-Fi or cell service or, if you do, your signal is so weak that you have to go stand up in the living room window to make sure you get a connection just to download a picture.

Like I said, it's gone beyond the fact that it's a necessity. It's not a want anymore; it's a necessity to go with the times. We are living in the 21st century; it's time for us to catch up to that. As we see with many other departments, like Tourism, if we want to attract people here, then the big thing now with that accessibility with cell service is that they can get on FaceTime. If somebody came here, let's say, from Portugal, they'd like to probably show their people back in Portugal look what I'm doing today out on the Chance Cove trail or the Skerwink or something like that, and it'll show off that beauty. So really, by having cell service in our province being robust, it's actually free advertising. So it's money that we'll save in the long run, but it's money that we need to spend upfront to get going.

For attracting business is another side of Wi-Fi and cell service. These are technologies now that are a necessity. Everybody's doing electronic

communication and businesses are no different. Nobody wants to come here and go down and assess the Bull Arm site or the West White Rose site or anything like that and have to get on a payphone and call their office to tell them what's going on.

Another really big one actually – and I applaud the group that are doing the Health Accord. Not only for their time but also for their interest in it and their professionalism of what they bring to the table. One of the biggest things that I find coming out of the Health Accord is that they're talking about virtual care. We can't do virtual care if not everybody has the same access to Wi-Fi and cell service. If the federal government were coming here to announce a plan, then I would rather see it that we're getting everybody on first before we start improving the signal that people that already have service would get. Like I said, having some and having none are two majorly different things when it comes to Wi-Fi and cell service.

One of the biggest things for me when it comes to Wi-Fi and cell service is our fire and emergency services. I think it's very incumbent on us to support them with this technology for the simple fact that – like in my district, I have a department that goes basically from the top of Mile Hill in Swift Current right to Rushoon and Red Harbour. Like I said, that's a pretty vast area but, in the meantime, they don't know who's on site. They can't communicate with each other about who's heading to that site or what care is on the way or anything like that and the communication amongst themselves once they're on site. Like I said, fire and emergency services I think probably need the Wi-Fi and cell service more robust than anybody.

With all that being said, I find that right now in our economy in Newfoundland and Labrador we're actually at a fork in the road. We can keep going down the same path that we've always been going and keep the lights on and keep the bills paid, as we're doing here with Interim Supply, but we need to think beyond that. We need to start thinking about improving the economy versus cutting and lowering services. If we improve the economy, that's how we'll have a better doctor and nurse recruitment and retention program. We'd be able to afford them

to stay in line with what other jurisdictions are paying for their services.

But cutting and lowering services and also raising taxes actually flies in the face of each other. It's very contradictory. When we look at improving the economy, I would like to say and be on record as saying it; I think I speak for a lot of people here in Newfoundland and Labrador when I say that we don't want any more giveaways. We don't want any more concessions for what we have in our natural resources.

If we have an asset like our oil and gas or anything like that, then let's utilize it to our best potential. Yes, we know we're going to a green economy, but it's not going to be a flick of a switch or anything like that. It's not going to be pretty quick.

So with 30 seconds left, I would say that with this fork in the road, Bay du Nord is a start and it's needed now. But being proactive would be developing more, not less or stopping one project out of, what we're told, 650 Hibernias out there.

I thank you for your time, Chair, and I think that the bottom line for me is that improving the economy makes a lot more sense because we'll be able to afford all the programs that we're looking for instead of selling off our assets.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Chair.

It's great to be mask-free, even for a short period of time, and to stand in the House. I've not done as many Interim Supply motions as my colleague from Waterford Valley. He's a lot older than I am. So I'm pretty new at all this.

What Interim Supply is, though, as the previous Member said, it's kind of keeping the lights on and keeping the bills paid. What I've heard from

commentary on the other side is new directions in fiscal spending, and that really falls under the next go-round on the budget, which is the presentation of the fiscal policies of this government, followed by the debate in the way that the current Minister of Finance is now actually presented three in the last 18 months.

From my perspective, the important work around Interim Supply is simply the continuity of those programs that we all debated and voted on over the course of last budget that are starting now to show some fruit. The most recent in time terms, really, was the package that I announced for recruitment and retention, recognizing the challenges that COVID has really wrought on the health care workforce.

We announced a package, aimed initially at physicians, and we'll be announcing more work to follow as we get our new secretariat up and running and those hiring processes are underway, interviews for secretariat and for an assistant deputy minister who would have as their portfolio, their mandate, recruitment and retention of health care providers in general.

I'm pleased to say that the other measures that were announced have generated significant interest. We have, very recently through Eastern Health, appointed six physicians to the first of the Collaborative Team Clinics that were announced as part of that package. I'm pleased to announce to the House that none of those physicians are being drawn away from existing primary care locations. This is fresh blood into the workforce.

Again – and I've said this before – this tranche of job postings, of which there are nine in total, there are still some more to go, is the first one I can recall in 28 years of being involved in health care recruitment in this province where we've actually had a competitive process with more applicants – significantly more applicants – than there were vacant positions.

There have been times in the past when, basically, a pulse and a licence were the two basic requirements for recruitment in health care and that has generated significant challenges all of its own. We have seen significant interest from new graduating residents of the family medicine program and, in actual fact,

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are currently trained and working in other jurisdictions to come back because of the forgivable loan that we have arranged, in addition to our bursary programs. I'm aware of at least four physicians that are interested in taking up that option.

For those who are new to practice and somewhat hesitant, we have a minimum income guarantee for the first two years of their practice. We actually don't think that will cost us any money because they will make that without any difficulty, but that option exists as a safety net for those, like myself, who, many years ago, transitioned into a fee-for-service environment, uncertain of what that would mean.

These are all increasingly attractive measures, but I think the real piece that has kind of sealed the deal from the physician end has really been around a successful conclusion to the negotiations with the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association; a significant majority of their membership ratified the deal and we're simply dotting i's and crossing t's through the Minister of Finance, Human Resource Secretariat's department about getting that signed off. Then we can move on to really what is an ongoing negotiation around the implementation of some of those.

There are real highlights in there. We have an opportunity, which we need to get right, to completely revitalize the way we compensate our primary care physicians, for example, in a way that matches the needs of our aging demographic with their skillset. Again, based around the collaborative team clinics.

With this being my first time standing in the House without the weight of a Public Health state of emergency hanging over me, I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the people of this province for the way they stepped up over the last 24 months.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: I think what made the difference in putting us, if you like, motor racing terms, in pole position amongst the jurisdictions in Canada, was their willingness and their receptiveness to taking Dr. Fitzgerald and Public

Health team's advice. On the flip side, we were well advised and continue to be well advised by not only Public Health, but by a series of academic experts both based here and, with the true Newfoundland connection, scattered across the Mainland as well.

The other piece of the pandemic, which has really resonated in discourse out there, is around the mental health strains and stresses it has placed on the people of this province as we went through lockdown and opening and lockdown again. I think the Minister of Education's comments about how schools, for example, have managed to preserve face-to-face instructional time and educational time should not be understated. Because whilst everyone remembers the lockdown, I think what people have not done is lifted their eyes up and seen the challenges that other jurisdictions have faced. With family in Ontario and BC, I can tell you that the school system there was in a far worse situation than it is here and will probably take longer to recover.

Certainly one of the pillars of our current expenditure and, therefore, entirely relevant to the Interim Supply discussion are around our mental health programs. I get regular updates from our mental health and addictions crowd. This is just today's summary of the stuff that's been going on. From the 60-plus, nearly 70 Doorways clinics which were declared an essential service by the department back in March of 2020 – which, even in the height of the lockdown, allowed individuals the opportunity to get face-to-face, one-off counselling and was an entry point for the mental health and addictions system, if they needed it, all the way through to the newer technology around investments with the Strongest Families Institute, for example, in Nova Scotia. What started off five or six years ago as a program to deal with anxiety in elementary schoolchildren, we have, with them, pioneered a country-leading program for 12- to 18-year-olds. There was nothing like that with teens.

We invested \$170,000 back a couple of years ago, and this is available free to any family in this province who needs it. It's available online. It's available by phone. It's available by online Zoom consultations in a medium that supports the family to support their child or student with

anxiety. It is unrivaled. We lead the country in the use of these kind of programs. Indeed, our e-mental health services have won international awards.

Some years ago, we sent our mental health and addictions team to New Zealand to see how it was done. They're coming here now to see how we got it right. That's a story that is not told and not out there enough. As we look forward to 2023 and the opening of the new adult mental health facility, we still have work to do in the interim.

I notice I'm down to less than 46 seconds and I've not even touched on these notes at all, but I would suggest very strongly to my colleagues opposite that they support the motion to grant Interim Supply.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's certainly a pleasure to stand in this hon. House and speak for the first of many times that I intend to do during this session. I'm sure everybody is very excited about that. Mr. Chair, there are so many things that I could speak about because I'm in constant contact with my constituents on any number of issues. My intent was really to talk about health care.

Before I do, though, I just want to raise an issue – it's been raised already, I guess, but to add my two cents worth on behalf of people I represent – about today's announcement, the five-point plan as it's called. Again, as other Members have said, I'm certainly appreciative on behalf of seniors that I know and people in my district that would benefit from the announcement. It's nothing to sneeze at; it's over \$20 million. There's no doubt a lot of it is being directed towards the most vulnerable amongst us. Certainly, if we're going to do anything at all, I

think that's where it really has to start. So I'm not knocking that at all.

But I do want to say that once that five-point plan, that news release came out after the press conference, I shared that. I cut and pasted the actual news release, I put it right on my Facebook page to my constituents and so on just to say this is what was contained in the announcement today, for your information in case it benefits you. That was it; no more comment.

I will say that the commentary I've gotten back on it has not been overly kind. So I just want to put that out there to Members.

Why I say it's not been overly kind, necessarily, is that certainly for the district that I represent – and this is the exact same issue I had, by the way, in 2016, the exact same issues that I raised with the Minister of Finance at the time in 2016 over the budget and so on and all the taxes and so on. The feedback I was getting from my constituents at that time is: Paul, we are the group.

By and large – now, I do have some – I don't think I have any Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in my district, I don't believe I do. I have a lot of co-op housing. I have some seniors in the older part of Mount Pearl, not all of them are on fixed incomes, some are, but a lot of them are people who worked and have pensions and so on. A lot of my district are, what I'll call, the middle class. They're working people: the Southlands and the Westminster area, those areas, or even Ashford Drive or whatever, Newtown and so on, it's the working-class people. They're middle income, the lower middle-income to higher middle-income. It's not the elite, the wealthy, per se, but it's that group in between. It's a group that are keeping the wheels turning.

They're the people that are going to work everyday. They're the ones that when they get their cheque and they look at their gross pay and then they look at their net pay and say, wait now, this should be in reverse, because the net pay is actually gross. It's not the gross pay, it's the net pay that's gross when I look at it because it turns my stomach to look at all the money I paid in and what I'm actually getting to take

home after government gets their hands on all my money. That's how they look at it. It is what it is.

So I would just say that while I do appreciate what was done for the most vulnerable, I'm just saying that there are a lot of people, including people in my district, that are very disappointed because they feel like they're the group that are working everyday, paying all the taxes, paying for everything, but they never get a break. They don't qualify for any breaks. Anytime there is a break for anything, they don't get it.

You look at programs like the Home Repair Program, for example, or the Energy Efficiency Program or the other one that they have – I forget the name of it now. Basically, if you're a senior and you need grab bars in your house and a new bathtub, there is one through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to make it more accessible. I think it's an accessibility grant and so on. A lot of these people, they are paying into it but they don't qualify for any of it because you say they are making too much money.

I get that, but the fact of the matter is that even though they might make a decent living, which by the way they work hard for. They went and got an education and so on to be able to make a decent living or they are working hard at a job to make a decent living. Well, just because more work is coming in, it doesn't mean they are any more well off, because perhaps their bills and their lifestyle reflects their income. So instead of a house that is a \$200,000 house, most of the houses in Southlands are \$400,000 houses and a \$400,000 house means a \$400,000 mortgage and so on.

So when times are tight and when the expenses go up – and we can all argue people should be living within their means and we all know that, but then there is reality. We also know that most people – most – probably live paycheque to paycheque. They're basing their lifestyle on the money that is coming in the door. So when you get into a time where everything all of a sudden – where their taxes go up or prices go up and so on – no, they're not going to starve to death but they are still impacted and they feel that because they are paying into the system, they should be getting a break on the other side.

A lot of people who I've heard from today feel that there was no break in it for them. I am just putting it out there to government. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about because I'm sure that you have a lot of the same emails from people in your district as well. But it is a point that has to be put out there. The people who are paying in to the system all the time and paying the taxes, they never seem to get a break: the working class.

For some, yeah, absolutely, for some it means that they won't be able to go out to The Keg on Saturday. And some people will say well boo-hoo on you, and I get that. But for others on the lower-middle end of things, by the time they pay their bills, there really is nothing left.

It is important to note that everybody pays in. Arguably, everybody should be able to benefit on the other side when we're able to do so.

Now, with that said – and I'm starting to run down on time already – I did also want to talk about health care. I wanted to talk about COVID-19.

First of all, hats off to Dr. Fitzgerald, who all of Newfoundland and Labrador are very familiar with and admire. She's actually a constituent of mine. I'm very proud that she lives in my district for sure. Hats off to her and her team and the great job they did in managing us through COVID-19, I absolutely agree.

Did I agree with every decision she made? No, I didn't. Not every decision. There were different decisions along the way where I thought things were inconsistent, I'll say, on certain decisions at certain times. But, overall, I think they did a stellar job.

One of the impacts – and we're hearing it now from the NLMA – from COVID-19 was that as we shut down all of our health care facilities and left it only for what was classified as an absolute emergencies, in terms of surgeries and so on, now we have this huge backlog.

My colleague here for Humber - Bay of Islands was talking about cataract surgery. That's very important. Imagine going around and not being able to see and now being told you have to wait for another year and a half or two years half

blind. Can't drive, can't watch TV, can't do anything, especially when there's a quick fix that it could be done.

Cataract surgery is one thing, but we've heard from the NLMA – and people were raising this during COVID. I've had people contact me and say how many people – by the time they finally get their cancer diagnosis – are going to be told, I'm sorry, it's stage IV. If we had to have done it two months ago or three months ago, maybe it would have been stage III or stage II. I don't know how many people are in that boat, but you do have to wonder how many people need cancer surgery.

AN HON. MEMBER: One is too many.

P. LANE: One is too many, absolutely. How many people need cancer surgery or heart surgery or whatever the case might be, that if they had it a month ago or two months or three months ago, or if they could have it tomorrow, hopefully, they'd be okay. But if they have to wait another three or four or five or six months, by the time they actually get the surgery, the cancer has grown, it has spread, or they die of a heart attack before they ever get on the table to get their heart surgery done.

These are very valid questions. I know it's an ongoing thing, but it's been exacerbated by COVID-19. So, certainly, the NLMA have brought it to our attention. I want to certainly encourage the government and the minister to find a way to try to expedite this. If you have to bring in other resources, if you have to do surgeries on weekends or nights to try to get this list down, let's get it done.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR (Trimper): For our next speaker, the hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I stand today to talk about a tragic event in the Town of St. Lawrence that happened recently. That event, of course, was the closure of Canada Fluorspar Inc.

Canada Fluorspar Inc., as you know, was a specialty resource mine, which mined fluorspar.

The mine is located within the municipal boundaries of the Town of St. Lawrence, a place where I grew up. We were always considered a mining town, even though we started in the fishery, we realized quickly that we were a mining town back in the 1930s when an American Walter Seibert came into town and wanted to mine fluorspar.

At that time, mining wasn't even thought about in the area. At that time, we had just gotten over the tragic tidal wave that completely destroyed the fishery.

The mine opened in the 30s. It was called, then, St. Lawrence Corporation. In the late 30s, the mine was sold to ALCAN and then became known as Newspar or Canada Fluorspar. ALCAN operated the mine, I should say, until 1977 and then they closed due to low market prices.

I remember when ALCAN operated the mine; they operated in such a way that they were a great supporter of the community in the area. I remember as a student working in the mine; going to MUN, going home in May and working on the mine site, in a lot of cases, for our summer holidays and we'd get enough money to go back to university. It was great corporate citizen.

When it closed down there was a period of time when a company called Burin Minerals out of Great Britain came and took it over. They lasted six to seven years and they folded and went their merry way as well.

The mine closed then, and I remember being on council during this time. It was a rough time for the community, very rough. Then, in 2009, Canada Fluorspar Inc. came on and the mine was reopened in 2018. There was a lot of work that had to be done in that period of time.

Now, we are where we are today where we have Canada Fluorspar announcing on February 21 that they were going bankrupt. A very sad day for our community; a very sad day.

On that day, a total of 261 employees, not only from St. Lawrence but from the Burin Peninsula were laid off. There were actually 280 laid off but there were 261 that were considered active

and 19 considered inactive. Again, a great blow to the peninsula. In a lot of cases, you had people working there that were husband and wife teams and so on. The community was booming. The region was booming. There were a lot of great things happening. The mine, as well, was a great corporate citizen.

I met with some of the mayors of the municipalities affected last week and everybody's town on the Burin Peninsula, pretty well, was hit because out of the 280 people that were laid off, only about 60 of those were from St. Lawrence. The rest were from the region.

Luckily for us, on March 6, government reached a financing agreement with Bridging Finance Inc. in an attempt to find a new buyer. This, indeed, was great for the community and will buy us some time to get the mine on the market.

Fluorspar right now is trading at an all-time high. My understanding is, the last time I checked, it was a little over \$700 US per ton. So it's a great investment for some company.

I spoke to the mining manager there a while ago asking about the longevity of the mine, if it was to go again. During their tenure in there, so far, every drilling program that they had – and they had two or three per year – was successful. It was something that there is lots of ore to carry that mine into the next 20 years.

Even if they were to open in the next little while, they'd need about six months of removing stone, because it an open-pit mine and they would reach veins that would allow them to operate 24-7 for 6½ years. That's only one piece of where they're working now. So we are very hopeful on the Burin Peninsula that this will happen soon.

If you look at the number of families that are affected, the number of individuals, already I'm hearing of people that are leaving the area, going back to Alberta and so on. It's so sad. It further erodes rural Newfoundland on the Burin Peninsula for sure, a big shutdown like this.

The impact it's having on local suppliers, the impact it's having on people who are working there and the impact it's having on the contractors that have small businesses but did work for the mine. I have a couple of neighbours

that had all of their equipment working at the mine site. It's just amazing.

The impact on taxes of the town alone. The town had a really robust tax agreement with the mine. That now has diminished and gone.

In their layoff letter, the people of the town that were working there said they were entitled to 12-weeks severance. When it went bankrupt, that 12-week severance is gone. They were counting on that to get them through, hopefully, in the short time for the town to get a buyer. But there is a federal program out there, and I'll just mention it just in case it happens to any of you.

It's called the federal Wage Earner Protection Program. It gives a certain amount of money to people who are affected by layoffs when the companies do go bankrupt.

Our provincial government has reached a financial agreement with Bridging Finance in an attempt to find a new buyer for the mine.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: I agree by the way. The provincial government is contributing up to 50 per cent of the \$3.25 million of the required cash flow to keep the mine in a care and maintenance scenario for approximately 20 weeks. This will allow us time to shop the mine around.

The provincial government will offer support to those affected employees resulting from the financial difficulties CFI is experiencing. You must remember the fluorspar mine in St. Lawrence is the only one of its kind in North America. The mine is a very significant employer in the region and an economic generator for this great province.

The mineral fluorspar is integral to items such as aluminium, lithium batteries, solar panels and steel. Prior to receivership, CFI produced acid-grade fluorspar and shipped the product to the US, Canada, Europe and Asia. Provincial officials are ready to provide support to impacted fluorspar workers.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's always a pleasure to get up in this House and say a few words, especially on a time in history in our province where we're facing a lot of financial difficulties and I guess the world around us. It's been a very difficult two years.

I've said this many times and we're living it. We're here, we're elected officials and we're all residents of this province and, really, of the country and the world. I think you will look back at these last two years as a very dark time in our history. There have been a lot of good stories, a lot of good things that happened over the last couple of years; we're all lucky to be where we are now with keeping our health. A lot of lives have been lost and a lot more are being lost.

I guess we look at Ukraine down there and we're watching it every day. It's appalling, it's frightening and sometimes it's a lot of complaints and it's protests. A lot of people are raising concerns and valid concerns to us. We hear it, we see them on the streets sometimes, but we're very fortunate where we live in this province and in this country. I think we should never forget that. All you have to do is flick on your television and you can see a quite a different story. So we're very fortunate and I think we all should remember that.

Mr. Chair, when we look at Interim Supply – and right now, the Supply bill is just to prolong until we get the budget for government to pay the bills. It's an issue that I think we all hear about it, and we get lots of emails. I know I get them in my district from constituents and abroad about the price of gas, the price of home heating fuel.

I mean, to go a step further, the price of groceries on the shelves. You walk in the supermarket or any store now and the price of food is atrociously high. You see some Facebook posts up there; someone goes in puts the picture of roast of beef for \$55 or \$60, or chickens are \$30. People are actually putting this

stuff on Facebook now. Just think about that. People with a family, how do you afford to live? How are they actually, what I call, living properly, with the proper nourishment when you're paying costs like that? Now, a lot of those costs are as a result of the high price of gas, obviously, and diesel and what have you – transportation.

With that inflation, it all coincides and it's like one big snowball effect. It effects everyone. It's effecting every single person in this province. The ones that are being affected the most, of course, are our vulnerable people, our seniors, our low-income families and our working poor.

There was an announcement today – I'm not saying it was a bad announcement. There were aspects of it that's good. We're all realistic. Our leader, earlier today, said there are good things in everything. But it did stop short. We, as an Opposition – and I was critic for several years in the Climate Change portfolio; carbon pricing is fair enough. It's here and now; it's what we're dealing with. Climate change is real; we're not denying that. We're not going to be the radical about that.

But I've always questioned; it has to be more measured. You're bringing in carbon prices. Right now, in April we are going to be over 11 cents a litre based on just carbon taxes alone. We're looking at almost \$2 a litre for gasoline, then the other provincial taxes. It was a made-in-Newfoundland approach and that portion of money comes back to the province. We're told by the Minister of Finance and the Premier there's nothing we can do. The numbers they give are 14 cents a litre but when you add up all the other figures, it's much more than that.

People question that. People come to us and they ask us that question. You trust the numbers being given out, but then there are other people who questioned – there are other portions of this that could be looked at. You had an announcement today and none of that was addressed.

When you're going to a gas station or you're getting your fuel filled up for your furnace and you're paying pretty well double – double – what you paid early on in this pandemic, that's too much for most. These measures today,

they'll help some. They're far, far, far from the solution. Then looking down the barrel now and a budget coming that we don't know what's there.

Listening this morning on my drive in – I was listening to the radio – and it was brought up about the Moya Greene report. That was the blueprint for the future, that's what the Premier said, that was going to be the measuring stick. That's our way forward. I remember we have had lots of way forwards in the last number of years since 2015.

What have you heard about the Moya Greene report since? There are a few measures that were in that report that have come in. There has been very little about it.

Then we got the Rothschild group, they're doing another report. I don't know what happened to the Moya Greene report, but I'm not even going to say that's a bad thing. But where are we going with this? We are spending millions and millions of dollars on these reports but where are they going? What are they solving?

We still have \$2 a litre gas. We still have seniors that are struggling to feed themselves, to stay warm. We have families out there working that can't afford to keep the lights on in their house.

I was talking to – it was about a week ago – and I like to put it in realistic terms because this is the real world we're living in. I was talking to a lady who worked with a home-heating company with fuels and we were talking about the price of fuels. She says it has doubled; home heating oil has actually doubled from what it was this time last year. She said I know seniors are making the choice about turning down the heat in the house and eating less food.

You look at seniors, again, one of the most vulnerable portions of our population, this person is dealing with these people calling in every day; they're looking for \$50 worth of oil. As we all know, if you're paying \$1.50 a litre, that's not going to keep your house warm very long but that is all they can afford.

We come out with these announcements today and there's lots of fanfare about it, and it's right on the cusp of opening the House of Assembly

for the spring session. For the last month or two, my colleague, the critic and shadow minister for Finance, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, he's been out on this. Our Leader of the Opposition has been out on this. We have had lots of Members speaking individually on this at various media shows and social media. Everyone's district is feeling it and across the way, the same thing. It is not just the Opposition; this is a provincial issue.

So when you get these measures that come today, they are far, far short. But what is it? Is it smoke and mirrors? I hate to say that sometimes but I feel that. I have a crowd around me who can confirm some of my backroom comments and I'll keep them in the backroom, but photo ops are not going to solve our problems. Nice words are not going to solve our problems. Platitudes don't get us anywhere. You have to take real meaningful action.

I know Members opposite will get frustrated and they'll get offended sometimes when you make those comments, and I tend to do that to a lot of Members sometimes when I make some comments, but I'm doing it because I'm listening to the people that I represent. I can do that because I'm listening to what people write me on Facebook; I listen to the people in my district.

The Government House Leader is well aware; we've had many good debates. I'm not pulling punches. I could show you the emails, people's concerns. It's frustration, Mr. Chair. It's their concerns, but they go into frustration, people just throw their arms up. What are we going to do?

I got an email this afternoon: What help did we get with gas today? Nothing. That's what they're telling me. What can I tell them back? Oh yeah, no, it's nothing. That's no measures. It's nice to say we're taking it serious. We feel it's very serious. You hear the Premier say it's a serious issue; we're with you. Oh yeah, we're with you people, we're always with you.

But when it comes down to it, really what's happening? What's changing? It's a feel-good moment, everyone feels great, but what's really changed? Nothing. Those seniors are still hungry. They're still cold. They're still calling Ultramar looking for \$50 worth of oil and the

lady is telling them this is not worth our time to come but we're going to come. You're going to run out again by tonight or tomorrow.

It's just not feasible. They're doing what they can. It's costing them money to deliver oil to some people because in their own compassion they feel for these people.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) conscience.

B. PETTEN: They have a conscience, right.

So I call and talk to these people. I'm getting this from the companies that I've talked to. I deal with Ultramar. The lady that I called up one day, this was her story to me because she knew what I did, she knew what I worked at. She's passing the message along to me on behalf of seniors to get it out there.

I'm not government. I'm not the Minister of Finance. I'm not the Minister of Education. I'm an Opposition Member, but I care. That's not a platitude, that's not just talk, that's not rhetoric; that's a fact. I actually care. I think most Members in this House care, on all sides. But you have to move aside from the foolish – these commentaries and this everything is wonderful. What world are we living in?

People are watching, people are paying attention and what they're seeing they're not liking, Mr. Chair. Words will not solve our problems. There has to be actions and action is what we saw in the lunchtime news conference. If we're going to get that coming forward now when the budget's release, unless you're going to do meaningful actions to help those people that are vulnerable, we're failing them now and it will continue to fail.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's always a great opportunity to speak here in this hon. House and it's always great to practice democracy, as we're doing here. I'm happy to see that the debate has remained somewhat civilized and respectful here today.

At this time, too, I'd be remiss if I didn't give my thoughts and to send my prayers on what's happening in Ukraine and what we're seeing. Our thoughts and prayers are with those people and what they're going through and anything that we can do, as a province, to show our solidarity in the unanimous call for peace, of course.

It's always a great pleasure to speak on behalf of the District of Harbour Grace-Port de Grave. I'm really proud of the district I represent. We have a lot of great big towns and municipalities there that are certainly doing great things in their communities. They're gearing up for our Come Home celebrations. So, please God, all that rolls out well and we're able to get some people to come to our beautiful province.

We've got a lot of great things to celebrate here. We're a real jewel in the crown, if I do say so. No matter where you go when you travel and you tell someone you're from Newfoundland and Labrador, they really receive that well. The next question is: Well, how many instruments do you play or whatever? So I'm looking forward to the summer, of course, and the funding that we are certainly going to be granting to these municipalities and organizations and whatnot.

Also, we're just off of Violence Protection Month as well as International Women's Day as we know. It's recognized on March 8. Of course, International Women's Day on March 8 is a global day to recognize the achievements of women and gender-diverse people and an opportunity to emphasize the necessary work that continues to be critical around the promotion of gender equality around the world and including our very own Newfoundland and Labrador.

Also, I want to throw a bouquet to all communities that I work with in the department of Women and Gender Equality in communities. The work that they do on the frontlines to help victims and the people who need these services the most, my heart goes out to them. This work

gets very passionate in what they do. In a lot of situations and in many ways they're saving lives. So I commend them and anything I can do to support them and to be their voice at the government table, I certainly do.

Just in *Budget 2021* – as we're talking about Interim Supply and how important it is to support this so we can continue to pay the people who are providing these very valuable services on our frontlines – the Office of Women and Gender Equality provided \$3.2 million in funding for seven of the nine women's centres across the province; \$142,625 each allocated in *Budget 2021*; 10 violence prevention organizations at \$80,000 each, except Violence Prevention in Labrador, which received a \$100,000 allocation in *Budget 2021*. Again, I can't emphasize enough how important it is to equip these groups and to do what we can to support them.

Also, I had an opportunity to travel to Corner Brook, actually Steady Brook, in the fall – in December, actually, just before the Christmas break – to meet at the Gathering. My colleague, the Minister Responsible for Labrador and Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation also joined me, as well as officials from the Department of Justice and Public Safety, and we had a great opportunity to meet with and to listen to, ultimately, some very important issues as it pertains to missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, as well as the many issues that they are facing.

I have to say, I was certainly honoured to be there and to be invited to be there and to listen. It was two days. It was jammed packed with information, and how important it was and how interesting it was to learn about the different cultures, many different cultures; Indigenous cultures that we celebrate and that we have here. Again, I thank them for all they do, because they are certainly leaders in their communities and for the people that they represent. I look forward to continuing this important work.

Also, the report actually was completed and submitted now. We have received a response actually from the Women's Gathering as it pertains to the 231 Calls for Justice that we saw from the national inquiry. It's a very important priority for my department, as well as the

Department of Justice and Public Safety, as well as Indigenous Affairs and to our government overall. It's always wonderful when we can do the good work that needs to be done to service the people.

I'll talk a little bit about my district, as well, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. As we know, we were awarded the Summer Games. I think it was originally supposed to happen in 2021 or 2020, I can't even remember now. COVID actually changed the gears on that. But we are scheduled to host again the 2024 Summer Games, the Newfoundland and Labrador games.

We had a number of ministers out at that time, too, to make these announcements and the significant funding that has been granted to the Town of Bay Roberts to get their infrastructure in place as well as surrounding communities. Other facilities will be utilized such as Upper Island Cove for their baseball facility, as well even in the neighbouring District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde with golf, Pitcher's Pond comes to mind as well.

We're certainly looking forward to that. As we're coming off the pandemic, which is now what many people are calling an endemic, we're looking forward to life getting back to somewhat normal. With that said, I think we'll forever be living with COVID and coping to live with COVID.

I also want to throw a bouquet to the people of the province. I mean, they've stepped up. We're a leader; we are actually a leader in the country with regard to our vaccines and the protocols and the safety measures that the people took upon themselves to carry out. I couldn't be more proud. Again, it's tough times. It's an unprecedented past two years that we've lived through but I'm certainly looking forward to getting back to those community events in person.

Again, I can't emphasize enough about the Summer Games. I know there are a lot of volunteers that are gearing up, ready to go. With the Town of Bay Roberts and the surrounding communities in Conception Bay North, it's going to be a proud moment.

I also want to thank my colleague, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, for the recent meetings and the future meetings that we'll be having to make sure that we do have the infrastructure to where it needs to be. We realize, of course, that demand is far and wide, across all 40 districts. I appreciate the efforts and the dedication that's made there.

Again, I also always want to talk about the volunteer firefighters in my district because they go above and beyond, as we all know. When everybody is running to seek safety and to seek shelter, it is those men and women who run into the danger, ultimately, to risk their lives and to put their lives on the line, ultimately, to support us all. We all sleep easier at night knowing that they are there to answer the call.

I was happy to also announce a vehicle for Spaniard's Bay, Tilton, the municipality there, through the second-hand vehicle program that they received recently. Again, I can't thank them enough for the work that they do. All the departments, Upper Island Cove as well as Harbour Grace and, of course, Bay Roberts, Spaniard's Bay, Tilton and all firefighters across Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is great, too, that we are able to work with them and support them and to bring in legislation, such as presumptive cancer coverage legislation that supports them. They don't have to be a career firefighter; volunteers can also avail of those supports and benefits, if needed. Hopefully, they don't need them but it's good to know that they are there to support the volunteers who do this work.

It is always great to be back in the House of Assembly. I look forward to when the budget comes down. It's something that we're all anticipating, people across Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Member across the way said how he listens to his constituents. Well, I certainly listen to my constituents 24-7, seven days a week. No matter if it's a Saturday, no matter if it's a Sunday, no matter if it's a morning I could be on vacation, I'm taking the time to speak to my constituents and to hear them. I hope that they know, anybody watching, I am certainly here to do everything I can to support them as their MHA.

I'm grateful for the support they've shown me and I'm certainly doing everything I can within my power to work with them.

I love our district, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. It used to be the former Port de Grave District but now it's Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. We are a powerhouse, if you will, for Conception Bay North.

With that said, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat. I am sitting, I realize, because of the COVID protocols but I certainly will take my seat. I look forward to speaking again on the great initiatives that will be happening in Harbour Grace - Port de Grave as well as the Office of Women and Gender Equality.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chair, it's great to be back in this House of Assembly and debate the Interim Supply and the upcoming budget. It is always nice to be here to represent the District of Exploits. It's something that I'm very proud of and I was elected to do, to serve the District of Exploits and I'll continue to do so. I'll bring their issues here to the House of Assembly whenever I get a chance.

Mr. Chair, yes, Interim Supply is important. We need Interim Supply right now to keep our public service paid, to keep them going, because they do a great deal of work for us. I know every time I call them, they get back to me. They give me answers that I'm looking for and it's great to be able to do that. It's good to be able to speak on Interim Supply and keep those public service workers attached and working for us and working for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

But, Mr. Chair, having said that, in my district I'm still hearing – of course, I've heard it mentioned lots of times here – the cost of living, oil, fuel, meats, whatever, all the cost of living is affecting all of us. It's detrimental to a lot of

people. Low-income earners, Mr. Chair, it's hurting a lot of those people in a bad, bad way.

People on minimum wage trying to get to work, it's impossible. I'm hearing it every day; they're driving probably 40 or 50 kilometres to get to work. All they're doing is getting to work; they can't afford to do anything else. To see that the government is not acknowledging that is disheartening, Mr. Chair, because when they can come up with pockets of money to give to their Liberal friends to support an office in Central Newfoundland, when people can't even get back and forth to work, that's unreal. It's unbelievable that this government can do that.

There's a lot more they can do. There's a home heat rebate program they could have come up with. Actually, we had the home heat rebate program in Grand Falls-Windsor. In 2016, it was taken out by the Liberals, 26 jobs gone. What did we get? We get two extra Liberal friends' jobs, that's what we get out of it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: That's what we got out of it.

So 26 jobs gone from a home heat rebate that's causing those seniors and low incomes to be cold and can't afford the price of food. Yet, you can give us –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. FORSEY: Where's yours?

CHAIR: A little order, please. Let's let the Member finish his time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

It's getting a little late in the day.

P. FORSEY: Yet, you can give us two Liberal friends to put an office there. That probably cost quarter of a million dollars just to set that up. Yet, you can, over there –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: That's a joke, is it? It's not a joke to the people in Central Newfoundland, I tell you that right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: I hear it every day. It's no joke to them when they can't afford to get to work, but you can give it to your Liberal buddies.

They tell us, sure, we elected two MHAs from the district. That's who they want representing us. But no, we'll pay somebody else. We don't want them. We'll pay somebody else to put it there so we can take something else from you, probably. Who knows?

We also lost the 24-hour emergency service in Botwood. They lost that in 2016. They took that. In 2018, lab services – lab testing hub into Gander, a Liberal district. Now, what happens again? Again, we lost the Home Heat Rebate. What did we get back? Two Liberal friends being paid. That's what we got out of it.

AN HON. MEMBER: And they got a handsome salary.

P. FORSEY: And a handsome salary on top of that.

So, Mr. Chair, it's disheartening to see that we're not putting more money into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Home care is another thing that I hear in there. Seniors can't get extra hours. The Member from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, we see it. We're only just divided there. He gets the same calls as I get. They can't get home care hours. That's another thing you did. Boy, wonderful, you were cutting home care hours back in 2016. Now they have to pay more subsidies to have home care hours with less hours. Boy, you're doing wonderful stuff. You're doing great things.

AN HON. MEMBER: Pat him on the back.

P. FORSEY: Pat him on the back. Can we get another Liberal buddy in Central?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: Yes, let's get it going.

So here you are doing things like that and they cut their home care hours. They can't get enough hours. Not only can't they afford to live in their own homes, they can't even get help to live in their own homes. Like, it's ridiculous. This is totally ridiculous. Listen, this is true. I'm hearing this every day. I'm hearing from every person in my district. Hearing it every day. I'm sure you fellows got to be hearing it in yours. You've got to be.

Anyway, housing, another big story in my district, like community housing, community sectors. You got people on the street, basically. I was trying to get housing for a person in November, living in a shed, and I battled with the system over and over and we finally got him in somewhere, but the treatment he had to go through to come home: Go to the hospital, put him in the hospital and send him out, b'ys. We have nowhere; we can't do anything with him. He's good enough to go home, but he has no home to go to. He lived in a shed for four months during the winter. That's where he lived.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: He lived in a shed for four months in the cold until we finally got him in somewhere. Yet, you can take your dollars, you can take your money and give it to two Liberal friends to set up a quarter million dollars in the Central area. It's ridiculous.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. FORSEY: They're over there and they can laugh at that. You can laugh at it. I see three Members right there; you're laughing at it. It's ridiculous.

AN HON. MEMBER: I was laughing at you laughing.

P. FORSEY: Hey, at least you admitted you were laughing. It's not laughing, anyway.

To see stuff like that happening, it's really disheartening to see that you can come out with an announcement today – which is good. I mean, you do help the seniors a little bit there. You help –

S. COADY: (Inaudible) help those on low income.

P. FORSEY: Help those on the low incomes. Low income is a broad range. Anybody going to work on minimum wage, that is a low income. By the time you take out the gas when they have to work, take out all their taxes, take out their food that they have to buy for their youngsters, yeah, that is a low, low income, no doubt about. I'm sure their incomes don't match the incomes that they're getting paid by the Premier's office in Central, no doubt about it.

Anyway, like I say, it's good to talk about Interim Supply but when you see those things happening in your district, you get disheartened with it. There are other words I could use, but I don't think I'm allowed to use them here.

Other than that, Mr. Chair, there is a lot more that we can discuss. Yes, I will be in favour of the Interim Supply, no doubt about it, but I do want to see more good announcements, especially now that we have the Premier's office in Central Newfoundland. I'm expecting to hear more good announcements for Central Newfoundland. Not to be striping anything, but there to be more announcements.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, with that, I'll take my seat and we'll continue on another day.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

I thank the Member for Ferryland for picking up the afternoon. Thank you, Sir.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to take the opportunity to speak to Interim Supply. I always enjoy this opportunity to do that, especially after I had the opportunity to listen to a couple of my colleagues from across the other side of the House.

First of all, I think it's an important piece of legislation for continuity of the government and the services that government provides to the people that we all represent. I think that's

important. But I'd like to delve into a couple of the statements from the previous people on the other side, the hon. Member for CBS and the hon. Member for Exploits.

I know the hon. Member for CBS was here when we were in 2015 and seen what kind of mess we were left; \$2.7 billion in the hole. Not only did we have no dishes in the cupboards, your PC administration took the cupboards off the wall on us. The revisionist style of history that we're trying to depict here today is wrong. Facts matter. Facts really do matter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: So facts do matter. Let me tell you about a fact. I'm going to give you –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Let's try to get through it.

B. DAVIS: – one number right now: \$961.53. You're going to look at me with the blank faces because you're not going to know what that number means. I didn't know what it was until I took the number that the PC administration put us in debt \$500 million a year per man, woman and child in this province is \$961.53 that we've had to come to the table with each and every year to ensure the electricity rates don't double.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Each and every year. So that's a fact, and that matters.

When we're discussing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

One at a time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Order, please!

Let's let him finish. Let the hon. Member finish.

B. DAVIS: I will say the hon. Member for Terra Nova understands very well in military terms what marking time means, right? He understands very well. So do I from the cadet program; nowhere near as much experience as he would have, but he understands what marking time is, which is essentially what that \$500 million is doing.

We're actually just marking time, not able to invest in many of the programs that – I agree with each and every one of you on the other side that we should be investing in every one of them, but there's not enough money to go around to do what the Member for Exploits wants done and the Member for Terra Nova wants done, which we all agree with on this side, for the most part, we want to try to do. We can't do it because of the albatross that has been left around our neck by the previous administration.

I'm okay with that, because I didn't want to go down that road until two Members previous to us went down that road. I'm only simply going to go down that road and stop there at this point for that benefit.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. DAVIS: Sorry?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. DAVIS: Five-hundred million dollars for an ill-conceived project that will remain nameless.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

B. DAVIS: Ill-conceived and misguided project.

Now, I do want to take some opportunity because I do have a few minutes left, I do want to take some opportunity to talk about some of the things that I think are an opportunity for us as a government to look at.

Climate change is real. I'm very happy that the Member for CBS had said that in his statements, that climate change is real. It is. It's something that we all have to face. Not just that we have to

face, our children face and our children's children will have to face. Each and every action we take as a government, as a people and as a global community is going to matter.

We've had a Climate Change Action Plan that we put in place with 45 actions. Of those 45 actions, 67 per cent of those are complete, which leaves 33 per cent, obviously, that's not complete or in process of being completed across 11 different departments. That's what this Interim Supply helps to alleviate, to ensure that work continues.

We have the Low-Carbon Economy Leadership Fund, which some \$90 million has been invested in changing over heating systems within municipalities, community organizations, government buildings; operations that are going to save greenhouse gas emissions in this province to help us hit our targets, which we need to be firm on to make sure we do hit. It's working. We've exceeded our greenhouse gas reductions to the tune of 116,000 tons per year, based on just what's been approved so far.

Adaptation work: some people in this House have talked about some of the work that needs to be done with flood-risk mapping and what our shorelines are going to look like as we transfer through what's going through with climate change and what we're facing as a province. So all of those things are very, very important. Funding required for those things like flood-risk mapping provides a significant amount of opportunity for, not just government here, but municipalities or people that want to build cabins in a particular areas or houses in particular areas, for zoning and planning within municipalities across our province. It's an important piece.

We've established a net-zero advisory Committee that's going to provide us with insight into things that are happening right across the global community, not just here in Canada, but the globe, and things that we can implement that will be beneficial and help us hit those targets. We can always talk about things that are going wrong – that's a case in point for some people. I like to look at things in positive terms.

We've moved a long way over a very difficult period of time; there's a lot more to do. We're going to continue to work on this side of the House and, hopefully, with my colleagues on the other side, too, to implement many of the things that are going to be beneficial to all of us.

We've talked about a couple of things like the EV Rebate Program today. We had an announcement today that's going to help transition people to make that decision. It's not going to be easy for everyone to make that decision, but, at the end of the day, when your vehicle is past its end of life, or getting close to its end of life, or your lease is up, you'd like to take that opportunity, we're trying to take down the barriers that would exist in between the cost of an internal combustion engine and an EV. That's what we're trying to do. It's a barrier that exists for some people.

Some people are going to make that decision regardless of what we do; some people are not. We're going to try to take down every barrier we possibly can to make that move in that direction.

The announcement today is about \$2,500 for individuals to transition to an EV. Also, in addition to that, this year over last year, what we've done is we've put in place another million dollars for infrastructure upgrades to make sure we have the infrastructure there to meet the needs of what the electric vehicles that are coming on are going to need to face. In addition to that, we also offered \$1,500 to purchase a plug-in hybrid vehicle, which we realize is a transition vehicle for people that may not be feeling that they can go full EV at this point, and we understand that. That's why we've put something in place for that.

I think as my time gets a little nearer to the end, I also want to highlight the oil to electric program, which is an important program. I know we're talking about cost of living in everything we talk about. My constituents, just like your constituents, are facing the exact same things. They tell us about those things as well. This is one of the things that we can help some 48,000 households in this province that are on oil to transition to electric, which will add consistency, take away the peaks and valleys of being a fossil fuel burning household. Putting \$2 million into that and doubling the rebate to \$5,000 is going

to help transition people, and a very costly thing to do, to make that move.

There are also partnerships where we can lobby with the federal government to get additional resources put in place. You're investing here and trying to double down on it with the federal government, which is an important piece as well.

Some other things that we can talk about, I know in Minister Abbott's shop, our department works

—

CHAIR: Order, please!

B. DAVIS: Sorry, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi's shop, we work very closely with the Home Energy Savings Program, the HESP program, which allows homeowners in low income areas \$5,000 to retrofit their homes or allow them to tighten up the energy consumption on their homes to reduce the cost to them, which in turn not only is it good for the environment, it's good their pocketbooks, it's good for them long term, it's transitioning them that way. So any role we can play to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels in this province is good to help people mitigate those processes.

The last thing I'd like to touch on is one of the adaptation things that I touched on a little earlier, which was flood-risk mapping. It's very important as we see climate change coming and precipitation rates and patterns increasing, we understand that things are changing. So we have to continue to make sure the models are strong and put in place. That's why we have solid staff working on that.

As rainfall increases and the 100-year flood becomes the one in 50-year flood, those things need to be noted in the communities that we all represent. That information is very important to help planning and determining where municipalities can build infrastructure, where they can regulate where residential developments can go and it's going to help with compensation for the federal and provincial disaster financing assistance programs and emergency responses. All of those things are important.

I'd be remiss if I didn't say thank you to the teachers and staff at our schools that are in my

district for going through a very challenging time.

Thank you very much to my hon. colleagues for the indulgence of five seconds.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you very much to the Member.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I move the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville and Deputy Chair of Committees.

P. TRIMPER: Speaker, the Committee of Supply have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

When shall this be received?

S. CROCKER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee sit again?

S. CROCKER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted.
Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.